The Exodus Experiment: Theatrically Bridging the Cultural Gap

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The Exodus Experiment: Theatrically Bridging the Cultural Gap

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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I would like to thank my husband, Justin, for all his love, encouragement, and support during this process. I would also like to thank my parents for encouraging me to follow my dreams. Thank you to all my friends and “family” for participating in this project, and for the collaborative and enthusiastic spirit they have met me with along the way. And finally, thank you to God for giving me the freedom to openly discuss and explore new ideas, and for continually guiding me every step of the way.
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Abstract

THE EXODUS EXPERIMENT: THEATRICALLY BRIDGING THE CULTURAL GAP

By Kari A. Hatfield, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2005

Major Director: Dr. Noreen C. Barnes, Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Theatre

As a theatre professional and a practicing Christian, I have found it very difficult to bring my two worlds together. Theatre is a tool for education, discussion, and understanding. In my work on this project, I have explored the ways in which theatre can and cannot help us understand each other on the volatile subjects that divide our contemporary culture: homosexuality and religion. Twenty-nine people with various backgrounds and worldviews were interviewed for this project. The words from these interviews were used to create the beginnings of a script for a play that explores the issues of homosexuality, religion, and the so-called “culture wars” from various points of view. While struggling to remain unbiased, this play also introduces new voices in theatre that are not commonly heard.
Part One: Why?

In the fall of 2004, I was enrolled in a Dramatic Literature and Theory class taught by Dr. Aaron Anderson. This class was designed to help us define who we are as artists and scholars, and to help us define what theatre means to us. Needless to say, this was a class that made me think. As a practicing Christian and a theatre practitioner, I am always trying to reconcile my faith and my art. I believe that this is something that can be done (without only doing plays of a religious nature). However, it is and has been a struggle for me to be divided between the worlds of conservative Christian and theatre artist. There are some (not all) people of faith who have tried to discourage my pursuit of a career in the arts because of a belief that it is not possible for faith and the lifestyle of an artist to co-exist. On the other hand, there are some (not all) people in the arts who hold the belief that I am naive, unprofessional, ignorant, or unenlightened for living by (Christian) faith in a profession that is largely based on relativism and socially constructed reality.

This struggle was amplified during the presidential elections in the fall of 2004. This election will go down in history as the election that divided America. During the meeting of Dr. Anderson’s class on November 5, 2004, I remember him making the comment to the class that, “52% of America voted for things that most theatre practitioners are against.” During the discussion that followed, we discussed what this
meant for the theatre. Although Dr. Anderson steered the discussion in a neutral direction, much of the class was biased in an anti-conservative way. I sat and listened to this discussion, and I realized that for me, this meant that I wasn’t doing enough. I realized that I passionately want these two areas of my life to co-exist. I want my Christian family to know and understand what my non-Christian theatre friends believe, and I want my theatre friends to know and understand that most Christians are not ignorant, closed-minded, bigoted, or hateful for believing that there is a difference between right and wrong. Then I began to think about why I do theatre. Theatre is a tool for education and a key to open up discussion, among other things. Suddenly I realized that a theatre piece that brings these two worlds together for discussion would be a wonderful contribution to the world, and a way for me to have my voice heard. But how would I do this?

An issue that brings pain, frustration, and heartache to so many, myself included, is the issue of homosexuality. This is a topic that has been often explored in the theatre, both from a “Christian” and non-Christian perspective, but the result is usually reactionary, meaning one group is reacting against the other in order to prove their point. I cannot think of a single theatrical piece that truly represents my beliefs as a Christian when it comes to this subject. (I’m not saying that none exist, but that I have never come across any personally at this point.) This is also an issue that has divided most of the country – and it seems to me that anyone who speaks out against the practice of homosexuality is automatically labeled a bigot and a hatemonger. This is an issue that has
affected my life personally because of my many friends who are gay or who fully support the gay lifestyle, and because of my many other friends who believe the practice of homosexuality to be morally wrong. I have found that many people in the Church come across as a little bit bigoted because they have no experience with homosexuals, therefore have never thought about what homosexuality really is. This lack of understanding of homosexuality scares them a little bit, and sometimes causes them to say things before they think about what they are saying. However, this goes for the other side of the coin as well. Many of my non-Christian friends are afraid of Christianity, and have no experience with people who truly try to embody the example of Christ, therefore they believe that everyone who believes homosexuality is wrong must be hateful about it. I think this is a huge problem. I think that theatre can be used as a tool to begin to bridge the gap in our culture. That is what I set out to do with this project.

I realize that my experience, while broader than some, is still limited. I will never know what it is like to have homosexual feelings. I have never personally experienced that. I will never know what it’s like to feel like I was born in the wrong body. I have never personally experienced that. I only know what I’ve experienced in my own life. While my personal experience is valuable, and my opinion counts, the issue of homosexuality cannot be addressed with only my limited experience. Therefore, I decided to interview people with very different backgrounds and life experiences and use their words to begin this discussion.
During the interview process, and in my research, I found that while most of the issues are deeply divided, there are several issues agreed on by both "sides." For instance, both sides agreed on the need for love, compassion, and understanding; both sides are a little bit fearful of the other; both sides feel that homosexuality is a very important issue; and most importantly, both sides agree on the urgent need for discussion. These themes were echoed in almost every interview I conducted, and these themes emotionally touched almost all of the interviewees. Because of this, I felt that these themes should be focused on in the writing of a play.

Because this is my first attempt at a project of this nature, I cannot guarantee that I will fully realize my goal to create theatre that bridges the gap in our culture. However, I can begin a journey that will hopefully make myself and others think, and will maybe open some doors for the beginnings of dialogue. Everyone I interviewed agreed that this is an important goal, and I am encouraged by the enthusiasm, the passion, and the support I received from those who participated in this project.

In my work on this project, I read many books on the subject of homosexuality and the Bible. The discussion of what the Bible says about homosexuality is important, but the discussion is also divided. My desire with this work is not to prove who is right and who is wrong. While there are books on this subject I would recommend more highly than others because of the level of scholarship and their non-reactionary nature, I realize that any attempt to prove someone right would not be relevant for this project. Like so many others, I know why I believe what I believe, and so I feel it's important to present
the evidence for both sides so that others can come to an understanding for themselves. I feel that the most important thing is that the discussion be allowed to happen, and although it has been a challenge, I have tried not to focus on the outcome.

I do believe that it is important for anyone who is studying the topic of “the Bible and homosexuality,” or “homosexuality and moral values,” to study all the information on the subject, not just books that prove their own point. There are more books readily available that say the Bible does not teach that homosexuality is wrong (because, presumably, of the recent movement of our society in this direction). However, there are several books I’ve found that are recent, thorough, and written by men of compassion and understanding who present a study of the more traditional Christian point of view in a non-judgmental, scholarly way. I have also found a few books from the pro-homosexual point of view that take a scholarly approach, though I will say that it has been harder to find books from this point of view that are not reactionary against Christianity, and specifically against the Catholic Church. I feel that this is important to mention, because these books are representative of the ideas that are currently shaping our society. Even though I have decided not to focus on proving anyone right, as I stated before, I wanted to study the available resources on this subject in order to better understand the fundamental ideas behind the division of our culture. (For a list of relevant books for further study of this topic, see the list of Works Consulted.)
Part 2: What?

Character List:

Greg: A 21-year-old theatre performance major at a state university

Marcus: Greg’s college roommate. Theatre major, openly gay

Dad: Greg’s father, a minister and certified counselor

Mom: Greg’s mother

Lanie: Greg’s 15-year-old sister

Peter and Lucy Brown: Church members, friends of Greg’s family

Audrey Oslow: Church member, friend of Greg’s family

Professor: A theatre professor

Classmate #1

Classmate #2

Scene 1 – Greg is in his dorm room with his friend, Marcus, who is openly gay. They are working on a project for class.

Greg: Hey man, can I ask you something?

Marcus: Sure. Is everything okay?
Greg: Yeah, well, I don’t know, I guess. It’s just, we’ve been studying *The Laramie Project* in my dramatic lit class and I just, I don’t know.

Marcus: Did you read it or watch the movie? Cause when I took that class, any chance I had to watch the movie instead of reading the play I took, that’s for sure.

Greg: Yeah, well, we’ve actually been acting it out. I think a group of us might watch the movie later though. But that’s not the point ….

Marcus: Well, what is it?

Greg: I just, I don’t know what to think about it, man. I guess I’ve just never really thought about, like, you know, about what it might be like to be gay and stuff, and I’ve really been thinking about it. I know what my parents think about it, and you know me, I know what the Bible says about it, and I know what I’ve always believed, and I still believe that, it’s just, I mean, I’m sorry that I’ve never really talked to you about it. You’ve always just been here, and I’ve never really felt comfortable asking you about it, and I hope that I haven’t acted like some of the people in that play. I guess I have the conflict that most Christians have; How do you really love the person when you really hate the sin?
Marcus: Hey. It’s okay man. I mean, I was raised with parents just like yours in a church just like yours, and I’ve always had a hard time with that whole “hate the sin” cliché. Especially when I began to be aware of my homosexuality myself.

Greg: What was that like for you? I mean, how did it happen?

Marcus: What? You mean like how did I know I was gay?

Greg: Yeah, I guess.

Marcus: You just know, man. It’s accepting that about yourself that’s the hard part.

Greg: Well, how did you do that?

Marcus: Um … it took a lot of time. A lot of time, a lot of prayer, a lot of study, reading … I think that, um, one good thing that came out of me having to go through this is that it forced me to become more educated. I think if I had grown up as a straight person I wouldn’t have put as much time and energy finding out about myself and other people, but because I didn’t grow up a straight person, it forced me to do a lot of reading of other people’s experiences, other people’s processes of reconciling their religious beliefs with their sexuality. And also, I have an uncle who is gay and is actually a minister, went
through seminary, has his M.Div. And in talking with him, he had probably a worse time in reconciling his beliefs than I did, and his partner, who also has an M. Div. These are two very religious men whom I respect, and I really enjoyed listening to their experiences and that was a part of what I did. But more importantly than anything that I ever read or anyone I talked to was my personal feeling and whether or not I felt all right with God myself, and I took a lot of time and a lot of prayer, and I do feel that I’m just as normal and loved by God as anybody else and that my sexuality is something that I was given. I think I was born this way and I have this life for a specific reason. And I look forward to finding that and I look forward to doing what I was meant and born to do.

Greg: Yeah, but what did your parents think? I know your family, and I can’t imagine this was easy for them.

Marcus: Well, (chuckle), you’d be right about that. When I had to come out to my parents in high school, my senior year of high school, I had the talk with my dad the minister and my mom the minister’s wife. We proceeded to talk, and they proceeded to throw at me all the traditional scriptural verses, which I was already very well aware of, of course. And growing up in the church and seeing my parents in their ministry, I’d always seen them, um, treat other people in the congregation and in the community with the utmost respect. They were there to comfort and to educate and to inspire people, and they never judged anybody period, and that was always to me the most impressive thing about my parents
and their ministry and their role in society. And yet, when it came to me coming out it was the complete opposite of what I had always seen growing up. When it came to someone in their own family, that compassion and that same love and that same willingness to understand was not there. Um, and so, you know, that made me realize that there’s a fine line between things and it’s taken me a long time to forgive my parents for not showing me the same understanding and willingness to include me in their life anymore after I did this, and it was a long time before things returned to normal in my family.

Greg: Man.... That’s ....

Marcus: Hey, don’t. It’s not your fault. And anyway, I know who I am. But you know, the one thing they didn’t do in that entire interaction with me, was they never, and I love this – I kept saying, well, this is how I feel. These are my experiences, these are my thoughts, and more importantly, this is how I feel. The one thing they didn’t do however, is that they didn’t believe me.

Greg: I’m sorry, dude.

Marcus: Yeah, well. Anyway, I guess I’d better get going. I promised I’d meet some people for dinner.
Greg: See ya.

Marcus: Yeah, later. And hey – really, it’s okay man. Anytime you have questions, ask. There’s too many people who don’t ask, they just assume.

(Marcus exits)

(The lights change, spotlight on Greg at center stage. He is “writing” thoughts in his journal)

Greg: I believe homosexuality is wrong sometimes. I think it is a sin, but then I wonder how God would really react to it. I just don’t know. It’s an endless cycle of thinking. The problem is that I can’t see the God I worship as one who would react toward homosexuality as the church has reacted to it. I also fully realize that the church rarely acts as God would. I have so many friends who are gay, or who see nothing wrong with homosexuality. And most of the time I don’t think about the fact that they are gay. They’re just my friends, and I love them, but it hurts sometimes to know that we are actually so divided when it comes right down to things. I know what the Bible says. And I know the arguments against it being literal, or true for our culture, society, whatever, but I just can’t shake the thought that God knows things I don’t know. (Pauses to think). I
have a theory, okay, I have a theory that the only thing that makes artists artists is that they’re more sensitive, is that they see things more, that they feel things more deeply, they feel things more strongly. And being more sensitive makes you more compassionate, and it’s hard to be gay. And everybody judges you, and everybody thinks they know things about you that they don’t know. And I can’t imagine anything more difficult. I can’t imagine anything more challenging. (Pause) Unless it’s struggling to be a practicing Christian in an environment where it’s cool to pass judgement on anyone who takes a stand against something like homosexuality. You know, I’m beginning to wonder why more people don’t see the similarity in the situation.

**Scene 2** – Around the dinner table at the home of Greg’s parents.

Peter Brown: So, Greg, I hear you’ve got another play coming up.

Greg: Yeah.

Peter: Well, what astounding performance could we expect from you this time around?

Greg: I’m not sure yet, rehearsals just started this past week.
Lucy: Well, whatever happens, Greg, I’m sure you’ll be wonderful. You always do such a good job.

Greg: Tell that to my professors!

Dad: (Laughing) well he does work hard, that’s for sure. At least I think he’s working hard. We’d probably never see or hear from him if we didn’t offer free food and laundry service every once in a while!

Audrey: Now, Gregory, tell me, how are things for you in that theatre department? When I heard you were going into theatre, I just didn’t know what to think. No telling what kinds of things you have to put up with out there, especially with these kids today and their goings on.

Greg: It’s all right. I guess it is a little hard sometimes, but I have some good friends.

Mom: There certainly are a lot of liberal minds out there, from what Greg tells me.

Greg: Mom ....
Mom: No really. Greg, it’s all right. Tell them what your professor said in class the other day.

Greg: Well, we were talking about a play that had a lot to do with politics today, and then somehow we got onto the subject of religion and politics, which, it always drives me crazy when those things are lumped together anyway, because most of my classmates think that Christianity means Catholicism anyway, which I think is too political, but anyway, we were talking about all of these things, and he says:

(Lights dim on dinner table and come up on professor on the opposite side of the stage)

Professor: I’ve always felt for the last twenty years, the last ten years, um, religion is a crutch. And crutch is kind’ve well, you know, it has a bad connotation. It doesn’t have to be. There are a lot of people who truly need religion to live. They could not survive without having this fundamental thing to fall back on. Um, especially in times of trouble when things aren’t making sense in the world. When you don’t have a very strong sense of self and a personal identity then it becomes very difficult. And it’s much easier if you have a history and a culture to fall back on. Um, you’ve got a god figure, you’ve got this Supreme Being, and that’s where you get this, “well, God has a reason for everything.” It becomes like a mantra. “There’s a reason, I just don’t know, but God does, so it’s okay.”
Audrey: Goodness. I don't even know how you sat there and took that Greg. I probably would have had to say something or walked out.

Greg: Well, I guess I'm pretty used to it. I've just been struggling a lot lately with some of my classes where the topic of homosexuality seems to be coming up a lot lately.

Dad: What's being said?

Greg: Well, just, you know, that the Bible doesn't really say that it's wrong, we just interpret it wrongly. And then there's the whole argument about love, that we should just all love everybody, which I agree with, but my friends all seem to have a different definition of love than I do. I just don't know how to explain it to them. All I know is that love doesn't mean to condone every little thing. And also, I guess, I personally have been struggling with why some people seem to be born with these feelings naturally. All my friends say that that's who they are, and that there is nothing they can do to change it. I just don't know what to think. And I know that they don't know what I think. It's like, I get the feeling that a lot of them are very willing to talk to me about it because they think that they are going to change my mind. But I'm just not sure that they are right, only I can't say how. It's just a feeling that I have. Then I ask myself, you know, am I just
unwilling to let go of the things I was taught growing up, am I unwilling to change, or am I uncertain of the truth?

Dad: Well, Greg, I know that’s hard on you. But I just want you to know, son, that it’s not a bad thing to be asking these questions. It’s probably the best thing you can do, and God loves a questioning heart. You know, I was in a counseling class one time that was being sponsored by a homosexual group to help educate us on homosexuality, and they came to the conclusion that homosexuals can’t be changed. They said, and this was almost a quote, they said, “all you really do in these cases where people say homosexuals have changed, all you’re really doing is just causing them to deny feelings that you already have.” Like this is a bad thing, to deny feelings that you have. A lot of men deny feelings that they have. Maybe there’s some guy who wants to have a wife and four girlfriends, but he doesn’t do that. So he learns this is not appropriate and we don’t do this. I’m not sure that the homosexual community understands that it’s okay to say no to a feeling that you have regarding your sexuality like that. I mean, at least in this one case they just told me, you know, you’re not really changing, you’re just denying feelings, and I wanted to say, okay, but don’t a lot of men deny their feelings when they don’t sleep around? You know?
Laney: I know, dad. It’s not just Greg, you know? I mean, at school in my classes and stuff, they think something’s wrong with you if you say it’s wrong, or that you’re being bigoted.

Mom: How does that make you feel, honey?

Laney: Sort’ve, um, sort’ve secluded, I guess because you sometimes, it makes you feel like you’re the only one who feels that way out of two thousand people.

Mom: But you have to remember you have as much right to your beliefs and your feelings as they do.

Laney: I know ....

Greg: Hard isn’t it?

Laney: Yeah, it is.

Peter: You know, I notice this a lot in my office too, you know, because journalism isn’t that much better, as we all know, with the whole consideration of someone else’s viewpoint thing. I think it’s really interesting that it’s very much okay to vilify people
who are sure of their faith. The fact that I think that homosexual behavior is sinful makes it really okay to pass judgment on me. We put labels of closed mindedness and bigotry and stupidity and um, if I say that I believe that a certain kind of behavior is wrong, judgment is passed on me that I am either bigoted, that I am either a Bible banger, that I am programmed by my church, that I just believe what my parents taught me, that I’m stupid, that I’m intentionally making, you know, that I’m ignorant. It really never seems to cross anyone’s mind that I may have made a difficult choice in good conscience. That I may genuinely have the courage of my convictions to say I believe this is wrong. As a result nobody gets to listen to the rest of my statement on the issue, which is I believe this is wrong, but I’m just as wrong. I love you anyway. God loves you anyway. And that doesn’t change, nothing is ever going to change that.

Audrey: Well, I’ve never really had to deal with this before. I don’t know, listening to you all, I just don’t know what to think. I know that I don’t think the church should shun them, but I personally think that they need to be more tolerant of us than we do of them because we are not forcing anything on them by being man and wife. Their way of life is something that is not accepted and should not be accepted. I’m just glad my children didn’t have to grow up around that in their schools like little Laney does here.

Lucy: Well, I don’t know about that, Ms. Audrey. I agree that it’s hard on kids in schools these days, but it’s certainly not going away. I personally don’t think the answer is for us
to hide from it, to pretend it doesn’t happen. Would I want this being taught to my kids in school? Of course not, but I also feel it’s more important that I teach my kids how to love their gay friends even if they don’t agree with them. Um, something that a friend of mine, a homosexual friend of mine told me one time that I will never forget, um, this particular friend of mine grew up in a church, and his father, who was estranged from him, died very suddenly of a heart attack when he was only twenty-nine years old. My friend was raised by a single mother, and even once he quote, unquote, figured out he was gay, he continued in the church and he and his current partner attend church. And he told me one time that he prayed that God would change him, change his heart and make him no longer gay. And he told God that if he died and Jesus sent him to hell that he would go to hell loving Jesus all the way. And for the first time when my friend told me that I understood the struggle somebody has dealing and struggling with this issue if they have any inclination or thoughts that they are gay, and how difficult that must be knowing what God says about homosexuality in the Bible, and still struggling with it.

Greg: Wow. I think I’m just beginning to understand that.

Dad: I wish more Christians had the opportunity to understand that.

**Scene 3:** Classroom at the university. Greg and several of his classmates are attending a class.
Professor: The ancient Greek word for the physical theatre was “theatron,” meaning “seeing place.” I believe that the theatre should be a place for us to “see” more clearly: to examine, to discuss, to inform, to persuade, to enlighten, to inspire, and to entertain (as in the specific use of the word meaning “to entertain a thought”; to consider). The ancient Greeks, as did the ancient Egyptians before them, believed theatre to be a place where their faith and beliefs might be extolled, examined, and grappled with; a place where important questions might be asked and answers proposed. In this same spirit, I believe that theatre can be of service today.

(Greg raises his hand)

Professor: Yes, Greg?

Greg: Well, I was just wondering, in light of what you just said, and in light of the kinds of plays we’ve been studying lately, I was wondering, what would happen if a person wrote a play to “entertain” the thought of a person who struggles with homosexual thoughts and feelings, but decides to deny those feelings?

(Silence in the room, some of the other students start to whisper or giggle, then the professor answers.)
Professor: Well, Greg, I believe that's already been done in *Angels in America*.

Greg: Well, yeah, in that play the Mormon guy is struggling with it and denying it, but it's still glorified a lot. I mean, what if in the end he decides that he can choose to deny those feelings, and he does so because of his religious beliefs?

Professor: Well, I think it would depend on how it was done and the connotation that was put on the situation.

Greg: (not quite sure he understands) Okay . . . .

Classmate #1: Yeah, I mean, I think a play like that would be important. Um, but I think it would be difficult not to have the message of the play impose a belief on the audience. I think it would depend on how it was done. I think it would be important and I think that it would … it would be hard to decide what message should have to come across from that.

Classmate #2: Yeah. I mean, there are a lot of people who go through denial, but I mean, you have to accept who you are if you’re going to try to live any sort of happy life. You know, if you’re going to fault someone for being gay then you have to fault them for
being black or being short or being tall or being blue eyed or brown eyed. You know, it's all the same .... You have to be careful.

Greg: I don’t know, I mean, how come a play like this would have to be carefully written when some other plays that have been written on this subject don’t seem to care what kind of careful consideration is taken for the things it presents about Christianity, for instance. I mean, half the plays out there that represent any kind of Christian either represent them all as ignorant, or as villains. The only Christians who are portrayed in a good light are the ones who seem to condone any kind of behavior, which I don’t think is a realistic portrayal of Christianity either.

Professor: Well, Greg, theatre that dictates to an audience what they have to think is not good theatre. All I’m saying is you have to be careful with the message of that play. For instance, there used to be a lot of theatre that portrayed slavery as a good thing, because the Bible also tells us slavery is okay. Then, when people started to realize that slavery is a heinous thing, and uh, this is one of the things that I don’t quite understand about the conservative right is the picking and choosing of what’s moral and what’s not. And the ignoring of one thing and grabbing onto another. And theatre, and that’s where theatre can become important. It can put both of those things in front of an audience and in a non-judgmental way, if it’s well written, it can allow the audience to respond as the audience would respond as opposed to telling the audience what to think.
Greg: Yeah, I get that, I guess. It’s just that, well, ninety-five percent of the population in
survey believes in a higher power, believes in God. I can’t think of a whole lot of theatre
that deals with that, that ever acknowledges that. Characters in plays don’t even, you
know, barely even mention God in passing. Uh, and almost, very few of them,
particularly recently, their belief in God really, um, determines their choice of actions.
And the population at large, most people believe in God, and a huge chunk of them is
conservative Christian. And if theatre is a representation of society, of our population, the
fact that the overwhelming majority of characters in theatre behave for, and then deal
with purely materialist, naturalist perspectives and motivation. Then is theatre a lie? Are
we representing our population?

Professor: Well, Greg, polarization on this issue makes me wonder if dialogue is possible.
Under what circumstances can dialogue occur? Can theatre be a mediating force for more
thoughtful and considerate dialogue, when the dialogue thus far has been so strident as to
be referred to as the “culture wars?” These are questions that you are trying to address –
and they need addressing. I hope you can find the common ground needed for such a
dialogue.

(Lights dim, spotlight on Greg at center stage. He is writing in his journal)
Greg: I’ve been discussing this play idea with a lot of people today, and it’s interesting the kinds of answers I’ve been given. I appreciate the honesty my friends have had with me, but it’s almost like, well, they all think it’s a great idea if I do it from their perspective. Like if I show the struggle someone has when they are first making the decision to come out. Or if I show someone in denial and how miserable they are, so it’s better just to accept yourself for who you are. And the thing is, I believe in accepting yourself for who you are, it’s just that from my perspective as a Christian I don’t regard someone’s sexual feelings as his identity any more than I regard someone who gossips about people to have his identity determined by that behavior. I think a lot of my friends are saying that their sexual feelings determine an individual’s whole identity and therefore when I talk about their behavior they have anger and resentment as if I’m denying their whole person as individuals. I believe that homosexual behavior is sinful. I don’t believe that having homosexual feelings is sinful, it’s just acting on them that is wrong. I believe this because I believe God. And I know all the arguments about how the Bible is misinterpreted, but I’ve also studied what those passages in the Bible meant in the original time and to the original people, and really, you can’t tell me that the Rome of the New Testament was really all that much different than American society today. It just doesn’t make sense. I don’t, however, believe that homosexuality is any worse than any of the other sins listed in the Bible, like greed or gossip or dishonesty. And I believe these things, not because I’m afraid that if I don’t check off my list of good deeds every day I’ll go to hell. The things I believe and the things I do are because I love God and I appreciate
the gifts He’s given me, not because I’m trying to “work my way into heaven”. I just wish people would get that about me. I just wish I knew how to show people.

Scene 4 – Greg in his Dorm room studying with Marcus.

Marcus: That was interesting what you brought up in class the other day.

Greg: Yeah, I know.

Marcus: You’re not really a confrontational person. I wasn’t sure what you were doing.

Greg: What do you mean, what I was doing?

Marcus: You know, stirring up the fire. It’s not as if you’re the most popular guy in class anyway.

Greg: So what? What does that have to do with anything?

Marcus: Look, Greg, I agree just as much as anyone else, there needs to be more dialogue. But do you even know what goes through the mind of a gay person? Do you know what it’s like to have all these thoughts going on in your head like “am I just a
phase? Are people going to hate me for it? Are my parents going to love me? Am I going to go to heaven?"

Greg: Well, no, I’ve never had those thoughts as it relates to my sexuality, but I can guarantee I’ve felt every single one of those things in other areas of my life. It’s just that there are so many people in our world who believe that homosexual behavior is a choice, and I think that needs to be represented.

Marcus: Uh, no, you are gay or you are not gay. There’s no choice involved. The whole sexual preference thing is a misnomer. You don’t have the opportunity to choose, if you are really a homosexual. I know this from personal experience. I have a friend who is gay and who had a relationship with a woman in which they were both desperately in love with each other to prove it. Could they have lived out their lives together as a couple? Sure, but it wouldn’t have erased the fact that he was physically attracted to men and that would have always been in their relationship. There’s nothing he can do about that. There’s nothing any of us can do about that.

Greg: I agree, man. I agree that there may be nothing you can do about the feelings or urges you have towards men. But I’m not saying the feeling is a choice, I’m saying the behavior, the act is a choice. And I’m not saying pretend to be straight, have a relationship with a woman until you’re “cured.” You know what, God never promised
anyone sexual satisfaction. And while that is a need everyone has, I’m not convinced it’s a necessity for us to be happy. I just don’t think there is anything in the theatre world that represents that point of view.

Marcus: No, man, and here’s the impact of this. If we’re born this way, God did it, didn’t He? And what God does he’s not going to call a sin. God made me this way. He made me this way, and it’s sinful of me to degrade what God made. I think people who deny that just lack the courage to live as a homosexual in a society that tells us that gay people are trash.

Greg: Look, I’m trying to understand you. But you want courage? Here’s courage. Courage is the willingness to allow yourself to believe something you didn’t believe. Courage is allowing yourself to have your mind changed. And courage is the willingness to change what you think and change what you do about something because you think it’s right. Boy, does it take a lot of courage to say “I am gay,” and boy that’s valuable. But if you’re gonna ask me to believe in you would you please believe in me too? If you’re gonna expect me to accept that you have made your choice in good conscience and you expect me to try to understand it, offer me the same … offer me the same courtesy. Very few people have done it. I can count them on one hand and I don’t even need all the fingers. But I’m gonna love you and believe in you even if you don’t believe in me, so
it's really kind've okay. I guess that's it. That's how I really feel. That's why I'm asking these questions. That's why I'm doing this.
Part 3: How?

Once I formulated the idea for this project, I began to wonder how on earth I should go about doing it. I knew I needed to conduct some interviews, but I was a little unsure of what to ask. I had an idea for a play that addressed certain issues, but I had no ideas for characters, plotlines, or settings. I looked to other plays that had been developed out of interviews, such as *The Laramie Project*, and found them to be fascinating, but they were plays that were based on an event that resonated to a wider culture. I had no such event with which to start. As a result, the questions I came up with at first covered a wide range of topics. I quickly realized that if I was going to be able to handle the amount of information that would result from the interview process I needed to get more specific with my line of questioning. I decided that twenty questions would be plenty for me to get to the heart of several key issues, while allowing me some breathing room as ideas for the play began to formulate. I attempted to ask questions that would help me understand where people were coming from, what their background was like, and how much personal experience they had with the issues involved. Many of the questions I asked were questions that were discussed in Dr. Anderson’s Dramatic Literature and Theory class. The questions - focusing on homosexuality, religion, morality, and theatre - were as follows:

1. Do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?

2. Do you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?
3. Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality?

4. What would you say to someone who confided in you that they might be gay?

5. Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

6. What would you describe as “conventional values?”

7. Do you believe in God? What are your beliefs about the Bible?

8. Some believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference? Why? Why not?

9. Do you consider yourself a religious person, or do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Or both?

10. How would you describe your relationship with God?

11. Do you believe in moral absolutism? Why/why not?

12. Do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong? Why or why not?

13. How did you come to the conclusion you have come to on this issue? (What kind of critical thinking, if any?)

14. What do you consider to be an example of someone forcing his or her beliefs on someone else?

15. What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

16. Do you think homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas? Why or why not?

17. Do you find that a play about someone who has homosexual urges, but denies them would be important or accepted in theatre? Why or why not?
18. Do you think artists are elitist?

19. How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? Do you feel people ought to be classified as individuals rather than groups?

20. Do you think homosexuals are born homosexual, or do you think it is a choice?

21. How do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who agree with homosexuality, and vice-versa?

22. Are there any questions that I have not asked that you feel I should be asking? Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

Once I figured out what kind of questions I wanted to ask, I discussed with several people how to word certain questions and how to order them. For instance, I knew if I started the line of questioning with questions about someone’s sexuality I might turn them off or discourage people from full honesty. After seeking the advice of several peers and professors, I finally felt comfortable with the order and the wording of the questions. (Questions twenty and twenty-one were added later on in the process at the suggestion of several of the people I interviewed in their response to question twenty-two).

I had no problem finding people who were willing to participate in the interview process. Everyone I interviewed seemed happy for the chance to discuss the issues, and several seemed relieved and grateful that they were able to express their opinions and experiences without interruption. I interviewed a total of twenty-two people in person,
and conducted seven email interviews from people who lived out of town, for a total of twenty-nine interviews. I recorded each of these interviews and transcribed them before I began formulating scenes. (A full text of these transcriptions can be found in the appendix of this paper). Of course, once I had the transcriptions finished, an overwhelming feeling of “now what?” came over me, but once I began breaking things down I felt a bit better. Throughout the interview process I was able to make mental notes of things people said that resonated with me, or things that were said that seemed to get to the heart of the matter. When I was transcribing these interviews, I highlighted sections that I knew were relevant, and by the end of the transcribing process, I had already narrowed over one hundred and forty pages of transcriptions down to twenty. Next, I went through the twenty pages of relevant quotes and sorted them into three categories: First, things people said about the struggle on all sides of the issue; second, things people said that reflected their opposing opinions (the things people argue about the most); and third, things that everyone had in common. It was very helpful for me to break the text down in this way, but I still had not come to a conclusion as to how to begin constructing the play.

Theatre is a collaborative art. I am fully aware of this. Several days after I had broken down the transcripts and still had no solid ideas for a script, I decided it was time to seek help from my peers. I was eating lunch one afternoon with a couple of my friends who are playwrights, and I began to discuss with them the ideas I had for my project. Once I explained to them what it was I was attempting to do, the ideas started flowing.
One of my friends began to discuss her experiences in college, and that led to another friend making the suggestion that I should set the play in a college environment, and maybe have a character who was struggling with his sexual identity. (It was decided that a male coming to terms with his sexuality would be more accessible and identifiable than a female in the society we currently live in.) I thought about this when I got home that night, and decided that maybe I should just set the play in a college theatre department since so many college students develop their own opinions and identities in college, (and especially in the theatre because of the nature of the work we do.) It really is the perfect setting for someone to be questioning his or her beliefs. I began to look over the transcripts I had broken down, and decided that instead of making one character only say the words from one person’s interview, that I should mix and match interviews to create characters that were a bit more complex and representative of different points of view. I knew from the beginning that I wanted this to be a play that accomplished three things: First, I wanted to represent a point of view that is not often represented in contemporary theatre – the non-stereotypical conservative Christian point of view; Second, I wanted to help Christians understand what it is to be homosexual, because so many Christians have no experience with it and don’t understand what it really means. I also wanted to help non-Christians understand the ways in which Christians struggle with these issues, and that many Christians are not just hateful or unthinking people. And third, I wanted to create theatre that brings the various sides together for discussion of these issues without trying to prove one side right or reacting against one side or the other. I wanted this to be
theatre that provokes thought, not theatre that forces an answer. Therefore, when I began actually putting the script together, I knew that my main character needed to be someone who asked a lot of questions. When I began writing, I realized that although I was using the words of other people, the main character, Greg, was turning out to be a lot like me. He was a performance major at a state university and he was struggling to reconcile his spiritual beliefs with his work in the theatre. This is a struggle I am very familiar with, and I felt that it was important to show this struggle, not because it is my struggle, but because I think it is one that is misunderstood both by people in the church and people outside of the church. I also began to create Marcus as another main character with a less common struggle. Several of the people I interviewed are openly gay and either describe themselves as Christians or were raised in a religious home. This is not a commonly represented point of view. I felt that it was important for Greg and Marcus to be close friends, because they are people who both struggle to reconcile their beliefs with their work, and ultimately, they struggle to reconcile their beliefs with each other. They have different points of view, but they struggle to understand each other. I also felt it was important to put a non-stereotypical gay person and a non-stereotypical Christian in the script to show that no one can fall under just one label.

The dinner table scene came from a need for me to show different sides to Christianity, and what most Christians (or at least most of the Christians I interviewed or have known personally) really believe. The classroom scene was important to me because it came out of one of the key questions that I asked in my interviews. Every time I asked
the question “Do you feel that a play about someone who struggles with homosexuality and denies it would be important or accepted in the theatre,” I ended up with two typical answers. Those who see nothing wrong with homosexuality all said that it would be important, but it would depend on how it was done, and most Christians said it would be important, but it would probably never be accepted. I thought this would be an interesting topic to explore in the script for my play, and once I began writing it into the classroom scene, I realized that this could possibly become the central plot for the play. A play about a person creating theatre to address issues that many people struggle with seemed to be an interesting topic for a script that came out of questions that I struggle with personally.

Once I sat down and wrote these four scenes, I realized that there was much more information that I wanted to include in my script, but first I needed to get some distance and feedback before I did any more writing so that I could avoid muddying the water with irrelevant words. The more I wrote, the more difficult it became for me to refrain from inserting my own opinion everywhere to just prove a point or react against things I didn’t agree with. I wanted to make sure that the four scenes represented various points of view honestly, and that they didn’t just preach things from a one-sided direction. I also wanted to step back from the script for a while and figure out if I had the beginnings of a play that would have plot and action. One of my biggest concerns with developing a play out of interviews was the fact that I had so much dialogue to work with. (And not just dialogue; most of the interviews were nothing but one big monologue after another). I
knew that too much talking and not enough action might lose the audience before long. I knew that it was time for me to get feedback from others before I went any further.

On July 9, 2005, I had an informal staged reading of the four scenes included in section two. I was very nervous about the response I would get for several reasons, one was the subject matter, and another was the fact that most of the people at the reading were people I had interviewed. I was worried that they would accuse me of manipulating their words or misrepresenting their point of view. I was also very nervous because this was my first experience showcasing any kind of work that I had written myself. There was no writer or director to blame anything on, just me all by myself. However, my fears turned out to be unfounded. Most of the people who attended the reading had a very good response. Everyone agreed that this was an important and ambitious project (maybe even a little too ambitious!) Everyone was also unanimous about the fact that the questions raised by the play were important. In the discussion that followed the reading, I received a lot of good feedback about how I might consider developing the script in the future. One of the main comments I received was that there needed to be more balance in the questioning. It was suggested to me more than once that I might develop Marcus’ character more and make him a similar character to Greg. For instance, I should include some scenes with Marcus and people that are in agreement with him as a contrast to the scene with Greg and his family at dinner. Also, I could develop scenes where Greg and Marcus are individually interacting with people who do not agree with them or accept them. Then the play would become more about the similar struggles that both boys have
rather than just Greg's struggle. It would also show the issues that divide us deeply, and the ways in which we try to understand each other, even if we don't agree. It was also suggested that I add more characters with various opinions and add more characters that have extreme opinions on all sides of the issue to create more conflict and more honesty in the action. These characters may be other classmates, or family members of one of the boys.

One thing that was interesting in the discussion following the reading was that when we discussed where the plot might go, an assumption was made by three different people that Greg would end up changing his mind about homosexuality in the end. This line of thought continued until someone spoke up and said that we can't assume that anyone is going to change their mind about anything. The play itself is about learning to understand each other, not about proving anyone right. It was very interesting that this assumption was made without anyone even realizing they were making the assumption. It just reinforces to me even more the importance of showing the struggle without providing the answer.

I also realized that there needs to be much more interaction in the play to show how Greg and Marcus are as people, not just how they feel. For instance, in order to fully identify with Greg, people need to know what he does on Saturday nights, what his sense of humor is like, how he treats other people, and what interests him outside of these serious questions. I fully realize the need for these things to be added to the play for all the characters, but I have been unsure of how to go about doing that. Because I developed
the script thus far from interview transcripts, I was unsure if I should go beyond the transcripts and add action or dialogue from my own imagination. However, I learned from this discussion that I need to allow the play to grow beyond the interviews. I also realized that before I do anything else, I might want to get a group of people together and do some improvisations with these characters. I think that would be very helpful in the development of the script even further.

Another idea that was suggested to me at the staged reading was that I should explore the idea of the play within a play more fully. Because I am greatly influenced to ask questions of myself through plays such as *The Laramie Project* and *Angels in America*, I should allow the plays that Greg and Marcus encounter prompt them to question themselves and each other. Also, because the plot seems to be developing into Greg creating a play about someone denying homosexuality, it was suggested that I end the play with the first monologue from the play he creates that echoes themes from the first scene with Greg and Marcus, so that the script comes full circle in the end.

Eventually, our discussion became about naming the major dramatic question of the play. We agreed that the real dramatic question is “how do we co-exist?” Greg and Marcus are looking for acceptance on two different levels, with the realization that they are two different human levels. I think this leaves the play open enough for the audience to be able to identify with the characters and the struggle they each have and walk away from the play with their own questions to struggle with. That is what I hope would happen with this play.
I plan to continue developing this script. I am going to act on the offers of some of my friends and colleagues to collaborate through devising theatre and improvisations to develop the characters and the action of the play more fully. I feel that this is a very important subject to explore, and I would love to see this play develop into something that acts as a starting point for discussion. I do not claim to be a playwright, and I sometimes feel that I am inadequate to be creating theatre of this nature, but I also know that theatre develops out of passion and honesty, which gives me hope that this project will meet with success. I would love to develop the script to the point where it can be workshopped in larger venues, and possibly even produced one day. I know that it has got a long way to go before that day comes, but I look forward to the process of discovery and collaboration along the way!
Part 4: What I learned

Where do I even begin? I guess I have to say that the number one thing that I learned from this project is that we have more in common than we realize. Everyone feels misunderstood. Everyone feels isolated at times. Everyone wishes there was more dialogue happening. However, the things that divide us are usually based on assumptions. We assume that we know someone because of the label we put on them. We assume that we all define things the same way. We assume that we are right, and those who do not agree with us just haven’t been enlightened, or haven’t had their eyes opened. We assume that the only way for a situation to resolve is for people to change their minds and agree with us. I am amazed in my work on this project at how many of the same phrases came out of the mouths of people with opposite points of view. I also learned, unfortunately, that many people define “being judgmental” as anyone who doesn’t agree or condone everything. Can we co-exist in a world where the very act of questioning beliefs of any nature is seen as a threat to the person being questioned? I don’t know. Maybe the biggest lesson I’ve learned in this process is the importance of exploration without the presupposition of the outcome. It’s not differing opinions that inhibit the dialogue, it’s the assumptions that we bring to the table. I am searching for a theatre that denies assumptions and demands dialogue.
Works Consulted


This book is a compilation of ten essays written by persons who are both ordained pastors and professors. The essays address the discussion of the mainline church understandings of science, Old and New Testaments, and theology as they relate to the issue of homosexuality and the church. The editor, David Balch, has tried to represent opinions on all sides of the debate as it now stands in the evangelical churches.


This book seems to be one of the fundamental books in the contemporary debate of homosexuality in our culture. Boswell’s research was mentioned in almost every book I read on the topic that was written after 1980. (Both the books I have mentioned here and others that I have not mentioned.)


This was one of the best books I read on the subject from the conservative Christian perspective. The research was thorough, recent, relevant, and very compassionate. The author has been in close friendships with practicing
homosexuals and has a great understanding and compassion for them while explaining why he and so many others do not agree with the practice of homosexuality. I would recommend this book for the introduction alone. (If you do not have the time to read a thorough hermeneutical study on the topic).


This is another book I would highly recommend for anyone who wishes to read a scholarly and compassionate approach to the subject. The topic of homosexuality is only one chapter of this book, but the information is very thorough. A professor at Yale Divinity School, the author also has a personal understanding of the issue because his best friend of many years, who was a Christian and a homosexual, died of aids shortly before he wrote the text of this book. I highly recommend this for anyone who wants to understand what many conservative Christians really think about the issue.


This was a book that was highly recommended to me by several people who knew I was researching this project. While there was some interesting information in the book, I was a bit disappointed in the level of scholarship and thoroughness of the discussion. The author clearly states in the introduction that he is not using a
lot of technical jargon or scholarly information in order to keep the book accessible to the average person, but I felt that this caused the argument to be under developed. Several of the other books I read that had a high level of scholarship still kept the information accessible. Although the book has a catchy title, I don’t feel it is a thorough representation of the issue. I would probably recommend John Boswell’s book over this one for a study of evidence for the pro homosexual point of view.
Appendix A
Interview Transcripts

3/9/05
Brian Vrtis: Age 26, graduate theatre student

K: All right, um, first of all do you consider yourself an open-minded person and why or why not?

B: I like to think so, yeah. I don’t know, in terms of why I would say, just... I try to at least sit down and maybe look at something, something new without coming down hard line one way or the other, so, yeah...

K: Okay, um... do you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

B: Uhhh, doo doo doo doo... yes. Uhhh, I’m trying to think of who. Umm, there’s a couple of the students of mine, er, not students... a couple of students in Noreen’s class... a couple of students in the grad department itself ummm... I’m trying to think of outside of the school... if there is...doo doo doo doo...there is...I’m not exactly sure if I would... actually I’m not exactly sure if I would quality him as such, I’m not familiar enough with his sexuality to say one way or the other.

K: Okay. Um, well this one kind of goes along with that, but, do you have friends or relatives who personally deal with homosexuality...whether they’re out of the closet, quote unquote, or not?

B: Yeah. Yeah – my wife is....

K: Okay. Um... What would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay, if they haven’t come to that conclusion yet?

B: Ummm.......Hm.....

K: And you don’t have to answer these if you don’t want to – you can always say “pass” that’s fine...
B: I'm not sure what I would say. Ummm (long pause) I think my first response would be "okay." Ummm....if they, I mean, if they know or not. Ummmm.... Yeah.

K: Okay. Basically it would depend on why they were telling you...

B: Why they were telling me, and, you know, yes take it from there. I think, I think my first response would belike okay you are, so....

K: Okay. Um, okay, um have you ever dealt personally with thoughts of homosexuality?

B: Uh-huh.

K: Okay...ummmm, what would you describe as "conventional values?"

B: (Exhale). I would say the closest thing I could think of would bee...along the lines of the values of my, uh, the values of my parents. Umm, just sort of that mindset of that upbringing and such I think.

K: And can you expand on that a little bit. What were, what were their mindsets?

B: They were... ummm...they're both Catholic. They're both very very, uhh faithful, um Catholics, so...I would...I'm trying to describe it as, I'm not THE best Catholic in the world if at all anymore, umm, but...ummm...studying what's in the Old and New Testament, and what's...using that as a guideline that sort of that foundation to umm building their actions on ....I mean that's the biggest, ummm. That was the biggest reason for my mother at least .....she thought it's good to have that as a guideline, a guideset...

