

5-9 July
Online in Run The World

REA Annual Meeting 2021 Proceedings
gender, sexuality, and wholeness

**Religious Education for
Confrontation and Healing**

<http://religiouseducation.net/rea2021>

The Religious Education Association (REA) is an Association of
Professors, Practitioners, and Researchers in Religious Education





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Contemplative Pedagogy: An Approach To Wholeness With African American Adolescents

Abstract

This paper is proposing that contemplative pedagogy is a way to break the silence on the subject of sexuality within the church. The paper will specifically address the needs of African American adolescents relating to sexual identity and sexual abuse. The paper will present various contemplative pedagogies and examine and explore strengths and weaknesses. Special attention will be given to the pedagogy of mindfulness.

This paper will address the African American church's silence in its preaching and teaching as it relates to sexuality and how this affects identity formation in African American adolescents. I will critique the assumptions and arguments of Erik Erikson related to culture and race and how when there is silence in the African American community norms are established based on a European understanding of adolescents and identity formation.

Introduction

Retired Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church Bishop Othal H. Lakey writes in his book, *Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered*, “despite the insatiable inclination of African American preachers to take text and select topics on virtually any and every subject at hand, there is one subject, however, on which their collective silence is conspicuous. That subject is sex.”¹

One of the most memorable elective courses I took in seminary was entitled *Human Sexuality*. It was taught by an adjunct faculty member whose profession was psychotherapy. In retrospect I can say prior to this class in all of my educational endeavors in public schools and churches I had acquired very little knowledge about human sexuality. Actually, I could not recall one time the subject was addressed in the school or the church.

Having now served the CME church as its chief officer of education for close to twenty years, I agree with Bishop Lakey that there is a collective silence concerning sexuality. Conversations about sexuality often denigrate into homophobia. As a practical theologian and practitioner in the field of Christian education I am disturbed by this silence.

In this paper I outline how this silence leads to confusion regarding sexual identity among adolescent African Americans. Furthermore, I will argue how this confusion leads to abuse that is often not detected and when it is, it is not addressed in healthy ways. This confusion leads to some adolescents finding it difficult to find their place in the church and to navigate through the malaise of church politics and order.

I want to offer a pedagogy that is not only not popular in the African American church experience, but uncomfortable, difficult, and not encouraged. I think this is the case because it has not been examined as a way to assist adolescents find a place of expression and “mindfulness.”

I am proposing that contemplative pedagogy become an alternative for helping African American adolescents in the area of identity formation. Although I believe this pedagogical approach will be helpful for the majority of African American adolescents, I believe it will be specifically helpful for those African American adolescents who are struggling with their sexual identity.

Contemplative pedagogy allows for the focus of teaching and learning to incorporate “first person” approaches which connect adolescents to their lived, embodied experiences. Adolescents are encouraged to become more aware of their internal world and connect their learning to their own values and sense of meaning which in turn enables them to form richer and deeper relationships with their peers, their communities, and the world around them. In doing so adolescents become more accepting of their own identity.

A challenge to teachers in churches is this proposal would move the teacher from a more traditional third person approach to teaching that gives authority to the teacher as the dispenser

¹ Othal Hawthorne Lakey. *Bewitched, Bothered & Bewildered*. CME Publishing House. Memphis. 2011, 52

of information. Contemplative pedagogy opens up a new way of knowing and I might add, knowing oneself. Contemplative pedagogy incorporates mind, body, and spirit in contrast to other pedagogies that are technical and scientific. This allows space for African American adolescents to incorporate who they are and at the same time to identify and understand how they are changed by what they learn.

Contemplative pedagogy, specifically mindfulness, provides opportunities for bringing wholeness to African American adolescents, identity formation and sensibilities toward those in the church community who may identify within the LGBTQIA+ community. It approaches teaching and learning as a wholistic venture that seeks to bring healing and wholeness specifically to African American adolescents.

During this time of sheltering in our homes and the use of virtual platforms to teach, I have conducted my initial research in this manner. I engaged a group of six people once a week for four weeks. Using exercises such as mindful breathing, observation, awareness, listening, immersion, and appreciation I used guided meditations around the general subject of human sexuality and adolescence. Through careful listening and observations, I have drawn my conclusions about the use of contemplative pedagogy with African American adolescents. Two of my research listening partners were *Contemplative Youth Ministry: Practicing the Presence of Jesus* (Youth Specialties) and *Growing Souls: Experiments in Contemplative Youth Ministry* by Mark Yaconelli. A main source for my listening was Peter Tyler and his book *Christian Mindfulness: Theology and Practice*.

On their smartphones, young Christians read headlines about more and more U.S. states recognizing same-sex marriage. At school, their friends increasingly embrace gay, bisexual and transgender lifestyles. In the pews, many of them struggle with same-sex attraction — in silence. In the places where I minister, I don't hear talk about any of these things. However, across America, kids are talking about this. Yet the church remains silent.

Keynoter Mark Yarhouse told more than 150 ministers, parents, and Bible students from 18 states during a conference, hosted by Lipscomb University:

“How would a youth struggling with sexual identity view your youth group?” asked Yarhouse, a professor of psychology at Regent University in Virginia Beach, Va. Would they see a community of “warmth, depth and hospitality” — yet committed to God’s word? Or would they find a group of Christians “so concerned about civility that you can’t tell what they believe?” Robin Gough, college minister for the South Baton Rouge Church of Christ in Louisiana, said he attended the conference because “this is a hot topic for millennials.” It’s also why they’re leaving church, he said.²

Young believers want to know how to interact with gay friends, Gough said, and they perceive that their congregations aren’t helping them find answers. For some participants, the conference was deeply personal. One couple told *The Christian Chronicle* that, just weeks earlier, their son

² <https://christianchronicle.org/sexual-identity-sin-and-silence/>

had attempted suicide. He struggles with same-sex attraction, and his friends have demonized the couple as close-minded and intolerant, they said.³

Bishop John Selders, Jr., an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ says, “there is a train of thought that holds a major critique of the Black Church and of its homophobic treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, especially those children of African descent. There is also the critique, as well, of the long-standing pattern of leadership in the African American community exemplified in the charismatic black male preacher and the power analysis that must be understood and reimagined in fresh new ways.”⁴

I present in this paper two situations that represent some of the issues around sexual identity. One is from real life and the second is fictional from a movie. The presentations of these two stories illustrate some of the issues surrounding sexual identity. I realize there are many terms that need to be discussed in the Black church, but I am limiting my definitions to sexual identity.

Sexual identity defined

“Sexual identity is how one thinks of oneself in terms of whom one is romantically or sexually attracted to. Sexual identity may also refer to sexual orientation identity, which is when people identify or dis-identify with a sexual orientation or choose not to identify with a sexual orientation. Sexual identity and sexual behavior are closely related to sexual orientation, but they are distinguished, with identity referring to an individual's conception of themselves, behavior referring to actual sexual acts performed by the individual, and sexual orientation referring to romantic or sexual attractions toward the opposite sex, the same sex, both sexes, or having no attractions. Historical models of sexual identity have tended to view its formation as a process undergone only by sexual minorities, while more contemporary models view the process as far more universal and attempt to present sexual identity within the larger scope of other major identity theories and processes.”⁵

One story: Sexual Abuse in the Parish

When he was 17, Spencer LeGrande alleges, he was coerced and manipulated into having a sexual relationship with the late Bishop Eddie L. Long, who was then senior pastor of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Stonecrest and one of the most influential megachurch leaders in the nation.

Cases of sexual abuse within the African American community are often either ignored, denied, or minimized, even as the ugly truth stares us in the face. **Robin D. Stone**, author of *No Secrets, No Lies: How Black Families Can Heal from Sexual Abuse*, discusses the silent issue in the African-American community and shares some startling facts about one of its best kept secrets. Race matters: African-American women are less likely than white women to involve police in cases of child sexual abuse. Fears about betraying the family by turning abusers into “the system” and distrust of institutions and authorities often lead blacks to remain silent about “family business.” Boys are also abused: About 14 percent of all young victims of sexual assault

³ <https://christianchronicle.org/sexual-identity-sin-and-silence/>

⁴ <https://reflections.yale.edu/article/sex-and-church/black-church-and-sexuality>. The Black Church and Sexuality.

⁵ <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=sexual+identity&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

are male, according to police reports. Among African Americans, homophobia perpetuates the denial of sexual abuse of boys. Cause and effect: Black women report being more severely abused with greater force. They also report “more upset, greater long-term effects and more negative life experiences” from sexual abuse than white women. Among the effects: post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance abuse, self-mutilation and more.⁶

What becomes clear when looking at these statistics in context is that the loud silence that pulsates in the African-American community when the subject of rape and sexual abuse is discussed should almost be expected. We have had to heal our own wounds for so long, that it seems somehow wrong to utilize a system that has been designed to see us — especially our men — fail.

On November 10, 1963, human-rights activist Malcolm X delivered his empowering speech, “Message to the Grassroots,” in Detroit, Michigan. Integral to his focal point of unity was the underlying order that Black America should never “air our dirty laundry” in public, especially within view of White America, was crystal clear. To do so was considered not only treasonous, but also detrimental to our progression as a people and brother Malcolm was not afraid to tell us so... Don’t let the enemy know that you got [sic] a disagreement. Instead of us airing our differences in public, we have to realize we’re all the same family. And when you have a family squabble, you don’t get out on the sidewalk. If you do, everybody calls you uncouth, unrefined, uncivilized, savage. If you don’t make it at home, you settle it at home; you get in the closet — argue it out behind closed doors. And then when you come out on the street, you pose a common front, a united front. And this is what we need to do in the community, and in the city, and in the state. We need to stop airing our differences in front of the white man.⁷

There is a misguided sense of loyalty, fear of societal retribution, and yes, even a lingering homophobia that paralyzes many of us when it comes to reporting sexual abuse against our children, especially our boys. We must realize that our archaic subscription to “what happens in our community stays in our community” is harming our next generation of men:

A Second Story: The Serial Killer’s Struggle With Physical and Sexual Identity

Serial killers have become a sensation. No longer are these predatory killers merely figures that haunt our nightmares or the faces that flash on the news at night. Instead, they are sensationalized images of horror, a force to be conquered by the heroic male. They are seen as mental illness embodied to the most violent extreme, but these fictional portrayals are not to be seen as models for mental illness. Instead, they should be seen as characters who are struggling with some kind of identity, an identity that is not just conveyed by their actions but also through their physical body. The character that I will specifically focus on is Buffalo Bill from Jonathan Demme’s 1991 film *Silence of the Lambs*, a fictional serial killer who kills to gain some identity he does not believe he possesses: a female identity in the case of Buffalo Bill.

⁶ Robin D. Stone. *No Secrets No Lies: How Black Families Can Heal From Sexual Abuse*. Harlem Moon, an imprint of Broadway Books, a division of Random House, Inc. 2004, 56

⁷ <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/speeches-african-american-history/1963-malcolm-x-message-grassroots/>

This character represents extreme violence but also the extreme opposite of the representation on screen. Buffalo Bill is a secondary villain and a hunted character, seen as evil in both his killing and his desire to transform into a woman. Buffalo Bill is the villainized and feminized homosexual. The character conveys a societal fear or worry, sexual and gender identity in the case of Bill. He is struggling with identity grounded in his physical body, all-the-while seemingly coping with mental illness, with this illness being exaggerated in his physicality and his need to kill. The representation of Buffalo Bill desire to change his body, and the representation of his body on screen, convey an idea about cultural ideology while influencing how we read the body of the serial killer. In *Silence of the Lambs*, Jame “Buffalo Bill” specifically wishes to become a woman, an identity he desires and believes should be his own. To aid this transformation, and to cope with this desire to become a woman in the only way he believes is possible, he begins to kill and skin women to create a woman suit, an act that is villainized from the film’s very beginning as the FBI is trying to hunt him down. As stated by Robert Cettl, “Bill is concerned with transformation and transcendence, and kills to maintain that process. He believes he is in a process of becoming”. But it is not just his murderous desires that villainizes him; it is also his transgender identity.⁸

From the film’s beginning, Bill is represented as a severely mentally disturbed man that not only kills women, but wishes to become one, which makes him even more terrifying. He is mentally ill not just due to the murders he commits, but also due to his sexual and gender identity. This desperate desire for transformation was seen by some as a “character of the serial murderer [that] had attributes associated with stereotypes of gay men”.⁹ Buffalo Bill’s sexual identity is portrayed as evil and is exaggerated with his need to kill to reaffirm this sexual identity. What is most surprising is not many critics discuss or even mention Buffalo Bill being transgender; they only discussed his identity as a gay man. In the film, his sexual desires are barely addressed, while his desire to become a woman is primarily focused upon. Perhaps these critics did not have the language to discuss transgender issues and perhaps Demme was not aware of issues of transphobia. However, he was aware of issues of homophobia and we are aware of issues of transphobia now; this film does reflect the fear of a man wanting to let go of his superior, stronger male identity for a weaker, submissive female identity.

Teaching The Teacher To Teach With Contemplative Pedagogy

I set out to teach a group of members at the church I pastor. I had three goals.

1. To examine the meaning of Contemplative Pedagogy
2. To sense my passion for the youth.
3. To articulate the essence of Contemplative Pedagogy and how it might be used with youth in addressing sexuality.

⁸ Cettl, Robert. *Serial Killer Cinema: An Analytical Filmography With An Introduction*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2003.

⁹ Staiger, Janet. “Taboos and Totems: Cultural Meanings of *The Silence of the Lambs*.” *Perverse Spectators: Practices of Film Reception*. New York: New York University Press (2000): 161-178.

The students involved were all active members in church school and bible study. All but one of them are either presently involved in ministry to youth or have been in some way in the past. Four one-hour sessions were held. I knew it was very ambitious for me to accomplish my goals in this timeframe. My intention is to continue this contemplative study for several more weeks, addressing sexuality directly and how it might be helpful in assisting young people work through their sexual identity.

I began each session by helping the learners grasp an understanding of key terminology. Since all of the participants were college graduates, bible students, and regular attendees in other studies with me, they would be expecting something different than what I was presenting. They all were used to the word education and the expectation of gaining knowledge.

What is Contemplative Pedagogy

Contemplative pedagogy shifts the focus of teaching and learning to incorporate ‘first person’ approaches which connect students to their lived, embodied experience of their own learning. Students are encouraged to become more aware of their internal world and connect learning to their own values and sense of meaning which in turn enables them to form richer deeper, relationships with their peers, their communities, and the world around them.

Contemplative Pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning with the goal of encouraging deep learning through focused attention, reflection, and heightened awareness. Learners are encouraged to engage deeply through contemplation and introspection (examining their thoughts and feelings).

The Christian life is not a static one. It is moving us someplace, and the Holy Spirit is our faithful companion, faithful to guide us to the place we are to be. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “You are what you think all day long.”¹⁰ I wouldn’t go so far as to say that we are defined by our thoughts, but two thousand years of Christian practices and tradition remind us that we *become* what we do. Our hearts are formed by, and our lives are shaped into, the practices we live out in our day-to-day lives. The danger in talking about spiritual practices, though, is that they can quickly slip from formative into legalistic, and then the old saying starts to ring true: “We only belong if we behave.”

I’d like to pull us away from a legalistic view and remind us that all good things take time. As any craftsman knows, the formation of something requires diligence and patience. We are not now what we will be one day, that’s true. However, we need not always be what we are right now. From the beginning, the church has used spiritual practices to aid and spur on the spiritual life.

Contemplative pedagogy not only provides a way of helping students to concentrate more effectively; it incorporates ways of teaching and learning that can provide a vastly different learning experience by opening new ways of knowing. This is achieved by moving beyond a technical, scientific training to incorporate body, mind, and spirit by allowing the space for students to incorporate who they are and to understand how they are changed by what they learn.

¹⁰ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/114540-you-become-what-you-think-about-all-day-long>

The importance of this was stated clearly by Daniel Barbezat ([Speaking at Syracuse University 15th October 2013](#)) in his discussion about how science and technology have often been applied in ways which create harm: *'The consequences of our unwillingness to bring into the classroom our own students sense of meaning and have them begin to build and exercise a sense of discernment about that meaning and the implications in the world are quite frankly horrifying'*¹¹

It seems to me that contemplative pedagogy has the potential to break the silence in the midst of silence. This will happen as people come more in touch with who they are they will speak uninhibited. I believe this might provide an avenue for the church to hear our youth express themselves in regard to sexual identity.

I began the journey of teaching teachers contemplative pedagogy by introducing some terms. INSTRUCTION is concerned with the intellectual aspects of learning. This is not the whole of religious learning, although some may wish to confine the work of the Sunday church school to this. Instruction requires *skills*. These are the methods and the techniques through which teaching takes place. The teacher tries to structure the perceptual field of the learner in order that the latter may understand and so receive the instruction.

THE WORD "EDUCATION" goes beyond instruction. The dictionary finds its rootage in *educare*— "to rear, bring up, education" — "to lead". The words "develop", and "growth" enter into this definition. Education is a more inclusive process than instruction. It would seem to involve the whole person. This is a broader basis for curriculum, providing for the enrichment of instructional material as well as the expression and testing of instruction. Knowledge and skills would be put to use in areas related to the basic learning.

The aim of faith formation is deepening relationship with God, what some would call "spirituality," and the faithful witness through word and action that grows out of this relationship. Through this relationship with God, persons are transformed to a life of loving God's creation, including oneself and others. While the faith community's efforts do not cause this transformation, they provide the environment and opportunities for lives to be transformed by God through the process of faith formation.

Pedagogy=Teaching and learning.

Lectio Divina

The first contemplative practice with the group was Lectio Divina. Lectio Divina is a contemplative way of reading the Bible. It dates back to the early centuries of the Christian Church and was established as a monastic practice by Benedict in the 6th century. It is a way of praying the scriptures that leads us deeper into God's word.

So, *lectio* is not Bible study or even an alternative to Bible study but something radically different. The practice understands Scripture as a meeting place for a personal encounter

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5iARQfWRZQ>

with the Living God. It is a practice we come to with the desire to be changed at all sorts of levels. It operates very much on the emotional rather than the purely cerebral level. It is perhaps *heartly* rather than *heady*. Through it we allow ourselves to be formed in the likeness of Christ; it is about *formation* rather than *instruction*.

When undertaken in a group setting *lectio* is about listening to the experience of others and how that might inform your experience. It is never about pushing a particular view and is certainly not competitive.

- It is an ancient method of Praying with Scripture.
- It is based on the belief that Christ is truly present in Scripture and that the reading of Scripture allows God to speak to us.

Lectio Divina: Engaging the Scriptures for Spiritual Transformation

Lectio Divina (translated “divine [or sacred] reading”) is an approach to the Scriptures that sets us up to listen for the word of God spoken to us in this present moment. *Lectio divina* refers to the ancient practice of divine reading that dates back to the early mothers and fathers of the Christian faith. Referring to the material being read and also the method itself, the practice of *lectio divina* is rooted in the belief that through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures are indeed alive and active as we engage them for spiritual transformation (Hebrews 4:12).

Lectio involves a slower, more reflective reading of Scripture that helps us to be open to God’s initiative rather than being subject to human agendas—our own or someone else’s.

How does this translate into engaging adolescents wholeness? It allows youth to be who they are or “to be.” It gives them permission to be authentic and real about their sexual identity as they listen to God’s word.

Mindfulness

The following week we explored the contemplative pedagogical approach of mindfulness. This was to cultivate deepened awareness, concentration, and insight. Tobin Hart states, “Inviting the contemplative simply includes the natural human capacity for knowing through silence, looking inward, pondering deeply, beholding, witnessing the contents of our consciousness.... These approaches cultivate an inner technology of knowing....” This cultivation is the aim of contemplative pedagogy, teaching that includes methods “designed to quiet and shift the habitual chatter of the mind to cultivate a capacity for deepened awareness, concentration, and insight.”¹² Our hearts are formed by, and our lives are shaped into, the practices we live out in our day-to-day lives. I took the group through some exercises designed to know God’s presence with all five senses and in every moment. A widely circulated definition that I found was from Jon Kabat-Zinn, is this: “Mindfulness is the awareness that arises from paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.”¹³

How do you teach adolescents to listen mindfully? The practice I did with my learning group was asked to be present with your conversation partner and focus on what they’re saying to each other and don’t get distracted by your own thoughts. I ask them to appreciate their words before

¹² <https://childspirit.org/tobin-hart-ph-d/>

¹³ <https://centerhealthyminds.org/assets/files-publications/PaulsonBecomingAotNYAoS.pdf>

you think about your response. Value them as someone with worth, created in the image of God (see [Genesis 1:27](#)), and thank God for your relationship with them.

Just as this was difficult, but not impossible for the adult group, I believe it can be done with adolescents. I would only try this in a very small group.

Our last action was to ask the group to think of one individual, maybe someone who asked them to pray for them, or someone who needs God's love and peace right now. They were asked to close their eyes and picture the person's face, imagine what they might be doing right now, and the student was asked to bring his/her awareness to *God's presence with them*, even as God was present with them in that moment.

During the next session we concentrated on youth. Mark Yaconelli in his book *Contemplative Youth Ministry* tells of an exercise he did with a group of teens. He asked each teen to write a definition of adulthood. One answer came back, "Adults have no friends, adults have no passions, and adults are stressed out."¹⁴

I recently was assisting in the leading of a focus group of Black youth and they said, "No disrespect, but we need a younger group asking us questions." Young people are about energy. They have bodies that want to move, they have emotions they want to express, and they have developing relationships that are incredibly interesting and important to them. Adults --- especially in the faith community --- are about status quo. They want young people to listen, to behave, to be still, to stop talking, to soothe adult fears, to fulfill mission statements, and to support programs. This makes young people wary and anxious.¹⁵

Teens cause adults to be anxious. Teens won't stay still. They exaggerate and mirror adult postures that makes adults self-conscious and uncomfortable. Young people can be disturbingly unpredictable. One day they seem happy to conform to their parents' wishes and adult conventions, the next day it appears they are making it up as they go along.¹⁶

However, there are many times a young person's presence can be an unexpected grace that lifts a grown-up's spirit. There are many more positive ways, not to mention ordinary ways in which adults respond and relate to young people.

Yaconelli points out that out of anxiety most youth ministries are about control and conformity. When we are anxious, we want control, we want answers, we want concrete measurable results. When youth ministry responds to the anxiety of adults, it becomes restrictive and deadening.¹⁷

I think this is one of the reasons Black churches do not address sexuality with teens. It is out of the adults anxiety. Youth ministry becomes safe, revolving around answers, and false assurances. The youth are quarantined. They are placed at the margins---incubated in basements or gathered at off hours when the congregation won't be disturbed. The ministry becomes more and more

¹⁴ Mark Yaconelli. *Contemplative Youth Ministry*.37

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, 39, 40

¹⁷ Ibid, 44.

unreal, causing those young people who won't conform to become disruptive or swallow their real questions and struggles.¹⁸

Thus, questions concerning sexual identity go unanswered because they are never asked. Mindfulness has a strong possibility of giving permission to youth to speak openly about sexuality, but only when done without anxiety from adults. Young people need people in their lives who know how to be present to God and present to others. They need adults who are practicing mindfulness and heartfulness. Young people need adults who are taking a long loving look at the real. Also, they need adults who are transparent and patient. Most of all, they need adults who are willing to listen as well as teach. "As adults, we find it hard to listen patiently to them, to appreciate their concerns, demands, and to speak to them in a language they can understand. For the same reason, our efforts in the field of education do not produce the results expected." (Pope Francis)

Guided Meditation

During our final session I led the group in several guided meditations designed to energize the group to relate to youth and to be more open about their feelings concerning sexuality. The group was slow to respond. I believe further work will yield different results. But for now I learned that we do need more work.

One of the guided meditations was a self-enlightenment exercise. I was attempting to get participants to think deeply about youth and sexuality. As a part of time together we looked closely at the lyrics from Tupac Shakur's song *Dear Mama*.

This was a good exercise as I referenced the work of Barbara Holmes in her book *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church* where she labels rap music as a contemplative practice. Holmes points out that rap music speaks of sex casually but values family relations.¹⁹ She further asserts that Shakur's love song to his mother is unmatched for its honesty about her failings, yet there is an unabashed declaration of love.²⁰

Shakur's song invoked great discussion about youth and their relationship to the church. I think it might be the starting point for moving forward with contemplative pedagogy as a way to bring wholeness to black adolescents.

Holmes writings concerning contemplative practices in the Black church gives rise to my optimism that contemplative pedagogy is viable as a method of addressing sexuality in the Black church and bringing wholeness to young African Americans.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Barbara Holmes. *Joy Unspeakable*, 195

²⁰ Barbara Holmes. *Joy Unspeakable*, 195

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Promoting Introspection in a Religiously, Sexually, and Gender Diverse World

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Abstract

This paper highlights critical observations from teaching a non-devotional secondary level course on Religion, Gender, and Sexuality for four consecutive years at a Quaker day and boarding school in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The author traces the evolution of the course from a traditions based approach, which tended to essentialize the ways that religions have understood and expressed their beliefs about gender and sexuality, to an approach which deliberately foregrounded the diversity of thought about gender and sexuality within and between religious traditions. Comparing the two pedagogical models used for teaching Religion, Gender, and Sexuality reveals that the approach which emphasized the complexity within and between religions generated greater opportunities for students to practice critical thinking and self-reflection about both their gender identity and the sexual dimensions of their lives.

The mystery of sex continues to be greater than our capacity to comprehend it, surely this power and its mystery relate to the mystery of God's relationship to us.¹

-Mary Steichen Calderone

In 1973, Mary S. Calderone, president and co-founder of the Sex Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS) and former medical director of Planned Parenthood, was invited by American Quakers to deliver the Rufus Jones Lecture at the annual gathering of the Friends General Conference. A trailblazer in the field of sex education, Calderone (a Quaker herself) is credited with almost single-handedly convincing the American Medical Association to eliminate a policy prohibiting physicians from disseminating information about birth control to patients in 1964. She wrote two books, *The Family Book about Sexuality* and *Talking with Your Child About Sex*. The New York Times said at the time of her death that, "Dr. Calderone did more than any other individual to convince both the medical profession and the public that human sexuality goes far beyond the sex act." In 1973, when Calderone gave her Friends General Conference lecture, the Society of Friends (more commonly known as Quakers) were at odds about the acceptance and inclusion of lesbian and gay people in their religious community. According to the historian Robert Frost, "Friends began to discuss openly homosexuality around 1970 at a Conference on Sexuality of the New Swarthmoor movement, in articles in the Friends Journal written by gays using pseudonyms, an in young

¹ Calderone, Mary Steichen. *Human Sexuality and the Quaker Conscience*. Philadelphia: Friends General Conference, 1973.

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men declaring that they were gay in meeting for worship.”² Indeed, gay Quaker men who had participated in the civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam War protests, increasingly began to gather within their local Meetings for worship and fellowship with one another. These coalitions of gay Friends eventually put pressure on the executive planning committee of the Friends General Conference to allow same-sex couples to room together and to hold their own worship sharing groups. The committee granted their request in 1972 and same-sex couples were permitted to share bedrooms in a building reserved for older Friends. This policy, however, was short lived and rescinded at the 1972 plenary sessions. Same-sex housing was not reinstated at the FGC annual gathering until 1975.

It was during this interim period that Calderone gave her talk titled “Human Sexuality and the Quaker Conscience.” The committee that appointed Calderone said they recognized a need for “a searching look at our [i.e. Quaker] attitudes toward sexuality that is [*sic*] going on within Quakerism today . . . Some Friends, yearly meetings and monthly meetings are asking: what can we say? How do we respond to these questions? What is appropriate behavior within the community of Friends?”³ The FGC chose Calderone as “the obvious choice to begin this dialogue [about sex] among Friends,” specifically because her work at SIECUS was about “liberating human sexuality from the unhealthy atmosphere of suspicion, guilt, and fear that surrounded it.”⁴ Her lecture consisted of two parts. In the first part, Calderone shared her understanding of the ‘basic facts’ of gender identity and the development of sexual desire in adolescence. She stressed two main points: (1) gender identity is a product of socialization, “developmental processes that comprise sexualization will not happen automatically,” and (2) sexual desire is a natural and essential aspect of human experience. In the second part of her talk, Calderone turned towards the Quaker conscience and its relationship to human sexuality. She asked her audience to question with her whether “it is as simple as a [Quaker] syllogism . . . there is that of God in every human, and because sexuality is an innate part of the human being, then there must surely be that of God in human sexuality.” Always the champion of a deeper dialogue about sex, Calderone encouraged her Quaker audience to think more reflectively about their own sexual desires and how they might each personally relate to their relationship with God, however known. “The great challenge of being a Friend has always been for me,” says Calderone, “that only one of us may hear, each one for his or her own self, God speaking to us. No other human being can overhear these messages, nor our response to them, nor can any other human being respond to them on our behalf; and so a double burden is laid on each one of us alone--to hear and to respond.”⁵ A correct interpretation of Calderone’s talk will detect her insistence that a relationship with God and the relationship between self and sex are not mutually exclusive. Both require deep listening. They should not be theoretically dissociated, but rather Calderone suggests that a prayerful practice of seeking and responding to messages from the light of God within should be encouraged by Friends as a vital part of sexual development.

More than four decades later, this author found himself preparing to teach a course on Religion, Gender, and Sexuality at a Quaker day and boarding school outside of Philadelphia. Also a Quaker, I was attempting to teach a course in the spirit of Calderone’s mission to

² Frost, J. William. *Three Twentieth-Century Revolutions: Liberal Theology, Sexual Moralities, Peace Testimonies*. 28 July 2001. Swarthmore College Manuscript: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/Library/friends/FGC2000.htm>. (accessed January 2013).

³ Calderone, preface.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 17

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liberate “human sexuality from the unhealthy atmosphere of suspicion, guilt, and fear that surrounded it.” If only because so many of the problems at the intersections of religion and sexuality which Calderone identified in the 1970s have persisted. Many young people are still psychologically disturbed by what they assume their traditions say about human sexuality and what they are learning about themselves as sexual beings. In 2016, three researchers from the Psychology and Philosophy Department at Texas Women's University conducted a study of 196 undergraduate college women to find out how religious commitments are related to women's sexual self-esteem. What the researchers found was that the higher a woman's religious commitments and the more they viewed God as having negative views about sex, both of these factors independently predicted decreased sexual activity, poor sexual satisfaction, and higher degrees of sexual guilt.⁶ Lesbian and gay young people experience some of the most egregious effects of negative religious ideas about sexuality. According to studies conducted at Baylor University in 2006 using reputable implicit bias tests, religious fundamentalism and Christian orthodoxy are the strongest predictors of negative evaluations of gay and lesbian people.⁷

My primary goal as an educator has always been to help young people disrupt their assumptions about religion. I feel passionate about helping young people understand that religion is not inherently a source of peace and inclusion or violence and discrimination, but rather it has represented what is most admirable and most deplorable about humanity over the course of history. I also feel passionate about disrupting assumptions about gender and sexuality, and the relationship these aspects of human experience have to religion. I hope that the young people I teach will be agents of change for a better world in which women and LGBTQ+ people do not need to fear religion and its discontents. Different from Calderone's experience at the 1973 FGC, however, the population I seek to teach is primarily non-Quaker, many of my students identify as non-religious. The students I teach come from a wide variety of cultural, religious, and spiritual backgrounds. They identify as Jewish, Buddhist, Agnostic, Spiritual but not Religious, Catholic, Pagan, Muslim, Quaker, Native American Spiritual and Religious Traditions, Atheist, and they claim many other forms of religious and spiritual identity. My department also takes a non-devotional approach to the study of religion in our courses, so it would be entirely inappropriate for me to promote religious or spiritual views about gender or sexuality onto my students. How then should I teach a course about Religion, Gender, and Sexuality to such a diverse student population? How does the sectarian nature of my Quaker institutional context and my personal commitments to a Quaker approach to sexuality and religion inform my pedagogy? What do I hope students will gain from this course? What can I provide that is more than a handy list of memorized beliefs and practices concerning how religions have responded to gender and sexuality?

