

Synthesis Dialogue

Austin Morgan

The Sources:

Angie Dahl and Renee Galliher: “Sexual Minority Young Adult Religiosity, Sexual Orientation Conflict, Self-Esteem and Depressive Symptoms.”



Dr. Angie Dahl, a professor at Ferrum College, has extensively studied both religion and psychology, and having worked in clinical psychology, she became interested in how religion and other cultural context influences development and identity in young people. Renee Galliher, a professor at Utah State University’s Department of Psychology, is interested in communication and interpersonal relationships among adolescents. She is particularly interested in studying young people from diverse and rural backgrounds.

Hans C. Clausen: "The "Privilege of Speech" in a "Pleasantly Authoritarian Country": How Canada's Judiciary Allowed Laws Proscribing Discourse Critical Of Homosexuality To Trump Free Speech And Religious Liberty."



Hans C. Clausen is a lawyer based in Atlanta, GA, who received his J.D. from Vanderbilt University. He is a former judicial clerk to the Chief Justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court and the former Editor-in-Chief of *The Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*. He doesn’t seem to focus on these issues very often, but his law background is definitely relevant.

Rebecca J. Hamblin and Alan Gross: "Religious Faith, Homosexuality, and Psychological Well-Being: A Theoretical and Empirical Review."



Rebecca J. Hamblin is a clinical psychologist who received her MA from the University of Mississippi and is currently enrolled in the doctoral program. Dr. Alan M. Gross is a clinical psychology professor at the University of Mississippi focusing on developmental and abnormal psychology. He has done research on sexual assault and child behavior problems.

Douglas NeJaime: "Marriage Inequality: Same-Sex Relationships, Religious Exemptions, And The Production of Sexual Orientation Discrimination."



Douglas NeJaime is a law professor at UC Irvine School of Law who is an expert on sexual orientation law, same-sex marriage, law and social movements, family law, cause lawyering, and anti-discrimination law (in other words, very relevant subjects to this paper).



Austin Morgan is a super great freshman at American University in Washington, DC, majoring in International Studies and Economics. Severely outclassed in academic experience by his panelists, Austin relies on the assistance of the wonderful American

University College Writing Program and *They Say/I Say* strategies to strengthen his arguments and catalyze his intellectual and academic development.

The Dialogue

This synthesis dialogue was written relatively early in the essay process, during a time when I had read some of the sources, but was still working out exactly what the focus of my essay would be and still trying to understand some of the legal intricacies of my topic. The argument here, therefore, does not exactly reflect the final product, and is definitely missing some big pieces, but it does reflect where I was at the time and the benefits of using tools such as the synthesis dialogue as a stepping stone toward that final product. This was one of the most helpful activities in class for really getting the important “stuff” out of my sources, and it helped me see how all the different “stuff” might be able to fit together. So without further ado,

AUSTIN: Hello, reader, my name is Austin Morgan and today I will be moderating a discussion among respected academics and experts... and Mr. Clausen.

HANS CLAUSEN: (*chortles*) Very funny. Call me Hans.

AUSTIN: You know I'm just giving you a hard time, Hans. As I was saying, I am joined today by legal experts Mr. Hans C. Clausen and Mr. Douglas NeJaime, and psychologists Dr. Renee Galliher and Ms. Rebecca J. Hamblin. Welcome, everyone, and thank you so much for joining me!

ALL: (*simultaneously and gratefully*) You're very welcome. What an honor.

AUSTIN: The topic of discussion today is very current, regarding legislation affecting sexual minorities, including self-identified “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” etc. people.

HANS: And people of faith!

AUSTIN: Yes, Hans, I was getting to that. There are many laws created in the name of religious liberty that may actually be overstepping the line of freedom of religion, causing more harm than good. It is important to keep in mind religious concerns when creating legislation, but these days we find “freedom of religion” in conflict with “freedom from religion.” Regarding sexual minorities, we must ensure that they are afforded equal protection under the law, and taking into consideration mental health and social concerns makes some legislation problematic, such as the recently-overturned “right to discriminate bill” in Arizona. Mr. NeJaime, as our focus is legislation and you are an expert on law related to sexual minorities, would you like to briefly summarize your position?

