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S E X U A L

I D E N T I T Y

A RESOURCE FOR YOUTH MINISTRY

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

ZONDERVAN

*Understanding Sexual Identity: A Resource for Youth Ministry*  
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# 1

## BECOMING A BETTER TRAIL GUIDE



### CHECK YOUR COMPASS

1. Why do some people prefer the culture wars to ministry or pastoral care?
2. What are the advantages of keeping the discussions political or social/cultural rather than personal and pastoral? What are some of the unintended consequences when our focus is exclusively political?
3. What is gained and what is lost in relying on theological statements about sexual ethics to function as pastoral care?
4. In what practical ways would your ministry change if you adopted “convicted civility” as your ministry brand?

# 2

## CHECK CONDITIONS: THE STORM CLOUD



**Figure 1. *The Storm Cloud: Sexual and Religious Identity Conflict***



## CHECK YOUR COMPASS

1. How would you describe questions that arise out of same-sex attractions? These were referred to as sexual-identity questions—can you name one?
2. What are religious-identity questions, and how are they different from sexual-identity questions?
3. Why is the relationship between sexual-identity and religious-identity questions referred to as a “storm cloud”?
4. Why is it important to “locate the storm” as being either within the sexual minority, between the sexual minority and others, or both?
5. How would you describe the messages you have been sending (either explicitly or implicitly) about homosexuality, sexual identity, and the people who are navigating these concerns?
6. If you hope to radically alter how you engage your youth around this topic, you may want to invite others in leadership to read this book and understand the rationale for the steps you are taking. Remember, many Christians have been influenced more by the culture war than by compassionate care.

# 3

## MARKERS ON THE TRAIL: A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

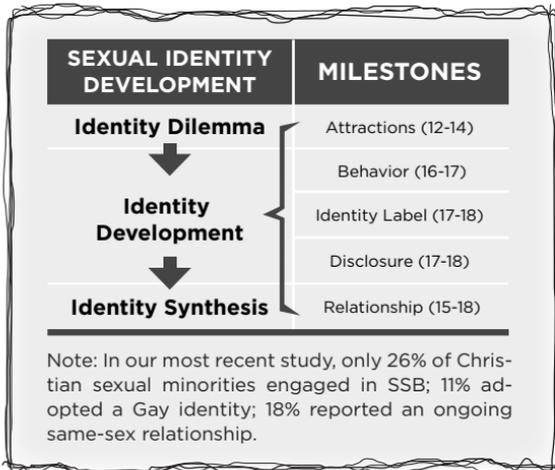


**Figure 2. *Developmental Context***

Population	Awareness	SSB	Label	Disclosure	Relationship
Christian Sexual Minorities	12-14	16-17	17-18	17-18	15-18
Gay Young Adults	7-9	14-17	16-18	17-18	n/a

Note: Awareness = first awareness of feelings of same-sex attraction; SSB = same-sex behavior; Label = first labeling of oneself as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; Disclosure = first disclosure to another person; Relationship = first ongoing relationship with the same sex. In our most recent study, 26% of Christian sexual minorities engaged in SSB; 11% adopted a Gay identity; 18% reported an ongoing same-sex relationship.

**Table 1. Milestone Events in Sexual-Identity Development**



**Table 2. Sexual-Identity Development & Milestones**

SEXUAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT	MILESTONES	MEANING-MAKING
<b>Identity Dilemma</b> ↓	Attractions (12-14)	How do I make sense of what I feel?
<b>Identity Development</b> ↓	Behavior (16-17)	Should I delay or refrain from sexual behavior?
	Identity Label (17-18)	How do I name my reality?
<b>Identity Synthesis</b>	Disclosure (17-18)	Who can I trust with what I am going through?
	Relationship (15-18)	How can my needs for intimacy be met?

Note: In our most recent study, only 26% of Christian sexual minorities engaged in SSB; 11% adopted a Gay identity; 18% reported an ongoing same-sex relationship.