In the remainder of this paper, I will outline how my Religion, Gender, and Sexuality course at a Quaker day and boarding school evolved from a traditions based course, which tended to essentialize the ways that religions have understood and expressed their beliefs about gender and sexuality, to a course which more intentionally foregrounded the diversity of thought about gender and sexuality within and between religious traditions. Major changes to this course did not merely add complexity to student awareness of how religious traditions

⁶ Abbott, Dena M., et al. "The Impact of Religious Commitment on Women's Sexual Self-Esteem." *Sexuality and Culture*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2016, p. 1063.

⁷ Rowatt, et al. "Associations between religious personality dimensions and implicit homosexual prejudice." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, v. 45, n. 3, p. 397–406, 2006.

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have conceptualized gender and sexuality, but moreover it made more space for students to think critically and introspectively about the development of their gender identity and emerging sense of a personalized sexuality. Practically speaking, the course changed by selecting different texts and incorporating an approach to teaching about religions in secondary schools developed by Diane Moore and her team at the Religion and Public Life Program (formerly named the Religious Literacy Project) at Harvard University. In a Quaker educational context, however, this change in approach signaled to students that it was important for them to look within themselves in order to ask tough questions about the ways they both express and interpret gender and sexuality as both an important dimension of all human experience and their daily lives.

In the early iterations of the course, I was primarily concerned with students gaining basic religious literacy about the role of gender and sexuality in the beliefs and practices of five major religions--Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam--strictly in that order. The primary textbook used was *Sexuality and the World Religions*, an edited volume by David Wayne Machacek and Melissa M. Wilcox. Students in the course steadily progressed through the chapters of this book, completing reading comprehension assignments, producing creative projects about what they were learning, giving presentations, and participating in Harkness style discussions along the way. Each chapter analyzed how religions, in isolation from one another, think about gender and sexuality. Some of my learning goals for students in this early interaction of the course included:

- Hindus have a tradition of portraying the divine as both male and/or female and sex is celebrated in many sacred texts
- Some Buddhist traditions have denied female ordination and many monastic Buddhist traditions have tended to have a negative view of heterosexual reproductive sex, preferring celibacy
- Reform and Reconstructionist Jews have led the way for ordination of female and LGBTQ+ Rabbis; meanwhile Ultra-orthodox Jews have restricted their sexual practices to Halacha, including a prohibition against masturbation
- St. Augustine is responsible for sex-phobia in Christianity, Catholics have denied women the right to ordination, marriage for clergy is a key difference between Catholics and Protestants, and there are differences between American Catholic views on abortion and contraception among the laity and official church doctrines. During the 20th century, Evangelical Christians revitalized and reinvented Christian beliefs in sexual purity and opposition to pre-marital sex. The relationship between Christianity and homosexuality is complicated, but primarily negative. The texts in the Bible about homosexuality can be interpreted in a variety of ways.
- Headcoverings for Muslim women are based in contested interpretations of verses in the Qur'an and teachings from the Hadith. Regulation of marriages, divorces, sexual behaviors, and gender norms in Islam are shaped by Islamic jurisprudence and 7th century Arab cultural norms.

After the first year of the course, Native American Religious Traditions and Religions of Africa and the African Diaspora were added to the list of units of study. Almost by virtue of adding Native American and indigenous African views about gender and sexuality, I was feeling increasingly uncomfortable with the way I was approaching this course. Were students getting the impression that there were some religious traditions that were inherently more

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progressive than others? What space was there for gay, lesbian, and transgender people in more conservative religious societies? Was religion itself being portrayed as a category of human experience that was intrinsically oppressive to women and LGBTQ+ people? Where were the students inserting their voices and experiences into the course? Was there room for them to listen to what Quakers have called the still small voice within, in order to hear what it might have to say about their gender or sexual identity? In the summer of 2019, I began to take these questions seriously and look for new ways to teach the course that would intentionally promote student introspection without putting students in an uncomfortable spotlight where they would feel forced, persuaded, or cajoled into sharing something deeply personal with their peers or instructor about their gender or sexual development.

The first major change in the course involved adopting new textbooks. *Sexuality and the World Religions* was effectively replaced by *Sex and Religion* by Dag Oistein Endsjo. Chapters in the Endsjo volume are organized around topics, such as celibacy, masturbation, heterosexuality, and homosexuality, rather than isolated religions. Each chapter showcases the diversity of beliefs about these topics both within and between religious traditions. This singular change in the curriculum made a tremendous difference. With the previous textbook, students metaphorically judged religions with a scorecard. They would appraise religious traditions on how progressive or conservative they were about any particular topic of their interest. Whether it was gender equality, acceptance of homosexuality, or the value of reproductive sex, students seemed led towards evaluating religions on grossly simplistic scales which entirely overlooked internal diversity and changes in religions over time. Endsjo, seemingly more than the authors in the Manchaek and Wilcox edited volume, was more effective at helping students disrupt their tendencies to generalize about religions, especially how religions respond to gender and sexuality. By destabilizing their generalizations, students could then find more connections between their developing gender and sexual identities with the religious views they were studying. For example, rather than reducing Buddhist teachings about desire and attachment to an axiom that ‘sex leads to suffering,’ students learned about the value of celibacy in many Buddhist traditions alongside the development of sexual yoga in Tibetan Tantric Buddhist Traditions, the ravenous sexual appetite of Japanese Zen masters such as the poet Ikkyu, and the American Soto Buddhist priest Issan Dorsey who founded a hospice for gay people dying with AIDS. With this new approach to the course, students learned that their personal views about sexuality, however conservative or liberal, were reflected somewhere in the tradition of Buddhism. Equally so, students were offered an opportunity to learn something about Buddhist perspectives on sexuality that conflicted or stretched their current ethical standpoint.

A variety of other texts were added, including *Sex, Sin, and Zen: A Buddhist Exploration of Sex from Celibacy to Polyamory and Everything in Between* by Brad Warner, *Shameless: A Sexual Reformation* by Nadia Bolz-Weber, and selections from *Queer Religion (vol. 1): Homosexuality in Modern Times* edited by David L. Boisvert and Jay Emerson Johnson. These texts added layers of personal storytelling which helped students understand the intersections of religion, gender, and sexuality as lived realities. Effectively, these texts offered students an invitation for them to see their gender and sexual development as ongoing journeys, rife with confusion, challenges, moments of enlightenment, worry, triumphs, and the whole gamut of emotional responses to the gendered and sexual dimensions of their lives.

Endsjo’s *Sex and Religion* was especially instrumental in helping the course transition away from a traditions based model to one that more formally emphasized the key principles of

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the Dr. Diane Moore's approach to teaching about religions to young people, which has been advocated by the American Academy of Religion in its Guidelines for teaching about religions in K-12 schools. The three main principles of Moore's approach and the AAR Guidelines are: (1) religions are internally diverse, (2) religions evolve and change over time, and (3) religions are embedded in culture and politics.⁸ Endsjo's *Sex and Religion* paired exquisitely well with these three principles. Rather than asking students to demonstrate their conclusive understanding of official doctrine or predominating religious ideas about gender and sexuality, students were tasked instead with explaining the complexity and diversity of thought about gender and sexuality within and between religions. Effectively, minority views within religions were given much more attention. For example, while gender roles for men and women are delineated somewhat explicitly in Hindu societies, transgender students in the course were delighted to learn about the significant role that Hijra's have played in Indian history. One student was particularly interested in tracing the disappearance of gender diversity in North America after European colonialism discredited two-spirit forms of gender identity and they drew parallels with the delegitimization of Hijra's ceremonial roles after British colonization in India. This example not only illustrates how students gained a greater sense of the ways in which religious ideas about gender and sexuality have changed over time and the significance of their integration with culture and politics, but also highlights how students saw themselves in the content they were studying.

Finally, a few key examples will highlight the effects of making changes to the texts and pedagogical approach employed in this course. While the early iterations of the course expected that students would notice a difference between a well-documented objection to homosexuality in western monotheistic traditions compared with relative ambivalence about homosexuality in many eastern polytheistic and nontheistic traditions, the updated version of the course expected that students would develop skills for explaining a greater complexity of thought about homosexuality in both western and eastern traditions. Effectively, rather than positioning the constructed notion of a homophobic west against a more inclusive east, the newer version of the course drove students towards destabilizing their essentializing assumptions and tendencies about the relationship between religion and homosexuality. Another shift in approach destabilized assumptions students might have about the value of celibacy and abstinence in religions. In the first year of the course, celibacy was studied as if it was an atemporal requirement for Catholic priests, Buddhist monastics, and some Hindu ascetics, but was relatively irrelevant when talking about other religions. This set up a false portrayal of some religious traditions as tending towards sex positivity and others as tending towards sexual abstinence. As the focus of the course shifted, students gained a better understanding of the rise and decline in a preference for celibacy in Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism at specific periods of history. Finally, while the first version of this course asked students to define Christian ideals of masculinity, as if they were singular, monolithic, and born in a domain apart from history and culture, the later versions of the course asked students to analyze how Evangelical Christian ideas about masculinity influenced recent presidential elections in the United States.

⁸ AAR Religion in the Schools Task Force; Diane L. Moore, Chair. *Guidelines for Teaching About Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States*.

<https://www.aarweb.org/common/Uploaded%20files/Publications%20and%20News/Guides%20and%20Best%20Practices/AARK-12CurriculumGuidelinesPDF.pdf> IAccessed May 2021)

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Comparing two pedagogical models used for teaching about Religion, Gender, and Sexuality has indicated that a critically responsive change in texts for the course and the application of three principles for teaching about religions as developed by Moore has offered young people richer opportunities for self-reflection about their gender identity. This change has also incentivized the pursuit of ethical formation about the sexual dimensions of their lives. In the course expectations for the class, it is stated that: “Students will gain from this course an ability to think more critically about their own psycho-social-emotional development concerning gender and sexuality by investigating the worldviews of people from different cultural contexts, but sharing personal background and experiences will never be a requirement.” Nonetheless, students seemed much more comfortable speaking about their experiences as gendered beings in the courses which used the new textbook and the three principles of the AAR Guidelines. They also seemed more reflective and critical about how religion has influenced their thinking about what constitutes healthy and morally responsible sexual behavior.

As educators, we are rightly reluctant to ask the young people under our care to speak in public about their sexuality. There are some very good reasons for doing so. It would be entirely inappropriate to ask students, or colleagues for that matter, to describe their sexual experiences in public. An environment of professionalism, where what is most private about one’s life is not required to be shared or exposed is fundamental for establishing a sense of safety in a learning community. In public education institutions, it may also be important for teachers to avoid asking students to share about their religious and/or spiritual views. Sexuality, like religion, is at once both incredibly private and a part of how human beings relate to other people. The classroom must also be a comfortable environment for intellectual growth and exploration without the requirement of personal self-discovery. For some students, there is a real and important need to seal off learning experiences from the emotional and psychological turmoil of their daily lives. In many ways, it is our responsibility as educators to provide them with that kind of a dispassionate and impersonal educational space. But let us not forfeit an opportunity to give young people who need it a safe space for them to think introspectively about their gender identity and sexual development in comparison and contrast to others. I never mentioned Mary Calderone to my students, but it seems to me like she was there as soon as I took the initiative to make these major changes to my curriculum. As Calderone said in her 1972 lecture: “The mystery of sex continues to be greater than our capacity to comprehend it, surely this power and its mystery relate to the mystery of God’s relationship to us.” For those of us with the privilege to work in educational spaces that allow students to express their religious and spiritual views, let us also provide space for them to think introspectively about their sense of themselves as gendered and sexual beings in this incredibly complex and diverse world.

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The Groaning of Women in the Korean #MeToo Movement¹

Abstract

Through the story of Korean Bible Women and the South Korean #MeToo movement today, this paper explores how Korean women’s innate creativity and imagination have challenged the patriarchal and hierarchical standpoints of the Korean Protestant church and society. Furthermore, this paper invites the Korean Protestant Church to remember and re-value Korean women’s innate power by co-operating and listening to the survivors of sexual violence in the community so that they can participate in God’s ongoing creation by responding #WithYou to the voices of #MeToo in church and society.

In 2018, the #MeToo movement in South Korea was initiated by Prosecutor Seo Ji-Hyun. Seo posted her experience of sexual harassment by a senior male prosecutor on the e-bulletin board of the prosecution's internal network, and then she had an interview in one of the major newsrooms in South Korea. As a mother and wife in Korean society, Seo’s courageous action provoked other women who had experienced similar sexual violence to raise their voices by groaning “#MeToo.” The #MeToo movement in South Korea has challenged not only individual abuse but also the social system. South Korea’s #MeToo movement has uncovered social diseases that until now went unnamed: gender discrimination, violation of human rights, and the culture of authoritarianism.

During Seo’s interview in the newsroom, she said the main trigger for her to expose the perpetrator was hearing about the perpetrator’s faith confession at a well-known Protestant church.² In the interview in the newsroom, Seo stated, “I want to tell you [the perpetrator] that genuine repentance should be done directly to the victims.”³ After Seo’s interview, the church posted an explanation on their website about the perpetrator’s confession, saying they did not know his past histories, and they seemed not to consider it an issue for the church but rather only for

¹ This paper is combined with two papers I submitted in class. Garam Han, “Bible Women” (unpublished paper, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL, Fall 2020). Garam Han, “What Kind of Practical Theology the Korean Church Need in Reflecting the Korean #MeToo Movement?” (unpublished paper, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL, Spring 2019).

²Min Jae Lee, “‘안태근 징역 2년... 서지현 검사 ‘안태근, 종교 귀의해 간증한단 소식 듣고’ [Ahn Tae-geun will be in prison for two years . . . Prosecutor Ji-Hyun Seo ‘I heard news of Ahn Tae-geun did testimony in church]”, *Kookje*, January 14, 2019, <http://www.kookje.co.kr/news2011/asp/newsbody.asp?code=0300&key=20190124.99099009746>. (The news title is my translation.)

³ Mi Ra Park, “‘서지현 검사, 교회에서 간증하는 안태근에 ‘회개는 피해자들에게 직접 해야 . . .’ [Prosecutor Ji-Hyun Seo said to Ahn Tae-geun, testifying at the church, ‘Repentance must be done directly to the victims . . .’],” *Hankyung*, January 30, 2019, <https://www.hankyung.com/society/article/2018013060911>. (The news title is my translation.)

society. Regardless of whether the church knew about his past histories or not, people blamed the church for its response because the church only tried to represent their innocence without giving any apologies or empathy to the woman. The church then deleted the post right away after they received a lot of criticism from the public.

The Korean #MeToo movement has spread to various fields in society, including religious institutions. Like many perpetrators in various fields, the perpetrators who are ministry leaders have denied their participation in sexual harassment and violence. Even some churches called the women survivors from the sexual violence “꽃뱀” – the literal translation is “flower snake” and this word is used only to describe women who seduce men, Satan, and an enemy who attempts to destroy *God’s church* and *the given authorities by God*.⁴ According to the Christian Anti Sexual Violence Center and News N Joy, many communities treat not only survivors but also supporters as “uncomfortable beings of the church.”⁵ Furthermore, some churches have asked survivors to forgive the perpetrators by God’s love as they are forgiven by God’s priceless grace.⁶ Surprisingly, but not surprisingly, many churches have protected the perpetrators – pastors and elders – rather than listening to the survivors.

The many mainstream churches in South Korea believe the #MeToo movement stems from personal problems, ignoring the systemic problems at hand.⁷ Because of the lackluster response of the community and society toward sexual violence issues, the survivors had to be silenced or leave the church. Nayoung Lee argues, “The continuing abuse and long-term concealment of the sexual violence were possible because of bystanders and those who sympathized with the perpetrator.”⁸ She calls attention to considering what made the bystanders be just bystanders, rather than “eradicating a few evil perpetrators.”⁹ In order to protect not only the survivors but also the whole community, the Korean Church should consider the systemic problem within them. Observing the Korean Church’s lack of responsibility toward #MeToo, I began to wonder what kinds of practices in history and past experience have built the Korean Church’s habitus today? How do the practices function in the Korean Church? Whose experience constitutes the practice? Who does or does not reap the benefit from the habitus? And can we change the habitus? If so, how? Although sexual violence happens to all genders in various communities, in this paper, I particularly focus on women survivors from sexual violence in the context of the Korean Protestant Church (KPC).

⁴ Christian Anti Sexual Violence Center and News N Joy, *#MeToo #ChurchToo #WithYou: A Guidebook to Resolve Sexual Violence in the Church* (Seoul: News N Joy, 2018), 52, 17. (italics mine).

⁵ Christian Anti Sexual Violence Center and News N Joy, *#MeToo #ChurchToo #WithYou*, 17 (my translation).

⁶ Christian Anti Sexual Violence Center and News N Joy, *#MeToo #ChurchToo #WithYou*, 53, 76-77.

⁷ Christian Anti Sexual Violence Center and News N Joy, *#MeToo #ChurchToo #WithYou*, 12-15, 56, 59, 80.

⁸ Yunjung Kim and Jiyoung Yoo, “미투 제대로 이해 못하니 '음모론'... 남자들도 공부해야[The conspiracy theory arises because people don’t understand #MeToo properly . . . Men should study, too.],” *Oh My News*, April 19, 2018, http://star.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/OhmyStar/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0002425601. (The news title is my translation.)

⁹ Yunjung Kim and Jiyoung Yoo, “미투 제대로 이해 못하니 '음모론'... 남자들도 공부해야[The conspiracy theory arises because people don’t understand #MeToo properly . . . Men should study, too.].”

Pierre Bourdieu identifies habitus as “a product of history and formed by past experiences.”¹⁰ The habitus is the history and experiences that have formed us today. We cannot perfectly eradicate the habitus unless all beings are made to completely disappear at once. While history, old culture, and tradition cannot be completely changed, human experience and the way of education can be reconstructed. Therefore, dismantling the Korean culture, Christianity, and education is necessary in order to recognize the norms and sources of the KPC that formed their habitus. The KPC should know what the problem is, and they should replace the rotten parts that affect the habitus and practices through the deconstructing process. This deconstruction is necessary so the KPC can reconstruct new experiences and education that can help people exercise new practices to transform their habitus.

To identify the current habitus of the KPC, I first explore the histories and practices that have built Korean culture and Christianity. Although various practices have built the habitus of Korean culture and Christianity, I would like to focus on the practices from patriarchal and hierarchical standpoints. Then, by reflecting on Korean Bible Women (KBW) and the Korean #MeToo movement, I explore how Korean women have been deconstructing and reconstructing the habitus of patriarchy and hierarchy.

Because the KPC, throughout history, has fought for justice and has stood in solidarity with marginalized people, I explore the ways in which churches can call on that history to construct a new habitus. Finally, I name the ways to revalue and re-center the innate power in Korean women to empower themselves, the community, and society today, and invite the KPC to practice recentering the innate power in Korean women together by experiencing God’s new creations in our living world.

The patriarchal and hierarchical standpoints are deeply rooted in Korean culture and society. Neo-Confucianism, in particular, enforced the patriarchal and hierarchical system in Korean tradition, culture, and religious philosophies. Although neo-Confucianism started as a religion, it became a pervasive understanding and worldview for Koreans. Therefore, understanding neo-Confucianism is necessary to understand Korean culture and the church. I offer a short explanation of neo-Confucianism.¹¹

Neo-Confucianism’s belief is a departure from earlier Confucian belief, becoming more hierarchical and patriarchal. Neo-Confucianism teaches that “the subordination of female to male was taken as ‘natural.’”¹² The influence of neo-Confucianism became a life ethic in Korean culture and continued to suppress women and taught that those who are elders and those who are in authority should be respected. This culture of respect is firmly ingrained within Koreans, and I value the culture of respecting elders. However, those in power often abuse this culture by requiring the *complete obedience* of subordinates and justifying it as respect.¹³ Unfortunately, patriarchal and hierarchical standpoints became stronger as

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 54.

¹¹ Garam Han, “The Formation of Women’s Identities in the Korean and Korean American Church” (unpublished paper, Columbia Theological Seminary, Atlanta, GA, Spring 2018), 8-10.

¹² Han, “The Formation of Women’s Identities in the Korean and Korean American Church,” 68-69.

¹³ Cheol-Seung Lee, “Confucianism, a Trio of Criticism, Succession and Transformation: Focused on the issue of Confucian revival,” in “The Study of Confucianism,” special issue, *Confucianism, a Trio of Criticism, Succession and Transformation- Focused on the issue of Confucian revival* 68, no. 6 (2017): 260-261.

Christianity and neo-Confucianism combined. The Korean Church emphasizes God's authority, and many Korean Christians see God as an elder and as the authority. God—as ruler, father, husband, older brother, and older friend in the five relationships¹⁴ of neo-Confucianism—is the one to whom we should show our obedience. It is a relationship of hierarchy and authority rather than one of mutual respect.

When the KPC refers to God's priceless love, the first image is that of sinful human beings compared to the loving God who sent the Savior to redeem them from sin. The relationship between God and Christians is *very* hierarchical, just like the relationships they have in neo-Confucian society. Furthermore, the traditional Christian understanding of women as the cause of sin and the patriarchal Korean culture and denial of their subject identity allows Korean Christian women to stay silent. According to Unhey Kim, because of these unique structures of the church, the sexual violence in church appears in a different pattern when compared to other communities, since a spiritual and absolute authority exists. Therefore, this unique structure causes sexual survivors to confuse violence with divine power. Kim calls this pattern “sexual grooming,” which inhibits women from exercising their own voices and true self.¹⁵

The deeply rooted hierarchical and patriarchal standpoints of church and society make deconstruction and reconstruction difficult, and it is harder when people do not want to challenge the habitus. The real problem in the church is that many Protestant Christians do not feel the need for freedom before the divine authority since control by authority gives them comfort. Many Protestant Christians feel unsafe and uncomfortable when they have challenged their faith habitus because of their *absolute* trust, which is inculcated by church authorities, so much so that they believe it as divine guidance. In particular, it is this traditional understanding and image of women in Korean Christianity that has made it more difficult for church women to develop their identity as the subject.¹⁶ Therefore, when we hear the voices of survivors from #MeToo in the church, the voices are the groan, outcry, and agony of body, mind, and spirit toward the last hope of breathing.

Despite the *insistent* structural oppression, Korean women have *insistently* resisted the unjust habitus by creating their spaces and exercising their true self through the interrelationship with one another. The Korean #MeToo movement is one example that illustrates Korean women's creativity and resilience to resist and actively challenge the unjust standpoints of society and church. Many female Korean scholars mention that the Korean #MeToo movement is not a sudden movement and is not just spread by the Hollywood #MeToo movement in the U.S. There are many histories of Korean women's insistent resisting—from individual to communal and national levels—and one of them is Korean Bible Women (KBW) in the history of Korean Christianity that I want to revalue today.¹⁷

¹⁴ The original concept of five relationships of neo-Confucianism values the mutual relationship; however, as the culture inherited and combined with other philosophies and religions, the relationship came to build in hierarchical and patriarchal understanding.

¹⁵ Unhey Kim, “Christian Ethical Considerations on the #MeToo Movement: Focusing on the Correlation between Social Change and Formation of Female Subjectivity,” *Institute of Theological Studies in Academy of Hanshin University* 73 (2018): 377.

¹⁶ Kim, “Christian Ethical Considerations on the #MeToo Movement,” 376-377.

¹⁷ Christine Sungjin Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches: The Research of Korean Bible Women in the Early Protestant Mission and Church Growth of Korea, 1892-1945* (Paju: KSI, 2008).

KBW worked to establish Protestant Christianity and evangelization in Korea. They were active from 1897 to 1910 and under the Japanese empire. KBW *sold* the Bible and booklets about the Christian faith, *delivered* the Gospel, and *taught* the Korean language, the Bible, Christian catechism, and doctrine by visiting each house to meet women in their town or other towns.¹⁸ At the beginning of the mission by many Western countries, Korea was a difficult country to evangelize; because of the neo-Confucian culture, gender distinction was strict, and Korean society did not welcome foreigners. With the cultural barriers, the missionaries from the West had trouble meeting Koreans for their mission work. In particular, delivering the Gospel to women was almost impossible because Korean women could not talk with other men and strangers or go outside freely. Furthermore, there was a language barrier between not only the foreign missionaries and Koreans but also the educated – mostly men – and the uneducated – primarily women and the poor. Although some educated Koreans knew and heard about the Gospel and the Christian Bible through Western studies in China, the Bible was written in Chinese. At that time, only privileged men learned the Chinese letters, so most Koreans could not read the Bible in Chinese even though they had been interested in it.¹⁹

In 1900, a missionary from Scotland, John Loss, who had active mission work in China, interpreted the Bible in Korean; the Korean language was regarded as the language of the uneducated.²⁰ The Korean Bible was especially meaningful for women since it was the beginning of liberation for them to receive an education.²¹ However, another obstacle was that most women and the poor who could speak Korean were illiterate. Therefore, KBW *read* the Bible to illiterate women and *taught* them the Korean language.²² The education of KBW became a tool to liberate the oppressed in society through teaching language and the Gospel. By engaging in ministry, Korean women could exercise more to resist the unjust standpoints in society. A missionary report by Miss Lillian Nicholes in 1912 represents a Korean women's liberation process through the work of KBW:

Child marriages were common in Korea, and women would marry at the age of fifteen. Abigail²³ married when she was young and became a widow without ever having a girlhood. It was not common for widows to remarry in the upper class, and they had to wait a long time. Abigail was left alone until age forty. At that time, she was asked to marry a married man who already had two wives, and the husband met three wives in turns. [. . .] Attending a church retreat, [. . .] Abigail heard the pastor preach about the sin of polygamy in marriage, it caused Abigail conflict, and she never went to church again. However, the Holy Spirit came down to her, and finally, she came back to Jesus.

¹⁸ Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 22.

¹⁹ Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 47, 56, 187-193.

²⁰ Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 185-6.

²¹ Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 187.

²² Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 187-193.

²³ It is shown by the baptismal name.

Abigail could not live with her husband anymore, so she left him. Finally, by a missionary's guidance, she attended a women's Bible school in Songdo.²⁴

Abigail challenged the unjust social structure by leaving her husband. Since a missionary wrote this report, we do not know exactly what happened to Abigail when she left her husband; however, from the neo-Confucian perspective, leaving her husband means she decided to be willingly abandoned and to receive all the blame from society. She was waiting for more than twenty years to remarry within the neo-Confucian system, but she liberated herself after the awakening experience by leaving everything that bound her life. Then, she went to school to learn more and became a Bible woman to teach others. Yes, it was indeed the work of the Holy Spirit as the missionary reported; however, it is important to recognize the fact that Abigail as an educator, activist, and leader created the space for the Holy Spirit to work in her life by decentering the abusive standpoint and recentering a new standpoint based on her subject identity to challenge the habitus she lived in before.

Even though missionaries had the Korean Bible, they needed Korean women to help their ministry since they could not meet Korean women because of the cultural background. Therefore, KBW was necessary for missionaries to reach other Korean women. Korean women found ways to connect to other women since they knew the marginalized spaces and knew how to expand and exercise their innate power from the marginalized spaces. Since women could not freely go outside of their houses, the place to meet women was 안방—*an bang*, which literally means “wife’s room.”²⁵ Women could meet each other at the wife’s room in someone’s house; however, the missionaries still could not come inside the house, even if the missionaries were women, so they used to wait outside.²⁶ After the missionaries realized the ministry in the wife’s room was adequate, they began to focus more on educating KBW to send them to meet Korean women and deliver the Gospel. Sung Jin Chang calls the KBW’s way of ministry as “the language of wife’s room.”²⁷ KBW knew how to expand the liminal space and experience God’s immanence in *an bang*, regardless of the unjust system.

Chang challenged the Western missionaries’ evaluation of Korean women who were passive and isolated in the wife’s room. Chang claims that Korean women always found ways to network with others while Korean society forcibly isolated Korean women.²⁸ *An bang* was the place for Korean women to have a network with one another by sharing their experiences and wisdom with their own voices, learning from each other, and playing together by doing needlework.²⁹ Since the missionaries were not allowed to come into *an bang*, they did not know that Korean women had actively engaged each other to exercise their creativity and

²⁴ Miss Lillian Nicholes, "The Story of a Bible Woman," in *The Korea Mission Field* (July 1912).

²⁵ Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 56-61.

²⁶ Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 56-61.

²⁷ Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 56-61.

²⁸ Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 56-61.

²⁹ Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 56-61.

imagination.³⁰ As a missionary expressed in a report to their denomination, “what can we do without these women [KBW]?” the Western missionary’s work would not have been possible without KBW.³¹

Through KBW’s ministry, many KBW challenged the habitus that was built by the power in various ways and began to have a passion for learning. The passion for education was not only for themselves; rather, they wanted to educate others to have the liberating experience that they had. These reports demonstrate the Korean woman’s passion for learning:

The Presbyterian Church in Seoul held Bible classes for women for 10 days starting on February 25th. More than 500 women, about half are from rural areas, have food on their heads and the Bibles and hymns. Some have brought children on their backs. Their faces were full of anticipation, and they looked like a victor overcoming difficulties.³²

About 113 women did not hesitate to come to study more than 61 miles. [...] The other is the wife of a wealthy merchant who came from Yeng Byeon 37 miles. She has a weak body, but she never misses the class.³³

Many Korean women began to join the Bible class and the church. A few KBW who took the courses became teachers of the institution. Observing KBW’s leadership itself was an opportunity for Koreans to see a new standpoint—Korean women’s leadership and the ability to change the system—thus, it inspired many other women to explore their voices and spaces. Although there were many widows among KBW, there were married women as well. The married women had to take care of the whole family, including the husband’s family, since they lived all together. Nevertheless, KBW did not give up *both learning and taking care of their families*, and their innate power made it possible.

Chang claims KBW’s absolute contribution to Korean women’s escape from illiteracy during the period of the end of the Joseon Dynasty and under the Japanese empire.³⁴ In addition, liberating them from illiteracy nurtured the intense eagerness toward freedom not only for individual rights but also for Korean independence from the Japanese empire.³⁵ Another outstanding work of KBW was that the ministry was not limited to their town. KBW’s roles expanded not only geographically but also socially. Since their ministry was mainly caring for others, they stretched their ministry to churches, schools, and hospitals.³⁶ KBW’s ministry across

³⁰ Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 56-61.

³¹ “Korea – Biblewoman,” *The 109th BFBS AR*, 1913, 361-362.

³² Katherine Wambold, “Women’s Class,” in *The Korea Mission Field* (June 1913), 366.

³³ Olga P. Shaffer, “Yeng Byeon Women’s Bible Class,” in *The Korea Mission Field* (November 1913), 166.

³⁴ Shaffer, “Yeng Byeon Women’s Bible Class,” 191-192.

³⁵ Shaffer, “Yeng Byeon Women’s Bible Class,” 191-192.

³⁶ Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 197.

the nation reminds me of the Apostle Paul's mission journey in the New Testament. I confidently state that KBW bodily and spiritually wrote the Korean version of acts of the Apostles.

However, unfortunately, the Korean Church began to forget the work of KBW consciously and unconsciously, and Man Yeol Lee finds a possible reason in male-centered leadership in the KPC.³⁷ Lee argues that, as the KPC was able to govern itself with a number of Korean Christians without the missionaries, the churches became constituted with male-centered leadership, and they did not feel the need for KBW's leadership and recording of the KBW's work anymore.³⁸ It is very unfortunate that KBW's embodied efforts toward the liberation of women and the entire society confronted the same standpoint—the androcentric system—again. Korean protestant Christian women were pushed again to the marginalized space after experiencing their fully embodied contribution to Korean Christianity.