NEJAIME: Certainly. I'll start small and work to the larger point if you don't mind. I believe that the thing that makes sexual minorities "sexual minorities" at the most essential level is the same-sex relationship. It is the most crucial part of their identity and its expression. Legislation enacted in the name of religious liberty is centered on inherent objections to same-sex relationships. Discrimination in this area is a denial of that fundamental aspect of the identity of sexual minorities. Same-sex marriage is just one of many issues where religious liberty finds itself in opposition to sexual orientation equality. Any "religious exemption" to anti-discrimination laws outside the realm of marriage is merely a shroud for discrimination.

AUSTIN: Hans, you hold a very different view. Would you like to jump in here?

HANS: Thank you for your points, Mr. NeJaime, though as Austin says I must disagree. There has recently been some legislation proposed in neighboring Canada and elsewhere which restricts speech critical of homosexuality. I'm sure this sounds good to you, Mr. NeJaime; however, I see it as a sacrifice of our fundamental rights to free discourse and religious liberty in favor of promoting the homosexual lifestyle. This is more than just stopping discrimination. It's an agenda. I mean, I have nothing against them and nothing against stopping discrimination, but apparently homosexuals are more important than speech and religious freedom now.

AUSTIN: Thank you both. That wraps up both sides of the legal argument. Ms. Hamblin, I believe you might have something to say about "free discourse" regarding sexual minorities?

HAMBLIN: Indeed I would, Austin. Hans, I understand your reservations about legislation limiting speech; however, I believe my research about sexual minorities may change your mind. Religion does not have to be in conflict with homosexuality. Church and religiosity may offer comfort and support to sexual minorities, who in the face of discrimination and hate truly need it. We do know that there are many happy religious people in same-sex relationships, after all. However, religion interpreted in a certain way is very harmful to the mental health and well-being of these people.

AUSTIN: Thanks, Rebecca. I guess this is a good time for me to jump in to say that religious objections to same-sex relationships are fine in theory, and are protected under the law, but perhaps it is when they become detrimental to the well-being of others that lawmakers feel the need to intervene. I'd now like to briefly turn it over to Dr. Galliher, since I think she would agree with a lot of what we are saying.

GALLIHER: Yes, I would agree with that. My research indicates that societal homonegativity based in religion contributes to the disproportionately high rate of suicide, depression, and other self-harm or mental health issues among the LGBTQ population. The religious base reinforces homonegative ideas, and the cognitive dissonance and internalized homophobia that this creates, particularly in gay and bisexual people of faith, leads to a number of psychological issues.

HAMBLIN: Absolutely. And my argument, which I believe Mr. NeJaime and Dr. Galliher would agree with, is simply that it is possible to grant rights and protections to sexual minorities without undermining Christianity.

AUSTIN: Thank you both for your contribution. Hans, it would appear that the psychologists are in agreement with Mr. NeJaime here. If you would like to respond, by all means...

HANS: You have read my work regarding this issue, Austin, wherein I describe a very extreme example, yet one that exemplifies my point. In Washington state there has for a long time been a billboard with anti-homosexual messages, one of the most infamous examples being "AIDS IS A MIRACLE DISEASE. IT TURNS FRUITS INTO VEGETABLES."

AUSTIN: It took me a minute to get that since I'm not a terrible person, but it is one of the vilest things I have ever heard. How could you possibly justify something like this?

HANS: Well you see, that's the point. I'm not saying I agree with the sign or that I would put up something similar, but I think the billboard is great. Our First Amendment rights are a huge part of what makes us American. I don't like what the man who put up the billboard said, but I love that he can say it. He summed it up best when one day he made the billboard say "THERE ARE NO BILLBOARDS IN RUSSIA, CUBA, OR COMMUNIST CHINA."

HAMBLIN: Hans, I admire your adherence to our nation's Constitution, and though I disagree with your specific beliefs here, I also admire that you stick to a very sound moral code. But I must ask you to try to put yourself into the shoes of one of these "fruits." The man who made that billboard thinks that the death of millions of people is funny. People die of AIDS regardless of their sexual orientation, but in this case, he targets sexual minorities in a way that I do not find acceptable. The sheer self-loathing that these outward displays of homophobia promote is grounds enough to take the billboard down; regardless of what the man believes, that is public enough that there is a problem.

AUSTIN: Hans, care to comment?

HANS: I still firmly believe in the principle of freedom of speech. Limiting speech is crossing the line into authoritarianism, and that is not acceptable regardless of what the people are saying. If you remember, the Supreme Court upheld the Westboro Baptist Church's right to protest at funerals and say whatever they want.

