Effect of religious upbringing on homosexuality views

Analysis & Discussion

According to Braun & Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is ' an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data' and I therefore deemed it the most appropriate form of analysis to assist with the comprehensiveness I intended to discover within an account regarding Christian attitudes towards those with a homosexual identity. The step by step guidelines for conducting inductive thematic analysis were followed within the current study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, the data is coded and then specific themes are devised, providing a suitcase for individual codes. Literature isn't reviewed at this stage in order to ensure that the analysis is completely flexible and doesn't fit into a pre-existing coding frame, allowing themes to emerge gradually. Accordingly, the analysis is much more data-driven, absent of biases. In the current analysis, using open-ended interview questions, I identified one meta-theme and three underlying sub-themes. Since these themes were uniquely interpreted through the data, the work employs a constructionist epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2006) whereby meaning is made of the data (Patton, 1990).

Individual Differences

The predominant meta-theme is the idea that a Christian's attitude toward homosexual Christians depends specifically on the individual and is concerned with individual factors such as upbringing, location and the degree to which one follows religious guidelines. With this in mind it isn't surprising that those who proclaim to be highly religious also partake in larger amounts of prejudice behaviours (Adorno et al, 1950). Importantly,

there are three main factors encouraging the extent to which a Christian is prejudice against homosexual Christians and these stand as the sub-themes within this analysis. These sub-themes include upbringing and society, experience of religion and the conflict between Christianity and homosexuality. Each will be considered and critically discussed systematically.

1. Upbringing & Society

Within the initial stages of interview one (lines 20-25) we learn that each Christian is unique in their own beliefs, thoughts and feelings:

erm (0. 3) I feel there are two views (0. 2) some there are some Christians that feel they (.) homosexuality is well all Chri- I think the majority of the Christians feel homosexuality is not like a-a (.) good thing (0. 1) I dunno how to yeah put it (.) but then there are some that are really really strong in their views

Similarly, when discussing the communities official views on homosexuality, participant two (interview two, lines 21-23) explains how everybody has different opinions on the matter, despite each labelling themselves as Christians highlighting the individual differences theme.

(0. 2) I think that would very much depend on the person that you asked (.) erm (.) some (.) people would have stronger views on the issue than others (.) erm some others would be more open to (.) to different views

With regards to upbringing and society influences, participant one highlights the fact that she is from Nigeria and it is within this country that

homosexuality is against the law. Furthermore, when asked what her reaction would be if a family member exploited their homosexuality, she responded with shock, explicitly for the reason that her location has never allowed it: (lines 111-112 & 158-160).

different views on it and there are regards to the laws in some countries (0. 2) like apparently the law from Nigeria now it's like a crime (.)

yeah (.) not (0. 2) only because of where we're from (.) in terms of like in Nigeria or Africa in general (0. 1) like it's not accepted so it-it would be really really shocking

Accordingly, if an individual has been exposed to specific laws and traditions, their views will remain similar and as participant one says she would be shocked, suggests that her upbringing has had an influence on her attitudes. Conversely, participant two discusses the fact that he believes the Christian community should be more welcoming of its members (lines 67-68), highlighting a much more laid back and accepting attitude. Importantly, he denotes the idea that his beliefs too, are influenced by his upbringing through the lines 70-71:

I think it's just my belief maybe the way that I've been brought up (.) I've been brought up to accept people of all (0. 1) [sorts]

Thus, by emphasising situational factors, both participants are able to freely express their opinions on homosexual members of the Christian community. Interestingly, the two participants seem to offer contrasting opinions, arguably because they have been exposed to different childhood

environments. According to recent statistics, Nigeria is ranked number one of the top twelve homophobic nations (Strasser, 2014). In addition to this, a study conducted by Ireland (2013) suggests that Africa is largely anti-gay due to factors such as conservative religious beliefs, delayed political and economic development and resistance to globalisation. Furthermore, the Presbyterian Church of the United States devised a rule in 1996, preventing homosexual ministers (Finlay & Walther, 2003). Accordingly, those situated in homophobic locations are much more exposed to homophobic outlooks, increasingly the likelihood of socially constructed attitudes.