**Table 3. Sexual-Identity Development, Milestones & Meaning-Making**



## CHECK YOUR COMPASS

1. What are some practical ways in which a developmental perspective informs youth ministry to sexual minorities?
2. How would you describe the importance of attributions and meaning-making in sexual-identity development?
3. What are some ways in which you could help Christian sexual minorities explore meanings with which they might not be as familiar?
4. What are some specific ways your ministry to youth could be improved in light of the normal, developmental focus on identity that occurs during adolescence?
5. How would your ministry to sexual minorities be different if you spoke into meaning and purposes associated with important milestone events?

4

FINDING A PATH

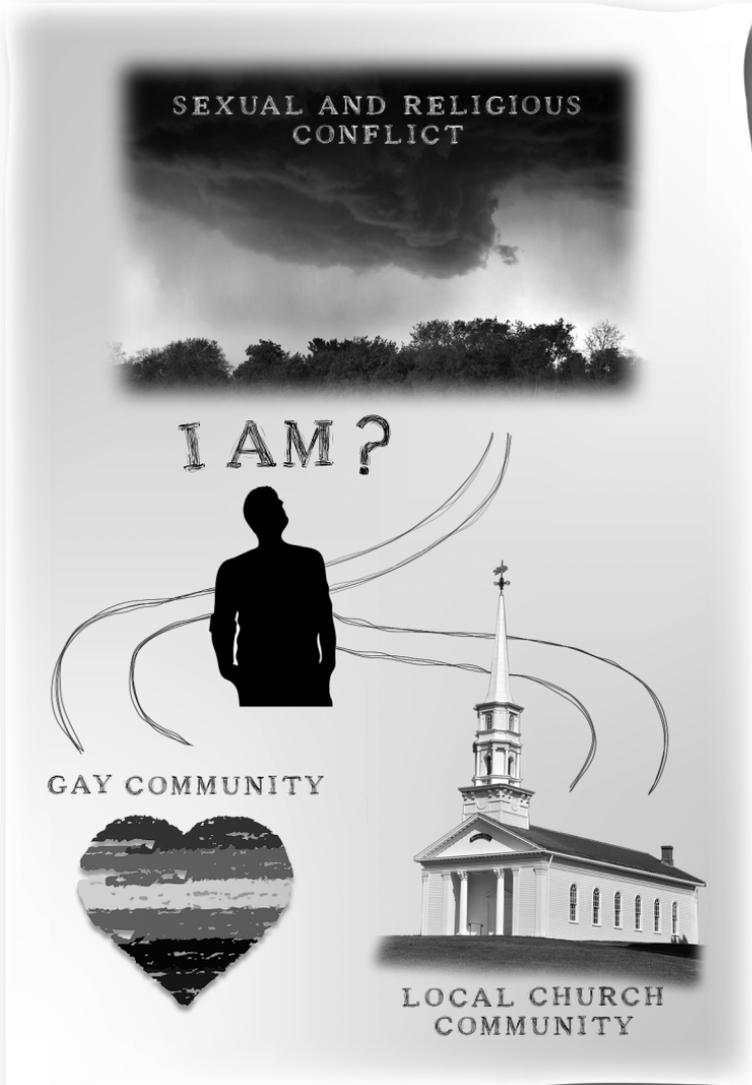


Figure 3. *The Competing Communities*

SEXUAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT	MILESTONES	SHAME
<b>Identity Dilemma</b> ↓	Attractions (12-14)	I am different in ways that go against my community's standards.
<b>Identity Development</b> ↓	Behavior (16-17)	My behavior reflects who I am.
	Identity Label (17-18)	Who I am (Gay) is bad.
	Disclosure (17-18)	I cannot risk letting others know me.
<b>Identity Synthesis</b>	Relationship (15-18)	I am not worthy of intimacy.