Even though the male-centered leadership repressed the spaces and voices of Korean women in the church, they could not stop Korean women from creating their spaces and exercising their voices even from the liminal place like they did at *an bang*. Moreover, they could not stop the innate spirit and wisdom that was passed to the next generation of Korean girls and women. Comparing to the past, many female leaders today in churches are a shred of evidence. As Chang argues, although Christianity was a liberating tool for Korean women to exercise their subjectivity, the KPC should revalue and recenter the innate creativity and spirituality in Korean women.

By observing the women's movement in the Korean #MeToo, I can acknowledge the Korean women's innate power. Women in the Korean #MeToo movement prove the possibility of exercising their creative and resilient power and the embedded practices from the ancestors; nevertheless, the society they live in is still deeply rooted in patriarchal and hierarchical standpoints. Unhey Kim calls the Korean #MeToo movement a “cultural revolution” since the survivors as the subjects expose their *own* experiences and publicly criticize the problem of an unjust system.³⁹ In the story of KBW and #MeToo, Unhey Kim and Hyeryung Kim call us to pay attention to the fact the survivors began to *speak*, not only with their voices but also presenting their physical bodies in public by themselves.

In the Korean #MeToo movement, I believe the prosecutor Seo was able to speak up in public since she focused fully on herself as the subject, rather than focusing on the only voices that the habitus forced her to speak in—as someone's mother, wife, and a junior prosecutor in the oppressor's standpoint. She called out her senior prosecutor six years after the sexual violence happened. Recognizing her true self, she was able to challenge her community and society to see problems by *speaking*, “it wasn't my fault.”⁴⁰ As a member of the community, it would not be easy for her to reveal the reality of her community—as an elite group in society. However, she chose to expose and claim that the community is also hers by raising questions toward common standpoints in the community, and it *inspired* other women to question their habitus and doubt their experiences and practices, in which they had been educated by the visible and invisible oppressors. Furthermore, Seo's initiated action was an opportunity for other women to see the

³⁷ Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 161.

³⁸ Chang, *A Forgotten Story of Korean Churches*, 161.

³⁹ Kim, “Christian Ethical Considerations on the #MeToo Movement,” 370-371.

⁴⁰ Kim, “Christian Ethical Considerations on the #MeToo Movement,” 390.

new possibility, and it evoked other women's critical thinking. Seo created a space for herself by taking a risk and revealing her vulnerability, and it became an invitation to other survivors of sexual violence to join the space by having the courage and taking a risk. By sharing their vulnerable experiences and relationships in the space, they expanded the space and inspired each other to realize their own subjectivity and innate power not only in the space but also in society. The space creates a whirlwind blow at the patriarchal and hierarchical standpoints in Korean society.

Unhey Kim says, "The power to change society is created not only through sudden and fortuitous forces but also through the political trust, support, and solidarity from the voices of individual subjects and collectives."⁴¹ Kim believes Korean women's insistent public exposure to sexual violence in Korean history has provoked today's Korean women but also the entire Korean society consciously and unconsciously. Today's survivors speaking is possible because the many survivors in Korean history never gave up speaking their experience, despite the insistent social oppression.⁴² Hyeryung Kim highlights the "perlocutionary action"⁴³ in #MeToo and claims that speaking "#MeToo" connects to another "#MeToo." Therefore, the act of consecutive speaking in solidarity with others proclaims and warns that the old habitus, "the clichéd response" from the patriarchal and hierarchical standpoints—naming the survivors as failures or lonely ones in society or as a Satan and unfaithful women in the Christian context—, cannot keep the sexual violence hidden anymore.⁴⁴ Korean society and church together should continue to work on "[restoring] the forgotten and lost history of women" in order to reconstruct a new habitus with women's experiences—in particular, the survivors."⁴⁵

Speaking as a subject is a way to dismantle the standpoint of hierarchy and patriarchy since the old standpoint expects sexual survivors to be silent. The voices of women in #MeToo claimed their subjectivity in society and began to deconstruct the habitus of the whole society, not only of their workplaces. KBW also participated in ministry, as the subjects, by leading the Western missionaries with their wisdom and exercising their subjectivity by *teaching* the Korean language and the Bible, *selling* the Bible for their financial support of the ministry, and *nurturing* their own family, community, and society. What KBW, as leaders, activists, practitioners, liberators, creators, survivors, and educators, did in neo-Confucian society are the acts of deconstructing and reconstructing toward God's new creation.

Therefore, the KPC needs to work on an educational space for survivors and the entire community to remember and revalue the past and present, the unheard and forgotten history of

⁴¹ Kim, "Christian Ethical Considerations on the #MeToo Movement," 390. (my translation).

⁴² There are many Korean women who exposed their sexual violence in public in Korean history, such as the sexual torture at *Buchen* police station in 1986, the testimony of Kim Hak-soon *halmony* (Korean words for grandmother)⁴² in 1991, the sexual harassment of a professor in Seoul university in 1993, etc.

⁴³ "The act of expanding the horizon of self-understanding as an ethical performer who resists injustice by establishing a solidarity away from defeatist self-understanding." (my translation). Hyeryung Kim, "The Age of #Me Too Movement: Criminal Nature of Sexual Violence and New Criteria for Christian Sexual Ethics," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 111 (January 2019): 271.

⁴⁴ Hyeryung Kim, "The Age of #Me Too Movement: Criminal Nature of Sexual Violence and New Criteria for Christian Sexual Ethics," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 111 (January 2019): 271.

⁴⁵ Hyun-Sook Kim, "Women's Experiences and Christian Education," *Theological Forum* 43, no. 2 (2006): 633.

speaking in Korean church and society. “Speaking” in Korean is “말하기”, which combines two words, 말 (word, language, talk, tongue, and expression term) and 하기 (doing). According to the Standard Korean dictionary, one meaning of 말하기 (speaking) is “expressing one’s opinion in words [so that the other person can understand it].”⁴⁶ Speaking—doing words—is not just about delivering the words. Much like Paulo Freire’s critique of the banking concept, speaking requires another person to *understand* what the speaker meant. Thus, when the survivors say “#MeToo,” if the KPC sincerely *understands* the survivors as the subject of the “speaking,” they should respond “#WithYou.”

Speaking—doing words—“#WithYou” is not just saying the words and hearing the survivor’s experience. It should be *action involved* by standing in solidarity with the survivors, like the women of KBW and #MeToo did. As KBW used *an bang*—wife’s room—KPC should support survivors to create their own visible/invisible spaces for sharing their experience, teaching each other, healing, and playing together. In this way, the entire community together can reconstruct a better community so they can experience new possibilities for the KPC where they can taste God’s new creation today.

One of my classmates said, “there are no such things as a safe place, but only brave space exists.” In the history of KBW and #MeToo movement, there was no safe place at all. Korean women made their own “brave spaces” together by educating themselves and others, so that they were able to reconstruct their own standpoint through their imagination and creativity beyond the obstacles. The innate power of creativity and imagination toward a better future made it possible for them to continue their resistance to the unjust standpoint insistently. In that sense, KPC should cooperate with survivors to exercise their innate power *insistently* by resisting the unjust standpoint with them. In particular, leaders of KPC should be brave enough to be vulnerable with the survivors in the place the survivors bravely created, rather than just providing a space to exercise their creativity.⁴⁷ Graham Ward claims revelation—God’s new creation—as an “ongoing activity” and “unfolding with the world” by saying, “Christian doxa has never held that the scriptures save direct access to the revelation of the divine.”⁴⁸ There are no specific and common rules that the church requires Christians to do. The KPC should just provide physical, spiritual, and financial fuel for survivors to continue finding and practicing their *speaking* and stand with them in a brave space to deconstruct and reconstruct for God’s new and ongoing revelations.

Finally, the KPC should transform their experiences and practices by thinking critically with various understandings like providing diverse symbols, interpretations of the Bible, and leadership, rather than giving them *the* answer. In the beginning of the KPC, there was no specific manual to evangelize the people; however, KBW had the passion and love for others to taste the humanizing experience through physical and spiritual liberation. Although there are many practices that Christians have learned from the church *consciously*, there are also lots of practices that we are wearing from *unconscious* learning, like the image of God in the patriarchal and hierarchical image, male-centered leadership, and the roles depending on genders. These

⁴⁶ Korean Standard Korean Dictionary of Korean Language, “말하기” [speaking]” accessed May 12, 2021, <https://stdict.korean.go.kr/search/searchView.do> (emphasis added; my translation.).

⁴⁷ Goto, *The Grace of Playing*, 131-2.

⁴⁸ Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 14.

kinds of unconscious standpoints would not be easy to transform because these are so habitual to us already. However, a more important recognition and question the KPC should have, before confronting the deeply rooted patriarchal and hierarchical standpoints, is whether KPC is willing to be transformed by the most suffering in the community.

Transformation is not a comfortable process for everyone; however, I believe the mission for the church is the “flourishing of the entire cosmos.”⁴⁹ If the church sincerely desires the flourishing of the world holistically, the whole society together will see God’s revelation today in our lives. Through transforming processes individually and communally, the church should keep challenging itself by asking the questions from Ward: “How are standpoints arrived at? Who arrives at them? Who legitimates that this is a ‘characteristic’ and that now forms a ‘pattern’?”⁵⁰ To stop questioning inwardly and continuing to look outwardly is a sign that the church is failing to do practical theology. I believe transforming the Korean Protestant Church’s standpoints and habitus through beginning a dialogue from the marginalized voices will make it able to respond to survivors by saying, “#WithYou physically, mentally, and spiritually” when the survivors groan in the church and society as in #MeToo.

⁴⁹ Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski, *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 53-4.

⁵⁰ Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*, 81.

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Girl / Friend Theology Rebooted
Introduction to the Revised Edition of Girl / Friend Theology
By Dori Grinenko Baker, Mdiv / PhD

Abstract:

In the decades since the 2005 publication of *Girlfriend Theology: God-Talk with Young Women*, understandings of gender, identity, sexuality, race, and the intersections between them evolved rapidly. New language and concepts emerged to describe the constructs of social identities and how these operate to create privilege for some and deny privilege to others. In some instances, faith communities readily adapt their theological commitments to in light of such new information, transforming traditional language, image and ritual to reflect contemporary social and political realities. Often, however, faith communities focus on preserving tradition rather than innovating. Reimagining *Girlfriend Theology* as *Girl / Friend Theology* addresses these shifts. Updating this methodology contributes to widespread educational advances that provide feminist, inclusive, story-based, intergenerational and collaborative practices for meaning-making. *Girl / Friend Theology* “rebooted” supports communities who wish to innovate for spiritual, emotional, and cross-cultural literacy of young people who are coming of age in this era of complexity and challenge. This paper will provide the basis of a new introductory chapter to the revised edition of *Girl / Friend Theology*.

*I believe in parables. I navigate life using stories
where I find them, and I hold tight to the ones that tell
me new kinds of truth.*

— Barbara Kingsolver

*God is a becoming, not a static being that can be
incarcerated in an ontology.*

--Bayo Akomolafe

*No matter who I am, no matter where I am, no matter
how I look, no matter how I speak, deep down in the
deepest place, in the truest place, in the quietest
place and loudest notion, I am Divine Love. You can
feel me in the grass when your toes crunch in green
and when birdwings whistle over your forehead and
when sun and moon
shine on your face. I love you.*

—Olivia Baker

The Slash: An Invitation

God is killing us. Images of God shame people. Images of God empower people to arm themselves with automatic weapons. Images of God disempower people, shroud them in self-hatred, and exclude them from the work and play of creating a better world.

God is also freeing us. Releasing ancient liberating images of the Divine and creating new ways of naming the holy -- using whatever images, stories, and artifacts we can find -- is a life force on the move. *Girl / Friend Theology* helps set it loose in the world.

Welcome to this revised edition of *Doing Girlfriend Theology*, renamed *Girl/Friend Theology*, with a slash. *Girl / Friend Theology* is a 90-minute experience in communal meaning-making that begins in our bodies, with a true story from a real life.

Over the past twenty-five years, *Girlfriend Theology* happened in places where small groups of young adults gather over meals with friends to do life together. *Girlfriend Theology* made a central claim: Images of God are rooted in us, for better or worse. Permanently uprooting harmful images can help us do life better -- not just our personal lives, but also our communal life, where structures that maintain suffering for some and luxury for others demand that we do better.¹

Unfortunately, shitty images of God continue to inform most people growing up in mainstream US culture. If your upbringing gave you a God who is not a white male, a vindictive father, or anti-gay, you are lucky! Rare is the young person I meet who does not battle against at least one such harmful image, implanted by their early formation, instilled by their faith community, or otherwise soaked into them by a culture still saturated with shitty images of God.

Faith traditions have a way of becoming tools in the hands of oppressors. Christianity became a bludgeon.

I am acutely aware of this every day, because I live in Lynchburg, Virginia, the home of Liberty University, a bastion of the Christianity right.² Lynchburg was also a center of trade of enslaved people and bears the same namesake of the word "lynching."³ Each morning when I step outside my bedroom door to connect with the earth beneath me, I remember that European settlers stole this very land from indigenous Monacan Indians

¹ For a helpful reframing of the collective task of "doing our best" -- given the vast inequalities of our global contexts -- see Patrick Reyes, *The Purpose Gap: Empowering Communities of Color to Find Meaning and Thrive*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2020), 24-25.

² Liberty University is also home to many people I love and admire, who do not hold the perspective of fundamentalisms or the politics of the Christian right. While the university itself attracts a wide diversity of people whose presence has enriched my life, I remain an outspoken critic of the university's policies, especially around gun laws, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and women's rights.

³ The word "lynch" is believed to originate from Charles Lynch, a Virginia farmer and American revolutionary who set up a system for punishing Loyalists who supported the British during the American Revolutionary War. His brother, John Lynch, was the founder of Lynchburg, Virginia.

and, not far from my backyard, tortured Black people stolen from their African homelands, along with their descendents. They violated women's bodies and sold children, using a warped rendition of Christianity as their primary tool. Similar forms of Christianity continue to bludgeon my LGBTQ+ friends today.

As a white, cis-gender, economically privileged ordained clergy woman, I *struggle* to stay Christian.

Luckily, I've also been surrounded by people who follow the life-giving practices of a very different Jesus-way. This Jesus was a Palestinian folk hero, a young adult, person of darker skin, who was born to a mother migrating under life-threatening conditions.⁴ He lived among artisans, farmers, and hunter-gatherers on the underside of the Roman empire and was always upturning the oppressive religious norms of his day. This Jesus captivated me as a young adult. I found community among other followers of this Jesus – and, well, to quote my friend Tyler Milton “I’ve been chasing that feeling all of my life.” Tyler identifies as queer. He left Christianity because it oppresses him. He still chases the feeling, though: the feeling of community, the feeling of something more that calls us to create a better world.

Those of us who stay Christian need to continuously reboot its interpretations in light of perspectives of people oppressed, marginalized, silenced, or subjugated.

The image of rebooting is apt. We turn our computers off to recover from an error. When we restart, the former information is still there, but accessible through a fresh lens.

The work of rebooting to recover from Christianity's errors is never done. The word reboot also calls to mind actual boots. Those seeking to reinterpret Christianity through liberatory lens need boots, because the work sometimes calls for warrior healers who can fight, stand their ground, or run for safe places of refuge to replenish themselves with abundant love from self and others.⁵

The original version of this book appeared in 2005. The slash in this revised edition – *Girl / Friend Theology* - is new. It reflects how this work evolved over the last two decades. The slash is here to slow us down, to acknowledge that gender and whiteness and race -- so many ideas entangled with our images of self, community, and God -- are not fixed and static, but were constructed by humans, and, lucky for us, are still always under construction.

The slash invites us to make room -- and then more room -- for voices that have been erased from our histories, our prayers, and the blueprints for world-building we call

⁴ I am indebted to my colleague Stephen Lewis for his regular depiction of Jesus using these descriptors.

⁵ This is a good place to say that my words, images, and ideas are informed by a community of cultural creatives I've been privileged to be a part of at the Forum for Theological Education (www.fteleaders.org). “Warrior Healers” is a term coined by my colleague and co-author Matthew Wesley Williams in the book *Another Way: Living and Leading Change on Purpose* (Chalice, 2020).

progress. The slash asks us to imagine what we cannot possibly know from any one perspective and to acknowledge that all perspectives are necessary to the communal task of meaning making. Voices of people whose stories historically got silenced, cut out, pasted over and ignored were central to *Girlfriend Theology*; more voices enter that center in *Girl / Friend Theology*.⁶ Welcome to the slash.

Context is Everything

The work of rooting out mental models that harm and replacing them with ones that liberate -- while hard work -- doesn't have to be work that drains the life out of us.

If you live near my social location -- in a body that holds white, economic, cis-gender and hetero-normative privilege -- and you desire to be a part of dismantling privilege and supremacies, this book is for you. If you do not live near my social locations of privilege, this book may also offer pathways for you.

It is the task of those of us living in white bodies to support one another as we do the hard work of growing beyond the "entrenched racialized divides" Resmaa Menakem describes.⁷ Menakem reminds us that this work begins in our bodies -- where trauma is stored, passed down in our DNA from generation to generation. We must support each other in the work, and also in the accompanying grief and lament, because if we embody privilege, we will lose something when we commit to the work of healing white-body and other supremacies. We must also celebrate our small victories, lifting one another up and enjoying the life-giving energy that can come with de-centering ourselves and continuing to reject the myth of white superiority that wants to engulf and belittle us all. I have experienced that life-giving energy while doing *Girl / Friend Theology*.⁸

⁶ I was not aware of Kimberly Crenshaw's work on intersectional feminism when I did my dissertation research that resourced this work. However, her identification of the overlapping discriminations of race, class, and gender and the ongoing work of others in complicating our notions of "feminism" informed my desire to seek insights from beyond the worlds of white feminisms alone. For more on Kimberly Crenshaw's work and its interpretations today, see <https://iwda.org.au/what-does-intersectional-feminism-actually-mean/>

⁷ Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2017), ix. I am grateful to Menakem for his emphasis on bodies as the site of knowledge and the necessary starting point for upending the status quo around white-body supremacy.

⁸ I reflect on the life-giving aspects of decentering of white privilege as a religious educator in faith communities (<https://www.redletterchristians.org/next-most-faithful-steps-in-healing-divided-community/>) and as a scholar within academic settings in Dori Grinenko Baker, "Noticing Our Norms So We Can Change Them," *Religious Education*, 114:3, 342-348, 2019. See also Martha Dixon Kearse, *The Sun is Up: One Minister's Awakening to Racial Reconciliation*, (Macon, Ga: Smith & Helwys), 2018; Robin D'Angelo's *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press), 2020 and Layla Saad's *Me and White Supremacy* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks), 2020.

Reclaiming my own Ukrainian ancestral roots is one way I attempt to transform my awareness of the racial terror of US history into medicine for healing. The writing and retreat leadership of Daniel Fore helps me cultivate relationship with my ancestors, who migrated from Russia and Germany in the early part of the 20th century.⁹ As I learn about my wise and loving ancestors, who predated and contributed to creating “whiteness” as a human category, I can imagine them as unsatisfied with the injustices in which they knowingly or unknowingly participated. They can become potential allies in my work as a healer called to discern my role in righting the wrongs done to Bipoc people.¹⁰ Ancestral healing expands my imagination, creating new pathways for prayer and ritual that revive the flattened liturgies I often experience in Christian worship and devotional life. This work contributes to my understanding as vocation as communal, a primary contribution of my co-authors in *Another Way: Living and Leading Change on Purpose*.¹¹

Over the decades, Bipoc and LGBTQ+ people have reached out to tell me that *Girlfriend Theology* helped them embrace liberatory theologies as they ripple back and forth between academia and lived reality. I will forever remember the young Latinx woman who encountered the writing of Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz through *Girlfriend Theology* in a college course. She remarked: “How could I get to be today years old and not know that a scholar like this exists in the world, that writing reflects *my* life?”

Another woman shared with me how *Girlfriend Theology* helped her raise the issue women in leadership in the conservative evangelical Christian tradition in which she worked. The method – because it invites story rather than dogma – allowed her to invite her youth group to question patriarchal norms in ways that did not create defensiveness. A Roman Catholic scholar emailed to tell me how she uses the method to support healthy body image in adolescent girls begin menstruation.

Finding better images of God can be life-giving, communal work that feeds us and fuels our actions in the world. In *Girl / Friend Theology*, the work begins with our own bodies - where we see suffering, where we experience rage, where we find empathy, where we find joy -- as we also pay attention to the embodied lives of others. Depending on our context, these others may be people we actually know. Often they include the stories we go looking for to fill in the gaps that exist because most of us live in neighborhoods and learn histories that are segregated by design.

Why *Girl / Friend Theology* is Good for Now

A sea of books describes the beautifully unfolding images of God uncorked within the past 30 years. We have access to the writings of Black women making meaning of the

⁹ Daniel Foor, *Ancestral Medicine: Rituals for Personal and Family Healing*, (Toronto, Canada: Bear & Company, 2017). See also www.ancestralmedicine.org

¹⁰ “Bipoc” is an acronym for Black, Indigenous People of Color. It is a contested designation for non-white people, but serves as a placeholder in this chapter until a better term evolves.

¹¹ Lewis, Williams, Baker, 2020

Atlantic passage of their enslaved ancestors.¹² We have the always present but now more available stories of indigenous North Americans whose connection to the land erases the divide between sacred and profane.¹³ We have queer theology in many manifestations.¹⁴ The list goes on.

Alongside the flourishing of such explicitly theological works, we have an abundance of stories told from the perspectives of people of color and genderqueer people that traffic in the stuff of spirit – joy, love, abundance, and suffering – without being explicitly theological.¹⁵ As these stories rightfully move from the margins to the center, they turn into Netflix binges and bestsellers, quenching a longstanding thirst for submerged truths that provide a fuller glimpse of humanity.

A few of these books address how to build spaces in which suppressed voices can be heard. Some offer guidance on how to tell our stories.¹⁶ **Rare is the resource that shows how to invite everyday people into meaning-making using their own stories, dreams and intuitions in conversation with the larger stories at play in our culture.** *Girl / Friend Theology* takes all three of these practical steps, lingering longest on the last, in the territory of meaning-making.

Bestselling New York Times author Elizabeth Lesser -- in her book *Cassandra Speaks: When Women are the Storytellers the Human Story Changes* -- wonders how history would have unfolded if women had been the primary storytellers. She writes:

¹² See Barbara Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004).

¹³ See Joy Harjo, *Crazy Brave: A Memoir* (New York: WW Norton & Company), 2012 and Robin Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions) 2013.

¹⁴ Books that fall into this category that have helped save my life since the publication of *Doing Girlfriend Theology* are too numerous to mention, but a few of my current favorites include: Tyler Sit, *Staying Awake: The Gospel for Changemakers* (St. Louis: Chalice Press) 2020; Elizabeth M. Edman, *Queer Virtue: What LGBTQ People Know about Life and Love and How it Can Revitalize Christianity*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press), 2016; Pamela R. Lightsey, *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications), 2015; Kathy K. Khang, *Raise Your Voice: Why We Stay Silent and How to Speak Up*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press), 2018; and Monica Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 2008.

¹⁵ The list of recent non-explicitly theological books that enlarge my view of humanity include: Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions) 2013. , (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions), 2013; Ross Gay, *The Book of Delights: Essays*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books), 2019; Roxanne Gay, *Bad Feminist: Essays* (Harper Perennial), 2019; Isabelle Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent*, (Random House), 2020.

¹⁶ One book that does this well is Kathy K. Khang's *Raise Your Voice: Why We Stay Silent and How to Speak Up*. (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Press) 2018. She includes autobiographical stories about her life as a Korean-American pastor and parent to coach women in the importance of using their voice as tools for personal and political change.

Humans love stories. We always have. We write them and read them, tell them and show them, learn from them and live by them. Throughout history, most of humankind's origin stories, hero's journey tales, novels and films have been created by men. Embedded in the stories are the values and priorities we live by, and what we believe about women and men, power and war, sex and love.¹⁷

I would add that what we believe about God, spirituality, and our human capacity for creating the worlds we want to live in -- has also been mostly determined by men seated within dominant culture. Lesser goes on to ask: "But what if women had been the storytellers too? What story would Eve have told about picking the apple? What would Pandora have said about opening the box?"¹⁸

I braided my longstanding love of stories told by women into the original design of *Girlfriend Theology*, with a particular focus on women of color. Stories by Maya Angelou, Gloria Anzaldua, Audre Lorde, and Annie Dillard grounded the original version of *Girlfriend Theology*.

Leaning a little deeper into Lesser's premise, today I ask: What if the stories we all knew by heart explicitly included those told by indigenous inhabitants of an occupied territory or genderqueer folks who experienced embodied reality as more than the male/female binary? What if the stories we weave into conversations with young people included memoirs of young people discovering their inner light, like this one, recounted by civil rights activist Rosemary Freeney Harding?

I can't say exactly where the Light entered, where it started from. Suddenly, it was just there with me. A white light, bright enough that it should have hurt to look. But it didn't hurt. In fact, as the light grew and enveloped everything in the room, I felt the most astonishing sense of protection, of peace. It surrounded me and I was in it, so joyfully. I don't know how long I was engulfed by this Light, this space. But when I came out of my room my family was looking at me oddly, like there was something different about me they couldn't quite name ... The Light became a kind of touchstone in my life. It was so much love. Like an infinite compassion.¹⁹

Harding goes on to ask, a few pages later, how her life might have been different if she had more access to wise elders with whom to process this experience and incorporate its meaning into her life.

Sometimes I wish I could talk to somebody who was there when Grandma Rye was questioning the Christian God, working out the transition. Figuring out what

¹⁷ <https://www.elizabethlesser.org/cassandraspeaks>. See also Elizabeth Lesser, *Cassandra Speaks: When Women are Storytellers The Human Story Changes*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins), 2020.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Rosemary Freeney Harding, *Remnants: A Memoir of Spirit, Activism and Mothering*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 1

parts were useful, what parts should be ignored; and where the connections lay between what she already knew to be true of the world, true of herself and God, and what new things the struggle (to be human) in this land was teaching her.²⁰

Harding's speaks here to the inchoate yearnings of young people. *Girl / Friend Theology* is an educational and formational replication of what might already be happening in families and communities, when young people have access to people like Grandma Rye and the process of selecting and creating that is the spiritual journey.²¹ The method allows adults who hold treasures like this story to gently drop it into a young person's life, in an act that sometimes amounts to throwing a lifeline.

Similarly, how good would it be for a contemporary thirteen year old to come upon these lines:

Though I was blurred with fear, I could still hear and feel the knowing. The knowing was my rudder, a shimmer of intelligent light, unerring in the midst of this destructive, terrible, and beautiful life. It is a strand of the divine, a pathway for the ancestors and teachers who love us.²²

Joy Harjo, poet laureate of the United States and member of the Muscogee Creek Nation, places these words after the story of an abusive step-father whose form of Christianity she rejected. "By the time I was thirteen," Harjo writes, "I had grown tired of the misuse of the Bible to prove the superiority of white people, to enforce the domination of women by men, and I didn't agree with the prohibition on dancing and the warnings against prophecy and visions."

The dissonance between Harjo's own inner knowing and the form of Christianity to which she was subjected inspired her to read the Bible through two or three times, finding there "a great respect for dreams and visions" and, in the Song of Solomon, a vision of God as beloved "rather than as a wrathful white man who was ready to destroy anyone who had an imagination."²³

Back in the 1990s, I like, Lesser, was primarily concerned with the voices of young women. *Girlfriend Theology* originated because I wanted to make sure young women had access to the life-affirming voices of their elders -- particularly Womanists, *mujeristas*, Asian feminists and white feminists -- who were rebooting theology from the ground up, using their lived experience to dismantle dominant versions of God.²⁴

²⁰ Harding, 13

²¹ This process is described in detail Chapter 4 of *Girl / Friend Theology*.

²² Harjo, 81.

²³ Ibid, 78.

²⁴ I specifically lifted up the writings and theological methods of *mujerista* scholar Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Hong-Kong born feminist theologian Kwok Pui Lan, Korean theologian Hyn Kyung Chung, and womanist scholar Katie Geneva Cannon as providing important critique to white feminist theologians who had been my earlier muses and mentors.

Those dominant versions of God -- born in White supremacy and its colonizing vision of reality -- constituted the ever-present realities of mainstream US culture.

I wanted young women to be able to see the water of mainstream culture as polluted. I wanted them to have access to the tools they would need to trouble that water, drain it completely, so they could draw from their own deep wells of spirit, ancestry, and culture, where submerged streams reflected more diverse, life-giving, images of God. I also wanted to free them to learn from, borrow from, be in back-and-forth relationships of give-and-take with the wells of others in ways that did not rob or steal, but shared in mutuality and respect.

As a young feminist youth minister and pastor, I found that it wasn't enough to simply translate liberatory theologies to young people; it was necessary to invite them into the action. If they were to let it seep into their bones and replace the damaging, limiting, harmful stories, they had to have a seat at the table. They had to create it, own it, mix it up in their own bespoke ways. It had to emerge from within them and reflect their own ways of knowing.

Placing their autobiographies-in-the-making alongside an ever-widening canon of written autobiographies -- this, I discovered, worked magic. It invited them to wonder about the ways they had been formed in faith. They become transformative iconoclasts who also cared about rebuilding a working faith on the other side of deconstruction. This led me to get a PhD focusing on critical pedagogy, critical race theory, adolescent development and emancipatory theologies.

Since the 90s, many workshop participants, gender activists, feminists, researchers, theologians and truth-tellers challenged my focus on young women, broadening it to include genderqueer people, young adult men inundated by toxic masculinity, and people of all ages. Where the acronym LGBT once sufficed, the term LGBTQ+ now strives to embrace the still-evolving ways of naming genderqueer identities, concerns, and experiences that we need to bring to the task of rebooting our images of God. I update those terms in this revised edition.

Several specific flourishings of resistance to dominant norms call forth this revision of *Girl / Friend Theology* now, in the post-2020 era following the global pandemic and massive unmasking of historical and ongoing racial violence in the US. These resistance movements include:

- The Black Lives Matter and immigration reform movements that focus attention on state-based violence against Black and Brown people, along with recognition of and resistance to anti-Asian hate during and after the Covid-19 pandemic
- The #Me-Too movement and its challenge to gender-based sexual violence
- The dismantling of the gender binary and coming to terms with historical suppression of gender non-conforming humans

- Mounting evidence of climate collapse and species decline and the disproportionate effect this is having among indigenous communities, poor communities, and communities of color
- A growing movement of people culturally described as white who are discerning calls to the intersectional work of dismantling white supremacies through their bodies and their lives.

Each of these movements challenges the pain, death and disparity that erupt from a status quo that works for some, but not for all. These movements also challenge the deep mental models that preserve the way things are. I believe *Girl / Friend Theology* holds promise for these movements because it addresses those mental models with practical skills that:

- Help people tell the stories of their lives, out loud to one another.
- Invite a communal process of meaning making around those stories
- Guide facilitators in creating space for that storytelling and meaning making.

It is one tool that can create and sustain better mental models, ones that affirm life and flourishing for all creation. Methods like *Girl / Friend Theology* are now more necessary than ever because we stand at a crossroads, culturally.

The oppressive cultural norms at work in dystopic novels like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid Tales* do not come about by accident. As that novel and its television adaptation shows, these structures of oppression are by design. They sneak in incrementally, but they are not by accident. Powerful forces seek to keep power structures weighted toward those who've historically been in power. Because of this, those of us with hope of upsetting the dominant norms must equip ourselves with all the tools in our potential arsenals.

Finding better images of God -- or Spirit, Divine, Creation, Universe, however you choose to name the whisper of love "deep down in the deepest place" -- can be a grounding, centering, life-giving force in our lives. It can help us grow into people who survive and thrive in our own personal realms and return excess loving energy back to our communities.

Finding better images of God can help us commit to better actions in the world, becoming people who create conditions that make room for everyone on that journey, not just those who started life with a larger slice of the unevenly distributed socio-economic pie.²⁵

This book is about the task of finding new narratives and creating new parables to live by. It is also about discovering, seizing and claiming ancient wisdoms that were once silenced or suppressed but are ripe for reclaiming.²⁶

²⁵ Reyes, 2020.