2. Experience of Religion

The second part of analysis places emphasis on the differences in how people understand religion, which affects their views on homosexuality. Christianity places an importance on the holy Bible, yet some Christians label themselves as committed without following traditional rules. It is within this section that we discover the extent to which Christians organise their own faith. Although both participants discuss core values of Christianity as ' respect' and ' always looking out for each other' (lines 10-11, participant 1; 11-12, participant 2) there are differences in terms of religious perception:

but the core like the values of Christianity and everything (0. 3) from the bible says like a-another man shouldn't like another man and stuff like that (0. 2) those are the (0. 1) those are the beliefs so I don't think (0. 2) I don't have anything against them but like (0. 1) I don't know how to put this (0. 1) I-I have nothing against them y'know we can still be friends (0. 2) everything

like that but (0. 3) <u>behind </u>it is (0. 1) not that it doesn't make sense to me it's just (0. 3) I don't fully agree (participant 1, lines 69-75)

I just think (0. 1) some people are much more open to (.) modern day (.) ideologies and just new ideas that are coming through whereas (0. 1) some are just a bit more fixed in their ways (.) and not they're not so open to new things (participant 2, lines 41-43)

Christians with strong views (.) erm (.) will always have those views and so remain (.) <u>faithful </u>as they put it to their religion (participant 2, lines 76-78)

Evidently, participant one places an emphasis on the Bible and the strict rules that follow; although she wouldn't disregard homosexuals, not living up to the rules of the Bible wouldn't be faithful. Conversely, participant two displays a much more modernised view; Christians are becoming more accepting due to modern day ideologies, whereas some are stubborn to change. These differences in religious experience could influence the relationship between religion and homosexual attitudes (Allport & Ross, 1967). Allport and Ross placed religion into two categories; extrinsic and intrinsic; those with an extrinsic orientation use religion as way of achieving non-religious goals, such as attending church to keep up with social networks. On the other hand, an intrinsic orientation describes those who see religion as the most important part of life, and stick to every rule which is displayed.

Furthermore, Herek (1987) found that intrinsic orientation correlated positively with homosexual prejudice in a sample of Christian students. Having said this, although not accepting, intrinsic Christians do make an

attempt to tolerate homosexuality in order to live up to Christian expectations such as to be loving and caring. Similarly, participant one makes an attempt to show that although she doesn't agree, she wouldn't disregard a fellow homosexual Christian (lines 69-75). Consequently, the theme identified supports the idea that Christian beliefs are unique, having a direct effect on homosexual perceptions.

Conflict between Christianity & homosexuality

The third and final part of analysis acknowledges the view that homosexual Christians are often disregarded by fellow Christians due to strict beliefs, however yet again this is different depending upon the extent to which a Christian understands religion. In terms of the current interviews, both participants offer similar views regarding the communities acceptance of homosexuals and generally, a pattern of negativity is understood:

yeah definitely like (0. 3) so many I think people like discriminate against them a lot like (0. 2) okay cause a certain group (.) or a certain person is gay or lesbian and only treat them a certain way or (0. 2) I think they feel left out of certain things like I think people do because of the way they are treated an' all that so those are the sort of challenges I think they face (Participant 1, lines 80-84)

(0. 3) yes in some respect erm I think (.) gay people can be looked down on by some erm (.) and maybe their views and ideas are (.) not (0. 1) not taken on board as much they can be a bit ignored sometimes (0. 1) erm (0. 2) whereas some (0. 3) some Christians may accept (0. 1) gay people (Participant 2, lines 54-57)

Similarly, both extracts serve to emphasise the idea that it is common for homosexual Christians to be overlooked or disregarded in the Christian community. Therefore, by constructing a sense of despondency, both participants are aware of the challenges the Christian community places on its homosexual members and highlight the importance of being ' left out' and ' ignored'. With both sharing corresponding details suggests that Christians are generally oblivious of their homosexual members. Many researchers have supported this view; Subhi & Greelan (2012) suggested that living a religious lifestyle can be very difficult for homosexuals in traditional Christian communities. Furthermore, according to Barret & Barzan (1996) support isn't often available for Christians who experience homosexuality causing them to feel distressed and unable to express their sexuality. Importantly, previous research using qualitative interviews has highlighted that those who were raised as Christians and identified themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual mentioned that religion promoted more of a difficulty, rather than a source of support. Interestingly, a conflict arises between the values of Christianity and the beliefs; how can Christians be loving and caring if they disregard homosexuals? Finally, Schuck & Liddle (2001) stressed that homosexuals are often forced by surrounding Christians to pray for forgiveness, causing them to feel anxious and isolated from the Christian community. Generally, those who identify as homosexual in a Christian environment fear being rejected by God and treated negatively by religious Christian communities and this is communicated through the interviews with both participants.

Conclusions

Individual differences-conflict-yarhouse, brooke, pisano & Tan (2005) the struggle depends on the type of Christians you are living with.

References

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