

RELIGION AS A TOOL OF CENSORSHIP AGAINST THE LGBT COMMUNITY

An archival look at Salem State University
in the 1970's

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Research Methods in the Social
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BACKGROUND

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) community is an extremely vulnerable group in the United States. The oppression they face is felt in many aspects of our society such as policymaking, education, medical assistance, and religion. The LGBT community is vast with around 5.6% of the United States population identifying themselves as members of the LGBT community according to Gallup (Jones, 2021).

The Christian religion over the years has been known for being particularly unaccepting of the LGBT community. They have also actively contributed to the censoring of the LGBT community through their major influence. Over the course of history, the LGBT community has not been allowed to have the same voice as other groups and it has harmed how they are viewed. It is important to examine what this relationship looks like in terms of individuals conflicting identities, available platforms, and possible pushback.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

How has Christianity been used to censor the LGBT community through language and representation? What were they allowed to say in the 1970's?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

We did qualitative research using content analysis of the Salem State University Archives of the LOG to look into the perspectives of different groups on campus from 1970-1976

We were able to access some school newspaper columns from the LOG called "Some of Your Best Friends"

We also looked at Letters to the editor which came from both the LGBT group on campus and the opposing Christian group on campus

We took a sample of ten columns and letters and coded them for the terms

- Homosexuality is a "sin"
- Homophobic slurs/stereotypes
- Ways of censorship

PAST RESEARCH

- Jonathan S. Coley (2019) and Melinda D. Kane (2013) address the conflicts between LGBT identity and Christian identity. They mention that a lot of LGBT people abandon their religion because it is harmful to them. Kane (2013) states that the LGBT community also create their own denominations in order to feel safe within their religion
- Michael J. Maher (2006) talks about interviews with several contacts in LGBT related churches, but outside events such as AIDS related homophobia, discouraged the contacts from talking. He investigated what drives away the voices of the LGBT community, especially in a religious setting.

PAST RESEARCH

- Jen Scott Curwood, Megan Schliesman and Kathleen T. Horning (2009) and Samuel L. Perry and Kara J. Snawder (2016) talk about platforms and the censorship of the LGBT in places such as the education system and the media. This included the banning of books in schools, violence towards LGBT students, and the ways that media exposure can change people's opinions on the LGBT community.

WHAT HAS NOT
BEEN
RESEARCHED?

An important question we must ask is, what about the members of the LGBT community who stay in the churches they grew up in? Does the “religiously justified” hatred cause members of the LGBT to lose their beliefs?

what happens when the LGBT is competing with the Christian community? They often have opposing messages and desires. What happens when they are competing for the same audiences such as on college campuses? Who has the resources to make more noise?

FINDINGS

Use of the word "sin"

Out of the 10 pieces of archival data we looked at, most of them contained the words "sin" or something equivalent.

This was usually accompanied by statements such as "Jesus loves everyone but"



By Peter Robicheau

Many people condemn the bible and Christianity without even reading the bible. They take things out of context and interpret things their own way.

The homosexuals say that Jesus said homosexuality was OK. He did not. A friend of mine says you can get to heaven through any religion. The bible does not say so. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by me." (John 14:6).

There are many other misconceptions about Christianity which can be cleaned up by reading the bible. Many people believe you are a Christian just because you go to church. This is not necessarily so. Many believe Jesus came to destroy the Mosaic law and deviate from Jewish history-not so. Jesus came to fulfill the law and His coming is foretold in the Old Testament.

It is very easy to pull things out of context. You need to look at the bible as a whole to understanding a lot of things.

I have an offer. It is for those who think they know what the bible means and for those who know they do not. I would like to start a bible study with people interested in looking at it as literature. You can see what it says about various subjects and it will be a good learning experience. You will be provided with a bible for the study and if you have something in particular you want to look at we can.

If you are interested call 745-0556 ext. 315 or come and leave your name and phone number in the Interfaith Office on the second floor of the Student Union.

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

TO THE EDITOR:

In last week's LOG I wrote to you regarding Dave Newton's series of essays on homosexuality that have been appearing in the school paper.

I did sign my name to that letter and assumed my letter would carry my signature. I did not ask the LOG to delete my name, nor do I want the LOG to delete my name. Indeed it would be a contradiction in terms of what I said in my letter.

Also, I wrote "bores" and not "boors" (not to be confused with the Boers!). Thank you,

Harry Allard

EDITOR'S REPLY:

I felt I understood the meaning and intent of your letter of last week, and it was for this reason I left your name in. However, one of the LOG's production workers may have misread those same intentions, and removed your name, due to the delicate nature of homosexuality.

I did change the word bore, however, to boor. Since you capitalized Bo perhaps, then you did mean Bore. My apologies.

News Editor

WOODSY OWL HOOTS:

**Recycle cans,
bottles and paper.**



GIVE A HOOT. DON'T POLLUTE



FINDINGS

Use of slurs or stereotypes

The data had some slurs and stereotypes, but typically referred to the LGBT community as homosexuals. There were more instances of stereotypes, specifically towards lesbians, than slurs.

FINDINGS

Ways of censorship

As for censorship, most of the data did not censor the LGBT community, but attempted to discredit or correct previous statements made in the "Some of Your Best Friends" column of the LOG

LETTERS TO THE LOG

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ;

Your responses to my article on the morality of homosexuality were well taken. I disagree with much of what you said, and also with some of your interpretations, just as you do with mine. That is not really important; we could argue interpretation until Doom's Day, and it would not really make any difference to either party.

Ms. Risberg seems to have missed an important point I was trying to make in the limited-size column on Gay morality. I agree that Christ was against lust, according to the Bible — but no more so against Gay situations of lust than of Straight, as you imply. The point is this: why do you consider homosexuality as only a state of lust? We also love, besides lust, as you do. Why do you think we often live together in pairs, and want the legal right to wed? At least some of us want this right — others don't need a legal piece of paper to proclaim our fidelity, and complete love for one another.