K: Okay – ummmm that kinda leads me into my next question which is do you believe in God?

B: I'm not sure, actually. Ummm... There's... there's nothing I've seen that says hardcore there is but at the same time there's nothing I've seen that says there hardcore isn't, so....

K: What about the Bible? What are your beliefs about the Bible?

B: I don't believe in it enough to take it literally...ummm...there are things in there that it would be good to live by. There are things in there that maybe it's time to think about moving on from that...ummm...I don't know if I look at it as being the hard facts, this is it, and I'm not going to change....
K: Okay....ummm...some believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and being a religious person, um, do you see a difference, and why or why not?

B: I think if, I think there can be, but I think there’s an overlap. It’s... I can’t remember the name of the diagram with the two circles that have the overlap in them that move in there I think... Ummm... They’re very very close, a religious person.....might be someone who maybe doesn’t have that strong a backing of faith in what it says, they’re just kind’ve going through with it... ummm a spiritual person I think is someone who has just sort of that belief in ....there are outside, other forces and it’s not really tied down in just one set and I think when you get the overlap is when you get the people that actually really do believe in what they have set down...

K: Okay - do you consider yourself a religious person or a spiritual person, or both? Or neither?

B: Ummm....I would say at the moment, neither but kind’ve leaning towards the spiritual side, I think, as I put it, ummm....I think I started as more the religious person, which is part of why I’ve kind’ve moved away from the church as it was I just... going through the motions and stuff...

K: So, umm, and this you may have already answered, but umm.. so how would you describe your relationship with God?

B: Ummm.....

K: As, you know as, in respect to what you said about your beliefs...

B: Whether there is one or not?

K: Uh-huh.

B Um.... (Long pause). I would put it as somewhat distant then, I think. Uhhh.....enough that from looking at various beliefs and what they say God wants, I can go with that but not enough that I’m ready I guess in the very faithful Christian side to let Him......in, I suppose, to let Him into the personal...to let Him almost...I want to say take over, but not...but that’s basically, yeah...

K: Okay. Umm. Do you believe in moral absolutes? Why or why not?

B: (Long pause). That’s tough...
K: Yeah. They were hard to write too!

B: (Laughing). They’re getting harder as you go down, isn’t it....Ummm....... 

K: They won’t all be that hard....

B: Oh okay (laughing)....(serious) ummm... I think there are a couple of things that I hold hard and fast that you don’t do, ummm...

K: Such as...

B: Ummm........ Rape, child abuse, ummm.... Those are the big ones I can think of, ummmm... Yeah. Murder. Those are, I think hard and fast no......

K: Okay, ummm.... Do you believe that homosexuality is morally wrong, why or why not?

B: No. It's.... another form of... I mean it's a relationship. If there’s consent on both parties, then I don’t see how there could be anything wrong with it.

K: Umm... so how did you come to that conclusion, um, like what kind of critical thinking did you do to come to that conclusion, if any?

B: I don’t know if I did, a lot of the, I don’t know, a lot of the ideas ......that I’ve sat down and went well that makes sense to me, so...okay. If, you know, if.... if it’s a relationship and if people are happy and if they both are in it and both consenting then.... I don’t know if, it’s one of those, it looks like it is right so I don’t know if it could be wrong.

K: Okay. Ummm.... okay, moving on to maybe some easier questions for you (giggle).... take a deep breath.... ummm... What would you consider to be an example of someone shoving their beliefs down someone else’s throat, or someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

B: Ummm....

K: Hopefully that is an easier question...(giggle).

B: Yeah, a bit of an easier ... I’m trying to figure it out...ummm... Man it’s so much easier to see on the right than it is on the left. I’m trying to think of example for both. The
easiest one I can think of right now is Fred Phelps or Jack Chick, and their actions and they’re just…. I think forcing it down the throat is if you sit back and just say this is a given, it has to be a given, and if you were in any way an intelligent human being you would agree with me. Ummm, instead of sitting there and saying, this is what I think, ummm… trying to find a common ground and how do we build from that. Umm, you know, this is what I think, what do you think?

K: And just give me some background, cause I’m not familiar with Fred Phelps or Jack…

B: Fred Phelps is… uhhh… Fred Phelps is (chuckle)...he’s virulently, virulently, anti-gay, anti-much of everything, he’s incredibly fundamentalist. Umm…. he looks out for a lot of the umm… a lot of the most visible protesting on the Matthew Shepherd case and on The Laramie Project was him and his group…

K: Okay, well I’m fixing to do some research on him then… (Giggle).

B: Yeah, he’s, yeah…. he’s the one…he’s the primary face of that I think…. Um…Jack Chick…

K: Was he the one that was in the script of The Laramie Project ?….

B: Yes.

K: Then I do know who that is…

B: As for Jack Chick, Jack Chick does a series of religious cartoons, small tracts; I don’t know if you’re familiar with it. It’s a small comic book…

K: I’m familiar with tracts of many different kinds….

B: Ummmm, that he does…and…. (Sigh) to live in his world… He’s very very very hardcore about anti-Catholic, anti-Muslim, anti-Halloween, anti…yes… ummm… so he’s very hardcore…

K: Talks a lot about what not to do….

B: Yes. And then a lot of his things focus on what is wrong, what is bad about the Catholics, how the Catholics are, how the Catholics are the whore of Babylon, umm… or what is bad about rock music or what is bad about Halloween, or such, and so…

K: What is bad about girls wearing pants…I’ve met a few of those too. I understand….
B: I don’t know if he goes that far…. but yeah…

K: So that is what you would consider…

B: I would consider that very much a you have to believe that it’s the only logical way and I’m going to keep hammering on you and hammering on you and hammering on you until…

K: Until you bend…

B: Yeah.

K: Okay. Ummm… What do you believe is the purpose of theatre? (Pause). In three words or less…(laugh). I’m just kidding.

B: (Laughs). In three words or less… ummm… Theatre is a fun house mirror. It’s… the director and the playwright and the actors put up their reflection of what they see going on in the world. It can’t…. It’s be easy to just say okay they look at it and they put it up on stage so people can see it but, you can’t have something that’s purely objective, it’s going to be bent and twisted and shaped by uhhh… those performers, those artists’ agendas by those artists’ beliefs and by what they want. So it’s going to have some distortion, which is like that fun house mirror, so you can see what they’re seeing in society and what they would like, ummm, done about it. Or what they feel is bad in society and what they feel is good in society. So it’s a way for people to look at themselves through another’s eyes.

K: Okay. Umm, do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in the theatre than in other social arenas, why or why not?

B: I think so. Ummm…. Partly because I think there’s that slightly stereotypical view that if you’re going into theatre then you must be homosexual to begin with, I guess, or, I mean there’s the stereotypical view of the gay actor that you see on Will and Grace – Jack who is a character. I think that’s very accepted in the mainstream, and I think that still gets a little bit into the theatre world, so I think that’s worked on the acceptance there. Umm… and I think again going back to the fun house mirror and looking at it through other people’s eyes, I think after being exposed to theatre that talks about these issues and such, I think that broadens people a little bit…
K: Okay... Umm, do you uhhh... do you think or find that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be accepted or important in the theatre. Why or why not?

B: I’m not sure... Ummm. I think... it would be different, I think it would find itself about as much controversy as one of the more, I suppose, ummm... I don’t want to say... but a more, ummmm... one where... finding homosexual urges and following through with them, I think it would be about as controversial as one that had that. For being important I think so, yeah. I mean, it’s another viewpoint. It’s a way we look at where people are standing, where people are seeing, where we as a culture as a race stand, as a species stand, yes. So I think yeah.

K: Okay. Do you think that artists, specifically theatre artists, but just artists in general, are elitist? This is going back to Aaron’s class....

B: I think some of them are, yeah. I think there’s a tendency to divide things up into high art and to low art, and I only want to do high art and, umm, something that Noreen always brings up but you know, some theatre historians only want to look into this stuff instead of looking into...

K: Cats....

B: Yes, Cats... And I think there’s, I think there’s that undercurrent of, um, Cats is not important or to be studied as opposed to...

K: Shakespeare....

B: Yes, Shakespeare...(laugh) um... yes, but the high culture, ummmm, yeah...

K: And the last question, besides me getting your name and your age and all that stuff later, umm... How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? And this is actually a two part question the next part is, ummm, do you feel people ought to be classified as individuals rather than groups, does that make sense?

B: How do you mean classified together? As in....

K: As in, ummmm....

B: Like a gay actor versus a regular actor, or...
K: Yeah.

B: Okay.

K: As in all women feel this way, all gay people feel this way, all African Americans feel this way…

B: Right…. And how do I feel about it?

K: How do you feel about it, yes…

B: Ummm….. it’s… we need to classify things I think, people do, ummm…. But it’s…. I think I may be going to answer both at once. I would prefer it based on an individual level versus you’re an x so you must feel y. I think that does a disservice and I think that’s too …constraining I think to use, just too much of you have to be in here and you have to do that…. So ummm…. 

K: Okay. Very cool…Ummm… go ahead and just say your name and your age and also, ummm, I’m trying to think about how to put this… the degree you’re pursuing and what you feel your work is in the theatre, I guess what would you classify yourself as in the theatre.

B: Okay, ummm. My name is Brian Vrtis, I’m 26. Ummm… and… my work in the theatre, I’m pursuing a degree an MFA in Pedagogy, ummm emphasizing more on a historic, ummm, history education, so ummm dramaturgy, mostly, yeah, dramaturgy and teaching…

K: At the university level?

B: Yeah.

K: Okay – and can you spell Vrtis for me just so I make sure I …

B: Yeah, it’s V-R-T-I-S.

K: Okay. Thank you very much!

B: Thank you!
Kari: So, question number one, do you consider yourself an open-minded person, why or why not?

M: Yes. I consider myself an open-minded person because I realize that no human being has all the answers to anything and I base my opinions and ideas based on my experience and my relationships with other people, and my education, my training and my spiritual beliefs.

K: Okay, um, now some of these are the repetitive ones, so, um, do you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

M: As far as a relationship, yes I have friendships with a lot of people who are openly gay, yes.

K: Okay, um do you have friends or, obviously yes, or relatives who deal with homosexuality?

M: Yes. I have members in my family who are gay as well as I have quite a few friends who have, who are either gay or who are straight or who have members in their family who are gay, lesbian or bi-sexual or trans-gendered.

K: Okay, so hypothetically, if someone who was not openly gay came up to you and said that they thought they might be, what would you say?

M: I would say take your time. Uh, most people seem to think that dealing or discovering or identifying your sexuality or sexual preferences and your gender, two very specific and independent things, in my opinion, um, that they are often felt that they need to make a rush decision or something like that, and I think that’s one of the worst things you can do. These are very delicate things and they need to be given enough time and meditation and thought before dealing with them. So to that I would say talk to some people, do some research, some reading, prayer. This is not something that should be taken lightly, this discovery process of who you are.

K: Okay. Um, have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

M: Yes. Ever since I was a little boy I knew that there was something different about me, however, I couldn’t exactly, you know, figure out what it was because as a young person
you don’t, you’re not um, aware of what sexuality is or sexual preference. At an early stage of your life you’re determining what your gender is and who you are as a person and you’re seeing, you’re beginning to discover the differences between the two sexes, I’m male and you’re female, or what have you. Um, and so, while I didn’t place my difference in a sexual connotation I knew that there was something different about me and it wasn’t until after puberty that I realized that I was male as a gender and my sexuality was that of a gay male.

K: What would you describe as “conventional values?”

M: That’s a very good question, um, in fact in discussing, you know, with my brother my sexuality, it often shocks him (laugh), it shocks him the values that I place as far as not being radical that he thought they might be. In fact I share very conventional standards, values that the majority of the United States holds. You know I do believe in family values and I believe in the unity of a family together. The makeup of the family I might have different views on, but I view the same things as far as violence, and race and gender, and freedom of speech and religious freedom and things like that. My values are very similar to that of a traditional, you know, Christian living in the United States.

K: Okay, um, once again, possibly repetitive, but do you believe in God?

M: I do believe in God. I was raised in the United Methodist Church. I am a born-again Christian myself. I’m a practicing Christian. I’m not a perfect Christian, like none of us are, but um, you know, God and my belief in God are a very important part of my life and it has shadowed and influenced many of my decisions in my life and it will continue to do that hopefully, the rest of my life. Um, I place a lot of value in my beliefs and I respect the beliefs of other Christians. And being gay and Christian, you know, that’s kind of a weird category to be in, not that I think it’s weird, but you know I recognize and understand that that’s a hard, that’s a weird dichotomy in our society and in my particular religion, so...

K: Along with that, what are your beliefs about the Bible?

M: Um, I believe that the Bible is one of the most important things we have as Christians to be able to create a stronger walk with Jesus and our Creator and that it is one of the best ways for us to understand the things that God has done for us and the things in life that God has set for us to try and be and to become more Christ-like. Um, I believe that, sadly, just like so many other things in history, you know, man is fallible, and so, um, while I do believe that the people who wrote the Bible were influenced and uh, it’s God’s work through their life and influence which led them to be able to write the text which is in the Bible, I do realize that the Bible has been passed through a lot of hands for the past
few thousand years and so with that there are certain human qualities to it. I think the most important thing, however, for the Bible, is to remember what it is and to look at it as a tool and a way of making the relationship that much closer with God and you can glean from it some of the most amazing tools and lessons to live your life so that you are a pleasing being in the sight of God. So I don’t believe that the Bible should be taken 100% verbatim. I think there’s danger in doing that uh, in any time period and I believe that Jesus was one of the first to point that out that you shouldn’t fall into taking things exactly as they are written because when you do that you shut yourself off from some of the multitudes and facets of God and His creation. So, that was a very long answer but in short, I believe we need to be an educated reader of the Bible and understand the society and the culture in which many parts of the Bible were written in and then understand how that applies to us today in the 21st century, and there are more similarities than differences between our cultures and societies but I think one needs to realize that the Bible is a living text, and um, however in that is, living it will have different reflections on society and the times that it was written.

K: Some people believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference? Why or why not?

M: Um, that’s a really good question, and it’s funny, I always hear people say I’m a spiritual person, I’m not a religious person. And I think there is there’s a difference and there’s a similarity as well. My hope is that religious people are also spiritual people, um, however, I can see that people who have a relationship with their creator in whatever form they feel their creator is, that that’s a spiritual relationship and to me, that’s the most important thing. I’m not the first person to point out that the church as a whole, we’ve had a lot of problems over the past couple thousand years, a lot of things that we, that we’re not very proud of (laugh). And so because of that I think that’s forced a lot of people away from organized religion and to me that’s one of the biggest travesties growing up in the church, you know, in the Methodist church. I can’t tell you how many times the older people in the church are like “why can’t we get more children in the church? Our churches are dying out.” And my answer to that is well, of course they are, because we haven’t lived very good lives to begin with and we’ve been very hypocritical and we’ve showed ourselves to be, we’ve preached that nobody’s perfect and yet we still judge and condemn people for things and our attitudes and behaviors are less than becoming. So if I was a teenager, of course I wouldn’t want to be a part of something that I saw was inherently hypocritical or closed minded or um, less than encompassing. And an institution such as the church can inherently not be about the relationship between us as a human being and our creator, um, I think most people seem to miss that. That to me is the most important part of Jesus’ ministry is it’s about our personal relationship with God and way too many people forget that. And that’s the whole point of it, number one, our relationship with God, and number two, it’s the way that we treat our fellow human
beings and the way we live our lives so that we are pleasing in the eyes of God. So I can, you know, I respect those people who say they are spiritual and that they have beliefs in God, that to me the point of the Church is for us to have a place for us to commune with other believers and so that we can have worship together. And I think that’s an important part of our, of anyone’s spiritual walk with their creator is to have that. And so, I tend to say to people who think of themselves as spiritual, I understand that the church has done a lot of bad things and has a lot of bad connotations, but don’t exclude yourself from being part of something that can perhaps give a lot of meaning to your beliefs. Sorry for the long answer....

K: No, this is good, I appreciate the thoroughness. Um, do you consider yourself a religious person or a spiritual person or both?

M: Um, I consider myself both. Um, you know, I haven’t been the most model church going person in the last couple of years because one, I haven’t really been able to find a congregation that I’ve been comfortable in, and there’s a variety of reasons for that, not just a church’s particular issues on acceptance or understanding of sexuality. That’s the smallest part of what I look for in a community congregation...but yes, meditation and prayer is a part of my life and my spiritual relationship with God is very important, so I feel I am both.

K: Okay, so how would you describe your relationship with God?

M: Um, you know, it’s like any other Christian, you know, I have my good days and my bad days... There will always be times when my human part of me comes out and I deal with things like every other human being does. And then there are days when I appreciate and am so filled... hold on for a second... (Outside interruption)....

K: How would you describe your relationship with God?

M: Oh, um so, I think my relationship is good. There’s always areas where I need room for improvement because a journey, a relationship with Christ is not one that’s perfect and it never will be. That’s why it’s called a journey, you’re walking with him, and so, you know, I hope that as I get older and wiser that my walk will continue to grow stronger and that the influence I have on people will make people think, well, maybe there is something about this person, and maybe they can’t put their finger on it but hopefully they will see that I try and be kind and my focus is on things that would be pleasing to God.

K: Do you believe in moral absolutism? Why or why not?
M: Well, to answer that I would need to know your definition of moral absolutism.

K: My definition.... I actually am asking this question to find people’s definitions of moral absolutism, most people define it as there is one standard and if you deviate from that then you are in the wrong, but I am interested in various definitions...

M: Um... I would have to say (chuckle) you know, in Jesus’ ministry, He was quite a rebel, and I think because we are human beings (chuckle) sometimes we take the most simple things that were given by God and because we’re humans we just keep compiling all of these things on top of it. I mean just look at Old Testament Jewish law – six hundred and some laws when all God gave them in the covenant that He gave to Moses was ten commandments and it was the humans that put all this stuff on top of it. And I think, I think with that, you know, again, Jesus in His ministry, He was trying to deconstruct all of this stuff and say no, you’re missing the point here, the point here is our relationship with God. And so that’s an interesting question. I don’t think anybody will ever fit into the perfect mold 100% of the time. You know, even Jesus being fully human and fully divine – that was the whole point of Him being both, so He could understand what it meant to be human. So I don’t think anybody will fit into a mold of being.... and in fact, if we look at moral absolutism as this is the way it must be, that in itself is a contradiction of our nature of humanity and us being a creation of God, God would obviously know that being omnipotent, um, so no, I don’t believe that there is a set thing. It always reminds me that you can’t classify sin; all sin’s the same. But, you know, the little kid in Sunday school who raises his hand and says but what about murder? What if I tell a lie? Isn’t that less of a sin than murder? Well, depends on who you talk to and things like that. I believe that sin is sin no matter what it is, but it’s these kind of things that I don’t – it’s part of the mystery of God, and I don’t think any of that will ever be revealed. I think the most important thing for our time here on earth is our relationship and how we live, and our walk that’s the most important thing. And if we try and do that and we do the best we can and we have good intentions then I think that’s the most important thing and that’s important to God.

K: Okay. Do you believe that homosexuality is morally wrong, why or why not?

M: Um, I believe that sexuality is just one of the facets of human beings as well as eye color, hair color, height, weight, all those kinds of things, and it would be very limiting of me to say that God doesn’t, uh, have an idea of what His creations are like. You know, being all-knowing and being able to see all of humanity and the entire timeline of humanity, you know, you always get into these big theory debate things well, if God knows that there are going to be these certain things happening, then why didn’t He change it from the beginning so that it never happens? Well, I think we’re limiting God
when we try to say that He didn’t create sexuality to be a very important part of who we are as human beings. Um, and I don’t believe that sexuality is something that is necessarily chosen, like I wake up one day and say I’m gonna be straight or I’m gonna be gay or bi-sexual. I think that’s inherent in each person, and I think there are plenty of studies to show that sexuality is not based on nurture. There will be studies to describe both sides of every issue until the end of time, but I don’t believe that sexuality is a nurtured or learned behavior. I think it is a natural thing that does happen, and, um, you know, sexuality to me is a gift from God and is a way of expressing intimacy and love between myself and another person, and I don’t necessarily view that as being an evil thing or something that God wouldn’t have a hand in creating. Now that being said, however, I still have the same values and morals um, again these are from a traditional heterosexual mindset, but I still view monogamy as a really powerful thing, you know. I hold myself and other gay people to the same things as other heterosexual couples...let me rephrase that, heterosexual Christian couples. In that relationships should be monogamous, and you know, um, in comparing, a lot of people would be very mad at me in comparing gay relationships with straight relationships particularly in a Christian connotation, simply because gay people are not allowed to have their unions recognized, so that creates a problem. So in response to that, that I think has been one of the causes for a lot of promiscuity in the gay community, because when you try to follow the same patterns that straight couples do as far as marriage and engagement and all that, we’re not allowed to and so, obviously what’s going to happen, there’s going to be a complete 360 or 180 (chuckle) away from it, and we’re going to fall into the opposite thing. But I still believe that everybody’s held to the same things that relationships are important and that monogamy and the same morals apply. It doesn’t matter that you have a different sexuality, it’s the same; it’s the same thing...

K: Okay, um, so how have you come to the conclusion that you have come to? .... What kind of critical thinking... what was the process to get you to this point?

M: Um... a lot of time. A lot of time, a lot of prayer, a lot of study, reading.... I think that, um, you know the one good thing that came out of me having to go through this process, is that it forced me to become more educated. I think if I had been a heterosexual growing up.... Hold on a minute... (Outside interruption)...
.... I think if I had grown up as a straight person I wouldn’t have put in as much time and energy finding out about myself and other people, but because I didn’t grow up a straight person, it forced me to do a lot of reading of what, of other people’s experiences, other people’s processes of reconciling their religious beliefs with their sexuality. So because of that it made me do a lot of personal soul searching and a lot of personal prayer and meditation to find out what God felt about all this and you know what the Bible says and other people, their experiences and other Christians who have gone through the same thing and so, and also you know having people in my own family who are gay. I have an
uncle who is gay and actually is a minister, went through seminary, has his M. Div. And all that kind of good stuff, and in talking with him... he had probably a worse time in reconciling his beliefs than I did, and his partner, um, also has an M. Div., and these are two very religious men who m I respect, and I really enjoyed listening to their experiences and that was a part of what I did. But more importantly than anything that I ever read or anyone I talking to was my personal feeling and whether or not I felt all right with God myself, and I took a lot of time and a lot of prayer, and I do feel that I am just as normal and loved by God as anybody else and that my sexuality is something that I was given. I don’t believe that sexuality is given to give somebody a harder time in life or anything like that I don’t believe that, but I think that I was born this way and I have this life for a specific reason. There’s something in my life and in God’s plan for me that this was, I was born and my life has unfolded this way to help other people or to give a greater understanding or to be a comfort or to be a friend or to be in a relationship with someone. I feel that I have a very important role in life and in humanity. And I look forward to finding that and when that happens I look forward to being there and doing what I was meant and born to do.

K: Um, okay, kind’ve switching gears maybe a little bit, um, what would you consider to be an example of someone forcing his or her beliefs on someone else?

M: Um, I can actually give you a very personal example. When I had to come out to my parents in high school, my senior year of high school, and my dad being a minster and my mother being a minister’s wife and all that kind of good stuff, we proceeded to talk, and they proceeded to throw at me all the traditional scriptural verses, which I was already very well, I already knew all of them of course, and everything, and growing up in the church and seeing my parents in their ministry, I’d always seen them um, treat other people in the congregation and in the community with the utmost respect. They were there to comfort and to educate and to inspire people, and they never judged anybody period, and that was always to me the most impressive thing about my parents and their ministry and their role in society. And yet, however, when it came to me coming out it was the complete opposite of what I had always seen growing up for 18 years and when it came to someone in their own family, that same compassion and that same love and that same willingness to understand was not there. Um, and so, you know, in that that made me realize that there’s a fine line between things and it’s taken me a long time to forgive my parents for not showing me the same understanding and willingness to include me in their life anymore after I did this, and it was a long time for things to return to normal in my family. And the only reason they did return to normal is because my parents finally justified that I was going through a spiritual battle in which the only thing they could do for me was pray, which, I love prayer – send it on, bring it on, everybody could use more prayer. But the fact that it was something that I would have to deal with, they couldn’t do anything more, and the fact that I told them that I did
not want to discuss this anymore with them, that was enough for them to kind’ve dismiss it from their minds, and so immediately everything turned back to normal the way it had been before I came out. Which to me is absolutely disgusting, parents shouldn’t do that particularly Christian parents, and especially not a minister and his wife... Read your question to me one more time...

K: What would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

M: And so, in that story, I feel that they were trying to force something on me because the one thing they didn’t do in that entire interaction with me, was they never – and I love this – I kept saying, well, this is how I feel. These are my experiences, these are my thoughts, and more importantly, this is how I feel. The one thing they didn’t do, however, is that they didn’t believe me. And that’s my biggest thing, when someone’s trying to tell you something of how they feel or how they understand something, and you dismiss it, and you never take their opinion or their feeling or their value, their belief at face value and accept that you totally, uh, ignore that...that to me is forcing your belief on someone else, or your value on someone else, by not identifying or not respecting the other person’s beliefs. And the last part, and then we’ll move on...(chuckle)...Forcing someone’s belief onto someone else is that when you are completely so one sided in your belief or your argument that you fail to recognize what your “opponents” have to say. When you don’t take into account what other people are saying or other people’s beliefs or experiences um, and when you don’t give them the benefit of the doubt or understand that maybe you don’t have the most clear, concise understanding of a situation or an idea. And when you refuse to acknowledge that other side, that’s when I believe people force their beliefs on someone else. Sorry for the long interview....

K: No, I... this is great. What do you believe is the purpose of theatre? If that can be answered.... (laugh)...

M: Um, well, the good thing about being in grad school is that we’re kind’ve forced to pare that down. I believe that the purpose of theatre is to, there are actually a few things, one is to educate. It is to entertain. And it is to challenge people to go on a journey with you. When you come into a theatre to a play or a musical the biggest thing for me is that you, by walking through those doors is that you have made a commitment to go on a journey with a playwright or with a play or with a musical or with a character that you see on stage. And by being “open minded” enough to go on this journey there are one of two things that you will be able to get out of the theatrical experience. One, you will be able to be, um, exposed to a different idea, opinion, belief, or situation, and from that you will be able to understand it and incorporate it into your life and into your understanding of humanity. The other thing is that you will be exposed to new ideas, new thoughts, new
beliefs, new situations, and you will be able to use them to reinforce a previous held belief that you have, and either way is great. It’s all about the journey and the process of being willing to go on the journey to see what you wind up with. Two things can happen and they’re both great. Either you reinforce your beliefs, or you’re exposed to something else that allows you to reinterpret your beliefs or to give you another perspective or understanding of humanity in some way. So that’s what I view as the purpose of theatre, and if we can do that, then that’s excellent, that’s all that it needs to be.

K: Do you think that, um, homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas?

M: I would say so, simply because theatre has always been considered a safe haven for gay people simply because it’s the one area of our society in which, and the arts in general, because the means and modes of expression are so varied that it’s a safe haven. I think that’s a good thing and a bad thing. It does create community and family if you want to call it that. The bad thing it does is that it limits exposure and incorporation in society. Most people, whether it’s about sexuality or something else, most people if they’re afraid of something, or if they’re uneducated about something, it generates fear and it creates misunderstanding. And so, I wish that there was more understanding and one-on-one experiences in other areas and other fields.

K: Okay, where are we? Um… Would you find, or do you think, that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in the theatre? Why or why not?

M: Um, that’s a very good question, and I think it depends on the mode in which it is presented. I will never be the first one to say that a person’s experience and self-discovery of their sexuality is not a very personal thing, and it would be very hypocritical of me to say to that person, well, that’s terrible of you to deny something that you have been given as part of who you are, your sexuality, who you are, and to deny that. Because I’m not them. I don’t understand their existence and their relationship to other people. So that would be very stupid of me to say that. However, you have to be very careful, because the issue of Christianity, especially Christianity and sexuality is very taboo, and because it has been so stigmatized in our society, and because gay people have been for such a long time been excluded from Christian churches and worship and all of that kind of stuff, there’s a lot of hurt feelings on both sides, and so when you have something like that it’s going to make people on both sides automatically go crazy and stand up and cheer and boo and hiss. I’m very much willing and open to all kinds of theatre which explores everything. There are people who have struggled with their sexuality and their religious beliefs, and so why not explore that on the stage? The one thing for that particular issue, I, the one thing I don’t like about theatre is theatre that forces, or perhaps
forces is too strong a word, but determines a certain outcome for an audience to feel or think or believe. So for that particular play in that situation I would insist instead of having a character definitely choose something I would prefer perhaps maybe giving that opinion or that decision up to the audience. Let them decide for themselves. Is it something that can be overcome, or is it something that’s not, again going on that journey with the character is the most important thing, and either reinforcing their beliefs that yes, homosexuality can be overcome through religious beliefs, or through Christian beliefs and relationship with God, or no, it can’t, and again, reinforcing those beliefs, or opening up your own to new questions, maybe it can, maybe it can’t. Either way, again, it’s getting people to discuss, and so the danger of giving the audience a set answer at the end blocks people from having that discussion.

K: Okay, um, do you think that artists in general, I guess specifically theatre artists, but just in general are elitist? This kind’ve goes back to Dr. Anderson…(laugh).

M: Um, (laugh) I would say our natural personalities, yes, because we’re (classical mocking voice) theatre artists, blah blah blah, boo hoo hoo…you know, uh, naturally we fall into that, and that’s one of our most negative aspects, you know it’s the most disconcerting to a lot of the people we come into contact with is that we’re …on such a high pedestal sometimes that it makes people immediately give connotations of well they’re, all theatre people are snobbish, or elitist or what have you, and I think that’s something in the community that we need to work on. We are just another occupation. We’re just another field. And also, however on the same token, on the flip side we’re also very misunderstood as far as what we actually do and the amount of work that actually goes into our occupation. So it’s, I think we’re still fighting that balance in our society of what theatre and what art is and how much work it is, but at the same time we’re not helping anything by propagating these beliefs or these stereotypes that we are in fact elitist.

K: Last question! And it’s actually kind’ve in two parts, um, how do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are classified as a group? In other words, do you feel that people should be classified as individuals or social groups?

M: One of my favorite quotes is “Labels belong on beer not humans.” Or soda, whatever you prefer…Um, and I think that’s true. We have a natural tendency as humans to classify everything, absolutely everything. And there’s danger in that. But on the flip side, also by creating community and creating unity we can create security for ourselves just like any other community that has been marginalized or you know, fits outside of the traditional or most common group of society, you know, whether it’s through race or whether it’s religion, you know, religious beliefs or understandings that have been marginalized or fall under connotations, you know, whether it’s Christians that are
beginning to be viewed as a certain thing, that’s not good either. Same thing is with gay
people, the gay community, you can’t look at, …there’s good in creating community, but
at the same time, it’s very bad because it doesn’t create unity in our society and culture as
a whole. So...

3/14/05
Anonymous 1: Mother of 2, age 42

Anonymous 2: teenage girl, 17

Anonymous 2: teenage girl, 14

Kari: Okay, well the first question is, and you can answer this together or separately or
whatever you want, do you consider yourself an open-minded person, why or why not?

A2: Ummmm…. I’m more open minded than I used to be, but compared to a lot of my
friends I’m very closed minded.

K: Why do you say that?

A2: Because I think homosexuality is wrong, and I think that sex out of marriage is
wrong, and they think it’s not.

K: Okay.

A1: I like to think of myself as being open-minded, but I know I’m not. I was raised too
conservative, I raised my children conservative…

A2: Tell me about it (laugh).

A1: So, I’m very conservative.

A3: I’m gonna have to agree with her (A2) because that’s pretty much how it is with me
and my friends too, cause like, yeah… it’s the same pretty much…except for like some of
the people I hang out with who go to church pretty much other than that, all my friends
are just… yeah.

K: Do any of you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

A2&3: Yeah…
K: Would you care to elaborate?

A2: Ummmm, let's see, my best friend is gay...

A3: And he's also my friend, and then Nancy, she's a lesbian....

A2: And Anthony, although I'm not very good friends with him...

A3: I don't really know him very well...

A2: Andy's coming out of the closet, it's kind've sad...

A1: And then I grew up with a guy who turned out to be gay, and his name was Andy too...

A2: And he was a drum major...

A1: He was a drum major and makes his living by interior designing....

A2: He's a lot like our Andy...

A1: I didn't know any of that growing up though, until I was older.

K: Okay, umm, might be a little repetitive, but do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality?

All: Yes...

A2: I don't think we have any relatives...

A1: Not relatives, just acquaintances...

A2: Just very good friends.

K: Okay, umm, what would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

A2: Exactly what I said to Andy. I have a problem with it, but I love you anyway.
A1: I've never had anyone come up to me and just say “I'm gay,” so I have not faced that.

K: Do you know what you might say?

A1: Ummm, well, I think having children now, a lot of it is at their age, how on earth would they know yet? You know, they haven’t experienced life yet. I don’t approve of it. I, you know, you love the person, but you don’t have to love their behavior.

A3: Ummm, Andy sort’ve told me that he was gay without really telling me, and I just kind’ve you know, looked at him and he was like, yeah, and he sort’ve told me and I was like, okay, and I didn’t really know how to react, and then finally I was just like, yeah I guess I understand, I probably…. and then I told him I would still be his friend no matter what.

K: Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

A2: No.

A1: No.

A3: No.

(Giggles)

A2: I may not have a boyfriend but I still like guys…. (Giggles)

K: What would you describe as “conventional values?”

A2: What do you mean by conventional?

K: That’s what I’m asking you.

A1: I think of conventional as being traditional. That there should be a boy and a girl they should get married, then start a family, and live happily ever after.

A3: Yeah I can agree with that…

A2: I kind’ve agree with them, but I don’t think we agree with most of America’s ideas of conventional morals…
K: Okay. Do you believe in God?

A1&2: Yeah...

A3: Yes I do....

K: And what are your beliefs about the Bible?

A3: It’s real. Like it’s hard for me too because like, my social studies teacher I think she’s an Atheist because all she does is pretty much like dis the Bible every other day and she’s like “yes, well you say all this stuff, but He never really says this...” and that makes it really hard on me because I want to be like “yeah He did, He did say this...” but I can’t really do that and yeah....

A2: She’ll lower your grade even more than...

A3: Yeah...

A1: I believe it’s the inspired word of God.

A2: Yeah, me too.

K: Okay, uh, some people believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference, why or why not?

A2: Yeah. Buddhists are spiritual people, (pause) well, wait, hang on...

A1: (Laugh).

A2: There is a difference but I can’t really put it into words...I’ll figure it out in a second.

A1: I think religious can be looked upon as, a lot of people can think they’re living the right kind of life and say it’s in the name of religion, but a spiritual person believes it and lives it.

A2: There you go...

A3: Yeah, I agree with her...

K: Okay, let’s move on. Uh, do you consider yourself a spiritual person or a religious person or both?
A2: I think I’m both; I’d like to think I’m both....

A1: I would like to think that we’re all both, not only spiritual, but that the people who don’t believe spiritually can look at you and know that there’s something different about you.

A3: I think I’m both, I think it sort’ve depends on how people deal with conflicts, I guess, in a way...

K: What do you mean by that?

A3: Like, if they come up with like a decision or something, like if they make a good decision or a bad decision or whatever, that can make like a big impact on their lives or something that can sort’ve make a big impact.... (Giggle) I can’t put it into words...

K: Okay. How would you describe your relationship with God?

A2: Not as good as it could be.

A1: I think we like to think of ourselves being close, but we can always draw closer.

A3: Yeah. I try to read my Bible every day and pray, and sometimes I forget, but I try...

K: Okay, do you believe in moral absolutism? Why or why not?

A2: I’m trying to remember what moral absolutism is; you’ve mentioned it before....

K: Do you believe there is an absolute moral standard; do you believe in absolute truth?

(Long pause). (Laughter).

K: Okay, um, do you believe that there is black and white, that something is true or it is not, or do you believe that things are relative?

A2: I think I’m pretty black and white.... to the chagrin of a lot of my friends...

A1: I like to believe the world is black and white, but as I grow older there’s a lot of gray areas I think.

A3: Yeah, it’s like a thin gray line right down the middle, so...I don’t know...
K: It’s all right, some of these are hard, so…

A2: Well like, there are gray areas if somebody asks you “does this thing make me look fat” you don’t know what to tell them…

A3: You don’t want to lie (giggle), don’t even look – you don’t want to get in trouble….

K: Okay, do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong? Why or why not?

A2: Yes.

A3: Yeah, because God said so…

A2: To quote the bumper sticker, “God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.”

A1: It’s wrong; it says so in the Bible.

K: How did you come to the conclusion that you have come to on this issue? What kind of critical thinking have you done, if any, or how did you arrive at this conclusion?

A3: With Bible study, and like with our Bible class, and some of the sermons that Lonnie did on it, and then like just in reading you come across that sort of thing, and yeah…

A2: And you see like other people’s behavior who are gay, and it’s kind’ve awkward, especially in the hallway when they’re making out, I mean, ughh….

A1: Well, I just finished reading Leviticus, and one of the things that it said in there, one of the laws is you know, it’s not right, ummm, Sodom and Gomorrah with Lot, it wasn’t right, there’s just never any example when it is right.

K: Okay, what would you consider to be an example of someone forcing his or her beliefs on someone else?

A2: (Laughs). I just think of the Simpsons episode last night where Flanders was trying to convert Apu to Christianity……..Um, I guess I go up to somebody and say “You’re wrong this is right, you should stop doing that and do this,” if you do that they’re not going to have anything to do with you…

A3: That’s like, I don’t know, that’s being a jerk in my opinion. They might not know what’s wrong, if they’ve never been to church before or something….
A2: Or if they've been to church but they have different beliefs.

A3: Yeah, then they might not know, and so that's not fair to them if you just come up and get in their face about it....

A1: There are times when you have to live the example, because unless they have an open mind and an open heart, you can tell them all you want and they're not going to hear you. But the one way that you can keep from confrontation is to live it and let them see you and make a difference in that way.

K: Okay, what.... and you might have to think about this for a minute, we're kind've switching gears here, what do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

A3: Ummm, I think it's entertainment and like sort've informing people at the same time.

A2: Yeah, like if you're a playwright, you're trying to get a message across.

A1: It's a performing art. And it's a performing art that can be used to get a message across to all kinds of audiences through humor, seriousness, whatever, you can use all kinds of messages to reach all crowds of people.

K: Okay, um, do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in the theatre than in other social arenas, why or why not?

A2: I know it's definitely more accepted in the arts, cause we're at the specialty center for the arts, so unless you count like Manchester where they have the really excellent show choir, we have the most gay people at our school.

K: Why do you think that is, or why not?

A2: Cause like, the majority of the guys in our show choir are gay, and in the theatre especially, there are a lot of techies who are lesbians, there are a lot of actors who are gay, and then we have a whole bunch of, well not a whole bunch, but we're getting more gay cheerleaders.

A3: Um, could you repeat the question?

K: Yeah, do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in the theatre than in other social arenas?
A3: Yeah, I think more of it has to do though with like also dancing and that sort of thing, cause you don’t really see that many straight guys like taking dance. And then like when you get into show choir and that sort of thing it’s like dancing, and a bunch of guys but they’re all gay...

A2: And it’s so sad cause some of them are hot (giggle)...

A1: Well, from what my children tell me, it seems to be more of an accepted practice in the performing arts.

A2: At school they think something’s wrong with you if you say it’s wrong, or that you’re being bigoted.

K: How does that make you feel?

A3: Sort’ve um... hang on, I’ll think of the word...sort’ve secluded, I guess because you sometimes, it makes you feel like you’re the only one who feels that way out of two thousand people.

A1: But you have to remember you have as much right to your beliefs and your feelings as they do.

A3: I know...

A2: Real quick what was the question again, I had something to say but I forgot...

K: Do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas?

A2: Oh, we’re still on that one?

K: Yeah, and then I asked how that makes you feel...

A2: Oh yeah, umm.... (Long pause). Oh, I lost it; it will come back to me at midnight...

K: Okay, well just call me up (laugh). Um, do you feel that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in the theatre? Why or why not?

A2: Um, I think like your friends told you it would depend on how it was presented. Um, I think there would be a lot of people who would be very much against it, but you would
be reaching out more to the Christian people and helping them understand the other people, like understand the theatre community, because that doesn’t happen very much.

A1: I think it presents to an audience how people have a choice and the right to make a choice.

A3: Can you repeat the question?

K: Do you think a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in the theatre?

A3: I think it would be important because there’s probably a ton of people like that out there that people don’t know about and so I think that would sort’ve give them like encouragement, but I don’t know if it would be that accepted…

A2: Like with Andy, he thinks he’s gay, but he doesn’t seem happy about it. I told him, well, you know you have a choice, and he was like “no I don’t, you’re born gay.” Like he doesn’t think you have a choice. And if he like, you present like a real life story of somebody who found out he did have a choice and chose not to like give in to homosexual urges, it’d be really important for people like him who aren’t happy with it.

A1: Umhmmm.

K: Um, do you think that artists, particularly theatre artists, but really anyone in the arts, are elitist?

A2: Yeah (laugh) yeah, I go to RYSO every Tuesday, we’re elitist.

A3: I think some of them can be. I think it really depends on like where their priorities are. Like, if some people are like all like orchestra or like all band or something and that’s like all they do, I suppose they can get a little snooty or whatever because if all they do is work on that then they think it’s gonna be the best…I think it’s yeah, it just sort’ve depends…

A1: I think it’s just keeping everything in perspective.

A3: Yeah.

K: And last question, how do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? In other words, do you feel that people ought to be classified
as individuals rather than social groups like minorities, women, or homosexuals, or
conservative Christians, you know what I mean?

A2: I don’t, I think it would be better if we could be classified as individuals, but I don’t
know if that’s actually possible, so I mean like there might be a group of conservative
Christians, but their beliefs are still gonna be different. Like each person’s gonna think
something different about each thing.

A1: (Pause) I think you pretty well said it... I just, um, I don’t know if, it would be nice if
everyone is looked upon as an individual but that is very difficult to do because even we
ourselves classify people into groups and it would be very hard not to because our society
is structured on that.

A2: I’m classified as a band geek.

K: (To A3 who is fading fast) We’re almost done.... (Laughs).... Is there anything else
you guys would like to say?

A2: I think you’re very brave...

A3: Yeah....

A2: And I think this could be really really important to the theatre community and
anyone else who sees it.

A1: Yeah.

K: That may have to be off the record though... (laughs)....

3/15/05
Lonnie Davis: Church of Christ Minister for 35 years, certified counselor, age 59

Kari: So here’s the first question, do you consider yourself an open-minded person, why
or why not?

L: Yes, but I confess to struggling with it. I mean I do confess to struggling with it.
Sometimes it takes me a long time to get over an old attitude or an old way of doing
things but I try to be open-minded about things that have to do with our opinions.

K: Okay, do you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?
L: No I do not. I do not know, no I do not. I’ve talked with many, and with several and have known some but I don’t have a relationship with anyone who is, no.

K: Okay, and this might be a bit repetitive, but um, do you have any friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality, either themselves or in their relationships?

L: No, I do not.

K: What would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

L: Well, I’ve been in that position because I do counseling and that’s also a part of my ministry is I do, is for years I’ve been a counselor. And I’ve counseled people who have been gay, and you know, you’re supposed to keep your own values out of it and everything, but I’ve never counseled anyone who has said, “is it okay to be gay?,” you know, just people really who have said “I want to turn things around in my life” and try to help them in that perspective. I can counsel or talk with a gay person or help a gay person in areas that don’t pertain to sexuality, but if a gay person came to me and said you know, I’m having trouble getting along with my boyfriend and he was a guy, you know that’s tough for me. He would be better off getting his counseling from someone else.

K: Okay, um, have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

L: No.

K: Okay, what would you describe as “conventional values?”

L: Uh, conventional values to me, that, of course everything I say is so slanted by being a Christian, and you know being a preacher, being a minister. But I guess if I had to define the term conventional values by the use of the word conventional it would be to say by looking at the public at large and seeing what their values are and what they hold dear, you know, even in this area concerning for instance, uh, the right of homosexuals to marry each other, that is not a conventional value, and that’s one of the great struggles is that those in the homosexual community are trying to make that a conventional value but it’s not one. Which was evidenced in the 2004 elections when it went down in eleven places when it was voted on, in all eleven places it was not allowed, so that’s not a conventional value. Homosexuality is not a conventional value because the great majority, the great great majority of the people in America are not homosexual.
K: Do you believe in God?

L: Absolutely.

K: And what are your beliefs about the Bible?

L: I believe the Bible is the word of God and it is the guidebook for how people who want to have a relationship with God ought to live.

K: Okay, some people believe there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference? Why or why not?

L: Yes, yes I do. Uh, there ought not to be, but a person might be spiritual for instance, and not know much about God. Or a person might be religious, and that’s where you find mostly, most people who are spiritual will also be religious, but sometimes there are people who are religious who really aren’t very spiritual. You know they just, if they do go to church while the preacher’s preaching they’re sitting there in their mind redecorating their house or going on a fishing trip or whatever, but they have this appearance of religion, but without the depth of the spiritual side of it, and that’s certainly going to happen...

K: Okay. Do you consider yourself a spiritual person or a religious person or both?

L: Both. Spirituality will lead you to religion, and religion without spirituality is hypocrisy and I don’t believe I’m a hypocrite, so obviously I consider myself both.

