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# Men of God Homosexual and Catholic Identity Negotiation, Through Holland's Catholic Priests

Kyle Alexander  
*SIT Study Abroad*

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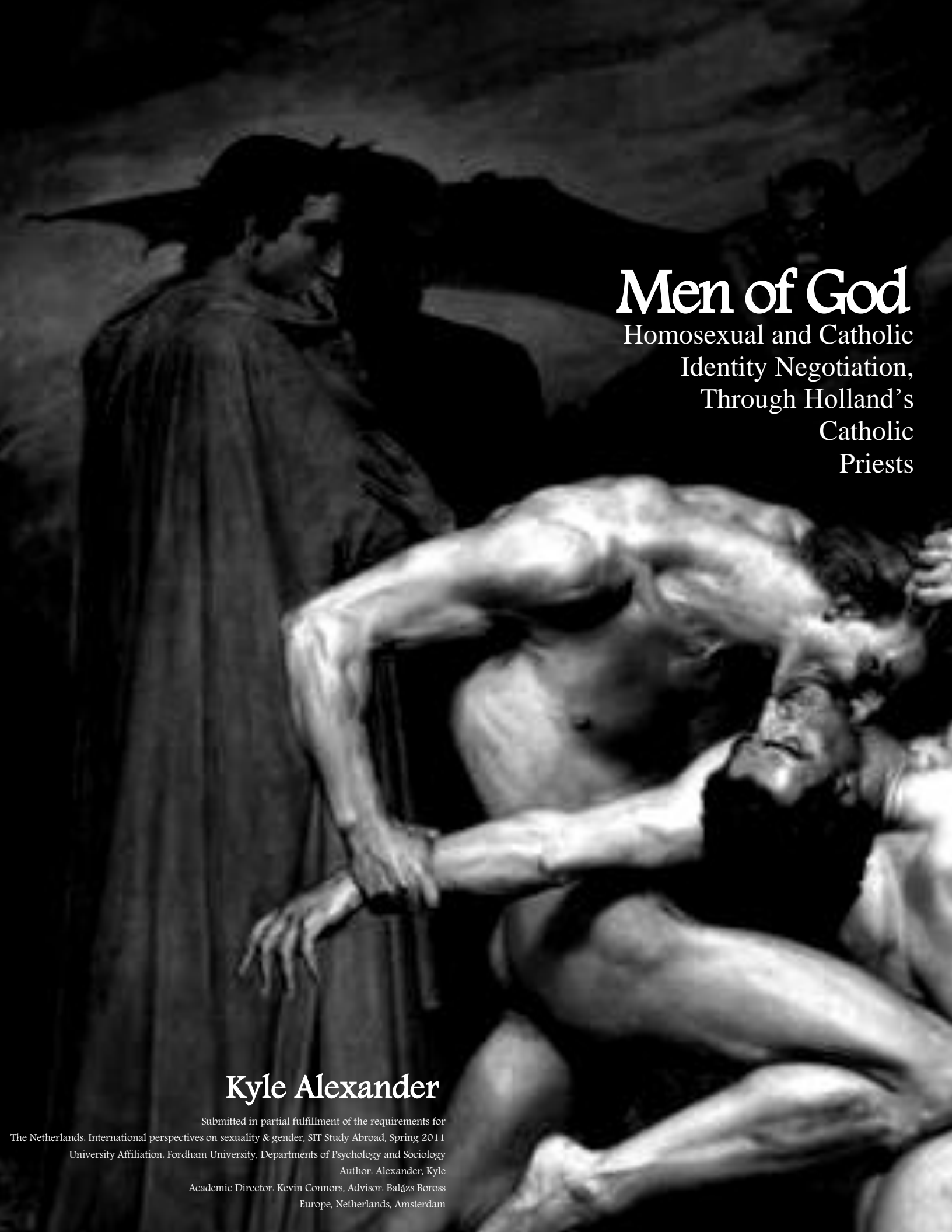
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# Men of God

Homosexual and Catholic  
Identity Negotiation,  
Through Holland's  
Catholic  
Priests

**Kyle Alexander**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how the Dutch gay Catholic man negotiates his seemingly contradictory sexual and religious identities. Homophobic interpretations of Catholic doctrine and belief often leave the gay Catholic man distanced and isolated from his faith. The current study expands on previous psychosocial literature by providing a more fluid and humanist theoretical framing of identity negotiation; as well as a historical, political, and psychological understanding of the gay Catholic men in Dutch context. Three life stories of Dutch Gay Catholic priests were collected and critically engaged to comment on the larger issue of religious and sexual identity negotiation in general. Celibacy was not found as a solution for the cognitive dissonance experienced by the gay priests (and in general), as sexual identity was found to be a core identity, not simply defined by physical coitus. The complete acceptance or rejection of Catholicism or homosexuality in the gay Catholic man's life was found to be an inappropriate and un-realistic solution to identity conciliation, as said conciliation was found to be a: fluid, highly individualistic, constant negotiation depending on environmental variables (religious upbringing, urban/rural geographic area, conservatism of parish and peer group, etc...) spanning the gay Dutch Catholic man's lifetime. Future research in this area should examine differing sexual orientations, gender, religious and ethnic expressions to broaden the understanding of the process of identity negotiation.

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Men of God  
Homosexual and Catholic Identity Negotiation,  
Through Holland's Catholic Priests

**W**hen the other priests found out that I was gay, they gave me a small candle .Every night, I was to light the candle and ask God to heal me. So I did. I lit my candle each night and tried to pray away my homosexuality. But after awhile I found that it didn't work, it didn't work at all. I was very close to suicide at this point in my life. My whole life I did pray, and God has never answered me once. So in a way, I thought I should stop believing, believing for me was never really healthy... This didn't mean that I was going to stop with religion or believing entirely, it was more that I found that it didn't work this way... From that point onwards, to me, spirituality became something more of music, of literature, of mindfulness.

~ Vincent

The Dutch Catholic priest who happens to be gay, provides us with a lens to view the Catholic and homosexual identities in their purest form of conflict. The priest proves himself the most untainted of subjects, when examining the core identity of Catholicism within Dutch society. The Dutch Catholic priest has traditionally been isolated from the majority of social influences, kept safely behind seminary and rectory doors, allowing his Catholic identity to evolve and develop unencumbered by the majority of Dutch political and cultural underpinnings of increased secularism. While other Dutch Catholic citizens may place great importance on their Catholic identity, this emphasis cannot rival the priest's level of devotion. While the typical citizen may attend Church on Sundays, the priest defines all aspects of his personhood on his faith. His work, social, political and spiritual identities are all predicated on his Catholic faith. When the priest possesses an additional homosexual identity, this facet dramatically contrasts with all other aspects of the priest's being. As traditionally, the homosexual identity and behavior, is radically opposed by official Catholic doctrine. Therefore the gay Catholic priest

must navigate these conflicting identities, developing coping strategies to ease the cognitive dissonance he feels from being simultaneously a highly devote Catholic in a secular realm, and a gay man in the stereotypical gay capital of the world that is Amsterdam, and The Netherlands.