Further, I could disagree that all laws come from God. Really now, did God positively sanction laws prohibiting certain religious groups in certain states; poll tax laws, etc? If your God and Jesus sanctions oppression in this way, then I don't want them — your God is too small for me — my God and Jesus are much greater, and made of love. I presume that what you and all other religious groups in this country and the world?

I would say that the biggest problem between myself and the Christian writers' letters, is in our view of the nature of the Bible — you obviously think that it is divinely inspired in toto; I do not. Check out the Council of Nicea and other councils — which decided years long after Jesus' death which writings would be accepted as fact — such as the Virgin Birth of Christ for example — and others which would not be; and incorporated into the Bible. These decisions were made by men. For your sake, with your great faith, I hope that their choices were correct. As for myself, as a creature of God with free will, and a Protestant, I will continue to question and interpret the scriptures as I see fit. I would further suggest that you realize (Mr. Robicheau) that the Old Testament was written by men (not women) of, at that time, a small group of Semites who had much to protect and/or condemn, if they were to multiply to match the other Middle Eastern groups in power. How do you or I know what was divinely inspired, and what was politically inspired? So please do not say that I am twisting the Bible, the church twisted it for centuries. I am simply questioning, and not assuming that it says things that it doesn't. It is unfortunate that you feel only your interpretation is correct. This was the attitude of the Jewish religious-political parties that saw to it that Jesus was arrested and murdered. Now Ms. Piel — I quite resent that you feel that my opinion was unresearched concerning Christ's up-

heaval of Mosaic tradition. Research why the Jewish religious-political parties condemned Jesus.

I could not agree more that it is Jesus' "love that saves us" — at least for me, as a Christian. (This does not mean that any other religions are less valid for other people, in my system of belief.)

In essence, my response to all three writers is this: 1. I believe in Christ, and am not in the least bit worried that I will be damned for my homosexuality. As long as I believe that I atone for my sins, I believe that I am in the grace of God — whatever he/she is. 2. I believe that I was born Gay, and intend to remain the same. (1 Tim. 4:4) 3. Let this letter be an end to our discussion or disagreement over Christianity and Gays. To quote Rev. Troy Perry of the San Francisco M.C.C.: "I am not a person who is given to try to rationally expound my views by quoting scripture, because I think you can quote scriptures ad infinitum. You pick a topic and I can take something out of context and prove it to be the Bible — rightness or mankind just as possibly today as He did in the first century A.D. I don't think that St. Paul was the only one who could have a revelation."

I was saved by the blood of Christ — not Moses, or Paul of Tarsus. As long as organized religion supports oppression, I want no part of it.

Ralph N. Sweeney, Jr.
Class of '77

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Title	Date	Author	Use of "Sin"?	Slurs/stereotypes?	Censorship?
2	Jesus Christ condemns Homosexuality 1	11-Feb-76	Charlotte Risberg	Yes	No	No
3	Jesus Christ condemns Homosexuality 2	2/11/1976	Peter Robicheau	Yes	No	No
4	Jesus Christ condemns Homosexuality 3	2/11/1976	Betty Piel	Yes	No	No
5	A Rebuttal	19-Nov-75	Dave Newton	No	Yes	No
6	Logos	25-Feb-76	Peter Robicheau	Yes	No	No
7	Cancellation of "Some of Your Best Friends"	13-Nov-76	Barry Mogel	No	No	Yes
8	Is Homosexuality a sin?	9-Apr-75	No name	Yes	No	No
9	posters for Gay Film Night being ripped down around campus.	16-Mar-77		No	No	Yes
10	A matter of Priorities	Feb 26 1976	David Newton	No	No	No

FINDINGS

LETTERS TO THE LOG

A number of people have asked me this semester why the Gay Task Force's column, "Some of Your Best Friends. . .", has not appeared in this year's LOG. The column was a regular feature of The LOG from the middle of the 1973-74 school year through the end of the last academic year.

Although both LOG editors and the Gay Task Force are aware that The LOG's Feature Editor has canceled the column, I think the rest of the college community should be aware of the circumstances surrounding that decision. About three weeks ago, I was informed in a letter from the Feature Editor that "Some of Your Best Friends. . ." would not run this year because ". . .there is not enough interest on campus to warrant publication of the column this academic year." This decision had been reached, I was informed, "after due consideration of the facts, and consultation with LOG editors and other campus leaders" (sic).

Members of the Gay Task Force are not convinced that the editor's decision is either a fair or justifiable one, and we will continue to explore (1) other factors that may have been involved in this decision, and (2) avenues which may be available to us to have the column reinstated in The LOG.

Whatever my disagreement with the Feature Editor's decision, I personally commend The LOG staff on what I infer to be its (new?) policy of running only those weekly columns which are of general interest to the campus and which are approved by the editorial board and "other campus leaders." I look forward to the opportunity of expressing my vote on some of the regular features which have appeared in The LOG.

My best wishes for the success of this venture into making The LOG a more exciting and popular paper!

David E. Newton
Professor of Chemistry and
Physics

The Cancellation of "Some of Your Best Friends" in the LOG

November 13, 1976

CONCLUSION

We are able to conclude from the archives and the literature that there is a conflict in the relationship between Christianity and the LGBT community in the 1970's and still today. The archives showcases the conflict between the LGBT and Christians on Salem State's campus. They argued over morality and Christians constantly called for their LGBT peers to recognize their "sins".

Christians were able to call the morality of LGBT students into question and they did things such as ripping down posters for LGBT events and setting up rallies to celebrate Anita Bryant, a strong advocate against the LGBT community.

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