K: Okay. How would you describe your relationship with God?

L: Well of course having spent thirty something years preaching and teaching about Him, He guides me through His word in what I should do, He opens and closes doors for me... You know I believe that God has a hand-held relationship with me, you know that He helps me with things, because also I learn about Him through the study of and the meditation on His word, but you know, I think about Him every day.

K: Okay, um, do you believe in moral absolutism? Why or why not?

L: Of course I do. It just, I mean this is one of the old arguments of theism and atheism. If there is no moral absolutism then you have to get your values from someplace and if you just get them from the society around you then Hitler was okay in what he did because the society around him said it was fine. His own people, you know. But we say no that
what he did was wrong, but the only way we can know that is to say there is an absolute law, and of course by God, and by what He did.

K: Okay, um, do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong, why or why not?

L: Yes I do believe that it’s morally wrong, and I believe it’s morally wrong because the Bible teaches that it is, in Romans one for instance, where it just talks about that subject, and I believe teaches that it’s wrong.

K: Okay, How did you come to the conclusion that you have come to on that issue? What kind of critical thinking have you done?

L: Well, uh, you have to understand that I began with the premise of the Bible as God’s word for man, and so when I came to the subject, you go to the Bible and see if the Bible talks about it and there’s several places when it does, and when it does it talks about it as something we shouldn’t do. And so that’s how I came to it, well God said don’t do it and that’s fine enough for me.

K: Okay, um, what would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

L: Well, you know of course I would say that sometimes judges do that. You know, they legislate from the bench and write their own laws by twisting the law and overextending it and therefore force their beliefs on other people. Madeline Murray O’Hara in taking her court case about prayer, she forced her beliefs on everybody. Now I understand that she would say we were forcing our beliefs on her because we were having prayer and the same thing with the homosexuality issue, it is my conviction that they are trying to force their beliefs on us by calling us homophobes if we believe it’s wrong. I’m not a homophobe; I just believe God has spoken on this. Of course they say we’re trying to force our beliefs on them and I understand that that gets into the cat, dog chasing it’s tail and all that kind of stuff but they’re...I’m not a homophobe. God said it’s wrong; therefore it’s wrong, that doesn’t make me a homophobe. For somebody to get up and publicly try to embarrass me by saying I’m a homophobe and telling a lie on me, they’re forcing their, they’re trying to force their belief. They want all of America to believe that I’m a homophobe, and I’m not. I’m not scared; I just don’t believe that’s what God wants us to do.

K: Okay, um, what do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

L: Well, to entertain first, but I can’t pass up the times that I’ve learned from it. You know, you learn from it too. And sometimes even your values can be shaped. You can
learn to show compassion for certain people, you can entertain, to educate, to at least expose values, and maybe sometimes even shape them. I mean obviously, in history there has been a lot of religious drama for the purpose of shaping values and things, we learn by what we see, so I guess that’s what I would say.

K: Do you think homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas, why or why not?

L: Absolutely. Of course it is. I think it’s probably more accepted in theatre than among the truck drivers of America, you know, but I think the reason that it is maybe is because a lot of the lifestyle, educational lifestyle that leads you to study this this long maybe draws people that are more compassionate or softer or more giving and caring, and sometimes people in other arenas of life can just be pretty harsh. You know I think it is. But, you know, maybe for the same reason I think that theatre draws people who are often less moral who are heterosexual, and you know part of that is if you put yourself around somebody every day for six months and you’re in an acting arena when you’re acting like you love each other and you’re treating them this way, things just happen, and it’s a danger. I’m not saying you can’t do it, I’m just saying, well, you know better than I do, it’s just something that you’ve got to watch out for.

K: Okay, do you feel that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in the theatre? Why or why not?

L: I think it would be important, but I don’t know how well it would be accepted among some of the actors because I was in a counseling class one time that was being sponsored by a homosexual group to help educate us on homosexuality, and they came to the conclusion that homosexuals can’t be changed. They said, and this was almost a quote, they said, “all you do in these cases where people say homosexuals have changed, all you’re doing really is just causing them to deny feelings that they already have.” And like this is some bad thing, to deny feelings that you have. A lot of men deny feelings that they have. Maybe there’s some guy who wants to have a wife and four girlfriends, but he doesn’t do that. So he learns this is not appropriate and we don’t do this. I’m not sure that the homosexual community understands that it’s okay to say no to a feeling that you have regarding your sexuality like that. I mean at least in this one case they just told me you know, you’re not really changing, you’re just denying feelings, and I wanted to say okay, but don’t a lot of men deny their feelings when they don’t sleep around? I mean just because you meet somebody and they are attractive...I don’t think the homosexual community would look on it as an acceptable alternative to have that kind of an ending and for this person to feel this way. I think they would feel sad that he was not able to just go ahead and show his feelings. That’s my feeling on it anyway.
K: Do you think artists are elitist?

L: I think some of them are. I mean, I think some of them aren’t. All I know is what I read in the papers and watch on television, so I don’t really know them. Certainly some of them are portrayed that way, and I think in a way they kind’ve have to come off that way, because if they don’t they’re, sometimes famous people, I mean it’s the same thing with athletes and sometimes politicians, if you don’t stand off just a little bit you’ll be smothered. I’ve known golfers, Byron used to tell me you know you can’t go out to eat. Or Elvis Presley in the old days used to tell how he would rent a theatre and go at midnight, rent the whole theatre out. What was he supposed to do? If he just goes at the normal time.... So is that elitism? You know they have to be standoffish some, in order to have any privacy. But some of them no doubt are, but some of them aren’t.

K: Okay. How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? In other words, do you feel people should be classified as individuals rather than groups?

L: I don’t think there’s...that’s not changeable. We’re going to say, “he’s in a group of men, she’s in a group of women.” We’re gonna say “he’s in a group of whites, he’s in a group of Hispanics, he’s in a group of blacks, he’s in a group of...” We group people, you know, we just do. And not only that, we want to be grouped. You know we all want to belong to a group and people will say “they’re Baptist or they’re Methodist or they’re Lutherans or they’re Church of Christ.” We just do groups. So yeah, we do, you know, I don’t think that’s going to change.

K: Okay, well, do you have anything you want to add or...

L: No.

K: Okay, well that’s it!

L: (continued – afterthought) I attended a class on culture, and one culture was homosexuality. And I tried not to be confrontational because they knew I was there and they knew I was a very conservative Christian. And, but there was one lady that was on the very end down there who was very educated. She had her masters in counseling, she had her own practice and everything. And so, I asked her because she, they had all taken their turns saying whether or not they were born this way or whether or not they chose it, and we didn’t ask them to do that, they just did it, and so I asked her I said, do you know of any evidence that shows or proves that you were born this way. And she became very agitated with me and basically didn’t answer it. So later I talked with one of the other women in the class who is a counselor and she had an observation on that, well, she said
there’s evidence that there is... and that’s not true. The best thing they’ve done on this is twin studies. And what you have to do to do twin studies of course is the best way to do is find twins, identical twins, who have never known each other. And that happens, there’s a bunch of them out there, some of which are homosexual. They’ve done some studies with those kinds of twins and about half of them, in the ones when they were homosexual, about half of them their twins were not homosexual. Now you would expect, and I don’t know the percentages or anything, but you would expect that if they were born that way and their genes are identical that they would both be homosexual all the time, or at least a huge percentage of the time, 95% of the time, but they’re not. And I think that’s crucial to this because if we’re born this way, and here’s the impact of this, if we’re born this way, God did it, didn’t He, and what God does He’s not going to call a sin. So that’s where we’re trying to come to this, but there’s just no definitive medical answer to are we born this way or is it a choice? I believe it’s a choice for the same reason. If God’s going to call it a sin, He’s not going to make it where you can’t do anything about it, or it wouldn’t be a sin...

3/21/05
Anonymous: Male age 23, undergraduate theatre student, native of the Dominican Republic

Kari: Do you consider yourself an open-minded person, why or why not?

A: Yes, I consider myself an open-minded person because I don’t think I discriminate, I don’t think, you know that I have that pre-judgment of anybody. Um, I’m really you know, open to new things and new ideas. I do question a lot, I do question a lot of things, you know, I don’t let myself go with any idea, but, um, once I’ve questioned and I have tested, then yeah, I’m very open-minded.

K: Next question, do you have a relationship of any kind with anyone who is openly gay?

A: Yes, yes.

K: Okay, um, do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality?

A: Ummmm.... Deal?

K: Whether personally themselves are homosexual or have...

A: Yeah, I have a lot of friends that, and I have family actually that yeah, that deal with it uh-huh.....
K: Um, what would you say....

A: Some are all family and some are not all family...sorry.....

K: Thank you. Um, what would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

A: What would I say if somebody confided in me that they might be gay? Ummm, well, you know I would question them about it, I would talk to them about it to see how they feel, and what you know makes them feel or think that they are, to make sure that they know who they are, to make sure they know their orientation, you know. I would help that person to find out for sure, you know?

K: Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

A: Yes.

K: Ummmm, sorry I keep losing my place..... What would you describe as “conventional values?”

A: Conventional values, Conventional values... ummm. The values are changing. Because ummm, it used to be you know that homosexuality was looked at you know like sinful and it used to be that homosexuality was supposed to be bad, but there are a lot more people coming out and you know being openly gay and you know, gay marriages in various states and more people talking about it, and I think it’s gonna get into, into the place where the values are, are going to be you know, that it isn’t going to matter anymore, that it’s gonna be more open, because of the stipulation that this is happening all over the United States.

K: Do you believe in God?

A: Yes.

K: And what are your beliefs about the Bible?

A: I believe the Bible is the word of God, but it’s definitely not to be taken literally (laugh). That it’s to be taken you know, um, as a guide as a reference to the way you live. It’s not something that you need to go you know, like period and dotted “I”s and “T”s.
K: Some people believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference, why or why not?

A: To me, being a religious person means that you have put yourself with a set of rules according to whatever religion you are following. And a spiritual person not necessarily needs to have a set of specific rules or a specific religion. A spiritual person can be somebody eccentric that knows themselves and feels good about his spirit himself and the spirit of others, and you know has a balance in his life. But um, a religious person is someone that you know has a balance in his life, but you know might have not taken it to the extreme with the religion.

K: Do you consider yourself a religious person or a spiritual person or both?

A: I consider myself a spiritual person. Um, I'm always in search of ... in my life. But um, I do not have a set you know, a set religion or a set you know, yeah basically. Although I was raised Mennonite...

K: But that is not what you practice now?

A: No...

K: How would you describe your relationship with God?

A: How would I describe my relationship with God? Um, I think um, it can be better. I think that sometimes I push away from Him or that I don’t take the time to you know work the relationship with God, but I think it could be better...

K: Okay, do you believe in moral absolutism?

A: What is that?...

K: Like, uhh, absolute truth, there is one standard of morality...

A: There can't be, there can’t be, because it’s too many people too many views too many... if you're not ticking somebody off then you’re ticking the other one off, there can’t be one set of rules.

K: Okay. Do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong, why or why not?

A: No. No, I believe, um, homosexuality is just you know another, another flavor, another you know, another set of colors, another choice in the bunch.
K: How did you come to the conclusion that you have come to on that? What kind of critical thinking have you done?

A: Well, um basically... um, I'm sorry the previous question was if it was wrong... if it was morally wrong?

K: Right.

A: Because, you know, to be a homosexual (laugh) doesn't have to mean that they're morally wrong. It doesn't you know, to be a homosexual doesn't mean that you have to you know, erase all your values that you have grown with or all the values that people teach you or that you're going around killing people or something like that. It just means that, that um, that you like your same sex, basically, and it doesn't make you a bad person for that, it's just the orientation that you have, it's just the people that you like to sleep with...

K: What would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on somebody else?

A: Forcing beliefs on somebody else, um, wow, that's a hard one... Um, .... I don't want to take it to religion, back to religion, but um, there are, when I used to go to church, to the Spanish church that I used to go, they were really really you know, um, drawing on their banning of homosexuality because it is in the Bible, and you know yes I have read it, and the Bible does say you know that that's one of the things that you shouldn't do, but, um, they were really really strong about it, and that was one of the reasons that I had to leave, cause I couldn't stay you know, it was like Sunday after Sunday, and that was like when (laugh) Madonna kissed that one chick...

K: Britney Spears...

A: Britney Spears and it was like Sunday after Sunday, and it's like hell is breaking loose and now people are kissing each other on TV and look it's the last days, and it was just over and over, and to me that's just imposing somebody's views, that's somebody's you know, just trying you know trying to make the rules of how things should go. Whenever you try to make it the rules, the rules of something without giving a choice, without giving you know, without letting the people choose, that to me is insulting, is insulting somebody's views. But is can go the other way too, you know, when a person says you know you should always be a homosexual, or something, or you should act like this because you are a homosexual, then um, that's enforcing rules, that's you know you're not letting me choose, you know?
K: What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

A: The purpose of theatre, oh that’s a lovely question, I love it! The purpose of theatre, the purpose of theatre is like any art form is to resemble life. It’s to resemble life and the human condition basically. Uhhh, it’s something you know, it educates people, but that’s not the purpose you know, the purpose is you know, to really show or resemble what’s going on and human condition, human life, yeah, that’s the ultimate. That’s the essence...

K: Do you think homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas, why or why not?

A: I don’t think so, I don’t think so. Um, because if look to how many you know gay and lesbian plays there are, or gay and lesbian theatres there are, or gay and lesbian films there are, it’s a bare minimum. Um, I don’t think it’s as accepted. I think like the values thing, it’s making its way through you know, people are opening more to it, but um, until I don’t see, you know, like a major Hollywood film with a guy and a guy or a girl and a girl kissing without being, you know, like Romeo and Juliet but Romeo and Romeo or Juliet and Juliet you know that sort of thing, um I don’t think, um, no, it’s not been accepted, it’s opening to it and more people are thinking about it you know, and the more we talk about it the more it’s gonna change you know what I mean? That’s what I think.

K: Okay, we’re almost done… Do you find or do you feel that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in the theatre, why or why not?

A: Um, it is important because it happens, you know what I mean, and that goes back to showing human condition, and it happens a lot, and there has been plays about you know. Like Angels in America where he denied it until the day he died. But um, you know, I think, yeah it’s important, it’s important to show that part of homosexuality. I would love to see more about different like other faces of homosexuality in the theatre but so far you know, yeah I think it’s important.

K: Okay, do you think that artists are elitist?

A: Artists are elitist… yes, yes. Because not everything is art. Not everything you know is considered beautiful, not everything is considered, although beauty is in the eye of the beholder (laugh)... not everything is considered you know artful. So you have to be elitist when you’re an artist because you have to choose carefully, you know, about what people are going to see as art, unless you’re really rich and famous and then you don’t care about what you choose, but um, yeah, artists should be elitist about art.
K: Okay, um, how do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? In other words, do you feel that people should be socially classified together or...

A: Right, right. I don’t see why, I don’t see you know why it should matter, cause my sexual orientation is only going to, um, uh, how can I say, what’s the word I’m looking for? It’s only going to affect, um, who I choose to you know sleep with behind my closed doors, you know what I mean? It’s not something that’s going to effect my work, it isn’t going to effect who I am outside of my house, outside of my doors, outside of my room. Um, I don’t think it should be a classification. I don’t think people should you know classify you for your sexual orientation. That’s something that’s very personal that’s very private something that not everybody should know, personally.

K: Okay, um, are there any questions that you think I should be asking that I haven’t on this survey?

A: Let’s see.... I can’t think of any right now, but I’ll let you know....

K: Okay, and one last question really quickly, um, just cause I kind’ve hinted at it, but I never actually asked it, um do you think that homosexuality is a choice or do you think people are born that way?

A: Oh right, um...

K: It’s the big...

A: Yeah, that’s the big one, um, I used to think that it was a choice, something that you choose to do or choose to be. But um, I don’t think so anymore, I really don’t. I think you’re born being who you are, it’s a part of you that you cannot change, that you can hide, that you can you know work to be, you know whatever normal standard means, but you know what’s normal? Whatever is normal to you isn’t normal to me. Um, but um, I really believe that it’s something you’re born with, it’s gotta be something in the genes or something... It’s just you...

K: And while I’m at it, how do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and vice versa....

A: Um, I think, I believe that um, it should be, um you know, I don’t want to say you know it should be .... That’s a hard question, that is a very hard question, because I don’t want to want to go against the Bible on one side, but I don’t want to you know, um, I
know that they shouldn’t be banned from church, I know that, because we are all children of God, because even murderers can go to church, can be religious, um you know, nobody should be banned, and, I mean there has to be a balance, there has to find a medium, there has to be...

K: And how do you feel on the other side of the coin, non-church going people should treat...

A: The church? I definitely think it should be respected because church is something that gives you so much. It’s something that is necessary, well most of the time, you can not go to the church and still be religious and still feel God in you, but I think the church should be respected because it’s a, an institution that you know, it just you know, it should, I’m sorry I can’t speak right now...

K: That’s okay. Is there anything else you’d like to say?

A: No.

K: Okay, we’re done!

3/24/05
Anonymous: Female age 29, graduate student, theatre director, and teacher.

Kari: So let’s get started.

A: All right.

K: All right, first question, do you consider yourself an open-minded person, why or why not?

A: I think so. I think I am pretty ...of other people’s points of view, but I still have my own opinion. So I think so.

K: Um, do you have a relationship of any kind with anyone who is openly gay?

A: Yes.

K: Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality either themselves or in their relationships?
A: Yes.

K: What would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

A: Um...what would I say to them? I would say...uh.... I don’t know. I’ve never thought about it before, uh.... it’s funny because you know in theatre everyone is just out. Um, I would say, I, I would say I support your decision. I support whatever lifestyle you feel you need to live and I hope that you can live it openly, and I’m here for you, you know, when you need to talk.

K: Okay. Um, have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

A: Uh-huh. About myself being gay, or about like just being attracted to another woman?

K: Either, or...

A: Um, yes. Attracted to another woman, yes, and have um, acted on it. But I’ve never had a physical relationship and I’ve never felt identified as homosexual, um, or bisexual.

K: Okay. Um, what would you describe as “conventional values?”

A: Conventional values? Conventional values. I think conventional values, um, that’s a really hard question. Conventional is a hard word. I think conventional values are to treat other people well and to treat other people with respect, um for their points of view, and for their choices. I think at the end of the day it comes down to, um, well I guess that maybe idealistic – the idea of do unto others as you would have done unto you is what I’d like conventional values to be, um, but I think they get a little skewed sometimes. But I think conventional values also get a bad name, um, because of politics and other things like that. But I think conventional values are to be the best person you can and to be as kind and as open to other people as possible. I don’t know that they are always played out, but I think that’s a conventional value that we all grow up with and are taught.

K: Do you believe in God?

A: (Laugh and pause). I believe in a higher power. Um, I believe in, I believe in an... and I’ve thought about this a lot because my father just died like two years ago, so, um, I believe that there is an energy to the universe that’s inherently good and forward moving that you can appeal to, and that looks out for you. Um, and I do believe that even though it deals you, um, a raw deal sometimes and stuff that feels really shitty, that it comes back and balances it somehow, at some point.
K: Okay, um, what are your beliefs about the Bible?

A: The Bible I think has been, um, the Bible I think has been interpreted by white men with power for a really long time and gets wielded as a weapon a lot. And, well, I took actually classes in Biblical studies at Duke - I have no religious upbringing at all. And one of the women was a translator of Hebrew. We were looking at the Old Testament and she was translating for us and everything. And it was really fascinating. And I mean I think, I think that Christian mythology is incredibly useful for us to be aware of because it influences our whole lives and ethics and everything. Um, at the end of the day I don't think that religions are different from each other; I think they all try to do the same thing. But, um, I think the Bible, um, can be problematic. With any text that gets translated inherent in the translation is a power structure. And there are so many translations you can choose; you actually can just choose whatever ideology you want. But I guess that's why you choose a church, you choose the church that matches what you believe, I guess. Does that answer the question?

K: Yes. Some people believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference, why or why not?

A: Ummmm…. I think you can be spiritual and religious. I think you can be spiritual without being religious. I think you can be religious without being spiritual. And I think because I think of spiritualness in this um, sort of universe energy that I was talking about, and I think of, a lot of times I think of religion as being exclusionary rather than inclusionary, um, because, well because it takes place in a church where the congregation comes and I guess people are allowed to go who don't belong there. Um, and also because I think religion like the Bible gets a bad name because it gets yielded as a weapon and as a reason for like ethnic cleansing, and stuff like that whereas I think a spiritual person regardless of their religious background would be like you know what, I'm not sure we should kill these people, if that makes sense.

K: Do you see yourself as a spiritual person or a religious person, or both? Or neither?

A: I don't think I'm very religious, um, you know if anything because I don't feel like I pray to a god because I don't know what God is. You know because he's always been represented to me with a capital "G" as a white man, and I think that's really limiting. But I do appeal to something sometimes; you know I appeal to uh, the universe. Or I you know say I don't know what to do with this, somebody please help me, and I do believe in intuition, which I think comes from some sort of divinity or spiritual divinity. So I think I am spiritual but I'm not, I don't consider myself religious because I don't adhere to any religion. And I don't go anywhere to do my religion. So that's it.
K: Okay, so um, how would you describe your relationship with God, or…

A: The divinity (laugh). My relationship with the divine. Um, well I think that the greater energy, the energy of the universe is positive in general and forward moving in general and that things unfold as they are meant to do. But I don’t know, I don’t feel like it ever tells me what I’m meant to do. But there’s a certain trusting in intuition, and intuition comes from trusting a higher power, whatever that is. Um, but I don’t, you know, I don’t pray, I don’t pray for guidance in like an organized way, you know I don’t pray for guidance. But I think, um, in contemplation or meditation that it’s often an appeal, or I’ll say to people for instance I’m going to send you good thoughts when someone is sick. And I think that that’s really what a prayer is, is offering good thoughts out of the universe and I think they do get to the people they need to get to. So I don’t feel like I pray to a god, but I feel like I appeal to a higher power that I think is fair and looks after people and I have a great amount of faith that you know it is what it is and if someone dies it’s because they have to and if someone is sick it’s because that’s the plan, there’s a great plan… something…

K: Okay. Do you believe in moral absolutism? Why or why not?

A: I don’t know what moral absolutism is.

K: Um, like absolute truth, um that there is a moral standard that is it…

A: Oh, probably not.

K: Okay. Do you have a reason, or just…

A: I don’t know, cause it seems that, that I think…. I don’t know, I don’t think so…. I mean it seems like what I…. I think that moral absolutism is just do unto others as you would have them do unto you, really. But that’s about it, um, I don’t really care what else you do besides that…

K: Do you believe that homosexuality is morally wrong? Why or why not?

A: No, because I think, and this is, I’ve thought about this a lot actually my whole life because I actually grew up with, um, my godfather is gay, and has a partner and he lives in like in this small town but …Um, I don’t think any relationship between people is wrong, I don’t think sex in any form is wrong, um, except with little children because they don’t have any volition. Um, and because inherently two people loving each other
can’t be bad. In my opinion, it just can’t be bad because it’s a positive energy. I don’t really care who people have sex with, so that doesn’t bother me.

K: Okay. How did you come to the conclusion you’ve come to on this issue?

A: Well it’s funny because, um, my father, he doesn’t believe in homosexuality at all. He doesn’t believe it… I ‘mean he knows it there, but he thinks it’s wrong. But my mother on the other hand is very open. But she’s selectively open. Like the cute gay white men are fine, but like lesbians kind’ve freak her out, and the Hispanic gays freak her out. But, um, but I think that I came to the conclusion through, I had this example of Ralph and Fred that nobody ever told me was wrong. And then, and so people being gay was just sort’ve always there. And um, I think in my relationships with other people, I mean at Duke, um, my teachers and some of my friends were gay. One of my teachers was in a long standing loving relationship, and it was in a time in my life when I didn’t have in my immediate family any models of long standing relationships, um, and Jeff and Ed were the first examples I had of people making a life together, and negotiating ups and downs and things. And then from there you know in New York and everything I had a lot of promiscuous gay friends who aren’t interested in being in relationships and that’s fine because I have a lot of promiscuous heterosexual friends and I can’t really judge that, because you know, I can’t. But it’s really this example of people in these relationships committed to each other and making a life for themselves and being good to other people that makes me think it can’t be wrong.

K: Okay. What would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

A: An example of that? Umm… Well, telling someone that they can’t do something because you think it’s wrong. In other words, telling me that I can’t live with my fiancé before marriage because it’s wrong to them, or that I shouldn’t, as a single woman, I shouldn’t be promiscuous because it’s wrong somehow. Um, not because it’s you know, they could say it’s unhealthy and I could say it’s not unhealthy because I’m safe about it. Sorry, we start talking about homosexuality and I start thinking about sex. Or telling me who I can be saying, okay well, now you’re going to get married and now you can’t have a career you have to have a family, or you can’t have a family because you’re supposed to be this career woman. Or people telling me how or what I can do based on their choices, I guess, I think. That’s a hard question Kari.

K: They’re all hard questions.

A: They are hard questions.
K: They were hard questions to come up with too.

A: They’re not things I think about.

K: Well, hopefully this is one you’ve thought about – what is the purpose of theater?

A: Oh, the purpose of theatre… I do think about this, but what is my answer to that? The purpose of theatre…. I think the purpose of theatre is actually manifold. I think sometimes the purpose of theatre is to represent life, like…. we say finally black people can see themselves on stage where they were excluded, so to give a space to excluded populations. And it can also be used as provocation for um, point of view in order to have discussion happen. I don’t think that it should be therapy or just um, let me air these things but I don’t really want discussion about it, you have to take it. But at the same time you don’t have to take it because it’s theatre and you can walk out. Um, and I think, I think it is, I think ultimately its purpose is to give voice to expression and if the audience comes away being able to see a little bit differently, you know here’s what Aaron was saying, then that’s good. Even if you go to see The Lion King and you’re able to think a bit differently then that’s good, you go to see Uncle Tom and you think a lot differently maybe, or maybe not. But either way it sort’ve gets you thinking. And sometimes I think it is important too that sometimes people go to theatre for community and to feel, like after 9-11 in New York, um, theatre was this healing place. Yet, everybody writing plays about 9-11 really irks me, because I’m sort’ve like how can you think that you own my experience, so I’m really conflicted.

K: Okay. Um, do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas? Why or why not?

A: Oh I think so. I think so just because um, I think, because musical theatre is also really attached to dance and I think that homosexuality in the dance world is almost really a given, I don’t know I don’t spend much time in the dance world. But, um, I think theatre being what it is, and theatre being so broad and being a place to express and be other things, that would necessarily attract populations that feel less out, in a way, because then they get to be on stage and tell their story to the mass audience. In general I feel that theater is so broad and big and can be anything that it…. it gets more accepted because there’s enough room for everybody, and there’s no money, so I mean that’s not at stake….  

K: Do you feel that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in the theatre? Why or why not?
A: Um, yeah, I think so. The other thing though, important context for you. My experience in the theatre is New York and I think New York is generally really open to homosexuality. So, a play about someone who has homosexual urges and denies them? I think it would be important, I think people do it for a lot of reasons, um, you know I have a friend who told me that... This is interesting, I have a friend who told me, and I just didn’t know what to say to him, said to me, um, “I was gay.” And I said to him really you were? What’s that about? And he said “well I had um, I was really in love with this boy,” it was right after college, he was 22, “I was really in love with him and we got a long really well, and I really felt like I identified with this boy, but then my parents told me that they found it unacceptable and I couldn’t be, so I decided not to be, and now I have a girlfriend.” And I was like okay, you know if you’re happy then that’s okay. Because I also feel like people sometimes dabble in homosexuality, and sometimes homosexuals dabble in heterosexuality or bisexuality or whatever because I think human desire is a very nebulous thing, and who you’re attracted to sometimes doesn’t have any bearing on the genitalia of that person, so, um. So to have homosexual urges and deny them, yeah that’s important because they might not be homosexual, one. Or they might be and be, feel oppressed by the society they live in and not be able to come out. I mean either way it could be important for an audience and obviously it would get people talking.

K: Do you think artists are elitist?

A: In general yeah. In general yeah I do, um, because we sit around a table talking about race and we’re all white. And I mean I think in general theatre is a very white, middle class place, and if you... then you’re elitist because you’re screening a certain education level of your audience for them to be able to appreciate it. Um, and I think we get terribly snobby about non-theatre people and we get terribly snobby about our own experience, so yeah I do, I think they are.

K: How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? In other words, do you think people should be classified as individuals rather than groups like women, minorities, gays, etc?

A: Ideally yes. Ideally I think individuals are most important because being a woman is only a part of my identity, so to be classified as Woman with a capital “W” is simplified. However, in order to, if society is run by a group of individuals, a group of people of whom you are not a part of as an individual, then you often need to get into a group of other individuals and become a group of people in order to agitate for some rights, so I mean ideally, everyone’s an individual and whatever you choose is what you choose and what you are is what you are. But ultimately, the system of government and society, you know, you need a group in order to attain things. I think also there’s a human need for community, and a community of likenesses.
K: Okay, we’re almost done. Do you think that homosexuals are born that way or do you think they choose to be?

A: I think that… I think… I don’t know. I don’t think it’s a choice. I’m not sure what we are when we’re born, you know. I think we have the seeds of what we will become when we’re born, but I don’t know that we know. I can’t fathom that it would be a choice. Only because why? It’s like theatre, if you could do anything else, why would you do this? Why not? Because being in theatre is so ridiculously hard and you never work and you have to be a teacher instead, and you know all of this stuff. So I feel like there’s something innate that compels us. There’s something innate in me that compels me to be a heterosexual I couldn’t choose to be homosexual, I have no desire that way, long term, you know. So I guess ultimately, I guess they’re born that way… “That way.”

K: How do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and vice versa?

A: Um, is it assuming that this… what kind of church-going people?

K: The ideal church going people I guess…

A: I don’t understand, I mean I do understand because I have read the Bible and I know how it’s been interpreted. But I don’t actually understand why homosexuals can’t be in church, um, except that the interpretation of a piece of text tell s them that what they do is wrong with a certain amount of ideological and political structure. So, I mean, you know in an ideal world we all would support each other, and if the church-going people don’t like the homosexuals and the homosexuals don’t like the church-goers we would just leave each other alone. And yet make space for each other if they could. I mean I can’t imagine that a bunch of church-going people would… So ideally they would just sort of respect each other’s choices and respect each other’s innate things. Cause I also feel like people who are very religious are born with that as well, I mean people who feel very strongly about their religion, are born with that. I don’t know that you lose that. I mean, I guess it … I do feel that it’s something, that religion makes sense to a person innately or it doesn’t, and there’s no in-between.

K: Okay, last question, are there any questions you think I should be asking that I haven’t asked, on this topic of bridging the gap, I guess?

A: Um, no. I don’t know, it depends on how specific you’re trying to be because like it’s so interesting because homosexual and church-going people are such general categories…
K: Yeah, it's that labeling thing again...

A: It's really hard because I'm like what church-going people. I actually don't even know like what church I don't even know. I know of some Episcopalian churches where it's totally fine, some marry gay people and some churches don't, so....

K: Do you think maybe it should be how do you think Christians should treat homosexuals?

A: I think that's hard too cause I think Christians is really generic as well. But that's an important point, isn't it, that this label of Christian we often, Christian and homosexual are two labels that we simplify so much, um, on both ends of the spectrum, and it's unfair to each person. Um, I assume that it's set up opposed most often but that assumption is only an assumption. I have no idea cause I'm neither.

K: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

A: No. You made my brain hurt.

K: I know. Think of how my brain felt trying to come up with them.

3/25/2005
Jennifer Robison: Female age 30, graduate theatre student, former schoolteacher, professional actress

Kari: All right, so first question. Do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?

Jennifer: Yes, I do consider myself an open-minded person as much as I can, um...pretty much that's it.

K: Okay! Um, do you have any kind of relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

J: Relationship like friendship?

K: Yes.

J: Yes. Um, I have several friends who are gay, uh, one of them who, in fact, she is becoming a he. And another one who he is becoming a she. And this all happened in the last year after we talked about Hidden: A Gender so I was prepared.
K: Okay, um, do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality either themselves or within their relationships?

J: No.

K: Um, what would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

J: Um, I would probably listen to them, hear what they have to say. And the best thing that I could do as a friend to them is to point them in whatever they want to do. Um, if they don’t know, then I would support them in a safe manner, you know, chemically and scientifically safely. Um, safe sex, yeah. Um, if they have to meet people and figure that out then they should do so because they have the right to know who they are.

K: Have you ever dealt with homosexuality personally?

J: Yes. Um, yes. I am a, I am heterosexual, but I think I am bisexual by nature, but I am in a heterosexual very serious relationship.

K: Okay, what would you describe as “conventional values”?

J: Hmmm, conventional...Um, conventional values I believe are to me, conventional values are standards that usually are agreed upon in a culture. That’s what that pretty much says to me, it says you know, there’s a value for every social circle every certain kind of group in society. And what they consider to be the norm in that group that’s their value system, that is what that is based upon, that’s where their ethics come from.

K: Do you believe in God?

J: Yes.

K: And what are your beliefs about the Bible?

J: Um, I believe that in terms of the Bible I believe it is there as a mode of inspiration, it is filled with beautiful stories, many that I think are true, but I also know that they were written second hand or first hand or third hand. So I read the stories and I try to take in essence what the story is trying to say. What is it really about? What is it telling me that is you know, for me, that is where I take my main value system. That is where I pretty much come from, because I was raised Catholic. I’ve actually taught Catholic school for two years. Um, so it really comes down to, um, I do believe in God, I do use the Bible.
I’ve also spent a lot of my life looking at other religions, trying to figure out, you know, cause I was raised Catholic and I just didn’t feel like that was completely where I wanted to be, so I’ve been researching other religions lately.

K: Okay, um, some people feel that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference, why or why not?

J: Um, I’ve seen both. Um, I think a spiritual person I would say… there’s so many kinds of definitions of that because there are people who go “oh I am a spiritual person…” and they tend, I hate to do this because it’s such a generalization and that’s such a fallacy, I don’t like to do that, I don’t like to say that, because it’s in terms of faith. Segregating people into groups, I like to respect people on the basis of their faith. I don’t believe there is a respect value based on oh you’re this religion or that religion. I find that religion can be, it’s a respect…it’s respectful. You have to be respectful of that cause that deals with someone’s belief system and who they are. But for me, personally, I would never impact this on anyone else, but I think that it comes down to a series of faiths. Religion it just gets into the whole thing of institutions for me, and of course that comes from me being raised Catholic, so I know all about the sacraments and everything, I can tell you everything...

K: Okay, so along those lines, do you consider yourself a spiritual person or a religious person or both? Or neither?

J: I guess, if I’m gonna give myself a label, probably spiritual. Um, because I go more along the lines of faith and I use parts of ideas of different religions. Like right now I’m very much into (name), who is the yogi, um, Autobiography of a Yogi, he wrote that, and he’s Hindu. But a lot of his spiritual beliefs on God are very, I can very much see… I can associate with that spiritually and as a person, and um yeah, so I guess spiritual would probably be closer.

K: Okay, um, how would you describe your relationship with God?

J: Wow….. (looking up and waving) hi! (Laugh). Uh, I believe I’m His child and that He has made me perfect, but that it is my need to deal with my freedom of choice which is a gift. I very much believe that. Um, which is why I try very hard….it’s very hard at times, but you have to respect other people’s freedom of choice and how that impacts your life. Um, I would say that definitely, He, I try to, I see Him as that voice in my head, you know that, something to aspire to be with. Not to go for, um, like I am a sinner, I am guilty. Which is pretty much how I was raised in the Catholic Church is “you’re guilty, do you feel guilty, do you feel this…” And I find that to be very detrimental, so it’s not like I’m aspiring to be with God, it’s pretty much I am a part of Him, I’m one of His
children, and I think that’s the easiest way we can describe it. And I’m here for a reason to learn something and to take it to the next wherever I’m supposed to go.

K: Okay, um…. I always loose my place…

J: That’s okay…

K: Do you believe in moral absolutism? Why or why not?

J: What is that? (laugh)

K: Everyone says that. Do you believe in absolute truth?

J: My boyfriend would say yes. We have this debate all the time (laugh). Moral absolutism. I think there probably could be something. Obviously there has to be something because there just has to be Ten Commandments it’s gotta come from something. I mean every culture has some form of, I mean we all call it different things, but it really is very much related, it really is. And um, there’s the little technical differences sometimes. I would say there probably is, cause it just makes sense. But I think it’s bigger than we realize and I don’t think we always should label it the way that we do. But people have to do that in order to feel comfortable with themselves and I think that’s why that happens. Um, which is why the Ten Commandments I think are so beautifully written because they’re so rounded, they’re so open. They just say don’t do this… and then we have the freedom of choice to go well, you know, how do I apply this? And so I think that there is a moral absolutism, I just think it’s bigger than we realize and it’s more complex than we realize. So that’s about my best attempt to answer that question (laughing).

K: I didn’t say that this would be easy…

J: Oh, that’s fine these are very good questions.

K: Do you think that homosexuality is morally wrong?

J: I do not. Um, I believe that God and nature are very much intertwined. Um, and I believe that, whatever you want to call the deity, God, Yahweh, anything like that, it’s all a label, it’s all a way for us to associate. I think that when it comes down to it, it’s all about the soul inside. Cause honestly, we leave this behind. And I think that I would like to believe that it really doesn’t matter what you’re in. It’s just the package, you know, cause when you die you can say “oh I’m dead” and God would say “well, aren’t you talking to me?” You’re not dead, you just move to another plane of existence. So I think
that when it comes to the issues of love and homosexuality and things like that, I think that it’s higher than that. I think it’s something that’s much more than that.

K: Okay, um, how did you come to the conclusion that you’ve come to on that?

J: Um, a lot of experience with different people that were gay. I have to admit that when I was in college I was in Intervarsity Christian Fellowship and the theatre department. So I was kind’ve ostracized in both places because of that. And that made me kind’ve go, wait a minute. I mean I’ve always been aware of homosexuality, but when you’re in high school it’s just hee hee hee hee giggle giggle giggle, very immature on my behalf. And now that I’ve gotten to know people I felt uncomfortable. I didn’t feel like I didn’t like them, if that’s the best way to describe it. I didn’t feel like “oh you’re wrong you shouldn’t do that,” which is what I got from my family. Um, but I also noticed that being an artist, I was very aware of seeing the beauty in things, I mean you had to. You have to look at people for who they are if you’re gonna act with them you have to be able to see into that. And that I think helped me a lot along with being ostracized in those two groups. It made me go well why? I’m still the same person you know, in both groups. I’m just in this group talking about this, and in this group working on this. And I ended up leaving the Christian fellowship group and sticking with the theatre because that’s what I love. But I still got that sense of well, she’s the good little Christian girl. And so I actually went the opposite. I was like okay fine; I’m not going to be the good little Christian girl. I’m going to be the loud, obnoxious, crazy person that I used to be and probably still am. Um, so I don’t know I think it just happened through a series of going to a woman’s college really opened it up for me, seeing women in relationships with other women, um, I’ve often talked about it with my friends and stuff and my best friend who, she had a lot of gay friends so she gave me a lot of information on people in general and talking and asking questions and how not to be afraid. And you know, I still feel sometimes that level of uncomfortability, but I have that maturity level now to say wait a minute, this is stupid, you know compared to what do I say what do I do, you know that’s just something you do when you’re thirteen. And now it’s like oh, okay, that’s fine, whatever.

K: What would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

J: Uhhhh…. oh my, oh my. I’ve had lots of experience with this. Um, I see nothing wrong with enthusiasm. I think you should be passionate about what you believe in and I believe you have a right to it because you believe in it and you’re proud of it. And I see nothing wrong with telling people about it. I think that’s that’s wonderful. But I do have a problem when you are always telling people about it. And you are speaking about it in a way that, and this is hard to describe, this is the best way I can describe it. And you are
speaking about it in a way that is patronizing to others around you or dis... just totally not considering who is sitting at the table, because not everyone is going to think like you. If you’re in the middle of a religious debate, then yeah, okay, then you’re gonna get that and if you get all upset about that afterwards, then you get what you ask for, but if you’re just talking about a situation and someone starts bringing in issues of any kind, it doesn’t just have to be religious, it can be political, it can be sexual, anything, there’s just a level of respect that I think needs to remain, and as long as the communication’s there then you can say well this is what I think, and this is ...... why wouldn’t you know asking questions and trying to keep open even though you’re defending your own position. Does that make sense?

K: Yeah.

J: Then there are the people that come in and they’re totally allowed to do what they want and feel what they want but they pressure. You feel it, you can’t really describe it through verbs and nouns and stuff, you just feel it, you know, somebody’s pressuring you to consider their thing. Um, you know, so, um, and there’s just a time and a place to talk about those things. And there’s a time and a place with certain people to talk about those things, cause, when you talk about spiritual beliefs, that’s a very personal topic, just like sexuality is a very personal topic. And I don’t go out and say “hey everybody I’m bisexual,” you know I’m not gonna do that, nobody cares, it’s not gonna help me get my work done. Just everybody’s gonna go whoa, there’s a personal boomerang, what was that? So, I think that there is a way to approach it, but you know, you’re entitled to what you believe.

K: Okay. Um, what do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

J: The purpose of theatre is to express, and learn, and create...(laugh) let’s see.... In four words or less. The purpose of theatre for me is those three things. Just to grow to learn, to meet people, and to just create things with different people all the time. That to me is why I love doing this. I mean, I love putting on a show, I love it, I eat it up. I love sitting with a group of people. I love doing that. I love the process part so much, because then when you get to that product you’re like wow! I see where that... oh! It’s so exciting. Um, yeah, I think the purpose of it is to give as many people the opportunity to see how wonderful this art form is, and it’s not just about doing a little dance, singing a little song, learning a little script and that’s it. It’s more than that. It’s coming up with new ideas and forms of anything. You know it’s an incredible media; it’s the most social form in the art world there is. And with that comes having to work with different kids of people.... so.

K: Okay, um, do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other arenas? Why or why not?
J: Um, my first reaction is to say yes, um, because, most, because theatre is such an empathetic and viewing... you've got actors who have to know who they are or are exploring who they are constantly. You have artists who have to work together constantly. And so, in the theatre community, we've always had the reputation of being the touchy feely group. I remember in high school how people used to be like oh man they've gotta be theatre or music chorus or show choir or something cause they're all hugging and kissing each other, they're all loving each other. And I think it's more accepted because in the past you know, people have broken through and said you know this is who I am, and it's kind've been accepted by our society that that's the way it is. Unfortunate, but true. And I think it began back when men were playing girls. I really do. It goes all the way back to that, um, let's look at Greece. Let's look at the Roman generals and their armies, there's a lot going on there... but theatre has always been the place where it was okay to do that because, I think men played women, and that really made it easier to do that. And women have always been emotionally, you know, more sensual than men, in my opinion, and so that's what guys have learned to do in the theater. And so, yeah, I think in the theatre it is definitely more accepted. I wish it was more accepted outside of the art world, um, I think definitely in the visual art world it is very apparent. Fashion world, definitely. Um, I think it just deals with the fact that people have to be more in tune with our feminine masculine sides, we have to be very in tune, especially performers because we're playing so many parts of ourselves at the same time.

K: Do you feel that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in the theater?

J: Yes. Because it is a realistic issue that continues to happen. And I think that um, even if it was violent, if it was a violent situation, that still needs to be seen because people need to, this is how people learn. They learn how to deal with this. Um, there have been people in society who have denied those parts of themselves and then they go out and kill someone because they're not brave enough to face themselves and go through those moments of pain of realizing that. And so they go out and they put pain on someone else or they kill several teachers or something like that, which is really really just abominable. Um, I think that when people see it in a story it distances themselves away from themselves, but at the same time it brings them closer to themselves and opens up their minds to possibilities to a better, more psychologically stable society, and a more sexually open-minded environment and less violently, sometimes I find to be violently closed-minded, and frightening. It's very frightening. Because in other countries it's not as much of a problem a it is... the U.S. to me seems to me to be one of the most, out of the western world... and I say the WESTERN world, cause I know, I don't know a lot about all of those things, but I don't know that in my experience, America seems to be the most obsessed with finding its identity and yet stopping it's identity when it comes to
It wants to be this really fast and yeah, but at the same time it sucks because it’s too afraid to take the responsibility. That’s the sense of what I get, and I don’t say I’m right, because I’m willing to be proven wrong (laugh) I’m always willing to be proven wrong.

K: What if it was, um, what if the play was someone denying homosexuality because of religious reasons?

J: Yeah. I still would say yeah, I would like to see it. Because it’s a perspective, and it happens. I’ve met people who are very much in conflict with their sexuality and their religion and have... denied religion, and denied faith for that matter, of any kind, in essence of finding their sexuality. And it’s so interesting when they do that because they end up, they do find a faith of some kind they just don’t want to give it a name. Because they’re so afraid of doing that. So I think, or vice versa. And you know you look at the Catholic Church (laugh). I mean, I believe the priests should get married. I think they should. I mean, it’s a beautiful concept. But God’s also in nature, and it’s a beautiful concept to deny yourself, but in reality I don’t think it’s necessary to prove how strong your faith is I don’t think it’s necessary. And that is my personal profession and when you get into an institution of religion then you get into something else, you get into politics.

K: Do you think that artists are elitists?

J: No. And I hate it when they are. I really hate it when they are. I find it to be very snobby. I find it to be just as bad as any zealot. And the minute you say you’re an elitist you’re denying your equality with the human race. And I believe you should be confident, I believe you should. But I don’t believe that you should believe that what you say is the end all be all. I believe that that’s pride and it’s very detrimental to the creative process.