### **Executive Summary**

When one first begins thinking about how the gay Dutch man negotiates being gay and Catholic in Holland, it may first appear an insignificant question too pose. After all, the urban areas of the Netherlands are continually heralded as homosexual Mecca of tolerance, and as the most secular nation in the world. Therefore why would a homosexual man even have trouble dealing with his religion in such a secular context, moreover, why would a gay man even struggle with being gay at all? Through three, in-person qualitative interviews with gay Dutch Catholic priests, and eleven supplementary interviews with other gay members of the Church community, the current study aims to dispel previous notions that Catholic and homosexual identity negotiation is a crystallized refusal or acceptance of either identity, advocating for a more fluid approach to identity amalgamation and coping strategies. The current study will also attempt question the assumption that the status of the Netherlands as highly secular and gay friendly, would ease and make this negotiation seamless. When speaking of gay Catholic priests, the majority of previous literature and media publications have demonized the gay Catholic priest, focusing in on instances of pedophilia and pedasty. However, the present study moves away from this unfair fascination, and focuses on the gay priest's identity development in hopes of illuminating way to ease the integration of Catholic and homosexual identities in a Dutch context.

The current study expands on current psychological and sociological analysis by focusing on the individual gay priest's experience. While a brief outline of church doctrine will be provided in the analysis, it will not be the focal point of this work. However it is necessary to understand the Roman Catholic teachings on homosexuality, as well as Dutch historical and contemporary application (of Catholicism and Homosexual policy); in order to lay the foundation of this analysis.

The primary research question of this analysis divulges into how the gay Catholic Dutch man negotiates his seemingly contradictory homosexual and Catholic identities. The current study attempts to answer this question by collecting the life stories of three Dutch Gay Catholic priests, critically engaging and utilizing their experiences of being gay and Catholic, to comment on the larger issue of religious and sexual identity negotiation in general. The current study acknowledges the common belief that the Catholic priests' vow of celibacy may present him as an unfit subject in discussing issues of sexuality. However, the researcher believes the priest an acceptable subject, as human sexuality is not defined solely by the act of physical intercourse, that the erotic is experienced fluidly throughout the gay male's lifetime, and individuals can express and understand themselves as sexual beings...regardless of the presence of copulation.

### **Historical Frame of Roman Catholic Teachings on Homosexuality**

In regards to Catholic teachings, homophobia is not an abstract belief or a political argument; it is a fear and distaste so deeply felt as to seem ordained by "natural law", even inscribed in Christian tradition (Mitchell, 2009). The history of anti-gay Christian sentiment spans back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century with religious documentation stating, "...the man, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; a man with man is unseemly. Romans 1:26-28". Interpreting the bible to be anti-gay served as a metaphorical jumping board



for 14<sup>th</sup> century homophobia. It was unacceptable in the Catholic Church for a man to love a man and a woman to love a woman because the bible frowned on such behavior.

Throughout the 14<sup>th</sup> century homosexuality came to be understood as a perversion rather than as inversion; thinking had departed from the idea that homosexuality was simply a reversal of sexual attraction to the notion that it was pathological and that homosexuals might be insane (Fone, 2000). Homophobic individuals rationalized homosexual behavior by attributing homosexuality to mere insanity. Byrne Fone's research on the history of homophobia found that Christians began to believe that homosexuality was that crime that ought always to be detested: an execrable moral depravity (Fone, 2000). To most, love between same sex couples was perverse and insane; therefore society deemed this love a "moral depravity."

To an intolerant Christian tradition, if one was homosexual surely one had to be insane, resulting in homosexuality becoming known as "onbespreekbaar zoned"[the unmentionable sin]. In 1478 with the approval of Pope Sixtus IV, Queen Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon's Inquisition turned its attention to all forms of sin including the "onbespreekbaar zonde" (Fone, 2000). Fone found that during the Inquisition in Spanish Castile, a series of laws named Las Siete Partidas, decreed that when one man desires to sin against nature with another... both were to be castrated before the whole populace and on the third day hung by the legs until dead, and that their bodies never be taken down (Fone, 2000). Experts in LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bi-Sexual and Transgender) history establish that sodomy and homosexuality in Dutch society was practiced by every social class thus, homophobic ideation permeated Dutch class hierarchy. Among men charged and executed for homosexuality were teachers, soldiers, and even nobility. In the Netherlands seventy people were burned for homosexuality between 1567 and 1616 (Fone, 2000).

Throughout Christian history the definition of homosexuality broadened. Homophobia, once only religiously based, became conflated with all kinds of social deviance. The broadening of what it meant to be homosexual broadened what it meant to be homophobic. In the 1400s and 1500s homosexuals were thought to be heretics, traitor's sorcerers, and the cause of plague and civic disaster. From the 1600s to the present, homophobia has included ostracizing homosexuals as social outcasts and worthless effeminate (Fone, 2000).

While the Catholic view of homosexuality is not as punitive and hateful in 2011 as it was in the 1600s, the roots of Catholic tradition remain intact. Therefore, while the Catholic Church is moving towards tolerance of LGBT individuals, homosexual sexual activity is still unacceptable in the eyes of the Catholic Church (Maher, 2008). Until the Catholic Church moves to completely accept the LGBT identity as legitimate, individuals who stridently follow the teachings of their Christian faith will remain homophobic to some degree.

### **Catholicism in the Netherlands**

The beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of pillarisation in the Netherlands. Pillarisation refers to the politico-denominational segregation of Dutch society into the three main denominations of Catholic, Protestant, and Social Democrat. All aspects of social life: from religion, to school, to recreation, to even food depended on the pillar to which you subscribed. Prior to pillarisation, the Catholic Church had been forced underground for 250 years. Hence an explosion of Catholic devotion ensued when the Catholic Church was liberated in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Until around the Vatican council of the 1960s, the Dutch church was similar to the Irish or Polish church; traditional Catholic values were cherished and exalted. One must merely look at the cityscape of many Dutch towns, to witness the remains of a large

number of Catholic and Protestant churches constructed during this period of religious enlightenment.

Yet progressive ideologies began to attack traditional and authoritarian paternalistic structures imposed by the Catholic Church, with the advent of Holland's sexual revolution, and the other various counter-cultural movements in the 1960s. When the contemporary understandings of contraception, differing forms of sexual expression, and divorce attacked Catholic traditionalism, the Catholic pillar crumbled. Secular ideologies flourished as the Netherlands devolved from one of the most religious societies in the world, to a highly secular nation. The common understanding of contemporary Dutch society is that "de-pillarisation" marked the advent of supposed Dutch secularism and with it, the ever diminishing specific code of Catholic behavior (Hooydonk, 1993). Dutch Christianity died when the collective, ritual and reflexive religious practices in which it had articulated itself... gradually becoming less important in the lives of believers, in the wake of the popularization of the discourses and practices of the expressive and reflexive self (Mepschen, et al., 2010).

### **Political & Legal Recognition of Dutch Homosexuals**

The Netherlands legal policy towards homosexual individuals has elevated the country's status as an accepting environment for the gay population. In Holland, gay men face little legal discrimination in the realms of marriage equality and access to the military. Adoption rights and anti-discrimination policies continue to protect Dutch gays. Having achieved this relatively elevated position in society, Dutch gays "no longer feel the need to maintain a political gay identity" (Duyvendak, 1996). On the surface level, the Netherland's history of legal policies, lack of religious influence, and visibility of LGBT spaces in urban areas, paints the Netherlands as a safe haven for homosexual men and women.

### **Review of Existing Identity Negotiation Literature**

The gay Catholic man seeks integration and gratification in both his sexual and spiritual life. The event of being Catholic and homosexual can be doubly isolating, leaving the man to fall in a gap between these two worlds (Haldeman, 1996). Catholic men are largely unable to identify in the gay community as Catholic or in the catholic community as gay (Wagner, 1980). As both identities seem to be strikingly contradictory to one another, existing psychosocial literature has painted an over simplistic portrait of identity negotiation as a simple complete rejection, or acceptance of either Catholic or gay identity.

