



Queerness and Religion

Stonewall Japan doesn't promote or intend to promote a religious doctrine or practice. Religion and one's own religious belief can be a very personal and intimate topic of discussion. Despite being used as an instrument of division and harm, some communities share very complex and intertwined relationships with belief systems. This month's newsletter will give some insight to individuals and some of these relationships in our community.

Hinduism and a third-gender

Hijras are the most common third gender group found in South Asia, particularly India. The hijra community includes trans and intersex individuals but they are simply recognized as third gender, neither male nor female, in their communities and culture. Many Hindu texts speak of hijra as highly respected and revered, being close to the divine as many of the gods in the Hindu pantheon are third gender themselves. The negative effects of British colonialism are still felt to this day though there have been positive developments for the community. In 2014, India, Nepal, and Bangladesh recognized third gender individuals as being deserving of equal rights and in 2015, the city of Raigarh in India saw its first hijra mayor.



Madhu Bai Kinnar, mayor of Raigarh @ DW.com

<https://mg.co.za/article/2017-04-13-00-hinduism-embraces-the-third-gender>
<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/03/06/tritiya-prakriti-hinduism-hijras/>

Yoruba and Santeria - African Diaspora and Queerness

Originating in Western Africa, the Yoruba people and their religion are the point of origin for Afro-Caribbean religions like Santeria. The over 1500 divine figures in this family of religions are united by, and originate from, Oludumare. Oludumare is recognized as genderless, or possessing all genders at once. Other divine figures

in Santeria exhibit male and female characteristics, or exist somewhere in the gender spectrum rarely falling into one specifically. Many queer individuals who are descendants of the African diaspora are finding a connection to their roots and queer identities through Afro-Caribbean religions today.



A Santeria altar

<https://www.aaihs.org/cosmological-queerness-across-the-yoruba-diaspora/>
<https://sites.google.com/site/theyorubareligiousconcepts/olodumare>

Openly Queer, Openly Religious

Aja from Ru Paul's Drag Race Season 9 is a genderqueer QPOC who practices Santeria. They include Santeria, an afro-caribbean religion, in their daily life and their art. In their video for 'Brujeria', Aja channels different orisha, the divine spirits in Santeria.

<http://remezcla.com/features/music/drag-race-aja-ep-interview/>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9m_Ffxxxc



Twitter: @ajaqueen



@outinjapan

Nishimura Kodo is a gay, Japanese, international makeup artist and buddhist monk. After studying abroad and starting a make up career in the US, Kodo returned to Japan to learn more about buddhism and become a monk. His sexuality has a place in buddhism and he views both makeup and buddhism as a way to promote inner balance and love to others.

<https://tricycle.org/magazine/buddhist-life-kodo-nishimura/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsfGUfBhUX0>

Brandi Carlile is a lesbian, three-time Grammy award winning sing/songwriter, and a Christian. In 2018, Carlile publicly forgave a pastor who denied her a baptism in front of her family and church community when she was 15 because she was gay. Carlile says that experienced made her stronger and inspired her to help LGBTQ+ youth.

<https://www.npr.org/2018/02/14/582454085/brandi-carlile-on-practicing-forgiveness-even-when-its-hard>



It's Quite Complex

There is a long history of religious communities not being welcoming to and/or doing harm onto the LGBTQ+ community. This has led to complex relationships with religion which individuals have evolved or ended. Below are some examples of people who navigate these relationships.

Bobby Berk from Netflix's Queer Eye has shared his experiences and stance on religion. Bobby has said "the one topic I told everyone was off limits was religion." stemming from the harm he experienced from the religious community he belonged to as a child and the continued efforts by religious groups to harm the LGBTQ+ community. Bobby has faced these conversations on the show and has been applauded for being true to who he is and his experiences, like not stepping into a church when he didn't feel comfortable doing so, and representing many who in the LGBTQ+ community have had similar experiences and feelings.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1943545699283887>

<https://www.bustle.com/p/where-did-bobby-grow-up-the-queer-eye-designer-has-mixed-feelings-about-his-small-town-origins-9376345>



'Mr. Atheist' on YouTube tackles anti-queer religious perspectives by critically challenging the points made. Mr. Atheist (a.k.a Jimmy Snow) is an ex-mormon and pansexual. He recognizes that dangerous religious doctrine exists and aims to "balance that and help others to see there is a happy, healthy world waiting for them on the other side of religion!"

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgeV3tFiU2Xq0PD1dAQbBHA/about>



Autostraddle, a "progressively feminist online community for multiple generations of kickass lesbian, bisexual & otherwise inclined ladies (and their friends).", presented an article back in 2013 in which over 10 queer individuals diverse in gender, race, age, sexuality, and religion shared their personal and evolving relationships with religion. The perspectives show how varied and common these experiences can be. The post can be found here:

<https://www.autostraddle.com/being-queer-and-spiritual-or-not-the-autostraddle-religion-roundtable-194714/>.

Positive Change and Inclusivity

Unity Mosque

Founded in May 2009 by Dr. El-Farouk Khaki, Laury Silvers, and Troy Jackson in Toronto Canada. The mosque does not have a dress code for its members nor is it gender segregated, allowing members of different gender identities to pray together. Anyone can lead the call to prayer at the start of service. Khaki, who is queer, promotes the message that "Islam is not a monolith", encouraging members to use "my Islam" in contrast to "Islam says". This space has allowed queer muslims to openly and safely practice their faith in a time where they may have strayed from it or been lost without such a community.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/affirming-mosques-help-gay-muslims-reconcile-faith-sexuality-n988151> ; <https://www.buzzfeed.com/davidemastracci/toronto-lgbt-unity-mosque>



El-Farouk Khaki @Toronto Star

Rev. Taka Zenryu Kawakami is the deputy head priest at *Shunkoin Temple* in Kyoto. After being approached about the possibility of performing a same-sex wedding for a Spanish woman and her partner, Kawakami referenced the texts of Mahayana Buddhism and found that a same-sex wedding would not go against scripture. He performed the wedding ceremony in 2010 and has performed more in the subsequent years for both foreign and Japanese couples. While the unions are spiritual and symbolic in nature, Kawakami hopes that the message of happiness for all members of a society is received in Japan.



https://www.huffpost.com/entry/shunkoin-temple-gay-marriage_n_56290990e4b0aac0b8fbeb01



Stonewall Japan will be at Tokyo Rainbow Pride this year sharing a booth with TELL Japan. We'll have a booth and bar crawl on Sunday (Sunday, April 28th) and a booth and our picnic on the second day (Monday, April 29th). Stay tuned to our updates via Facebook and Twitter before and during the festivities. If you're in the area please stop by and say hello!

For more information on Tokyo Rainbow Pride and TELL Japan check out the links below:

Tokyo Rainbow Pride: <https://tokyorainbowpride.com/>

TELL Japan: <https://telljp.com/>