K: How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, but anyone are socially classified together? In other words, do you believe that people should be labeled as groups or individuals?

J: I wish people could be labeled as individuals, but I know from experience of just working in a school system, that’s impossible, um, because certain things like measurements and statistics exist, and mostly for a good reason. But when I went to go see Dr. T’s show this really explained it, so I have to quote it again, um “prejudice is a system engrained in labeling and grouping people.” And it’s very difficult to get that out of you when it’s in you because you’re trained. You’re trained to be this way because it’s the way the culture works. It’s a system it’s there. It’s not a disease, it’s not an emotion,
it’s a system. And I suffer from it as much as anybody on different levels than like anybody, not than anybody, but like anybody. Um, so when people are put into groups, yes, part of me kind’ve goes gosh I wish we didn’t do that. It’s the same thing as like all you know blonds, or all you know, it’s the same thing. I hate labels. I really really do. I wish we didn’t use them, I wish we could just, I wish we all could get along. I wish we all could accept each other and be…. 

K: And be people…. 

J: …And be more than people, be just, souls and spirits and you know, but because we are in this physical crap…which is a blessing I’m not a slug… (laugh) thank you, thank you so much for not making me a cat or something like that… which probably in the next life I will be. Or if you… whatever… Um, but uh, I know that because of this it’s our need to control, and it’s going to exist regardless, and there’s nothing we can do except change our mindsets about okay, that’s what you look like, but that’s not who you are, and that has nothing to do with politically correct, um, it has to do with you know, this is you, that’s you. And people come up to me and they go “oh, I’m gay.” And I’m like, “okay, I’m bi, nice to meet you (laugh) and currently heterosexual and plan to be probably for the rest of my life,” I love you Robert (laugh). Um, so yeah, I wish labels didn’t exist, but unfortunately they do. And I’m getting ready to go into a field that’s full of them.

K: Do you think that homosexuals are born that way or do you think it is a choice?

J: Wow.

K: It’s the big debate question.

J: Yeah. You know, I can’t say it’s one way or the other. I can’t because I’ve seen both. Like my friend…. um, she was born a she, and she has always been very masculine, always. And she has always been a lesbian. And so when she told me that she wanted to become a man and started taking testosterone I was like Oh my God your body is going to hate you and develop cancer. I was really more worried about her health than I was concerned about the fact that she was changing into a man. I can’t say it didn’t shock me because it did, um, I was very surprised. But, if that is what she needs to do, I mean granted, I wanted to make sure that was the right choice for her, because you know once you go there there really is no turning back after that, you’ve made a choice to change your physical stance. But I think that she is one of those people that was definitely born in the wrong body. She has always struck me that way. I mean when I see her in a dress it absolutely blows my mind, it’s like she was one of those people that would be like why are you wearing a skirt? Because I have to. Okay…but she’s always been very masculine.
Now in terms of the guy friend I have, he’s different. Um, I think it’s a choice on his behalf because I’ve never really sensed from him to be, I’ve always sensed him to be bi. He’s been both. And so when he showed up wearing women’s clothing it really threw me. Um, partly because someone needs to show him how to do it. And, someone needs to show him how to put makeup on, that was my first response was okay honey, if you’re gonna wear this you gotta know how to do it right. We gotta help your face here. But I couldn’t say that because he was very much in tune at the moment with changing the pronoun. He was with this other person who was saying that he was a she and he was very serious about changing their names. And we kept saying he and they kept attacking us for that and that goes back to that other question of you know, how do you feel about people who talk about religious beliefs and stuff like that. Okay, don’t attack me, I’m trying to understand, could you stop? I feel personally, I have no say in his life, but my own personal feelings if he’s choosing to be a woman, I think he needs to do more soul searching, but, um, that’s why I believe there’s both things, but I mean, I love being a woman, but there are days when I wish I had no chest at all and I wish I had just a man so I could be stopped being looked at and stopped being this and stopped being that and people would look at me like a person instead of looking at me like a woman, or a big breasted 36D woman for that matter. I really do.

K: Okay, um, how do you think.... Um, let’s say this is a labeling question because we have to... but how do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and vice versa, or how do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who don’t feel that it’s wrong?

J: I think that they all should treat each other, not just the cop out I treat them like I would like to be treated. I mean so many people say that but then there are stipulations. Um, it’s like okay, I treat a bank teller better than what you just did. I mean it’s just like my own family, when I wasn’t dating anyone in college they thought I was a lesbian, and it was like just this fear came over the house. My mom kept asking me are you a lesbian, lesbian, lesbian, and I was like no, I just, I don’t feel like dating anyone right now. And so that’s when all of that came out. And I realized you know, just talk to a person, just talk to them. Treat them like their whole inside is .... But I think you should always meet people with honesty, and yes, that makes you more vulnerable, but there’s nothing wrong with that. And that you should be honest with people and up front with who you’re talking to and if you let that religion church thing or that homosexual or body piercing or whatever comes up in front of you get in the way, then you’re missing the point of why we’re here. If you get locked up in all that you know, looking the way you do, or you know, I have a friend who is a stripper and she would very interestingly in public. If something would happen to her, people would say well, just deal with it, you’re a stripper. I mean some of the things that you and I just walking to her car, I mean, that people thought they could do to her just walking to her car, it is obnoxious, and it’s just
like that’s just her job, that’s not who she is. It’s the same thing it’s just a more serious level. I just think you should talk to people, find out who we’re talking to and say okay, you know...

K: Okay. Last question, are there any questions you feel I should be asking that I have not asked?

J: No I think you pretty much, those were really good questions (laugh) um....

K: Or is there anything else that you would like to say?

J: I really, no, that’s really pretty much.... I just wish that people were less afraid of homosexuality especially in the education world. I think because of the pedophile instances in the Catholic Church in the past, people are much much more resistant to men being gay in the education world than women being lesbians. Because it comes under that label of women are allowed to be that way, we are more emotionally in tune, so it’s just accepted that we’re more sexually in tune. Whereas men can’t act that way. And I have always been very sad when I see other teachers say that they don’t have a problem when they obviously do, or they deny that there’s a problem, but they’re afraid to go talk to that person and say I’m trying to deal with this how can you help me deal with this? Because, let’s be honest if you really, if there’s a problem then it’s better to communicate it and to go to that person and to talk about it than to deny it. And it’s the same thing with the race issue too. The race issue, God that just sounds wrong. And it is. Gender, race, and sexuality issues, yeah, I just wish in the world of teaching public school and private school it wasn’t such a problem for people. Especially for men. Because I really feel that men make wonderful teachers and it shouldn’t be dominated purely by women. It shouldn’t be, um, but it is. And there are so many wonderful teachers out there who are homosexual or who are very religious. And I just wish that um, there was more appreciation for their people because they have so much to give us and when people shut that down it’s like they’re losing a resource that they don’t even know. So, I mean, that’s how I feel about that, I wish that, and politics to. Definitely politics. I mean politics is the art of people. That’s what that is. The art of...that’s what the definition means, and I just wish that people would understand that...like if it’s the art of people, then why is this becoming a problem, you know, when people decline from the race because they had a sexual relation. Big whoop, that has nothing to do with my taxes, you know, that’s their personal issue. I don’t need to know what that’s about. I need to know where my money’s going and how that’s going to help the community. Just don’t lie to me, that’s the only thing.

K: Okay. Thanks!
3/29/05

Andrew Hamm: Male, age 32, music minister, sound technician, theatre graduate student, teacher, youth minister

Kari: First of all, do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?

Andrew: Ummm, I think that’s a fantastically loaded question. I think we deify open-mindedness. I think we worship it. I think we use the word open-minded to mean good and valuable person. There are things that I am, I guess I would say no. I am not open-minded about child abuse being okay, I am not open-minded about theft and murder being okay, so I am very very narrow-minded. Um, it’s a very loaded question; it’s a loaded question. It’s a media term which I despise.

K: Okay, do you have any kind of relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

A: Yes. Many many many people.

K: Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality either themselves or in their relationships?

A: Um, I have a cousin who is cliché openly gay and lives in San Francisco, what are the odds. Uh, he’s the only relative I’m aware of, but I’m really only close with my insular family, not really very much with cousins and stuff. And I know that I have a large number of friends who deal with the issue from many many angles. I’m in the arts, I’m in the theatre and I couldn’t escape it if I wanted to, which I don’t want to.

K: Okay, what would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

A: Boy, um, that would just entirely depend on the person and the circumstances. Um, is it; is it like uh someone who is coming to me in the environment of theatre or of school? Is it somebody who is coming to me where I’m going to respond very very differently if someone is coming to me at the church where I do ministry? Um, (long pause) I don’t know, I guess I would ask more questions than I would try to give the answers cause it’s not something I …. It’s not something I have the background to be able to make judgments about. Um…. I guess that makes me open minded doesn’t it? (Laugh)

K: Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

A: No. No, if anything, I’m dangerously heterosexual.
K: What would you describe as “conventional values?”

A: Um, how much time do you have? Um, conventional values I would say, my definition of conventional values would probably be different than kind’ve societal conventional values ideals that have kind’ve been hijacked a little bit by the religious right and the republican party. Um, conventional values um, for some reason that idea brings up, you know white picket fences in the fifties and boys with flat top haircuts and Leave it to Beaver and Andy Griffith episodes. Conventional I think as well, we’re into a little bit of a loaded term. Uh, that’s a term that is gonna mean inherently good to one segment of society that term conventional is gonna mean, you know, societal evolutionary dinosaur, you know far beyond, you know, we’ve evolved beyond you know things that are conventional, we need to be doing things that are more progressive. Conventional values, you know I wanna think that that’s you know, husband and wife heterosexual marriage with children who uh...well, with or without children. I mean in the context of this I’d say yeah that’s conventional values.

K: Do you believe in God?

A: Absolutely.

K: And what are your beliefs about the Bible?

A: Uh I’m pretty much a fundamentalist evangelical Christian. I believe the Bible is a step beyond the inspired word of God. I think it’s the truth of the nature of the universe and what we are made for. I believe even the difficult things in the Bible to be even the literal truth and that where that differs from what we think or what we wanna believe our job is not to interpret the Bible so that it fits what we want to believe, our job is to change our behavior, to change our belief system so that it match what God’s will is for His creation. I also, as a kind of a side note, I actually don’t like the word believe very much. It implies a choice that I have made, it implies a whim. I have faith. I know things to be true with a capital K-N-O-W. Um, and the word belief has been very watered down, and it doesn’t describe...the word belief doesn’t actually describe what I believe.

K: Okay. Some people believe there is a difference between being a spiritual person and being a religious person. Do you see a difference? Why or why not?

A: Absolutely. Um, I grew up in church where a lot of, um, .... Uh, maybe I take issue with those terms and instead say that you can be a spiritually religious person or a culturally religious person. There are a lot of people who go to church because they feel in their minds that it’s the right thing to do. And I actually think there’s a certain kind of value to that. It’s a societal value and it’s a materialistic value, but there is a value to
being a religious person who goes there for cultural reasons. A whole lot of the Christian population is like that, particularly the Catholic population that I grew up in. A whole lot of the Jewish population is like that. There are a lot of people who are culturally Jewish, who refer to themselves as being Jewish who don’t really practice there very much. I think that’s a better definition of being a religious person but not a spiritual person than anything that I have experienced in my life, um, being a spiritually religious person, being a spiritual person, and once more we’re into loaded terms a little bit, you know, but um, yeah I think that has a different kind of, a different level of value, and that may in fact...no there’s no may in fact involved, it’s the most important thing in the world.

K: Okay, so do you consider yourself a religious person or a spiritual person or both?

A: Uh, I consider myself a spiritual person, definitely a person of faith. Um, and I guess I would consider myself a religious person as well, you know I go to church every week and I’m in the choir and I work with the youth and praise band and I’m very much in the church community, but I don’t do it you know because my church culturally demands it of me, I do it because my relationship with God demands it of me. So one is a result of the other.

K: Okay, so how would you describe your relationship with God?

A: I’m God’s creation and everything I am and have is gift from Him, um, and um, I feel like our gifts, our spiritual gifts, the things that we have are the things that other people don’t, the things that make us unique, that make us uniquely who we are are our super hero powers, and like Spiderman, it is our responsibility to figure out what the heck they’re for and to use them. Um, and I once again, it’s something beyond belief. I have faith; I have sure knowledge that all of us are created by God for a reason. And we are created to do something and the fact that He created something as wonderful and glorious and impossible as human beings, that in and of itself gives us a responsibility to give back, to use the amazing uniqueness that we have for whatever He’s created us for. I have my own feelings about that, different people have others. It’s um, fellowship with God and with others is what we were made for. Um, and I think that when you have gifts and talents you have the responsibility to use them to glorify God and to help other people understand who God is and what his amazing plan is for the world.

K: Okay, um, do you believe in moral absolutism?

A: Yes.

K: Why?
A: Um, because I feel it’s pretty obvious, I feel it’s pretty self-explanatory. Um, I think we get, but morals and values are created by a being with many many levels above our ability to comprehend. Um, the biggest moral absolute I guess that I believe in is we get stuff wrong all the time, we get it wrong more than we get it right. I really feel that we get it wrong more than we get it right. The mind of God is on a level so high above a level that we are able to comprehend that all we can do is try our best, acknowledge that we’re going to fail a lot, and get up and you know, wipe the blood off your lip and move on and try to better next time, or just try to do well next time. And I believe in moral absolutes because I believe in the Bible and the Bible is very very clear that there are moral absolutes.

K: Okay, um, do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong? Why or why not?

A: I believe that homosexual behavior is morally wrong, because, um, because the Bible is black and white about it and I honestly believe that any attempt to interpret scripture so that it doesn’t say that is wishful thinking at best, and well intentioned, um, well intentioned wishful thinking. However, um, I don’t think that it’s any worse than any sin that I have. A sin is a sin. I think we make too big of a deal about it. I think that we raise it up to a level of the unholy of the unholies sometimes. Um, yeah, you know what, homosexual behavior is a sin. My sex that I had before I was married. And my lust that I have in my heart right now is exactly the same. It is a sin. I have my own sins. And no sin I think is greater or worse than any other sin. And I think we don’t make a big deal about that enough I think we in the Christian community don’t talk about that enough. What’s more important than the fact that homosexual behavior is a sin is the fact that Jesus Christ dies for all sins and He had that one in mind too. Um, we make too big a deal about this being a sin and not a big enough deal about this is a sin that you are redeemed from, that you are saved from, um, just like mine. Just like my sins.

K: Okay, um, how did you come to the conclusion you have come to on this issue?

A: Um, you know, when I made the decision that I was gonna follow the word of God as being the word of God, I have in the years since then I have had to go through a lot of adjustments over the things in scripture that I was challenged by, um, I have made the decision to make the safe choice and in all good conscience and meditation go with what God says. And that’s very hard to do, but that is the decision that I made. I just decided that I was gonna trust God. God had a better idea than I did.

K: What would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?
A: Um, an example of that? Um, do what I do, believe in what I believe or I’ll kill you. Do what I do, believe in what I believe or I’ll find a way to convince you that you’re going to go to hell. Um, I don’t think there’s a whole lot of value to having your mind changed because someone forces you. You have to have your mind changed because you choose to do it. You have to have your mind changed because you choose to do it. You have to come to your own decisions about things. And I think that there is, I think coercion into believing something, threatening someone into believing something… I don’t believe that the threat of hell is a very effective tool for ministry. I may be wrong about that, Jesus talks about hell more than the rest of the Bible combined. I mean that… I don’t know what to do with that (laugh). I have a very hard time with that. And He also talks about sex a lot. Um, I don’t know. Case by case basis. I think threatening and coercion of faith rather than… knowledge is always more valuable when you make the decision to believe something. When you make the decision to choose something… and that’s not even just a matter of faith. I mean that’s a matter of education as well. I mean, you have to decide that you want to believe something. You have to decide that you’re gonna do something. There’s a difference between knowing something and owning the knowledge, and you can only own the knowledge by choosing to do that on your own. That was a very complicated answer to a very simple question.

K: Okay, what do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

A: Theatre is um, a reflection of human experience. All art is. Um, I wish there was a really simple answer, but it’s clearly complicated. Um, theatre is like all art. It is designed to, I really don’t even know, put up a mirror. Um, but yeah, put up a mirror and say this is human experience. Um, this is my experience, or this is something you may understand that may make you realize things about yourself that you didn’t realize previously. Um, that’s what it’s for. It’s to um, show us us. But as with all art, and as with everything else, it was also designed for God’s will, it was designed to glorify God and to glorify God’s creation, you know, and we are God’s creation. And any sort of reflection of that, any examination of that is a reflection of the glory of God.

K: So, do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas? Why or why not?

A: I, I… obviously it is, to even ask that question is a little silly, and more than a little bit laughable. I have a theory, okay, I have a theory that the only thing that makes artists artists is that they’re more sensitive, is that they see things more, that they feel things more deeply, they feel things more strongly. And being more sensitive makes you more compassionate, and it’s hard to be gay. And everybody judges you, and everybody thinks they know things about you that they don’t know. And I can’t imagine anything more difficult. I can’t imagine anything more challenging. And homosexuals are gonna
gravitate towards a community that is more sensitive. They’re gonna gravitate towards a community that knows what it’s like to be hurt by life, to feel things so strongly in the world that it hurts. And I think that’s the reason that the arts attracts outcasts of all kinds, um, it is that people who are more sensitive tend to be artists, they are artists because they’re more sensitive. And people who are easily hurt, who are more sensitive are gonna want to be in communities that recognize that and are not going to hurt them as much. I think that’s it.

K: Do you feel that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in the theatre?

A: No I do not think it would be accepted. I think it would be incredibly important. I think it would be incredibly important, um, because I can’t think of a play where that happens. Not for a second. Can’t even begin to come up with one. Freedom is another thing that we worship in this society. Um, it’s a thing that is, you know, freedom of choice, is a thing that is just kind’ve given inherent value. We just decide that it’s a good thing. Um, whereas I’m not at all convinced that that’s a good thing. I’d like my freedom of choice taken away (laugh). I’d like to always choose to do the thing that God would want me to do, but obviously, that’s not what I’m made for. Um, no I would be, I think it would be incredibly important, uh, and it would never be accepted. It would always be viewed as homophobic, which is a stupid term as well...uh, I’m afraid of homosexuals... Um.... it would never be accepted. It would never be accepted. It would never be accepted. It would never...I’d be surprised if it ever even made production. I’d be surprised if anybody would ever produce it. It would be seen as this character is betraying their core of who they are, because you know the fact that they have homosexual urges is, um, determines that... you know they are yet again an inherently valuable thing. You know, I have sinful heterosexual urges and they’re not an inherently valuable thing. But it’s not just in the theatre that this happens. This is seen in the church. This is seen with the election of Gene Robinson the um, openly gay bishop in New England right now, in New Hampshire if I remember correctly. Um, I’m in the Episcopal Church right now and this was a major issue for us a couple of years ago. And the thing that kept coming up that nobody would address was the idea that if he was if this man had left his wife and was living in sin with a woman, not only would he have not been elected a bishop, he wouldn’t be a priest anymore. He would have been stripped of his priesthood. So um, we um, we put homosexual desire in society right now on a different level, we hold it to a different standard. It is considered a civil rights issue more than an issue of personal conscience. So as a civil rights issue right now...and it is both, it is both things.... but as a civil rights issue right now, denying your homosexuality would be considered to be denying yourself. It would be considered inherently a betrayal. I can’t imagine a different example of a way that it wouldn’t be seen that way.
K: Okay. Do you think artists are elitists?

A: Um, well, yeah. Yeah, um, I think a certain amount of that is necessary. I think the theatre is perhaps the most elitist art in the world. Uh, and current theatre maybe has never been more elitist than it is right now. Um, and there’s a certain amount... without a certain amount of that things don’t grow and risks are not taken and chances are not taken, but at the same time, the theatre is um, really turning it’s back on the regular population of the world. Um, there needs to be a certain balance of elitism and populism in the arts, especially in theatre, which I would argue is the most pure art form, um, as far as being a pure representation of humanity, um, it’s just behavior, you know, it’s just stuff on stage, it’s just people watching people doing things. I’ll give you an example of how theatre is elitist. Um, over 95% of the population in survey believes in a higher power, believes in God. I can’t think of a whole lot of plays, a whole lot of theatre that deals with that, that even acknowledges that. Characters in plays don’t even, you know, barely even mention God in passing. Uh, and almost, and very very few of them, particularly recently, their belief in God really um, determines their choice of actions. And the population at large, most people believe in God, and a huge chunk of the population is conservative Christian. And if theatre is a representation of society, of our population, the fact that the overwhelming majority of characters in theatre behave for, and then deal with purely materialist, naturalist perspectives and motivation. Then is theatre a lie? Are we representing our population? If the overwhelming majority of our theatrical characters essentially define themselves as being agnostic or atheist when most of the population is pretty sure that there’s a God? Um, that’s a kind of elitism. Theatre has decided, especially the American theatre, has decided what reflection of humanity is acceptable to show, and it really doesn’t have a whole lot to do with the actual humanity that it purports to show it to.

K: How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, but anyone, are socially classified together? In other words, do you think that people should be classified as individuals or as groups?

A: I am in the middle of a job search. And I’m a white male Christian from the suburbs, and I am the most discriminated against minority in America I think, because everyone wants to appear as if they are culturally diverse, and I am expendable. I have you know, I have been told unofficially that some jobs that I’m looking for I’m not gonna be considered for because they are looking for a black woman or they are looking for a Hispanic man, or they are looking for someone who is gay. Uh, they’re looking for a minority so that they can look nice and multi cultural. And rather than taking the most qualified people and then winnowing down from there, they’re taking the ethnic or cultural group that they want other people to see, and they’re getting the most qualified candidates from that. And that galls me. And what galls me even more is the fact that I
am considered societally not to have a right to feel this way. Because I’m “the man” somehow. And I actually mentioned this to a professor of mine who shall remain nameless who said “well, now you know how women have felt for so many centuries,” and I just F you, you know F you. I haven’t oppressed anybody. You know? I am 32, and I have just been living my life and it yeah, any sort of classification of people in groups hurts more than it helps. And it is another thing that we absolutely deify in our society right now. Largely because our cultural and political leaders are baby boomers, um, are of the generation that grew up with really really important advances in civil rights that were absolutely vital and incredibly important and inarguable, but we worship them now. And we just, we just feel like this diversity and the civil rights thing is just something that’s good just because it’s good without really examining what it does for society. And I’ve seen student groups and political groups that are, you know, where all of the black students all get together and do their thing. And that forces an idea that just because you come from the same cultural background that you all need the same thing. And I believe that that helps nobody, and I believe that it is responsible for more division, more divisiveness. And it just seems obvious to me that it hurts so much more than it helps. And I feel like a voice crying in the wilderness. And I don’t have a right to complain about it. I am just inherently and automatically not listened to because it is just assumed that I am getting all the advantages of being Caucasian and being male and having grown up in the suburbs. I just don’t see how this stratification of our society helps, but I sure do see how it hurts.

K: Um, do you feel that homosexuals are born that way or do you feel that it’s a choice?

A: Um, I don’t care. I don’t know. As somebody who is very interested in science, I believe that the jury is very much out on that issue. I believe that the evidence is very fuzzy. Then again, I really don’t think very much of modern science, I think it’s a mass of arrogance, um, and has been for hundreds of years. Um, you know what I don’t care. I don’t care and I don’t think it matters, and I think we pay too much attention to it because child molesters are born that way and it’s still wrong. And people are born with chemical imbalances that cause them to be pathological liars, and lying is still wrong. And this is my confession, uh, I have a super active libido and I always have, and if I let myself loose the fact that I was born this way would not make it right. It would not make it right. You know, we all have our challenges, we all have our crap. We all have our things that we are born with and we are all responsible for our actions anyway. I don’t give a damn what I was born with, I don’t care how I was born. I care what I do with it. Um, I think there is some compelling evidence that homosexuals, some homosexuals at least, are born that way. Um…that alone does not make it acceptable. That alone does not make behavior acceptable.
K: Okay, a couple more questions. How do you think, and this is another one of those social grouping things, one of those necessary evils I guess, but how do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and people who believe that homosexuality is okay and vice versa?

A: I would hope with open arms, but that ain’t happening. Um, Aaron Thorken is one of my favorite writers, and he has a couple of quotes that I’m gonna garble, that are from a freakin TV show for crying out loud, but that I have really taken to heart. One is that if you really believe something very strongly, you have a moral responsibility to try to change my mind. And the other is if you’re dumb, surround yourself with smart people, if you’re smart, surround yourself with smart people who disagree with you. Um, if you genuinely have uh (groan) an open mind, no harm can come from discussion. It’s not just that, the more you think somebody’s behavior is wrong and sinful, as a person of faith the more you should embrace those people the more you should reach out to them, because the sexual message of Jesus Christ is that we are all full of sin and we all fall short of the glory of God and no one is righteous, but He loves us so much that He died for us and He became the only possible acceptable sacrifice to make us right with God. More Christians should reach out and try to talk to the homosexual community and bring this message to them. And more homosexuals should try to come to church and try to… give me a reason to not despise you, give me, narrow minded, stupid, bigoted Christian man, give me a reason to love you. You wanna be accepted? Give me a reason. By the way, you should be accepting me at the same time. You wanna be accepted, prove it. Prove it! Accept me. You think acceptance is good? Accept me. You think open-mindedness is good? Be open-minded to the fact that I have a right to be bigoted. I have a right to be a racist in this country. If I decide I want to hate all black people and think that they’re inferior, damn it I have a right to believe that. I’m a jackass, but I have a right to believe that. I’m wrong. But I have a right to be wrong. So come try to change my mind. So come talk to me and try to change my mind. But if you come to change my mind, you damn well better come with an open mind of your own. You better come to me with the idea that everything I believe might be completely wrong. And if you don’t come to me, talk to me with that idea, cause I guarantee you I have that idea right now. I’ve really tried to cultivate that in myself recently. If you come to me, try to change my mind, and you are closed to the idea that you may be wrong, then this discussion is dishonest and I’m not interested in talking with you. I want you know, okay, I’m a fundamentalist evangelical Christian. I know that in my church, because I’ve talked to my pastor about this. You come in the door of my church, my pastor shakes your hand and asks you what your name is. He doesn’t ask you if you’re gay. He wants you to know that you’re welcome, and I want you to know that you’re welcome. And you know what, I think what you’re doing is wrong, but I know what I’m doing is wrong. And we’re in the same boat. We’re in the same boat; we’re in the same boat. It’s just another sin, and it’s just another thing that I thank God that I don’t take responsibility for because Christ took
responsibility for me. Um, there should be more dialogue, there should be more dialogue, we should be talking. And we should just talk for the sake of talking for crying out loud. Um, we should just sit down to have a conversation and say all right, we are going to leave this table still not agreeing with each other, but we’re gonna understand each other a little bit more, in fact maybe a whole lot more. You know, we treat too much discussion and the quest for knowledge as a search for an answer rather than an exploration of questions. You know we’re dumb. We’re dumb and we’re small and we’re flawed and we blow it more than we get it right, so let’s at least understand each other a little bit better.

K: And last question, um, are there any questions that I have not asked today that you think should be asked, or is there anything else you would like to say?

A: Um, I think it’s really interesting that it’s very much okay to vilify people who are sure of their faith. The fact that I think that homosexual behavior is sinful makes it really okay to pass judgment on me. Um, it’s really cool to pass judgment on me. We put labels of closed mindedness and bigotry and stupidity and um, if I say that I believe that a certain kind of behavior is wrong, judgment is passed on me that I am either bigoted, that I am either a Bible banger, that I am programmed by my church, that I just believe what my parents taught me, that I’m stupid, that I’m intentionally making, you know that I’m ignorant. It really never seems to cross anyone’s mind that I may have made a difficult choice in good conscience. That I may genuinely have the courage of my convictions to say I believe this is wrong. As a result, nobody gets to listen to the rest of my statement on the issue, which is I believe this is wrong but I love you. I believe this is wrong, but I’m just as wrong. I love you anyway. God loves you anyway. And that doesn’t change...nothing is ever going to change that, nothing is ever going to change that. Um, it’s very cool to stop me ant the beginning of that sentence and not let me finish it. We don’t...this is courage. Here’s courage. Courage is the willingness to allow yourself to believe something you didn’t believe. Courage is allowing yourself to have your mind changed. And courage is the willingness to change what you think and change what you do about something a lot because you think it’s right. Um, boy does it take a lot of courage to say I am gay, and boy that is valuable. And I believe that there are... (long pause) well, I don’t know where I was going....lost that thought...um, please if you’re gonna ask me to believe in you would you please believe in me too. If you’re gonna expect me to accept that you have made your choice in good conscience and you expect me to try to understand it, offer me the same...offer me the same courtesy. Very few people have done it. I can count them on one hand and I don’t even need all the fingers. But I’m gonna love you and believe in you even if you don’t believe in me, so it’s really kind’ve okay. I guess that’s it.
3/29/05  
Laurie Vines: Female, age 31, graduate theatre student, former high school teacher, mother

Kari: All right, um, first question, do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?

Laurie: Yes, open-minded in the sense that I think that I know why I think what I think. Open-minded, but I... you know what that’s a hard question... does it matter if I stumble? I think I’m open-minded in the sense that I listen to other people and I explore why I think what I think. Some people would say that I’m not open-minded in the sense that there are some things that I feel very black and white about.

K: Okay, do you have any kind of relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

L: Relationships? No. I have had friends that have struggled with being gay and I have had a friend who was gay who I’m no longer friends with, but not because of that, and I have acquaintances who are are gay.

K: Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality either in their own lives or in their relationships?

L: Yes, I have two cousins who are gay, and that’s it.

K: Okay, what would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

L: I would probably ask them to explain, ask them to tell me where they’re coming from and try to find out how they feel and where they’re at with it first.

K: Um, have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

L: Um, no, I think I’ve had perverse thoughts, struggled with perverse thoughts at different times, but I wouldn’t say necessarily homosexual thoughts.

K: Okay, what would you describe as “conventional values?”

L: Conventional values, I’m not sure what to say of the word conventional, but when I think of the word value I think of a standard for behavior or a set of rules for things that you should or shouldn’t do that you should or shouldn’t live by.
K: Okay, do you believe in God?

L: Yes.

K: And what are your beliefs about the Bible?

L: I believe that it was inspired by God and it is inerrant.

K: Inerrant?

L: Yes, flawless.

K: Some people believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference? Why or why not?

L: Yes. I think both of those words can mean a million different things. I think you can be spiritual and believe in spiritual things and not adhere to particular religion. I think if you’re religious you adhere to some type of religious practice.

K: Okay, do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person or a religious person or both?

L: I don’t really like those terms, I think that they’re negative a lot of times. Um, I adhere to a religion, so I guess you could say I’m religious and I believe that we are spirit (laugh) so I guess you could say I’m spiritual, but again, I think those terms can be very negative so I don’t…I probably, I think that that’s all people have sometimes to describe people, but I wouldn’t necessarily want to be called religious, and spiritual to me, I don’t know that I would want to be just referred to as that either.

K: Okay, so how would you describe your relationship with God?

L: I’d describe it just as that. That it’s a relationship that it’s not rules and regulations although there are definitely things that I think are right and wrong, because my religious views are based on the fact that I am in right standing with God not because of what I do or what I don’t do, but because of His Son, Jesus Christ.

K: Do you believe in moral absolutism? Why or why not?

L: Absolutely. Yes, absolutely. Well, I believe in it I guess a lot of different reasons. I believe in it because of the Bible, the Bible teaches it. I believe in it because I think that it’s logical. I believe in it because I think experience supports that there are moral
absolutes. There are things that are absolute that we should live by, and when we don’t live by those things there are negative results.

K: Okay, do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong? Why or why not?

L: I’m just thinking about words, that’s the only reason why I’m hesitating, you said morally, morally. I’m not sure about the moral part, because I have to think about what moral means, but I do think that homosexuality is wrong. So I’ll just say I think that it’s wrong, yes.

K: So, how did you come to the conclusion that you have come to on this issue? What kind of critical thinking have you done, if any?

L: I would say the same thing. I would say the Bible to me is very clear on its stance, and if I’m going to say that I follow the Bible as a Christian then I’m going to accept what it says about it. I’d say logically it makes sense to me because you know, looking at other countries where it’s prevalent you see the detriment that it’s had to family. And I just think that you know, it’s logical. There’s just a lot of arguments for why it breaks down the family, there’s a lot of arguments and a lot of research for why children need a male and a female figure in their life. You just see a lot of destruction from it, and not just on a small basis. I think that it has very negative ramifications for our culture, and I think that’s been proven time and time again.

K: Okay, what would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

L: Oh, force. I would say you force your beliefs on someone else when someone tells you they don’t want to hear it and they ask you not to tell them. Because I don’t think just sharing your beliefs is forcing them, because the person is listening. I think when the person becomes unwilling to listen then you’re forcing.

K: What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

L: Some deep questions. The purpose of theatre... oh my. The purpose of theatre.... I think it’s got a lot of purposes, I’ll tell you the ones I can think of at the moment. I think it’s to entertain, that’s part of the purpose, and I think there’s a need for that. I think it’s to teach and educate. And I think it’s to communicate.... I guess teach and educate sums up all of that.

K: Okay, do you think homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas?
L: Yes.

K: Why?

L: Well (laugh). I'd say experience, that's what I've observed. I've been in the teaching world, you know I've done some retail, I've been in different arenas and I've also been in the theatre and it seems that... one it seems that it is more open, you have more people that are gay that people don't think there's anything wrong with it. And I think theatre by nature pushes the limits of things. I think that for many reasons I think it you know it invites people that feel they're a minority or that feel their voice hasn't been heard in society.

K: Okay, do you think that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in the theatre?

L: Yes.

K: Why?

L: Because I think that the theatre is not... I think it's very biased. Kind've like the media...(laugh) just a little aside. I think that it too often just shows one point of view and doesn't show all points of view, and I think that that's very misleading and very potentially deceiving.

K: Okay, do you think artists are elitists?

L: Elitist meaning like you know, class of their own or they kind've think they're better than everybody else?

K: Yes.

L: Do they think they're better than everybody else? Um, I think people in general most of the time probably think they're better than everybody else. That's a hard question. I would say I feel like people who have had a lot of success are, but just as a whole.... I couldn't make a blanket statement like that, no.

K: How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, but any group of people, are socially classified together? In other words, do you feel people should be classified as groups or individuals?
L: I think it can be positive or negative. I think we all are born with a need to identify with something, you know, for identity. So I think in that case we do, you know I think it's natural. We group ourselves with people that are like ourselves and we have to have a way to describe groups of people. I think that that can be positive cause it can bring a sense of identity and community. I think it can be negative when it leads to stereotypes, or when you paint a certain group a certain way and then there's no room for variety or difference.

K: Okay. Do you think that homosexuals are born that way or do you think it is a choice?

L: Both. I think in the sense that we are all born with a nature that's inclined to do wicked things. So I think that I'm born with a nature that is designed to do perverse things, I think that homosexuals are born with a nature that's you know, that's its nature. That's what it will do...desire things that are perverse or off. So yes, I think born that way in the sense that they're inclined towards perverse things. And yes I think it's a choice because I mean it's everything I believe in my faith. I believe that we are given a choice to have a new nature when we accept Jesus Christ into our lives and follow him. That he takes away our old nature and he helps us to overcome it and walk a different way.

K: Okay, two more questions. How do you feel church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who believe in homosexuality and vice versa?

L: Um, I think church people are generally, probably um, I would use the word scared of homosexuals. I'd use the word prideful, pretentious a lot of times. I think that they wrongly isolate themselves. I think they should treat homosexuals with love, I don't think they should isolate themselves from them. I think they should be around them, I think they should treat them as human beings because they are. I also don't think that they should, that they should not say how they feel about homosexuality either. Because you know, I love my husband and if my husband was doing something I disagreed with I certainly would, you know, tell them and have a discussion about it. It doesn't mean you can't be honest about how you feel about their lifestyle, but I don't think you should shun them. And I think the, you know, the same goes the other way, homosexuals towards the church. And you know, I think dialogue is important, I think it's important to understand where they're coming from, why they feel the way that they feel, why they feel it's not a choice, why they feel they're born that way, why they feel the Bible thinks it's okay, you know a lot of things that homosexuals, or even supposed Christian homosexuals would say. It's just important to know where they're coming from.

K: Um, are there any questions you feel that I should be asking that I haven't or is there anything else you'd like to say?
L: Um, (long pause)...I just think it’s important to, um, I think I’ve kind’ve said it, like with VCU where we go to school I think it’s important to keep the dialogue open because I think theatre is a powerful tool and I think it’s power can be you know it’s danger if it’s used incorrectly, so I think it’s very good to bring all the voices to the table and let the truth speak for itself.

K: Okay.

3/30/05
Megan Brown: Female, age 24, graduate theatre student

Kari: First question, do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?

Megan: Um, yes, I think of myself as an open-minded person because I make a conscious effort to look at both sides of a story although I do have very strong opinions about most things, I always make an effort to look at the other side of what my opinion is on because I hate it when people don’t look at mine.

K: Okay, do you have any kind of relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

M: Yes. Many people – my best friend back home is gay.

K: Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality either themselves or in their relationships with other people?

M: I don’t really understand the question.

K: I didn’t really ask that well. You’ve already said yes, you have friends. Do you have relatives who are homosexual or who are connected to people who are in their relationships?

M: Um, yes, I guess so. I mean my brothers and sisters have friends who are gay also, and my fiancé does too.

K: What would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

M: I would probably tell them that they should follow their heart and what they believe is what’s important to them. I really don’t think my opinion matters that much, but I’m not opposed to homosexuality um, so it really wouldn’t be very much of an issue for me. It’s not really something that I spend much time thinking about.
K: Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

M: No, um, I mean I guess I, kind've in high school I thought I wonder if I’m gay cause I knew so many people who were gay, but then I was like no, I’m not, because I’m not attracted to women.

K: Okay, um, what would you describe as “conventional values?”

M: That’s a really hard question. Um, I guess I have a hard time defining what I think are conventional values because my family’s conventional values aren’t necessarily conventional values. So what I grew up with, I grew up Catholic in the south, which is not really conventional. Um, when I think of conventional, I kind’ve think of conservative, but I know they’re not necessarily the same thing. I think of conventional values as um, people who are not like me, mostly. People who are generally more religious than I am, people who um, view things in a more religious way than I do and who have firmer beliefs than I do.

K: Do you believe in God?

M: Yes.

K: What are your beliefs about the Bible?

M: Um, I think of it mostly figuratively. I don’t believe in a literal translation of the Bible, I don’t think it can be taken literally at all, I think it’s a great set of guidelines, but I also think that when you take into account everything that’s in it as a whole you have to you know, look at some things, some things really are ridiculous. There’s a passage that says women shouldn’t wear pearls. I don’t believe women shouldn’t wear pearls, so because there are things like that, I can’t take all the things I would tend to believe absolutely as literally as I would like to think that they are. I just kind’ve have to um, take a step back and evaluate it kind’ve logically sometimes.

K: Some people believe there’s a difference between being a religious person and being a spiritual person. Do you see a difference? Why or why not?

M: Yes, um, I think being a religious person, I don’t necessarily think of myself as being a religious person even though I believe in God because I don’t um, I don’t attend worship services, I don’t attend youth group, I don’t study the Bible. I did when I was younger but that was mostly because I attended religious schools so it was more natural for me then, but I think of being spiritual, I tend to think it has to be connected to a belief
in God or something like God, I know a lot of people who don’t believe in God who believe that there’s some kind of force that’s greater than them and um, in a much more abstract way. Um, I think that is more of a spiritual life than a religious life. I think of religion as following certain rules and attending services.

K: Okay, so um, do you, um, do you see yourself as a religious person or a spiritual person or both or neither?

M: I see myself more as a spiritual person than a religious person.

K: Okay, um, how would you describe your relationship with God?

M: Um, I guess I don’t really think of it that way, um, I don’t think of it as being a relationship other than my relationship to this chair is that we both exist at the same time. I pray, but I don’t, um, I don’t necessarily, I guess praying to me is more like sending letters. I don’t think I’m going to get a response back, I don’t feel like when I’m praying, I don’t feel like it’s a conversation, um, I don’t feel like, you know, I don’t have the idea that some people have of Jesus being my friend. I just feel like, I think it has something to do with growing up Catholic. Um, that God is bigger and more incomprehensible than I could possibly imagine and I’m just very small in comparison.

K: Do you believe in moral absolutism?

M: No.

K: Why?

M: Um, I guess because I don’t understand what it would be if there is moral absolutism. It kind’ve baffles me because, partly because I study science a lot and I see that um, people can go for thousands of years thinking one thing is right and then find out later that it’s wrong. Um, and partly because I think that people’s morals have to do with what their personal reactions to them are, what personal consequences it has for them. I think that some people can engage in one behavior and feel guilty about it, and other people can engage in the same behavior and not feel guilty about it and that’s not to say that the behavior is right or wrong. It could be right and it could be wrong, or it could be that it’s right for one person and it’s wrong for the other person.

K: Okay, do you think that homosexuality is morally wrong?

M: No.
K: How did you come to that conclusion?

M: I had to evaluate whether or not I thought that it’s a choice. It really came through my friend Douglas who I’m really close with. He and I were having a conversation about this a few years ago and he was talking about how he got really angry when people would tell him that it was his choice to be homosexual, and he said why would I choose to be persecuted and spit on and hit in the face for the rest of my life when all I want is to be like everybody else, but I can’t change the way that I feel, and um, that made me think well, yeah. Why would you choose to be that? So it made me think that there must be something inherent that he just is that way.

K: Okay, um, what would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

M: Um, I think any instance where somebody is telling you that something is right or wrong and that you not believing that has some consequence. Um, I don’t have a problem with people telling me what they think is right or wrong, but if they tell me that something that I think is wrong and that because of that I’m either a bad person or I’m going to hell, or that God’s gonna smite me or whatever, that that’s when I think somebody’s imposing that belief on you when they think that it’s going to cause me some consequence that I don’t believe.

K: What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

M: I think the purpose of theatre is um, I think there’s a lot of purposes of theatre. I think it depends on who your audience is, where you are in the world and where you are in this country. Um, my primary purpose in creating theatre is to move people. I think that theatre can and should be done to educate I think it can and should be done to shock people. Um, neither one of those is the kind of theatre that I want to practice. I’ll go see them, but I don’t necessarily want to be involved in them in any way other than to be an audience member. Um, generally I feel like theater is to create an emotional experience for the audience in some way.

K: Okay, um, do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in the theatre than in other social arenas?

M: Absolutely. Um, just from personal experience, I’ve worked in theatre for a long time and I’ve also worked in science for a long time. Um, in the world of theatre most people that I knew were much more accepting of homosexuality, in the world of science it was like people either cringed and didn’t want to talk about it because they were so uncomfortable, um it was just entirely avoided altogether, or if people um, if people
actually did get in a conversation about it, it was a very divisive issue. There would be some people who were really strongly in acceptance of it or were really strongly against it and it would generally cause arguments which I think is why the rest of the time they just generally avoided talking about it.

K: Um, do you think a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in the theater?

M: I think it would be important. Um, I think it would be difficult not to have the message of that play impose a belief on the audience. I think it would depend on how it was done. I think it would be important and I think that it would...It would be hard to decide what message should have to come across from that.

K: Do you think that artists are elitist?

M: Yes. I know I am. Um, I think just like, I think in anything everybody has their opinion and um, and while they’re entitled to it I think people tend not to be open-minded, people tend to only believe what they want to believe and generally discount anything else. For example, my fiancé and I generally like realist art and some you know, near realist art and expressionist art and impressionist art, but neither one of us likes abstract art and we tend not to believe that it has very much value because we both know that it can be made without skill. I think that’s where I’m elitist. I think other people could be exactly the opposite and feel like abstract art has more expressive qualities and like you know, any anti-realist theatre has more expressive qualities and doesn’t really follow a traditional structure and therefore it’s better because it’s breaking out of the mold. Um, but I think almost all artists are elitist and I think you kind’ve have to be to be successful.

K: How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, but any group of people, are socially classified together? In other words, do you think people should be classified as individuals or as social groups?

M: Um, ideally on a theoretical level I think that everybody should be classified as an individual, but I also understand that the human mind doesn’t work that way. The human mind automatically classifies everything that enters into it. Um, after having studied cognitive extensively I understand that the first thing that you do when you learn something is to relate it to something that you already know. Whether it be you see a color that you’ve never seen before and you relate it to a color that it’s like, or you meet a person that you’ve never met and you relate them to people that you already know. Um, I don’t think that there’s any way for people to get away from classifying people or
labeling people or putting them in a box because that’s just the way the brain works, that’s how the synapses move from one to the other.

K: Okay, um, do you think that homosexuals are born as homosexuals or do you think that it is a choice?

M: I don’t think that it’s a choice. I just couldn’t believe that it is. I don’t think anybody would choose it if it was a choice.

K: Okay, and this is another one of those labeling questions, but how do you think church going people should treat homosexuals and those who hold that to be true and vice versa?

M: Jesus said “whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers you do unto me.” And I think that you don’t have to agree with how people live their life, you don’t have to agree with their behaviors, you don’t have to agree with their sexual orientation, but you have to treat them with respect and act like human beings. Um, just you know, Jesus befriended prostitutes and loved them as much as he loved his brothers. I think that all human beings have a responsibility to be respectful of other human beings. But that doesn’t mean you have to agree with everything because there’s no way that everyone could agree with everyone else in the world.