The majority of existing psychosocial literature adheres to this structuralist hypothesis that identities can be selected and simply discarded, pushed aside. Bauman, an American sociologist states, “Identities are light cloaks ready to be taken off at any time” (Toft, 2009). That conflicting parts of the sexual self, must be permentaly suppressed or denied in order for healthy psychosocial functioning (Stein & Cohen, 1986). Previous applications cite Goffman’s idea of ‘front’ and ‘back’ stages, arguing that the gay Catholic man relinquishes himself from the cognitive dissonance he feels by pushing his ‘gayness’ to the ‘back stage’ of his self (Keenan, 2009). While more contemporary theorists (Nahas, 2005 & Yip, 2010) propose various “staging models” in which the gay Catholic man concretely follows a series of steps towards successful homosexual and Catholic cohesion. Using survey, questionnaire, or interview research methods, these studies provide empirical support for the “complete exclusion of religion” method (Yip 2000; Mahaffy 1996; Garcia, Gray-Stanley, & Ramirez-Valles 2008; Rodriguez & Ouellette 2000), and the “severing contact with the gay community” strategy (Rodriguez & Ouellette 2000).

### **Towards a More Fluid, Theoretical Framing**

Feelings of spirituality and sexuality are not discarded *cloaks*, or superfluous *back stages*. While one may choose to distance oneself from ideas of spirituality or sexuality, the intrinsic footprints of sexuality and spirituality are never completely wiped away. While the Catholic gay man may attempt to move his homosexual identity to his “back stage”... the emotional problems accompanying his gayness will not magically disappear. He may intrinsically validate his Catholic identity as superior and invalidate his homosexual identity, but while this homosexual may recede or be suppressed, it is still ever-present in the gay man’s consciousness (Bartoli .& Gillem, 2008). One can suppress such homosexual urges, but they continue to influence and exert power (even if it is to a minuscule degree) over the validated identity. The invalidated identity may even be suppressed at one temporal space in the individual’s life, but a shift in the social, historical, generational, or geographical aspects may validate or relinquish the suppressed homosexual identity.

Identity negotiation is not a process of crystallization, but a process of continual upheaval and fluidity. When cultural, historical, and geographic considerations are eliminated from theories of identity negotiation, it to assume that gay lives are unresponsive to social change (D’Augelli & Herek, 1994). Conceptualizing and integrating one’s homosexual identity into one’s personhood is a life spanning developmental process not to be reduced into simple stages of development.

### **Phase Mentality**

Our feelings of sexuality and spirituality are extremely important parts of our personhood. Previous psychological studies support that a complete rejection of either of these identities is nearly impossible and harmful to the individual’s psyche (Haldeman, 1996; Gall,

2006; Gross, 2010). Gay Catholic men constantly modify, create, and alter their personal biography in accordance with environmental contexts (D'Augelli & Herek 1994; Keenan, 2009). It is important to move away from models that include a definite refusal/acceptance hypothesis, inserting plasticity into the current body of literature. The gay man may possess negative feelings towards his homosexuality within his conservative setting; however, later in his psychosocial development, he may be transferred to a more liberal and accepting local, therefore his previously felt negative feeling may evolve and shift according to his geographic location.

The current study advocates for a theoretical framework based on phases and individual experiences, rather than definite stages of identity integration. The term *phrase* is utilized over *stage* to suggest the flexible and unpredictable nature of identity negotiation. The experience of being both gay and Catholic possesses much variability and a theoretical understanding of such issues must also be malleable and leave room for individual difference (Scasta, 1998). Sexual orientation and spiritual development, (as well as gender, race, class, etc...) are all interconnected and fluid aspects of identity. Classifying religiosity and sexuality into stages, essentially untying them from community, is neither helpful nor an accurate portrayal of the individual human condition (Davidson, 2000). Staging models based on more extremist resolutions of identity integration (such as completely leaving one's faith or utterly denying homosexual urges) overshadow the more complex and delicate concessions that take place there. Such models assume that gay men must go through stages in which they struggle to integrate their Catholic and sexual identities while the gay man, may not struggle at all in this endeavor. The adoption of fluid phase ideologies allows the gay man to move individuality through the identity integration process...or bypass this process entirely.

## Methodology

The present study's methodological process was an integrated approach from a mixture of psychological, sociological, and oral history perspectives. The present study began as a quantitative analysis, focusing on the coping strategies employed by gay Christians who struggled to rectify their conflicting identities. Quantitative methodological tools were drafted based on pre-existing literature and were ready to be distributed to a Dutch sample. The preliminary surveys were collected and the data was found to be over simplistic, and ill-encompassing of this complex behavioral process. As the in-depth dimension of human experience surrounding the issues of spirituality and sexuality are difficult to accurately quantify, a more qualitative methodology was chosen (Haldeman, 1996).

The researcher re-evaluated his methodological process, adopting a qualitative approach consisting of a series of in-depth face-to-face interviews more accurately capturing the subtleties and humanistic components of this process. Narrowing the target population to those of male gender expression, gay sexual orientation, and Catholic religious orientation; allowed the researcher to more specifically understand dimensions of the gay Catholic male experience, rather than attempting to discuss the vast topic of Christianity and the entire spectrum that is the LGBTQIA community (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual). The present study acknowledges that all Catholic members of the LGBTQIA community may fluidly integrate their religious and sexual identities; however, the current study chooses to focus on the gay male to deepen and narrow its analysis.

In total 14 qualitative interviews were conducted (N=14). Participants were selected through convenience and snowball sampling. The researcher's affiliation with the organization LKP (an umbrella organization catering to the needs of LGBT Christian individuals in the

Netherlands) allowed access and personal referrals to said target population. The target population evolved to focus strongly on the life stories of three Dutch gay Catholic priests. Each of the interviews lasted from two to four hours, was conducted in each priest's home/rectory, and was tape recorded to preserve the integrity of the interview. The length of the interview allowed the researcher to gain life stories from the priests to better understand how his feelings of sexuality and religiosity changed over time. The researcher felt it appropriate not to limit his experience solely to gay priests, but to gain depth in understating the external dimension of the gay priest's experience by also interviewing other members of the Catholic community.

The remaining six, in-person interviews, consisted of hour long sessions with: four gay Catholic men in the church community where the gay priests served, one Catholic theologian, one gay Jungian psychologist specializing in the field of sexuality and religious conflict, and one Catholic ex-pat living in Amsterdam. The final four participants consisted of self-identified gay Dutch Catholic men, who wished to answer online version of the survey, to preserve their identities (see appendix for format of online survey). The majority of data collected in these interviews was not able to be published in this analysis because length restrictions but the researcher has included some of the more pertinent and interesting transcripts in the appendix section of this paper.

Privacy and confidentiality were maintained throughout the interview process as each participant was any identifying information was stricken from record and each participant was given a pseudonym, with the single master list of identifying information was secured by the primary researcher. Written and verbal consent was contained at the beginning of each interview. The interviews were un-structured and conversational in nature, the only universal question asked to the participants occurred at the beginning of the interview:



I am trying to better understand the relationship between sexuality and religion in the lives of gay, Christian, Dutch men. I would like you to tell me your life story and life experience with religion and sexuality, and in doing so to be sure to describe your religious experiences as you were growing up as well as your growing sense of sexuality, and how these two areas of your life may have been related...right up to the present day.

From that point forward, the interviewee was asked to share his story with the research in a relaxed oral-history fashion, where the researcher only interjected his perspective to gently guide the conversation.