²⁶ I first learned about the long history of reclaiming the suppressed strains of Christian tradition that empower women and predate gender hierarchies from my mentor, acclaimed Roman Catholic feminist

If we, collectively, are to discern our unique roles in healing the trauma around race and gender that threaten Bipoc lives and diminish human community at this moment in time, we will need all the help we can muster. If we are to tend adequately to the grief of species decline and the rise of oceans that will kill and displace millions of people over the next decades, we will need all the help we can muster. This book is about using all that is available to us -- especially the subversive, spirit-fed, sparks of divine disruption - to heal and to grieve, and to keep up the work of building a world of flourishing for all creation.

How *Girl / Friend Theology* Works

In this book, you'll find:

1. A four-step method using the acronym L.I.V.E. that updates the original instructions for group theological reflection around one person's story. It's simple, adaptable, and repeatable.²⁷ If practiced together over time, it can become a group's default path for ongoing meaning-making.
2. Numerous examples of groups using these four steps, showing exactly how new images of God arose when we thought critically together about our faith traditions' interpretations of scripture and tradition, alongside our own lives and the larger stories emerging from subversive voices around the globe
3. A set of beliefs that challenge white, patriarchal norms about God that emerged out of sustained encounter with girls and women doing *Girlfriend Theology* over time.

All of the stories and examples in the chapters that follow are from the original book. While I continue leading groups in *Girl / Friend Theology* and its adaptations over the years, I chose to retain the original examples here. They are snapshots in time that may seem quaint or archaic to today's readers, but often offer a glimpse of how culture has changed; other times they give a sense of how lasting change is stalled by the reinforcing tendencies of whiteness and patriarchy.

The new experiences are yours to write. To get you thinking, I share a few glimpses of fresh stories I've encountered recently while sharing the method:

-- my friend Tyson²⁸ led a group of his LGBTQ+ friends around a story about coming out to his white conservative Christian family while he was an undergraduate at Liberty University

theologian and historian Rosemary Radford Ruether. Ruether wrote the foreword to the original version of this book, which has been included in the appendix to this revised edition.

²⁷ I am indebted to Stephen Lewis for the acronym L.I.V.E. I introduced it and walk through twenty-one examples using it in the book *The Barefoot Way: A Faith Guide for Youth, Young Adults and the People who Walk with Them*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012). The L.I.V.E. method is included as Addendum 1 to this chapter.

²⁸ Pseudonyms are used here unless I have the express permission of the storyteller to share the synopsis of their session.

-- my friend Lizzy led a group at her campus ministry around a story about the intricate snake tattoo on her arm, the anger it sparked in her adoptive parents, and its redemptive meaning within her own indigenous worldview.

-- my friend Tasha led a group of older women around a story about a moment on her honeymoon hike of the Pacific Coast Trail, when hot and tired, she plunged into a river and swam upstream while her newlywed husband set up camp.

-- my friend Austin told a story about the bully who grew up next door and caused him to grow the thick skin of masculinity he wears as an armor against intimacy.

In each of these examples, God showed up in unexpected ways as we walked through the steps of *Girl / Friend Theology* together.

In Lizzy's story, a groundswell of voices rose up to give witness to the power of "tattooing" as a spiritual practice of naming and claiming body and identity. Three Native American women in a room of mostly white women spoke up to affirm Lizzy's rejection of traditional Christian interpretations of evil tied to the serpent in the Garden of Eden. One person flipped that interpretation to name the connection between the way a snake sheds its old skin and the Christian concept of becoming a new person. In this session of *Girl / Friend Theology*, I perceived a momentary decentering of white normative interpretations of Christianity. Others in the room confirmed my perception when they gave thanks out loud for the moment in which the group made space for collective meaning-making through the lens of indigenous images. Although these moments of decentering often occur only in glimpses, they can develop an appetite for creating or participating in them more regularly. This, I believe, is the important incremental work of cultural change.

In Tyson's story, an outpouring of love affirmed Tyson for exactly who he is. One participant voiced that God is like the red-winged hawk – a sign of affirmation and unconditional love -- who flew over Tyson's head at one point in his story.

In Tasha's story, an elderly woman named that early marriage is often like swimming upstream, naked and vulnerable, as the river of life rushes toward you. Another flipped the feminist notion of the ever-present "male gaze" of censure and critique, noting that, in this case, the male was not a gaze. God could be seen as the partner preparing space for rest and sustenance as the partner experienced joy and refreshment, washing off the dust of a hard day.

Sometimes, God shows up as we sit with one another to hold our pain, as in the case of Austin's experience with the bully. There was no silver lining to that story, but there was a glimmer of divine hope when someone named the rare and beautiful experience of a group holding space and silence together around the incarcerating effects of toxic masculinity.

Girl / Friend Theology is not about pasting shiny rainbows on suffering. It's about sitting together in the suffering. It is an art, a practice, a sometimes hard-edged, and sometimes playful tool for pushing against the constructs we live within. It provides space for people to consider the role of God in welcoming their identity and loving their very existence. It seeks to revise the stories that limit, oppress, and squeeze people into boxes that were never designed for our flourishing or survival. While it focuses on creating space for young people to do this work, it also benefits people of all ages who choose to welcome God's becoming.

In this book, you'll learn how to take part in or lead a group process of reclaiming religious and cultural symbols for our lives from one real life story told by a person in the group. Many other facilitator tips show up in the book, but here's a few important ones to keep in mind:

- It helps if a few people in the group are trained in theology or critical race theory.
- It helps if a few people in the group are trained in trauma-informed care.
- It helps to have a person who is a trained facilitator, and even better if they are skilled in creating brave and "safe enough" containers for groups to share vulnerability and courage.²⁹
- I always try to share the facilitation role with another adult.
- It is absolutely necessary that the group have access to emergency mental health care in case a story triggers a mental health emergency.³⁰

But formal theological training isn't necessary, and the method is not therapy. I've learned through the decades of using this process that it can be healing for people who've been harmed by church teachings. It can also be healing for those who hold responsibility for being part of that harm. It can create a desire to learn about stories told by people whose journeys collided with dominant powers and did not survive that encounter intact. It can create a common ground for coming together, no matter our points of departure.

While I originally designed this tool to revise oppressive forms of Christianity and reform the church from within, I learned along the way that this method also feeds a hunger in wider circles. It is a spiritual technology that can be used by anyone eager to tease out the meanings of their life, anyone doubting a religious tradition, anyone looking for better ways to live into a sense of meaning and purpose.

²⁹ See the Covenants of Presence in Lewis, Williams, Baker (2020), 37-40.

³⁰ In Appendix 2 of this paper, you will find an adaptable template for inviting participants to write and share their story. I have learned that stories about suicide or suicide attempts are usually too triggering for this non-therapeutic method, unless you are a trained clinical counselor using this method as a tool within your practice. If a story about serious mental health challenge arises during the course of collecting and choosing a story to use in a session, I seek out the storyteller to assess whether additional mental health resources are necessary. On several occasions, interventions such as this surfaced needs that received appropriate medical and mental health attention. This is not a by-product of the method; it is part of holistic trauma informed small-group leadership.

Anyone can use this story-sharing method to energize the work of excavating harmful culture-shaping images, while uncovering spiritual wisdom that can help liberate. In other words, you don't have to be Christian to engage in revising the underlying harm Christianity has done in shaping cultural norms that live around us and persist within us.

The slash in this revised edition is no small thing. It is a celebration. The slash is an invitation to listen to, elevate and support the realities of all young people coming into their embodied identities and asking big questions, such as "Why am I here? What do I long for?" "Who is God for me?" "Why does that matter?" and, perhaps most significantly, "*Do I matter?*"

Girl/Friend Theology insists that *you do matter* – but even better – it provides opportunities to surround yourself with peers and elders to remind you that you matter, deeply. Fervent love creates and holds you – as you are and as you are evolving. I invite you to the hard, life-affirming work of finding new stories to live by, beginning with the stories that already live within us.

Dori Baker
Mother's Day 2021

Addendum 1: The L.I.V.E. Girl / Friend Theology Method

This reproduceable handout introduces participants of the four steps of *Girl / Friend Theology*. More detailed directions for facilitating the method are described in the chapters that follow. I often print these steps out as a bookmark for participants to keep in front of them as we move through the 90-minute session.

How to L.I.V.E.

The Four-Step Method of Girl / Friend Theology

Note to facilitator: Begin by creating hospitable space for shared conversation by establishing covenants or norms that ensure all voices will be honored and respected.³¹

L = Listen: Enter into a deep listening to the story.

Listen as if the story and the storyteller is all that matters in this moment.³²

Allow yourself to set aside all other thoughts as you focus on the story.

³¹ For detailed descriptions for creating hospitable space, see Lewis, Williams, Baker, 2020, 29-46. For an example of covenants that hold space, go to Covenants of Presence under the resource tab at www.leadanotherway.com.

³² For a step-by-step exercise in learning how to listen in this way, go to Holy Listening under the resource tab at www.leadanotherway.com. The exercise of Holy Listening might be an important initial step for a group unaccustomed to holding sacred space for one another.

I = Immerse: Immerse yourself in the feelings that emerge as you listened. Be sure to explore the whole spectrum of feelings the story brought up. Also, you might share briefly a story from your own life that the current story brought starkly to mind.

V = View: View it wider by asking “What stories from my faith tradition are confirmed, challenged, turned upside down by this story?” Think critically about the images of God you carry with you. How does this story offer an alternative or paradox? How does it echo a non-dominate image of God you might like to explore? Who is missing from the picture when you consider where God appears in the story?

E = Enact the Next Most Faithful Step: How does this story ask you to act differently? So what? What action might you take in the world as a result of this time exploring this story and its meaning? Name any Aha-moments.

Addendum 2: An Invitation to Tell Your Story

I use a variation of the following invitation to encourage potential storytellers to bring their offering to the *Girl / Friend Theology* process.

Pro-Tip 1: Tailor this invitation to meet your needs: If you are gathering to discern your next steps regarding your role in dismantling white supremacy, ask for a story about one’s earliest memories of racial inequality; if you are gathering to think critically about patriarchy or gender binary; ask participants to tell a story about a time when they experienced a limiting perspective about gender in their bodies, or a time when they felt blissfully at home in their bodies. The goal is to keep the request general enough, and keep it focused on a story, rather than an analysis. If it helps, ask them to channel The Moth Radio Hour or NPR’s Storycorps or another well-known storytelling platform.

Pro-Tip 2: I find a gentle way to ask that the story *not* use lots of God-language or tell us too much about where the storyteller finds God in the story. That work will be up to the group. Sometimes a simple back-and-forth edit with the storyteller can help them pare the story down to the experience itself, without too much interpretation.

Pro-Tip 3: If the group is too large to allow for everyone’s story to be received and welcomed into the meaning-making process, I make sure to read everyone’s story and write back to them with appreciation and musings about where the process might have led had time allowed. In cases like this, I select the stories with the highest potential of upending traditional norms or creating entrance for subversive images of God.

Invitation to Tell Your Story

Please write a **one-page story** about an event in your life that you would not mind sharing. The story can be about **almost** anything: a moment in which you discovered a truth about yourself, a close call with danger, a time when you took a risk, a loss you grieved, a dream you had, or just about any memory you hold as significant.

Don't fret over this. Often, the first story that pops into your head is the one you need to tell. We will be using these stories in a small-group process that will send us looking for meaning and purpose in our lives. We won't be figuring out the meaning of your story for you; your story will be an entry for us all to make our own meanings. If you don't like writing, consider finding a time to tell me the story, and I will write it down.

The story should **not** be one you have told repeatedly in a small group or therapeutic setting. Nor should it be a story that is too painful or too fresh to feel comfortable sharing. If there is a story you are not sure about sharing, feel free to contact me to talk it over.

Please email it to us me at the following address: **Insert your email here**

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Web Based Resources

<https://iwda.org.au/what-does-intersectional-feminism-actually-mean/>

www.leadanotherway.com

www.fteleaders.org

www.doribaker.com

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Cultivating Ambivalence
Accompanying young adult Catholic women towards nuanced belonging

Abstract:

This paper engages the paradoxical reality that while many women acknowledge gender inequality in the Catholic Church, they are negotiating ways to participate and resist from within the community of the faithful. This paper illustrates that an experience of ambivalence often manifests from the dialectical nature of this negotiation. Drawing from the work of Mary Bednarowski, this paper argues that ambivalence, cultivated as a virtue, can serve as a prophetic posture from which to participate in transforming the Church. A three- movement approach of *critique, conservation, and transformation* is suggested as a pedagogical framework to encourage participation. Furthermore, ambivalence as a virtue can serve as a theological access point for young adult women to find nuanced belonging and assert spiritual authority within the constructs of a Catholic identity.

“It's definitely messier taking a nuanced stance, but it's also critically important to true belonging.”
Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*

As a Catholic chaplain at a women's college, I facilitated a meeting with ten undergraduate women about to embark on a faith-based alternative spring break trip. As the discussion began, the students were enthusiastic in engaging with the first question I posed: what do you see as the connection between *faith and justice*? Then, when prompted to articulate their own faith and belief system, there was silence. Finally, one student expressed, “Gosh, I really love Jesus, but I’m not down with the institution”. Almost everyone nodded in the room. Of the other nine students, most expressed their own spiritual but not religious status. Most were raised in various faith traditions but didn’t practice anymore. One student shared self-consciously that she was still Catholic, but her faith was a personal, private experience. These are students that are inclined to sign up for a *faith-based* alternative spring break trip, yet when prompted about their own connection to a religious tradition they expressed a varied degree of ambivalence.

This paper argues that the experience of ambivalence towards the institutional Catholic Church can serve as an access point for creativity, belonging and identity formation. This paper focuses specifically on the experiences of young adult Catholic women, coming from my context of working as a Catholic Chaplain at a women's college. The purpose of this paper is to explore how articulating ambivalence as a virtue, can help religious educators support the faith development of young adult Catholic women that are struggling with the institutional Church.¹ This paper presupposes the claim that the Catholic Church both calls for justice in the world while simultaneously practicing injustice within its own institution. While many perceive there to be multiple unjust practices and theological assertions within Catholicism, this paper focuses on the claim that gender inequality exists within the institutional Catholic Church. It explores the paradoxical reality that while many Catholic women acknowledge this inequality, they simultaneously negotiate diverse ways to participate and resist from within the community of the faithful.

This paper has four sections. The first section explores the concept of *cultivated ambivalence* as described by Mary Bednarowski in her book *The Religious Imagination of American Women* (1999). Bednarowski articulates a shared experience of ambivalence among many women across faith traditions towards their claimed religious tradition. Bednarowski's thesis is that ambivalence towards one's religious tradition can be cultivated as a virtue through the three tasks of *critique, conservation, and transformation*. The second section illustrates the lived experience of *cultivated ambivalence* through reflecting on several recent memoirs and collections of essays by Catholic women. The third section suggests the positive pastoral and developmental implications of using the concept of *cultivated ambivalence* while working with young adults. The fourth section then argues that a narrative pedagogy framed by the three tasks of *cultivated ambivalence*, can support the faith development of young women who are struggling with perceived gender inequality in the Church.

¹ By young adult women I mean self-identified women in the age range of 18-25.

I. Cultivating Ambivalence: *Remaining and Resisting*

Multiple scholars of religion in the latter half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century have attempted to describe a phenomenon of women choosing to stay within their respective traditions while acknowledging gender inequality and sexism within the traditions (“Otherness” Mary Daly, 1984; “Resident Alien” Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, 1992; “Defecting in Place” Miriam Therese Winter, Adair Lummis, and Allison Stokes, 1994). Religious scholar, Mary Bednarowski, added greatly to the literature on this phenomenon of American women in religious traditions, in her book *The Religious Imagination of American Women* (1999). It is an interdisciplinary exploration of religious belonging among American women in the late twentieth century, with particular attention to lived experiences in the 1990s.

Bednarowski’s goal in her book is not to create a monolithic narrative of the religious experience of American women, but instead to offer informed insights into how “gender consciousness is shaping religious thought and what it has to contribute to understandings of particular traditions and theology and religion in general.”² She asserts that it is her “strong conviction that women’s religious thought offers us not just insights into possible relationships between gender and religion but powerful examples of theological creativity.”³ Bednarowski is intentional in her research to look at women’s experiences across varying religious traditions with attention also to the diversity within traditions. She does so through looking at narratives, theological works, and popular pieces of writing among a variety of women. She also notes in her introduction the importance she placed on paying attention to the “theological work of women in communities of color and to point out that the categorization of ‘communities of color’ brings with it its own complexities.”⁴ She notes that there is an “obvious bias” towards narratives that can be construed as liberal in the works that she cites and uses in her research, but also argues that her book should not be labeled as only contributing to liberal religious thought.⁵

Bednarowski’s first chapter lays the groundwork for the rest of the book arguing for *ambivalence* as a new religious virtue. She describes the shared experiences of many women across traditions within the United States who express degrees of ambivalence towards their religious traditions. She refutes the popular belief that being ambivalent is equated to being in a state of indecisiveness or confusion. She instead offers an alternative vision of ambivalence as a vehicle for creativity and a virtue to be cultivated.⁶ She explains,

It is a functional ambivalence that offers a contrast to the certainties of tone that are typical of much religious thought. It is also an ambivalence that requires the telling of

² Bednarowski, Mary, *The Religious Imagination of American Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 11.

³ Bednarowski, 15.

⁴ Bednarowski, 8.

⁵ Bednarowski, 9.

⁶ Bednarowski, 19.

detailed stories about their wary and rueful, deeply loving and knowledgeable, experiences of their traditions.⁷

She highlights instances of this type of ambivalence within narratives coming from women within various Christian denominations, Jewish traditions and Buddhist affiliations. Bednarowski argues that within this state of *cultivated ambivalence* there are three tasks in relationship to an individual and their tradition: to maintain a critical distance, to commit to conservation of their tradition's deepest insights, and to move forward with innovation and transformation.⁸ She further explains,

It is an ambivalence that demands wariness that does not lapse into cynicism, loyalty that does not succumb to docility or resignation, creativity that flourishes on the margins without losing sight of the center.⁹

The concept of *cultivated ambivalence* attempts to shift the experience of ambivalence from one of confusion to one of agency. Maintaining a critical distance does not mean disengaging but in feeling healthily detached from the ongoing effects of sexism within the institution.

Cultivated ambivalence flips the idea of ambivalence from one of disengagement or apathy, to one of agency and participation. Bednarowski explains the stories she writes about “women make it clear they do not experience themselves at the mercy of their traditions but instead are responsible for them along with other members of their communities.”¹⁰ Choosing to stay within an institution that one feels is unjust, is only the first step. The next step is to think about one's responsibility to engage so as not to remain alienated nor complicit. Not all Catholics are called to be ethicists within the academy, but all can be invited to discern how they are to be ethicists in their praxis of faith and participation in their faith communities. One must creatively utilize this space of ambivalence in order to resist unjust structures, laws and theologies so as to remain with integrity. As Bednarowski explains, “Ambivalence leads not to final resolution of issues affecting the equality of women but to an ongoing commitment to a tradition that, she believes, will continue to offer both limitation and transformation.”¹¹ *Cultivated ambivalence* is an active commitment to slow work, transformational work, and all rooted in the knowledge that the Church is beyond a structure and beyond an institution. It is not rooted in false hopes that the Church will change overnight, but that people *are* the Church and by their very actions they are creating the Church.

II. Struggling for the “Soul of Something”: Cultivated Ambivalence in Action

What does *cultivated ambivalence* look like in action? Many women who are choosing to stay and claim a Catholic identity while not passively accepting the institutional Church's position on every issue wholesale – in fact, struggling against every semblance of sexist and gender

⁷ Bednarowski, 32.

⁸ Bednarowski, 20. -

⁹ Bednarowski, 20. -

¹⁰ Bednarowski, 33.

¹¹ Bednarowski, 41.

discrimination by their church. Feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson is one such woman that has deliberately chosen to stay and has been an outspoken role model for many others. When asked by journalist Jamie Manson why she stays, she explained, “If you feel deeply enough, you stay. Not because you are a masochist, but because it’s worth it. You’re struggling for the soul of something.”¹² While Bednarowski uses anecdotes throughout her book of the women she interviewed and observed, she does not offer specific vignettes that are as helpful as teaching tools. This section seeks to build on her work by exploring how *cultivated ambivalence* is revealed in several recent memoirs and essays by women about their experiences of being Catholic in the US.

This idea suggested by Elizabeth Johnson of choosing to stay for the struggle for the “soul of something” comes across in several recent memoirs and compilations of essays from the lived experiences of Catholic women. *From the Pews in the Back: Young Women and Catholicism* (2009), is a compilation of essays from young women and their experiences within Catholicism in the twenty-first century. In their introduction, the editors Jen Owens and Kate Dugan, explain that:

The majority of memoirs we received came from women who have at some point, struggled to be Catholic and hold political and social positions against which Catholicism teaches- moms who have been on birth control, female seminarians who believe in women’s ordination, lesbians who don’t believe their lifestyle ought to be condemned.¹³

Catholic Women Speak is also an excellent source with primary examples of Catholic women sharing their complicated relationships with the Church and their deeply held faith. It was intended as a contribution to the synodal process of the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the family 2014-15).¹⁴ The introduction asserts that the authors, “Do not speak as one voice but as many voices with a common desire to enrich the Church through our differences. We do not speak as “Woman” but as many women who together form part of the Body of Christ.”¹⁵ The compilation consists of stories of divorce, same-sex marriage, call to priesthood, birth control, etc. All the stories share descriptions of struggle, nuanced belonging and of again a deeply held faith.

Kaya Oakes in her book, *Radical Reinvention: An Unlikely Return to the Catholic Church* (2012), describes the winding road she took back to the Church after years away. She describes in the opening paragraphs that she searched other denominations but “the feeling is not the same.”¹⁶ She goes on to reflect that, “I missed Catholicism, the feeling it gave me to pray and to pray with

¹² Oakes, Kaya, *The Nones Are Alright: A New Generation of Believers, Seekers, and Those in Between* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 65.

¹³ “Introduction” in *From the Pews in the Back: Young Women and Catholicism*, eds. Kate Dugan and Jen Owens (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), xviii.

¹⁴ *Catholic Women Speak: Bringing Our Gifts to the Table* Ed by The Catholic Women Speak Network (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), XII-I.

¹⁵ *Catholic Women Speak*, XXVIII.

¹⁶ Oakes, Kaya, *Radical Reinvention: An Unlikely Return to the Catholic Church* (Berkeley, California: Counterpoint, 2012), 11.

others: deep in my guts...I'm Catholic in my Guts.”¹⁷ She articulates the constant tensions of feeling Catholic in her guts while also feeling challenged by many of the Church's official position on social issues. Oakes ultimately decided to return to Catholicism through asserting “Would [Catholicism] ever have any hope of changing if people like me bailed on it?”¹⁸ Editors Owens and Dugan also describe this commitment to be Catholic among the writers of their collection and how they stay and work for change. They explain that,

Many of the young women in the collection push boundaries of the Vatican's definition of Catholic identity and do so with profound respect. These authors live committed lives, and they bring that same commitment to exploring and defining Catholic identity. We are forward-thinking women of faith whose reflections on our experiences of life are filled with hope, and we challenge our church to think carefully about how it can be even more faithful to Jesus' radically inclusive message.¹⁹

This journey towards commitment is one in which the individual can value both trusted authorities and their own internal authority so they are able to live with paradox. This is the ideal condition for a *cultivated ambivalence* to be a useful access point for thinking about nuanced belonging. Kaya Oakes describes this best in her own relationship with Catholicism:

Faith is part of my identity and it's not going away, even if it's not always a perfect fit. Maybe the sense of rebellion felt by those of us who envision a better version of the Church is the same as the anger the Psalmists expressed. A better version of the Church, after all, is where we will ultimately find a better version of ourselves. All the saints whose examples I follow- alive and dead, believers and not, secular and holy- are agitators for reinventions: Of the Church, the self, the world. And they never give up.²⁰

Never giving up is a sure sign of commitment. Indeed, it is a liberative commitment, fueled by faith and grounded in hope. Particularly for individuals who are able to integrate the voices of internal and external authority, this commitment can provide a realized and legitimate state of being. These examples complicate the monolithic assumption that there is a defined and clear distinction of being in or out of the Church. It is crucial to lift up these experiences of authentic faith identity and they should be held up as examples of creative fidelity to the tradition.

Kate Dugan, Jen Owens, Kaya Oakes are all articulating an active participation in each of these three tasks of *cultivated ambivalence*. Kate Dugan and Jen Owens reflected that their own identities as Catholic women are “rooted in growing up Catholic. Something about Catholic rituals and the Catholic way of thinking and expressing faith seeps into our bones and grabs hold of our

¹⁷ Oakes, *Radical Reinvention*, 12.

¹⁸ Oakes, *Radical Reinvention*, 11.

¹⁹ Dugan and Owens, xix.

²⁰ Oakes, *Radical Reinvention*, 240.

religious sense.”²¹ This articulation expresses the shared respect for ritual and Catholic thought. In producing the collection of essays they were engaging in critique and working for transformational change. The personal stories throughout the book also reveal diverse ways of maintaining a critical distance, cherishing rituals and tradition and working for transformational change in the Church. Oakes mirrors these three tasks in reflecting:

Faith is a love story. Over and Over Christ tells us to love one another, love our enemies, love the people who persecute us. The Catholic Church is so good at ministering to the poor, caring for the sick, educating people in forgotten communities. It is so good at encouraging its flock to stand up to injustice and fight oppression. And it is just freaking awful at understanding what it means to be a woman, or to be gay, or to want to express your sexuality without catching a disease. Yet what being Catholic has given me is a sense of love and compassion for the people around me that was pretty much absent in my decades of fake atheist faithlessness.²²

This love story that she speaks of is a nuanced one. It is a love story that entails being part of a church that does not ordain women *and* calling yourself a feminist. It is a love story that gushes about the Catholic rituals and compassion rooted in Catholicism. It is a love story that can hold the tension of realizing that sexism and homophobia exist in the Church, while knowing this is not the end of the story, that it will continue, and the only way it will get better, is if one doesn’t walk away.

III. Pastoral and Developmental Implications of Cultivated Ambivalence

Pastoral Implications

Cultivated ambivalence can serve as a theological access point for women to find nuanced belonging and assert spiritual authority within the constructs of a Catholic identity. The concept of *cultivated ambivalence* has shaped my own pastoral work in working young adult women. I have found it helpful while sitting with young people who experience simultaneous feelings of belonging *and* alienation and struggling with whether to stay or leave the Church. Religious educators and those interested in young adult faith formation must meet young adults where they are at and take seriously the doubt, struggle and questions of young adults if we are to reach them and not turn them away. I have found sharing the concept of ambivalence as a virtue can be a source of empowerment for students I work with. It offers a nuanced way of belonging that does not make it an either/or decision to stay or leave. It can give affirmation to experiences so that one does not feel that they are the only one who has ever experienced it, nor that they are forced into a breaking point of needing to leave the Church.

Developmental Implications

If religious educators make room for doubt, critique and questioning, there is the possibility that young adults can emerge with a deeper, more mature and committed faith and sense of belonging. Part of the goal of faith development is for individuals to grow into their own spiritual authority,

²¹ Dugan and Owens, 227.

²² Oakes, *Radical Reinvention*, 187.

one that is authentic, thoughtful, and tested. Religious educators can play a significant role in helping young adults move beyond dualistic thinking not only in service of healthy faith development but into developing the capacity for living with paradox and nuance, which is so crucially needed in our world of increasing polarization today. The overall epistemic aim is for them to develop an internal process of meaning making that is capable of navigating the complexity of both church and world.

The contributions of Sharon Daloz Parks and Robert Kegan are most useful for our conversation. Parks work on faith development incorporates cognitive, affective and interpersonal aspects. She asserts that there are four *Forms of Knowing* within the faith development of an individual (authoritative, unqualified relativism, commitment in relativism, and convictional relativism). Parks expands *commitment in relativism* to include two different periods: *probing commitment* and *tested commitment*.²³ She places most young adults in the *probing commitment* period. Religious educators can support young adults in this process and provide space and opportunities for them to move into *tested commitment*. In *tested commitment*, the goal is that one commits to a specific tradition, but this does not mean they need to agree with everything within the tradition. In *tested commitment* one can see the complexities of a tradition *and* commit to holding in tension their own spiritual authority, their individual beliefs, as well as the Church's authority, history and context. This mirrors well the experience of *cultivated ambivalence*.

Kegan offers helpful insights into how transformation occurs developmentally for both psychological and spiritual purposes. Kegan's subject-object theory describes the process of assessing the meaning-making capacity of an individual. Kegan's theory describes the "evolution of consciousness, the personal unfolding ways of organizing experience that are not simply replaced as we grow but subsumed into more complex systems of mind."²⁴ Kegan's theory stresses the importance of paying attention to what the individual, the a person, holds as object, what they have control over, and what is subject, what is fixed or beyond one's control. According to his theory, growth occurs when the individual "dis-embeds" from what they thought was subject, so that it becomes object. The tasks of *cultivating ambivalence* (maintaining a critical distance, conserving the traditions deepest insights, and moving forward with innovation and transformation) can be a catalyst for the dis-embedding process as it relates to one's relationship to one's faith tradition and religious belief system.

Kegan and Parks concur that in order to navigate meaning-making and self-discovery, young adults need environments that provide both support and challenge. Religious educators can support young adults in developing a capacity for meaning-making that values both trusted authorities and one's own internal authority, combining these into a personally held and critical faith. Kegan argues that the environment for growth needs to be both welcoming and acknowledge exactly who the person is right now as he or she is, in order to foster their psychological development.²⁵ In the next section I will propose that this type of environment for potential growth to occur within pastoral settings can be provided through using a framework of narrative pedagogy.

²³ Parks, Sharon Daloz, *Big Questions Worthy Dreams*, (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2000), 69.

²⁴ Kegan, Robert. *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 9.

²⁵ Kegan, 43.

IV. The Call to Critique, Conserve and Transform: A Narrative Pedagogy

A narrative pedagogical framework based on the three tasks of *cultivated ambivalence* can help move young adults towards embracing the paradoxes of their faith, to be critical believers. Narrative pedagogies aid in shaping the spiritual identity and religious imagination of young adults. Stories have long since served a purpose beyond mere entertainment, and instead serve for the sake of passing down traditions, teaching morality, and making meaning out of life and circumstance. In many contemporary settings religious educators already make diverse and good use of narrative pedagogies. Narrative pedagogies can be used as a meaning making tool to instill agency in an individual, helping them not only become their more authentic self, and more aware of self as a knower in their contexts and the world. In this section I will first look at how narrative pedagogies in religious education can be helpful in the process of fostering young adult identity formation and share examples of inspiring narrative pedagogies in religious education (Groome, Wimberly, Parker). Then, inspired by these models, I offer my own narrative pedagogy for working specifically with young adults based off of the three tasks of cultivated ambivalence: *critique, conserve, transform*.

Narrative Pedagogy as a Development Tool

First, it is important to define what is happening in the narrative process that is helpful for developmental growth. Narrative pedagogy is not just about creating space and time for personal reflection but should engage deeper questions about what is going on when one is asked to share their own story and how the process can shed light on new insights in how one sees oneself as a knower. The ability to tell our life-stories is crucial to meaning-making. Josh Lunde-Whitler's article, "Paul Ricoeur and Robert Kegan in Unlikely Dialogue: Towards A 'Narrative-Developmental' Approach to Human Identity and Its Value for Christian Religious Education," marries the work of Ricoeur and Kegan in order to argue that the process of telling and sharing narratives provides an excellent vehicle for healthy and identity formation in order to meet the needs of one's environment. Mining one's stories and critically reflecting on oneself as an active and moral agent in the stories can help one develop skills of perception and understanding. Lunde-Whitler argues that developing the ability to integrate and negotiate one's life stories, "creates the possibility for a more adaptable (yet not chaotic or rudderless) sense of self, which corresponds with a certain inherent posture of respect and anticipation towards others and the world."²⁶ Lunde-Whitler further argues that narrative practice in the field of religious education ultimately allows participants to "become theologians, by learning how to reflect theologically and critically about oneself and the world."²⁷ Narrative pedagogy can develop critical reflection skills and aid in identity formation for both the story-tellers and the story-hearers.