K: Okay, and last question, are there any questions you feel that I should be asking that I haven’t or is there anything else you would like to say?

M: Um, the only other thing that I would like to add is the biggest issue that I have with the whole debate on homosexuality is whether or not it’s appropriate to infringe on someone’s human rights and what human rights are actually human rights. For example, of course the big issue right now is gay marriage and whether or not it should be legal and I’m assuming that you’re intentionally avoiding that subject. But I think that it probably needs to be addressed in some way um, just on the fact that we have to...I think that some people tend to see homosexuals as not human, and when you don’t let them have the same rights as other humans, it subjectifies them and keeps them from being human beings. Um, and that’s the biggest issue I have with um, I understand theoretically why many people who are Christians don’t agree with homosexuality. I understand why they believe their behaviors are wrong. I don’t agree, but I do understand and I respect that, um, but I don’t think that it is their right to impose their belief about anybody upon anyone else. I think it’s okay to express the belief that homosexuality is wrong, but I don’t believe that that belief should cause consequences for people who are homosexual. I don’t think that it should keep them from having any kind of rights that people who aren’t homosexuals have.
K: Is that it?
M: That's it!

4/7/05
Jennifer Hundley: Female, age 40, middle school teacher, theatre graduate student, professional director and actress, mother

Kari: First question, do you consider yourself an open-minded person, why or why not?

Jennie: Yes I do consider myself to be an open-minded person because of my upbringing but also because theater has taught me to look at life from different points of view. And that’s a tool I think that benefits me as a person.

K: Okay, um, do you have any kind of relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

J: Yes, um, some of my closest friends are openly gay. Male and female.

K: Okay, um, this is a bit repetitive, but do you have friends or relatives who are homosexual or who have relationships with those who are?

J: Yes, I do have relatives who are either homosexual or have very close friends who are homosexual.

K: What would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

J: Um, I would suggest for them to get with a support group, um, if they’re younger particularly, um, there’s a local group called Rosene that actually is specifically for high schools who are struggling with what societal views are on homosexuality within their school community as well as within the whole community. I also would make sure that they are professing it for the right reasons because sometimes it’s not important to talk about your sexuality.

K: Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

J: No. (laugh) I’m a hetero.

K: What would you describe as “conventional values?”
J: Um, I think it depends on the person. Conventional is kind've a full word. It depends on who you’re talking to what conventional is. I’m drawn to unconventional in theatre practices, but as I raise my children I recognize that there are conventional things that they need to know in order to survive. (Laugh). Is that clear?

K: Do you believe in God?

J: Yes I do.

K: And what are your beliefs about the Bible?

J: Um, I believe that it is storytelling that is engaging. Um, I don’t necessarily believe that all of it is written fact. Uh, I think that the Bible is interpreted in different ways depending on the denominational values that are brought to the Bible. Uh, I think that we have to continue to look at it in the context of our society now as well, um, but I think it grounds an awful lot of our value system.

K: Okay, some people believe that there’s a difference between being a religious person and a spiritual person. Do you see a difference? Why or why not?

J: I do believe there’s a difference between those. Um, I think religion has to do with your worship, um, I think it has to do with ritual within your worship and your religious practices. I think spirituality is your soul. I think spirituality has to do with your inner self and I think that you can, um, you don’t have to necessarily be both religious and spiritual and I think that there are people that have no professed religion, but they are highly spiritual. And I also think that spirituality ties in to our connection to the world, with our environment with the creation of God and giving us the earth and how those cycles fit in with our spirituality. Sounds crazy, but I think that even the tides and the moon and the way nature works for us or against us is part of spirituality too.

K: So do you see yourself as a religious person or a spiritual person or both?

J: Both. Both. Sometimes I’m more religious than others, um, but I’m always spiritual.

K: Okay, how would you describe your relationship with God?

J: Ever changing. Um, I’ve gone through periods of my life where I have been very connected to Him particularly in my youth, uh, in questioning things about the world there were a lot of answers that were provided to me from God, I think. Um, I think as I have gotten older and have had more access to other religions, um, Buddhism for
example, I recognize that there’s probably not a singular God, um, and I continue to want to know more about other religions, not just the one that I was raised with.

K: Okay, do you believe in moral absolutism? Why or why not?

J: Will you define moral absolutism, like one way to do things?

K: Like absolute truth.

J: No. I don’t. Because there’s not one absolute type of person.

K: Do you believe that homosexuality is morally wrong?

J: No, I don’t.

K: Why not?

J: Because I think God loves all people and that has nothing to do with their sexual preferences. It doesn’t have anything to do with their attraction to gender.

K: How did you come to that conclusion?

J: My father and I had a conversation when I was 18. And I think when I recognized that he was open to looking at relationships whether same gender or not that that was one of the things that he taught me.

K: Okay, um, what would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

J: Hmmm. I think school systems do it all the time. I think textbooks do it all the time. I think parents do that, um, but that’s a little different because it’s through love as opposed to mandating....

K: Okay. I know what you mean...

J: You do? I don’t know how else to answer that.

K: Okay. What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

J: Um, first and foremost for me I think is education because that’s the kind of theatre that I like to do and that I am employed to do. Um, but I think that there’s also the
entertainment factor that people come to a place to be entertained, but that entertainment might involve thought provoking, it might be enlightenment it might be education, it might be all of those things, but I think the entertainment factor we have to keep in mind.

K: Do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas?

J: Yes I do.

K: Why?

J: I think that there’s a stereotype that goes along with that and the assumption that homosexuals are drawn to performance, uh, high drama, drama queens, and all the cliché or stereotypical things. But I also think that in that acceptance homosexuality is probably not as out of the ordinary in the theatre community too. So what if somebody’s gay because well, that’s just a part of our community. You know what I mean?

K: Yes. Do you think that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them for one reason or another would be important or accepted in the theatre?

J: Yes, I think it would be important. I think it has been done; I’m not quite sure a specific title. But I think um, that it is important because um, particularly with this Rosene group that I was mentioning before, I think that there’s a tool there, particularly for people who are struggling with that issue of whether to come out, whether not to come out, or folks who are put into a position where they are doing all the things that society tells them to do but it isn’t really where their heart is. Um, so that’s a conflict, that’s a struggle and that’s essential to all drama, so it would work.

K: Do you think that artists are elitists?

J: At times yes I do. Uh, and I think sometimes art whether it be visual or performing, uh, they tend to do work, or can do work that only speaks to an artist’s mind as opposed to general communities or society.

K: Okay, how do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, but any group of people are socially classified together? In other words, do you feel that people should be classified as individuals or as social groups? Like women, minorities, gays...

J: I think categories are something that we will never break away from because that’s the way our minds wrap around not just people, but items, we put everything into a category, everything into a box, no matter what culture, they do that. Um, but I do think that
individuality and humanism is something that’s really becoming a lot more prominent in all cultures. I think that has a lot to do with our civilization, um, if you look at it from that standpoint we’re evolving, continuing to evolve. Um, I think there’s probably some downfalls of not putting people in categories too. We lose some of maybe a voice a little bit when we all become alike.

K: Okay, um, do you think that homosexuals are born that way or do you think it is a choice?

J: I think that’s a nature/nurture question, and I think that certainly there are people who are born, uh, there is nothing they can do about what they are drawn to, and that has to do with biological make up. There’s been some studies done on chromosomes and how uh, that can affect a person’s sexuality or sense of gender. But I also think that there can be nurturing environments that allow people to make choices as they grow, that might sway them towards having a sexual preference.

K: How do you feel that church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who agree with it and vice versa?

J: I think that that goes back to God and that we are to love everyone regardless. And I think that when church-going people deny homosexuals or homosexuality within their community as a church they’re not loving, they’re not Christian. I also think on the other side of that that there are homosexuals who are not loving and are not Christian-like to maybe a more extreme church environment that is telling them that they’re not allowed to be who they are, so I think that battle there is probably not going to be an easily won scenario.

K: So, last question, are there any questions that you feel I should be asking that I have not, or is there anything else you would like to add?

J: Um, I can’t think of any that you haven’t asked, um, but I think that as you put together the information, um, maybe to consider the idea that there are a lot of plays that could be written that haven’t been written and um, that what you’re doing is probably a really good thing to fill in that gap.

K: That’s what I’m hoping for, but we’ll see...

J: Yes. That’s cool.
4/11/05
Anonymous: Female, age 23, undergraduate theatre student

Kari: Okay, first of all do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?

A: I do, I consider myself to be someone who strives to be an open-minded person. I know that I have a lot of prejudices and make judgments very quickly because that’s the kind of example I was raised under because a lot of my family is that way and they don’t mean to be in any kind of like degrading way but they just they say what their impression is right away and I’ve spend most of my life trying to get away from that because, especially my mom who’s had a problem with judging the friends that I have and blaming them for the phases that I go through in my life and that’s still engrained in me and when I meet a person I see a person and I am pretty judgmental and I expect, I expect to not like people, but I’m aware of that in myself and so I try to um, question my initial reactions to people and how they look and how they act.

K: Okay, do you have any kind of relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

A: Yes.

K: Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality either personally or in their relationships?

A: Um, I have friends, I don’t have any relatives that I know of.

K: Okay, um, what would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

A: Um, well, that’s funny because that’s never actually happened to me before, I’ve either had people deny that they were gay to me and then I found out later when they had felt more comfortable talking to other people about it, or I’ve just only met people who are already openly gay, so I haven’t gone through that step, that change with anyone, but um, I mean if someone confided that to me I would be more than willing to hear them and support them.

K: Okay, have you ever dealt with homosexuality personally?

A: No, not really, I mean, you always have to think about it, especially, um, for me I actually had an experience where um, when I was in the eighth grade my best friend and I had really vicious rumors spread about us that we were lesbians together and it wasn’t
that bothered us, it was that people heckled us in the hallways and threatened us for it, so that really set off a lot insecurities in me and it made me think about that I think even earlier than I should’ve had to because, I mean I was twelve or thirteen. So yes in that sense, and yes in the sense that you know, you get close to other women and you see other women and you think of them and their sexuality but I’ve never had those sort’ve feelings for another woman. So my answer was really long. (Laugh).

K: No, you’re doing fine. What would you describe as “conventional values?”

A: Conventional values…I don’t know. (Laugh). I don’t even really know what that means. Um, conventional values. I guess my knee-jerk reaction to it would be conservative, which may not be true or fair because I’ve never really thought about that term before, but I guess that’s kind’ve what I think of.

K: Okay. Do you believe in God?

A: Um, hmm. I have, I have a very like, I do on a level that I think I haven’t figured out how to express to other people yet, and that’s something that I’ve been thinking about a lot lately and discussing with my friends, um because I have sort’ve a system that I’ve grown for myself in my world, but I don’t really know how to describe it, but yes.

K: Okay, what are your beliefs about the Bible?

A: My beliefs about the Bible? I actually have never read the Bible in full, I was raised Unitarian so, um, it really didn’t focus on one teaching or one writing about any particular religion, we were taught the basics of all religions. And I was a child then, so it was Sunday school so like one week we would study one religion and the next week another, so I’ve never really experienced the Bible in any kind of deep way. But I do believe that the stories in the Bible are important to understand and apply to yourself as a human, but I don’t necessarily believe that it’s um, this is really hard to articulate, um, that it’s something to completely base your life on.

K: Um, some people believe that there’s a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference or...

A: I think that there can be a difference; I think you can be spiritual person without connecting yourself to any specific religion.

K: Sorry, I keep looking at this because it keeps doing something weird, so if it cuts of off we’ll figure something out, but do you consider yourself a religious person or a spiritual person?
A: I consider myself a religious person... I, sorry, I consider myself a spiritual person but not a religious person, I’m definitely not...

K: Okay, um how would you describe your relationship with God, if you can?

A: Um... I, it’s hard to articulate. I guess it’s just kind’ve a sense of um, like kind’ve a sense of a partnership with my world, it’s another force that’s helping me to get through whatever kind of good times or bad times I’m having, like, I’ve never really tried to describe it. It’s just something that I can sense, and when I need to focus it’s just... I know that if I need to be alone and look inside myself that there is something out there supporting me in that.

K: Okay. Do you believe in moral absolutism? Why or why not?

A: Oh... Um...

K: Like, do you believe that there is absolute truth?

A: I think it really depends on what you’re talking about. I think with certain things that there’s just.... When it comes to certain things there is a right and a wrong. Like, you know, let’s say murder for example, to make it really broad. There it’s wrong. That’s something that’s wrong. But there are also more issues that are more blurred. Especially in the society that we live in that’s so... I think, I mean, we live in a college campus. We’re as a group a balanced community living pretty peacefully together. And I think that there are a lot of things that are blurred amongst us, because for the most part we are living in harmony and you know, there’s betrayals and there’s lies, and all of that is there, it’s just blurred out, I think especially for people our age.

K: This may die on me here, but um, do you believe that homosexuality is morally wrong? Why or why not?

A: I do not think it’s morally wrong. I think that people are brought into the world to live that lifestyle.

K: Okay.... no, don’t die.... sorry... (Break) Okay yes it’s working... So I just asked you if you believe homosexuality is morally wrong?

A: Uh-huh.

K: Okay, how did you come to the conclusion you’ve come to on that?
A: Um, I think that a, I was raised believing that. My family is very liberal and very accepting, which is kind’ve odd considering what I said earlier. But the judgments I spoke of earlier were more about personality and not necessarily about a person and their sexuality and their ethnicity. I was raised being open to any kind of person and any kind of person’s beliefs and backgrounds and um, I mean, my sister and my mom have had all sorts of gay friends that I’ve heard about all my life. And I guess, growing up I was always in performing arts, and I was, I did ballet for my entire childhood and I know a lot of gay people through that and I don’t know it’s just been sort of a reality that’s very comfortable and acceptable, and my best friend is gay and so I’ve learned even more about that kind of life. I don’t know it’s just part of me...

K: Okay, um, what would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

A: Um, that’s funny cause I’ve experienced that a lot, but I don’t know it’s just...It’s more...unfortunately, this is very funny because I had an experience with this just two weeks ago and because of that a friend of mine and I haven’t spoken for a while and it’s not like hostile or anything, we just haven’t had a chance to discuss it again. And it’s very pertinent. But unfortunately the times when I’ve experienced that the most have been with close friends of mine, and it’s a feeling, it’s the way a person talks to you. And I really think that when someone, there’s a fine line between when someone wants to talk to you about their beliefs and when they’re talking at you about their beliefs. And I think a fair conversation is when someone tells you where they’re coming from and then they want to hear what you believe as well, and I think when there’s only one side to a conversation about something as important as religion or sexuality, when there’s only one side and two people have two different opinions, when there’s only one side then that’s when it becomes forcing and not sharing.

K: What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

A: The purpose of theatre? Um, I think that theatre has many purposes and it can be utilized for many things, but I think that the main thing is storytelling and reflecting one’s life and one’s experience. And that goes for everything, writing, directing, acting, all of it...

K: Okay, um, do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in the theatre than in other social arenas?

A: Um, I think yes...I think so.
K: Why?

A: I might think that just because I do theater and that’s what I’ve experienced so that’s what I think, but I think theatre as well as a lot of other artistic groups... Words are not coming to me right now...um, but I think it’s safe to say yes.

K: Okay, um, do you think a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them for some reason or another would be important or accepted in the theatre?

A: Absolutely. I don’t think that there’s necessarily anything that is not important to be, is not an important subject to be portrayed through theatre. You know if you want to question something or explore something theatre is one of the great forms for that and I don’t think there should be any judgment as to what that topic is. And you know, obviously lines are crossed and it can get, it can become hostile, but that’s what its all about is having the freedom to talk about what you want to talk about.

K: Do you think that artists are elitists?

A: I think they can be, absolutely. I think that um, yes. I do think, I don’t think all artists are elitists, especially not on like really grade levels...but I’ve met lots of people who feel that because they’re an artist they are entitled to greater praise than others, and unfortunately those are usually the ones who are not quite worthy of um, thinking so highly of themselves.

K: Okay. How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? In other words, do you feel that people should be classified as individuals or as social groups?

A: I mean, ... I think that ... I mean social groups, whether you always think of them that way or not, I mean, I think it’s important to realize that not all homosexuals are the same. That there’s a difference...not every woman is the same, not every man is the same, not every black person is the same, not every white person, not every homosexual is the same kind of person, and I mean, that one thing that they have in common, you can’t get around that. And I don’t think there’s anything wrong with having that awareness that I think it is important to realize that each individual is a different entity from the group.

K: Okay, um, okay, do you feel that homosexuals are born that way or do you think it is a choice?

A: I think they’re born that way.
K: Okay, and how do you feel that church-going people should treat homosexuals or those who embrace homosexuality and vice versa?

A: I think that, I think that no matter what acceptance is absolutely vital. Um, I don’t think...yeah, to me, to me the idea of a church-going person judging a homosexual person specifically or a homosexual person judging a church-going person because of those things is just ridiculous to me, it doesn’t make any sense. It’s kind’ve hard for me to, (laugh) yeah. I think acceptance is just yeah, absolutely the most important thing. It’s just where you have to begin.

K: And last question, are there any questions I have not asked that you feel I should be asking, or is there anything else you would like to add?

A: Um .... I’m just gonna sit here and talk for a long time, I have a million things to say, I guess one thing you asked me is if I think homosexuals are born that way or if it is a choice. It’s interesting because most homosexual people I know absolutely believe that they were born that way, that they’ve always felt that and it’s always been a part of them. But I recently met someone who has questioned that in their lives and that they don’t know because of experiences they’ve had. So, you know, it’s very hard to um, especially for a person who’s not homosexual, to speculate on that because even people who embrace that about themselves now have wondered how they came to be that person. But, I don’t know why I feel the urge to say this, but I’ve mentioned it before, but my best friend is homosexual, and he’s struggled with religion, he was raised Catholic, and you know, he’s been very lucky because his family has been so accepting of him despite their religious beliefs and despite their...they’re just a very socially not aware family, and um, I think it’s just a really interesting issue. And the whole theatre part of it, it’s funny to me, it’s kind’ve put them all together into one thought, just I don’t know, yeah, I’ve never had a discussion about those three things before together at once.

4/17/05
Jeff Kelly: Male age 25, theatre graduate student, teacher and producer

Kari: Um, do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?

Jeff: I consider myself an open-minded person, um, I have a fairly easygoing and joking nature, and I try not to discount anyone’s opinions before I’ve given it a full chance to... I guess... I guess I’m open-minded, I hope so.

K: Okay, do you have any kind of relationship with anyone who is openly gay?
J: Um, I know, um, I have friends that are gay, I guess I shouldn’t mention their names, I don’t know, not that they care. But um, until I came here I didn’t really, I used to live in Georgia, I didn’t know anyone who is gay. Um, I had like a lesbian friend in high school; then again, she might be straight now, for all I know, when you’re in high school you don’t really know. I never had a like a problem or thought about any negative about, you know gays or anything like that, but I just didn’t know any until I came here. But I’m pretty decent friends with...

K: Okay, do you have relatives who deal with homosexuality either themselves or in their relationships?

J: Not to my knowledge, I don’t have a single relative, not to my knowledge, I don’t have a single member of my family who is gay, so that’s I guess why I never had any experience growing up dealing with it because it just never was an issue.

K: What would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

J: That they should probably explore, um, their feelings. Um, that if they think they are there’s probably a good chance they are and if they’re scared, um, and uh, if there’s a person that they’re having those feelings to, um, maybe they should talk to that person about that, um, but not be ashamed of who they are, of how they feel. I mean, love is I guess the greatest quality that people can have and as long as you care for something I think that’s good, so they should be proud of that and not be afraid.

K: Have you ever had thoughts of homosexuality personally?

J: Um, no. I do think though at one point in time my parents thought I was gay because I just never got any dates with girls because I always just got turned down. But other than that no I never have.

K: Okay. What would you describe as “conventional values?”

J: Conventional values, that’s a good question. I guess conventional values would be, geez, what we were led to believe if we would watch old 50s, 60s, 70s sitcoms um, of what is good and bad, and I guess the TV generation um, would be conventional values. I think that real values um, would be specific to each family and how you’re brought up and there really isn’t conventional values anymore I don’t think.

K: Okay. Do you believe in God?
J: I do. Um, and I didn’t uh, until this past summer, I didn’t know. I started out in high school as an atheist until I realized that I wasn’t really an atheist I was more of a uh, agnostic. And uh, then this summer something else happened and that’s very good.

K: What are your beliefs about the Bible?

J: Beliefs about the Bible...um, I’ve always looked at the Bible as an excellent history reference. I think there are a lot of good messages that are in the Bible that um, you can choose to follow or not. I feel the same way with all religious texts that the basic principle is to live a good life and try to be the best person you can be. Um, but I don’t follow all of the uh, you know, this is the one way for any one religion. I think that shuts out too many people, and that would be too narrow-minded. Then again it could be narrow-minded of me to feel that way, so...

K: Some people believe that there is a difference between being spiritual and religious. Do you see a difference?

J: I think there can be a difference. Um, because I think before, I don’t even know how religious religious I am, I don’t practice in church or anything, I do that on my own time, but I believe before I found God I was still a spiritual person, um, not that I didn’t believe in a soul before, things that make up who you really are, I used to do yoga and stuff, um, and I still think that I had spiritual quality about me and still believed in spiritual ideals even though I didn’t believe in a God at that time, so I think that can be a distinction between the two.

K: Okay, this may be a bit repetitive, but do you consider yourself a spiritual person or a religious person or both or neither?

J: I would consider myself both now. Um, spiritual I think I’m the same, if that makes sense. Um, religiously, different, I’m not like publicly religious; I don’t share my views with people. And now that I have found my religion that I think that it becomes intertwined with my spirituality now and I think they’re kind’ve meshed into one, or like fused. So I guess you can have them separate and they can be together, and I guess, I don’t know what can happen in the future so, who knows what even will befall the planet and maybe they can be split again, I don’t think so, but I don’t know.

K: Okay, how would you describe your relationship with God?

J: Open and excited. Um, I had wanted to know for a while, I guess, if there was a God and I found myself asking Him questions and not getting any answers. And one day
something happened, and um, and I believe wholeheartedly after that, and.... what was the question?

K: How would you describe your relationship with God? I didn’t say these would be easy (laugh).

J: No. I would find myself talking to God, or whatever you want to call it more often than of course, than I did when I didn’t know, I mean I would ask questions and be like so if you are listening, you know, this is what I think, you know, you should do this and this, um, and now I guess, I do that sometimes, but more often I try to make sure that I’m doing the right thing. I ask questions about that now, I make sure that what I’m doing is best for me or whoever, whatever I’m trying to do, that it’s the best decision and this will yield the greatest good, I guess if that makes any sense. So I guess I talk a lot now.

K: Do you believe in moral absolutism?

J: Moral absolutism?

K: Like absolute truth.

J: Oh you mean like, like there’s...

K: Like there is a standard for right and wrong and that there’s an absolute standard.

J: Geez, um, I don’t know. Um, I think that some things are absolute, um, I believe that um, you should, I’m going to try to think of specific examples to illustrate my point. Um, you should never hurt people. And you can take hurt in whatever direction you want to take that, and you should always try to do your best to make the world a better place. I do think there are times, periods of history in our culture that this line is going to be different from how people have been raised and what that culture I guess requires of the people who are living there. So I would have to say no there’s not one, but I think innate in all of us we know what is good and bad, so, um, that’s a hard question.

K: It is.

J: Yeah.

K: And the background music really helps.

J: It does.
K: I hope that ends soon... anyway, so uh, do you believe that homosexuality is morally wrong?

J: I don't.

K: Why?

J: Like I said before, I think that love is one of the greatest things that we can do. And um, and it's rare to find true love, and even if you don't nurture it it won't last, it requires a constant effort to maintain that, and if someone finds that and is able to give that to someone else and have that in return, I think that's fabulous and I think we should encourage that as people instead of telling them to hide their feelings and telling them they're wrong because they care about someone else. Um, if we all cared a little more maybe we wouldn't have some of the problems that we do, so I would disagree with that.

K: Okay, um, how did you come to that conclusion?

J: Wow, um, well I'm not sure, let's see... um, I probably would've had a different grounds for that reason if I had never been in love with someone before, and I guess you have to have experienced that or have that to I guess have the understanding of my answer for that question. I would still would've said homosexuality was okay before that, I wouldn't have been able to tell you what my reasoning would have been. But, um, and how I came to the idea that love is that special I can't answer. Maybe it's just one of those things that you just know or don't know.

K: Okay, what would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

J: Oh I have many examples of that!

K: Don't we all...

J: Yes we do... well when I was in undergraduate school in Georgia it was also known as the Bible belt. And this was the time when I was not knowing if I was atheistic or agnostic and I had lots of friends that were very Christian and very worried and they would say you know, you're going to hell. And I would say well thank you that makes me feel very comfortable and then they would come to me and say well listen, you can't go to hell you have to feel this and it's one of those... to have that religion come to you that I think all people will experience these things at different times, you now, it wasn't right for me then. You know, I wasn't ready to accept whatever it is that I was going to. And when people try to force-feed you that's a turn off. And maybe I wouldn't say I
would have found this beforehand cause that would be wrong to blame other people for it, but it definitely cast a negative light in my opinion, and especially on the religion of Christianity itself because of the way they acted as far as it being the one true religion and they would talk to the Muslims at our school like they were bad because they had their certain beliefs and these are twenty-year-old kids that are still developing their own ideas and they really need to you know... I don't know, I just thought it was sad the way they would at other people like they did, so, yes, that would be an example.

K: Okay, so what do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

J: The purpose of theatre. This is a question we've been asking ourselves ever since we've been here. Um, I think I have a different answer every time I write something. Um, the purpose of theatre, um, theatre I think can have many purposes and I think it depends on what is going on in your life at the time you're doing it, whatever influences you whatever your audience is going through and whatever you're trying to communicate to the audience. And I think theatre can be as simple as just trying to bring joy to people's lives and trying to entertain them and trying to take them out of everyday life and the droning, and make them happy for a while. There's nothing wrong with making people smile. But then I do think that theatre can educate people and I think it should from time to time. And I think that it can be political, I think it can get across certain messages and I think it can be radical. I think it can be a lot of things. I don't think it should ever be any one thing. That's my answer.

K: Okay. Do you think homosexuality is more accepted in the theatre than in other areas?

J: I would probably say so, um, and I guess it might be because artistic people in general and painters and writers and stuff are maybe a little more willing to be in touch with whatever they have inside. I guess that other disciplines are a little more removed from themselves, and may be that frightens them more, and maybe um, since we have more openly gay at least theatre practitioners, we are more used to being around them. And so it's instead of it being like them, it's just you or me or whoever it is it's just a person, and it's the same way with race really, or religion or whatever it is. It's the way we view people. And I think that when we talk about you know well one day we won't see color, I'm like well, you see color that's a characteristic. I'm a pale skinny white guy. That's how I look. It's what's inside. I'm like, you know, you can describe me however you want to because that's just how I look, that's how God made me you know, so just because somebody's gay, that's a characteristic, that's a trait about them. We should not focus on that.

K: Okay, do you think a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be accepted or important in the theatre?
J: I think it could be important and I think it would be accepted and it should be. I think that concern I guess, about denying oneself or not knowing oneself is probably a topical issue that a lot of people face, and it can transcend the sexuality barrier. I mean there’s lots of things that we deny ourselves or that we are unsure of. Um, and just because a homosexual is experiencing something like that I could empathize on another level as well. And I think that um, most gay people I know tend to be pretty open people, and I think they would be very accepting of it because they probably were that person or have been there at one point as well, and I think a show like that could probably help people.

K: Do you think artists are elitist?

J: I think we think so sometimes, definitely (laugh). I think we are a little snotty sometimes and think we are better than other people because we are smarter. And maybe sometimes we are, but I definitely think so, but I think everybody, a lot of people have those feelings too. Athletes are like that and doctors are like that. But I think artists, um, have that feeling that we create something and we don’t have to get paid and it’s all aesthetically beautiful and that makes us wonderful.

K: How do you feel when people, um, specifically homosexuals, but any group are socially classified in groups rather than individuals?

J: Um, its kind’ve sad, but like we’re culturally engineered to accept that and I actually accept that and I use that in my speech and I have in this interview. And that’s just the way we talk and I don’t know how to change that, um, to deal with just the person instead of clumping and grouping. I mean we do it to ourselves, um, we’re artists, I mean we just did that. Um, and but then again I guess some kind of social group does give you a definition of who you are and a sense of belonging because I guess if everyone was just everyone alone in the world then we might be a little more lonely. But I don’t have any proposal on how to make that better.

K: Okay, um, do you think that homosexuals are born homosexual or do you think it is a choice?

J: I don’t have any idea. I know that for myself that once puberty hit and I was attracted to women, I was attracted to women. And I never, you know, of course looking at pretty girls in TV or in magazines you know, when you’re younger and you like them and you close your eyes because people catch you and you’re not supposed to like them until you’re you know a certain age or whatever. And you know you always hear stories of people saying well you were always like this or you know your environment helps foster that opinion in you. But I know that I’ve always been attracted to females, so I might be
tempted to say that I was born that way, so maybe if I was born that way then you were born that way too, so I don’t know what’s going on in other peoples heads....

K: Okay, so, this is one of those questions that labels people, so, how do you feel that church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who embrace homosexuality and vice versa?

J: I think that they would embrace them as people, and you know as long as they do good and are good people then a homosexual can be a criminal just like a person who goes to church can be a criminal or just like someone that does...can be a criminal. And I think that um, Christians should openly accept them and I think the gays should accept them too. And I always think of a really funny joke that George Coen when he’s like you would think that the Catholics wouldn’t join up with the Christians because they’re always against abortion and here’s a whole group of people guaranteed to never have an abortion. I always think that’s funny (laugh) that’s just a funny joke for me. But I think that.... less bickering.

K: Okay, last question, are there any questions you feel I should be asking that I have not, or is there anything else you would like to add?

J: These are pretty good questions, um, something that you’re missing.... I think if you’re writing the play to or about homosexuals...

K: I’m not really sure yet. It’s just gonna, my goal is, my goals are to bring in other opinions and to open up the discussion, I have no idea how I’m gonna do that yet.

J: You’re not sure, all right. It’s interesting, the questionnaire thing, cause when I was in school I did a semi similar questionnaire, I was trying to write a play about something that I never ended up writing about but I was examining like, love at the time, and this is when I was still agnostic I think, and I asked everyone, I just had them fill out like I just handed out forms and pens to like everyone. And the questions were like what is love, or you know, what is good what is bad, what is an angel, what is a demon, what do you believe in, what can you do to change the world, thinks, all these kinds of weird things, and the whole idea behind this play I was trying to write was like God and the Devil were like fighting over this group of people, and both were trying to influence them to do what they thought was best, of course, you think a demon would do something bad and an angel would do something good. And an angel and a demon were to come down to earth and be people and um, so you have something that’s supposed to be purely good and something that was purely evil and that’s like a common answer. And through the course of the play, they didn’t know that the other was who they were and they ended up becoming human beings and humans aren’t good or bad, there kind’ve in the middle, and
so that’s what happened with them, they because humanized and they fell in love with each other.…

K: Weird.

J: And so they found out you know when they were getting ready to go home who they were and that they had to separate and they could try to make the choice to stay and it caused problems everywhere, and I don’t even know how to write it, so I didn’t.

K: That’s farther along than I am right now.

J: Yeah, but you have really good questions. Um, I guess what I would ask yourself in this story you’re trying to tell or whatever is what message you believe in, if you have a formulated one yet cause I was like I don’t know, and that’s why I found it hard to write. Um, but at least like the point you want to get across to the audience and um, go from there. It’s a big project, so I wish you a lot of luck. I think there are a lot of stories that could come out of this.

K: Thank you.

4/20/05

David White: Male, age 24, graduate theatre student

Kari: Question number one, do you consider yourself an open-minded person?

David: I would consider myself an exceedingly open-minded person. Uh, partially because of how I was raised and just because of my life experiences, there are very few things that offend me. Very few things that I’m not comfortable talking about. Occasionally in mixed company the discussions become a little bit less outlandish and upfront, but typically after I get to know someone I’m fully open. I’m also very honest about my opinions. I don’t like crouching and hiding and you know, sweet-talking when I can just be open and honest and tell people how I feel.

K: Okay, I can relate to that. Um, do you have any kind of relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

D: Yes, quite a few. Uh, first person who I knew who was gay was my brother’s friend from high school who was I guess he was probably six years older than I was. Wonderful guy, openly gay, flamingly openly gay, very sweet, uh, died very young, yes, uh, all through my life.
K: So this may be a repetitive one, but do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality either themselves or in their relationships?

D: Well, one family member who might be but she’s never really been open and out about it, I’ve just always kind’ve wondered. Uh, but for the most part just general you deal with them at work, you deal with them on a daily basis, you don’t really think about it, it’s just kind’ve well, it’s them. And uh, a great guy that my mom works with, he works in the hospital and he’s also flamingly gay and he’s wonderful and every time we go visit my mom at the hospital he’s always hitting on my brother and I and it’s very entertaining. It’s kind’ve like yeah, whatever.

K: What would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

D: I would tell them if they really felt they were to look into it more, to explore it, to figure it out, um, I tend to be a fairly strong believer from what I’ve seen of the family that I’ve known, there is at least some portion of it that is genetic. And uh, I knew one guy who it was him, his brother, his sister who was raised by another parent, they were divorced, um, and then her son are all gay. So it’s just kind’ve like huh, that’s interesting. Especially at this age people are always trying to, am I, am I not, what’s going on, because I like this does that make me gay, or because I don’t like that does that make me gay? And nine times out of ten, yeah it’s probably them going through just that exploratory phase. Um, but I think that especially if they’re in college, it’s the perfect environment to explore to discover to figure out if you are or not, because you’re never gonna have anywhere that’s as open as accepting as your typical college environment will be.

K: Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

D: Yeah, I think everyone does at some point. Especially when you’re young and you’re first like hitting puberty and your like hormones are going crazy, and you’re like oh my God, what’s going on? Then as you get older and you start like exploring sex and you know that kind of encounters. And you start finding out what you like and there’s certain things you might like that would be considered well, isn’t it kind’ve gay to like that? Then you know, you really stop and think, you know, it feels good. Just because it feels good doesn’t make you gay, it just feels good. Um, so I’m very open sexually too, and I think that you know do what feels good to you, and yeah, there’s so much more to being gay than sexual preference as far as like sex partners go.

K: Okay, what would you consider to be “conventional values?”
D: Uh, it depends on where you are. In this country conventional values typically connotate Christian values, which even those differ from church to church and denomination to denomination. And it’s almost horrible because in America conventional values are, I still feel that we’re kind’ve stuck in a 50s Leave it to Beaver environment. And we’ve gotten better than that to some extent, but there’s still this kind’ve, there’s always this idea that women should be the subservient they should be the home, wife, the mother, the cooking person, that drives me crazy. That men should be strong they shouldn’t cry, they should be the resilient ones, that’s ridiculous. Coming to theatre you kind’ve see where all these stereotypes really don’t work because you can’t have those attitudes and values and be a good actor or actress, because you can’t explore your other side. So, conventional values, uh, I don’t know because it’s a tricky question because it really does, it varies from person to person. Um, you know there’s always a question of morality, which again, is a person-to-person basis unless you’re following a specific religion, then its kind’ve thrust upon you. For me personally, my conventions are ones that I came up with on my own, cause I was raised Presbyterian and went to a Catholic school, so I had lots of good Christian upbringing, and it did kind’ve ground me in this nice, polite correct way to behave, but then I started realizing that the church itself didn’t have all the answers and it wasn’t’ quite right and they had some very ambiguous statements, and so I started exploring elsewhere. And the more I discovered the more it was like, well, I’ve got these standards, I’ve got the Ten Commandments, yes for the most part, every religion has its Ten Commandments. Um, well you take those and you kind’ve add your own on and you can like take from this group take from that group, take from this philosophy and suddenly you have your own little set of like morals that fit you as a person. I think everyone should do that, they should not follow any sort of set rules. Religion’s a great idea, but you should find your own path to where you want to be.

K: So do you believe in God?

D: Um, good question.

K: I tried.

D: (Laugh). Yes and no. Um, I don’t follow any particular faith, uh, cause none of them really fit for me. Christianity didn’t work for me at all, I kept laughing, um, and still to this day every time I go into a church I giggle...well you were there for the Catholic thing, whoo.... So yeah, Christianity was out.

K: So by Christianity do you mean the Catholic Church?

D: I was, like I said I was raised Presbyterian for thirteen years, and went to Catholic school for nine, so I had both sides of the Catholic faith and I had a good grounding in the
Protestant faith. So when I hit fifth or sixth grade I started questioning, and I started going out and I read every book on religion I could get my hands on, and none of them really fit what I personally believed. Um, I have vague tendencies towards paganism. I don’t really follow it, but I find it to be entertaining. Um, the Bahai faith is really one of the most interesting religions I’ve ever found, but I really don’t believe in it or their gods specifically, but it really is a nice group of people. Um, anything that really got its start, got its heyday with the hippies, it’s gotta be a nice religion. Um, I don’t disbelieve, but I have no reason to believe. I really have no need to have that in my life. Uh, I’m kind’ve a fan of be strong for who you are and for what you believe in, and once you have come up with your own like set of philosophies for your life then you don’t need to keep referring to a higher power. And there’s always kind’ve like a cop out rule with religion, oh there’s God. Or it’s the, well we don’t have to worry about it cause the next life will be better, it’s you know, I prefer a much more pro-active let’s make this life better now. Um, so yeah, kind’ve do kind’ve don’t. Kind’ve like aliens. I figure they’re probably out there maybe, but probably not as we think, and who knows who cares? It doesn’t affect me on a daily basis, I don’t have to worry.

K: Okay, and what are your beliefs about the Bible?

D: I’ve gotten in trouble for saying this, so I’ll say it. Um, I find the Bible to be a wonderful book of mythology, with like most mythology, a smattering of historical accuracy that you need in myths. You know, like the flood story. Okay, there’s like umpteen myths in religions that have a flood story. Did it happen for forty days and forty nights, um, probably not. Uh, walking on water? Um, maybe in a shallow pool with rocks underneath or little alligator heads like in … Um, I find like with most religious texts it has a lot of good parables and fables. Uh, and that the point of it isn’t to, the point of the Bible isn’t to give you a book of law that everything has to be true and factual. Cause it contradicts itself, especially in the New Testament a lot. Um, and it becomes a little bit, I mean, how can they all be right? So it becomes more a collection of stories that teach values, that teach you the standards of morality and codes of conduct that you should follow, or at least that are suggested that you should follow for that religious belief. Um, boring compared to other world religion’s books. It really lacks the punch that you find in the Mahabharata and the you know some of the Ramayana and all that. It just needs kind’ve a fun flavor. There’s no monkey king in the Bible who runs around and like carries mountains. It’s not as much fun.

K: But there is Elijah who called a bear to destroy a bunch of people who were making fun of his bald head.

D: Yeah, but again, monkey king…Elijah… monkey king…
K: Yeah I know. Um, some people believe that there is a difference between being a religious person and a spiritual person. Do you see a difference?

D: Phenomenal difference. Um, I consider myself very spiritual. Um, religion, and I’ve always felt that for the last twenty years, the last ten years, um, religion is a crutch. And crutch is kind’ve, you know, it has a negative connotation. It doesn’t have to be. There are a lot of people who truly need religion to live. They could not survive without having this fundamental thing to fall back on. Um, especially in times of trouble when things aren’t making sense in the world. When you don’t have a very strong sense of self and a personal identity then it becomes very difficult. And it’s much easier if you have a history and a culture to fall back on. Um, you’ve got a god figure, you’ve got this supreme being, and that’s where you get this, well God has a reason for everything, it becomes like a, it’s like a mantra you can tell yourself when life is going bad. There’s a reason, there’s a reason, there’s a reason, there’s a reason, I just don’t know. Um, but God does so it’s okay. Um, spiritual is about, it’s kind’ve the difference between a religion and a philosophy of life. Um, that you, you have a very strong belief in life. Uh, there doesn’t have to be, if there’s a god, it’s almost just like everything has a god to it. Like, this is a god and this is a god and this is a god and so on. It’s sort’ve very, like it’s an appreciation for life and for living. It really is. It’s, religion is for the afterlife, spirituality is for this life. Because you want every moment to be as connected to the world around you. And it’s very easy to have spirituality by yourself. Religion by its very nature connects you to a large group of people, spirituality is much more individual because you tend to define it yourself.

K: Okay, this one is repetitive, but do you consider yourself to be spiritual or religious?

D: Spiritual.

K: Okay. How would you describe your relationship or non-relationship with God?

D: (Laugh). Um, in general, it’s kind’ve a take or leave it. Um, I certainly use His name in vain when I hammer my thumb. But there’s no, I don’t pray, I don’t really see a point to it. Um, I allow myself the possibility that there could be a god, not necessarily a Christian god, or that there could be multiple gods, polytheism certainly has its believers. Uh, you know, I almost think that there is this pantheon god because that makes more sense, but on a daily basis I have no connection with any deity, Christian or otherwise.

K: Do you believe in moral absolutism?

D: I tend to say no. Like I said, everyone makes their own, everyone should make their own moral code, and that’s one of the reasons I have a problem with religion. It’s simply the fact that from my upbringing in religion the Bible gives you a very strict set of rules,
and so many people take it as that is the only way it can be, and that’s the way it is. To define the world we live in that’s so rich and so beautiful as being black and white, you deny any flavor of life. And while it had its value when these books of law were written because they were things that we were striving against, you know the Old Testament says thou shall not eat pork, well yeah because it wasn’t clean, it was bad, it wasn’t treated and it could kill you. But today that’s not the case. And so, you know, and even like the Catholic Church, Vatican I and Vatican II, they completely revamped a lot of their religious beliefs and laws because they realized well we’ve been hard assed about this and we’ve condemned people in the past. Yeah we kind’ve might be wrong, so we’re gonna change slightly. So I think it’s a matter of evolving over time. Beliefs and religions change and if they don’t change then they go stagnant. And that’s why religions die out. Cause I mean the Catholic church was dying out for a long time, and actually still is, there’s no one joining the seminaries, because so many of the priests aren’t going to join.... so....

K: So, do you believe that homosexuality is morally wrong?

D: Absolutely not. No, uh, it’s.... it’s I am .... it’s a very strong absolutely not. It’s quite fine. Um, I know too many good, I know too many good people who are homosexuals to ever lay that judgment on them. From a strictly Biblical interpretation there is that whole smiting Sodom and Gomorrah issue, then yeah, but times change. And in that time when you know you’re desperately trying to increase the population, then yeah, homosexuality is not so much a great idea because you’re not increasing the populace around. Well, times change, and I think that it’s a perfectly acceptable and wonderful choice. If that’s who you are and that’s what you want to do then that’s wonderful.

K: How did you come to the conclusion you have come to on this?

D: Um, I was never, like my family never really had a prejudice against them, and I’ve like never really heard the stories until, (laugh) ....um you never really hear, that’s not typically the story you’re told in Bible school. I was never given a prejudice against them until much later. And by that point I’d already met a handful, um, I’ve always been overly well read, and so you’re always like reading about it, um, it’s not like it’s a new thing. Um, and so it’s very hard to meet someone and suddenly be told, well he’s a bad person because he’s gay, and I’m like but he’s a wonderful person and does wonderful things. It’s very hard to you know kind’ve put that together without having a clash. And again, I do go towards a genetic background for a majority of it, and if you’re going to fault someone for being gay then you have to fault them for being black or being short or being tall or being blue eyed or brown eyed. You know, it’s equal level of blame on genetics, so....
K: Okay, what would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

D: Missionaries! (Laugh) Um, missionaries have always driven me absolutely up the wall, you know, on the very principle of what they do. Uh, especially how it started you know with the, and Southpark did a wonderful parody of it, of you know, Bible, accepting Jesus as your savior, plus English equals food. And it was like, well, okay, bribery great! Religion has always been used as a means of power and control. Uh, and that’s kind’ve if you look at history the pattern that’s been created. Any time you have a set of religious beliefs or you have a set of moral beliefs that are yours you’ve come to on your own, or even if they’re another religious belief on top of it, um if you’re happy and it works for you, even if you’re a dirty heathen living in the jungle, that’s great. That’s your belief. You’ve come to it, you’re happy, your culture’s been doing it that way for hundreds and thousands of years, you go right ahead. Um, missionaries are the worst in my opinion because they’re the most prevalent all around the world. And part of what bothers me is the we’re doing good deeds, but with a sideline of, well we’re doing good deeds, but we’re doing them because we’re Christian and you should be too or we’re Mormon and you should be too. Or, um, other than that there’s always political beliefs getting forced on people, through politicians, through ad campaigns, misinformation, um, and that’s the worst thing is that no one usually gives both sides of the case in politics and religion. It’s always our side is right because, or it’s always, yes they do have those beliefs but they’re not good because they’re heathens. Um, so it’s kind’ve of the acknowledgement with a backhanded slap of well, look who’s Caucasian. Who would you rather believe, the guy in the loincloth or the guy in the three-piece suit?

K: What would you say is the purpose of theatre?