The researcher acknowledges his potential bias as a gay Catholic man, reconciling said bias by remaining neutral in his insight and tone throughout the interviews. The current study believes that the researcher's similar position as a gay catholic male facilitated increased access into the gay/Catholic community allowing him to empathize and put participants at ease. One interviewee remarked:

I felt very comfortable talking to you. Doing this interview with you was extremely cathartic for me because I have never relayed the whole story of my sexuality to anyone before in my entire life.

The researcher avoided assuming that Catholic priests automatically struggle integrating their identities, by merely asking for individual stories and experiences from the participants.

## **Presentation & Analysis of Data**

### **Stories of Gay Catholic Priests**

#### **Vincent**

Vincent is a 72 year old Dutch gay from Utrecht, now living in Amsterdam. Vincent was called into the Catholic priesthood from a young age, yet his growing feelings of homosexuality left him conflicted. Here Vincent tells his story:

**I** remember my first communion well. I had heard that when you have your first communion Jesus is in the altar, and I wanted to find Jesus. So I walked up to the altar before the ceremony, and I couldn't find Jesus. There was just a woman cleaning the church, I was sitting there and nothing happened in the altar. So where is he then? And then I saw the confessional, because I knew that you had to learn to say confession. I opened the confessional door, and there was just a vacuum inside. So the confessional wasn't used. It was disappointing to me. But it means that I was aware that something important was happening during my first communion. I was introduced into another world...I wanted so badly to believe.

As a boy of eight years, the nuns and other priests at my Catholic school told me that God was calling me to become a Priest, and that feeling stayed with me for the majority of my childhood. You see the way it was back then, it was God who was calling you to become a Priest. Of course, that's not the way it really works. But I believed it.

So I attended the grand seminary in Holland, I really like the structure of the seminary it was like my second home. During my second year at the seminary, I was 14 years old, and had my first experience with one of the other boys. And at that moment, the moment that I wanted to do something with him, to pull down his shorts. The moment that I felt his erection through his shorts... I got shocked. What I was doing now was sinful. Not only that, it was very dangerous for my whole future. When they see that I am doing this, they can just kick me out of the seminary. And I would not be able to become a priest...I saw my life in ruins.

So I stopped, and threw the boy back in the bed. I jumped out of the room and into my room, and thought to myself, 'no more, this stops here'. But for me, my homosexuality was something that I always knew about; it was always in the back of my mind.... So I continued from there. I played my violin, I did well in school, everyone was happy....But in a way when I look back: it was boring. It was very predictable. You can say I was educated to have a future inside of the Church, and until my death it was laid out.

I continued from that point and graduated from Seminary in 1968, marking the beginning of my work as a Catholic priest and lay theologian in Holland...I didn't see a way out. I knew that I was gay, but I was also a celibate priest, I didn't know what to do, my future became vaguer and vaguer.

When the other priests found out that I was gay, they gave me a small candle. I was to light the candle and ask God to heal me. So I did. I lit my candle each night and tried to pray away my homosexuality. But after awhile I found that it didn't work, it didn't work at all.... I was very close to suicide at this point in my life. My whole life I did pray, and God has never answered me once. So in a way, I thought I should stop believing, believing for me was never really healthy... This didn't mean that I was going to stop with religion or believing entirely, it was more that I found that it didn't work this way...

*In 2001 I left the priesthood. From that point onwards, to me, spirituality became something more of music, literature, and mindfulness. There is a widespread belief in Holland, of what we call a somethingism. That there has to be something bigger than ourselves. Whether it be: God, mother nature, or a good spirit... there has to be something. That is very popular. Looking to a sense of life through meditation and yoga are also very popular here... There is an acceptance of secular spirituality in Holland that is anti-institution, and anti- hierarchy.*

*Throughout my life, I was a very believing boy. I thought that when I am in dire need, God will help me. I really believed that. And when I was so close to suicide, I had expected a personal relation with God, for Him to rescue me....Like a boy, I wanted to see Jesus in the altar.*

## **Analysis**

From a young age Vincent felt called to join the Catholic priesthood despite his growing feelings of homosexuality. Like many other gay men drawn to the priesthood, Vincent initially saw that his status of a celibate priest as a legitimate compromise between his homosexuality and religiosity (Davidson, 2000). Many gay men are drawn to priesthood as they are promised an exchange of their ‘outsider’ homosexual identity for an esteemed ‘insider’ priestly identity. As official Church doctrine calls all homosexual individuals to celibacy, the priesthood serves as an honorable form of escapism (Stuart, 1993). In this respect, the priesthood is as gay a world Catholicism allows.

Vincent’s spiritual journey is one of darkness and eventual liberation. It is dishearteningly ironic that it took the ex-priest over seventy years to comprehend an understanding of the Catholic religion he experienced as a young boy, during his first experience with religion. The image of a small boy alone in an empty church, searching through vacant altars and empty confessionals for an apparition of an absent Jesus, is one of haunting revelation. Vincent’s life-spanning quest for a material God, left him isolated from institutionalized Catholicism...but not completely isolated from differing interpretations of spirituality. For

Vincent, integrating his homosexuality and religiosity was not a mere rejection of religiosity or sexuality, but a continual search for avenues of spirituality (yoga, mindfulness, etc...) that melded with his personhood. The spiritual dimensions of Vincent's psyche were too engrained to be merely rejected; therefore Vincent separated his spiritual identity from Catholic institutionalized religion. Moving forwards towards individualized spiritual outlets allowing for expression of Victor's homosexual identity.

Recent psychological data published in the Netherlands, points at growing levels of suicide and depression rates amongst Holland's LGBT population. (Bartoli .& Gillem, 2008).

Like any a member of an oppressed group:

The homosexual will know a lot about darkness, loneliness, nothingness. And about letting go and letting be... The sacrament of 'coming out' is a kind of letting go: a letting go of the images of personhood, sexuality, and self-hood, that society has put on one in favor of trusting oneself enough to let oneself be oneself (Stuart, 1993).

Entering the priesthood served only as a band-aid for Victor's depression and loneliness stemming from the lack of integration of his sexuality and religiosity. Yet, Victor endured his fears, resentments, and frustrations with the Church, re-shaping his spirituality through past experience.

### **Pieter**

Pieter is a 44 year old man of Dutch descent. Pieter is a Catholic priest who publically came out of the closet three weeks ago, resulting in his parish placing him on "permanent activity." Yet the sexual/spiritual/emotional liberation that ensued, resulted in Pieter deeming his 'coming-out' worthwhile. Here is Pieter's story:

*I am the eldest of the grandchildren, the eldest son of my parents. I always helped my mother pick out her clothes, her jewelry, and told her what to wear as a kid...she never guessed that I was gay. I tired coming out of the closet around 18 years of age. Looking back now they couldn't be shocked. They had to see it. But ok. Small village. They were shy. But it doesn't matter, I wanted to come out and wanted to have a boyfriend, but my father was shocked and he beat me up. My parents were angry, and my grandparents were angry: so I moved into the closet.*

*Two years after that, I joined the Catholic priesthood. My sexuality was eating me up and was very frustrating during this time. I would struggle sometimes when I saw a beautiful man. I said to myself, 'ok Pieter, You have chosen this life. You can look but, that is all. That is your problem.' Out of all the other priests, I was perhaps the best counselor for marriage because I told the men, don't look at other women, and just look at your women. Yeah, I was a perfect example; I never looked at a woman in my life!*