Note: In our most recent study, only 26% of Christian sexual minorities engaged in SSB; 11% adopted a Gay identity; 18% reported an ongoing same-sex relationship.

**Table 4. Sexual-Identity Development, Milestones & Shame**



## CHECK YOUR COMPASS

1. In what ways is the identity script as Gay compelling to a young person who experiences same-sex attraction?
2. In what ways could specific milestone events in sexual-identity development contribute to and intensify shame?
3. What is the difference between guilt and shame? How have you experienced these differences in your own life?
4. How does your approach to ministry change once you understand how the formula for shame affects those in your youth group who are attracted to the same sex?

# 5

## SETTING A COURSE: WHERE TO BEGIN IN MINISTRY

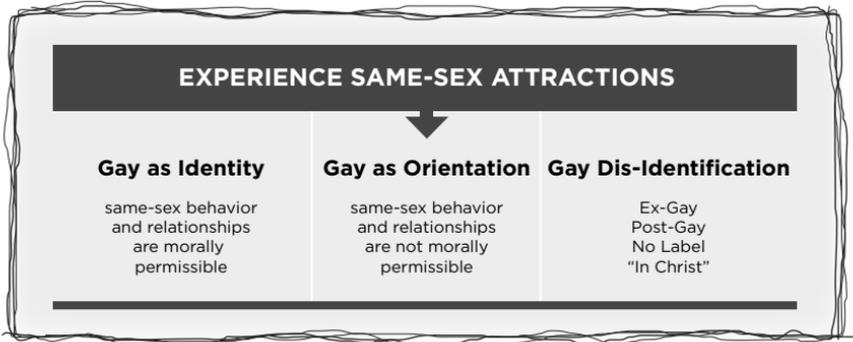


### CHECK YOUR COMPASS

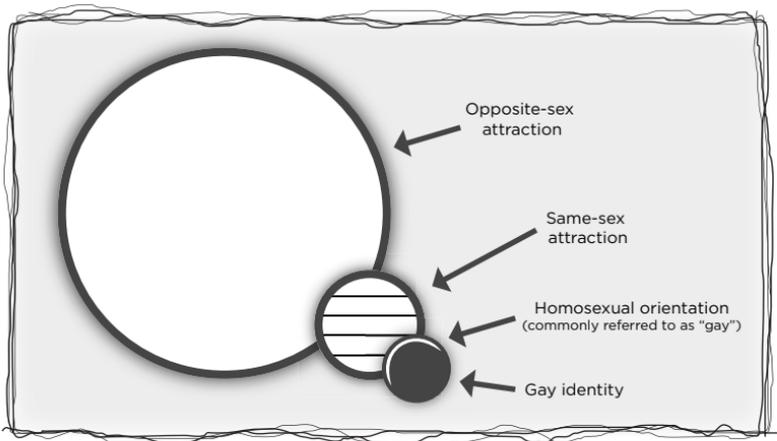
1. In the spirit of “How would I know?” if someone is gay, why is it important to focus on the relationship you have with the teen rather than on trying to interpret behavior?
2. What is an honest answer to the question, “How did I come to experience same-sex attraction?”
3. What are the benefits of discussing meaning and purpose rather than causes of same-sex sexuality?
4. What qualities do people possess that make teens believe they could talk to them about their sexual identity?

# 6

## LEARNING TO READ MAPS



**Figure 4. *The Many Ways to Be a Sexual Minority***



**Figure 5. *A Three-Tiered Distinction***

<b>DOMINANT NARRATIVES</b>	<b>COUNTER-NARRATIVE</b>
Same-sex attractions reflect real differences between types of people (that is, Gay, straight, and bisexual persons).	Same-sex attractions or orientations are a reflection of a fallen world in which we live.
These attractions accurately reflect who you are as a person.	Same-sex attractions or orientation are an important part of your experience, but there are many important facets to who you are, and you have choices to make about what weight you give to these various facets.
Your attractions ought to reside at the core of your identity, your sense of self.	For some people, choosing a Gay identity limits other options or identities.
If you are Gay (as identity), it makes sense to follow through and act out on what you feel (your attractions)—because you are expressing and enjoying who you are.	Having same-sex attractions or orientation (as gay) doesn't mean that a person has to either identify with them or act on them. Many people with same-sex attractions aren't in a same-sex relationship or have not acted on them. I can take a broader view of my sexuality (than just my impulses) and learn more about myself.

