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# Out of the Closet, Into the Youth Room



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## INTRODUCTION:

### *What We Have In Common*

- We all Love Jesus
- We all love Youth

### *Shared Realities about Youth and Sexual Identity*

- Sexual identity refers to private identity (to oneself) and public identity (to others).
- It is a way of communicating one's sexual preferences.
- Sexual identity is influenced by:
  - one's biological sex
  - gender identity
  - attractions
  - intentions
  - behaviors
  - values

**REALITY ONE:** "SGA is common in adolescence and you have youth in your church with some amount of sexual identity confusion."

- 27% of Grade 9 Students report being unsure of their sexual orientation
- 9% of Grade 12 Students report being
- unsure of their sexual orientation
- Around 2-3% of Adults Identify themselves as being Gay or Lesbian  
(University of Minnesota, Demography of Sexual Orientation in Adolescents Pediatrics, vol. 89, April 1992 (survey of 34,706 students))

### **Therefore:**

*"We can no longer afford to ignore this issue. Ignoring it will NOT make it go away."*

**REALITY TWO:** *"Sexuality is Complex!"*

### Causation is Complex

- The Big Debate: Nature vs. Nurture!
- The Real Answer: We don't know, but probably BOTH!
- Causation is not the same for everyone!
- Causation matters less then we pretend  
(Yarhouse, M.A(2003) *Sexual Identity: A guide to living in the time between times*. Latham, MD: University Press of America)

### Homosexuality is Complex

- What do you mean when you say "Gay"?
- Your youth could mean something else
- Most gay identified youth have had their first sexual experience with a person of the opposite sex (Savin-Williams)
- Gay or bi identified male Youth in BC are 4x more likely to get a girl pregnant than

- their hetero identified peers (BC AdHealth III)
- It is not uncommon for youth to change their public sexual identity several times (Diamond, 2003)
- Identity and Behavior can be divorced. (Down Low Culture, Feminist Action Groups)
- Youth can engage in homoerotic behavior for a variety of reasons. The majority of males who have same gender sexual contact as adolescents identify themselves as heterosexual (Savin-Williams)
- Most youth engaging in same-gender sexual behavior in adolescence will move on to engage in exclusively opposite gender behavior later in life. (Savin-Williams)
- A growing number of teens refuse firm labels, or generate new ones (ie. Bi-flexible, Tri-sexual, Open, Questioning)

Because Sexuality is Complex:

- We need to make space for multiple explanations
- We need to listen to students' narratives
- We need to dialogue and share
- We need to get to know the WHOLE person
- We need to let go our desire for simple answers
- We need to help teens process complexity
- We need to be comfortable walking with students in the "messy in-between"

### **REALITY THREE:** "Enforced Labels and Limiting Scripts are Hurtful"

The Danger of Stereotypes

- The only way to tell a student is SGA is when they tell you.
- Students continue to defy our desire to classify them

Sex, Scripts and Stories

Limiting Scripts and Dangerous Stories:

- SGA students are essentially different
- "That's SO GAY!"
- Biological determinism
- No future, no place in the church
- "God doesn't love you because your gay"
- Sex is dirty and bad...so save it for marriage

Making Safe Places, Telling Safe Stories

- There is no "us and them" there is only "us"
- No Perfect People Allowed
- The Importance of Questions
- Making Space in the Church: More than Just Marriage

### **REALITY FOUR:** "Homophobia exists in the church... and it is NOT okay."

- How we handle the issue of homosexuality is the *litmus test* non-Christians use to determine if our message is true (Bruxy Cavey)
- Over 90% of non-Christians identify Christians as being against homosexuals. This is the most agreed on identifier of Christians in the study. (UN-Christian)

*Because Homophobia exists:*

- We need to speak out against it wherever it occurs
- We need to overcome evil with love
- We need to engage in service
- We need to dialogue about this issue with respect and humility