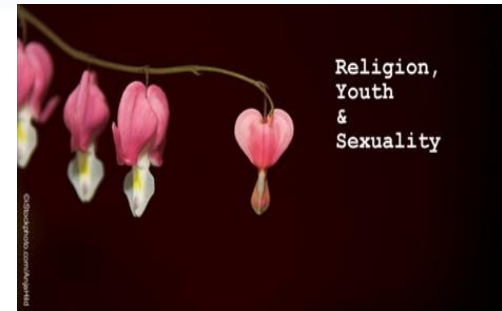


Young people find ways to be religious and sexual – despite the silence of their elders



Young religious people in the UK today do not live out their sexual identities simply according to prescriptions laid out in sacred texts. Being a sexual human being is just as important to them as being a religious person, and these aspects can be differently expressed in different contexts e.g. with their family, at work, with friends, in their religious community. Young people can feel deep conflicts and tensions between the two, but this significant area of overlap and potential problems is little addressed by academia, religious leaders or youth workers and sexual health professionals. This is part of what Andrew Yip, Michael Keenan and Sarah-Jane Page found in a project conducted between 2009 and 2011 and funded by [Religion and Society](#).

The team used combined methods. With an online survey they sought the views of 693 Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, Buddhists and people of mixed-faith aged between 18 and 25 years old. They then interviewed 61 of these respondents. Twenty-four were subsequently asked to keep a video diary for a week documenting their opinions, feelings and experiences related to religion, youth, sexuality and gender. The team wished to investigate how their sexual identities, values and choices were related to their religious faith.

What they found was a lot of variety, within and between religions, but also some general trends. They discovered that it was wrong to assume that even in the most conservative forms of Christianity and Islam young lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people feel excluded and unhappy. Many LGB young people did indeed report finding the challenge of integrating the religious and sexual parts of their life enormously difficult. However, many also found ways through this. One approach was to compartmentalize their religious and sexual identities, although this can negatively affect psychological, social and emotional well-being. But several spoke of how their religious identity gave them a firm foundation from which to affirm and express their sexual identity. The majority – heterosexual and LBG – experienced religion as a positive force in their lives, and the main influence upon their sexual practices and identities. A significant number felt that relationships outside of marriage could be committed, meaningful and acceptable.

Interestingly, most participants were less reflective and articulate about their sexual than their religious identities, and this was particularly true of the heterosexual who formed the majority of the sample (74.3 per cent). This may relate to wider silence on the part of those in authority. Fewer than half those sampled were sexually active. The perceived sexualization of wider secular society and casual sex were frequently criticized.

A major recommendation arising from the research is that religious leaders, youth workers and healthcare professionals would do well to be more open about sexuality: to address the topic and remove taboos, to listen to young people more, and create safe spaces where they felt that could discuss their sexual experiences, thoughts and feelings without being judged. The data may help other young people in reflecting upon their own personal

religious and sexual journeys by highlighting different stories and that there is no single right way of living out one's religious and sexual identities.

Find out more...

- Visit the project web pages: <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/sociology/research/projects/rys/index.aspx>
- Watch a video about the project featuring project leader Andrew Yip and researcher Sarah-Jane Page: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtx3HFUtuL8>
- Read and download the project report: http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/uploads/docs/2011_03/1298990240_rys-research-report.pdf
- Listen to and download podcasts of Sarah-Jane Page and project Co-Investigator Michael Keenan discussing the research: http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/publications/podcasts/show/youth_religion_and_sexuality
- Read press articles about the project: *The Guardian* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/mar/21/sexuality-religion-young-people-survey> *Church Times* <http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=108924>, *Nottingham Evening Post* <http://www.thisisnottingham.co.uk/news/Sex-religion-young-people-think/article-3288352-detail/article.html>
- Look out for the book from the project *Religious and Sexual Journeys: A Multi-Faith Exploration of Young Believers* to be published shortly by Ashgate: http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Religious_and_Sexual_Journeys.html?id=OAVsXwAACAAJ&redir_esc=y

You might also be interested in...

- Reading about an event on youth and religion the Religion and Society Programme co-organised with King's College London at which Sarah-Jane Page spoke about the project: http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/young_people_and_religion_event

Award Title

Religion, Youth & Religion: A Multi-faith Exploration

Team

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Award Type

Phase 2 Large Grant

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