Aussie Alt Christian

MENTAL HEALTH

Repetitive and Cumulative Trauma — Folau Adds to It

Argues the Israel Folau saga compounds cumulative trauma in the LGBTIQA+ community, drawing parallels with other traumatised groups.

By **Jason Masters** · 26 June 2019

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Mental health is a significant issue in the LGBTIQ community, not because people are LGBTIQ, but because of the way LGBTIQ people are treated in society.

I recently wrote an article for my local parish magazine. I am not sure the average Australian understand what has happened and continues to happen to the LGBTIQ community in Australia. On Richard Glovers ABC Drive radio show on Monday evening (24 June 2019) a highly educated commentator suggested that now there is marriage equality all issues are solved. As I keep telling people, marriage equality is just one of the inequalities against LGBTIQ people.

The following is what I wrote for my parish magazine. Are you willing to respond to a call to action, as Jesus did to walk with the marginalised rather than the powerful?

I recently had some conversations with several leaders within the Uniting Church about repetitive and cumulative trauma.

I have been concerned about this for some time as an issue for many in the Aboriginal community.

There are those among us and within the media that go out of their way to identify flaws or weaknesses within the Aboriginal people, and upon finding one or two individuals, entire communities are then made to feel at fault.

In my roles within the cemetery sphere, I have become far more attuned to specific cultural and faith requirements around death and interment. When working with a significant Aboriginal Land Council here in the Greater Sydney area last year, I was shocked to be confronted with the fact that the number one cause of intergenerational poverty is the cost of funerals. Trauma passes from generation to generation.

I have also been aware of the concept of ongoing trauma within the community of people who have suffered from ‘institutional child sexual abuse’. Firstly, they were abused. Then when they told someone, it is unlikely they were believed. Later (if they were brave enough to report it to the police or other authorities), they were often considered to be making up stories, or the authorities interfered to protect the institutions or individuals within them.

Later, with the Royal Commission, many had to retell their stories, provide facts to investigators, both privately and publicly when asked to take the stand. This only added to the trauma they have suffered.

Now, as cases are going through the criminal courts (even if the situation doesn’t involve a particular individual), the wall-to-wall media interest in high profile cases brings back their

trauma. They are being repeatedly traumatised.

While LGBTIQ issues are very different from these issues discussed above, they have a parallel. As I journey through writing my book, I have seen the impacts of little events and problems along the way. These little things cumulate.

When I talk with people around the Israel Folau matter, there are those that say there are no consequences concerning Folau's posts. But there are. We all know the saying 'The straw that broke the camel's back'. Cumulative trauma is a real issue within the LGBTIQ community.

A youth may hear a slur in the playground, or the phrase "That's gay," on the sporting field as a derogatory comment. If they read much of the News Corporation's newspapers available in Australia (in Sydney, The Australian and the Daily Telegraph), they would always be reading and exposed to articles that suggest that LGBTIQ people should not be recognised and ultimately, should be disregarded. If they happen to enter many churches in Sydney, there can be outright hostility to LGBTIQ people.

I recently heard of two people from a Uniting Church here in Sydney – both cisgendered (a person whose gender identity corresponds to their biological sex at birth) and heterosexual, who happen to be employed by an Anglican Church child agency. They were told that as their Minister was gay, they would either need to leave their employment or leave their Uniting Church. They needed work so, unfortunately, they have been forced to leave their parish.

Teens see lots of negative information on social media. This becomes cumulative.

People rarely commit suicide because of one event; suicidality usually builds or cumulates from a series of events.

This is why Isreal Folau's post was so dangerous. I contend that it was not theologically accurate, but for some young people, it is the proverbial straw.

Uniting Network, the LGBTIQ community within the Uniting Church has many aims, but the two big ones are pastoral care and theological engagement. This work is becoming a real challenge for members of the Uniting Network. Theological engagement is continuing but will now need to be ramped up to respond to the increasing commentary of non-affirming Christians in Australia and their perceived growing political power. But the Uniting Network members are tired, exhausted.

Pastoral care is now failing as we can barely care for ourselves, let alone others within our community. Repetitive and Cumulative Trauma is having its toll. The last few years have been huge for advocates, and from reading about some of the 30-year plus veteran advocates, they say the last three to five years have been the most intense in a long time.

The following is just some of my engagements over the last couple of years:

- Engagement to have Parliament directly deal with marriage equality
- Invovlement to stop the plebiscite on marriage quality
- Campaigning for marriage quality through the postal survey. In my case, I received numerous social media nooses as threats, guns pointed to a head, and many horrendous comments such as “all LGBTIQ kids should die”
- Dealt with my own homophobic attack in late 2017 connected to my sporting community
- Continuing the momentum during the marriage equality debates in Parliament
- Engaging with the Uniting Church Assembly process around same-gender marriage decision within the Uniting Church
- Advocating during the attempts to delay the Assembly decision through a never previously used clause in the Uniting Church’s constitution
- Supporting transgender people’s rights who have received inappropriate treatment by medical practitioners
- Engagement around the Israel Folau issue that is now into its second year
- Engagement with the secretive Ruddock Inquiry into Religious Freedom
- Responding to misinformation by so many around Transgender people, across the media, some elements of the medical profession (usually driven by conservative Christian views overriding medical knowledge), and politicians, including our Prime Minister before the election
- Upcoming engagement with the Australian Law Reform Commission on the Prime Minister’s referral of religious freedom to them
- Meeting with Local, Federal and State MP’s on LGBTIQ issues, including HIV in our area
- I am expecting an increase in hostility towards the LGBTIQ community as a result of the recent election, primarily due to the stance taken by News Corporation and the conservative Christian

Some Christian leaders and associated lobby groups who feel they are owed something from the return of the Government.

I was pleased to see that during the election, the Prime Minister announced increased funding to support mental health issues within the LGBTIQ community, as well as supporting the movement to be primarily driven by states to stop gay conversion, ex-gay, reparative therapy or similar “treatments”.

As this next three years are going to continue to require considerable advocacy by the LGBTIQ Community to retain civil rights that have been a long time coming and to continue to move for further civil rights (such as no LGBTIQ discrimination in all schools), this is the time for Allies to step up.

In what way can LGBTIQ Allies step up?

- Perhaps undertake a Mental Health First Aid Course and other pastoral care courses focused on LGBTIQ issues to ensure good pastoral care of your LGBTIQ church members, family and friends.
- Take time to learn more about LGBTIQ issues.
- Identify areas of advocacy that may interest you around LGBTIQ issues and engage with the media, your local members, the broader church, and the wider community.

Repetitive and cumulative trauma is here within so many groups across our society – are you willing to engage?

From the original discussion (June 2019):

> **I found this post so insightful and helpful. Thank you, Jason, for bringing awareness to this important situation. And yes, I'll stand with the marginalised any day. Isn't that what Jesus would do?**
> **— Nicole Cody**

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Web aussiealtchristian.com.au

Email info@aussiealtchristian.com.au

We welcome LGBTIQA+ readers, writers, and contributors. The Progress Pride Flag (Daniel Quasar, 2018; intersex update by Valentino Vecchietti, 2021) is shown here as a statement of who we are and who this publication is for.

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