

Room for conversation? Seminarians across diverse viewpoints invoke similar authorities on questions of sexuality.

WHAT WE STUDIED

Drawing from 102 in-depth interviews with first year Masters of Divinity students, we explored how students describe and account for their attitudes toward same-sex relationships, marriage, and ordination.



3 TYPES OF AUTHORITIES WERE MOST OFTEN INVOKED BY AFFIRMING AND NONAFFIRMING STUDENTS ALIKE:



GODLY AUTHORITY

The authority of God's nature, design, or sovereignty to judge human action

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

The authority of Christian scripture to speak to or be reflective of cultural context

EXPERIENTIAL AUTHORITY

The authority of one's lived experiences of and relationships with LGBTQ+ individuals



WHAT WE FOUND

All three authorities were mentioned at least once by more than half of students, with experiential authority mentioned least (55%) and Biblical authority mentioned most (72%).

2/3 of students were confident in their views (69%), while 1/3 expressed uncertainty (31%); confidence appeared to be achieved by privileging one authority over the other.

Sexuality is a salient theological issue for seminary students; nearly half of students (46%) mentioned wrestling with it in the past or present.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What authorities are most salient to you on matters of sexuality?

Do your sources of authority ever conflict with one another? If so, how have you attempted to reconcile?

What aspect of this research gives you hope—and who might you tell?



WHAT IT MEANS

Our data suggests many students come to seminary expecting and wanting to gain clarity on their attitudes toward same-sex relationships.

Conversations that start by acknowledging shared and overlapping authorities may reduce stereotypes of the "other side" and make these interactions more fruitful, especially when uncertainties and contradictions are allowed to breathe.



*from Johnston, Erin, Anna Holleman, and Laura Krull, "There's theology and then there's the people I love...": Authority and Ambivalence in Seminarians' Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Relationships, Marriage, and Ordination," *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* (2023): <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srad040>.