D: Aaron’s poetics.... (Sigh)....this is a very long one. Um, theatre in general, uh, theatre I think right now, and again I’ve been working on my poetics, has lots of different purposes. Um, a source for change is one of the wonderful things that theatre can be used for. I mean, politics, all that is great. Doesn’t have to be. I’m a firm believer in theatre for schlock value...for fun. I mean, what’s the point of doing, there’s no point in doing musicals, but because they’re schlock they’re fun. What’s the point in doing a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical ever, except for schlock, for fun? And I think they’re wonderful. Um, there’s also simple self discovery and exploration, you know, one of my favorite things about theatre is getting a group of people together and just exploring, playing. Allowing this long process of just discovering more about yourself, about each other, about the world you live in about the situations you’re creating. All of this can come together in this beautiful theatrical experience. Um, you don’t need an audience, you have each other. And it’s just this wonderful medium that allows, it really does
promote learning, it’s wonderful. But it has so many different purposes, and it all depends on who’s doing it, who for whom, and why.

K: Do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas?

D: Typically yes. Um, dance, music, the performing arts in general tend to have a much more liberal than society’s typical standpoint. Um, theatre has always been a little like little nips of.... because you have the musical theatre, San Francisco especially and the musical theatre and the gay community, um, New York has always been more liberal in general, so they’ve always had a little population up there. Um, anytime you get a group of male chorus boys, nine out of ten uh, in concert orchestras, um, if you have male flautist you can kind’ve assume, and it’s horrible the assumptions you can make with the performing arts. And yeah, theatre has always been kind’ve more acceptable because, in part because of the idea of exploration and self discovery because you’re doing this piece and you suddenly discover oh my god, I think I might be gay. Well, the whole point was to discover things about yourself, so how could that be wrong? You know, discovering that you have this viewpoint on life, you know, like well wait, you know you do a play and you decide I think that abortion rights should be different than they are is no different than discovering that you might be gay. It’s no different; it’s just a personal outlook on life that you might find. Anything goes in theatre.

K: Do you think that a play about a person who has homosexual urges but denies them for one reason or another would be important or accepted in theatre?

D: It depends on how it was done and the connotation that was put on the situation. Because again, most of the homosexual community does follow this belief now that you’re either gay or your not. And there are people who are bi. But even people who are bi tend to be, it’s bi serious, it’s the well we’re trying it out in college because you know it’s the hip thing to do. Young women at Maryland were always like they get drunk they could try being lesbian for a night and then next morning they could be, well I was drunk I didn’t know what I was doing if they didn’t like it. Or if they did like it, well, I could do it again. Um, but it would have to be handled very delicately because you know it is a sensitive subject. And there’s been so much, you know, you have like *The Laramie Project* which was you know, popular and important and it was, it really kind’ve brought this to attention especially in the theatre. Where it’s always kind’ve been we know it’s there, it’s been there for hundreds of years, no one really talks about it it’s always kind’ve been, well we know it happens it’s no big deal. Uh, and that really brought the whole issue to light in theatre especially. And having someone explore homosexuality and they find out it’s not really for me, that’s fine, you know, it happens every day on this campus
and in the rest of the world, people say I’m gonna try it this time and then say well you know what, it’s really not for me. I’m not a homosexual.

K: What if it was someone who for religious reasons denied homosexuality?

D: Again, it’s, if you would portray them as being truly homosexual, like if you set them up as truly falling in love with someone else, and then denying that love for religion, um, I think it would put religion in a very paltry light. Um, because, you know, we’ve always had plays where it’s choosing honor over love and duty over love, and suddenly you have religion put up there and religion next to you know, duty to country and honor and it just pales in comparison you know. Cause it’s much harder to make the argument well I’m doing this for my country my patriotism, you know, and especially in this country with patriotism issues, um, that I’m doing this for my country and my love of country and its people, than to say I’m doing this for a book that was written thousands of years ago and was changed and edited a lot over time. Uh, it becomes a lot trickier. To make that work, just to handle it, and again it all depends on how it’s handled and the rest of the story behind it. Yeah.

K: Do you think that artists are elitist?

D: Artists as in any artist, or as in theatre artists in particular?

K: Any artist.

D: I don’t know if elitist is quite the right word, although there certainly are artists that are elitist. Um, but you look at someone like Boal who all his work was about social change, and while there is, it goes back to the whole missionary idea. It’s the idea that our beliefs are right and therefore you should know, if we’re better than you are you should try to be better like us. Artists, okay, it’s hard, okay, the chorus girl in Oklahoma! who is in a couple of the dance numbers, it’s very hard to imagine her being elitist over other people because okay she’s on Broadway, well that’s great, but you’re also having to bust your ass as a waitress eight nights a week. Uh, but I think there’s definitely this idea that because, and it’s even worse in an academic situation, because there’s this idea that well we are academic we are scholars we are learned and therefore our art becomes more. And again it’s a delicate situation because if you present theatre that’s well we’re going to explain this to you because you don’t know so we’re telling you. Then yes, that’s elitism, but if you’re simply laying out there flat and both sides are there and it’s up to the audience to choose then it’s less elitist and it’s more, it becomes a social dialogue with the community.
K: Um, how do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, but any group are
socially classified together? In other words, do you feel that people should be classified
as individuals or groups?

D: Individuals. I despise all labels and I hate them. Our society, western society
especially, loves to group things. We have to have a name for everything, and you know
we have a name for the names of things. You know, we have categories that are names
for categories and we have names for the naming of the categories. And it’s like, you
know what’s the point? Keep it broad we’re all people. Um, you know, race, color,
ethnicity, sexual preferences, religion, gender preferences, um, so much of it is subjective
so that everyone who looks at someone is going to find something different. Um, my
first, I transferred into a public high school from the private Catholic school my freshman
year we had a bald, black principal and the first day we had orientation he picked on me
because I was the new kid and he wanted to get me more out in the open, he liked me a
lot, we just met over the summer. And he said you know, we were talking about being
racially offensive, and he said Mr. White when you first met me what was the first thing
you noticed? And I was like you son of bitch, you set me up for this. And he was like no
come on just tell me, did you notice I was black or bald? And I was like oh sir, I noticed
you were bald. And he was like well David I think you’re just trying to be socially
correct. And I was like no sir, we were outside and the sun was reflecting off of your
head. And we all laughed and he was like okay, I’ll give you that. And it’s the idea that
you really shouldn’t label people. And it’s as soon as you break someone down like that,
you know, we talked a lot about this in Aaron’s class, you’re establishing this hegemonic
structure and as soon as anyone is classified or pointed out or singled out you become a
dysfunctional society.... yeah.

K: Okay, so, you’ve kind’ve already answered this, but do you think that homosexuals
are born that way or do you think it is a choice?

D: Um, I would say 95% of the time you’re born that way. I know there are a lot of
people in this world who are homosexual who don’t come out because of religious or
social fear. Um, there’s a guy that I know who is so he’s very gay and he is so afraid to
come out and he’s called me many times in tears because he knows he is but he won’t
come out because he’s a devout Southern Baptist. And he would be completely denied
not only from his church but from his family. And it’s been horrible for him, and he’s
still fighting with it. And you know you can be gay and you cannot do it for those
reasons, but typically it makes you miserable because you’re not happy.

K: Um, this is a labeling question, but how do you think church-going people of whatever
religion should treat homosexuals and those who agree with homosexuals and vice versa?
D: The same way they treat white people and black people or, I mean, and I'll be honest there's definitely reverse prejudice and racism and sexism or whatever between. Because you know, because homosexuals have been persecuted so long that you do get kind've this very, you know, and actually some people started being scared of homosexuals when they'd have these other types. Because there's definitely labels in the homosexual community too. Because you have this one guy who's flamingly out and is like you know, I'm gay I'm proud so you'd better not oppress me, uh-uh. Yeah we know you are and I'm really glad you're out, but you're not going to turn me gay and all you're doing is making other homosexuals look bad because you're being so obnoxious about it, same way missionaries do, it's just like, be yourself, be happy with who you are, don't worry about spreading it or whatever. Churchgoers, treat others as you want to be treated. You know, do unto others as you would want them to do unto you...in almost every faith actually, so therefore, be yourselves treat them as you treat any other person, judge them as a person, as what they do their actions, not their sexual orientation, not the color of their skin, not their religious beliefs, nothing. Um, homosexuals, it's another classification, they're people. I know lots of homosexuals who are churchgoers. But they're homosexuals. So again it's labeling, it's how do you separate when they're the same group? How does a churchgoing homosexual treat themselves? Well now, it's a matter of semantics, I don't think it's really, it shouldn't be an issue, let's put it that way.

K: And last question, are there any questions you feel I should be asking that I haven't or is there anything else you would like to say?

D: Um, all in all, pretty well-rounded questioning. But If I think of any I will let you know.

K: Okay.

4/23/05
Andy Lehman: Male, age 15, high school student

Kari: First question, do you consider yourself an open-minded person?

Andy: Yes.

K: How?

A: Well I just, I really don't care about who people are as long as they're a good decent person. As long as they don't do drugs have sex, drink all that stuff, I really don't like all that stuff. But I mean as long as they're just I don't know, as long as they're nice and
they’re a good person inside, I don’t have a problem with them I don’t care if they’re black, white, gay, straight, I don’t care who they are, just I’ll get along with them.

K: Okay, do you have any kind of relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

A: Well I am. Well, I’m not openly fully gay yet, but all most close friends know, Kaitlin and Erin know, but I have a gay uncle and a gay aunt and a few good friends at school so yeah.

K: Okay, well you’ve already mentioned a few of these already, but do your friends or relatives deal with homosexuality, you’ve mentioned already a couple of them do, and do they have friends or relationships themselves with people who are openly gay?

A: Well, they probably do, I don’t know if they have friends that are gay, um, I can’t think of anybody off the top of my head, but they wouldn’t have a problem with it, so...

K: Um, what would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

A: Uh, well, since I have a little bit of experience with that if they ever need to talk, I’d be there for them. Or they can talk to my parents if they want to, my parents can be an adult they can talk to if they want to. A lot of kids aren’t going to come out and say they’re gay just because of all the social pressure and stuff, and I mean, yeah it hurts sometimes because I’ve been made fun of sometimes, but I think that’s not important because they’re really immature and I still have all these friends that really do care about me and love me, so I really don’t care or worry about hat stuff, but if they ever needed anything I would be there for them, they could call me anytime they want.

K: Okay, and you’ve already answered this, but have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

A: Uh-huh.

K: Okay, what would you describe as “conventional values?”

A: Um, could you elaborate on that?

K: Um, what comes to your mind, there’s no right answer on this, if you read the term or heard the term “conventional values” what would come to your mind?
A: Um, it just, like what’s right, what’s morally right. Like a lot of people these days, I mean they just look at sex so casual, they’re like oh it’s no big deal, and I don’t understand how they can say that, like in the Bible it says they’re supposed to be married and in love. And like just for pleasure I just don’t understand that. And like with drinking and smoking I don’t really see why people should do that. I mean if you want to drink and smoke when you’re legal age then that’s your choice but I don’t understand why people my age would do that. Um, and just like, just being a good person, a good citizen, just knowing what’s right what’s wrong… not being a total jerk, and oh gosh….

K: I didn’t say these would be easy, and they’re not for anyone, so….

A: Just, whatever is morally right for them, I mean everybody has different beliefs and values but as long as they’re doing what they feel is right, it fluctuates between every person.

K: Okay, do you believe in God?

A: Yes, I do.

K: And what are your beliefs about the Bible?

A: Um, I believe the Bible is a standard for which we should base our lives off of, and I mean our society has changed so much since the Bible is written, and we should look at it and try to learn from it, but I don’t think we should take it word for word. Being gay, the whole thing about that it’s a sin, I don’t believe that, I don’t believe that I’m going to go to hell. I believe in God, I’ve asked for forgiveness of my sins, and I try my hardest to do what’s right. I believe in God and I’m not ashamed to believe in God. But all these people that take the Bible and try to decipher it word for word, I just don’t understand why they do that, the Bible should be something that we go to when we need help to figure out problems or just as a guideline to live our lives.

K: Okay, some people believe that there’s a difference between being a religious person and being a spiritual person. Do you see a difference? Why or why not?

A: Well, my grandmother, she’s a very spiritual lady, she talks about angels and just like, my step-grandfather just passed away so she’s been very hectic, and she’s just like his spirit’s in heaven and he’s having a good time, and I can feel his spirit around me. And religious I think more of, more church type kind’ve scenario, but they are all closely related, so yeah they might be just a little different, but they all come back to the same thing.
K: Okay, do you consider yourself a spiritual person or a religious person or both or neither?

A: Uh, both, um, like at my step-grandfather’s funeral, he like got really bad on Good Friday and he died on Easter. And his funeral was on April Fools Day, and he’s a very joke kind of person. So the atmosphere was just kind’ve funny, not like, just, it was enjoyable. And I kind’ve thought, hey he’s here with us and he doesn’t want us to grieve but to remember all the good times and all the great times we’ve had with him. Um, but them I also believe, just um, the religious aspect of it, like I pray and if I’m in a situation, what’s the right thing to do, what would God want me to do, so um, so yeah I’m both.

K: How would you describe your relationship with God?

A: Well at the moment our church is going through a kind of spiral effect, our old pastor just quit about a year ago, and the one we have, our interim pastor is not that great, so um, uh, not a lot of people come to church now and our youth group has gone drastically down, um, so I haven’t been going lately, and schoolwork is an issue with that too because I’m so busy. But I pray every night, and I’ll ask Him for, if I’m having a rough time I’ll ask Him for a sign or something, not like a miracle, but just a little something, hey you’re with me. And I just if ever I feel just horrible or upset I always know He’s there.

K: Do you believe in moral absolutism? Do you know what I mean by that?

A: No.

K: Um, do you believe that there is absolute truth, there is a standard that deciphers what is right and what is wrong?

A: Um, well again, going with the Bible, the Bible was written a very long time ago and society has changed since then. Um, but there’s a very vague line, like murdering, rape, all that stuff, that is wrong, that’s just something nobody should do, but just little things like drinking and stuff, yeah it’s wrong, but it’s not like drastically wrong where you’re just going to be shunned on life for that, so it’s very, it might be a vague line.

K: Okay, um, do you believe that homosexuality is morally wrong?

A: No. I just, it’s I think God made us who we are, and so if he made us gay, it’s for a reason. I have a lot of girlfriends and they’re very close to me and they come to me for boy troubles and stuff, and I’m not trying to brag but I give very good relationship advice and I’m always that one guy they can always come to if they need anything. And so I
think that’s kind’ve my purpose is to help other people. And I think if I was straight I could still help people but I wouldn’t get that sense of trust with all these friends that I’ve made. But I don’t think it’s morally wrong I just think it’s different people like if you’re black or white, it’s just different traits.

K: Okay, um, how did you come to that conclusion?

A: Well in the sixth grade I kind’ve started wondering if I was gay because I had girlfriends but I didn’t really see anything out of them, and after a certain point I just realized I was, and I went through so much pain, I’d cry every night, I had suicide thoughts, I had to go to a psychiatrist for four or five years, um, but at first I wasn’t sure if it was... maybe I am, but as time went on I realized, well, I still believe in God and I mean, just cause I’m gay doesn’t mean I’m a bad person, just I’m different. So as long as we believe in God and we ask for forgiveness of sins and all that, I don’t see anything wrong with it.

K: Okay, what would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

A: Um, well there’s people who don’t believe in homosexuality, they believe that is a very big sin, so they try to send them to a doctor to try to turn them straight. And I don’t believe in that, I don’t think you should try to change somebody just because they’re not to your standards. Um, lets see what else.... um, just their beliefs about God too, um, there are people that say God’s word is the Bible this is what is written down you cannot sway off from that, you have to stay on that you can’t alter it, can’t change it whatever, so they go around and they try to force people, this is what the Bible says, you have to be like this. You can’t change it you have to be like this or you will go to hell. And again, I don’t really see the point in that. As long as Christianity is God, it’s very open for thought, um, but people try to give their religious beliefs to everyone else, thinking that theirs is the one, everyone else’s laws.

K: What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

A: Um, theatre is just it’s a way of showing what people believe, what people think, how people feel. It’s a great program to express art. I love art in just general. And it’s just a way to show off people’s talents, music, dancing, art, whatever. It’s just a great great program.

K: Okay, do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social areas?
A: Yes. In show choir I’m a lot more comfortable there cause show choir goes along with Broadway and all that stuff and there’s a lot more gay people in Broadway than band. Then I’m not as comfortable talking about that with people cause band people are like don’t talk to me about that it’s nasty. But with theatre I think it’s a lot more open and accepting.

K: Okay, do you think that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them for one reason or another would be important or accepted in the theatre?

A: I think it would be just to show people that it is so hard for a homosexual to be themselves, I mean they have all these thoughts in their heads I mean, am I just a phase, are people going to hate me for it, are my parents still going to love me, am I going to go to heaven? So I think it’s a good way to show people this is what these people go through and they shouldn’t have to go through this, they should just be accepted for who they am, for who they are, and I think theatre is a great way to show that.

K: Um, do you think that artists are elitist?

A: You mean like a leader not a follower?

K: No, elitist, like higher than other people.

A: No I just think they look at things differently like the left side the right side of the brain thing, they see things differently. Like my brother is more athletic, I am more artistic, I can see things and I’m like oh wow that would be really cool. It’s just basically again how they see things, they see a whole different picture, they look outside the box.

K: How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, but any group of people are socially classified together? In other words, do you think that people should be seen as individuals or as social groups like minorities, women, gays, etc.?

A: Well, we have all the social cliques in school, the preps the jocks, the athletic people the goths, it’s I really, again, I don’t see a point in that either, but it’s self segregation. Like in gym all the black people go play basketball and all the white people go do something random. Um, but I don’t think people should be looked at as oh he’s goth or oh she’s poor, he’s black. I don’t look at them from the outside but from the inside, oh that person gave all their money to the poor or wow this person does so much community service. You should look at them like that, not just by the clothes they wear or what they look like on the outside and say you’re that kind of person.

K: Do you think homosexuals are born that way or do you think it is a choice?
A: I think you’re born that way, cause if it was a choice…. if it was a choice I’m not sure I would, I’m pretty sure I would stay that way because there’s so much more variety I guess, cause it’s so much different than the average life. But I think you’re born that way, cause if it’s a choice a lot of people probably wouldn’t have chose it cause it’s just so hard.

K: How do you feel church-going people should treat homosexuals and vice versa?

A: Um, some churches are very closed-minded about it, they’re like you’re gay, don’t come to our church we don’t want you here. Some are like, you believe in God, come on in. I really don’t think there should be feuding between the two groups. If you believe in God, if you believe in Jesus, if you want to go there to learn about Jesus and the forgiveness of your sins, go to church. And the church should let them in, and vice versa, the homosexuals shouldn’t ban churches and say we don’t want you to, some churches don’t believe in homosexuality. It should be a very open agreement between the two.

K: Okay, last question, are there any questions I haven’t asked that you feel that I should be asking, or is there anything else you would like to say?

A: Um, no, your questions are fine, and I think this is a big step for me personally, cause a couple of years ago I would never ever have done anything like this, but now I’m just more accepting of myself, and this is just one of the things that will push me further and just this will make me feel good about myself cause I did this interview and I’m not ashamed of who I am and this is proving to myself that I can do this.

K: Well thank you very much for agreeing to do this because I know these aren’t easy questions to answer.

A: Thank you.

4/24/05
Kathy Wine: Female, age 49, mother of 2

Kari: Do you consider yourself an open-minded person?

Kathy: About certain things.

Kari: Can you expand on that?
Kathy: Um, when it comes to things, um like drugs and alcohol and stuff I’m very closed-minded and there’s no room for deviation from the way I believe. I’m very closed-minded when it comes to my faith, I don’t deviate from that because I firmly believe in what I believe in. Um, I’m open-minded about certain things, but probably a fence rider maybe, cause I could go either way, but if it’s something I firmly believe in I will put my feet down and there’s no changing my mind.

Kari: Do you have any kind of relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

Kathy: No, not that I’m aware of.

Kari: Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality personally or in their relationships?

Kathy: I had one, my brother’s sister-in-law’s husband is supposedly gay and they broke up. And I’ve had some contact with him – he’s a very nice guy.

Kari: What would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

Kathy: That they need to get some counseling first to be sure that they are. Then I’d point out in the Bible where it’s wrong, after they had their counseling, I’d let them go through counseling first, and then work with them after that.

Kari: Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

Kathy: No, oh no.

Kari: What would you describe as “conventional values?”

Kathy: As far as men marrying women and…?

Kari: What comes to your mind when you hear the term “conventional values?”

Kathy: Probably the way Bush, President Bush tries to talk about the unity of marriage is between a man and a woman. Um, conventional values … hmmmm…. That’s the biggest thing that pops into my mind right now. And I’m not really in favor of mixed relationships. I think that it ought to be in the same race.

Kari: Okay, um, do you believe in God?
Kathy: Yes ma’am.

Kari: And what are your beliefs about the Bible?

Kathy: I believe it’s all true. My faith tells me that it’s all true.

Kari: Some people believe that there’s a difference between being a spiritual person and being a religious person. Do you see a difference? Why or why not?

Kathy: No.

Kari: How come?

Kathy: Cause I think to me to be a religious person you have to be spiritual. And spiritual to me is just a feeling of trusting in things that you can’t really see, that you can’t put your hands on but you know they’re there. I don’t see how you could be religious and not be spiritual at the same time. It’s just a feeling that overtakes you. I mean, that’s spirituality in my mind.

Kari: So, do you describe yourself as a religious person or a spiritual person or both?

Kathy: Both.

Kari: And how would you describe your relationship with God?

Kathy: Close. Very close. I talk to Him everyday several times a day.

Kari: Do you believe in moral absolutism?

Kathy: What do you mean by that?

Kari: Absolute truth. That there is a standard that says that this is right and this is wrong and everything else that deviates from it....

Kathy: Boy that’s a tough question. Um, I believe that there are some people who have said that there are absolutes about certain things that I believe there could be gray areas in but I can’t come up with anything off the top of my mind. That’s a tough question Kari! Um, absolute truth... I believe there are absolute truths certainly. The absolute truth that God exists, the absolute truth that it’s better to wait until you’re married to have sex, it’s absolute truth that you know, it’s better not to drink and drive, you know. I mean there
are absolute truths but I think that there are some areas where there are gray areas on some things.

Kari: Okay. Um, do you believe that homosexuality is morally wrong?

Kathy: Yes.

Kari: Why?

Kathy: Morally? Well, it goes back to my spirituality, I can’t separate the two. Because I know that God, God knows it’s wrong, God has told us it’s wrong, and it’s just not natural. It’s tied into my spirituality, I can’t separate the two.

Kari: How did you come to that conclusion?

Kathy: By reading the Bible. And by having my ministers telling me that and searching the Bible and seeing it for myself.

Kari: What would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

Kathy: Um, example of someone forcing their beliefs…. well, um, case in point, I have a next door neighbor and she has a son who is four. When he was one her brother and his wife hired gay people to watch their baby in D.C. A gay guy couple. And they didn’t believe, my next door neighbor didn’t believe it was right to have gay people around him, but yet they brought these gay people down when they would come and visit and they would try to force them into liking these people and force them into talking to them and accepting them, and I think that was definitely forcing their opinion on them. And they started to kind’ ve like these guys, but then all the sudden she stepped back from it and realized this was wrong and so she totally got back away from it again, but that was something that was forced on them.

Kari: What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

Kathy: Oh, many things. Um, to make you laugh, to make you cry, to make you think. To give you, it’s history, you know. I mean you can go see a play and you can go back in time a hundred years, or you can go forward a hundred years and see what you think it’s gonna be like. I think it’s just to stimulate your mind, and sometimes not so much to stimulate your mind but just to relax and laugh and get away from your worries.

Kari: Do you think homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas?
Kathy: Um, I’m not really close to a lot of people in theatre to know that. I think as far as if you want to combine theatre with Hollywood I would say certainly, yes. I definitely think it’s more accepted in those arenas.

Kari: Why do you say that?

Kathy: Because I don’t think a lot of the people in that situation, number one I think maybe forty percent or so don’t have the values and don’t have the relationship with God to know that it’s wrong, and I think the other ones in Hollywood are too afraid to speak against it.

Kari: Um, do you think a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in theatre?

Kathy: It would be accepted by as many people as it would be declined by as many people, do you know what I’m saying? You know, I think that people that thought it was really important to show their children that there are people who think that way but are trying to fight it, and it’s a good thing to fight it. I think it’s something that could be used in schools certainly, especially at James River, you know they have the homosexual societies down there now. I think it could be, I think if you did a play about homosexuality being accepted I think equally as many people would come because I think it’s very divided the way people feel, so I think you’d still have equal people.

Kari: Okay, do you think that artists are elitist?

Kathy: Not all of them, not all of them. I think certainly in any profession you can find people who are elitist. I don’t think all of them are. I think some of them are very humble and very down to earth. I don’t look at all of them as being that way.

Kari: How do you think people, specifically homosexuals, but any group of people are socially classified together? In other words do you think people should be seen as individuals or as social groups like minorities, gays, women, whatever?

Kathy: I’m split and divided on that too. I think that you know, it’s fine to group people men, women, when you’re doing censuses of course, blacks, Caucasians. But I don’t think that ... um, would I want to have dinner with a lot of mixed races, do I want to sit down with a lot of gay people, no. I mean, I don’t want to be exposed to that I don’t want to be around it at all. Um, I mean, not unless I thought I could help them. But to, you know, to be in a social situation it does not bother me to be in a situation with a lot of
different ethnic backgrounds. But if you took me to a place where 90% of the people were gay I would not be happy.

Kari: Do you feel that homosexuals are born homosexual, or do you feel that it is a choice?

Kathy: I haven’t looked into that enough to know an answer for that, to say for sure. Um, because there are certain babies that are born that I’m sure you’re aware of that they have to decide whether they want them to be male or female. I think in those cases, yeah, there can be some definite problems with that. I think a lot of times it’s more people who are trying to get noticed or make a statement in society. You know, just try and be different. I think more often than not it’s not something you’re born with.

Kari: How do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who agree with homosexuality and vice versa?

Kathy: I don’t think that church people should shun them, but I think you’ve gotta be real careful with someone if you can’t help them and they’re dead set and they’re not going to change their mind and you’ve worked with them, I think you have to be real careful with what kind of message you’re going to send to them if you keep trying, woo, how do I put this? Do you know what I’m trying to say? Um, I don’t think you should shun them, I really don’t. But I think that they need to clearly know where you stand from the beginning on their lifestyle and that you don’t accept it and that you don’t want to be a part of that. I think you need to be a little tolerant because you’re trying to help them, and I think they need to be tolerant if you don’t appreciate their lifestyle because their lifestyle is not a normal lifestyle. It’s not something that normal people do and that sounds bigoted. Um, it’s just not something that has ever been from the beginning of time that we’ve known about you know, I just, I think they need to be more tolerant than we do of them because we are not forcing ourselves by being a man and wife being around them forcing ourselves on them, but their way of life is something that is not accepted and it should not be accepted, but ooh, that’s bad, ooh boy, Kari that’s a toughie. Um, do I want my children hanging around gay people? No. Because I don’t want them to ever feel comfortable with it. Because it’s not something that I want them to ever accept, and I think the more … you have to be a strong person to be around it and not eventually accept them for what they are. Because you can’t ever do that, that would be like accepting a friend who is a habitual person who goes out on her husband all the time or vice versa. You can’t ever accept them like that because it’s wrong and it’s wrong of you to never try to show them the right way. So, you know, I’ve had friends that I’ve had to back off from because they were running around on their spouses and I couldn’t take it, I told them it was wrong and they wouldn’t accept it and I backed away from them. You know I just um, does that answer your question? Okay.
Kari: Last question, are there any questions you feel I should be asking that I haven’t or is there anything else you would like to say?

Kathy: I do think that anything that you could do to try to get the openness out of schools, I do not think ... college is different, but I do not think high school is a place where this should be openly accepted. Or in any school below college. It shouldn’t be accepted in college, but when you get to college is different, different ballpark. But I do not think these kids should be allowed to have these societies, they have floats in parades. I don’t, I mean anything that theatre or anybody could do to get rid of that I think would be wonderful, cause it just it absolutely bothers me to death when I see that. They had a parade down in front of James River High School and they had the gay and lesbian float and I’m going I can’t believe that this is so open today. And I don’t want Lauren around that, I don’t want Meggie around it, I don’t want Brooke or any of the kids around that. You know and I just don’t think it ought to be an openly accepted society. Lock me up and put me away... (Laugh).

Kathy: .... You know, um, talking about Donnie, I was just saying I’ve never been approached by a friend of my who I already loved who told me they were gay, so would I hate them or dislike them because they came up, no I would probably still love them very much. So I’m talking from a perspective of a person who has never had that happen to them. And I was talking about my brother’s sister-in-law’s ex husband who has admitted he’s gay. Um, do I still like him, yeah, I like him a lot. Am I going to be mean to him? No. Because there’s not a mean bone in that guy’s body. You know he’s gone to see my dad more than I have since my dad’s been sick. So it’s just, I don’t hate gay people by any means. I feel sorry for them cause I think some of them are truly mixed up. But do I want to be seen with a whole lot of gay people, no. But again, if my best friends came up and told me they were gay I don’t know what I’d do, cause I couldn’t just not love them anymore. So it’s a very sticky situation.

Kari: It is.

4/27/05
Jonathan Becker: Male, age 41, theatre professional, business owner

Kari: First question, do you consider yourself an open-minded person?

Jonathan: Yes.

K: Why?
J: Um, uh, I think because I’m able to see, uh, I’m able to see things from a variety of different perspectives, and understand people’s approaches to different ideas, different subject matter. In part because of my upbringing and the background I have, and in part because of the overwhelming amount of, sort of absurd amount of education that I’ve had. It allows me to you know, sometimes in classes for example, I have an exercise for myself that I’ll choose a point of view that I don’t agree with to argue that aspect of it to make sure I understand my own point of view thoroughly. And also I think as an artist, uh, dedicated my life to work in the theater, uh, collaborating is a large part of what we do, and in order to collaborate with people you have to understand their perspective, where they’re coming from, and how they process thoughts, so I think I’m able to understand people’s points of view. Now, that’s not always to say I agree with them, but I can understand why they might have their point of view, their thoughts.

K: Do you have a relationship of any kind with anyone who is openly gay?

J: A relationship like as in a long-term relationship?

K: Any kind of relationship, friendship or …

J: Oh yeah, many. Many friendships with people who are openly gay.

K: Do you have, this is a bit repetitive, but do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality either personally or in their relationships with others?

J: Yeah, many friends, no relatives, but many many friends.

K: Okay, what would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

J: Uh, what would I say to them? Uh, well, um, my counselor training would have me ask them why they thought those things and then listen to their responses and based on what I know of homosexuality being a gay man myself I would be able to say to them you know, whether or not you know, how, why they’re feeling these things is to whether or not that is an accurate description of who they are. Chances are if they’ve gotten to the point of confiding that to somebody else then that is in fact the case. It is a tremendous journey for someone to take to actually get to the point where they actually can share that with someone else depending on of course their family background and whether or not their families are overly religious and if they come from a conservative culture or um, it could be more difficult to confide that in anyone.

K: Um, have you dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?
J: Yeah, um, I’ve dealt with that my entire life. Uh, in retrospect, I don’t think we think about these things as a young person, but in retrospect you know, as we go back and we review the way we feel about, uh, about life and our reactions to things and our interactions with other people, my first physical attractions and sexual feelings were towards other males, at the time boys because I was 10 or 11 years old. Um, and uh, and then throughout, you know, throughout college, throughout high school and college, uh, the always gravitating in terms of my physical attractions towards that direction. Uh, for me the journey of accepting that in myself was a very long one in large part because I had no cognitive model for uh, for relationships between men, as well as the fact that I really wanted for myself the type of upbringing that I had with a dining room table in which there were two parents and kids and the extended family that I had was the experience growing up, and family is very important to me, um, uh, and so I wanted all of those things for myself. And so for me, what I did was to marry what I did, and so I never really had to confront in myself those feelings directly. And when, when they would surface in a very visceral way, when you meet somebody who you’re very attracted to and there’s that moment of connection that’s so exhilarating and electric, when that would happen for me I would turn in a different direction from it. And so I led a celibate existence until I was 35. Um, and then um, had my first long term relationship with a woman because we were very much in love with each other, except that I was not physically attracted to her in any way. Um, and for me that relationship was also a lot about what I wanted for myself in terms of who I am as a person. And so throughout that relationship I felt like I was lying everyday to this person. And so it was very, it kept a distance between us that undermined the successful parts of our relationship, um, of those feelings. Um, and also I was very open with her from the very beginning of our relationship about those aspects of myself. Um, but we decided eventually after ten years of making ourselves miserable to draw an end to that and try to move on. Um, and so it wasn’t until after that relationship that I began to pursue the idea of trying to develop a romantic relationship with a man. Coming out, being out for me is a very recent thing. I didn’t come out until I was 40. And I didn’t have the religious pressures from my family, um, my family is very liberal, uh, very open-minded about many things so for them it was no big deal. Um, and certainly I work within a community of people that um, that is very tolerant. It’s a community full of true human beings who are able see all, to see everyone as a human being without judgment in many ways. So why it took me so long to come out in that way is a mystery on one level and on another level not so much, because much of my not pursuing my sexuality had to do with what I wanted based on ideas that society gives to me and say’s you know, this is who you should be as opposed to be who you are. Um, if I could choose, I would not choose to be gay um, in the current contemporary culture and society in which we live because that society says to me that I am human garbage and teaches me to hate myself. So it’s a constant struggle to live without anger and to live within a uh, in a comfortable way. Now that I have um, now
that I have moved into a different phase of my life in which I feel more complete as a
dhuman being but in which it becomes much more difficult to live outwardly in the society
I am in, um that who I am ultimately becomes a political issue as opposed to a human
issue. And that makes for different struggles in life.

K: Okay, um, what would you describe as “conventional values?”

J: Conventional values?

K: What comes to mind when you hear that phrase?

J: Conventional values ... (long pause) ... it's really sort of huge .... I don't know when
we talk about values, um, societal values, uh, being kind comes to mind, uh, being
tolerant, being, uh, working hard, uh, and um, giving back to society. Um, uh, (long
pause), um, I think we, in our society we talk an awful lot about how family is so
important and yet there's no aspect of our society that seems to value family in terms of
demands that employers make and the kind of way that we live now as opposed to, like I
would say the family was truly a value 25 or 30 years ago in our society. I grew up in a
family where family was valued, the relationship to family was valued. And time was
taken to make that happen across the board not only with immediate family, but with
extended family as well. But when I talk about family in terms of values I don't talk, you
know, family is, family means a lot of things to me. I have a blood family, those people
who I'm related to genetically, and I have also a family of people who in many ways
know me better than my immediate family does and who I consider closer to me as sisters
or brothers than my own brother is, who I don't know very well, and yet is a fabulous
human being. He's the world's nicest guy I just don't know him very well. So, um, values
... It's I think, there are values, you know I've lived in many places all my life I've lived
in Europe and I've lived in many different places in this country, and I had a Christian
upbringing, I was baptized in a Christian church and as an adult my spiritual convictions
have become larger than an organized religion in a way, and so it's a difficult question
for me to answer. It's also a question that's worded in a way that politicians talk about
these things in our contemporary society. The politicians are always talking about them
from one religious dogmatic perspective, at least right now in terms of the conservative
tone that politics are taking. So it falsifies the issue as a human issue for me because
human values, um, if we look cross culturally and across all religions we find
commonality about them all, we find a bigger truth with a capital “T” than we do when
we're only looking at one dogmatic interpretation of a religious teaching. And so for me
it's difficult to answer that question in a very succinct or specific way because for me
things are human issues when we talk about values, and uh, you know it's the value of
life is an important aspect of us as human beings. Because value of like, that's a huge
thing when you say that. You know if we look at the Ten Commandments, for example,
we find inherent in that values that are shared cross-culturally in many different ways and yet they’re open dogmatically to pushing them in certain directions, if we don’t understand the whole human condition as it is spiritually as well as otherwise, because politics is false, it’s temporal, it’s whimsy, … um, so uh, I don’t know, that’s my answer to that question.

K: Okay. I didn’t say these would be easy.

J: (Laugh).

K: Do you believe in God?

J: Yes, I do.

K: What are your beliefs about the Bible?

J: The Bible for me is uh, it’s an ancient text, um, that was written by many men, um, who were as best as they could trying to communicate their understanding of spiritual values. And that uh, I believe it very much to be allegorical in most contexts, um, it’s also a document that exists in many aspects as directorial teaching to the masses to help them be more successful in life based on the times that they were living in, and those are transferable to today, but they have to be seen in the context of which they were given to the people in those times, because it was written by men. Because putting God and the Bible in the same phrase for me is a little difficult because God didn’t write the Bible, men wrote the Bible. And um, uh, and we know as human beings that any time we begin to communicate something even that we’ve experienced directly we’ve immediately interpreted it and put our own personal values into it, and that immediately changes it into something that is ours instead of something that exists as something greater in the world. And so, uh, they don’t really go hand in had for me, the Bible and God, because it would also discount all of the other great writers of truth who have walked the earth who aren’t included or mentioned in the Bible uh, and who brought the word of God to their own people and their own cultures in the times in which they were living.

K: Some people believe there’s a difference between being spiritual and being religious. Do you see a difference?

J: I do. Um, religion, it’s really all about semantics in the end, but for me when we talk about religious or religion we are plugging ourselves into being a member of an organization and by being a member we have to follow its rules and its guidelines which in many cases is closed. Um, that they cut off the opportunity for the true answering of questions, that when a question can’t be answered it has a nebulous response that cuts off
the ability to answering, truly finding an answer to that question. Um, and being religious in terms of that religion attaches to a dogmatic way of living one’s life. It actually, I think, being religious makes life easier because um, because it codifies a set of rules that if I follow these rules then everything will be all right, I’ll be accepted into the kingdom of heaven in a religious sense, in the Christian religious sense. And for me leading a spiritual life, for example for me as much as I can possibly do that I try to make each day and each act as an act of worship. I would say that I am wholly unsuccessful at that, but that is the objective, as opposed to going to church on Sunday. And then my pursuit in life is to understand what my, what that spiritual path is and trying to answer the questions that arise in such a way that I am constantly becoming better, if that makes sense, so that um, because that, that would be the quest. Otherwise you have to sort of ignore it entirely as an agnostic might, and that doesn’t work for me cause that doesn’t make any sense to me.

K: This may be a little repetitive as well, but do you consider yourself a religious person or a spiritual person or both or neither?

J: Spiritual.

K: How would you describe your relationship with God?

J: (Long pause). I don’t think based on the way that I believe and feel about things that I have a relationship with God simply because it’s unattainable to have a personal relationship with God given that God is other than myself and is so much other that I can attain to be the best of me, and I can reach for that, but to enter into a direct relationship with God is not a possible option. So the answer to that is very much connected to how I understand the universe to be constructed.

K: Okay. Do you believe in moral absolutism?

J: Moral absolutism?

K: That there is absolute truth that dictates what is right and what is wrong.

J: Um, yes, I do. Otherwise where are we, and everything is possible. I can run across the street and murder somebody. That said, yes, that is true, but I also don’t believe that there is any human being living who can say what all of these things are because that would connotate that they had a total understanding of the human condition on a spiritual level, which I don’t think is possible for any human being.

K: Do you believe that homosexuality is morally wrong?
J: I do not.

K: Why?

J: I don't think that that would be a possible option. One because it's an erroneous interpretation of Biblical teaching if you look at it as an ancient text. It's in error um, to see that as an option. And um, uh, and then it would discount the other hundreds of cultures across our planet that don't see it as morally wrong, so does that mean that if we are not a Christian then as human beings we are trash? I don't think so. And also, I know that I am a very moral human being that um, and uh, um, and that I can't change that about myself. So what does that mean then? That would mean that I should commit suicide, which is what some of the very fundamentalist Christian conservative groups do to their gay youth. They make them hate themselves enough until they kill themselves. Or at least that is the outcome of what would be good intentions. Um, but it's nothing that I can change about myself, because if I could change it I would say that I would. It would make my life a whole lot easier, um, given the culture and society that I live in. But I can't because it's not a psychological condition, it's not something that can be changed, I can't change the way I think, because that still won't change who I am at the deepest core of my being, and sexuality is a huge part of, uh, it's connected to our spiritual self. And also as a gay man, I can't live my life thinking that I'm an aberration, that would be crazy, then I would have to go jump off a bridge. And uh, um, and also I just don't think that in a modern society, that a thinking, a truly thinking, intelligent human being can come to the conclusion that is in fact absolutely the case. Based on everything we know based on the past hundred years of religious study, um, scientific study, uh, and even where we begin to observe, and this is how I answer a lot of questions um, in terms of spiritual versus material, is that if we can find things reflected around us in creation that say to us, that, cause here's where the truth lies, when we see all of creation behaving in one way on a material level we can assume that there's something behind that spiritually, that the material is a reflection of the spiritual. And there's absolutely nothing that would indicate any immorality of homosexuality. Um, from that perspective, or scientific perspective either. It is something that is only connected to one particular dogmatic religious point of view, and when we buy into that 100% we're then unable to see the other things that exist around it. So no, my answer to that question is no, I don't see anything wrong with it.

K: Okay, and you may already have answered this, but how did you come to that conclusion?

J: Well, that is my, I think I've already answered that.
K: Yeah, I do too. What would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

J: Um, changing laws to dictate to people how they should live. Uh, in Texas they’re tearing children away from families right now. Uh, because they just changed their laws and now they’re tearing children away from families that they’ve been living with for years. I would uh, in referencing an online conversation here at the university last year, telling people they will burn in hell is a forcing of belief on someone else. Uh, standing in judgment of other people is a way to force your beliefs on them in a subversive way. Uh, I feel spiritually that we have ourselves to deal with. It’s very much how I teach, trying to come into the class each day as a new day dealing with that student and that day regardless of my personal feelings about that student working with them always as I work with the other students within their work. And I try to reflect that in my life as well so that regardless of what I know of this other person we co-exist as human beings together uh, without judgment of the other and that what we believe spiritually or what our religious practices are are not important to the interaction of human beings. And that each one of us has our own spiritual path to walk and we will find what we need to find in the end, or we won’t. And as long as societies we maintain, as you mentioned before, a moral outlook that keeps us from killing each other and you know, that the laws that we set up in our society allow us the freedom to walk our paths separately and that we can live out our lives in that way without harming others, then that is the way things should progress. Did I answer the question?

K: I think so.

J: Okay.

K: What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

J: Oh, wow, um, well it depends on the culture and society in which it, um, it is. I think theatre is by its very nature, um, uh, a political forum, in many ways. Because first I think all artists create in some way out of a response to the world. They’re either asking questions or they’re angry or they want to put their thoughts out there so people will see them. Um, and this is the same for painters and sculptors as it is for music and theatre people as well. Um, you know, theatre is for us in our culture and our society it is entertainment. Um, there’s a whole aspect of it that is entertainment, and yet some of that entertainment becomes political, or has a political bent to it. The musical Chicago is a very political musical in terms of how it’s, you could look at it as dealing with women’s issues in a political way, you could emphasize that as a director if you want to, it’s there in the play. Um, theatre I think is, it is a forum for conversation, it is something that should be more than entertainment. It is about the human condition, and you can’t have
theatre without looking at the whole human condition. It’s a celebration of, uh, of human
interaction and of human beings, and you must celebrate it all in order to be human
beings. Um, because you can’t have a play with a villain and have the actor that’s playing
the villain not celebrate the villain and all the aspects of the villain, otherwise we don’t
believe in it. Cause the villain doesn’t see himself as a villain, um, he sees himself as the
person in the right. And that’s why I think theatre training is good for everybody because
it allows us to see things from a different perspective. He isn’t right, you know. Uh, if
he’s truly a villain he’s not standing in a place where he’s not a productive member of
society, we couldn’t see Hitler as ever anything but a villain, um, but he believed in what
he was doing, clearly, how else would he have been able to do it? Um, uh, I’m sounding
like a Quaker. Um, uh, what’s the question? I lost my train of thought.

K: What is the purpose of theatre?

J: I think it’s to celebrate the human condition. Um, to inspire discussion, to inspire
thought. Like we wouldn’t be having this interview right now if Tony Kushner had not
written Angels in America. Um, it is a play that has changed the fabric in terms of how it
began a discussion. A very important discussion. And for many years it made things
better for us all as human beings, and now we’re swinging in a direction that is very
unfortunate and will be unfortunate for everybody. Um, but the same sort of swinging
happened right before the emancipation also, when people sort’ve realized that slavery
was a heinous thing, because the Bible also tells us that slavery is okay. And uh, and this
is one of the things that I don’t quite understand about the conservative right is the
picking and choosing of what’s moral and what’s not. And the ignoring of one thing and
grabbing hold of another. And theatre, and that’s where theatre can become important. It
can put both of those things in front of an audience and in a non-judgmental way, if it’s
well written, it can allow the audience to respond as the audience would respond as
opposed to telling the audience what to think.

K: Do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in the theatre than in other social
arenas?

J: Um, I think as a community it is because as artists, um, and I think it’s not just in
theatre in terms of artistic expression, I think in music and the visual arts also, because as
artists it is our job to explore the human condition and in exploration there comes an
understanding of it, and when we understand it then there is an acceptance, uh, and I
think also because, uh, because I think a lot of, uh, gay people, if they have an artistic
tendency, they gravitate towards, towards an environment of the theatre, because in their
daily lives they have to perform a role where they’re constantly creating something that
they are not. I taught myself how to move like a man, for example, “like a man” in terms
of how we see that culturally, um, as a young person. And so we’re always performing
something and looking for places where we can put that into practice. And I think so, in
the artistic community, I don’t think there are more gay people in the artistic community
than there are outside of the artistic community, it’s just that they live openly there. Um,
because statistically we know, statistically we know that there’s a very large gay
population in our country, well everywhere in the world, and um, it’s just in the theatre
that people live in a more open way. And they’re willing to state their opinions in a very
open way as well.