The Use of Narrative Pedagogy in Religious Education

In many contemporary settings, religious educators already make diverse use of narrative pedagogies. In this section I will lift up three different works by religious educators who intentionally link narrative pedagogy to formation and growth. The first is Thomas Groome's *Shared Christian Praxis*. Groome's model begins with the experience of the learner and engages

²⁶ Lunde-Whitler, Joshua H. "Paul Ricoeur and Robert Kegan in Unlikely Dialogue: Towards A 'Narrative-Developmental' Approach to Human Identity and Its Value for Christian Religious Education" *IJPT* (2015); 19(2), 310.

²⁷ Lunde-Whitler, 311.

both the autobiographical stories of the learner, and the communal narratives of the Christian story. Groome explains that the importance in his method of linking personal stories to a larger Christian story in that the,

Christian story and vision suggest a narrative of faith that is ongoing that reaches into our own time and will continue after us. They can be engaging for people, as all stories are, and invite participants to step inside them and find echoes and horizons for themselves.²⁸

There are five movements to the Shared Christian Praxis method:

Movement One: Have people respond to a specific theme as it pertains to their lives

Movement Two: Encourage them to reflect critically on the theme in conversation together

Movement Three: Share the Story and Vision of Christian faith in ways that are pertinent to the theme and meaningful for this group context

Movement Four: Encourage participants to appropriate and integrate Christian Faith with Life

Movement Five: Invite people to make a decision in response to the process²⁹

It is through these movements that transformation can happen in first engaging the individual within their own context. It is a process that gives the learner agency as a knower of their own story and can help locate them in the larger Christian narrative, as a disciple of Christ in and for the world.

The second pedagogical example is Anne Streaty Wimberly's *Story-Linking Process*.³⁰ Wimberly's particular context is working with African American Christians. Her work builds explicitly off of Groome's *Shared Christian Praxis*. She also engages both autobiographical narratives and larger Christian narratives. Her process has four movements:³¹

Movement One: Begins in the stories of our everyday lives.

Movement Two: Moves to the stories of God and the good news of Jesus Christ in Scripture

Movement Three: Moves to post-biblical Christian faith heritage stories (from African American Christian heritage)

Movement Four: Moves to engaging in a decision making process

Wimberly argues that narrative pedagogy can be a liberating tool. It encourages participants to critically engage the stories of self and community to become aware of how to make decisions that enable liberation of self and others. Her model offers a practical guide for how religious educators can help learners weave and reflect upon personal, scriptural and cultural narratives in order to shape positive self-identity. Wimberly pays careful attention in her model to begin with the

²⁸ Groome, Thomas H. *Will There Be Faith?: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 291.

²⁹ Groome, 299-300.

³⁰ Wimberly, Anne Streaty *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* (Nashville, TN.: Abingdon Press, 2005), 25.

³¹ Wimberly, 25.

experience of the learner, insists on proper training and compassionate intention in the role of the educator, and asserts the importance of creating a positive and nurturing environment for the stories to be shared within.³² For both Wimberly and Groome there is an essential decision-making aspect to the narrative pedagogy. It is important for them that the work of unearthing one's story and linking it to a greater Christian narrative, is ultimately for the sake of the greater community. The goal of transformative religious education is not only for personal growth but also for forming disciples in mission.

The third example is Evelyn Parker's method used in her research for her book *The Sacred Selves of Adolescent Girls: Hard Stories of Race, Class, and Gender* (2010). This method is called the *Life-Story in Metaphor* method. Parker interviewed adolescent girls, inviting them to share their stories using the metaphor of a song. For example in an interview she would ask the girls, *If your life were a song, what would it be and why?* She then looked for recurring themes in their answers, listening for how God was showing up in their stories.³³ Her conclusion is that these "stories of young people are the stories of the gospel, being lived out and spoken to us in this generation."³⁴ Her findings also suggest that through this narrative process, the girls began to develop a critical consciousness and in developing a critical consciousness they were empowered to begin questioning oppressions and injustice that they had faced in their own lives.³⁵ She argues that a critical consciousness is an aspect of a healthy spirituality for everyone and intentionally helping to form this aspect of spiritual identity should be taken more seriously by religious educators.³⁶

Groome, Wimberly, and Parker offer practical tools to accompany the faithful in formation. Narrative pedagogy within a theological framework is liberative in helping one come to see themselves as beloved, as knower, and as a valued member of a community. Groome states that religious education at its best, "Informs, forms, transforms the very being of people and does so in ways that are powerfully life-giving for both themselves and society."³⁷ Ultimately the goal of religious education, through practices such as narrative pedagogy, is to form critically conscious disciples and co-creators of God's liberative vision for humanity.

Cultivating Ambivalence: A Narrative Pedagogy

This final section suggests a narrative pedagogy, inspired by Groome, Wimberly, and Parker's work, that is based on the three tasks of cultivated ambivalence: *critique, conservation, and transformation*.³⁸ The goals of this process are for the individuals to 1) Comprehend that "the Church" is not one static, unified institution. 2) Learn about diverse ways individuals have navigated "remaining and resisting" in order to have role models for how to inhabit nuanced belonging. 3) Develop and assert spiritual authority and agency within the constructs of a Catholic identity. This

³² Wimberly, 35.

³³ Parker, Evelyn *The Sacred Selves of Adolescent Girls: Hard Stories of Race, Class, and Gender* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 8.

³⁴ Parker, 160.

³⁵ Parker, 172.

³⁶ Parker, 166.

³⁷ Groome, 94.

³⁸ This framework is still a work in progress for my dissertation so I would love feedback on it. I see this framework as useful and adaptable for religious educators whether they are working with individuals, groups, or in classroom settings. While my context is working with Catholic young women, I also would hope this framework and content could be useful in different ministry settings and different denominations.

does not have to be a formal process and can be done even in spiritual direction settings with individuals. I do think there would be great benefit to having it be a small group process so that young women have peer companions for conversations.

Step One: Introducing Role Models and Faith Companions

Familiarity with Catholic feminist traditions and suggested memoirs and essays in section II can provide role models and faith companions for young women struggling with gender inequality in the Church. Memoirs or historical accounts of Catholic feminists can offer pathways and examples for *how* to participate when one feels marginalized or unseen in the institutional structures of the Church. This also can provide thoughtful content to analyze the way certain American Catholic women negotiate authority, claim leadership, and reconfigure identity within their tradition. It can affirm that cultivated ambivalence is a valid faith stance that has the potential to lead towards prophetic participation. When suggesting role models for young women in the Church, the ultimate hope is that young women experience and see themselves as sacred and beloved with the God-given right to be on a path of holiness. I suggest offering one or two “memoirs” or accounts to read and then have a chance to reflect on the following questions with a skilled religious educator.

Reflection questions after readings:

- 1) **Critique:** What did _____ (Name of person from narrative) find challenging about the Catholic Church?
- 2) **Conserve:** What is it that _____ seemed to cherish about Catholicism? What Catholic tradition(s) did _____ uphold or mention?
- 3) **Transform:** What were _____ hopes for how the Church can better reflect the liberative nature of Christ? How did _____ embody these hopes through praxis?
- 4) **Further suggested questions:** Can you relate to this _____’s journey? What gives *you* hope about _____’s story? Does anything frustrate *you* about _____’s story?

Step Two: Share personal faith journeys

This step is a chance for individuals to share their own experiences. This can be done through inviting time to journal, share in 1:1 conversation with a spiritual director, or in small group sharing.

Reflection questions:

- 1) **Critique:** What do you find challenging about the Catholic Church?
- 2) **Conserve:** What is it that you love about Catholicism?
- 3) **Transform:** What are your hopes for how the Church can more reflect the liberative nature of Christ? How can you embody these hopes through praxis now?

Narrative pedagogy can invite young adults to participate in the change one wants to see. While there is a need for collective action for institutional structural change, mining narratives both personal and of others can help young adults comprehend that transforming the Church happens through *praxis*- the faithfuls’ everyday lived actions and experiences. The third question regarding transformation is crucial in encouraging and inviting young adults to not just be observers in the process but to take responsibility for *being* Church by how *they* live, act and participate.

Conclusion

Cultivated ambivalence can articulate a faith identity that leaves room for doubt and thoughtful, well informed critique, while simultaneously acknowledging cherished Catholic traditions and rituals that bring meaning to life. This paper has argued that the three tasks of *cultivated ambivalence: critique, conserve and transform* can enable creative participation and nuanced belonging. Furthermore, this paper has suggested that a narrative pedagogy based on these three tasks can serve as a useful tool for religious educators to work with young adult women struggling with the institutional Church. The goal of this approach is for women to develop a mature faith that acknowledges the paradoxes of their tradition while also recognizing their own spiritual authority and agency to enact change and work towards transformation.

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Because They Don't Know Bits from Bobs: Exploring the Hows and Whys of Teaching Sex Ed Alongside Sexual Ethics

Abstract: This paper will examine why professors and religious educators who plan to facilitate discussions on sexual ethics or morality should also be prepared to teach “sex ed” content to their learners, who otherwise may have inconsistent or incomplete knowledge about the biological and emotional realities of sex and sexuality. This piece will propose three areas – vocabulary and language, pleasure, and risks and rewards of sexual expression – where teachers can offer informational knowledge that will scaffold learners’ critical thinking around sexuality, with examples of activities to facilitate discussion.

Sexuality education throughout the United States is inconsistent, both in public school and religious settings. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, only 22 states require that sexuality education be medically accurate, and only 30 require sexuality education at all (though, strangely, 39 require education about HIV).¹ An educator need only ask a handful of their young adult students “what was your sex ed experience like?” to hear a wide variety of answers, ranging from in-school health classes and puberty talks to religious chastity vow events (sometimes involving “purity rings” or signed certificates) to receiving books from parents to nothing at all. Adolescents and young adults react to the information they have in a wide variety of ways as well; some embracing sexual postponement for religious or risk-related reasons, some postponing sexual debut until an opportunity or significant relationship presents itself, some launching into solo or partnered sexual behavior with enthusiasm. Teachers can – and should – anticipate that their learners represent many of these experiences rather than assuming similar knowledge and experiences throughout a classroom.

With this context in mind, religious educators and professors in higher education who want to address sexual ethics and morality should expect that their learners will have incomplete, though developing, knowledge of both the biological realities and the emotional/relational aspects of sex and sexuality. Even learners who received fairly comprehensive sexuality education often go years without refreshers and likely retain information inconsistently.

Learners cannot do their best critical thinking without a baseline of informational knowledge about the topic at hand. With this in mind, this paper will first outline the potential gaps in knowledge that college professors or religious educators might encounter, even among fairly independent young adults. Once this context is established, this paper will explore three areas of sexuality education that educators should consider directly addressing with their students in order to create a common base of understanding so that moral and ethical questions about sex and sexuality can be considered more deeply. Each of these areas will be punctuated with

¹ National Conference of State Legislatures. “State Policies on Sex Education in Schools.” Accessed January 27, 2021. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/health/state-policies-on-sex-education-in-schools.aspx>.

examples of activities or resources that can be used in the learning space to facilitate conversation and retention of new sex ed information.

I speak as a theologian and professor at a small, Catholic and Mercy-identified women's college in the Midwest. My dissertation-level research focused on Catholic women's experiences of sex education and ultimately provided some of the groundwork for a new course I teach titled "Bodies in Christian Theology," wherein we spend roughly a third of the course addressing sex and sexuality directly and examining the variety of ways that Christian traditions approach sexuality-related issues. Due to my prior research, I integrated sexuality education into this unit so that students were starting from a more level playing field of knowledge prior to our discussions, and these conversations were extremely well-received, with one student saying she felt like she was finally learning information she was supposed to have somehow known during middle school. While learnings from my highly specific, female-centered context may not apply fully to all classrooms and units focused on sexual morality, several major takeaways should be relevant to a variety of situations.

The first area for consideration will be language around sex and sexuality. Fluency in the language of sex and sexuality is often contained to either medical terminology (e.g., penis, uterus, vulva) or more casual or slang language (e.g., dick, hooking up). Imagine the awkward and stilted conversations you might overhear in an introductory-level foreign language course; this is what one can expect, more or less, when asking students to talk about sex and sexuality before ascertaining what language they have at their disposal. Discussion and critical thinking are natural stymied when students do not have the vocabulary or the comfort to be specific; therefore, a few ice-breaking activities designed to practice using sex-related terminology out loud and reviewing vocabulary are both essential and often highly entertaining.

I initially found in my dissertation study that some of my interview participants were simply unable to use certain types of sexuality-related language, though it was unclear if they didn't know the terminology or were too uncomfortable using it. Classrooms also come with particular conventions around speaking more formally, and not all people are equally used to technical terminology (for example, while students might be familiar with the phrase "oral sex," it lacks the particularity of "cunnilingus," oral sex performed on a vulva, or "fellatio," oral sex performed on a penis). I found that my health science students were frequently more confident in this anatomical language given their other coursework expectations, but students in humanities or students for whom English wasn't a first language seemed more stymied by their vocabulary.

A favorite, and humorous, activity for pushing past this first communication barrier comes from the *Our Whole Lives Young Adult* curriculum,² where learners compete in groups to come up with as many formal, informal, slang, vulgar, or scientific terms as they possibly can for particular prompts (such as "breasts" or "testicles"). The competitive aspect helps learners push through their initial hesitancy to speak, and the deliberate permission given to use slang terms allows them to jump in at whatever conversational level they are most accustomed to. This game is, in my experience, also intensely funny and educational for the facilitator or teacher, who has the opportunity to learn more recent or generationally-specific lingo. After counting up unique terms and affirming the "winning" groups, this activity also offers grounds to talk directly about what sort of language learners expect or prefer in a classroom setting so that the group has the power to shape some of their own norms about terminology. This can also be a good opportunity

² Tino, Michael J., Sarah Gibb Millsbaugh, and Laura Anne Stuart. *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Young Adults, Ages 18-35*. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, 2008, 13-14.

to discuss why certain words or types of language can provoke discomfort and how learners can be conscious of their own reactions and the reactions of others in this space. Once the ice is broken, so to speak, students have a larger and more diverse vocabulary at their disposal, along with a clearer sense of how they can speak about sexuality and sexual behavior in a way that they now know is appropriate and acceptable in the classroom space.

A second area worth exploring in a sexuality unit or class is sexual pleasure, especially given the Christian tradition's historical ambivalence towards bodily pleasure as represented by Augustine of Hippo.³ For students who may be unfamiliar with early Church history, it can be instructive to begin by discussing Augustine and his difficult, storied history with sexual expression.⁴ Once students have a better sense of where Christian hesitancy around sexual pleasure is rooted, they have better grounds from which to understand how sexuality can be defined as a God-given, beautiful capacity for connection while also being such a source of anxiety and negative emotion in the Christian spaces they're more familiar with.

Christine Gudorf's exploration about pleasure as a premoral good can be a useful resource here,⁵ but teachers may be better served by simply opening discussion about how pleasure and guilt can coincide in non-sexual contexts; for example, is eating a large slice of chocolate cake purely pleasurable, or does it also create ambiguous or negative feelings because of the perception that desserts are "unhealthy?" Students are often easily able to identify pleasurable experiences in their lives that are also tinged with guilt – scrolling through social media or unwinding by binge-watching Netflix when they're not fully caught up on schoolwork often arise as common experiences.

One intriguing activity to explore why sexual pleasure isn't often at the forefront of sexual morality discussions again comes from the Our Whole Lives curriculum and, at first glance, looks like nothing so much as a basic anatomy lesson.⁶ In this activity, learners are assigned either typically male or typically female genital cross-section charts (preferably on large poster-sized paper) and are given anatomical labels to affix to the correct position. It is usually in the first two minutes that learners realize they are not primarily labeling reproductive systems – there is no label for uterus or vas deferens, for example. Instead, all anatomical labels are for parts of the genital regions that are associated with the experience of sexual pleasure. Learners are often slightly baffled by new-to-them terms such as "frenulum," a band of tissue just underneath the head of the penis, or the "g-spot," a spongy area a few inches inside the vagina, that they have never seen identified in health or biology classes. This activity offers grounds to discuss why the pleasurable aspects of sexual behavior are so often obscured behind lessons on reproductive function or risk. Official theology in the Catholic world, for example, holds that sexual behavior should always be directed at the possibility of reproduction and can be interpreted as discouraging sex for the delight of it. Students can easily jump from this train of thought into discussing whose pleasure is usually prioritized in a sexual encounter, why there are specific cultural expectations for when a sexual encounter is "finished" (usually with a male partner ejaculating) and potential issues of female pleasure erasure in these framings.

³ Gaillardetz, Richard R., and Catherine Clifford. *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012, 104.

⁴ Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead, *A Sense of Sexuality: Christian Love and Intimacy*, 1st ed (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 99.

⁵ Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1994), 6.

⁶ Tino, Millspaugh, and Stuart, *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Young Adults, Ages 18-35*, 24.

Another productive and enlightening topic to explore in the pleasure unit is the existence of the clitoris in typical female genitalia and whether the existence of an organ whose sole purpose is the creation of sexual pleasure – and the fact that this organ is only found in typically female genitalia – may suggest about the significance of sexual pleasure, a la natural law. While I may have had unusual success with this conversation given my context in a female-dominant and health science heavy institution, learners have been fascinated to discuss why certain organs can be so easily “ignored” even in health-related spaces. Memorably, one of my students, a post-baccalaureate learner pursuing her second science degree in nursing with a focus on women’s health, noted that this discussion of female anatomy was the first she’d ever experienced where the clitoris was even mentioned, much less addressed as a purposeful organ.

Finally, educators should consider directly addressing risks and rewards of sexual expression. In my experience, students are more likely to have encountered information about the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancy than nearly any other form of sexuality education; this focus on potential risks tends to silence discussion about why people enjoy sexual expression and how mitigation of risks can be part of enhancing mutual pleasure. This topical area may need special handling depending upon one’s setting; some institutions may balk at learning that a teacher is speaking directly about contraception and prophylaxis, for example, but the major takeaways of this segment do not need to be confined to sharing facts about condoms and IUDs.

A teacher may, in fact, find more fertile footing in simply opening up the question; “Why do you think so much sex ed focuses on STIs and pregnancy?” Students frequently have a clear sense that their prior sex ed experiences were sometimes meant to evoke fear in hopes that they would choose to avoid sexual behavior. Mixed-aged classrooms that contain parents, such as the ones I experience, often yield the second insight that parents and caregivers are genuinely anxious about their growing offspring making sexual decisions that could have long-term or permanent consequences, and that this sort of anxiety can be transmitted along with factual information even when that adult authority figure is trying to be neutral and open. This conversation naturally segues into a broader theological discussion of the motivations behind decision-making in all contexts – do people make their best choices when fearful or anxious? Do people make “good” choices because they want to, or because they’re trying to avoid judgment, even hell? What would it look like to make choices entirely based on one’s desire for life-giving experiences rather than avoidance of negative outcomes?

While not appropriate for all classroom settings, this section on risks, rewards, and decision-making could incorporate an Our Whole Lives activity wherein learners privately reflect on and mark down the types of sexual behaviors they’re comfortable engaging in with various others – friends, casual dating partners, committed partners, nobody, etc.⁷ Whether or not this activity is utilized, however, the following question tends to be excellent fodder for either discussion or reflection; “How do you know what you *want*, and not just what you’re trying to avoid?”

As has likely become obvious throughout this presentation, my own teaching style trends towards keeping classroom time light and humorous to open space for difficult discussions, establishing trust among a community of learners so that relevant and endlessly intriguing topics like sexuality and sexual behavior can be addressed openly and critically without shame. This is a difficult task, and educators should be mindful that class sessions don’t have to run perfectly

⁷ Tino, Millspaugh, and Stuart, *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Young Adults, Ages 18-35*, 134.

smoothly or present information in the same way as a biology course might in order to spark key reflections and add context to major theological questions. Very few learners expect theologians or religious educators to be topical experts in sexuality and sexual behavior, and many are grateful for any chance to reflect more deeply on the hard questions that almost inevitably intersect with their own life decisions.

Furthermore, the religious affiliation or context of one's instruction will weigh heavily on whether and how a teacher can address sex and sexuality in the spirit of open and honest critical discussion. The intention of the above suggestions is not to lay a path for all sexuality education in religious environments, but to offer areas of interest that may lead to more fruitful discussion later on. It should be noted that neither my professional context, nor the Our Whole Lives resources I often employ, are invested in learners coming away with a specific set of beliefs or a commitment to experience or avoid particular practices around sex and sexuality (beyond the firmly held baselines of enthusiastic consent and non-harm).

For those who are interested in offering more depth or in improving their own courses on sexual morality or ethics, however, I hope that these reflections about what information to include to scaffold critical analysis have proven thought-provoking. I look forward to hearing how you can envision sexuality education taking place alongside theologizing around sex and sexuality.

Questions for reflection:

Do you agree or disagree that sexuality education in religious contexts frequently reflects an atmosphere of fear or anxiety?

For those who have taught sexual morality or sexual ethics, what do learners not know about sex and sexuality that you expected them to know?

How would the learners you most frequently encounter react to a genital anatomy lesson focused on pleasure, or a discussion of the function of the clitoris?

What specific challenges do you foresee in your own educational context when discussing sex and sexuality?

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Sex Education in University: Insights from Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Abstract:

Sex education is very important to be given to adolescents who reach adulthood. Misperceptions about sexuality can result in adolescents committing sexual violence or harassment. Therefore, sex education is still needed to be given to students at the university level. The goal of this research was to give some insights how Sanata Dharma University develops character and sex education for young people amidst the challenges of sexual abuses that happen in society. This research applied qualitative descriptive method. The research sample was limited to students of Sanata Dharma University who have taken Moral Theology or Moral Philosophy courses. The results of the study showed that through sex education the students were greatly helped to accept themselves and to become more mature person. The result of this study are expected as insights for education institution how to develop sex education.

Key words: sex education, moral weekend, sexuality, University students

1. Introduction

In Indonesia, many people do not really want to talk about sex. Talking about sex is a taboo topic. Only when the children are growing and the problem of sex arises in their families, everyone gets tense. They do not know how to cope the problem.

Students classified as adolescents are very vulnerable to misinformation about sex. The impact is that they will be consumed by myths about sex that are not true, and even fall into it. Eni Gustina, the Deputy for Family Planning and Reproductive Health of the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN) revealed in a virtual discussion on November 27, 2020 that adolescents are very vulnerable to falling into various problems, such as child marriage, sex outside of marriage, unwanted pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, using of narcotics and drugs (<https://nasional.sindonews.com>). A survey by the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN) found that more than 60 percent of adolescents in Indonesia have had premarital sex. This possibility continues to increase if there is no real treatment effort (<https://surabaya.tribunnews.com>).

The number of child marriage in Indonesia reached 1,459,000 marriages, placing it at number 7 in the list of 10 countries with the highest number of child marriages. The Ministry of

Religion annually records around 2.4 million marriages. However, around 48.9% of those who were married turned out to be under the age of 20.

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of minors applying for marriage dispensation increased significantly. In Madiun Regency, East Java, the number of child marriage in 2020 has increased more than 100 percent compared to similar cases in the previous year. From January to August 2020, the Madiun Regency Religious Court had recorded 120 applications for marriage dispensation (<https://www.liputan6.com>).

Likewise in Blitar, East Java, the number of minors applying for marriage dispensation has doubled. The number of children applying for marriage dispensation at the Blitar Religious Court has increased sharply. From January to August 2020 there were 408 applications for marriage dispensation. Of the 408 applicants, 20 percent were due to cases of pregnancy outside of marriage. One of the factors in the increasing dispensation of marriage is due to the lack of parental supervision of their children's activities in the midst of the corona pandemic. The local government has now intensively promoted the prevention of early marriage. (<https://www.kompas.tv>).

Similar cases have also occurred in other cities in Indonesia. The increase of early marriage is triggered by the easy access to technological information for children, including adult content. Advertisements for adult content are easily accessed by children. There is weak supervision from parents and the surrounding community about promiscuity that occurs among teenagers. During the Covid-19 pandemic, adolescents who are at home every day without parental supervision due to work and the surrounding community that tends not to care about the promiscuity of adolescents also trigger early marriages due to extramarital pregnancies (<https://jateng.kemenag.go.id>).

When it comes to sex, the most influential global forces are not schools. Magazines, films, television, the internet, and the mass media have far more influence on the sexuality of children today than formal educational institutions. Sex educators often design their curricula in response to challenges from the media (Zimmerman, 2015: 156-157).

One of the causes of adolescents falling into premarital sex is the result of addiction to viewing pornography on the internet. Experts have found that the habit of viewing pornography via the internet affects boys and girls differently (Marcovitz, 2013: 22-23). According to Dennis Frank, assistant professor of counseling and human services at Roosevelt University in Illinois, boys who frequently watch Internet pornography come to regard girls as sex objects. Meanwhile, as for girls, Michael Castleman says that girls who watch Internet pornography compare their bodies with those of the actresses they see on the Internet.

Premarital sex for adolescents, according to psychologists and medical and mental health professionals, is untimely, inappropriate, and inherently harmful and has consequences of adverse mental health (Abbot, White, Felix, 2010: 161). Therefore, one of the efforts to prevent premarital sex and early marriage is by socializing early age sex education and teaching religious moral values among adolescents. By teaching sex education, adolescents know the boundaries of social interactions. They understand the things that are prohibited and avoid promiscuity.

Sanata Dharma University as Jesuit education places education within a framework of a Christian understanding of the human person as a creation of God whose ultimate goal is to develop humanity (Kolvenbach, 2001). It is very important to assist young people who study at Sanata Dharma University in order to achieve their identity as the image and partner of God in the world. As Jesuit education, Sanata Dharma University applies Pedagogical Paradigm of Reflection as a pedagogy which can help students growing more holistic, not only in cognitive aspect and skills, but also in morality, spirituality, emotion, psychic, and their inner life (Rukiyanto, 2016: 157). This pedagogy approach is very important to be implemented in sex education.

Sex Education organized by Sanata Dharma University is one of the university's efforts to assist the students so that they are aware of his existence as men or women who are both the image of God. Sex education is part of the course of Moral Theology or Moral Philosophy, which one of the topics is discussing family morals (Rukiyanto and Sumarah, 2014). Sex education is intended to guide the students to deepen the meaning of spirituality of sexuality, so that they are able to appreciate the gift of their existence appropriately.

In this research, researcher give some insights how Sanata Dharma University develops sex education for young people amidst the challenges of sexual abuses that happen in society. This research applies qualitative descriptive method. The research sample is limited to students of Sanata Dharma University who have taken sex education subject. The problem is formulated as follows: How is sex education carried out at Sanata Dharma University? To what extent are students helped to develop maturity by participating in sex education?

2. Sex Education

People have different perceptions about sex education: whether about anatomy and physiology of the human body, or sexual intercourse relations, or reproduction and family life, or prevention of disease and unwanted pregnancy (Hisham Altalib, Abu Sulayman and Omar Altalib, 2021: 258). The question that often arises is, does educating children about sex give them permission to engage in sex?

Sex education is “a mirror, reflecting all the flux and diversity — and the confusion and instability — of sex and youth in our globalized world.” (Zimmerman, 2015: 159). Most sex education programs are incomplete and avoid problems of morality, sexual dysfunction, deviation, and marriage. There are two basic problems: biological facts, this has to do with teenage fears which occurs when they are not ready to experience menstruation or wet dreams at night. Another basic problem is providing enough information to sexually active youth to avoid unwanted pregnancies or abortions, by providing balanced information about abstinence and birth control method (Lindberg, Santelli, and Singh, 2006: 189; Kenney and Orr, 1984: 496). Correct information will help protect them from danger.

Sex education means education about sexuality in a broad sense. Sexuality includes various aspects, namely aspects of biology, sex orientation, sociocultural and moral values, and behavior. In accordance with the age group based on the development of human life, sex

education can be divided into sex education for preschool and school children, sex education for adolescents, for premarital and married adults.

Sex education for children aims to make children understand their identity and be protected from sexual problems that can be bad for children. Sex education for pre-school children is more in the form of providing information about good communication between parents and children. Sex education for adolescents aims to protect adolescents from various bad consequences due to wrong sexual perceptions and behavior. Meanwhile, sex education for adults aims to foster a harmonious sexual life as a married couple.

Thus, sex education, apart from explaining anatomical and biological aspects, also explains psychological and moral aspects. Sex education must also include elements of human rights, as well as cultural and religious values so that it will constitute moral education (Hisham Altalib, Abu Sulayman and Omar Altalib, 2021: 264).

Students are given an understanding of sexuality to help them understand sex properly: what is good about sex, what is bad about sex, and the emotional stuff that comes along with it. Thus, students are given a comprehensive sex education, like pregnancy and STDs, sexual intercourse, orientation and values, decision making and negotiation, condoms and safer sex, abstinence and techniques for saying no to unwanted sex (Masters, Beadnell, Morrison, Hoppe, and Gillmore, 2008: 87, 92). Abstinence is an important aspect as the lone acceptable and effective method to prevent unwanted pregnancies and STDs (Marcovitz, 2013: 27, 69; Howard and McCabe, 1990: 25-26).

The effective approach of sex education does not only discuss about how to control oneself, but also discuss about romantic relationships. Thus, students are taught how to develop caring, mutual sexual relationships, to have understanding of their own and partner's sexuality, how to build a healthy relationship, and how to assess others as possible romantic partner (Weissbourd, Peterson, and Weinstein, 2015:57).

The material taught includes the introduction of different characteristics and needs between men and women, hygiene, abstinence, the causes of free sex, its negative impacts, and solutions to avoid free sex (Malone and Rodriguez, 2011:5-6). The issues on gender and power in intimate relationships should also be considered as the content of sex education (Haberland, 2015: 38). Sex education should also include information about homosexuality, gay and lesbian people, their lifestyles, and their sexuality (Marcovits, 2013: 43). The purpose of the explanation about LGBTQ is for people to respect LGBTQ people and to emancipate with them (Dankmeijer, 2012: 254-255; Drazenovich, 2015: 11).

3. Design and Method

The method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive method. A qualitative descriptive research method is a research method which is commonly used to examine the condition of natural objects, where the researcher acts as a key instrument and describes a situation objectively (Sugiyono, 2018: 15).

In this research, informants were students at Sanata Dharma University who have taken Moral Theology or Moral Philosophy courses. The techniques used were questionnaires, document study, interviews and observation. The data analysis process was carried out during and after the data collection. The analysis process included data reduction, presentation of data, and drawing conclusions.

4. Sex Education in Sanata Dharma University

Sanata Dharma University provides sex education to students who take Moral Theology or Moral Philosophy courses in the form of a moral weekend (two days meetings). The purpose of sex education is for students to appreciate the gifts of masculinity and femininity appropriately because they have a clear moral commitment that sexuality should be seen as a gift from God (God-centered), not just for personal pleasure (self-centered). To achieve this goal, the dynamics that occur during sex education is a dialogue to understand sexuality from a theological point of view, as well as from psychological, biological and socio-cultural point of view (Sumarah, 2013: 5-8). Each time there is an explanation, an opportunity to ask and to discuss, to reflect and to share their experiences. During the pandemic, the program is held online. At the end of the event there is an opportunity to reflect on the whole program and its benefits for them.

a. Sexuality from Theological View

The theme of sex education is “From Hypocritical to Authentic: Understanding the Body, Understanding Love.” In the perspective of Christian theology, it is important for students to have an understanding of love which is manifested in actions, not in words (as emphasized by St. Ignatius of Loyola). The quality of love must come out of oneself through a willingness to give of oneself. Students need to be reminded that today the understanding of love is more marked by self-love and falsehood, because there is a hidden personal agenda in relationships. This is called hypocrisy in love. If this understanding is developed, it is certain that there will be no happiness on all parties, both victims of hypocrisy and perpetrators of hypocrisy (Sumarah, 2013: 5).