AUSTIN: I do remember, Hans, and I do believe that we should continue to protect freedom of speech; however, in my opinion some of this type of speech is nothing more than violence. The AIDS billboard isn't an important, subversive political statement that needs protection. The man can say what he wants in private, but such a public display, whether he paid for it or not, is inherently going to have to take into consideration members of the public. The fact that a gay youth could see that billboard and understand what it means is disgusting. The man can express his desire for freedom of religion and his opposition to same-sex marriage, but when you go this far, it is clearly violent, inciting language intended to provoke, dehumanize, and essentially taunt anyone opposed to it under "freedom of speech."

HANS: Violent? It's just speech. It's his opinion!

AUSTIN: His “opinion” in this case happens to be a public, unavoidable statement that laughs at the tragic deaths of millions based on their sexual orientation. We've seen the psychological damage this kind of stuff can do from our two psychological sources, and I firmly believe that allowing this billboard and things like it under the protection of freedom of speech, while great for whomever's saying it, is then a violation of the rights of others.

HANS: I see your point, but where do you draw the line? It's a slippery slope to—

NEJAIME: It's a slippery slope to even more protections for sexual minorities, that's what it is.

AUSTIN: Care to explain, Mr. NeJaime?

NEJAIME: We can't always give a religious exemption. I believe that a single ruling in the US favoring sexual minorities over those who exercise power over them is a huge step forward to really tackling the discrimination that these people face. We've seen the psychological effects, and it seems clear that the concerns for the well-being of the targeted people trumps the protection of the person who potentially could incite violence or at least hatred against those people.

AUSTIN: I agree. Actually I believe that this billboard story could apply to a lot of legal scenarios. Let's look at the Arizona "right to discriminate" bill that was recently shut down. So basically businesses could hypothetically refuse service to same-sex couples on religious grounds.

HANS: That is not the same as just a billboard. This bill was shut down, too, as you said, so I don't see the point of this.

AUSTIN: We already established that it's not "just a billboard"; you'll see the parallel in a moment. So my argument here is that yes, you have the right to speak about same-sex-attracted people, and yes you can theoretically refuse service to someone, but you cannot refuse service to someone because their behavior and the expression of one of the most fundamental parts of their identity is "wrong" in your eyes. It's pure discrimination, wouldn't you agree?

HANS: I suppose, but as I said, the bill was shut down. This is not the same thing.

AUSTIN: I'd argue that it is "the same thing," and that the billboard should have been shut down as well. You see, again, the man can believe what he wants, but the moment that people in public are exposed to that violent hate speech, he loses that freedom. A shop owner again can believe what s/he wants, but the minute a customer is unjustly refused service, we have a problem.

HANS: I still feel like homosexuals are getting special treatment against religious people. What if I'm offended by a billboard with a homosexual couple promoting gay marriage?

AUSTIN: You're offended by that?

HANS: Well, it's against my religion.

AUSTIN: Then don't get married to a man. Religious people have oppressed "homosexuals" for centuries, so unfortunately certain measures must be taken to ensure their protection *from* religious people. You heard the suicide statistics. You've seen the hate crimes on the news.

HANS: Then shield those people from the world, don't change it.

AUSTIN: You know, in a lot of places, same-sex couples can't even go to high school prom together. Either it's not allowed or it's discouraged. The justification for discouraging it at my high school was that "it would cause controversy." The school didn't want to have a scene at prom, so they discouraged gay and bisexual students from attending. Shouldn't we instead discourage the students who will create the problem from attending? The gay and bisexual kids are just living their lives, not asking for any trouble. To say that somehow their mere presence is asking for trouble highlights the root of society's problem. Stop the person who will beat up a gay kid after prom, or the girls who won't talk to their lesbian friend anymore, not the kids who just want to dance. Stop the person who refuses service across the board to those s/he sees as inferior and corrupted, not the couples who just want to buy something. Stop the man who laughs at the death and suffering of real human beings, not the young people who are the butt of the joke. No, they can't do something else on prom night. No, they can't take their business elsewhere. No, they can't drive another way or look away from the billboard. We need to stop justifying hate and discrimination in our society, and instead counter it with meaningful legislation. Stop protecting those in power from seeing their dominance challenged. There are lives on the line here, and we have a responsibility to take a critical look at "freedom of speech" and "freedom of religion" in a modern world that sees them challenged. Thank you all for joining me.

Works Cited

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