*I knew that the Church would not accept me if they knew I was gay, so I kept it a secret for 18 more years. As each day passed, the pressure became insurmountable; the secret inside of me was eating me up. Two years ago, I suffered a seizure and was paralyzed for three days. The doctors could not find any physical cause for my injury; they said that all was good and healthy. At that moment, I realized that my body wouldn't accept my secret anymore, that this was a big wake up call. Previously, I had suffered two mental breakdowns from stress, I can't remember anything from those time periods...two years of my life have become irreconcilable black holes in my memory. I needed to change it and be who I was: to stop pleasing parents, grandparents, children, wife, and Church. It had to be who I am.*

*While the Church is against homosexual sex, I will choose for myself, because I know God loves me because he created me with all my feelings. So that is no problem for me anymore, because maybe I have had to struggle with it for over 20 years. But for those 20 years, I have accepted and know that God loves me. All the leaders from church can't imagine that being gay is no problem for me. They said, 'do you want to pray, do you want to be healed?' You would not give a healthy person medicine. And I am healthy being gay, so I don't need their prayers! People like that don't understand that coming out made me healthier and happier than the closet ever allowed.*

*I am finally happy, it may have taken me 20 years, but I can finally breathe. Many think that I would have rejected my faith after getting kicked out of the Church. However, my struggle with my sexuality and spirituality has placed me even closer to God. My pain allows me to empathize and love others who are consumed with pain and anguish. Those who use Sodom and Gomorra to condemn homosexuality are speaking in the past, in the Old Testament. Christ is the New Testament, we are living in the new. The bible teaches me so much, some verses are so powerful for me. For Christ there is no condemnation towards homosexuals anymore.*

*I don't regret that I didn't come out sooner. When you are looking backwards, you have your back to the future. Regrets cannot change the past.*

## **Analysis**

Pieter's story illuminates: the external pressure and blatant hatred of the homosexual identity sometimes felt from the Catholic church, the cognitive dissonance and closeting effect of being simultaneously gay and Catholic, and the spiritual deepening that occurs often through periods of stress and tribulation.

Apparently the supposed liberal and accepting nature of homosexuality in the Netherlands does not always extend to the gays, in the eyes' of Holland's Catholic churches. Pieter's ex-communication and official placement on "permanent activity", displays the tangible homophobic sentiment of official Church doctrine. Vatican lead witch-hunts, only force gay priests further into the closet, handicapping their ability as priests and hampering their sense of self. The Vatican will have to come to the harsh realization that there are, and will always continue to be gay men in the priesthood (Stuart, 1993). Embracing, rather than condemning homosexuality and other forms of diversity, only increases the empathetic power of the liturgy.

After reading Pieter's story one is struck by the image of a man who is left literally paralyzed by the fear of expressing his homosexual identity. Pieter's fear of the Church's homophobic sentiment frightened the Dutch man into 43 years of closeted anguish and repression. Recent studies support that gay individuals with a strong Catholic background have an insurmountably harder time coming out their less devout peers (Scasta, 1998). Through the analysis of the 11 other supplemental interviews with gay members of the Catholic community, the researcher concluded that while the average closeted Catholic man may experience negative consequences from coming out, the risks is far greater for the Catholic priest. The average gay

may experience negative sentiment from his peer group, yet he may transcend this negative sentiment by relying on alternative networks of support in his life. However, all aspects of the priest's life (peer group, living space, wealth etc...) are enmeshed in his parish community. Therefore, if the priest's parish is un-accepting of homosexuality, 'coming out' means the complete fracturing of all aspects of the priest's life.

One must not assume however that said fracturing is always negative. In Pieter's case, the total fracturing that ensued after Pieter came out allowed the priest "to be able to breath for the first time in 22 years." As all aspects of Pieter's social location were predicated on Catholic belief, his dismissal from the Catholic Church facilitated a complete metamorphous of Pieter's personhood. Now that Pieter has accepted his sexual identity as legitimate, he is able to inhabit a queer social space, which previously appeared inaccessible.

The lack of connectedness to a supportive or relevant external world experienced by gay men can, turn the individual's attention inward allowing for a re-interpretation of previous barriers preventing increased spiritual and sexual development (Haldeman, 1996). During the phase of integrating his homosexual and religious identities, Pieter moved beyond mere 'acceptance' and towards a sexual and spiritual deepening of both identities. Many participants expressed an increased connectivity with aspects of both their religious and spiritual lives following their psychosexual spiritual coming out processes (Davidson 2000; Keenan, 2009).

### **Nicolaas**

Nicolass, a 33 year old Dutch man, currently serves as a Catholic priest in Utrecht, one of the major urban areas of the the Netherlands. Similar to Pieter, Nicolas experience a spiritual and sexual deepening stemming from the integration of these seemingly conflicting identities. Yet

Nicolass did not have to get placed on permanent activity to make this deepening possible. Here is Nicolass' story:

*Throughout my life God has been on my side. He is my support. Throughout my childhood I kept my sexuality private, I was slightly ashamed and felt abnormal. It was not until college that I came out as gay. There I met a man, and we dated each other for eight years. It was a wonderful and liberating time in my life, but didn't work out in the end. After the end of this long-term relationship, I regressed back to the dark place in my life; where being gay made me feel alienated and alone. I couldn't help it; I started to harbor negative feelings about my sexuality. I didn't know if this was the life I wanted to have. Luckily, my faith helped me through this hard time in my life. It was around this time that I knew it was my calling to enter into the Catholic priesthood.*

*When I first began serving as a priest, I quickly learned that the Catholic faith has very little stronghold in Holland's major cities, it is hard to find devotion there. One has to travel below the Bible belt to reach the more southern Catholic regions of the Netherlands. My parish, it is quite liberal compared to other parishes in the Netherlands, people support the gay people in the parish here. I am gay here, very openly. My parish understands that homosexual identity is not condemned by the Church, rather the actual act of homosexual intercourse. Therefore, my position as a celibate priest places me in a favorable position with God. Most people in my parish understand the Catholic faith means 'To be good for one another, to be helping, kind, and loving' so they are naturally accepting towards those who are different.*

*While there are not many gay people in the parish, I know of several openly gay men. There was only one visible lesbian couple; the two women had been together for over 28 years. The couple was part of the parish community and because people knew them well, they were accepted. When one of the women died, I did nothing during the burial to hide the fact that the two women were lovers. I would never deny them acceptance in the Church's eyes, or deny death rights on the basis of homosexual orientation. My position as a gay man in the priesthood allows me increased compassion for those who struggle. I would never openly renounce other gay people in the Church. When counseling gay Catholic men, I tell them that 'we must remain positive and faithful, to continue to love one another despite others hatred'.*

*When I was coming out, God was my protection. He was the positive force in my life. I felt very alone during this time. My own thoughts consumed me, but allowed me to reflect on the importance of religion and sexuality in my life. I knew Jesus loved me. My reliance on my faith during this time-period brought me closer to Him. From this point on I constantly reinterpreted other's hateful interpretations of the Bible, and what it meant it meant to be faithful.*



## Analysis

Through Nicolaas' testimonial: we see the possibility for Catholic acceptance of homosexual priests, how spirituality can serve as a coping mechanism for feelings of abnormality, and how differing interpretations of biblical text can actually be affirmative towards the homosexual identity. Depending on the geographic location and liberalism of the parish, a Catholic church can indeed be open to homosexual priests, if the priest is remaining celibate that is. However, this acceptance is more favorable compared to harsh rejection Pieter and Vincent experienced from the Church.

Growing up gay in a heteronormative society means that the gay Catholic man must sometimes silently struggle with being abnormal, different, and non-normative. The homosexual man does not have the privilege to inhabit heteronormative space without constantly confronting his 'otherness.' The Catholic homosexual man is on the outside, looking into a Dutch heteronormative society. Particularly when levels of internalized homophobia inhabit the homosexual man's psyche, he constantly undertakes the process of self-reflexivity and self-contemplation, examining his own sexual identity (Stuart, 1993).