K: Okay, um, do you think that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but
denies them for one reason or another would be important or accepted in the theatre?

J: Yeah, I think that’s very true. I did for 30 years. Um, uh, as long as the play comes
from a point of, as long as it’s coming from a place where we see the human being in the
struggle, and whether that human being decides to accept that or not is neither here or
there in terms of the outcome of the play. As long as the struggle was depicted in a truth
filled way then I think that the theatre community would have no problems with that.

K: Okay, do you think artists are elitist?

J: I think everybody is elitist. Yeah, I think everybody is elitist; all factions of human
society are elitist. Um, are artists elitist? I guess. I would just prefer to hang around them,
which I guess makes me elitist. Um, because what motivates them is very different from
what motivates other people. Um, and there’s a vibrancy about artists that’s not always,
and there’s a tolerance within the artistic community that exists, that doesn’t exist
elsewhere in society, in most religions actually. Um, that, and I think that’s why a lot of
people gravitate towards the theatre as young people, because it’s a place where they can
be accepted. Many people get into theatre in high school because of that, you’ll find that
drama club has all the misfits. And it grows from there. The misfits go on to have their
careers in the theatre, and because they were outcasts to begin with they have learned to
be more accepting of everybody on a greater scale.

K: How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, but any social group of
people are classified together? In other words, do you think that people should be
classified as individuals ....

J: I’m really irritated with the whole social group thing. Um, I, because we’ve grown to a
point in our society and culture that we never talk about things as human issues anymore.
Um, uh, that it’s always gay versus straight or Christian versus non-Christian or men
versus women or black versus white. And so we, in addressing the problems that we have
as human beings in terms of how we interact in that way, um, we perpetuate what we’re
trying to solve. Because we don’t address it as a human condition. Um, we don’t address
it as human beings interacting together. When a black person and a white person have an argument it’s immediately racial, whether it is or not. Um, simply because of that. And you know, it’s very interesting having lived in Europe and lived away from all of the tensions that exist in the States here, um, certainly the Europeans have their own tensions and their own racial problems within their own country. But when you’re not aware of them and you’re interacting within a cosmopolitan environment, um, suddenly the fact that things become more human is really a relief. You know, I have a number of Nigerian friends where it never occurs to me that they’re black. Yet when I’m here in the states and I’m with black Americans there’s always that thing, that I’m white, they’re black. But with the gay straight issue doesn’t really become an issue until people bring to the fore what their sexuality is. And a lot of gay people, um, when they come out, um, everything is about their being gay, because it’s the only way they can identify with themselves based on the way society treats them. So that is what they become. They become a gay person, and everything is about being gay. On the other hand, nobody notices when heterosexuals are constantly being heterosexual in the same way a gay person is being openly gay. Because it is what we would consider normal so we don’t notice it as much, unless we belong to that faction of society that is suppressing all sexual feelings and all sexuality, in the same way that the Puritans did, um, by pushing away that aspect of being a human being. Then it becomes really obvious. But no, it irritates me, the factionalizing of society.

K: Do you believe that homosexuals are born homosexual or is it a choice?

J: Um, well I probably already answered that. Uh, no you are gay or you are not gay there’s no choice involved. The whole sexual preference phrase is a misnomer. You don’t get the opportunity to choose. Um, and I know this from personal experience. I can’t choose to be the other, and I have a relationship with a woman in which we were both desperately in love with each other to prove it. Um, could we have lived out our lives together as a couple? Sure I guess. But it wouldn’t have erased the fact that I am physically attracted to men. Um, and that would have always been in our relationship. And I would not have been able to fulfill that passionate aspect of a relationship with my partner that exists between heterosexual couples because it’s not part of my makeup. There’s nothing I can do about that. And recent scientific studies would show us that that is in fact the case. So um, you know, when we start mixing science and religion we always pick and choose what we want to believe and what we don’t want to believe, um, it’s only in the last 15 to 20 years that Galileo was actually pardoned by the Catholic Church for suggesting that the Earth revolves around the sun, and not vice versa. You know, we ignore what we want to ignore until we just simply can’t ignore it any longer. I think these beliefs come about when there’s a lack of understanding based on personal experience. I know that my sister used to always make comments about gay people this or gay people that because she didn’t know any gay people, or at least she didn’t know
that there were gay people around her. And uh, I don’t know how we can believe it otherwise if we actually open our minds to look at it from all perspectives. It’s the same way I feel about belief in God. I don’t know how agnostics can possibly do it because all the evidence that we have, empirical or otherwise points to existence of a higher power. So, and in the same way for me, I don’t see how at this point we’re still arguing that point of view. It just doesn’t make sense.

K: Two more questions. How do you think, and this is a labeling question I guess, but how do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and vice versa?

J: Well, I think I probably already answered that question in terms of how I feel about dealing with the human issue. But when you say church-going, you know, what does that mean? Does that mean Jewish, does that mean Christian, does that mean Hindu, does that mean Islam? What does that mean? I think we should all treat each other like human beings. Um, when we stop treating each other like human beings, we wind up at war. We wind up saying I’m right and you’re wrong. We wind up by doing science experiments on other human beings because we don’t see them as viable human beings, you know, and, you know, there’s a very radical knee-jerk part of me that I have to keep constantly putting away, especially in the current political climate, you know, with all the laws that are being passed concerning homosexuality, and I just wonder at what point, you know, we talk about our freedom of speech laws and how we can’t, how it’s not possible for us to squelch pornography which is incredibly destructive in our society. Um, uh, because if we squelch that, where do we stop? And I look at all these laws that are being passed now that are hateful and mean against the homosexual and gay population of our country, which is a huge huge population of people. At what point do we stop? At what point do we not because what Nazi Germany because, and start doing science experiments on homosexuals because they’re not seen as viable human beings? Um, I think we should treat each other as human beings, and um, I know it’s also very difficult when we believe something to be so true, you know, for example to say that, it’s okay for a gay person to raise a child. Um, while we believe being gay is evil we’re going to say no that’s not okay. You know, and what’s always interesting to me is that most of the gay people I know, not all of them but most of them, are what I would consider to be true human beings. They are tolerant, they are full of love, they are responsible, they are kind. And that’s not; those are not words that I would use to describe many of the Christian people that I know, and certainly not the current political movement that is happening in our country.

K: Okay, last question. Are there any questions you think I should be asking that I have not, or is there just anything you would like to say before we end?

J: No, I can’t think of anything off the top of my head.
K: I think I have one more question based on what you just said.

J: Sure.

K: Do you think, um, and there may be no right answer to this, but do you think that all gay people or the majority of gay people would define being gay as you have defined it?

J: Well, yeah, I mean...

K: I guess what I’m really asking is, do you think there are some people who are defining themselves as gay who are using it as a political...

J: No, that I don’t think. Because the reason it’s become a political issue is not because of the gay community in many ways. It is and it isn’t. Um, because for example, uh, gay partners, if the person that you’re in love with gets in a car accident and gets taken to the hospital as the life partner, you’re not permitted legally to go into the intensive care unit to hold that person’s hand while they die, because you’re not considered their family, right? Because the way we’ve set up in this country in a way that has not separated church and state in terms of the way we view marriage. Marriage is a legal term and yet it’s also connected to religious practices. And that’s what the argument is right now in the political arena. And the problem is that the people aren’t able to separate the two. Because what the gay community is asking for is to be treated the same way legally in terms of taxation and property rights and all that sort of thing, as heterosexual couples are. I don’t think people become gay to become political. I think they become political because they’re gay and they have had, because as a gay male I don’t have the same civil liberties that you have. I can be fired from my job because of my sexuality and have no protection from that. Um, I can’t serve on the military, for example, if I want to. I can’t in the state of Virginia I can’t own property with my partner because I can’t get married, because the laws say I can’t get married. And there are several tiers of laws that are even in their wording are very mean, so I don’t think that’s the case. I think, you know, the misnomer is, you know, in today’s society and culture, a lot of young people experiment for a while with sexuality. And that’s not to be confused with deciding to be gay. Because um, that is something that you are or are not, and if you’ve had homosexual relations in the past and you’ve gone on to have a monogamous couple relationship with a woman who you are both physically and emotionally and spiritually connected to and attracted to then you’re not gay. There’s a difference.

K: I’m just trying to define the word because I know how many words in our society cause controversy because they are being looked at from two completely different perspectives.
J: Right, and it often becomes about semantics. Because there is gay, which is not to be confused with bisexual, which is not to be confused with transgendered. For instance, I'm a gay man, and I'm really glad that I'm a man. I like being a man. Everything about being a man I like. I don't see myself as a woman, as feminine. And yet there are those who are transgendered who are clearly women incarnated in a male body. Why that happens we don't have answers for yet, but they are clearly transgendered. And some take the step of having the medical change made. Um, so that the plumbing parts match who they truly are. And if look at these men or these women, because there are also women, if you look at them at a glance when they are walking down the street even before they have the operation, you would assume they were women. Until you found out otherwise. Um, and that's a totally different thing than being gay. I think gay men especially tend to push on the gay factor of things, especially when they first come out because they are exploring the freedom, and also it identifies them as part of a group, because we have to be part of a group in order to be something culturally.

K: Which kind've makes it sad that the family has stopped being the group that you are a part of.

J: That's right, and that's a big indication of the whole, my feeling about it is that it's really the result of a capitalist culture. Our material wealth and our social standing has become more important than anything else, and so the family has completely dissolved. Um, but that's another discussion, um, uh, I think that what happens sometimes is that the gay community pushes on political issues much stronger in some cases to make a point. And uh, and I think in terms of our judicial system, we have to in order to make laws. And that's what this current gay marriage thing is about. It's about making it acceptable to be who you are in society and um, and to find a way to define that in legal terms with out threatening religious beliefs.

K: And what they teach their children. I think that has more to do with it in some places than in others.

J: Right.

K: What is allowed to be taught in my child's school is one of the more volatile issues, I think.

J: It is, and that's always been an issue in our country because of the fundamentalist perspective. We're still doing the whole evolution thing, as opposed to creationism. And um, that's you know, it's very difficult in a secular society, because we are a secular society. The reality is that the Christian fundamentalist is in the minority in terms of the
actual population of the students who go to school. Not everywhere, certainly like in the south and the southern states and certain states it’s still in the vast majority, but in many other parts of the country it’s just not. And so, um, and so to create a secular environment in our schools it’s really, it’s a challenge, because if you believe so deeply in one thing as absolutely right, then what’s the solution to that? Obviously the solution to that is private schools. If you can’t, if what we know to be true on a level that is uh, overall acceptable to human society as a whole, not just our country, if you don’t agree in that on a religious point of view, and accept the financial burden that that is. Or you open them up, you teach them what you would teach them at home and you open them up to all those other things in the world. Because they’re going to have questions about that anyway, and they need to ask those questions. And if they then come to a conclusion that is the same as yours then that’s terrific, and if they come to another conclusion that is different than yours then you have to let them go, you know, you have to let them do that. Um, that’s part of the whole growing thing, it’s part of the human quest that allows each human being to be that individual that they are. And um, that’s something that we do culturally in our society, it’s not something that many cultures do anywhere.

K: Well, thank you.

J: Yeah.

4/27/05
Anonymous: Male, age 32, graduate theatre student, professional theatre artist

Kari: First of all, do you consider yourself an open-minded person?

Anonymous: I do, yes.

K: Why?

A: Um, I consider myself that because of, I think, the way I sort’v accept people’s lifestyles being different than my own in the different places that I’ve lived and the different people I’ve encountered. I make an effort to be accepting and open, um, I mean of course, sometimes you can fail and not be aware of whether you’re being open or not, but to be actively trying to be open I guess is important, so that’s why I consider myself an open-minded person.

K: Do you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

A: I do, um, I’m thinking of Michael, Michael Hatton right off the bat. Um, I’m trying to think of other people that I’ve known from school, um, there’s about three or four people
that I went to school with and that I’m still mostly friends with, mostly acquaintances instead of really good friends ….

K: Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality either personally or in their relationships?

A: What was the question?

K: Do you have any friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality either personally or in their relationships? That one may be kind’ve repetitive…

A: What do you mean by deal with homosexuality?

K: They either are gay or have friends or people that they know are gay?

A: In my family, no, and friends I would say probably no. I mean, I do, I have friends that I know of are gay, but most people that my family associates with are not, unless they’re completely unaware of it.

K: What would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

A: Um, well I guess it depends on who it is and sort’ve how the situation came up, but I would be okay with it. Um, there’s people that I’ve been like, that I’ve known, like one friend that I knew when I was in Vegas, like everybody knew that he was gay except for him, and then I was out of touch with him for a while and then he came to visit me in New York and he was like, Oh I’m gay now. And I was like great, you’re so much happier. Um, so and I you know, and he had actually asked me once you know, what if I came out and told you I was gay and I was like I’d be fine, I’d be happy with it.

K: Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

A: I think probably when I was younger, like going through puberty, and like early on like around 14 or 15 when you start to, you know, wonder about yourself and how you might be different, and you start to think you know, maybe I am, may be I’m not. But it never sort’ve seized on my attention span or like sort’ve shaped who I was, because like, you know, just thoughts.

K: Okay, what would you describe as “conventional values?”

A: Conventional values?
K: Yeah, what pops into your head when you hear that phrase?

A: You mean like traditional values in America....

K: Whatever pops into your head.

A: Well that makes me think of like the traditional everything’s okay kind’ve values, and sort’ve makes me think of a rigid sort’ve structure, and it makes me think of my family and like the Catholic Church to some degree, the appearance is the most important thing and whatever is going on underneath should be sort’ve hidden away and not dealt with, so conventional values for me seems to be sort’ve a generic umbrella for people to try to stay safe.

K: Do you believe in God?

A: I do.

K: And what are your beliefs about the Bible?

A: Um, I’m sort’ve conflicted about the Bible and about my spirituality in God because I think that God and spirituality is different than the Bible or church. So I make a pretty clear distinction between how these things sort’ve, how these things function for each individual personality. Because when I was in high school I used to be, I was very religious and I used to be involved in a church group, and um, I’d do a lot of Bible study and do a lot of different stuff, and the things that I would discover on my own and my own sort’ve thoughts about how the world worked and how spiritualism worked seemed to conflict with how the church would be run or how the people would function within that. So I’m sort’ve conflicted about the Bible on some degree because the idea is that the Bible is written by God, but was translated by man, so there’s some sort of discrepancy I think in that translation and there’s also the interpretation issues of people who interpret the Bible in certain ways, plus there’s certain things that don’t really relate anymore. And I mean the Bible itself we say the Old Testament and the New Testament, they’re both different books to different churches. And the fact that for Americans who speak English the Bible was written in Greek and Aramaic and Latin so it’s like this adding on to the translation issue of getting the Bible translated into English and who does the translation, and you know, the people who were in charge of first doing the translations like King James, and what did he decide was important and how to sort’ve find it? So a lot of the stuff that I did, like my own Bible studies was actually going to the Greek words and trying to figure out what the Greek words mean. And so my own conflict with it is how
sort’ve frustrating it is and how you can sort’ve get into a loop of what is inspired and what does inspired mean. So that was a long answer to a simple question.

K: That’s all right. Some people believe that there’s a difference between being a religious person and being a spiritual person. Do you see a difference?

A: Yeah, I guess that’s sort’ve the semantic sermon, I guess that’s what I was just talking about, because if we say religion we think about the man-made institution of the church and what that means. And if we say spiritual that can apply to anything. You can be spiritual without having to be actually associated with a religion, you can be spiritual and have your own religion if you want to. You know, you can be spiritual and you know, believe in fairies or you can be spiritual and believe well there’s some cosmic thing going on but I don’t want to make a decision about anything. Um, and then I think you can probably, I mean, there’s, you can be both religious and spiritual, which a lot of people are, you know, they have their faith, they’re very involved in the church, they have their bake sales, they are very involved in their community and their religious functions are directly tied to their spirituality, so what they do is directly tied to what they believe. And there are those people who just believe and try to act that out in their daily life, so I guess there’s different levels of that. But I do think there are people who are involved in religious acts, but could be very hollow inside and not really very spiritual and that’s just sort’ve how they grew up and just part of the culture they are in.

K: So, do you consider yourself a spiritual person or a religious person or both or neither?

A: Um, I would consider myself a spiritual person in that I think there’s a spirituality and an underlying essence to things that we do, um, not necessarily there’s a reason to it, but there’s something going on that’s bigger than us. But I’m not really a religious person because I just, I have real problems with the institution of religion, the institution of churches and how we relinquish them.

K: Okay, um, how would you describe your relationship with God? (Long pause). Or to God, I guess.

A: Relationship to God? (Long pause). I don’t know. That’s a good question, I wouldn’t say that I really have, um, I don’t really feel like I have a strong connection with God or with spirit or whatever, um, I think intellectually or mentally I feel like it’s always there. But I don’t feel like, I don’t feel like, I don’t meditate, but I do yoga sometimes. I think I’m probably like most, a lot of people who feel like God is really important right when bad things happen to them. You know, you’re about to get into a car accident and suddenly you’re really spiritual, you know, but I don’t think about the relationship probably.
K: Okay. Do you believe in moral absolutism?

A: Moral absolutism … for myself or for others?

K: At all.

A: In general? Uh, I think in relation to a culture or society, I think there are moral standards. It's hard, that's a really gray area, because when you say absolutism, well who defines what is absolute and what does that mean? So I don't think that there is because everything sort've changes because you say well a moral absolute is thou shall not kill, but what if it's self defense? Because if you're in a situation where it is kill or be killed, then how do you approach that?

K: Do you believe that homosexuality is morally wrong?

A: I don't, no.

K: Why?

A: I don't because I don't see a reason for why it should be. I don't understand, like me personally, I'm not going to get into a relationship with another man, but for me to deny somebody else who feels love towards another human being and a relationship that actually works when so many male female relationships are so dysfunctional, and then you see a male male relationship and a female female relationship that actually works and doesn't cause problems in society, other than the fact that they're not accepted for who they are in most of society, I don't see that as well that's weird and wrong and evil or whatever, I feel like, yeah …

K: Okay, how did you come to that conclusion?

A: Well, you know, its sort've by just experiencing people who are homosexual and just getting to know them. Because my feelings and opinions have changed a lot over the years, like when I first got into college I pretty much believed in moral absolutism I was pretty much like this is the way it is, all these things are wrong, homosexuality is wrong, and not really understanding why, just sort've understanding homosexuality as some sort of abnormal disease, which you can pretty much do to any sort of behavior if you really wanted to, is say it's you know, a disease. But getting to know um, homosexuals and getting to realize what it's about and what it is, just sort've changed my mind about what I felt about it and whether I believed it was right or wrong.
K: Okay, what would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?

A: Well it’s funny because, okay so there was this one guy in college who thought, he was homosexual, and he thought that every man was homosexual, so if he was attracted to someone he thought he could turn him. Like, you know, it’s sort’ve, it’s kind of bizarre, it’s like the evangelical people on the sidewalk who try to convert everyone they see, um, trying to you know, change people’s beliefs, you know, so there’s two examples right there, you know, just cause you believe it doesn’t mean it’s true for everyone.

K: What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

A: (Laugh).

K: In five words or less ...

A: Who are you, working for Aaron? Aaron’s little agent?

K: I’m putting that in – he’s on my committee ....

A: Well, I was just writing about this in my poetics, in my manifesto .... I would say that it’s first of all to entertain, and by entertaining to examine issues and educate people and be a part of the community.

K: Okay, um, do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas?

A: Well, that’s funny because I haven’t really been in other arenas. You know, because when you’re always in the theatre, you’re always in the theatre. So you don’t know what it’s like for other ... I would say, like, it’s so weird, but I would say yes it is, accepted more in the theater than it would be in other sort’ve social cultures simply because the theatre is um, all about, you know, giving a venue to a lot of people who don’t fit a lot of the time, you know, you can’t be an athlete, you can’t be this, you find yourself in the theatre. Sometimes that’s not true, but sometimes that’s what it feels like, I think. But I think, you know, I used to work for Clinique, owned by Estee Lauder Company that owns all the makeup and all this kind of stuff, and it’s mostly women, it’s like 90% women that are like managers and all the people who work there. Except for a few men. Most of the men who were in the company who had done art, who were doing art design, like the VP of marketing I think was gay, I’m pretty sure he was, like nobody, in that environment it was okay, you know like nobody, they were like, whatever. But you
know, if you were an investment banker or you were like in politics, I don’t think it would be so readily accepted.

K: Um, do you think that a play about someone who had homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in the theatre?

A: Yes, I think it already has been, I think *Angels in America* sort’ve blew that door wide open with Joe, the Mormon, and there’s been other plays too, I’m sure, but um, yeah I think it would be accepted I just think it depends on where you do it. What city and what part of the country that you’re in.

K: What if that person, um, I know in *Angels in America* he was shown in conjunction with other characters who were pretty much telling him that he was in denial and to just accept it and move on with it, but what if it was a play that in the end he decides that he’s not going to do it because he feels personally about it as well?

A: Um, that would be interesting. For two reasons actually because some people would be like, he’s denying a part of himself, and other people would be like well he’s doing the right thing, he’s doing what he morally believes in. Which you get a really interesting conflict of somebody believing in a moral belief of something against something that would make them happy, that they know would make them happy. If they’re still exploring it and that makes them happy, then that’s one thing, but if they’re like, I know this is what would make me happy and this is what I really want, but I’m going to deny myself that so that I can follow this belief that I have. You have to go, then why do you have these beliefs then? So that’s kind’ve a weird…my mom saw that one movie with Kevin Kline, *In and Out*. And she was upset because at the end he ends up being gay. Um, and I thought, well, I think that’s who he was in that movie, that’s what the character was going for and that’s what they were exploring. So it’s weird that we have this expectation as an audience that they shouldn’t be gay. You know what I mean? Like my mom, I get most of my great comments about homosexuality from my mom. She said something about Anne Heche or Ellen Degeneres, she said, oh she’s so beautiful, she shouldn’t be gay. And it’s like, what does one thing have to do with the other?

K: Do you think artists are elitists? Another Aaron question.

A: It’s a great Aaron question. (Laugh). I think they have to be to some degree. Um, elitist has such bad connotations, if we say we’re elitist, that sets it up as we don’t want to associate with other people. I think artists have to be elitist in that they have to see the world in a different way than other people, otherwise why be an artist? And I think that they have to show these other people, it’s sort’ve like being a prophet or something, where you can step out and observe, but you still have to be a part of the community, so
which I think you can be elitist and still be part of the community, just a different sort’ve
section, if that makes sense.

K: Okay, how do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, but any social group
are socially classified together? In other words, do you feel people should be classified in
groups or as individuals?

A: Read that again …

K: How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, but any social group of
people are socially classified as a group rather than individuals?

A: I don’t know, that’s a good question. Um, I always think it’s sort’ve interesting that a
lot of people are like um, well, I’m a female artist, or I’m a gay artist or I’m a black artist
or something like that. And I think that it’s in a lot of ways limiting to say that I’m a part
of this group and that’s all I’m concerned with, because I think that homosexuals aren’t
like in their own little bubble, like they only live in Chelsea, New York or San Francisco
and they don’t live anywhere else and they only talk to each other. So I think that’s
sort’ve the danger of putting them in their own little group. And they only go and shop in
their own little place and we don’t have deal with them. Because they’re just part of the
group they’re like other minorities, you know, like women, women are a part of a group,
and as long as we keep them in a group we don’t have to deal with them and we can
maintain control.

K: Okay, um, do you think that homosexuals are born homosexual or do you think it is a
choice?

A: That’s a tough question and one that I’m not really sure about the answer of, but I
would lean more towards that they’re, it’s part of their chemistry and they’re born that
way. Because you could say you know, it’s a choice to some degree, but it’s not a choice
… the actions that they take are a choice, you know to use your example of a guy who is
in conflict with himself and decides to go against his feelings so he really feels like he is
following his moralistic beliefs. That’s a choice. But is he still a homosexual? You know
what I mean? Is he still having those feelings and thoughts? Is he still wired that way?
Because if he is then he’s just sort’ve denying that homosexuality so that he could be
something else, but he’s still that. So he’s making a choice, but he’s still homosexual.
You know, like back in the 50’s and 60’s they thought you could cure people of being
homosexual, that you could go to a psychiatrist and do therapy or whatever and you
would not be homosexual anymore, which was like a miserable failure. So I don’t think
it’s a choice to be that, it’s a choice for how you want to do that or what you do with it,
but I think you’re born that way.
K: Okay, so this is a labeling question, but how do you feel that church-going people should treat homosexuals and vice versa?

A: (Laugh). They should all be nice to each other. Uh, I think that church-going people and homosexuals or any people should be tolerant and open. The problem when you say church-going people is well, what church are you talking about? Some churches are very much against homosexuality and what it is. Um, the friend that I was telling you about that came out and that was waiting to come out, he was brought up very Catholic. And the biggest thing is that the Catholic Church and they don’t exactly smile about homosexuality. And so I think he was grappling with the fact that he was believing in a church, not necessarily a faith, but a church that does not support him. And that’s still just difficult. So I don’t know I mean homosexuality sort of fits into that. Um, I think that church-goers and if we’re talking specifically about Christians, they should be accepting because pretty much everything that they believe in resides on the fact that like, you know, if you follow Jesus and He’s your personal savior then Jesus died for all of your sins so that you can get to heaven or whatever, so that we should love everybody and I feel like that applies to everyone, and we shouldn’t exclude anyone.

K: Okay, last question, are there any questions you feel that I should be asking that I haven’t or is there just anything else that you would like to say before we end?

A: Um, I think if you, I think the question of, and you might have said it sort’ve with the friends and family who deal with homosexuality, but I think asking for an example of discrimination and homosexuality, or somebody that you know have ever mistreated somebody or if you’ve ever mistreated somebody or you yourself have been mistreated because of homosexuality.

K: Yeah, okay. Thanks!

A: You’re welcome. That wasn’t so bad!

5/22/05
Bill McFarland: Male, Age 52, Church of Christ Minister for 30 years “working with local churches and working with people in their everyday lives.” Father of three.

Kari: Do you consider yourself an open-minded person?

Bill: I consider myself someone who tries to be an open-minded person.
K: Why do you say that?

B: Working for people, working with people has sort’ve made it necessary for me to understand a lot of different backgrounds and a lot of different life stories, so that makes you not too resistant to any of them probably.

K: Do you have any kind of relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

B: Um, my son’s brother in law is openly gay, and in my, probably my daily routine I don’t have a close relationship with anyone who is openly gay but I know several people who are.

K: Um, this may be a bit repetitive, but do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality?

B: Uh, I don’t think I do have relatives who do other than in the family situation I mentioned a moment ago.

K: What would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

B: I would try to show a willingness to listen to that person and uh, to discover if this was a fear or a feeling or if it was something that this person was struggling with or asking for help with or wanting encouragement at, I would try to find out where this person was coming from and uh, then try to listen as much as I could to find out what the person was thinking. If it was a person who was close to me in a family situation I probably would try to explore especially the motivation for their revealing that struggle to me and then we would go from there.

K: Okay, have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

B: I don’t think I ever have, no.

K: What would you describe as “conventional values?”

B: Conventional values to me would be, uh, I suppose a lot of people would refer to them as traditional values, but I would think that they would be the kinds of values that seem to have been reflected in human experience down through a long period of time and not with any particular fad of a certain culture. I would look for values that sort’ve prove themselves over a long period of history and in that way they would be conventional values.
K: Do you believe in God?

B: Yes, very strongly I do.

K: And what are your beliefs about the Bible?

B: I believe that the Bible is a revelation from God in human experience and I take it as being something which is worthy of our best and deepest thought and careful reflection and uh, I believe that it claims for itself to be enough of a revelation from God that it should be regarded as an authority, or with authority in what is uh, right or wrong for human life. I take the Bible as being a revelation from God that’s in man’s overall best interest, uh, I believe because of the importance of this, uh, message of the Bible that it’s something that’s often been misused and can be misused, but anything I know of which is really powerful also has that same possibility, so …

K: Some people believe that there’s a difference between being spiritual and being religious, do you see a difference?

B: Yes I do. Uh, I think religion has often proved itself to be dangerous in the hands of people who are not very spiritual. On the other hand I think just because something is spiritual it necessarily becomes healthy or right. I think spirituality is a part of our nature that happens because we are hungry for God, so to speak, and it needs guidance from God, but religion often is a thing that is uh, developed by man and used as a, uh, in detrimental ways against other people, but spirituality on the other hand, by its very nature ought to be about a search for God, and I think in that way it’s different. Religion involves the organized practice of human beings, spirituality is a hunger for God, and if spirituality guides religion it becomes something that’s very healthy and rewarding, otherwise religion is dangerous.

K: Okay, um, so do you consider yourself a religious person or a spiritual person or both?

B: I consider myself both. I hope I’m both. But, uh, I am trying to be a person whose spirituality takes a direction that is guided by scripture, and by the fact that I try to practice my spirituality in connection with other people, then I’m sure that becomes religious activity too.

K: How would you describe your relationship with God?

B: Well it’s something that is still developing. When I first started trying to follow God, so to speak, I think I looked at uh, I looked more at the things that I thought I was
supposed to do, and I think gradually over my lifetime I’ve come to think more and more of God having a personality and I try to uh, to try to regard God as a person and as a heavenly father I have to focus more on who He is and what He’s like and respond to that. I’d say that uh, my relationship with God is strong but it has its peaks and its valleys like any other relationship does because of the fluctuation of my own spirit.

K: Do you believe in moral absolutism?

B: Since I believe that morals are grounded in God’s nature I view them as being standards that are only a reflection of who God is. For example, I believe that telling the truth is important because God is faithful, and I believe being kind to people is important because God is merciful, and so forth. And in that way I do believe there are morals that are steady, uh, regardless of the time and of the culture. Uh, whether that’s moral absolutism or not I’m not sure, but I do believe there are moral standards that are steady.

K: Okay. Do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong?

B: I believe the, I believe homosexual behavior uh, to act upon uh, sexual influences that are not in keeping with what I believe scripture calls for are morally inappropriate. Uh, I personally think there is a distinction in scripture between behavior and thoughts or feeling that may tempt a person. Temptation in scripture is not regarded as sin or morally wrong, so we all struggle with temptation. It seems to me that when we choose to act on those impulses then that’s where the difficulty comes in, so I would regard behavior that is not in keeping with what I find in scripture to be morally wrong.

K: How did you come to that conclusion?

B: Well, probably while trying to deal with my own moral struggles, while they may not be homosexual in nature they still are moral struggles, uh, for example to tell the truth or to humble yourself instead of being proud or to meet your responsibilities, to be considerate and kind toward other people, to rise above selfishness or greed or those kinds of things. The necessity of having to deal with those things myself, uh, makes me have to come to some kind of conclusion about when something brings guilt upon me so to speak. I think that looking at Jesus as I try to for my example of humanity, uh, I know that He was tempted in all points like as we are, and yet He didn’t sin, and I know that it’s not being tempted that’s wrong, but it’s the actual behavior, so by studying Jesus and by reflecting on my own experience I’ve come to that conclusion.

K: What would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs on someone else?
B: I would say when, when we uh, are not able to discuss something, uh, calmly and uh, kindly without it becoming an angry and passionate type of thing, uh, then we are approaching the point of force. It never has been the case it seems to me that to say that something is right or wrong and to conscientiously believe that means that you are forcing your view on someone else but where you do not allow another person the privilege to assume that same responsibility for himself, then that draws perilously close to the force idea. It seems to me that God has dealt with us as morally accountable individuals who have to make up our own minds, God has not used force in that way, and yet God has always been in scripture and what I read there very clear about who He is and what kinds of things He does or does not condone. For God to be able to say here’s what’s right and here’s what isn’t right and leave us the moral accountability to make the choices is not God forcing us, therefore for me to say here’s what I see to be right and here’s what I see to be wrong in scripture is not forcing that view on someone else, he still has to be responsible for that, but he has to allow me the right to be responsible also, so I don’t think that’s forcing it on someone. But whenever force or intimidation or that type of thing is used then it becomes forcing your views on someone else.

K: What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

B: I believe the purpose of theatre is to help us reflect on the human experience with all of the things that are enjoyable about that and sometimes the things that are not enjoyable. Theatre helps us to understand our humanity and to realize what being a human being means. Theatre has also always been it seems to me important in that way because it allows us to have a chance to have glimpses into what human relationships are and what human experiences are. And most of us I think see some of ourselves in all those experiences.

K: Do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas?

B: I personally don’t think so. I think our culture is struggling quite a bit with that in all arenas right now and because there has been a political movement from both sides of this really, it is kind’ve a hot button in our culture, but it’s present everywhere. Now since theatre does tend to deal with human experiences that are emotional and so forth at present, then it may be that theatre people are reflecting on this a lot right now, but I doubt personally whether it’s more so than the rest of our culture is. Even in religious circles right now there are a number of struggles with this, the uh, there are religious groups that are, have been much in the current reports because of individuals being appointed to leadership positions and so forth that maybe have been openly practicing homosexuals and so forth, so all circles are dealing with it right now, and we’re working our way through what the proper response is.
K: Do you think that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in the theatre?

B: Well, uh, I believe it would be accepted, uh, I know that individual’s feelings about sexual matters are among the strongest human feelings there are, and I don’t regard it as inappropriate for us to examine those struggles provided it’s done in a way that’s in uh, decent taste. But I don’t regard it as unacceptable, and it might even be necessary.

K: Do you think that artists are elitist?

B: Artists are human beings, and human beings in any field can become elitist, uh, can begin to assume that they maybe are, have a better understanding over a wide range of human experience and human issues than they really have. That includes ministers like myself, but it includes politicians, it includes sports figures, I’m certain that it includes people in theatre also, uh, we can get to the place fairly easily where our views become the informed views, and uh, when that happens I’m sure that it becomes a problem. I’ve noticed just in political discussions in recent election cycles that people who work in the arts, and maybe more in popular music and maybe movie or TV circles have become more and more outspoken politically, and uh, in that way they seem to at least have used their celebrity or to believe their celebrity made their opinion valuable, so in that way it’s possible for people to become elitist it seems to me.

K: Okay, um, I may have to pause this here in a second and make some more room on the file …

B: Are my answers too long?

K: No you’re fine.

B: Okay.

K: How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, but any social group of people are classified together. In other words do you feel that people should be classified as individuals or as social groups?

B: I would, I think it would be much more appropriate personally for us to deal with people as individual human beings. I think that that’s the way the Jesus dealt with it and since I as I’ve said is the example of true humanity I think that that would be the way that I’d want to do it. And I think that to suggest that any group of people are homogenous just because of their sexual feeling would tend to overlook the wide range of differences
in other parts of personalities. And I think if you value personality then you deal with people as individuals, and that’s what I would want to do.

K: Do you think that homosexuals are born homosexual or do you thing they choose to be?

B: I think there are probably a number of factors that may go into the development of that type of preference, I’m not sure that it’s either or in this case. I think it may be true that individuals are born with a susceptibility to certain types of feelings or temptations. I think environment on how strong those impulses become, then at some point or another choices will enter in to the actions taken, but I think that there’s not just one answer to why these kinds of things are then fashioned into an identity by some people. I think that just as I may be born with a tendency to want to look good to people or to have the approval of people for example, and that may be a strong impulse then I could see how the same might be possible in other areas too, so that’s how I would approach it.

K: Um, how do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and vice versa?

B: First with church-going people, uh, obviously any people who are trying to follow Jesus ought to try to treat people as He did, and the basic, the overall ethic of Jesus is always love. That means that certainly you should treat people with kindness and dignity and to deal with people as valuable individuals, to be considerate and to be honorable in treatment of people would always be in order and would always be a necessity. Uh, on the other hand, and this might come from the vice versa part of this, it needs to be understood by people in our world that the kind of love that Jesus practiced is not one which is simply a warm fuzzy feeling. It doesn’t mean that always behavior is endorsed or that it is approved. Uh, it means instead that we treat people with honor and respect themselves. Those who are looking at people who are following Jesus from maybe the other perspective might want to be aware that people make a choice or commitment to follow the Lord, uh, and to try to be like Him and to try to do what He has taught us to do by how He lived, that choice then will be reflected in the views that we take towards other things. And in the particular behaviors for example, that we may not believe to be acceptable, it’s not that we’ve chosen to look at individual people a certain way, we’ve chosen to look at the Lord a certain way and then that gives us a viewpoint on everything else that takes place. Uh, so those of us who are following Jesus need to make sure that we never become hateful or unkind, on the other hand, those who are not following the Lord need to realize that our view of what love is, what it means to love somebody will be determined by our following Him too.
K: And last question, are there any questions that you feel I should be asking that I have not, or is there anything else that you wish to add?

B: Well, one thing that I would probably add if I were just discussing this with someone, even if I’m just talking about my own private feelings about this. Of course I struggle like anyone else with how to apply love to a situation like this. One of the things I’ve noticed in the passages in the New Testament that I think speak to this issue is that this type of behavior is always catalogued in passages that also talk about things like greed or dishonesty or gossip and slander and those types of things, and that says to me number one that we’re not talking about something here which as Christians we should regard as the worst of sins or worst than other sins, and number two that we’re talking about something here which involves the behavior of individuals and not the identity of individuals. From my perspective as a Christian I don’t regard someone’s sexual feelings as his identity any more than I regard someone who gossips about people to have his identity determined by that behavior. So when I’m talking about this, I’m coming from a different perspective from what I understand a lot of the homosexual rights groups and so forth to be saying in our cultural debates right now. I think that they are saying as I understand them, that these feelings determine the individual’s whole identity and therefore when I talk about their behavior there is some anger and resentment about that as if I’m denying their person as individuals. But I’m talking from a whole different perspective than what they are, and I think that might need to be understood.

5/25/05
Carrie Simpson: Female, age 31, professional costume designer, for theatre, television, and fashion. Mother of 2.

Kari: First question, do you consider yourself an open-minded person?

Carrie: I would say yes, I mean my opinions are formed by my religious background, so I guess some people would say that that would be a no. But since I openly live and my religion influences my life and that’s what I live my life by I would have to say yes.

K: Do you have any kind of relationship with anyone who is openly gay?

C: Oh yes.

K: Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality?

C: Friends definitely, relatives, that one I’m not sure about. To my knowledge no close relatives, but sure lots of friends.
K: Okay, what would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?

C: I would say that they really needed to look at the reasons why they were feeling that way, and they needed to look at their background and find out if perhaps something in their background is convincing them of the fact that they might be gay. For instance, I've had friends who have had troubled backgrounds and decided hey I might be gay just to get away from the opposite sex just because they have a very negative opinion of them. I'm not saying that all homosexuals have troubled backgrounds, but overwhelmingly I've found that is the case in speaking with my friends who do profess to be homosexual. I would encourage them to um, really do some serious soul searching about it. I personally don’t believe people are born gay, that may be a question you’re going to ask later on. Um, I believe that they are socialized into becoming gay through friends or people who pick on them, through family, through abuse, through any number of outside things. Um, biology has proven that the male and female mind think completely differently. And if you have to sit there and wonder if you’re gay and convince yourself that you are gay I have real questions about that.

K: Have you ever had thoughts of homosexuality personally?

C: Not really. Um, being an art major, I mean, it was very normal for me to view naked females, naked males, I’ve always held a great respect for the human body. I’ve always thought women are more beautiful to draw than men, that doesn’t make me a lesbian by any means I don’t think. No, um I wouldn’t say so.

K: What would you describe as “conventional values?”

C: Well that’s hard cause it’s very ... is it subjective to the person? Yes, subjective to the person. And I think until you reach the point where you are actually capable of concrete thinking, which psychology has proved that that’s in your early twenties, um ... I don’t know, ask me the question again ....

K: What would you describe as “conventional values?”

C: Oh, until you get to the point where you start those for yourself, where you are actually responsible for supporting yourself for living a lifestyle, I mean outside of your parent’s home, I mean, it’s all about you and what you’re going to do for your future, I really don’t think it’s conventional until that point for you personally. I think you can be brought up any number of ways, in a church, not in a church, in a home where you have homosexual parents or not, but I really think that when you get to that point you make your own conventional values. You formulate your own. I’m not saying that’s necessarily
right or wrong because you could, I mean there’s all kinds of religions, there’s all kind so guidelines as far as morals are concerned. I mean, I think most people would agree you know, you don’t kill people, you don’t harm people, you don’t do bad things to people. However, you do at that point in your life have to elect, am I going to abide by the rules outlined in the Bible or for a specific religion, or am I just going to wing it and do what I want? Um, at that point those become your conventional values. Overwhelmingly in this country there are a lot of people that use the Bible as their guideline. I’m not saying that they all live by it 100% of the time, but I think it’s a pretty good safe value system to have because it definitely encourages you to treat your fellow man with respect and to treat yourself with respect, so that happens to be the values that my family, that I was brought up in and that my family currently embraces and those are our conventional values. And values that tend to want to harm, if someone has values that tend to want to harm or afflict another person really needs to look at their conventional values and really think about that. I don’t care if you want to embrace Hinduism or whatever, but you need a set of values that affects the way you handle yourself and your fellow man.

K: Okay, do you believe in God?

C: Absolutely.

K: And what are your beliefs about the Bible?

C: Well I believe that it is everything it says it is and that is the breathed word of God that He gave to us. I don’t question that . . . any longer.

K: Some people believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference?

C: Sure, you can profess all you want that you’re religious but if it doesn’t impact your life and the way you live it then you’re not letting it get to your spirit and your spiritual life.

K: Do you consider yourself a religious person or a spiritual person or both?

C: I try to be both. I’m definitely more successful at the first than the second, you know, some of the time, but it is my goal, my ongoing goal to be both.

K: How would you describe your relationship with God?

C: He’s always in the back of my mind, um, whenever I’m doing anything, like even when I’m driving the car and I’m like Lord, thank you for not letting me hit that person, I
mean, it’s always something, He’s always there. And it’s not just something the Bible says, it’s something I really believe and that I try to remember in the back of my mind at all times. I would say that it’s my goal to always please and to honor Him and for my children and my husband to do so. Um, I guess that’s His role in my life.

K: Do you believe in moral absolutism?

C: Meaning that something is either right or wrong, black or white?

K: That there is absolute truth.

C: I would say that yes it probably exists, but I don’t think as finite men we can understand it, I think the only being that is capable of understanding an absolute is a holy being and we are definitely not holy, so I believe that we have to constantly strive to look for the black and white. I would say as long as we use our sources, like the Bible, we’ve got to come close, because the Bible is very cut and dry about many things. But, um, there are gray areas, I mean, there’s no avoiding it.

K: Do you believe that homosexuality is morally wrong?

C: Yes.

K: Why?

C: Well, because um, as I stated previously, I believe the Bible and the Bible says it’s wrong. I have not seen society improve at all in granting homosexuals more and more and more rights. I just, um, I believe it’s wrong.

K: How did you come to that conclusion?

C: Um, throughout most of my college years, of course I was totally surrounded by a great many homosexual and lesbian friends, and I actually was not involved in church at the time, I had actually deliberately turned my back on church to see if maybe there was nothing out there, you know, maybe there was no God. You know I had grown up in a Christian home and a Christian school and you know, I had never really thought about there not being a God, and maybe there was room for all of us here on this planet, and you know, maybe I was wrong I guess. So I struggled with that for a majority of my college years, and finally I would say either right around my graduation or immediately thereafter I just made a commitment, I realized how empty I felt in my life. Um, I was you know, married the wrong man, all of my decisions that I’d made of my own volition were turning out empty. And finally I said okay, here’s your chance God, prove to me
that you’re here, and I started doing things that I thought God would want me to do and my life started to turn around and get better and I think that really proved to me that there was a God.

K: Okay, what would you consider to be an example of someone forcing their beliefs onto someone else?

C: Um, I think it’s okay when people can sit down and have an intelligent conversation where people say this is what I believe and why, x, y, z, and then you say well this is why I disagree with you, a, b, c, and then they can shake hands and mutually walk away from the table without any sort of angst between them. I mean, that takes a great deal of maturity, and I don’t think that happens very often in our society. I think everybody’s out to prove they’re right and you’re wrong, and there’s very little room for middle ground. Um, I think if you have to argue your point more than once why you believe something is a problem. I mean if someone asks you again to restate something that’s one thing, but if you continuously say this is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong, or I believe this is right over and over again when you’re not prompted to do so, I would say that’s an example of forcing your opinion on someone.

K: Um, what would you say is the purpose of theatre?

C: Well I’ve always believed that theatre could illustrate many interesting um, historical things, factual things, um, humor, I mean, the wonderful power of laughter, um, informative things. I think it’s a wonderful venue to make people think. I would say the most impressive theatre that I’ve ever seen was movies or stage plays that made me think. And you walk away from it and you’re just like man, I never really thought about that, or man, I really appreciated how they did this or how realistic it was. I would say to educate people or to make people think and to hold up a mirror to certain situations in life, to make people laugh. It’s kind’ve multifaceted.

K: Do you think that homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas?

C: Undoubtedly, just because of the proportion of homosexual people who are in the theatre department. I mean there’s other industries like fashion and like, let’s see what else, music. You know the arts are just disproportionately representative, or represented by a large quantity of homosexual members of society for whatever reason you know, biologically or because they are sensitive and creative or whatever reason you want to put on that, but I would say yeah, it’s had to be because there are so many of them there.
K: Do you think that a play about someone who has homosexual urges but denies them would be important or accepted in the theatre?