Then how should students behave? Students are invited to learn from Theology of the Body, written by Pope John Paul II. John Paul II invited people to become authentic persons by understanding the most basic thing, namely the body, because the body is often the first target of hypocrisy (John Paul II, 2005: 17-19; West, 2003: 5). In short, Theology of the Body can help students not to allow their bodies to become victims or to free themselves from situations of anonymity. Anonymity is a status of life that tends to follow the flow of the majority or to follow trends that are currently circulating strongly in society, such as self-love, free sex, pre-marital sex, promiscuity, etc.

Theology of the Body of John Paul II becomes the ground of understanding of the body and sexuality (John Paul II, 2005: 9-11). God is love (1 John 4: 8). Therefore, everything comes from God alone because of love too. Hence the theological reason regarding the existence of human beings who were created as male and female is also from love and for love (Obach, 2009: 194). So the existence of men and women in this world first and foremost is to love one another, instead of dominating or abusing (Porter, 1996: 107-108). A call to love one another is embodied in our bodies. Theology of the Body, then, is explored in sex education.

Sexuality is not merely a matter of having sex, but it is related to one's loving relationship to another. When love is stored only in the heart, it cannot be caught or experienced.

Therefore love must be expressed in concrete actions. The expression of love immediately involves the body or the expression of the body (Barnhill, 2013: 5-6). Kissing, looking at, hugging, holding hands, visiting friends who are sick and even staying up late if necessary, all require the body as the means. Therefore, it is necessary to start with understanding the meaning of the body. The lack of understanding of the meaning of the body opens the possibility of mistakes in “using” or “treating” the body, both one’s own body and the bodies of others (Winarsih, 2013: 19-20).

A young man who originally had a hobby of drinking liquor chose to stop poisoning the body when he realized that the body was not just an accessory for himself. A couple chooses wisely to express love because they are aware of the meaning of each other’s bodies. A teacher stops slapping a student because he is aware of the meaning of the body. These are a few examples of changes that occur due to a new awareness of the body. Therefore, studying Body Theology is not only useful for understanding sex, but life as a whole.

Theology of the Body is a rational critical reflection of the teachings, words and will of God as written in the Scriptures regarding the human body (West, 2003: 4-5). The question to reflect: What did God think about the human body when God created human beings with bodies? God is love (1 John 4: 8). Everything that comes from God is love. The theological reason for human existence is that human being was created from love and for love. We were made to love each other. This call to love one another is sealed in our bodies. Theology of the Body seeks to identify and to discover the love that God instills in us through our being.

b. Sexuality from Psychological View

Sexuality from a psychological point of view means the importance of having an understanding and appreciation of the authenticity of men and women in the pursuit of mutual growth. This happens when students (as men and women) have a positive self-concept, both as men and women, so that they can form healthy relationships and are able to express authentic participation to the person they love. An authentic person can express love productively because he/she is able to love others through the willingness to pay attention to his/her welfare, to help his/her growth and development, to be willing and able to listen to his/her needs, to see loved ones with full respect and to accept his/her individuality (Sumarah, 2013: 6).

Social construction of gender has an impact on structuring behavior according to certain measures. A person is not given the space to develop as he/she is, but he/she is required to develop according to the measures of the social construction (Susana, 2013: 35-38). This becomes one of the obstacles for someone to accept themselves (self-acceptance) and to respect themselves as they are (self-esteem).

Mutual relationships are manifested in mutual respect and provide equal opportunities for development to each individual. If such acceptance is manifested in society, it will help a person to be able to accept oneself and to develop oneself according to his potential. A person who is able to accept oneself as he/she is and feel comfortable with his/her existence, will be able to respect himself/herself and others. Among other things, it appears in the attitude of being able to take care of oneself and to make choices or decisions that develop oneself and others.

The essence of relationships is the ability of everyone to respect others, including accepting differences and managing them for personal growth together. Therefore, it is not very important to question the differences between men and women, masculinity and femininity in relationship, but it is better to understand and to appreciate the authenticity of each person in the efforts of mutual personal growth.

Allport (1991) states that a healthy relationship is a relationship characterized by the capacity of each individual to show intimacy and feelings. There is a difference between relationships of a neurotic person and relationships of a healthy person. The neurotic person has to receive love far more than he can afford to give love to others. When they give love, it is given on conditions and obligations which are not reciprocal but self-centered (Susana, 2013: 39).

Rogers (1961) states that the emergence of this conditional love is a result of the past experience of a loved one under certain conditions. The hallmark of conditional love is: "I love you, if" The impact of a conditional love experienced in the past is defensiveness and the inability to love others. A defensive attitude is shown by wearing a mask, not presenting themselves as they are.

This attitude arises especially when there is anxiety. Self-imposed conditions limit his/her behavior and turn reality into an idealized imaginary world. Therefore, individuals are not able to fully interact with others and be open to their environment. The world is seen as something threatening. These self-imposed conditions also apply to others. Therefore, in a relationship, he/she will tend to apply standards and personal requirements to others. As a result, he/she is unable to accept other people as they are and to love them sincerely.

In such an unhealthy relationship, the self becomes the center of the relationship. Other people will be seen as a means of self-sufficiency. The characteristics of such a relationship include demands, dissatisfaction, restraint, restriction, and jealousy. This applies to almost all types of relationships, for example between friends, siblings, parents-children, employer-employees, not only between husband and wife or girlfriend and boyfriend (Susana, 2013: 40).

This self-centered love can lead to exploitation in others, which in its extreme form usually takes the form of violence against others, such as against spouses, children, employees, or friends. In general, violence is carried out by parties who have more power, for example men, adults, parents, teachers, or employers. Meanwhile, weaker parties such as women, children, employees, or students have a high risk of becoming victims.

In relations between the sexes, for example husband-wife or boyfriend-girlfriend, the occurrence of coercion, rape, exploitation, betrayal and demands based on gender differences is actually a reflection of an unhealthy relationship. The love of healthy persons is unconditional, not crippling or binding.

Productive love according to Erich Fromm (1963) is a human relationship that is free and equal; everyone can maintain their individuality. One's self will not be absorbed or lost in love for others. The self is not diminished in productive love, but expanded, allowed to fully grow up. Thus relationships work, but one's identity and independence are preserved (Susana, 2013: 41).

Productive love involves four things, namely: attention, responsibility, respect and understanding. Loving others means caring for their well-being, helping them grow and develop. This means taking responsibility for loved ones, among other things in being willing and able to

listen to their needs. Loving also means looking at a loved one with respect and accepting their individuality.

c. Sexuality from Biological View

Through understanding sexuality from a biological point of view, students are invited to be grateful for their existence as humans who are gifted with a body by the Creator. The body makes it possible to meet other people. A healthy encounter or relationship will only be manifested through healthy behavior. Therefore, the description of sexuality from a biological perspective underlines the importance of students having an introduction to male and female organs, so that they get an initial understanding of their reproductive organs and are willing to maintain good reproductive health. Several efforts on how to behave healthily in the field of reproduction along with relevant current issues are also described. This healthy behavior appears in the willingness not to have free sex, to have intercourse only in a marriage bond, not changing partners, early detection and to see a doctor immediately if they experience suspicious symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases (Marianingsih, 2013: 75-79).

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are also explained, including the causes of contracting STDs, their bad consequences and also how to prevent them. With this explanation, it is hoped that students will avoid sexual activities that can cause them to contract STDs (Wijoyo, 2013: 54-58).

d. Sexuality from Socio-cultural View

Understanding sexuality from a socio-cultural point of view invites students to become “Monuments of Love.” Love is the most powerful force that moves humankind. Because of love, humans are able to do amazing things. The Emperor Mugal Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal as an expression of love for his wife. Millions of love-themed songs were created. Another form of love monument is movie. Although not as many as songs and poetry, movies are also monuments to human love. Most of the movies that are at the box office are also on the theme of love. Love is the inspiration and impetus for the birth of famous movies (Sumarah, 2013:7-8).

In Indonesia, the end of 2012 was marked by the presence of a biopic movie based on both political and personal life of Habibie with the theme of love, entitled *Habibie & Ainun* (Subagyo, 2013:101-103). *Habibie & Ainun* the movie was very popular and captured the attention of the society, followed by its prequels, *Rudy Habibie* (2016) and *Habibie & Ainun 3* (2019). The charm that emanates from *Habibie & Ainun* the movie is an authentic love.

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Bachruddin Jusuf Habibie was a great figure. He was a former Third President in this country (1998-1999) after briefly serving as vice president and serving periods as a minister. In addition, he was also known as a great scientist in aircraft physics whose expertise was recognized by the world. In Hamburg, Germany, he developed theories on thermodynamics, construction, and aerodynamics known as the Habibie Factor, Habibie Theorem, and Habibie Method, respectively. *Habibie & Ainun* the movie invited millions people to watch it, because of its powerful message about love that is sincere, loyal, true, authentic, and full of commitment. Students are reminded that each of us is also a monument of the love of our

parents. We were born and called to be a monument of love for our parents and others, also in the context of the relationship between men and women.

Habibie in his book *Habibie & Ainun* (2010) wrote, “This book is dedicated to my beloved wife Hasri Ainun Habibie whose soul, spirit, mind, and conscience are united wherever we are, all the time.” Thus, love that is sincere, loyal, true, and full of commitment becomes the theme of the book and the movie.

Habibie & Ainun at the same time also presents the personal qualities of Habibie and Ainun as human beings who were full of love. Each of them had proven themselves to be individuals who always celebrated love wisely. Love for parents was manifested by the seriousness of studying at schools and universities. Habibie was so diligent in forging himself to become a scientist in the field of aircraft physics who graduated from the Technische Hochschule Aachen (RWTH Aachen University) in Aachen, Germany. Ainun successfully completed her education in the field of physician and pediatricians at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Indonesia.

Habibie and Ainun with their individual uniqueness had been able to realize “two bodies but one soul” (Habibie, 2010: ix). Habibie was a man full of responsibility as a husband and father. Meanwhile, Ainun, a woman who was full of humility carried out her duties as a wife and mother in harmony. Habibie (2010: x) wrote, “Ainun was always present to provide balance and create harmony in our family life, with humility to give her husband always going ahead, as she said: the big you and the small I, with a mesmerizing “beautiful eyes”, so our household guide was like a song whose tone, rhythm, and lyrics had been orchestrated in such a way that it was always harmonious.”

Thus, love has a positive motility and impetus for humans. The Taj Mahal, millions of songs and poems, and thousands of movies are monuments to human love. Every human being is basically a monument of love. Each of us is first of all a monument to God’s love. Because of His love, human was created and born. Secondly, we are a monument to the love of our parents. Thirdly, we are monuments of mutual love. No one can live alone. As social beings, humans always need the presence of others.

e. Sexuality from Islamic View

For Muslim students, there is explanation about the Islamic view of sexuality. Understanding sexuality in Islam is often under the shadow of patriarchy, because many people consider that various religious texts from the Koran and Hadiths must be carried out and considered final so that contextualization is not needed when times have changed.

The study of sexuality and female reproduction had been discussed in classical books since the 5th century *Hijri* (12th century AD), but in reality women remain in the domestic realm. The study of women in Islam has been discussed deeply, but socially, women are still covered with various restrictive rules, for example prohibited to leave the house without the permission of their husband, prohibited from traveling except with *muhrim* (husband or siblings). In the public sphere in some countries, women still have limited space and do not yet have a real role (Qudsy, 2013: 108-111).

In Islamic view, sexual intercourse has to go through the institution of marriage. Various forms of pre-marital sex or behaviors that lead to pre-marital sex are strictly prohibited in Islam. Marriage is not a means to achieve physical enjoyment alone, but it is part of the fulfillment of Allah's rules, so that a marriage has a value of worship. The purpose of marriage is very clear, namely to form a family that is *sakinah* (peace), *mawaddah* (full of hope and love), and *warahmah* (love) (Surah Ar-Rum: 21). Thus, the institution of marriage is able to contribute to the stability and tranquility of society, because men and women can fulfill their sexual instincts properly and legally (Qudsy, 2013: 113-116).

Marriage in Islam has five main objectives: firstly, to meet the demands of human instincts. Sexual intercourse is an instinctive of every human being. Through the institution of marriage, men and women are allowed to channel their sexual desires freely and lawfully.

Secondly, to fortify noble morals. As the Prophet Muhammad SAW said, "O young men! Whoever among you is capable of getting married, then marry, because marriage is more to lower your gaze and fortify your genitals (*farji*). And whoever is unable, then let him fast, because fasting can fortify himself." (Narrated by Bukhari, Muslim, and Tirmidhi). By getting married, a person can reduce his/her sexual tension by directing it to someone who is lawful to have sex with.

Thirdly, to uphold an Islamic household. By getting married, a Muslim is assumed and should be more diligent in worship, because he has lived a life together, communicated and interacted well both socially and sexually in accordance with the guidelines outlined by Allah and Muhammad SAW.

Fourthly, to increase worship to Allah. This has something to do with the third objective. Because even in that sexual intercourse, even though it is filled with lust, it is still considered as worship, as the Prophet said, "If you have intercourse with your wife, it is almsgiving." He said again, "Likewise, if they have intercourse with their wives, they will get rewarded!" (Narrated by Muslim, Ahmad, and Nasa'i).

Fifthly, to get righteous offspring. Marriage in Islam is part of the universal continuity of human generation as stated in the Koran. "Allah has made from yourself a husband and wife and made for you from your wives, children and grandchildren. They give you a good fortune." (Surah An-Nahl: 72).

5. Analysis and Results

Moral weekend program was held on May 8, 2021. A week before the program, the researcher distributed a questionnaire to find out the situation of the students and their expectations for this program. From the questionnaires collected, there were 421 students who answered, consisting of 157 men (37,3%) and 247 women (58.7%), while 17 students (4%) chose the third option, namely not voting (see Table 1). It shows that 17 students who did not vote for man or woman meant that they did not want to vote or they still searched for identity or they were considered LGBTQ.

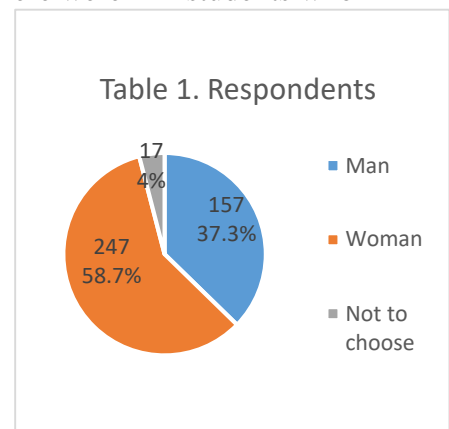
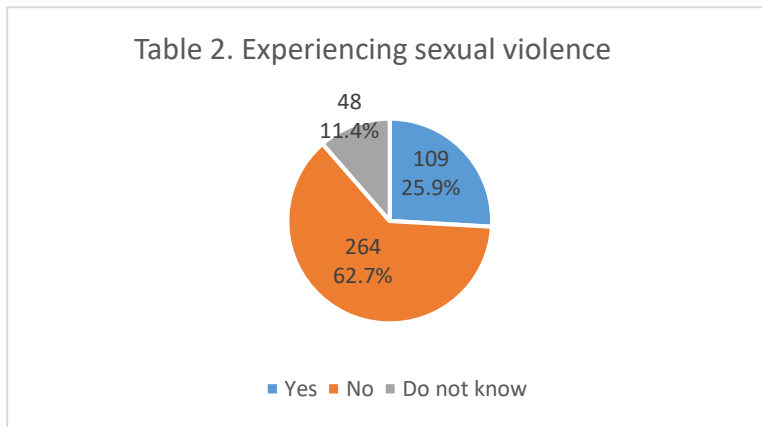


Table 2 shows that 25.9% of students have experienced sexual violence, 62.7% of students have never experienced sexual violence, and 11.4% of students did not know whether or not they have experienced sexual violence. This

means that quite a number of students have experienced sexual violence. Sanata Dharma university offers guidance and counseling to help students who are traumatized by sexual violence, as part of the campus' efforts to develop anti-violence education (Rukiyanto, 2017: 446). Students who have experienced trauma are helped to accept themselves, to forgive and to reconcile with people who hurt them (Rukiyanto, 2014: 152-155; Rukiyanto, 2018: 103-104).

Students' views on sexuality were mostly associated with sexual intercourse, sexual desires, sexual violence, or sexual harassment. Some students view it as gender or genitals. It appears that most of them have negative views about sexuality. The reason may be that they are accustomed to hearing, some even experiencing, negative things related to sexuality. This view, of course, needs to be corrected. It is the duty of sex education to correct this view.

With regard to dating, most students experienced healthy dating, mutually caring for each other, mutually beneficial, and committed one another. Some students experienced toxic relationships, such as experiencing violence, being always controlled and restrained, and being prohibited to befriend with other men. Some students are still single.

In connection with the expectations discussed in sex education, many students wanted a discussion about healthy dating, ways to overcome toxic relationships, the bad effects of pregnancy outside of marriage, how to deal with trauma due to sexual violence, and LGBTQ.

Many students viewed sex as risky and dangerous. Many students described sex as addictive: "People who have sex are addicted. They continue to want it." Many students agreed that curiosity of sex and lust are normal and humane, but they should refrain from these feelings. Sexuality is rarely discussed because it is seen as taboo. The lack of discussion on sexuality was

seen as a factor of harassment and violence. Stories of sexual violence and harassment were widespread among students, taking place in various forms including verbal, physical and virtual, and in many contexts including within the family, at campus, in dating relationships, and through social media.

Through the moral weekend, students learnt about sexuality so that they do not fall into unhealthy relationships. They also learnt about sexual violence or toxic relationship that often occurs. They learnt about good dating attitudes, healthy and unhealthy relationships. They had intention and will to avoid sexual violence by developing attitudes that build healthy relationships, such as open communication, honesty that can create trust between partners, mutual respect, not humiliating partners, avoiding premarital sex, and solving problems properly. Besides these, they had will to keep their eyes, to dress modestly to reduce sexual harassment, not to have excessive physical contact to avoid temptation to have sex, to avoid jealousy of their partner, to learn to trust and to respect each other, to have courageous and assertive attitudes, and not always following what boyfriend/girlfriend wants.

At the end of the program, students were asked to reflect together on what they had learned from the moral weekend and make a joint commitment to become mature individuals, who are able to accept themselves as they are, and to respect and love others sincerely. This commitment was expressed in the form of poetry or song or drama so that they can remember what they have learned and are able to make it happen in their daily lives.

6. Conclusion

Overall, the students were very happy with the sex education program held by the University. They were greatly helped to be mature in acting. They learnt a lot about sexuality from various perspectives. They were aware that the power of sexuality is “beautiful” because it is a gift from God. They understood better about the human body, especially reproductive organs, and how to maintain its health. They became comfortable with being man or woman (the biological dimension). They were helped to build a positive self-concept (the psychological dimension). All of these dimensions appeared in their willingness to create a mutual atmosphere of respect, not to impose personal will only, and their willingness to enrich themselves and to love one another, instead of destroying oneself. This was the key point in the socio-cultural dimension.

Finally, each student had a commitment to develop true love and to avoid a manipulative love. They were strengthened to say NO to promiscuity and NOT to want to be “slaves” of lust that can tarnish their self-image or hinder their journey in preparing themselves to be God’s image and partner. In short, they had a moral commitment to be a mature people.

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The Queer Identity of Religious Education

Abstract

Religious Education is queer. At first, it may seem as if the queer and religious education barely belong in the same sentence; however, a fresh look at the definition of queer with the current understanding of religious education reveals a deep connection. Playing on the historical question of Harrison Elliott, *Can Religious Education be Christian?* this paper will tease out the conflicts between religious education and queerness while ultimately showing not only how religious education can be queer but *must* be queer to reach its fullest potential.

Preface

I would be lying if I told you this paper grew solely out of response to the call for papers for this conference. This idea about the connections between queerness and religious education has been on my mind for at least three years. It all started one night when I walked into the Greenlight Bookstore in Brooklyn to ask about books concerning queer theory. I had been troubled by queerness's absence in the REA for some time, including when I attended my first REA conference in Boston, MA in 2013, the title of which was "Coming Out Religiously: Religion, the Public Sphere, and Religious Education Identity Formation." I was rather shocked to find not one queer conversation, panel, or speaker among the gathering that was so clearly utilizing a queer metaphor in "coming out." Concern began to bubble up in me, was there room for queerness in the field of Religious Education?

What made this paper coalesce for me though was teaching a virtual LGBTQ Bible study at my church in the fall of 2020. The idea of this study was to build off of a similar study I had led during Pride Month (June). There was continued interest from my congregation to continue and we started up an ongoing conversation. I desperately wanted to identify the group as a "queer" bible study but was reminded that "queer" is a sensitive word for many people. I stepped back; I was getting ahead of myself. Little did I realize how little what the study was called would matter with what began to happen within the virtual walls. The group was small, with about six to ten participants, many of whom were also in a larger, more generalized Bible study that I led. Not long after I started it, a few of its members petitioned me to lead it more frequently, so this past January 2021, we started meeting twice a month. I utilized the *Queer Bible Commentary* for a majority of our content and scholarship but grew more and more excited about how the group was teaching me about the queer experience and Religious Education. It was out of that experience that this paper which had been a twinkle in my eye grew into something more.

Summary

The words "queer" and "religious education" often seem like they are not only on opposite poles but on magnetically opposite poles. Both repel the other, making dialogue between the two complicated, messy, and for many Christian churches, a political nightmare. In recent years, the growth of queer pedagogies and queer studies have caused theologians to take a new look at queerness and begin to embrace the questions of queerness in new ways. Employing what might be called post-apologetic strategies, these theologians are challenging mainstream theology for a queer place at the table.

Religious Education as a field is uniquely poised to help set, adorn, and be a powerful voice for queerness in this framework. The interdisciplinary nature of our field allows quicker engagement with scholars in the field of education and theology to be brought into dialogue. This study will examine those educators and theologians, but our efforts must go beyond that dialogue. As religious educators, we must boldly proclaim queerness among our pedagogies, despite the polity challenges within various Christian denominations. Congregational experience, especially as it relates to the study of the Bible, is used as an example of how these conversations enhance teaching-learning in congregations.

Additionally, as we press forward, we must anchor our strength in our history. While our roots were not dealing with queerness directly, the work of our field through time, especially the early progressive thinkers, allows space for the new questions of queerness to parallel their inquiries about the radical nature of religious education. In particular, this study will rely on the work of Harrison Elliott, in his seminal book, *Can Religious Education Be Christian?*

This study asserts that not only can religious education bring queerness to the table, but the field itself can also benefit from unleashing the identity of queerness in our work, revitalizing the very heart of our work.

The Conflict

I have found it helpful to frame this issue in my mind using a spin on a classic question of our field: Can Religious Education be queer? This framework, of course, follows the seminal work of Harrison Elliott and his question posed in the title of his book published in 1940, *Can Religious Education be Christian?* Much as Elliott did, I will set forth the conflict and then aim to identify the meanings of religious education and queer before making some suggestions about how resolvable the conflict is and what a subsequent queer identity for religious education might look like and provide.

The words "queer" and "religious education" often seem like they are not only on opposite poles but on magnetically opposite poles. Both repel the other, making dialogue between the two complicated, messy, and for many Christian churches, a political nightmare. In recent years, the growth of queer pedagogies and queer studies have caused theologians to take a new look at queerness and begin to embrace the questions of queerness in new ways. Employing what might be called post-apologetic strategies, these theologians are challenging mainstream theology for a queer place at the table.

In an article titled, “At the Intersection of Queer Studies and Religion” Elizabeth Castelli rightly notes that “We are habituated to think of religion primarily in terms of its capacity for constraining and restricting many forms of sexual expression and sexual identity and to frame the relationship between religion and non-normative sexuality as one of irreconcilable antagonism” (2017). My thesis hovers around this tension in religious education. Castelli advocates for keeping religion and queer “in creative and critical suspense” or as we would phrase it in religious education, following Harris, it is the tension that is “created when important forces pull against each other” (1989, 27). In this model, religious education and queerness need each other in unique ways.

Much could be said about the ecclesiastical struggles, their histories, timelines, and present concerns. I am in no way suggesting that these ecclesiastical issues can entirely be set aside, but the queer identity of religious education can be discussed outside the bounds of ecclesiastical conflicts, depending on how one understands the meaning of religious education. How and if we can resolve this conflict between religious education and queerness depends on our expectations and understandings of religious education as a discipline and a practice.

The Meaning of Religious Education

It helps to explore the meaning of religious education. In its most basic form, religious education is still, as Elliott put it over eighty years ago, the “inter-relation of education and religion in all areas and at all age levels” (1940, 2). We must also acknowledge though the strengths of the early decades of religious education as a field of study were that its methodology is distinctive. Again, it is important to remember that religious education’s primary approach has *not been* to start with the beliefs of the faith communities and determine the best methods to provide teaching/learning for those ideas, instead, religious education has been focused on the *people* in the worshipping communities and the best methods by which their experiences can bring forth the creative energy of faith traditions. This shift depends on the best methodology in pedagogy as well as related areas of study including sociology, psychology, and anthropology, to name a few (Elliott 1940, 3-4).

It may be tempting to understand this meaning of religious education and embroiled in its historical moment at the crux of the debate between progressive theology and neo-orthodoxy in the mid-19th century, but the identity of religious education has done much to shift with the experience of worshipping communities. The emphasis on human experience is the same generator that gives a current understanding of religious education its identity, as we see, for example, when the issue of postmodernity is broached. Horell raises this same issue in a different contextual framework when he unpacks the issues of postmodernity concerning religious education and Christian identity in “Cultural Postmodernity and Christian Faith Formation” (2003). As Horell examines the characteristics of postmodernity as they live in religious education, it is clear that experience is that driver which shapes the dialogue between postmodern theory and religious education. The content of what is taught shifts with the experience of how people are called to live their lives in times of postmodern sensibilities. Make no mistake, many would challenge this definition of religious education, but the place of experience is at the heart of the discipline’s identity – presently and historically.

This heart of identity that allows the *people's experience* into conversation with the tenants of the church is significant. Experience is what allows the door to be opened for the meaning of the word queer to enter.

The Meaning of Queer

Queer is typically not an easy word for people to wrestle with, especially people of a certain generation. It has a negative edge for folks who were active in the 1980s and 1990s, but recently queer has been reclaimed by the LGBTQ community and re-imagined in terms of meaning. Queer is often used as an umbrella term that many find less cumbersome than LGBTQAI+, but queer can also have what Patrick Cheng calls "transgressive" qualities that emphasize opposition to "societal norms, particularly for sexuality and gender identity" (2011, 5). Cheng also discussed how the word queer in the world of queer theory embodies the quality of erasing boundaries, "particularly with respect to the essentialist or fixed binary categories of sexuality and gender" (2011, 8). For this paper and the intersection of religious education and queer identity, Tonsad argues for the word queer on slightly different grounds. She asserts that in her work, "queer theology is not about apologetics for the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in Christianity, but about visions of sociopolitical transformation that alter practices of distinction harming gender and sexual minorities as well as many other minoritized populations, queer is a reasonably (in)adequate term to use" (2018, 3). The meanings of queer as transformative and transgressive are very helpful in exploring the queer identity of religious education.

Tools for Resolving the Conflict

It would be too limiting however to only explore the meaning of the word queer in theological terms. Queer pedagogy is one of the significant tools to help understand the queerness of religious education. We might, in fact, consider the queer identity of religious education by standing with Luhmann on the head of a pin when they ask, "is queer pedagogy to become the house pedagogy of queer studies or it is about the queering of pedagogical theory?" (1998, 141) If we, like Luhmann, take the latter view, there is much exciting work to be done queering religious pedagogy. Much as Tonsad encourages us to theologically move beyond apologetics, Luhman pedagogically encourages us to move beyond mere questions of content and representation (1998, 141-143). In other words, religious education as an interdisciplinary field sits in a unique position to move beyond *both* apologetics *and* mere representation. Queering religious education is not just about including more queer voices in our content or doing hermeneutic backbends to explain away hurtful texts, the queer identity of religious education is also about pedagogy – something of which we are already skilled and astute practitioners.

In many ways, the conflict over pedagogy is one that religious education has been struggling with itself over many decades and many different kinds of stages. Elliott was fighting for progressive theology *and* progressive pedagogy that would fight against the rise of neo-orthodox theology. He asserted that religious education demanded a pedagogy that considered itself as strongly as the theology it was used to teach and *not* a theology that drives the pedagogy. Current struggles continue around the conflict of influence of postmodernity, and umbrella category that queer theory huddles under with many others. At stake always in these conflicts is

a fear that pedagogies might loosen the “fundamental tenants of Christian religion” (Elliott 1940, 3). But voices like Elliott, Scott, Harris, Moran, Luhmann, and others argue that that loosening is the very work of pedagogy. Good pedagogy is the kind of pedagogy “whose grounds of possibility require risk, uncertainty, and implication in traumatic times” (Britzman 2012, 293) Postmodernity puts this problem another way, by suggesting that identities – social and self – and religious identity, “is never a given” (Horell 2003, 85) Rather identity itself is something that can be shaped and reshaped.

Pedagogy then becomes a tool that helps with this reshaping. Within religious education, it is the identity of the field itself that cannot only incorporate but thrive with a queer identity. Apologetics and representation are factors in this identity development, but in fact, the practitioners' focus on these areas has slowed the possibilities of religious education coming out as queer. While the field has many gifts to contribute to the areas of apologetics and representation, like theology, we will be stuck if we aim to fully resolve those conflicts before considering our queerness. Religious Education is an interdisciplinary field; our ability to find balance with theology and pedagogy is long-standing, but we must now also pay attention to what queer pedagogy and queer theology are telling us. We must explore our queerness. And the simple reason is this: there are queer people in our houses of worship, there are queer people in our classrooms, there are queer people in *our field*. And frankly, if we don't start talking with more agility about these issues, there will be fewer and fewer queer people in all of those spaces, which will greatly diminish the fullness of all these dialogues.

We can continue to be like ecclesiastical bodies who ask LGBTQAI+ people to check their queerness at the door, but why? The very heartbeat of our field is based on thinking with people about their experience. Elliott captures this precedent in a few different ways. First, he reminds us that, “religious education has a definite function in relation to experience in home, school, and community beyond the confines of the church” (1940, 314). Furthermore, he adds that “The function of religious education is to help children, young people, and adults to consider the problems involved in situations they are facing to discover what is the Christian course of action or the Christian solution of the problem, and to makes plans for carrying out these decisions in individual and group life” (Elliott 1940, 314). In the same way that Elliott critiqued authoritarianism of neo-orthodoxy as being weak in how it told people what to do, exposing the potential that “children may grow up with second-hand moral standards which lack the strength of personal conviction and a second-hand religion which lacks the vitality of personal experience” (1940, 315).

It may be that all this talk about experience is confusing. Do I mean that without representation the queer identity of religious education becomes flat? On the contrary, experience is the entryway that demands we open the door for queerness, but to deepen our understanding of our queer identity as religious educators – no matter how we do or not identify as queer – takes theological and pedagogical work. Again, we have the tools but we haven't necessarily set them on the prism of queerness. The following are few examples of tools that can help us reshape our queer identity.