**Table 5. Dominant Narrative and Counter-Narrative**

	<b>ATTRACTIONS</b>	<b>IDENTITY</b>	<b>BEHAVIOR</b>
<b>Is it a choice?</b>	No.	Yes.	Yes.

**Table 6. Is it a Choice?**



## CHECK YOUR COMPASS

1. As a youth minister, if you had to describe yourself (your identity) in a few sentences, what would you say? Comment on different parts of who you are—your roles both now and in the anticipated future.
2. How would you apply what you learned in answering the first question to your ministry to youth who experience same-sex attraction?
3. In your own words, how would you describe the dominant narrative that exists around same-sex attraction today?
4. What are some practical steps you could take to help a young person develop a meaningful counter-narrative?

# 7

## ON NOT HIKING ALONE: SOCIAL SUPPORT AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING



### CHECK YOUR COMPASS

1. Ask yourself these questions: What would be the benefits of sharing my experiences with someone I trust? What would be the risks of sharing?
2. In your ministry, how do you foster greater intimacy and transparency among your youth?
3. When you encourage teens to talk to one another, how is encouraging personal transparency balanced against sharing “too much too soon”?
4. How do you talk with all of your youth about the friendships they have, and what guidelines do you offer when attraction and arousal are present in a friendship?

# 8

## COMMUNICATING WITH BASE CAMP



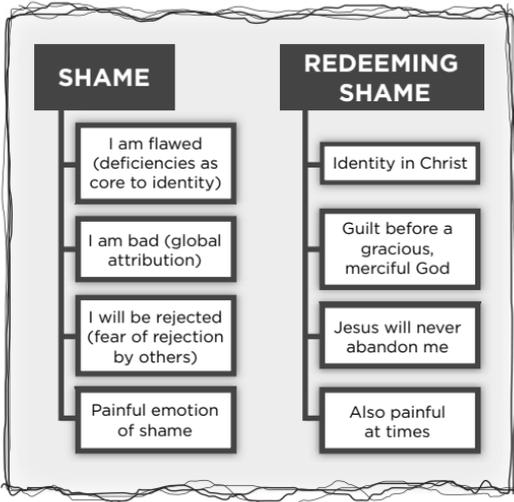
### CHECK YOUR COMPASS

1. What makes parents so important in the lives of teens who are navigating sexual-identity questions?
2. How might Christian subcultural shame affect a parent's ability to be supportive of his or her teen?
3. How would you describe the relationship between ambivalence and polarization to a concerned parent?