C: It should be accepted because theatre does not quantify or qualify things, that’s part of the freedom of it, however, because of what I previously stated, the fact that there is a large community of homosexuals in the theatre and television industry, there would undoubtedly be people in the theatre that would be offended, and those people tend to be very verbal, as they are when they are asking for more rights, they are very verbal. I see no reason why it should be rejected, because a play on the flip side of the coin would be accepted and I think you have to be mature enough to have a play that’s opposite of what people would think. It shouldn’t be, but it probably would be.

K: Okay, do you think that artists are elitist?

C: Meaning?

K: Think of themselves more highly than others?

C: Don’t have to stick to social norms and things like that, that they live above, on a different plane almost?

K: Yes.

C: No. I think to be a good artist the whole idea you know, think of communication arts, that’s painting, that’s fashion, I mean, any sort of 2D 3D media, I mean, if you’re gonna communicate with people then you have to be on their level, so that’s kind’ve how I feel about that one.

K: How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, but any group of people are socially classified together? In other words, do you think that people should be classified as social groups or as individuals?

C: Well, I mean, all of us fall into social groups just because of who we are, the color of our skin, our age, how many children, whether or not we’re married. I mean, we all fall into categories, I mean, I see homosexuality as more as a category than a social group because I have several of my friends who are homosexual but the last thing they want to do is go scream it from the mountains, the last thing they want to do is adopt kids. I mean, there are all sorts of homosexuals that aren’t as verbal as the ones that you see on TV picketing this that and the other. Um, I think it’s inevitable that we’re going to classify people in groups, and if that is your sexual orientation then like it or not that is
your title. I mean if you walked up to me and said you’re a heterosexual I would say yeah. I mean that is my classification.

K: Um, do you, you may have already answered this, but do you feel that homosexuals are born that way or do you think they choose to be?

C: I think they choose to be. I’ve sat through enough human anatomy and biology and psychology classes and sociology classes. I’ve had friends argue both points to me. Um, every single, almost, I’d say 95% of the homosexual friends that I know all had troubled childhoods or something. Something that happened. And then the whole attitude of “I think I’m gay,” that tells me that you’re weighing out your options. To me that’s borderline concrete thinking. You’re making a decision one way or the other. Um, does that mean to say that you know, that little boy that was picked on all the way from the time that he was four years old all the way through junior high school because he was more effeminate than the other boys, does that mean that he’s going to become gay? No, he doesn’t have to; unfortunately I’ve seen that happen to where he did. Um, I think it’s a choice and people would be hard pressed and would have to give me some medical evidence to prove that it wasn’t.

K: Okay, um, how do you think church-going people, that’s another label, but, how do you think that church-going people should treat homosexuals and vice versa?

C: That’s a hard one, I mean because it’s so, it depends on your role in the church too almost, I mean maybe that’s wrong, maybe I’m thinking about that wrongly. Anyway, the Bible clearly states that we are to love one another and in that verse it does not quantify or qualify anything. All right, so that’s step one, I’ve got to love this person whether or not I agree with them, and shoot I have that with my husband all the time (laugh). The way that I think is helpful, um, and this is how most of my friends and I have handled this issue, my homosexual friends and me. We always had a conversation where I stated how I felt and why I felt it, I gave them an opportunity to state why they felt the way they did, and then after that it was never an issue anymore. We were on the same ground, same level, we understood where each other was coming from, it was never necessary again to bring it up. Um, of course they would invite me to events and things that would involve their homosexual friends or whatever and once or twice I went um, these were usually events that were not …. That were fun related they were not like gay pride type things that could have been construed in any way that I was supportive of their lifestyle, um, I didn’t hang out with them on a regular basis, but if you know, if there was a dinner invitation or something, um, I would go. I mean, I think we have an obligation as Christians to say you know I don’t agree with your lifestyle and this is why, in a loving, caring manner, also giving them the opportunity to do the same, I don’t feel you’re correct because you know, I feel I’m homosexual because of this reason. Um, and then
once you’ve crossed that bridge I don’t think you should ever revisit it unless the other person brings it up in a, if they ask a question. I don’t think it’s something you should revisit without being asked. It shouldn’t be something you beat over each other’s heads all the time.

K: Okay, last question, are there any questions you feel I should be asking that I have not or is there anything else you would like to say?

C: Um, something that a friend of mine, a homosexual friend of mine told me one time that I will never ever forget, um, this particular friend of mine grew up in a church, his father who was estranged from him and died very suddenly when he was 8 years old, the man was like 29 years old and died of a massive heart attack. He grew up with a single mom, grew up in a church, and even once he “figured out he was gay,” he continued in the church and he and his current partner attend church. And he told me one time that he prayed that God would change him, change his heart and make him no longer gay, and that he had told God that if he died and God and Jesus or God sent him to hell that he would go to hell loving Jesus all the way. And for the first time when my friend told me that I really understood the struggle somebody has dealing and struggling with this issue if they have any inclination or thoughts that they are gay and how difficult that must be knowing what God says about homosexuality in the Bible and still struggling with it. However, and as I told this friend, I said you know, God doesn’t give you anything that you can’t handle without His help, He promises you that. And that’s you know, all I said, I didn’t belabor the point, I didn’t feel it was one to belabor because this boy obviously knew exactly how God thought about his sin or whatever. Um, that just really um, that really touched my heart and when I see Christians who are uncharitable or impatient with homosexuals I always try to kindly remind them that they are people and that many of them probably know exactly what the Bible says about them and their lifestyle and it’s probably not even something that they even have to bring up to that particular person. Um, I really wish that both sides would quit stereotyping each other. I think that the homosexuals are just as guilty as the religious people. I think both groups tend to make assumptions about the other group without getting to know them. They justify not getting to know them because of the Bible, which is a horrible crutch. Um, the homosexuals don’t try to get to know the Christian people because they assume the Christians are going to condemn them. So you’ve reached a stand off where people, it’s almost like they’re just staring at each other over like a 20 foot gap wishing they could be on the other side, or wishing they could just feel love from the other side. And to me that’s very sad because of what Jesus taught us all about love, and unconditional love and forgiveness and sin and the fact that you know, their sin is no different than ours the only thing is, it becomes different when they continue to, well, no, not really, when they continue to live in it, it’s no different than the man who continues to drink even though he knows it’s wrong or continues to do this that or the other. I mean, it’s no different it’s
just, they need God, and I just wish both sides could find some way to quit stereotyping each other as religious fanatics and homosexual liberals. I really do wish that. Because another thing I’ll never forget is a lesbian friend of mine telling me you’re the first Christian that ever has been a friend to me ever. She said, I have never had a Christian friend in my life that didn’t constantly tell me that I was dying and going to hell because I was a lesbian. And she calls me to this day and here I’ve been back in Virginia for five years, and I take no credit for that, I give all the credit to God because he obviously knew that she needed to see that you know, all Christians weren’t like that. I think we give ourselves a bad name many times. And I think they give themselves a bad name too when they get verbal on television about religious people and say terrible hurtful things about us. Um, I just, I don’t know that there’s any one way to do it, there probably isn’t. I just hope that even that one friend of mine that knows a Christian that’s not like that you know, maybe one at a time we can just touch their lives in a positive way and plant a seed in their heart that maybe one day you know, through the love of God they’ll find peace with God.

4/4/05
Email Interview
Jennifer Bell: Age 26, former high school teacher, administrator at a non-profit organization in Colorado

1. Do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?
   “Open-mindedness” has several definitions in our culture. Do I consider myself open-minded in the sense that I believe every life choice that a person makes is true, just and appropriate and that there are no moral absolutes? No I do not. I do, however, consider myself open-minded in the sense that I know I do not have all the answers. I have been able to extensively observe varying cultures both within the U.S. and abroad and realize that people, to an extent, are products of their environment. I acknowledge that free-will is granted to all human beings and they are allowed to make their own choices. I also acknowledge that humans, both the individuals making a particular choice and those connected in some way to those individuals, are required to live with the consequences of those choices, whether good or bad. I understand that I cannot fully know another person’s reasons for choices they make (background, etc.), and while I strongly adhere to the principal of free-will, I also believe it needs to be tempered with responsibility.

2. Do you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?
   I have recently moved and I am not currently in proximity or correspondence with anyone who is openly gay, but in the past I have had several relationships as such.

3. Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality?
The only people who have openly expressed to me that they were struggling with homosexuality were some friends I had in college.

4. What would you say to someone who confided in you that they might be gay?
First, I would let them know that I appreciate them confiding in me and that in no way do I consider them less of a friend or human being. I would then tell them that, though different people may struggle with areas due to heredity/genetics (alcoholism, obesity, depression, and, for men, lower amounts of testosterone, etc.), I believe a homosexual life-style is a choice. Urges and impulses can be resisted, but it takes hard work. For example, a compulsive eater must choose to avoid situations and foods that leads him/her to a life-style of obesity and poor health. I believe that humanity was created with a purpose and an order. Overwhelmingly, nature requires a male and female to unite in order to produce offspring. While a homosexual relationship may bring some happiness and fulfillment, it will only be a shadow of the real thing. The highest degree of fulfillment is found in the relationship that our Creator intended and for which we were “wired.” I do not want anyone to be cheated by a mere shadow of the real thing.

5. Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?
I believe that the female body and many women are amazingly beautiful. There have been times when media, publications, etc., have made me feel that those thoughts bore the hint of homosexuality. I am firmly convinced, now, however, that appreciating the beauty of women, in all aspects, is a compliment to the Creator and creation that surrounds us. It fits in with my appreciation for beauty in may arenas - flowers, landscape, etc. I have never had sexual desires towards another woman.

6. What would you describe as “conventional values?”
A set of values, and even perhaps social mores, held (more strongly a few decades ago than today) by a majority of the country’s population. I think the term now has a negative connotation in some circles due to a belief that the act of thinking any act or choice is immoral, is itself immoral. Some examples would be abstinence before marriage, fidelity within a marriage, abstaining from drunkenness, etc.

7. Do you believe in God? The Bible?
Yes.

8. Some believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference? Why? Why not?
I think that the terms “spiritual” and “religious” have a wide range of definitions, depending on their context and to whom you are speaking. For many people, “religious” implies a person whose purpose is to adhere (or make the appearance of adhering) to a set of rules. They are defined by the “laws” they keep and the activities and programs they attend. They give their beliefs lip-service, but their
words are not always accompanied by passion. Often times their religion can be a matter of culture, ethnicity and family, rather than a personal conviction. Spirituality, conversely, is often seen as something much more personal and emotional. In my experience, many who consider themselves spiritual do not do so in the traditional sense (i.e. a connection to the Biblical God), but rather in the sense that they believe in a supernatural. The supernatural could imply ghosts, god-like beings, angels, aliens, the earth force, nature, etc. In the context of Christianity, I see “spirituality” as the much needed emotional/personal/supernatural compliment to the intellectual/physical “religion.” Spirituality is the conductor for our personal relationship with the creator. It allows us to get beyond the idea that the Bible and Christianity are a simple code of ethics and to develop a deep faith that the natural and supernatural were meant to co-exist and to give purpose and meaning to life on a very real and personal level. Spirituality can transcend the rules and regulations of religion, but those rules and regulations are often needed to keep the spiritual side of us in check. Emotions can often be confused for spirituality, and they are not always righteous/beneficial. Emotions have led people throughout history to do despicable things and thus religion plays an important part in guiding them. So, to finally answer the question, in regards to my first definitions of religion simply being the appearance of belonging to a particular group or adhering to and performing certain “acts” devoid of passion and faith, and spirituality simply being the belief in some type of supernatural, then yes, I believe they can be separate. However, in the context of Christianity, which is my paradigm, I believe that both aspects need to co-exist in a person, creating a set of checks and balances.

9. Do you consider yourself a religious person, or do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Or both?
I strive to be both.

10. How would you describe your relationship with God?
I believe in a sovereign, personal God. I believe that He has gone to great lengths to provide an opportunity for me to live a true and purposeful life - not a shadow of life, but the real thing. I have accepted his offer to be His child and I strive to allow Him to guide me and to help me improve the lives of those around me.

11. Do you believe in moral absolutism? Why/why not?
I believe there are moral absolutes. For there to be belief in a wrong, there has to be belief in a right. I doubt that many people could say in good conscious that wrong does not exist, that, the Holocaust, for example, was simply someone’s view on how life should be for a certain group of people, and that the view was as equally right and good as any other view. If we thought the Nazis were simply following their own innate impulses of what was morally right and good, we would still have fought them, but would not have been able to blame them for
their actions because at the very depth of their beings they saw no error in their ways. They would not have been corrupted by hate, they would have been just following natural impulses. So, to agree that there is a “wrong” in the universe also necessitates that there be a “right.” I doubt that many would say that the actions of Hitler were as moral as, say the actions of Mother Theresa. C.S. Lewis states it so well:

“Whenever you find a man who says he does not believe in a real Right and Wrong, you will find the same man going back on this a moment later. He may break his promise to you, but if you try breaking one to him he will be complaining “It’s not fair” . . . . It seems then we are forced to believe in a real Right and Wrong. People may be sometimes mistaken about them, just as people sometimes get their sums wrong; but they are not a matter of mere taste and opinion any more than the multiplication table. . . . The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures two things is something different from either. You are, in fact, comparing them both with some Real Morality, admitting that there is such a thing as a real Right, independent of what people think, and that some people’s ideas get nearer to that real Right than others.”

(from Mere Christianity)

12. Do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong? Why or why not?
I feel homosexuality is morally wrong for two reasons. First, as a believer in the Bible, I feel it is wrong based on numerous scriptures, as well as teachings of Jesus that explicitly say so. I don’t believe homosexuality is “The Great Sin” that overshadows all sin, but it is included with pride, greed, gluttony, etc. The reason I feel homosexuality is dealt with more severely is because to choose to live in a homosexual life-style is to choose to continually and habitually sin (just as those people do in heterosexual relationship who disregard the boundaries of marriage). I don’t believe that to have a homosexual thought or urge is necessarily a sin. It is a temptation, just as many other things are temptations. What we do with temptation is what eventually leads to either virtue or sin. The second reason I believe it is morally wrong is because, as I stated earlier in the interview, I feel it is leaves people with only an imitation of the real thing. It mirrors the type of relationships we were created to have, but it is not able to truly fulfill those desires. That being said, I think any ideology that tries to convince people to settle for “good” when they could have the “best” is morally wrong.

13. How did you come to the conclusion you have come to on this issue? (What kind of critical thinking, if any?)
Most of my reasoning is included in the original answer, but to sum up, my conclusion is primarily based on observation and religious conviction. Observing the contrast between homosexual relationships and heterosexual relationships, as well as listening to my friends who were struggling with homosexuality, has led me to believe that the natural order is correct. Let me take a moment to say, however, that I realize not all heterosexual relationships are what they should be or what they are capable of being, but at least there is the potential if and when people choose to act unselfishly and appropriately. My conclusion is also based upon my faith in the Bible and teachings of Jesus, which leave no doubt as the inappropriateness and sinfulness of practicing homosexuality.

14. What do you consider to be an example of someone forcing his or her beliefs on someone else?
I think everyone should be free to express their views, and be willing to listen to other views in return. The key is that I think this should be done in a controlled and respectful manner. When person is put down and made to feel like less of a human being for his/her views (i.e. being called a bigot and closed-minded for not agreeing with homosexuality), then I think that is an example of forcing beliefs on someone. Rarely are you going to be able to change someone’s belief system through debate, and when those debates become emotionally heated, everyone looses. When, in presenting our belief system to someone, we fail to respect them as people, we force our beliefs on them.

15. What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?
As one not involved in theatre, for me it serves mostly for entertainment. At times I do find it challenges paradigms and allows one to see life from varying angles.

16. Do you think homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas? Why or why not?
Once again, not being involved in theatre I cannot give a very educated answer. However, my perception is that homosexuality is more accepted in theatre. Based on those who I have known in theatre, and media, there seems to be a culture of “anything goes” in the theatre realm. Perhaps it is because so much of theatre involves exploration, and therefore any findings of “one’s self” are esteemed.

17. Do you find that a play about someone who has homosexual urges, but denies them would be important or accepted in theatre? Why or why not?
I think it would be important, but I’m not sure how accepted it would be. It seems that theatre hates to cast judgment on anything, and to acknowledge that people deny homosexual urges would be to say that there is something wrong with them, and that would be taking a moral stance not generally attempted (acceptance of homosexuality is the preferred moral stance). I think it is important, however, because I know that it is reality. I have had friends who have struggled and overcome their homosexual impulses. It wasn’t easy, but they felt
it was the right thing to do, and now looking back on it several years later, they say there is no comparison and they are so glad they made the choice. I think our society almost pushes people into homosexuality. I think it is important to let people struggling with homosexuality know that there are options and that others struggle with the same things they do.

18. Do you think artists are elitist?
I think any professional/social group can tend to be elitist, because they obviously feel for what they do, and chose it for a reason and thus place a high amount of importance on it. Not all artists come across as elitists, but my experiences of being a non-artist amongst artists have indeed left me feeling that I was looked upon differently. This is common, however, when you are in a group of people who share interests that you do not.

19. How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? Do you feel people ought to be classified as individuals rather than groups?
I think any time that you have a number of people who are united on one or several points/ideologies/principals, and who actively propagate those beliefs, you will have social classification. Admittedly it is often frustrating. For example, I am in the classification of “Christian” with many people with whom I do not agree and with whom I do not want to be associated. People are individuals, and ideally should be considered as such. However, when taking a stance on an issue/s that are somewhat controversial, people to an extent define themselves and I believe that some classification is inevitable.

20. Do you think homosexuals are born homosexual, or do you think it is a choice?
See # 4

21. How do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who agree with homosexuality, and vice-versa?
I think the church should treat homosexuals with respect and love, just as the church is supposed to treat all of humanity. Homosexuals should be welcomed in with grace. However, that being said, I also think that homosexuality is a sin and not something that should be ignored. Therefore, I feel it is important that homosexuals be given time to evaluate their life-style in light of the Bible (if the teachings of the Bible are not to be accepted and heeded, one need not be in church, and one cannot just pick out the portions of the Bible that are convenient to believe in) and be given help and encouragement as they strive to live a holy life devoid of homosexual practices. At some point, I feel a line must be drawn in the sand. If a person has been in the church for a period of time and still shows no remorse, repentance, or at least an effort to reject homosexuality, then they should take time away from the church to search for what they truly want. God is a God of love, but He has also given us a set of rules to live by. I would say the same of a husband/wife who is having extra-marital affairs – something else the Bible also
clearly identifies as a sin – either stop the sinful act and repent, or else do not come to church and pretend to be dedicated. This point of view is obviously a Christian one, but being someone who truly believes the Bible and its teachings, I would assume that the Christian paradigm is to be expected. I think homosexuals should treat church-goers with the same respect and realize that to accept the teachings of the Bible is to accept the moral standard dictated by it. If this were not the case, there wouldn’t be church-goers. Those in the church have made moral decisions, just has homosexuals have, and should be allowed the same freedom to adhere to those views as homosexuals have.

22. Are there any questions that I have not asked that you feel I should be asking? Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

4/5/05
Email Interview
Anonymous: Ph.D. Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity, Professor in the Midwest

23. Do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?
   No. I consider everything to be an aspect of my Christianity. Although most Christians would view me as (too) “open-minded,” in the larger world I don’t believe that would be the case.

24. Do you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?
   What do you mean by “relationship”? I have a friend who is gay.

25. Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality?
   Yes.

26. What would you say to someone who confided in you that they might be gay?
   I would urge that person to seek counseling to address some of the deep-seated issues that may accompany that – both the previous development of the homosexual tendency and the stress associated with being gay. I would also offer an opportunity to study scripture with that person to help him or her see God’s perspective for life.

27. Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?
   No.

28. What would you describe as “conventional values?”
   Ethics for a female monastery? HAH! Actually, I seriously doubt conventional values exist. If any do exist in American society, they would be those proscribed in the Declaration of Independence, the right to pursue life, liberty, and happiness.

29. Do you believe in God? The Bible?
   Yes to both.

30. Some believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference? Why? Why not?
There is a difference. Many people are religious but undergo no radical change of lifestyle. Those who are spiritual no longer live “according to this world.”

31. Do you consider yourself a religious person, or do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Or both?

Both.

32. How would you describe your relationship with God?

We’re pretty friendly. We argue on occasion, but He always wins.

33. Do you believe in moral absolutism? Why/why not?

Yes and no. I believe that God instilled a certain morality in His creation but that included free will. The unspiritual exercising of free will has resulted in society defining morality. I believe absolute morals exist. I also believe humanity cannot or will not work within them.

34. Do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong? Why or why not?

Yes. Apart from scripture which is unequivocal, it is wholly unnatural.

35. How did you come to the conclusion you have come to on this issue? (What kind of critical thinking, if any?)

Probably the process has been cumulative. The values of my family, the teachings of the church, my separate investigation of scripture, and my associations with homosexuals have resulted in the conclusion that homosexuality is unnatural, immoral, and usually the result of psychological trauma in the younger years or seduction during the critical development of sexuality in the teens.

36. What do you consider to be an example of someone forcing his or her beliefs on someone else?

Roe vs. Wade.

37. What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

I believe it is primarily to entertain. On the other hand, historically theater has played significant roles in societal and governmental change, so education must also play a part. (Pun intended)

38. Do you think homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas? Why or why not?

Yes. I do not know the answer as to why. It may partially be due to stereotypes placed upon actors from the outside, thus creating a culturally acceptable “haven” in drama. Perhaps the larger issue of having to “act a certain role” in society (i.e., remain in the closet) makes acting more attractive to some since it has become a part of a socially acceptable lifestyle.

39. Do you find that a play about someone who has homosexual urges, but denies them would be important or accepted in theatre? Why or why not?

I think it would be important. I think people would be divided on the issue of acceptance. I think it would be important because of the perspective it would share and the potential entertainment value.

40. Do you think artists are elitist?
Some. Only a minority.

41. How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? Do you feel people ought to be classified as individuals rather than groups?
   I'm all about group identity and hate individualism. I'm not sure homosexuality is a valid "social" definition.

42. Do you think homosexuals are born homosexual, or do you think it is a choice?
   I think it is a choice.

43. How do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who agree with homosexuality, and vice-versa?
   With understanding and the belief that all can learn from open dialogue. Of course, Christians have a greater responsibility for displaying openness, acceptance, and love.

44. Are there any questions that I have not asked that you feel I should be asking? Do you have any other comments you would like to add?
   No.

4/13/05
Email Interview
Anonymous: Mid-twenties, teacher

1. Do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?
   Usually. I will always hear and consider the opinion of someone else, even if I don't agree with it. When it comes to morals, I consider myself closed-minded with just anyone, but open-minded to those I admire and respect. (Hope that makes sense).

2. Do you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?
   No.

3. Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality?
   Not that I'm aware of.

4. What would you say to someone who confided in you that they might be gay?
   My first question would be: why do you feel this way? After that.......I'd probably ask them a lot of questions, hopefully helping them to realize what started them feeling that way.

5. Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?
   No.

6. What would you describe as "conventional values?"
   Things that have been taught to your parents, and passed on to you.

7. Do you believe in God? The Bible?
   Yes, every word.
8. Some believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference? Why? Why not?
Yes, there is a difference. Anyone could consider themselves religious if they believe in some higher power or maybe attended a church. But being a spiritual person makes you deeper – someone who believes with a reason for why they believe it. Also, being spiritual means you live your life differently, that every decision is based on your beliefs. And I would hope that someone who is spiritual continues to study to discover more about what they believe.

9. Do you consider yourself a religious person, or do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Or both?
Probably both.

10. How would you describe your relationship with God?
Not what it should be, I struggle to keep it new instead of routine.

11. Do you believe in moral absolutism? Why/why not?

12. Do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong? Why or why not?
Yes, the Bible clearly states it.... several times.

13. How did you come to the conclusion you have come to on this issue? (What kind of critical thinking, if any?)
No critical thinking involved, the Bible says it, and I believe the WHOLE Bible to be true.

14. What do you consider to be an example of someone forcing his or her beliefs on someone else?

15. What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?
To entertain. To bring to life a story written in script-form so that it becomes 3-D.

16. Do you think homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas? Why or why not?
Yes, I really don’t know why, maybe because in theatre straight people are usually the minority?

17. Do you find that a play about someone who has homosexual urges, but denies them would be important or accepted in theatre? Why or why not?
(Don’t quite understand what you are implying with this question).

18. Do you think artists are elitist?
Can’t speak for all of them-- ????

19. How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? Do you feel people ought to be classified as individuals rather than groups?
Yes.

20. Do you think homosexuals are born homosexual, or do you think it is a choice? It’s a choice.

21. How do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who agree with homosexuality, and vice-versa?
Love the sinner, hate the sin (not sure I really know how to do that though…).

22. Are there any questions that I have not asked that you feel I should be asking? Do you have any other comments you would like to add?
   I don’t know how valid my opinion is, considering I don’t interact with homosexuals. Ever. There aren’t any that live where I do, or if they do, they’re not coming out.

4/26/05
Email Interview
Ed Murray: Minister in Riverton, Wyoming, Licensed counselor for prisons and private practice, father and grandfather

1. Do you consider yourself an open-minded person?
   I am open minded but think that open minded is define by individuals and others so much that it is like asking who is liberal or dogmatic. Depends on the individual and the setting in which it is being used which involves the culture of the person or group.

2. Do you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?
   Yes...Several of my clients are gay here in prison. I sit and talk to them and acknowledge them when I see them.

3. Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality?
   Yes. I know a lot of people in the community and some deal with the problem of homosexuality in their lives. For many of them it is an identity issue.

4. What would you say to someone who confided in you that they thought they might be gay?
   It would depend on the setting and the opportunities of discussion. If they bring God's word into the discussion I discuss it with them but in the context of the prison I deal with them where they are at. If they want to change or want to discuss the behavior then I do. I think there are a lot of deterrents to that behavior besides God’s word but in my professional position I have to let them direct the direction of the helping. Don't misunderstand - I do believe homosexuality, lesbianism, bi-sexual activity are wrong and against God’s word but I do not let their behavior keep me from helping with other issues.

5. Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?
   Yes. A lot of men do.. I believe it is because many men don't understand their sexuality and are uncomfortable with identity and feelings of inadequacy.

6. What would you describe as “conventional values?”
   I would understand that as the values of an idealized past. That
which met a social norm. Anything out of the norm I think is seen as unconventional - not an accepted way to think.

7. Do you believe in God? The Bible?
   YES and YES.

8. Some people believe there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference? Why? Why not?
   Religious person keeps rituals-most of the time not knowing why except their parents did it or that what I have always done. Spiritual person is a person connected to his practices by faith-lived out of dedication for a purpose. Most do it with joy and peace.

9. Do you consider yourself a religious person, or do you consider yourself a spiritual person?
   Both- My spiritual part directs my religious part. When no one else cares I keep doing it.

10. How would you describe your relationship with God?
    I want to be a man after God's heart but I would hope I am a friend.

11. Do you believe in moral absolutism?
    Yes...I believe God's word is the standard of how we are to live our physical lives as well as spiritual. As Jesus said - His word will judge in the last day.

12. Do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong?
    Yes - It is against God and His word which condemns it. Creation itself declares it wrong.

13. How did you come to the conclusion you have come to on this issue? (What kind of critical thinking, if any?)
    Proving the Bible is God's word - evidences, history.

14. What do you consider to be an example of someone forcing his or her beliefs on someone else?
    Demanding conformity, submissiveness of another without the right to and giving negative consequences unjustly.

15. What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?
    Education, entertainment, I know many use it to promote their agenda but that does not bother me...I can leave or turn it off but most of the time I use it to understand them and look for ways to give an account for my faith.

16. Do you think homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas? Why or why not?
    I don't know...I'm not behind the scenes in the theatre. It is openly acknowledged here (at the prison) but it is not to be practiced. If they get
caught then they get charges brought against them in the prison. But again it is against the rules to masturbate also...self harming behavior...

17. Do you find that a play about someone who has homosexual urges, but denies them would be important or accepted in the theatre?
   Yes - it might show that choices are being made. I believe that all behavior is purpose driven and is to meet needs in learned ways. Choices are made for that reason in this area.

18. Do you think artists are elitist?
   I think that is in the mind. I daily speak to fellows that think like that and are entitled.

19. How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? Do you feel people ought to be classified as individuals rather than groups?
   No problem - happens all the time depending on the issue - they do that with Arkansas people also you know...hahah.

20. Do you think homosexuals are born homosexual, or do you think it is a choice?
   I think that more become by choice. Most I see here were victimized at an early age and never adapted socially, emotionally or etc. More I see today are bi-sexual. That’s what is becoming so socially accepted.

21. How do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who agree with homosexuality, and vice-versa?
   I think they need to be invited in to study with. But as I explained to one lesbian – you’re always welcome here but if you’re looking to have your lifestyle condoned, it won't happen here.

22. Are there any questions that I have not asked that you feel I should be asking? Do you have any other comments you would like to add?
   No.

4/26/05
Katie Morris: Age 26, Event coordinator for Civic Center Music Hall in a Midwestern city

1. Do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?
   I would like to believe I am an open-minded person, but I think as much as I try not to judge people, there are some things I am not open-minded about.

2. Do you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?
I have friends and coworkers who are openly gay.

3. Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality?

Yes, there are a few people I am very close to who have struggled with homosexuality.

4. What would you say to someone who confided in you that they might be gay?

I would make sure he/she knew that I would still love them and our relationship would not change.

5. Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?

No, I have personally never dealt with feelings of homosexuality.

6. What would you describe as “conventional values?”

I believe “conventional values” are, in the simplest form, the difference between right and wrong.

7. Do you believe in God? The Bible?

Yes, I believe in God and the truth of the Bible.

8. Some believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference? Why? Why not?

I think it depends on the context in which these two words are used. My first instinct is a religious person is one that wants to “do good” and a spiritual person is one that wants to “feel good”. I don’t necessarily believe this to be true, it is just what comes to mind first.

9. Do you consider yourself a religious person, or do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Or both?

In using my previous definitions, I think I am, at times, both religious and spiritual. Sometimes I base my decisions and worship of God on what I perceive to be a good work, while other times I base it on what might feel good.

10. How would you describe your relationship with God?
I believe he is the creator of the world and of me. I don’t know how to define my relationship with Him. One day it is great and I rely on Him 100%, while other days I feel I have completely neglected Him. Everyday it changes and hopefully I learn something new about God and myself.

11. Do you believe in moral absolutism? Why/why not?

I believe in the difference between right and wrong. There is too much “grey” in our world. We are a society that likes to bend the rules as much as possible in order to make ourselves feel better about the decisions we are making. I don’t think that is how we are supposed to operate.

12. Do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong? Why or why not?

I consider homosexuality to be a sexual sin, like that of adultery.

13. How did you come to the conclusion you have come to on this issue? (What kind of critical thinking, if any?)

I came to this conclusion by reading the Bible and knowing that God designed sex to be between a married man and woman.

14. What do you consider to be an example of someone forcing his or her beliefs on someone else?

If someone talks about their beliefs all the time and also tells me mine are wrong and their beliefs are the only right ones, they are forcing their beliefs on me.

15. What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?

The purpose of theatre is to enlighten, educate, and entertain.

16. Do you think homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas? Why or why not?

Yes, I believe it is more accepted. Those who have grown up in the theatre tend to be more accepting individuals, in general. This has been my experience, and is of course, not the case for everyone. There also tend to be more homosexuals in the arts and, therefore, those in the theatre have been more exposed to it than the general public.
17. Do you find that a play about someone who has homosexual urges, but denies them would be important or accepted in theatre? Why or why not?

I think it would be important, because it is an area that has not been exposed. In the plays that have characters with homosexual urges, homosexuality is not only viewed as okay, but is often glorified.

18. Do you think artists are elitist?

No, I do not think artists are elitist.

19. How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? Do you feel people ought to be classified as individuals rather than groups?

Yes, I think everyone has different experiences and ideas that make them individuals. I think it is sad when people are socially classified together. This is the result of an ignorant and judgmental society. However, it is something for which we are all a little guilty.

20. Do you think homosexuals are born homosexual, or do you think it is a choice?

I do not think individuals are born as homosexuals, because that is not God’s design. Homosexuality is very often the result of unhealthy relationships with parents, abuse, varied experiences, as well as social stereotypes.

21. How do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who agree with homosexuality, and vice-versa?

We are all equal and we all sin. No one should act as if they are not guilty of sinning. We should embrace and love those who are homosexuals.

22. Are there any questions that I have not asked that you feel I should be asking? Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

It looks great to me!
Anonymous: mid-twenties, college admissions counselor in Oregon

1. Do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?
   Somewhat. I have the conflict I think most Christians have; how do you really
   love the person when you really hate the sin?
2. Do you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?
   Yes.
3. Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality?
   Yes.
4. What would you say to someone who confided in you that they might be gay?
   I have no idea. I have even had this happen and I still don’t know. I don’t
   remember what I said, but I know it wasn’t much.
5. Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?
   No.
6. What would you describe as “conventional values?”
   In what sense? The church? Conventional “Christian” values in this area have
   been that homosexuality is a sin. In a general sense, “conventional values” in the
   US are what we think of as the American ideal in the 50’s. Dad works, Mom
   keeps house, kids do what is expected. No drinking, drugs, sex, or any of the
   “big” sins.
7. Do you believe in God? The Bible?
   Most of the time.
8. Some believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a
   religious person. Do you see a difference? Why? Why not?
   Yes. I see a spiritual person as someone who is concerned about their spirit/soul,
   and who is looking for higher answers. A strictly religious person could be
   personified as one immersed in rules and rituals. I think there is also a movement
   of seeing someone as “spiritual” who is really just someone who focuses on
   emotions. I think that may be coming from the new-age movement. Crystals, and
   flowing dresses, and dreamy voices.
9. Do you consider yourself a religious person, or do you consider yourself a
   spiritual person?
   I think they go hand in hand. To be spiritual without religion is just an aimless
   wandering. A chasing after wind. To be religious without spirituality is basically
   living under the old law, when it is no longer necessary.
10. How would you describe your relationship with God?
    Turbulent.
11. Do you believe in moral absolutism? Why/why not?
Sometimes, and yes I see the irony in that. It’s hard to remain absolute in a post-modern world.

12. Do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong? Why or why not?
   Sometimes. I think it is a sin, but then I wonder how God would really react to it. I just don’t know.

13. How did you come to the conclusion you have come to on this issue? (What kind of critical thinking, if any?)
   It’s an endless cycle of thinking. I am not sure I will ever come to a real conclusion. The problem is that I can’t see the God I worship as one who would react toward homosexuality as the church has reacted to it. I do also fully realize that the “church” rarely acts as God would.

14. What do you consider to be an example of someone forcing his or her beliefs on someone else?
   The stereotype of this behavior is Christians forcing their religion on others, but I think there is an even more vicious forcing of secular beliefs onto Christians.

15. What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?
   To entertain, and to give us insights into ourselves.

16. Do you think homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas? Why or why not?
   Yes. I have no idea where it started.

17. Do you find that a play about someone who has homosexual urges, but denies them would be important or accepted in theatre? Why or why not?
   I think it would be very important. I have a sneaking suspicion that it would be wholly rejected. The theatre is like a sanctuary for homosexuality. To bring in that kind of a play would be like having an Athiest guest-preacher at a church.

18. Do you think artists are elitist?
   Yes.

19. How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? Do you feel people ought to be classified as individuals rather than groups?
   I think it’s natural, but a little stupid. Yes.

20. Do you think homosexuals are born homosexual, or do you think it is a choice?
   Ah, the question of the ages. I believe people are not born homosexual, but that it is not always a choice. I think it happens because of experiences in that person’s life, but that does not equal a choice for them.

21. How do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who agree with homosexuality, and vice-versa?
   Another tough question. Obviously kindness and love should prevail, but how can that really happen? I guess I still want that to be my answer: kindness and love.
22. Are there any questions that I have not asked that you feel I should be asking? Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

4/29/05
Email Interview
Phil Reagan: Age 55, Professor of theatre and communication at a Midwestern university

1. Do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?
   If by “open-minded” is meant nonrestrictive or unrestrictive, permissive, indulgent, lax, liberal or libertine, then I am not open-minded. If by “open-minded” is meant tolerant, influenceable, persuadable, or accessible, then I believe myself to be open-minded. For example, as a person who grew up in the southern United States, I was at one time somewhat prejudiced in my views towards African Americans. I believe that I am less so now. Likewise, my view about the roles of women has shifted over time.

2. Do you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?
   I do not have any close friends who are openly gay. However, I have a number of acquaintances who are living an openly gay life.

3. Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality?
   I have a friend who is gay, although he has never openly confessed this fact to me. I have no immediate relatives who are gay, but in my extended family have been one or more gay individuals.

4. What would you say to someone who confided in you that they might be gay?
   I would ask the person why they had decided to confide in me. I would try to ascertain if the person had only feelings of “gayness,” or if they had become committed to a gay relationship. I would try to assure them of my friendship and confidentiality. I would try to be a good listener.

5. Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?
   Honestly, no. I guess I have wondered what it would be like to be gay. But I have never had any desire for a physical relationship with someone of my own sex.

6. What would you describe as “conventional values”?
   Conventional values are those that have been understood, recognized, or acknowledged to be such by ordinary people over the history of humankind.

7. Do you believe in God? The Bible?
   Yes, I believe in God as he is revealed in the scriptures of the old and new testaments of the Bible. I believe the Bible to be God’s revelation of himself to humankind.
8. Some believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a 
religious person. Do you see a difference? Why? Why not?
At times, “spiritual” and “religious” may be used as synonyms. At other times, 
“religious” has the specific meaning of practicing one’s faith, being devout, or 
holding to a certain doctrine, whereas “spiritual” may refer only to an interest in 
the supernatural without the practice of any particular faith.
9. Do you consider yourself a religious person, or do you consider yourself a 
spiritual person? Or both?
I believe that I am both.
10. How would you describe your relationship with God?
His relationship with me is alright; it is my relationship with him that I worry 
about.
11. Do you believe in moral absolutism? Why/why not?
Yes. I believe some things are right, and some things are wrong. According to 
scripture (both old and new testament), the Bible teaches that God is the same 
yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Jesus also taught his disciples to be perfect, even 
as your Heavenly Father is perfect. Absolute perfection is not attainable by 
human beings themselves, but with God’s help/grace, humans can attain it. 
Christians also are taught to forgive even as we have been forgiven. We are 
taught to love one another, not to condemn one another.
12. Do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong? Why or why not?
Yes. The Bible, both old and new testaments, condemns the practice of 
homosexuality. See Leviticus 18:22; I Corinthians 6:9; and Romans 1:26, 27, 
among other passages.
13. How did you come to the conclusion you have come to on this issue? (What kind 
of critical thinking, if any?)
In my own study of the scriptures, I have concluded that the Bible sanctions 
sexual union in marriage between a man and a woman. God endorsed this union 
in the book of Genesis. Jesus himself endorsed this kind of relationship through 
his example by attending the wedding feast in Cana as described in the gospels. 
All other sexual unions are mutually excluded by this sanction of both Father and 
Son. In addition, sexual unions of all other kinds other than marriage between a 
man and woman are specifically condemned in scripture.
14. What do you consider to be an example of someone forcing his or her beliefs on 
someone else?
In the play “The Merchant of Venice” by Shakespeare, there is a specific example 
of a Christianized court forcing a Jew, Shylock, to rescind his Jewish faith and 
become a Christian on threat of forfeiture of his life and his property. I believe 
that verbal threat, use of physical force and use of social pressure have all been 
used at one time or another to force beliefs on someone else.
15. What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?
The ancient Greek word for the physical theatre was “theatron,” meaning “seeing place.” I believe that the theatre should be a place for us to “see” more clearly: to examine, to discuss, to inform, to persuade, to enlighten, to inspire and to entertain (as in the specific use of the word meaning “to entertain a thought”; to consider). The ancient Greeks, as did the ancient Egyptians before them, believed theatre to be a place where their faith/beliefs might be extolled, examined, and grappled with; a place where important questions might be asked and answers proposed. In this same spirit, I believe that theatre can be of service today. As Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

16. Do you think homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas? Why or why not?

No, I do not. Questions concerning the acceptability of homosexuality are asked within all social arenas today: the media, the government, the military, the business world, religion, the arts, etc.

17. Do you find that a play about someone who has homosexual urges, but denies them would be important or accepted in theatre? Why or why not?

A play that took this perspective would be important, yes. Would it be accepted? Although politically incorrect, in conservative elements of our culture this perspective would likely receive acceptance. However, in the more liberal elements of our culture, not only would it not be accepted, it would most surely be vehemently attached as discriminatory, biased and anti-intellectual.

18. Do you think artists are elitist?

Some artists are elitist; others, however, are not elitist. Some artists seek to be influential, and to accomplish this goal, seek to become a part of the ruling elite. To control taste is a very powerful thing – and power appeals to many people, not just those who are artists. Some artists, however, do not seek power or influence – but they acquire it, nevertheless, because of their talents. I don’t consider artists like these elitist.

19. How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? Do you feel people ought to be classified as individuals rather than groups?

Stereotyping should always be avoided. Homosexuals should be viewed as individuals.

20. Do you think homosexuals are born homosexual, or do you think it is a choice?

This is a difficult question, and my short answer is I don’t know. However, I know of no conclusive studies that prove homosexuality is a genetic condition.

21. How do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who agree with homosexuality, and vice-versa?
I believe church-going people should treat homosexuals, and those who agree with homosexuality, with kindness, consideration, respect and love.

22. Are there any questions that I have not asked that you feel I should be asking? Do you have any other comments you would like to add?
Polarization on this issue makes me wonder if dialogue is possible. Under what circumstances can dialogue occur? Can theatre be a mediating force for more thoughtful and considerate dialogue, when the dialogue thus far has been so strident as to be referred to as the “culture wars?” These are questions that you are trying to address – and they need addressing. I hope you can find the common ground needed for such a dialogue.

5/2/2005
Email Interview
Karen Reynolds: Age 27. Medical student in Texas

1. Do you consider yourself an open-minded person? Why or why not?
   Yes. It’s important to hear the opinions of others. This shows respect and often opens up possibilities of friendship and trust.
2. Do you have a relationship with anyone who is openly gay?
   No.
3. Do you have friends or relatives who deal with homosexuality?
4. What would you say to someone who confided in you that they might be gay?
   I would thank them for their trust in me. The rest of what I would say would depend on the situation.
5. Have you ever dealt with thoughts of homosexuality personally?
   No.
6. What would you describe as “conventional values?”
   Not to appear to cliché, but for lack of better terms, conventional values are those that stand the test of time, values that are held in high esteem from generation to generation. These values include, but are not limited to, honesty, integrity, and morality.
7. Do you believe in God? The Bible?
   Yes. Yes.
8. Some believe that there is a difference between being a spiritual person and a religious person. Do you see a difference? Why? Why not?
   Yes, I believe there is a difference. While the two terms often go hand in hand, I believe people can be religious without being spiritual at all. For example, they can go through all the motions of going to church and doing good but not have a
personal relationship with God. My personal relationship with God, in combination with my religious practices, defines my spirituality.

9. Do you consider yourself a religious person, or do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Or both?
   Both.

10. How would you describe your relationship with God?

11. Do you believe in moral absolutism? Why/why not?

12. Do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong? Why or why not?
   Yes. I believe morality is defined by God's law, and God does not approve of homosexuality.

13. How did you come to the conclusion you have come to on this issue? (What kind of critical thinking, if any?)

14. What do you consider to be an example of someone forcing his or her beliefs on someone else?

15. What do you believe is the purpose of theatre?
   I think theatre serves many purposes. It can provide comic relief, it can drive home a point, and it can represent the many experiences of life.

16. Do you think homosexuality is more accepted in theatre than in other social arenas? Why or why not?
   I'm not sure. I haven't been around homosexuality enough in any arena to be qualified to answer that. But from what I've heard, my answer would be yes.

17. Do you find that a play about someone who has homosexual urges, but denies them would be important or accepted in theatre? Why or why not?

18. Do you think artists are elitist?
   No.

19. How do you feel when people, specifically homosexuals, are socially classified together? Do you feel people ought to be classified as individuals rather than groups?
   If it's necessary to be classified at all, then individual classification is the only appropriate action. It bothers me when they are classified together because it's usually with such a negative connotation that the end result is complete avoidance. But the bottom line is that they are all still people. And how am I as a Christian supposed to reach them and help them if I avoid them?

20. Do you think homosexuals are born homosexual, or do you think it is a choice?
   I don't believe people are born as homosexuals, nor do I believe they all consciously choose to be homosexuals. Some do choose it, but I believe it is deeper than that. There are many studies that have revealed that homosexuality develops because of emptiness due to a lack of relationship with their same sex parent while growing up.

21. How do you think church-going people should treat homosexuals and those who agree with homosexuality, and vice-versa?
“Church-going people” must approach each situation with love. They must not condemn, but first must build a relationship consisting of trust. I also do not believe they should use the phrase “love the sinner but hate the sin.” To the person who is struggling with homosexuality, what they do is who they are. And we must remember that this sin is no greater than any other, and when it comes down to it, any sin I struggle with weighs the same as the sin of homosexuality.

22. Are there any questions that I have not asked that you feel I should be asking? Do you have any other comments you would like to add?
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