When an individual begins reflecting deeply about his sexual identity, other times he may analyze other parts of his personhood as well. When Nicolaas' internalized homophobic feelings caused him to reflect on his homosexual identity, he began to contemplate his Catholic identity as well. Similar to Pieter, this self-reflexive process ended in religious deepening. Nicolaas did not reject, or merely accept his core sexual or Catholic identities, rather his religious identity became increasingly more important and his sexual identity was sublimated through the priestly vow of celibacy. Nicolaas may have rejected the act of penetrative intercourse, but his core homosexual identity remains favorably preserved thanks to the liberal tradition of his parish.

## Common Themes

Vincent's, Pieter's, and Nicolaas' stories provide the most focused and dramatic of lenses in viewing the integration of homosexual and Catholic identities. The variation between these three stories alone punctuates the vastness of individual human experience, the complexity of identity negotiation. The priest's stories (as well as eleven other supplementary interviews), supports that the process of negotiating one's homosexual and Catholic identity is a complex life-spanning process perpetuated by the struggle for acceptance. While some of the participants may have slightly more positive experiences (thanks to accepting environmental factors: parishes, families, peer groups etc...) the majority of participants noted that their Catholic feelings conflicted with their feelings of sexuality. The majority of participants expressed their Catholic religiosity and homosexuality were both core parts of their personhood. Therefore, we can concur that that while these identities may conflict, their position as 'core' identities makes rejecting either identity almost impossible. That although certain homophobic Catholic doctrine clearly is incompatible with a healthy self-concept for gay men the solution is not a wholesale rejection of religion or spirituality in the gay man's life (Haldeman, 1996)

The cognitive dissonance felt by the gay/Catholic participants displays how mere 'acceptance' of these conflicting identities becomes problematic. All 14 participants expressed that integrating their sexual and Catholic feelings was a constant process. Throughout their lives homosexual and Catholic feelings evolved and deepened depending on environmental factors (external stressors, geographic location, liberalism of Church and peer community, etc...). These Catholic men did not wake up one morning accepting their gayness. It has been a constant negotiation leaving some men: looking for spiritual deepening, some for differing forms of

spiritual expression, some for differing parishes that would accept them, and some just looked for time. Time to examine the importance of Catholicism and homosexuality in their lives, and for the time they could happily accept themselves as gay and Catholic in the Netherlands.

## **Conclusions**

### **Challenging Dutch Liberalism**

#### **Secularism**

Stereotypically the Netherlands has been heralded for its highly secular nature and status as a homosexual Mecca of tolerance... the stories of Dutch gay Catholic men tells otherwise. While the counter culture revolution of the 60's may have pushed religious sentiment away from popular discourse, the fact that Holland was founded largely on the pillar of Catholicism remains. In 2011, Catholics make up 10% of the current population in the Netherlands (Hekma, 2000). Although Catholic sentiment may have been repressed, the Catholic tradition continues to hold importance and influence contemporary Dutch gay men. The mere existence of the Dutch umbrella organization LKP (Landelijk Coördinatie Punt Groepen Kerk en Homosexualiteit) that assists the Dutch Catholic LGBT community integrate their sexuality into their personhood, stands as a testament to the fact that Catholic religious sentiment continues to exert force in contemporary society (Hooydonk, 1993). While Catholic ideology may indeed be secularized in terms of political discourse (except that is in Holland's educational system) Holland's social foundation rests on underpinnings of Catholicism. Underpinnings associated with a negative Catholic understanding of homosexuality continue to make it difficult in 2011 for Dutch gay men to integrate their Catholic and homosexual identities.

Surface level Dutch secularism however, does have some positive benefits for identity integration. The secular ideology that perpetuates certain aspects of Dutch society allows for the popularization and acceptance of differing spiritual outlets. Through Vincent's interview we learn that:

Looking to a sense of life through meditation and yoga are very popular in Holland. There is an acceptance of secular spirituality here that is anti-institution, and anti-hierarchy.

Therefore, gay men who seek alternative forms of spiritual expression (that are not contradictory to their intrinsic homosexual feelings) have an easier time in a society where alternative forms of spirituality are popularized. As the mass-practice of organized religion is largely unpopular Dutch individuals have created for themselves other spiritual outlets. The existence of these non-Christian spiritual spaces, allows the gay Catholic man (who feels distanced from his Catholicism) an alternative venue. Seen through Vincent's example distancing oneself from the practice of Catholicism may leave the previously highly devote individual lacking a spiritual outlet that was previously important to his sense of self. Just because the gay Catholic may begin feeling distanced from his Catholic faith, does not mean he feels distanced from all types of spirituality. The accessibility of yoga, mindfulness training, and meditation in Dutch society is beneficial to gay men seeking alternative forms of spiritual expression.

### **Homosexual Tolerance**

The qualitative data also supports the surface level phenomena of Dutch homosexual tolerance. While a few participants expressed that being homosexual in the Netherlands posed no problem, the majority of participants experienced varying degrees of discrimination based on their sexual orientation.

Social discrimination has not disappeared amongst the old or new Dutch. Nearly half of the young men participating in the national survey on sex and youth indicated a disapproval of

sex between males (Duyvendak, 1996; Brugmans, 1995). In the last year alone, Dutch LGBT individuals have been the victims of over 40 hate crimes and over six LGBT spaces in Amsterdam were closed...surprising statistics for a supposed homosexual Mecca of tolerance.

Dutch Legal and political recognition of homosexuality has breed indifference rather than societal acceptance in Holland (Hekma, 2000). What problems could a gay man possibly face if he is allowed to marry his partner and fly a plane in the Dutch air force? Chris, a 63 year old Dutch gay man stated that:

Yes, in the Netherlands 95% of the gay rights are there, but it's just on paper. There is no movement now. As a young person, you are much more on your own. Society is not as interested in you, they are not seeing the problem for any minority...because essentially minorities have legal rights.

While there are more possibilities for being gay in contemporary Dutch society compared to 40 years ago, traditional prejudices continue to exist. The strong Dutch mentality that we should all be the same and leave our blinds open because we are all normal, and have nothing to hide. Exalts homogeneity hampering individualism. Dutch society believes they have liberated the gays through legal reform. But they have really just turned their backs on the more subtle forms of homophobia that continue to be perpetuated by the traditional currents of Dutch heterosexist society. Hate crimes will continue to occur, gay venues will continue to close their doors, and gay Catholic men will continue to struggle in expressing their homosexuality until the homophobia wrought by a largely indifferent Dutch heteronormative society is addressed.

### **Recommendations for Helping Professionals**

Assuming that the psychosexual mixing of homosexuality and Catholicism is a fluid process consisting of constant negotiations and differing punctuations based on environmental contexts, the current study will infer from the contexts of the interviews how helping professionals (psychologist, psychiatrist, social workers, etc...) can ease this process. However,

the secular nature of the Netherlands provides certain barriers to this discussion. Issues of spirituality and religion are not commonly discussed in public and professional spheres of Dutch social life. Ruard Ganzevoort, a professor of Practical Theology at the Vrije Universiteit, stated in a recent forum entitled “Dialogodag Kerken Seksuele Diversiteit” in Amsterdam East that:

In the Netherlands suicide and depression is quite high in the LGBT population compared to a heterosexual population. Therefore [helping professionals] do feel a responsibility for LGBT people who suffer from negative feelings stemming from their faith. Yet at the same time we feel conflicted about the freedom of religion, so we don't want to interfere too much in that arena.