# 10

## MINISTRY BETWEEN MIRACLES



**Figure 6. Shame and Redeeming Shame**

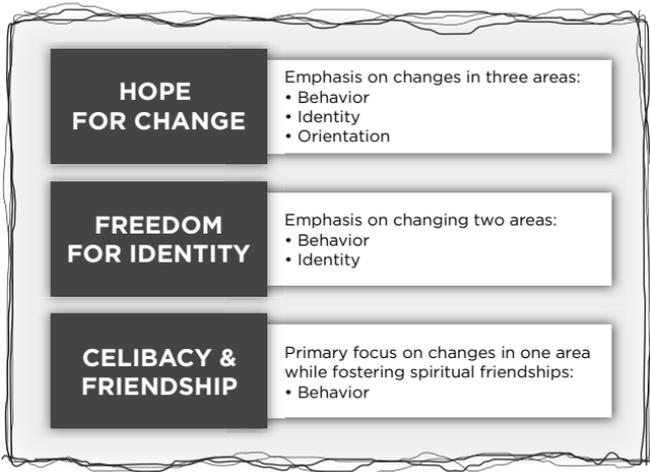


## CHECK YOUR COMPASS

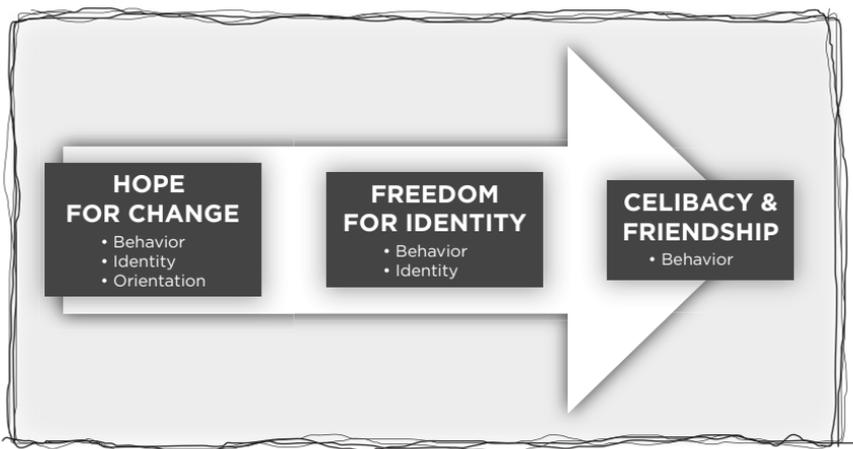
1. What questions or concerns do you have about helping a teenager “unpack” his or her feelings of same-sex attraction, even if it is just to understand them better?
2. How would you respond to a youth who has been “shutting down” his feelings of attraction? What might be helpful in shutting down feelings? What might be an unintended consequence?
3. Are there any areas in your life in which the use of radical acceptance could be helpful? How would your personal use of radical acceptance inform your ministry to youth?
4. Can you describe several different testimonies of how God could be at work in the life of a Christian who experiences same-sex attraction?

# 11

## MAPPING A MINISTRY FOCUS



**Figure 7. *The Ministry Landscape***



**Figure 8. *The Ministry Landscape as a Process***

<b>UNHELPFUL FOR FOSTERING VOCATION/STEWARDSHIP</b>	<b>HELPFUL FOR FOSTERING VOCATION/STEWARDSHIP</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I am acceptable to God only if I am good in every way.</li><li>• Life should be easy, fair, and make me happy, even during the most difficult times; if it is not, then I am being punished for my weak faith.</li><li>• God wants to meet my every need perfectly, so if life is tough it must be because of my sin and defective faith.</li><li>• Good Christians do not feel angry, fearful, or down, nor do they feel sexual desires.</li><li>• I should hide my imperfections so I do not disgrace God.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I am a child of God, made in God's image, and loved by God.</li><li>• The goal of life is not necessarily to be happy, but to love God and to become Christ-like in the way God intended.</li><li>• My sexuality and sexual experiences are not unknown to God; rather, they can be a means to serve Kingdom purposes.</li><li>• God wants me to be honest about my emotions and to foster a healthy view of myself as a sexual person.</li><li>• God's instruction is a trustworthy guide for living in all areas, including my sexuality.</li></ul>

**Figure 9. Unhelpful and Helpful Thoughts for Fostering Vocation/Stewardship**



## CHECK YOUR COMPASS

1. How would you describe the benefits and drawbacks to each of the three approaches to ministry described in this chapter? How might the ministry approaches be related to one another?
2. How would you like these ministry approaches to inform your work with youth who are navigating sexual-identity concerns?
3. Where would you like your teaching and ministry to “land” as it pertains to hope?
4. What are some practical ways you could promote to your youth the idea of stewarding our sexuality? How about the vocational aspect?