

## Title

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**Queer Spiritual Space(s): An investigation into the practices of non-hegemonic queer spiritual communities using case studies**



## What this Study Contributes

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This project draws together existing and interdisciplinary strands of research on spiritual space, queer space, LGBTQI [Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex] cultures and religion. It extends them by considering the ontology of queer spiritual spaces, across a spectrum of spiritual practices and beliefs. It breaks new ground by exploring the various strategies and embodiments related to imaginative, spiritual and physical inhabitations of queer spiritual spaces as text, community, virtual, physical, fixed and mutable architectures.

## Team

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**Principal Investigator:** Prof Sally Munt (Sussex)

**Co-Investigators:** Dr Kath Browne (Brighton), Professor Andrew Yip (Nottingham)

**Digital Media Supervisor:** Dr Kate O’Riordan (Sussex)

**Part-time postdoctoral fellows:** Dr Liz Dinnie, Dr Amna Khalid, Dr Sharon Smith and Dr Heather White

**Postgraduate digital media facilitator and researcher:** Patrick Brown and Dr Olu Jenzen

## University

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University of Sussex

## Award

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Phase 1 Small Grant £83,788

## Research Partners

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Numerous LGBTQI co-operators from a variety of religious faith traditions.

## Approach

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The project involved two inter-faith encounters where queer spiritual practitioners from different paths and traditions came together to discuss their understandings of queer spiritual space and contributed towards the creation of the project's website, as well as semi-structured interviews with LGBTI members of the Quakers, the Unitarians, Imaan and Al Fatiha, and the Radical Faeries and historical and cultural scholarship. Action research was employed, alongside internet-based research, especially using Second Life, and six case studies were conducted across the UK and USA.

## Findings

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Project ended **31<sup>st</sup> March 2009**

### **Provisional Findings:**

1. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning and Intersex (LGBTQI) members have to negotiate with the religious tradition they have chosen/been brought up in.
2. Negotiated/strategic identities resulted in separate time/space moments.
3. LGBTQI peoples largely disidentified with the label 'Queer' which they saw as uncomfortable and derogatory, even though this is the predominant term in academic circles and amongst the young Anglo-American middle class.
4. Issues of homophobia remained strong in all religious traditions, and within 'accepting' spiritualities people also had issues with exclusion, invisibility and marginalisation
5. Participants often carried over a sense of injury from early religious/familial affiliations that related to sexual/gender identities and could result in seeking alternative spiritualities

6. Spirituality was important to LGBTQI communities for a host of reasons including resilience and support, but that also 'narratives of selfhood' were key to both dimensions, sexual and spiritual.
7. Some of respondents largely disidentified with the clubbing/music scene of predominantly gay and lesbian urban life, preferring quiet spaces of nature, or friendship networks.

## Activities and Outcomes

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- A very popular website: <http://www.queerspiritualspaces.com/>.
- A well attended end of project conference including academic and non-academic participants at the University of Sussex on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2009:  
[http://www.queerspiritualspaces.com/downloads/qss\\_conf\\_post.pdf](http://www.queerspiritualspaces.com/downloads/qss_conf_post.pdf).
- The book *Queer Spiritual Spaces : Sexuality and Sacred Places* published by Ashgate in 2010 (see cover above): <http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9780754675273>.

## Further Information

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The project's use of Second Life was particularly pioneering.