Moreover, an interview with a Dutch psychologist and multiple gay Catholic men who spoke about their psychotherapy sessions, noted that the issue of religion had been completely ignored in their Dutch psychotherapy sessions as well. One man remarked:

Religion was not mentioned in my psychotherapy at all. The therapy itself was very secular, it wasn't anti-religious there was just no emphasis or discussions about my spirituality or religion. It was more focused on re-discovering my emotions.

As feelings of spirituality and religion are core identities to some gay men, it becomes problematic to ignore their existence: especially in a psychotherapy session in which one is attempting to explore emotions. To a man confronted with his gayness and Catholicism, his feelings regarding religiosity would surely be closely tied to an emotional response. The therapy should enable a safe environment for the gay male to explore emotions and beliefs surrounding his identity conflict with the aim of successful integration (Bartoli .& Gillem, 2008). The safe expression of religious feelings lessens the emotional ache so when the gay man attempts to cope with being gay and Catholic, his emotional pain will no longer be repressed which would have prevented the patient moving forward in his healing process. Despite the broader secular nature of the Netherlands religious sentiment cannot fail to be explored in psychotherapy sessions with gay men.

A reductionist mentality of religion's role in an individual's psychosocial development is not exclusive to the secular Dutch. American psychotherapy until recently reduced the power religion exerts over an individual's psyche. Religion was considered a mere source of behavioral control by Skinner and a form of irrational thought by Ellis (Bartoli .& Gillem, 2008). Only the recent advent of humanistic and pluralistic trends in psychotherapy allowed for a more wholesome understanding of religion in clinical and academic locales as it is now accepted that it is an area to which significant meaning may be attached (Haldeman, 1996).

The topical issue of religion must be integrated into counseling sessions attempting to assist the gay man in incorporating his sexual identity into his personhood. Religion can no longer be ignored in the Dutch secular context. A more humanistic approach to Dutch psychotherapy would be useful in dealing with gay Catholic men attempting to integrate their sexual and religious identity as this approach specifically explores the individual's own feelings, needs, values, rather than attempting to circumscribe to external pressures and stereotypical beliefs imposed by homophobic facets of Catholic culture (Fassinger, 2000).

### **Characteristics of Psychologist**

Multiple interviewees stressed that when they sought psychological help for problems surrounding their homosexuality and religion, their individual therapy sessions were often uncomfortable, frustrating, and not-worthwhile. Vincent remarked that:

My psychologist was a slightly awkward, older man. It was clear in the beginning that we really didn't have much in common. I didn't even tell him that I was gay until three weeks into our therapy. I just didn't feel at ease. And when we finally talked about me being 'gay', I could tell he didn't really feel comfortable addressing the issue of homosexuality.

Data gained from the interviews suggests that it may be beneficial for the psychologist to abstain from interjecting his own Catholic or homophobic bias into the therapy session. His position as a neutral party, focusing on assisting the client explore his individual experience is paramount

here. Conservative religious and sexual judgments are unacceptable when dealing with clients who are struggling with such issues as these conservative mentalities often provoke negative emotional responses in clients (Martell, Safren, & Ellen, 2004). The psychologist should carefully examine his own stance on such issues, before entering into a professional relationship with a gay Catholic client. Moreover, the Dutch helping professional should familiarize himself with the more affirmative re-interpretations of the Bible as well as support groups in the Netherlands (Dignity, Rozenkerk, LKP, Metropolitan Community Church, etc...) prior to entering into the relationship with the client in order to educate himself and pass this information along to the client.

The psychologist should enter into psychotherapy sessions perceiving identity negotiation as an individualist process with much environmental and temporal variability. That identity integration is a lifelong process with no permanent or exact solution. The therapist should not become discouraged with the client's regression, or overly confident with successes. Finding provisional resolutions, therefore, should not be considered an indication of failure on the part of the therapist, the client, or the treatment.

### **Future Directions**

Catholicism is one of many religious orientations expressed by LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual) individuals; therefore, future consideration of differing sects of Christianity as well as completely different religious orientations (Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism) would only expand the current comprehension of sexuality and religiosity negotiation. It is necessary that future research on Catholic and sexuality identity negotiation integrates pluralistic and multicultural values to expand the target popularity beyond



the white, homosexual, middle class, Dutch male. Consideration of the entire LGBTQIA community, as well as a cornucopia of gender, race, class, etc... expressions only increase the external validity of the sample population, as well as more adequately encompasses the complexity of the human condition.

The current study divulged into the lives of three gay Dutch Catholic priests (as well as eleven other gay Dutch Catholic men) to better understand how the gay man navigates seemingly conflicting identities. Through the stories of the three priests, we see that celibacy and imposed asexuality are not permanent solutions to Catholic and homosexuality identity negotiation. While the actual homosexual sex act may be restrained and repressed the core homosexual identity remains, producing cognitive dissonance and internal conflict in the psyche of the gay priest. Human sexuality transcends physical barriers, encompassing all aspects of personhood. Sexuality is far more than physical sex. It is an integral part of an individual's personhood, a polymorphous identity which can change and become fluid depending on one's environment and current psychosexual understanding.

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## Appendix

### Supplemental Interviews

Two supplemental interviews are provided in this appendix to demonstrate the diversity and variable complexity of identity negotiation. Lars and Andre are not gay priests, but gay Catholic men from differing geographic and ethnic backgrounds, currently residing in Holland. The sample provided in the analysis were all white, upper-class, middle aged men, therefore Lars' and Andre's stories provide is with differing lenses at looking at the same problem of navigating the Catholic and homosexual identities.

#### Andre

Andre is a 26 year old ex-pat from the United States:

*I moved from America to the Netherlands (Amsterdam) over three years ago at the age of 23. At that time, I had not attended any religious services for nearly ten years, and Christian religious services continue to play no part in my life today. Both of my parents are first-generation Hungarian-Americans, and while god and church were present in my childhood, they were not overbearing or conditioning aspects. I was, and still am, an avid reader of literature, and from an early age (10 or 11), most notions of 'faith' or god quickly became brittle. My parents and family discussed religion often, but allowed me engage in constructive debate and dialogue on those issues; I was never punished or meant to feel unloved because of my lack of faith. Later, I went to high school in a rural part of Ohio (Wooster), where I certainly experienced emotional struggles as I began to come out to myself.*

*Although coming out for me could certainly be described as an existential, emotional, and family crisis at that time, none of that had to do with religion or Christianity as far as I can remember. Once, my aunt placed a Bible on my bed, and I can only assume it had to do with my being gay, but I confronted her about it. I remember it as a quick moment of rage followed by a lengthy discussion with her with plenty of laughter. She realized there was no need to proselytize, and I realized there was no place for vengeance when we could both continue to love each other without worrying about how each of us loved individually.*

*I came out at the end of high school, and went to university after that. My school had the largest active Campus Crusade for Christ in the nation on campus. But I was actively involved with the gay/straight alliance on campus, and eventually became its president by my senior year. Although there was plenty of harassment generally on campus toward gay, lesbian, trans and bi students, the university faculty, community, and police were*

*actively supportive in ensuring the safety of all students. Our gay/straight student group also had lots of programming aimed directly at the residence halls, course materials and class topics, and the student body (lectures, symposiums, etc.). I never once felt personally threatened by Christians at all on campus.*

*Moving to the Netherlands hasn't changed much for me in terms of Christianity. In fact, Amsterdam seems to be evacuated of most anti-gay Christianity. I largely feel safe and comfortable in my sexuality and atheism here, and don't have any anecdotes to offer in exception.*

*Most of the world I still have yet to explore, so I certainly don't find the statement that Amsterdam is the gay capital of the world as correct. In Amsterdam, I hear it quite often, though. If I consider 'gay' in the strictest sense of the term – men sexually engaged with other men – there might be more of a truism involved, because there are certainly plenty of places to 'play' here for men, and I also get the sense that I see gay men all over the city; my frustration with this concept of the Netherlands as a 'gay capital' is that it completely excludes women and makes invisible the substantial transgender and transsexual community here.*

*There is a dearth of lesbian venues, and aside from parading or fetishizing trans folks, they are largely unassociated with the gay venues. Sure, same-sex marriages are legal here, there are many different types of bars and clubs and groups for gay men, and I feel comfortable walking on the street or kissing my partner in public pretty much everywhere I've been in this country, I still feel 'the Netherlands is the gay capital of the world' is less a reality than a concept toward which we are (hopefully) striving. Outside Amsterdam, the 'tolerance' falls much more quickly than one might expect of this country.*

### Lars

Lars is a 23 year old, Mexican migrant who recently immigrated to Amsterdam. Here he tells his story:

*I can tell that since I have memory of my childhood, my family was very close to each other, religion was a very important part of every weekend's routine. Going to church on Sunday morning was simply something that made family come together and see each other, and then later on, have lunch as a big family. When growing up, Catholicism was the first formal approach of catholic morality and values, that of course, is the base for the family moral. In the beginning, this was not a problem, I mean, I had no mayor issue with following my religious beliefs, in fact I'm always being a very religious person who prays if not every day, at least once a week on Sunday's mass.*

*When I became aware that I had the same feelings for boys as I used to have only for girls, was the start of my sexual consciousness. I remember being in what could be considered 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and I had feelings for a kid in class who was really beautiful, and as I knew that was not correct, I kept that in a secret. We all know that gay people exists everywhere and since long time ago, but the way Mexican culture look at it is very dramatic and pessimistic, because by that time (early 2000's), gay people, specially men, only care about sex and not building up a serious relationship, as it is socially not approved (which I considered to be a vicious cycle). I grew old and I accepted myself to be gay and liking boys was a quite difficult because I couldn't tell my family or friends what my feeling were.*

*Anyways, time passed and when my brother told my parents he knew I was gay... my world became a nightmare. First, dealing with the fact I had just accepted myself, my family gave a rough time, telling me I was going to be unhappy my whole life If I continue this way. My mother specially wanted me to have counseling by either a priest or a psychologist and she kept on having a very negative image of me (which I believe is just about me having sex with other men). My father, who was never really interested in my brothers' or my personal life, told me it was my decision, but he didn't want to bare the societal burden of having a gay son, for which he asked me to keep it to myself and don't let people to knew about this aspect of my life.*

*So I continued with my life as normal, and in order to keep things easy with my mother I agreed to have some counseling, which helped me a lot, specially to understand what could be the consequences of ongoing with a gay lifestyle and to understand other people's ideas about me being gay. After seeing 3 different psychologists and having therapies, all of them told my parents I was already accepting the fact of being gay and there was no chance for me to even consider any changes. My family was devastated with such news, and tried the last resource, religious counseling. So again for the sake of family's emotional stability I agreed, and went to see a priest that worked in my high school.*

*Yet again, instead of deciding for a change, I understood what is the catholic view of gay people and their sexual life, and that helped me enormously to have my faith backing every of my decisions (in the sense of self-control and looking for things that seems more alike to a “normal” heterosexual lifestyle). Ever since I feel completely ok with myself and throughout the years of dating people from different social classes and backgrounds, I think my perspective of homosexuality, grows and becomes part of my lifestyle.*

*Although I encounter very orthodox Catholic or Christian people, and have to have a conversation, explaining my view of gay life... it seems we can all agree on several points and have total opposite ideas on others, but at the end I know how to take constructive criticism and become better. In general I believe that being gay is just part of my life, not what determines how I live it, but I can accept those who think different from me, but at the same time I cannot say I would let myself being surrounded by those who act different (I believe there's a limit for tolerance).*

*Fortunately, before coming here to study and pursue a life in here, I had a very good friend who studied psychology and who told me great deal of advice and who helped me understood several unfinished issues I was struggling with. That helped me a lot to built my character and let me experience difference and try to integrate to different cultures, like Dutch one. I have nothing against gay life being lived in Holland, in fact I feel more comfortable that I guess I'll feel probably back home in Mexico, but still there are things that I personally believe is beyond freedom, almost like it is in the border of immoral. Some of this aspects are loyalty, pursue of a single partnership, openness of sex life, public deployments of affections, etc, that for instance are against to my religious beliefs and family values, but somehow socially accepted as normal in the Netherlands.*

## Online Version of Survey, with Consent Form

Please fill out the following questions to the best of your ability. Please provide specific examples and go in depth... we appreciate long responses!

Please return your complete survey to Kyle Alexander at the email address:

[kalexander@fordham.edu](mailto:kalexander@fordham.edu)

Please read the following consent statement.

By filling out and returning this survey, you consent to the terms listed below in the statement.

Reminder: your identity will be kept anonymous and your name or any identifying information will not be used in this study.

### Consent Form

*Project Topic: Examining the Christian, Dutch, Homosexual, Male.*

*Project Objective: To better understand the Dutch homosexual male identity and psychosocial development.*

You are invited to take part in a survey about Homosexuality and Christianity. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this survey. Results from this study will be used solely for this academic project and may eventually be utilized for a senior thesis at Fordham University.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to be in the study you can withdraw at any time. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and data will be stored in secure computer files and devices. All identifying material will be kept strictly private, and will be destroyed at the end of this study. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified.

If you have questions or want a copy or summary of this study's results, you can contact the researcher at the email address above. If you have any questions, you may contact SIT Study Abroad Academic Director, Kevin Connors ([kevinconnors@sit.edu](mailto:kevinconnors@sit.edu))

#### **Participant's Consent to Take Part in This Study**

By completing this survey I attest that I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study.

I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.

**(Instructions: Please read the following statements and respond to them in paragraph form. Use as many words as necessary to tell your story. Please write in the space under the question and send your completed survey to [kalexander@fordham.edu](mailto:kalexander@fordham.edu))**

Questions:

1. I am trying to better understand the relationship between sexuality and religion in the lives of gay, Christian, Dutch men. I would like you to tell me your life story and life experience with religion and sexuality, and in doing so to be sure to describe your religious experiences as you were growing up as well as your growing sense of sexuality, and how these two areas of your life may have been related...right up to the present day.
  - a. [If applicable] Within this broader life context, I'd also be grateful if you'd describe your experiences in psychotherapy or any support groups surrounding sexuality or religion

[Write response here; feel free to use multiple pages]

....next page

2. Please respond to the three statements below from personal experience. According to your personal experience do find these statements accurate...and why? (Please give specific examples from your life and stories that may prove or disprove these statements).
  - i. "The Netherlands is the Gay Capital of the World"
  - ii. "The Netherlands is the Most Secular Nation in the World"
  - iii. "The Netherlands is the Gay Capital of the World because it is Secular"

[Write response here; feel free to use multiple pages]

...End  
(Thanks for your time)

**Directions: Save survey and send as attachment to [kalexander@fordham.edu](mailto:kalexander@fordham.edu)**



### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank all of the friends I met here. I love that none of us are normal, and everything is NOT REAL. I will miss all of you, please keep in touch.

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