One tool we have at our disposal is imagination. In his presidential address to the REA in 2015, titled “The Imagination of RE:APPRRE,” Horell lifted the power of imagination in renewing the

"robust sense of scope of purpose" of the field. Like experience, "Imagination is a central part of how we learn to engage in everyday activities." We need our imaginations to reshape the queer identity of Religious Education. Building on the work of Mary Elizabeth Moore, among others, Horell suggests that imagination can foster connections, it can disrupt, it can call for transformation (2016, 351). As we consider just these aspects of imagination, we can *imagine* where queer identity intersects.

By imaginatively fostering connections we can learn more fully into the interdisciplinary aspects of religious education. We can pull in the best practices from queerness in other fields – including education, theology, and more broadly queer theory. From these queer fields, we can learn and teach new methods and focal points. We can broaden the language of religious education to be not only queer-friendly but queer agile. By queer agile I mean more than simply learning the language of the queer community to welcome “them.” If our identity is queer we can bring that part of ourselves into the shaping and reshaping of work of religious education, making us much more agile to talk about queerness - not with the language of outsiders - but with the language of our field. By connecting more with the field of queer theory and considering queer pedagogy we can expand the content of our field to include more queer language, experience, and further intersections with race, gender, class, sexual practices, and bodies (Luhmann 1998, 146 footnote).

Furthermore, our imaginative inquiry with queerness can disrupt us. Queerness, as discussed earlier, is by nature disruptive. Queerness necessarily stands outside the norms and questions those boundaries. Queerness by its very nature embraces fluidity and the subversive. As Religious Education continues to live into its postmodern identity, a little disruption may go a long way. The metanarrative that has for so long anchored Christianity, for example, can be challenged positively by the disruptive imagination of queerness. Could that metanarrative be more fluid, less binary, and still hold significant meaning for people?

Finally, our imagination can be transformative. Are we not coming out as queer because the conflict already seems so heightened? Are we truly unable to imagine a new way forward? Our very practice of utilizing imagination tells us that perhaps we are going about resolving this particular conflict in ways that are too limiting. In Joyce Mercer's editorial, "Imagination and Religious Education" she elevates the work of Maxine Greene when she asserts that imagination is meant to "awaken" (2016, 345). Mercer further suggests that she has always heard Greene's words "to be about the awakening and disclosure of hope in situations of concrete particularity where meaning is reduced to the limits of what we already see, hear, and expect. To be hopeful in a world where wholeness, community, and peace for persons and groups so often remain 'unseen, unheard, and unexpected' requires an imaginative capacity to transcend the possible and the already-known" (2016, 345). That's the transformative work that imagination can play by expressing its own queer identity. Religious Education can help queer experience, queer pedagogy, and queer theology be seen, heard, and expected in dialogue.

Lest one think imagination only points us to representation, here is an example from the LGBTQ Bible study that I teach that illustrates where the imagination can awaken connection, disruption, and transformation. During Lent of 2021, we were studying the Gospel of Luke, beginning with the visit of the angel Gabriel and then the Magnificat. I started the class by sharing a typical

overview of the gospel, then I asked two questions. 1) Tell me what you know about these stories in Luke 1? 2) Does anything in these stories seem particularly queer to you? At this point, I also defined “queer” in this case from Robert E. Goss, the commentator for the gospel of Luke in the Queer Bible commentary who defined queering as “to represent a dislocation or transgression of fixed categories” (2006, 526).

We talked at some length about the sexuality of angels, the sexuality, and the questions of Mary. We talked about her "situation" and her relationship with Joseph, the trouble she was in socially at that time. This robust dialogue led us to a place where I could ask, given Goss's definition of queer, could Mary be considered queer? Goss's point, I shared with them, is, yes (2006, 526). Goss says that “Mary the queer prophetess sins how God will upset the social world, bringing down the mighty and elevating the lowly. God’s action will queer the world by turning it upside-down, for Mary will bear a child who will queer the world, disrupting the social world” (2006, 527). Based on responses I heard, my sense of the group is at least that Mary’s actions and God’s actions are queer.

Then one of the learners says (paraphrasing) – "you know, I never thought about this before, but maybe this is why Mary runs away to see Elizabeth, that she just needs to get away from her parents and all the pressure she is feeling. As a queer person, I can understand that need to get away, to get somewhere safe." At this point, there is wide agreement in the group. I share with them Goss's note that Mary is "alone, shamed, frightened, seeking out understanding and comfort from her cousin" (2006, 529). Goss also notes (following Schaberg) that the Greek idiom “with haste” supports this reading (2006, 529).

For this little group, the process of teaching-learning did not take away our experience of Mary or what she was doing, but rather it deepened those connections, disrupted our expectations, and transformed how we can interact with this story. You might say our queer imagination was awakened. Religious Education can do that!

Perhaps this example shows not just the power of imagination in religious education’s queer identity but also the power of what Selcuk calls *encounter*. For Selcuk, encounter is a metaphor, but it is no mere metaphor.

“A metaphor as a touchstone that creates its meaning and I hope this meeting will emphasize the phenomenon of being in encounter and how teaching can advance and/or impede it. Please note that what I mean by encounter is more than dialogue, more than learning about another faith tradition, more than intercultural learning. It is about existence! It is not only about what we do but also about who we are. It is about how we share the world together” (2018, 234).

If we can dare to acknowledge and nurture the queer identity of religious education, we can live and work into this deeper meaning of encounter that Selcuk suggests. Our queer identity is not just about dialogue, apologetics, learning about what it means to be queer, or representation. Religious Education’s queer identity is about re-shaping our understanding of who we are to include our queerness in every sense of the word. Encounter invites us into the privilege of exploring our queer identity, as individual religious educators and as a field. One of the main

areas of encounter is the self. When we consider encounter with the self in relation to queerness, we know that history, present, and future are part of that identity formation. The possibility of being queer as a field is not individual sexual or gender identities within the field. It is more than representation. It is more than apologetics. The possibility of religious education being queer is deeply tied to our willingness to encounter, in all the fullness of that word. Are we willing to encounter difficult conversations and impasses? Are we able to imagine teaching-learning that could awaken interpretations that would raise theological challenges for ecclesiastical bodies across faith traditions? The depth of the encounter we need to come out as queer is enormous. But our queerness is not something we can simply avoid. We have the tools – the imagination, the willingness to encounter, the skill at developing pedagogies that could reshape religious education's very identity.

Conclusion

Countless other tools within our discipline could help us hone, develop and nurture our queer identity. There is no one way for all time to come out. Part of embracing our queerness is recognizing the change that promises us. Like encounter and imagination, being queer means that we can never fully see the road ahead, but rather, we move forward knowing full well the path will change in front of us. What we bring are the skills to learn and re-learn, to shape and re-shape what is needed to nurture our queer selves.

As I see it, we belong to a queer discipline. Religious Education is queer. We are by nature engaged in questions about our identity because of our interdisciplinary nature. We are committed to interconnectedness, encounter, imagination. Religious Education is also a humble field. We can embrace Luhmann's recognition of her queer pedagogy when she says, "As an inquiry into the processes, my queer pedagogy is not very heroic. It does not position itself as a bulwark against oppression. It does not claim the high ground of subversion but hopefully, it encourages an ethical practice by studying the risks of normalization, the limits of its practices, and the impossibilities of (subversive) teaching and learning" (1998, 154). We don't need to be heroes. We don't have to change every oppressive and queerphobic structure. We can still come out as queer. We can bring our compassion into dialogue with experience, imagination, and encounter that queer the conversation in beautiful ways.

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Queering Religious Education: Interweaving LGBTQ+ Life and Religious Yearning to LGBTQ+ Advocacy Education and Ministry

Abstract

This paper is based on the researcher's teaching experiences and insights over the past two years while teaching LGBTQ+ identity development and advocacy ministry to different groups. The researcher taught two groups: LGBTQ+ seminarians and the other group is Asian clergy allies. The wounds suffered from the religious culture, and church education and the reconciliation process with their own body and faith are the source and reason for this research. Based on interacting with these two groups, this paper insists that a paradigm shift in faith communities and religious education is a priority to achieve the LGBTQ+ affirming environment.

Introduction

Over the past decades, there has been tremendous progress in the human rights and social and cultural perceptions of sex and gender identities.¹ Despite political and cultural changes for a more inclusive and just society, faith communities still struggle to break through the conservative biblical interpretations and heteronormative understandings of human beings.

As a way of social justice action, I offered courses and seminars to support and protect the human rights and vocation of LGBTQ+ individuals and allies and help them find identity, meaning, and purpose as Christians.

As a result, I taught the same subject to two different groups: the development of LGBTQ+ identity and faith and restoring the faith community as a safe and healing space. However, these two groups of different identities had different starting and ending points due to their previous knowledge, prejudices, and existential reflection. In a broad sense, these two groups agreed that paying attention to human dignity and solidarity to social justice was necessary to form a more inclusive community. However, the needs and aspirations to achieve that goal were as diverse as the color of the rainbow.

Here, I realized that religious education should play a significant role for all members to unlearn the toxic heteronormativity and stop the cycle of harmful learning. I also realized that religious education to the LGBTQ+ and allies has to be carefully crafted to narrow the gap between each other. As mentioned in the training material for teachers to become allies, "many stigmas are still associated with LGBTQ individuals, and much of this is due to a lack of

1 Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 277; Roisin Coll, "Hospitality to difference: LGBT, religious education and the Catholic school," *Journal of Religious Education*. 69, 25–36 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-020-00126-2>. 25.

understanding that breeds prejudice and discrimination.”² Despite the goodwill to welcome the marginalized and vulnerable into the church, there are many LGBTQ+ people who still get hurt and leave the faith community.³ Religious leaders and volunteers need to be trained more actively to prevent the repetition of such ignorant harm and discrimination. It requires a complete paradigm shift from dichotomic thinking of us vs. them or insider vs. outsider. Therefore, this paper argues queering religious education as inclusive teaching and practice for everyone.

In that regard, this paper will explore ways to practice queer religious education, based on the four approaches to Christian education written and edited by Jack Seymour, that can make life and faith more comprehensive and constructive not only for the LGBTQ+ but also for everyone. Hopefully, this research provides an opportunity to build bridges between individuals and communities struggling with LGBTQ+ issues.

Appropriating the Concept of *Queer*

According to Britannica, *queer* is defined as the tendency to reject the common dichotomy of male and female.⁴ “This is a community made up of people who fall outside society’s prescribed male/female and masculine/feminine dichotomies.”⁵ This term, *queer*, once carried a negative connotation, “represents a new meaning and political commitment. Since the widespread emergence of biological and social notions linked to sexuality and gender, *queer* has been used to challenge the pervasive inequalities that stem from this recent historical shift in constructions of heterosexuality and homosexuality.”⁶ In that sense, “Queer theology challenges the essentialist notions of sexuality and gender identity, and it argues that these concepts are not so much “fixed” but rather socially constructed through language and discourse.”⁷

Queer is also used as an umbrella term interchangeably representing the entire LGBTQIA+ community.⁸ Although its meaning may vary depending on the intentions of scholars and activists, in this paper, I will use the word *queer* as the two meanings mentioned above. In other words, queer is a collective term for the LGBTQ+ community, and it refers to a certain movement that rejects stereotypes of sex and gender identities, heteronormative powers and privileges embedded in theology and church culture.

In her book *Outside the Lines: How Embracing Queerness Will Transform Your Faith*, Mihee Kim-Kort discusses spirituality based on such queerness. Kim-Kort writes,

2 “Teachers as LGBTQ Allies,” in *Accredited School Online*, April 27, 2021,

<https://www.accreditedschoolonline.org/education-teaching-degree/lgbtq-youth/>

3 Justin Tanis, *Trans-gender: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 126.

4 Mihee Kim-Kort, *Outside the Lines: How Embracing Queerness Will Transform Your Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), 74; Sam Killermann, *A Guide to Gender: The Social Justice Advocate's Handbook*, 2nd Edition (Austin, TX: Impetus Books, 2017), Kindle, 3704.

5 Kristen Barber, “Queer,” in *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/queer-sexual-politics>.

6 Kristen Barber; Elizabeth J. Meyer, “But I’m not Gay: What Straight Teachers Need to Know about Queer Theory,” in *Queering Straight Teachers: Discourses and Identity in Education*, eds. William F. Pinar and Nelson M. Rodriguez, (New York: Peter Lang International Academic, 2007), 15.

7 Patrick Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer theology* (New York: Church Publishing, 2011), 35-36.

8 Leigh Finke, ed., *Queerfully and Wonderfully Made: A Guide For LGBTQ+ Christian Teens* (Minneapolis: Beaming Books, 2020), 12; Killermann, Kindle 3704.

“When we are rooted in the queer love of God, all our existing boundaries dissolve – and these boundaries do not merely exist between people but are the kinds of lines drawn around people, marking off who we think we are or should be, and what that looks like. A desire rooted in flesh-and-blood bodies and intimacies in all their varied forms is an expression of faith in a God who originates and also reciprocates love, and that love is called out in its fullest expression in all our relationships. Queer intimacies are radical expressions of desire that open up traditional definitions and categories, and they invite us into understanding our humanity in new ways.”⁹

The queer spirituality she refers to dismantle all the boundaries and definitions set by human beings - historically, heterosexual white male-centered – to see God and the world from a new angle and establish liberating relationships. “A queer spirituality urges us not to blindly accept what culture gives us but to interrogate it thoughtfully, wholeheartedly, and prayerfully.”¹⁰ In that sense, *queering* refers to a series of efforts to dismantle socially categorized systems and reconstruct creatively interdependent relationships between human beings and God beyond the harmful effects of homophobia and heterosexism.¹¹

Then, how can we apply this queering movement to religious education? In their article “Agenda for the Future,” Seymour and Miller articulate the definition and the role of Christian Education.

“Christian education is at its best as it assists persons in dealing with the crucial issues of personal and social life in light of the gospel. Christian education teaches the faith tradition first recorded in the Bible, so that people take on the identity of Jesus and gather resources to seek God’s will in day-by-day encounters. Theological reflection occurs for each individual believer as he or she confronts and makes decisions about how to live faithfully in the moments of daily life. Christian education must provide open spaces where people can learn the faith tradition, engage that tradition with issues of life, and seek to live together in ways that are faithful to God.”¹²

This definition explains the foundations of Christian education and suggests the future we all hope for, the life of living faithfully together.¹³ However, it is now necessary to reconsider it from the perspective of the queer movement. At this point, I’ll leave it as it. As this study unfolds, I want readers to think about how to queer the definition above and create a more comprehensive role in Christian education.

Reflecting My Teaching Experiences

My teaching experience over the past two years has been to two different groups. One group was the LGBTQ+ students in Chicago Theological Seminary, and the other was a group of Korean clergies who were queer advocates. The classes for LGBTQ+ students were offered as a 3-credit

9 Kim-Kort, 22-23.

10 Kim-Kort, 23.

11 Meyer, 16.

12 Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller, “Agenda for the Future” in *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning*, ed. Jack L. Seymour (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 118.

13 Seymour and Miller, 128.

course for masters and doctorate students. I also provided the teaching sessions for the clergy group periodically throughout the year.

The first group I was engaged in was Korean clergies in the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church who supported LGBTQ+ justice. They formed the group in response to the denominational conflict over the LGBTQ+ ordination and marriage. These twenty Korean ministers officially announced their support for LGBTQ+ rights and developed the inclusiveness statement in the respective congregations. Yet, interestingly, these Korean ministers are all serving cross-cultural, cross-racial congregations. None of the Korean pastors serving in the Korean immigrant churches joined this group. In other words, it is worth noting that there is a considerable difference of opinion among Korean pastors on LGBTQ+ rights.

Among these twenty Korean allies, there was no LGBTQ+ identifying individual. Three of them said they are questioning, two of them said they have LGBTQ+ identifying children. They have gathered to make themselves better prepared theologically and pastorally and promote Korean pastors who support LGBTQ+ Christians. So they had regular meetings over the past two years. They participated in seminars together, networked with other organizations, seeking ways to engage in social justice activities in churches and communities, and studied queer theology with me. Before diving into the full discussion of queer theology, I realized that they lack basic knowledge of LGBTQ+ identities, so I had to offer an introductory session reviewing key terms and concepts on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The general response from this group is that although they are determined to support LGBTQ+ rights and ordination, they do not know the practical ways. In addition, as shown in the group's composition, there are much fewer educational materials for Korean-speaking communities. It is urgent to create a space for LGBTQ+ people closeted in the Korean immigrant community to prosper with their own identities. In families with immigrant second-generation LGBTQ+ children, the problem is that there are not many opportunities to receive family counseling in a bilingual language.

There is a desperate need for bilingual educational materials for Korean immigrant parents and children. It is not just an indication of the need for translated material. Resources and educational opportunities are needed to explain concepts that cannot be translated directly and to nurture them in the faith.

Second, I offered a course for LGBTQ+ students in two semesters, with fourteen students in total. The class format was a one-week intensive course and an online course format. In terms of the composition of students in these two classes, by race, there were nine White, four African American, and one Asian students. By sex and gender identity, there were eleven LGBTQ+ identifying students and three cis-heterosexual allies.

Students were geographically scattered throughout the United States, and the online course offering made it possible to bring them together. In the case of the week-long Intensive Course, only two people lived near the school, and four others traveled in Chicago for a week from different regions, including New York, Maryland, and Texas. From the first day of the class, students shared how excited they were to have such a meeting opportunity to talk about their identities, life journey, and calling to ministry. Out of fourteen students from two classes, seven students said it was the first time to share their stories in a seminary setting. The other seven students responded that they had attended some external seminars and conferences and taken LGBTQ+-related courses in seminary, which helped them expand and develop their

studies and ministries. Vocationally, eight students were ordained or in the ordination process, two students were in the doctorate program to pursue an academic career, and four students had different professions, including medical careers and social work. They all wanted to reflect on their identity formation process, were interested in leadership and ministry in the future, and contribute to helping other LGBTQ+ by pioneering their path creatively in various fields.

While studying identity development theories, students often recalled their past, expressed various emotions, and were grateful that these resources allowed them to articulate their experiences even now.¹⁴

Genuine Hospitality

Most students – all LGBTQ+ students – raised the issue of authentic welcome and hospitality. In addition to the stigma caused by the harmful words and actions in the conservative and exclusive church culture, many churches, known as inclusive, do not genuinely practice hospitality and treat LGBTQ+ members as strangers and objects to be understood and accepted by the majority. This issue commonly appears in various literature. In her book *Unashamed: A Coming Out Guide for LGBTQ Christians*, Cantorna points:

“Because of stories like this and the heartbreaking experiences of so many other LGBTQ people in church spaces, it is vitally important to know the difference between simply being welcome in the church and being fully affirmed as equal in the body of Christ. Many churches say, “All are welcome here,” but what they really mean is that you are welcome to attend service, give your tithe, and maybe even volunteer in a “lesser” role like hospitality, but when it comes to serving in a leadership capacity or getting married, they draw the line. This stance is damaging for so many LGBTQ people because it causes us to feel subhuman or less-than simply because of our sexual orientation or gender identity.”¹⁵

Creating a welcoming and inclusive statement is a good start, but it doesn’t mean anything without actual practice. The key here is to recognize that all human beings are created in the image of God and have the right to live equally and worthwhile in this world.¹⁶ In the ethics of hospitality, no one is superior or worth more than others. As long as the dynamics of mainstream and non-mainstream, strong and weak, center and margin exist, we cannot achieve genuine hospitality and genuine solidarity.

Cantorna talks about the harmful and frequently used phrases, “I love you but...” She states that God puts no conditions on God’s love.¹⁷ “Therefore, it often results in anger, pain, and distancing from those they love the most because of the pain that’s incurred. Be intentional in

14 Among many resources, students particularly enjoyed: Lee-Anne Gray, *LGBTQ+ Youth: A Guided Workbook to Support Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity* (Eau Claire, WI: PESI Publishing, 2018); Amber Cantorna, *Unashamed: A Coming-out Guide for LGBTQ Christians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2019); Justin Tanis, *Trans-gender: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003).

15 Cantorna, 43-44.

16 Call, 10.

17 Cantorna, 131.

using positive, affirming words of love when communicating with your LGBTQ loved one – love with no strings attached.”¹⁸

Intersectional Issues

Another lesson I learned was that even under the collective identity of the LGBTQIA+ community, there were also very diverse subgroups carrying various social and cultural multilayered issues. As Elizabeth Meyer and points, the unique issues of subgroups in the intersection of race, religion, and culture, for example, have not been fully discussed yet. Meyer notes,

“Many scholars of color, lesbian scholars, and Marxist theorists have critiqued much feminist work as being narrowly centered in the realm of white, middle class, heterosexual privilege. Gay and lesbian researchers have also had a history of working from a white, middle class, patriarchal perspective.... Queer theorists have consciously worked to understand the many intersecting layers of dominance and oppression as possible.”¹⁹

In my class, students pointed out that most of the LGBTQ+ literature is still white-centered. When I introduced Patrick Chang's *Rainbow Theology* to the students, they were astonished to learn about the challenges that LGBTQ+ people of color were going through and confessed their ignorance about this intersectional field. More data, research, support, and activities are needed for the life of the queer of color who is living between ethnic cultures and religious traditions “to achieving a truly equitable and just society.”²⁰

These two very different groups were working toward a common goal in different ways. It was clear that both groups wanted to create a more inclusive biblical interpretation and affirming church culture. However, a fundamental paradigm shift is required to pivot one's theological thinking in a way no one has ever taught and to lead others on the path of liberation and solidarity.

Tanis points what the community needs is “intentionality and planning.”²¹ He continues, “In order to accomplish these tasks, you need to educate your faith community about the lives and needs of transgendered people. Provide educational events that give your members an opportunity to ask questions in a safe environment. Let them hear the life stories of some transgendered people from your area. Preparing your faith community to be a welcoming and affirming place a vital step.”²²

It is not the responsibility of the LGBTQ+ people to overcome the wounds they have received and correct the harmful theology. As Killermann insists, “being well-intentioned isn't good enough.”²³ It is the responsibility of heterosexuals to stop judging others, humbly listen to the LGBTQ+ people, and create a new theology and genuinely affirming faith community. By

18 Cantorna, 131.

19 Meyer, 24-25.

20 Meyer, 25; Patrick Cheng, “Radically Inclusive Models of God,” in *Queering Christianity: Finding a Place at the Table for LGBTQI Christians*, eds. Robert E. Shore-Goss, et al. (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), 30.

21 Tanis, 128.

22 Tanis, 126.

23 Killermann, Kindle 2858.

queering religious education, we need to begin the unlearning process of the harmful heteronormative theology.

Queer theology is not just for queer Christians. Educational materials and programs are needed to help queer, and non-queer Christians break the wall and build a bridge between them. The educational approach we need is not learning about the queer people but the constructive conversation with them.

Paradigm Shift

For the theological paradigm shift, Cheng shares great insights in his book *Rainbow Theology*.

“Rainbow theology is a new way of doing theology that arises out of the experiences of LGBTIQ people of color. It is important to note that rainbow theology is not just theology about queer people of color (that is, theology with queer people of color as its subject). Rather, rainbow theology is a broader methodology and critique that can be applied to all forms of theological reflection.”²⁴

Cheng argues that rainbow theology is not simply a theological experiment or a thought for a particular group of people, but a theology that can replace the heteronormative theology, which has been considered a standard theology. Cheng’s rainbow theology reminds all of us that we have multiple identities throughout our lifetimes, and instead of compartmentalizing ourselves, it encourages us to embrace ourselves to the fullest.

In the class I taught, the allies among LGBTQ+ students were in that position. Allies experienced being a “minority” in the classroom. They shared the experience of social and cultural pressure and powerlessness. They experienced being welcomed and included in the colorful community. “Queering hospitality means thinking beyond concepts of ‘welcome’ and ‘inclusion,’ so that people are not simply objects of certain outreach programs, additive and supplemental to our community.”²⁵ In that sense, creating a community of genuine hospitality does not stop with accepting the minority by the majority group. It is instead a starting point to build a community of hospitality in solidarity.²⁶ In this redemptive community, we should embrace each other to save each other.

Building the Authentically Affirming Faith Community

For queer Christians, building an authentically affirming faith community is vital. As Cantorna asserts, “Meeting and spending time with healthy people who love God and are committed to their same-sex partner or spouse or are confident in their gender identity give you hope for what you can have in your own future.”²⁷ As we all ponder at some point in our lives about meaning,

24 Patrick Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*. (New York: Seabury Books, 2013), Kindle, 2202-2205.

25 Kim-Kort, 49.

26 Kim-Kort, 65.

27 Cantorna, 38.

purpose, and faith, it is a blessing for anyone and everyone to have a community that sincerely listens to each other and supports one's existence and calling.²⁸

In his book, *Trans-gender: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith*, transgendered theologian Justin Sabia-Tanis articulates insightful guidelines to build a affirming community. He first points that "Community after community has discovered that one key to liberation is the finding, claiming, and proclaiming of their own voices."²⁹ Then he lays out the key points of barriers and open doors.

| Barriers to participation | Signs of a Welcoming Community |
|---|---|
| Fear and unfamiliarity on the part of the congregation and the transgendered Language issues Physical layout that separates people by gender Programs that exclude or separate by gender Pathologizing or designating trans issues as sinful Overt hostility | Genuine hospitality Nondiscrimination policies and attitudes Appropriate and inclusive language The visible and audible presence of trans people and programs Provision of meaningful rituals to mark changes Outreach to trans groups and individuals Opportunities for the congregation to learn accurately about trans issues Rest rooms that the gender-variant can access |

Positive & Negative Signs of an Affirming Community³⁰

Kim-Kort also reminds us that "Queerness opens us to a more thoughtful and meaningful perspective, a willingness to see the possibility in what is different: all the different seasons and struggles, abilities, multiplicities, and convictions of each individual."³¹ To practice such queerness, we need to create a space to get to know each other, listen carefully to the queer community, and dismantle the stereotypes that hindered holistic understanding of each other.

In her book, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, Sharon Daloz Parks defines emerging young adulthood and summarizes the essential elements in finding the meaning and purpose of their lives. Her definition of the mentoring community is in the same direction as the queer Christians' yearning for an authentic community. Parks discusses that "'We human beings are unable to survive, and certainly cannot thrive, unless we can make meaning. If life is perceived as utterly random fragmented, and chaotic - meaningless - we suffer confusion, distress, stagnation and finally despair."³² To overcome such "metaphorical shipwreck" that can happen from the rejection from family or community, identity crisis, or loss of meaning and purpose, Parks insists the importance of building a mentoring community.³³ A mentoring community according to Parks is "a network of belonging that constitutes a spacious home for potential and vulnerability

28 Cantorna, 38; Kim-Kort, 204; Tanis, 122.

29 Tanis, 11

30 Tanis, 116-126.

31 Kim-Kort, 193.

32 Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, 2nd Edition. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 9.

33 Parks, 39.

of [the queer] imagination in practical, tangible terms."³⁴ In such community and relationship, "Mentors do not abandon [the queer] to their own devices, rather, they are willing to be part of [the queer's] initiation into a practical and worthy [queer] imagination of self, other, world, and God"³⁵ In this queering church, we are invited to fully acknowledge and bless each other's existence in God's creation and work together to make a better future. "So a queer spirituality is capacious and abundant in its confessional and creedal expressions of love, of faith, of hope. When it comes to church, this means there is more than enough room around the table, in this pew, in the font, within the hallowed walls, and even in the pulpit for your, for me, for all of us."³⁶

Conclusion: Queering Religious Education

Now, let's revisit the definition and the role of Christian education that I introduced at the beginning of this paper. Here is my queering version. I marked the queered parts in bold.

Christian education is at its best as it assists **all** persons in dealing with the crucial issues of personal and social life in light of the gospel. Christian education teaches **and how to critically interpret** the faith tradition first recorded in the Bible, so that people take on the identity of Jesus and gather resources to seek God's will in day-by-day encounters. Theological reflection occurs for each individual believer as **[one]** confronts and makes decisions about how to live faithfully in the moments of daily life. Christian education must provide open **and safe** spaces where people can learn **and question** the faith tradition, **[dismantle and reconstruct]** tradition with issues of life and seek to live together in ways that are faithful to God.³⁷

Through this study, I reviewed my experiences teaching LGBTQ+ identity development and advocacy ministry to different groups and discussed the challenges that emerged through them. Realizing religious education plays a significant role in supporting LGBTQ+ justice, I argued that paradigm shift from the harmful theology and education programs is critical to creating authentically affirming church culture. Toward the paradigm shift, I shared the implications of rainbow theology for all of us and began to work in queering the definition of Christian education.

Creating practical approaches remains a task. However, as rainbow theology emphasizes multiplicity rather than a monochrome approach, various approaches that fit the respective contexts should be developed in the cooperation of LGBTQ+ Christians and allies.³⁸

34 Parks, 176.

35 Parks, 165.

36 Kim-Kort, 204

37 Seymour and Miller, 118.

38 Cheng, Kindle 2435-2698.

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Rondee Gaines

Paper Title: “We Have the Right to Breathe, Breath, and Life: The Pandemic, the Everyday Lives of Black Folks’ Power, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.”

On Monday, March 23, 2020, Mayor Bill de Blasio tweeted that New York City is the “epicenter” of the COVID-19 crisis. When I moved to New York City, in 2016, no one could have ever told me that my life, as well as the lives of millions of New Yorkers and Americans, would be like this: a city that never sleeps, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, is now a city that seems to have come to a screeching halt. Governor Andrew Cuomo (NY), on March 20, 2020, announced the “New York State on PAUSE” executive order, which is a 10-point measure that requires all non-essential New York businesses to close and started at 8 p.m. on Sunday, March 22nd.¹

At the beginning of March 2020, life in the Big Apple, was full of millions of people flooding the streets, at all times of day and night, in transit throughout the city. Only a few weeks ago, after teaching two classes in Brooklyn and attending a student Methodist meeting at New York Theological Seminary, I Lyft-ed my way to a solo exhibition “Kara Walker: Drawings” for the one of the most dynamic African American female visual artists, Kara Walker, at Sikkema Jenkins & Co. art gallery, in the Chelsea district.² Little did I know, soon, all types of similar activities were about to change, since an overwhelming majority of all public and private events were canceled or postponed.

Even though 2020, to some, symbolized a of year of vision, clarity, and sight, the increasing coronavirus cases direct my attention to locate resources that provide guidance,

¹ <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-signs-new-york-state-pause-executive-order>

² <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/kara-walkers-drawings-barack-obama-1804425>

decisiveness, and understanding. At the onset of the pandemic, many of us, working remotely, taking online classes, and organizing meetings, increasingly find ways to stay connected, engaging in a drastic increase of sharing a lot of various resources, such as curriculums, prayers, group chats, and live performances by artists. A culture of community increasingly spreads like wildfire, across the world. Even though many nations' citizens are mandated to isolate, either through self-quarantine or government ordered, we can use this situation to explore how people create, sustain, and build community.

The overwhelming majority of leaders, across any institution, are caught off guard, jump on bandwagons, distantly speak in the comfort of their plush homes, harangue the U.S. President, and speak in an “ought to be” dialogue, subsequently producing abortive actions for change in the lives of black and brown folks. While the pockets of the neediest are emptied, the pockets of the least needy fill up with honorariums, publicity, and positions of influence. The overwhelming majority of the black and brown bodies, which are presently and historically negatively impacted the most in any season of oppression, are forced to live in a state of death, as those presumptuously speaking for them live off their breathlessly voiceless carcasses. I, as do many others, awaken, daily, to an increasing uncertainty, power mongering, a total collapse of institutional structures, and feeling leaderless.

Fervently and consistently seeking God and answers, I found the most relevant historical parallel, upon which I draw, is a critical examination of the life of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. (1908-1972). The 1918 pandemic, also known as Black Death, according to the Center for Disease Control, seems to be the most relevant parallel, of our historical time that might help us understand what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and bio, is one of the best exemplars to understand our present-day context: keeping the faith

amid increasing death. Powell, Jr.'s rise to religious and political life was precipitous in the timing of his influence. Historically, as the United States faced the emergence and gradual onset of the Great Depression, as well as the Great Migration, the Industrial Revolution, Jim Crowism, and rampant lynchings of black Americans, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., with the help, teaching, and guidance of his father Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., made a "way outta no way," providing sustenance, and community, faith.

Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., building on his father's legacy that he inherited, poured in his people, most of whom were African Americans. His resources, such as his political career, ministerial relationships, and business connections, were primarily used to cultivate wholeness, well-being, and survival, during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. In past weeks, while there is a clear need for leadership and guidance, I continually experience a deeper life-sustaining need that is inadequately met: a sense of wholeness and well-being. Though Governor Andrew Cuomo of the state of New York and Mayor Bill de Blasio of New York City effectively communicate to their constituents, of which I am, I, nonetheless, find myself in the ongoing creation of curating resources that establish a sense of social, emotional, and communal well-being.

Powell, Jr.'s legacy, as a leader, in and outside of the pulpit, illuminates the distinct value of critical community consciousness and a collectivist agenda that explores the multi-dimensionality of black lives (Houston and O. Davis, 2002, p. 3). Womanism engages problematic issues and fundamentally, undergirds a dynamic of problem-solving to extrapolate, posit, and investigate diverse contentions and sustain community-building. My brief exploration of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., through a womanist framework, focuses on (re)covering and (re)situating African American men and women, as well as all people, in a collective history,

expanding our intellectual and resistance tradition, and articulating the brilliance of “everydayness” in our lives. Instead of seeing the world through opposites or dichotomies, we view the world holistically, and black women and men’s unique socio-cultural and political situatedness lead us to develop a “both/and” understanding and approach toward self, community, and challenges. Accordingly, people of African descent have placed primacy on stressing the significance of rooting knowledge in concrete experiences and further developing strategies of resistance, affirmation, healing, and liberation. More than any other contemporary moment, today’s clarion call is for every person to take up the mantle of liberative praxis.

In the first part of this paper, using a womanist lens, I propose an Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. 10-point platform that will support a creatively thriving and culturally abundant black community, maintainable during and after the 2020 pandemic, the 2020 Presidential election, and 2020 #BlackLivesMatter developments. My womanist perspective incorporates ideas from *Adam by Adam: The Autobiography of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.* and *Keep the Faith Baby* and briefly prescribes a doable and livable framework that validates, values, affirms, and nourishes black bodies and an African-centered aesthetic. Part two of the paper explores the religious education community approaches of Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Jr., in the work they accomplished, during the Black Death Pandemic and the Great Depression.

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the organic development of community, faith, and hope. While the present-day crisis causes many of us to be physically removed from each other, as a means to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, we must find alternative approaches to create and be a part of a community. Creatively developing healthy, productive, and healing communities, particularly during times of increasing sickness, is one way to manage uncertainty, aloneness, and loneliness.

There are several benefits presented. One of those benefits is to provide a demonstrably livable framework that opens channels of access to community, thereby resistively mitigating a totalizing experience of isolation, dramatically magnified by oppressive conditions. A second mechanism of support for individuals, communities, and organizations, is that people, following state-mandated “shelter in place” orders, curfews, and social-distancing behaviors, can network, learning how to transgress permeable boundaries, having a culture of resistance and connection. Finally, I illuminate an opportunity for individuals to have visibility of one’s personhood, in a pandemic context that possibly saturate one’s life with feelings of socio-emotional invisibility. Living in times of crisis, such as the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic, I and other citizens have the right to available and accessible resources to live holistic lives.

A 10-point Platform Based on the Life and Legacy of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.

1. We have the right to choose our leaders and mandate that our leaders love us and not build a life off of being public figures, disrespectfully denying the humanity of our daily lived experiences. Gendered institutional racism forced us to live, as “the disenfranchised, the ostracized, the exploited,” and we require our leaders to say, “when they pressed upon me their many problems of many years, I could not refuse them because I love all people.”³
2. We have the right to use our minds for our purposes and collective development. “We need thinking rather than military power,” in the midst of our protests and community gatherings. “If we are able to be the right size for our day, we must be able tall enough to bump the sky.” (p. 129)
3. We have the right to prosper, in our homes, communities, and jobs, and reinvest in ourselves for our collective development. “If anything is to grow, it needs two worlds:

³ Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. *Adam by Adam: The Autobiography of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.*, p. 74

‘earth-plus relationship’ with the sky, the sun, rain and the wind” and “God plus: the beyond which is within.” (p. 130). “God plus weakness equals strength. God plus one is a majority.”

4. We have the right to effective religious leadership to use the church resources to reinvest in the congregation, growing the communities of the congregation that exist outside the church. I agree with Powell, Jr., when he said, “I believe it is the business of the preacher to say an eternal word in a contemporary setting; to say a permanent word in a changing world; to help those who enter the doors to have not only a sense of history but a sense of the age.” (p. 133).
5. We have the right to take our freedom into our hands, “to do the things that are pleasing in the sight of God.” “The highest freedom consists in identification with the law of God.” (p. 148).
6. We have the right to use our frustration, anger, sadness, and annoyances to bring attention to our plight against white supremacy, racism, and cultural hegemony. “Many political, social, educational and economic advantages have come to [Black people] from being forced to live under a cloud and under stress.” (p. 152).
7. In the midst of crisis, we have the right to peaceful assemblies, love our families, and protect ourselves. “There is no inalienable right to govern, but the human spirit does demand to be governed with justice.” (p. 157).
8. We have the right to create and implement our labor that best fits our communities and the well-being of our families, less confirming our skills, gifts, and purposes to the exploitive practices and demands of the work force. “To enforce conformity upon men

for their own good is a betrayal of everything the gospel has taught us about the dignity of men [and women].” (p. 173).

9. We have the right to resist, defend ourselves, and honor our collective humanity., and we have the right to prepare for a protracted and ongoing state of war. “No person ever ruled this world for a considerable period through force and power and might and arrogance. Those who seek to destroy the sons [and daughters] of God always end in self-destruction... True leadership has always come from the rank and file.” (p. 184).
10. We have the right to proclaim victory and a revolutionary hope that calls upon God’s righteousness to fight our battles. “In the darkest hours of human history, when all hope had seemed to vanish, God stepped in and helped His people.” (p. 186).

The lives of Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., particularly as noted in their autobiographies, are viably relevant blueprints to understand the interconnectedness among religious education, church, and community. The Abyssinian Baptist Church, which was pastored by both father and son, implemented a curriculum that seamlessly bridged buildings and the bodies of Harlemites, under their leadership. Respectably fascinating for me was their intentional efforts to abide by the first and second Christian commandments and discern what was to be, first, God-centric, and then, people-centric opportunities for community members. Many in the black community, in and around New York City, were direct and indirect beneficiaries of Powell Sr. and Powell Jr.’s leadership.

While much attention is given to the larger-than-life personality of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., his father and Powell Jr.’s overall influence deserves more critical attention and excavation, particularly focusing on *how* both men strategically implemented religious education programs that were effectually relevant and spiritually-centered. David Nathaniel Licorish,

writing the introduction to *Upon This Rock* in 1949, stated, “It must be noted that when Dr. Powell, Sr., came to Abyssinia forty years ago he ranked among the great liberals who were fighting for equality and fair play in the affairs of America. Daring to identify himself with the progressive school of thought, he demanded full citizenship rights for all Americans. His son has followed in his trail and has waged a bigger battle for the social, economic, political, and moral betterment of the people.”⁴

This discussion will explore *how* Powell, Sr. and his son effectively developed and implemented a koinonia curriculum that served the black community, those associated with Abyssinian and beyond. Ministry, in the Powell legacy, intimated a livable womanist ethic of survival that seamlessly followed the highest Christian commandments: loving God, first with all of our heart and, secondly, loving each other as ourselves. Amid the crises of the early 20th Century through the Civil Rights Movement, such as Jim Crowism, thousands of lynchings of black men and women, extremely high unemployment, WWI, WWII, the Vietnam War, political disenfranchisement, and inhumane housing, Powell, Sr. and Jr. constantly made “a way outta no way.” Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., reflecting on his rearing and tutelage of his father, notes, “My father was a kingdom-seeker. He believed that the mere act of seeking the kingdom brought all things you needed unto you. His life proved it. I am another witness that when a man seeks a kingdom on earth and puts that trust into his life, loves the people of the earth, friend and foe black and white, the beautiful and the ugly, even if in that loving he sometimes is unable to have the time to love an individual, then “All things will be added to him.”⁵ The black community, including those who lived in Harlem and in other communities, received as many of “all things” into their lives, as well as the Powell family itself.

⁴ Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. *Upon This Rock*, xiv.

⁵ Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. *Adam by Adam*, p. 11.

Undergirded by a womanist ethic of survival, Powell, Sr. and Jr. relentlessly and unapologetically struggled against and for God's people, who they both shepherded. Emilie M. Townes, in "Ethics as an Art of Doing the Work Our Souls Must Have," states, "The task of womanist ethics is to recognize the biases within particularity and work with them to explore the rootedness of social location and the demands for faithful reflection and witness in light of the gospel demands for justice and wholeness."⁶ My notion of womanist ethics of survival emerges out of the daily multi-faceted, multi-dimensional real-life experiences of women of African descent, as well as men, which enable us, by oppressive or spiritual forces, to have subjective integrity in how we make choices for ourselves and our communities, emphasizing a commitment to overall communal development. We are extraordinary in the ordinariness of everyday lives that creatively build up self and each other. The mere fact that the gendered institutional racism does not squelch the life force out of us speaks to the overcoming power, strength, faith, beauty, and resilience of black Americans, similar to Powell Sr. and Jr. Moreover, importuning the high-risk and black-life-is-valuable priority, which was demonstrably evinced the lives of Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Jr., inherently and knowingly places one in a liberation-struggle dialectical reality that acknowledges the constant real life-threat of impending death. Needless to say, this kind of work, on a daily basis, is not easy. Furthermore, we must keep in mind "[a]n ethic of justice must be based on the community from which it emerges, for it can degenerate into flaccid ideology if it does not espouse a future vision that calls community beyond itself into a wider and more inclusive circle. This circle is neither tight nor fixed."⁷

⁶ Emilie M. Townes, "Ethics as Doing the Work Our Souls Must Have," in *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, eds. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela D. Sims (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 37.

⁷ Powell, Jr. 38.

As such, Powell, Sr. and Powell, Jr. strategically prepared, structured, and deployed a communally centered religious education curriculum that enhanced the lives of many African Americans, from 1908 to 1967. Similar to the Christian community, in the formative years of religious education, organized to teach about the good news of Christ and bring more people into salvation, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. prescriptively presented a whole and holy Christian praxis that poured opportunities into the soul of the community and souls of the people.⁸ Therefore, by extension of godly purpose, godly direction, and the Holy Spirit, Abyssinian, as a church, became synonymous with community, and vice versa. Community life was Christian life, in and around the people connected to the innerworkings of the church building and the church's extension into the homes of people. Powell Sr. and Jr., paralleling the early church, placed a significant amount of emphasis on maintaining community-building, by bringing more people into the religious affiliation.

Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. were some of the most prolific black and American vanguards with their visions of what God's people needed to flourish in God's kingdom. The institutionally oppressive forces, under the Powells' leadership, was given a clear prognosis of freedom, and by igniting the hearts of the people, through their faith, and at the end of the day, the majority of the black community received many blessings, through relevant training, housing, employment, community-organizing resistance, grade school education, higher education, missionary trips, food, clothing, and financial support. Lauren Brisbon, in her research on Powell Jr., notes that Powell, Sr.: "welcomed all individuals to his church. His preaching attracted 'pimps, prostitutes, keepers of dives and gambling dens' to Christ. On March 5, 1909, Abyssinian installed Powell, Sr. as the new pastor and welcomed his

family, Mrs. Mattie Fletcher Shaffer Powell, Blanche, and Powell, Jr. Powell Sr. began to establish himself as a practitioner of the Social Gospel. His church constructed the Community House, a social center, and a home for the senior citizens. The Community House hosted training programs for religious teachers and Red Cross nurses. During the summer months, it hosted the largest youth vacation Bible school in New York.”⁹

The significance of their leadership can, also, be understood as incorporating an undivided religious curriculum that spoke to the full range of experiences of those in their community. Similar to the “[e]arly Christians,” stressing that “teaching and learning as important dimensions of the growing community,” and Powell Sr. and Jr. provided “good news (*kerygma*), attempted to build community (*koinonia*), witnessed (*marturion*) to their faith in Jesus, and served (*diakonia*) the needy of the community” and also included activities of “worship (*liturgia*) of the church” and developed “teaching or doctrine (*didache*).”¹⁰ Members and non-members received edification for their mind, body, spirit, and soul, fostering God’s way as a socio-cultural and psycho-spiritual apriorism. Powell, Sr., in one of his sermons that inferred kerygma, koinonia, marturion, diakonia, liturgia, and didache, brilliantly illuminates his stewardship, as a man of God in the lives of the Potter’s people:

“I began a campaign of education which had to be conducted with the greatest diplomacy. I preached many times from the text, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught.” “A Model Church” was the subject of this sermon which was delivered first in 1911, revised and repeated every year after that until 1923. In those early days I always

⁹ Lauren Brisbon, “The Social Activism and Theology of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.,” (Ph.D. diss., Clark Atlanta University, 2013), 90.

¹⁰ John L. Elias, *A History of Christian Education: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Perspectives* (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 2002), 22.

stressed the fact that Jesus organized the church in Jerusalem because more people were there than in any other place in Palestine. The obvious implication was: go to Harlem where the majority of colored people are. I learned from conversation with the most influential members that it would have been).”

Powell, Sr., stressing the fundamental educative implementation of ministry, meticulously organized a curriculum that was flexibly adaptive to the souls of black folks. There was no mistake in his intent, honoring God’s commandments, by honoring God’s people. The synergistic dynamic power of koinonia, marturion, kerygma, liturgia, diakonia, and didache were spiritual instruments that viscerally connected to the hearts and minds of those who encountered the experience of a God-sent word, experientially in verbal and non-verbal form. Studying the autobiographies of Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., I surmised that their commitment to the first and second Christian commandments were the spiritual fibers that fed the multitudes of their ministry. Using a homiletics of kingdom, rhetoric of community, and hermeneutics of love, Powell, Sr. and Jr. effectively structured communally-centered religious education, through various ministries, that built dialogical relationships from the pulpit, to the pew, and beyond the walls of the church building.

The pastorate of Powell, Sr. and Powell, Jr. began with a homiletics of kingdom, as an educative curriculum that taught people how to have a relationship with God. Similar to the early Christians, both pastors understood that “the fundamental ideal of Christian education as the imitation of and assimilation to Christ,” and “devotion to learning accompanied devotion to fellowship, prayer, and worship.”¹¹ Over almost 63 years, just as the word of God was

¹¹ Elias, p. 17.

proclaimed and evangelized by Peter and Paul, “teaching and learning,” “teaching and action,” and “preaching and teaching”¹² were the spiritual synergies of Abyssinian Baptist Church.

Prayer, study, sermon, and God’s people received a spiritually enriching experience of sustenance and abundantly sustaining edification. For example, during the Great Depression, as Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. worked with his father, thousands of church and community members were provided a clear word from God, food, clothing, shelter, and appropriately adequate training. Powell, Sr. remarked: “Day and night I heard the voice of Jesus say, ‘I was naked and ye clothed me. I was hungry and ye fed me.’ I preached from the former verse the first Sunday in December [of 1930], but no relief came to my haunted soul.”¹³ In continuous prayer, Powell, Sr. discerned that what he must do what he asked God to do, feeding and clothing his people. Through his sermons entitled “A Hungry God” and “A Naked God,” after Powell, Sr. pledged four months of his salary for the Relief Fund and Powell, Sr. pledged ten percent of his salary to Relief Fund, other church leaders and congregants generously opened their hearts, receiving the word from Powell, Sr., and gave several generously abundant offerings.¹⁴ Additionally, in 1930, the free food kitchen, paid and staffed by church and community members, was successfully opened.¹⁵

¹² Ibid, p. 17-18.

¹³ Powell, Sr. 196. *Against the Tide*

¹⁴ Ibid, 198. *Against the Tide*

¹⁵ According to Powell, Sr.’s *Against the Tide*, “Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., with the assistance of a staff of fifty workers, organized and directed the largest relief bureau ever set up by colored people. According to the secretary, this bureau accomplished the following. The food kitchen served 28,500 free meals, sent out 525 baskets containing 2,125 free dinners, gave away 1,530 pieces of bread and pastry, distributed 17,928 pieces of clothing and two thousand pairs of shoes. This distribution was made possible by the gifts of 2,564 persons and stores. During the terrible winter when workers were being laid off by the thousands, the bureau obtained 633 positions through the Prosser Committee and the church’s employment agency. Each Sunday the congregation was asked to report to the agency any jobs on the jobless. Because of this continued co-operation between the church office and the congregation, Abyssinians have not suffered as seriously from the unemployment situation as some others.” 199.

Powell, Sr. and Powell, Jr., in their respective times, were organically chosen by the people to lead God's people. In their own right, both father and son implored such a high level of communal ethos, among black Harlemites and a good number of white New Yorkers, enriching the overall success of the community and church programs. Decidedly aligning their call to serve, the life-giving power, emanating from their communication, both verbal and non-verbal, created a conduit of liberation, in the shackles of the Great Depression and extreme Jim Crowism, that taught and enabled a womanist ethics of survival to manifest. This example of homiletics of kingdom exemplified the power of the Holy Spirit through both pastors and community.

Consequently, the Abyssinian religious education program had several outcomes, using a homiletics of kingdom. First, the full range of the diversity of the community was embraced, and under their pastoring, young, old, mothers, fathers, children, uneducated, educated, working class to upper class, black Americans, white Americans, men, women, laymen, clergy, business owners, prostitutes, hustlers, and pimps were ushered into God's kingdom. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. conducted a spiritual journey that gave liberative place to the subjective reality of those oppressed. Second, the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, in the pulpit, was a captivating moment for the soul of the hearer, eventually doer, of the word, becoming a disciple of Jesus. They taught a justice that was "the radical act of truth-telling—of reality testing and reality challenging" and, as such, was "radically rooted in the truth-tradition and history of African-American life and witness."¹⁶

Another critical dimension of Powell, Sr. and Powell, Jr. was the educative element of a hermeneutic of love, covering a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8) and opening doors of

¹⁶ Emilie Townes, "Ethics as an Art of Doing the Work Our Souls Must Have," p. 38.

opportunities. A Powell hermeneutic of love, embodying a womanist ethic of survival of gratitude, vulnerability, and a vision of hope, calls into being a rendering of possibility. In the Powell home and beyond, the “community of faith taught [them and others] the principles of God’s universal parenthood which engendered a social, intellectual and cultural ethos, embracing the equal humanity of all people.”¹⁷ A God-centric hermeneutic of love manifests, even in oppressive conditions, a life-giving force that produces “life, prosperity, and honor,” for those who “pursue righteousness and love” (Proverbs 21: 21).

A womanist ethic of survival, undergirding a spirit of freedom, social justice, and God’s righteousness, demonstrably highlights an attitude of gratitude. Powell, Jr. and his father, paralleling the lives of African Americans during the Great Depression, came from extremely meager beginnings, and both men well understood the gendered institutional racism that seemed formidable.¹⁸ Against the odds of scientific racism, the lynching murders of black men and women, the destroying of entire black communities, the rapes of black women, and the prison chain gangs, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Jr.’s lives evinced deep care and gratitude for their God-given positions, as shepherds over God’s flock, in and out of the church. They were able to “not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present [their] requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, [did] guard [their] hearts and [their] minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7 NIV). Powell, Sr., in *Against the Tide*, he speaks to the kind of intimacy he has with his church family: “Perhaps there is not a man living who knows the desires, ambitions and aspirations of the Negro better than I do. For seventy-three years I have lived with them in log cabins, shanties, oxcarts, mule wagons,

¹⁷ Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 1).

¹⁸ Powell, Sr., in *Against the Tide*, explains how his family, like the overwhelming majority of African Americans, post-Civil War, struggled for food, housing, education, and employment.

bicycles and in automobiles. For twenty-nine years I was with them as a leader in the largest and most congested Negro center on earth. For fifteen years I administered to at least six thousand Negroes every week. The fourteen thousand members of the Abyssinian Church represent the most intellectual and the most ignorant—the richest and the poorest of my race.”¹⁹

Powell, Sr., as well as his son, were the people, moving as individuals with a collective power.²⁰ Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., in *Adam by Adam*, effectively communicates a womanist ethic of survival, in his leadership during the Great Depression, which is based on gratitude. “I learned something in those days that I will never forget: there is such a thing as gratitude. People have often said to me through the years, ‘Why do you work so hard for the masses? The masses are never grateful for what you do. When you need them, they will forget what you have done.’ This is totally untrue. The bread that we literally cast upon the waters in 1932 returned, and every man and woman to whom I was able to give even a small sum on Saturdays, and every man and woman who was able to get a little something to eat each day, has remembered—to this day. For every one person I helped over the years, a score rose up to stand by me. The sons and daughters of the parents we helped in the 1930s have gone on to high places, but they have been taught the story of what happened back in those days, when all their parents wanted was someone who cared...and I did care. And there is a reward when one gives of oneself

¹⁹ Powell, Sr., *Against the Tide*, 181-82.

²⁰ There are many discussions that primarily focus on the upper-class status of the Powell family and often highlight the highfalutin lifestyle of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. However, the socio-cultural and politico-historical conditions, from the time of Powell, Sr.’s birth to the death of Powell, Jr., prove that the lives of African Americans were always tumultuous. The first chapters in *Against the Tide* explain Powell, Sr.’s childhood and early adulthood. Moreover, in Powell, Sr.’s early years of pastorate, he received public and private death threats from whites and blacks.

wholeheartedly and without stint. Deep within there comes an inner glow that nothing can purchase and no one steal.”²¹

Gratitude, inherent in an educational hermeneutic of love, fosters, as Powell, Jr. mentioned, a reciprocal procurement that invest in the souls of God’s people. There is a dynamic giving-receiving centrifugal force that enables those, who are a part, endurance, nourishment, and growth. For it was God’s will that they “rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstance” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). In this sense, gratitude kept God’s chosen, clergy and laypersons, open to receive blessings, which were regenerative for generations.

Lastly, a hermeneutic of love, which springs from a subjective vulnerability, is a necessary prerequisite in what was taught by Powell, Sr. and Jr.’s womanist ethic of survival. Leaders, such as Powell, Sr. and Jr., as vulnerable servants of God, enabled them to wield resurrection power and to hold the tenuity of position. This means, instead of an individualistic top-down mode of operations, both father and son, in their respective vocations, were open channels of kingdom influence, holding the tension of their fleshly limitations succumbed to the all-encompassing divination of El Shaddai. Understanding the religious forms of curriculum, Maria Harris, in *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, notes that “the pastoral vocation as priestly involves living fully in the present, assisted by the visions and memory of the past. As prophetic, this living fully in the present is assisted by the visions and hopes of the future.”²²

The pastorates of both father and son authenticated the hope that Black Americans needed, especially in an extremely racist and dehumanizing context. The teachings of Powell, Sr.

²¹ Powell, Jr., *Adam by Adam*, p. 60.

²² Harris, p. 27.

and Powell, Sr., seemingly emerging out of an exigency of nothingness, proved to offer fecundity.

A rhetoric of community was key to the overall religious education programs of Powell, Sr. and Jr., embedding communal ethos, communal pathos, and communal logos. As effective rhetors of the people, the Abyssinian pastorate from 1908 to 1971, led by father and son, deeply convicted the interlocutors and moved them all to action, on behalf of God for freedom, justice, and righteousness. Imbued in a rhetoric of community is an identity of hearers that *calls* their subjective attention into *becoming* active participants in the prescriptive choices, which are presented by the speaker. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. knew and lived the heartbeat of their people, God's children, and they cast their rhetorical currency into the flock to flourish, in God's kingdom. When speaking of a rhetoric of community, the ability of one to craft and share a discourse that blends hope, in the midst of absolute despair, transformation, in the face of death, and life, in the presence of decay, is only seen by the consequential actions and outcomes of the hearers. While eating out of trash cans, eating bones, being evicted, losing jobs, and slowly dying, the people of Harlem had a voice in the wilderness, which spoke their reality and inspired joy in the morning.²³

Invoking a rhetoric of community, inspiring a womanist ethic of survival that generated immediate protest by Harlemites, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. led a march of 6,000 to organize against the unfair employment ban of African American workers at Harlem hospital. A “youngster of twenty-two,” Powell, Jr. with “nothing except the massive strength of [their] unity,” pushed for and achieved victory for the people.²⁴ Quoting one of the black Harlem

²³ Powell, Jr. *Adam*, 55-58.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 57-59.

doctors Dr. U. Conrad Vincent, they solicited Powell, Jr.'s leadership, his guidance for the "maimed and beaten, the sightless and voiceless" was "[t]he eyes and ears, and a flaming tongue crying in the wilderness for kindness and humanity and understanding."²⁵

²⁵ Ibid, 57.



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“Justice in the World” at 50: a call to action worthy of recovery

Abstract

The World Synod of Catholic Bishop’s 1971 document, “Justice in the World,” is often revered for its bold articulation that “action on behalf of justice is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.” In its jubilee year, it is timely to assess the relevance of this document today especially as religious educators address behemoths of injustice such as racism, sexism, and many forms of inequality. In highlighting gaps in the church’s approach to racial justice, this paper examines how lessons learned from the past 50 years might guide future implementation of this important teaching. In discussing how the notion of “constitutive dimension” has altered over the years, the paper proposes that religious educators embrace both activist and contemplative practices to recover the boldness and passion of “Justice in the World.”

“Justice in the World” Overview

As fifty years has passed since the publication of “Justicia in Mundo (JM),” it is timely for educators, church ministers and all people of faith to take up this document again, analyze its particular insights and apply it to the world of today. Just 10 years ago, Peter Henriot heralded JM as one of the most significant, albeit “forgotten,” documents in the body of contemporary Catholic Social Teaching (Henriot 2011). Its insights, he argues, are worthy of retrieval. As the world continues to confront racism, the ecological crisis, discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community, and the many forms of injustice that the marginalized of the earth face, an examination of some of the salient messages of JM may help renew the “call to action” which this document summons so boldly. At the same time, an examination of both why this document is often overlooked and how its interpretation has shifted over the year, can provide an important lens in addressing contemporary justice issues, as painful and intractable as they may be. Finally, the shortcomings of this document need emphasis; in particular, how this document neglects to articulate how white supremacy, sexism and other forms of systemic oppression perpetuate injustice.

In 74 short paragraphs, this powerful and pithy document, produced by 210 delegates to this World Synod, affirms the critical role people of good will can play, believers and unbelievers alike, in promoting justice. Influenced by Paul VI’s (1971) *Octogesimo Adveniens*, which condemned the “flagrant inequalities” among nations (Himes 2005, 333), the World Synod’s final document, “Justice in the World” (JM), describes in its first chapter the current state of world affairs as a “crisis of universal solidarity” (O’Brien and Shannon 1977, 391). The document notes with irony the fact that the advancements in technology and science hold the capacity for world unity and a strong sense of interdependence. The reality, though, speaks of a completely different scenario: the arms race pitting the superpowers against each other; the inequitable distribution of resources among the rich and poor nations; the systemic barriers and

vicious circles that keep the marginalized oppressed; and the damage to the environment due to pollution and depletion of natural resources (O'Brien and Shannon 1977, 392-93).

JM laments that the world has not progressed further in efforts to feed the hungry (10), noting the high rates of consumption and pollution in the developed world (11). It is in this context that the document challenges the church to be resolute in its commitment to action for justice, stating unequivocally that anyone who speaks of justice must indeed be just (40). JM makes very clear that love of neighbor and justice are integrally related (34); one cannot profess one and ignore the other. It also calls the church to an examination of conscience on its "modes of acting" and "lifestyle" that can perpetuate injustice (40). The church's treatment of women and lay people is also raised as an issue of justice though not elaborated upon to any significant degree (42). Calling for "Cooperation Between Local Churches," JM promotes the practice of bringing together rich and poor dioceses and associations throughout the globe for initiatives focused on economic, human, and spiritual formation (O'Brien and Shannon 1977, 404). It is clear that each of these endeavors –not only the spiritual ones –are considered "actions on behalf of justice" that can be understood as a "constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel" (6).

Unique Features

In examining JM from a contemporary perspective, some unique features contribute to current debates about social injustice. They include, among others: the clear acknowledgement of systemic injustices and the claim of action for justice as a "constitutive dimension" of the preaching of the gospel. Both of these features of JM connect closely to the current reckoning on racial justice in the U.S. First, the issue of systemic injustice. In the initial commentaries on JM, theologians were quick to point out how the emphasis on social sin is a significant element of this document. John F.X. Harriott opined that the "Council was vague about injustice in the Church, the Synodal document is specific (Harriott, 1972)." Harriott goes on to note that liberation is no longer seen as an inner spiritual conversion but relates to all oppressive structures of society. JM highlights the role education can play in cultivating awareness of the multiple dimensions of sin, as it states, "But education demands a renewal of heart, a renewal based on the recognition of sin in its individual and social manifestations (12)."

As the U.S. reckons with the cultural sin of racism, clearly there is much education to be done about the systemic dimensions of this social disease. At this writing there are state legislatures debating whether or not schools should teach about systemic racism in the United States. Bryan Massingale discusses the American penchant for defining racism as the individual acts of prejudice and bigotry but ignoring the cultural and systemic rootedness of racism (Massingale 2010, 1-42). "For despite measurable progress in combating individual prejudice and blatant discrimination," Massingale says, "the systemic obstacles and barriers that stymie the life chances of persons of color still endure, and race remains a principal lens for interpreting and understanding U.S. culture (42)." He further describes racism as a "deeply entrenched symbol system of meanings and values attached to skin color;" in the end, it "justifies the existence of race-based economic, social and political disparities (43)."

In 2018, the U.S. Bishops approved and published “Open Wide our Hearts,” their fourth document addressing racism, written almost 40 years after the 1979, “Brothers and Sisters to Us.” The most recent document does express remorse at the church’s failures in the area of racism. Advocating for atonement for the sin of racism, the document speaks of the formation of an Ad Hoc committee which will travel the nation to host listening sessions. At the same time, this letter does not address directly the specific examples of systemic racism that implicate the church. It does not mention current movements for justice such as Black Lives Matter movement, nor does it admit to the church’s role in promoting chattel slavery, specifically, and white supremacy in its multiple forms. Olga Segura writes, “The bishops call on Catholics to engage with those who are unlike us and work to dismantle systemic oppression, yet they provide no concrete action plans or focus on any of the issues that most devastating to marginalized communities (Segura 2021, 86).” As Segura argues, vagueness, a similar term Harriott uses to describe Vatican II documents on racism, permeates this most recent U.S. Bishops document.

It is clear then that 50 years after the publication of JM, the conversation about systemic evil continues, yet clear action steps and procedures for accountability still need to be achieved. Transparency is lacking as the need remains to address boldly the destructive power of white supremacy. In commenting on “Open Wide our Hearts,” theologian Daniel Horan says, “it lets whites too easily off the hook by failing to name the other side of the coin of racist oppression: white privilege (NCR 2018).” Why such reluctance? Where does this hesitation come from? In addressing these questions let’s turn to a second unique feature of JM and certainly one of its most memorable: the claim that “action for justice” is a “constitutive dimension to the preaching of the gospel.” The prolonged debate over the meaning of “constitutive” can shed light on the on-going reluctance, Horan has identified, to implicate white supremacy in the maintenance of the status quo of ingrained racism.

Charles Murphy has elaborated on the use of the word “constitutive,” which he describes as a “strong, arresting term (Murphy 1983, 299).” The Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace was charged with the drafting of the document and a French, Dominican theologian, Vincent Cosmao, was the author of the introductory paragraphs where the term “constitutive” is found. As Murphy explains, “constitutive” should be interpreted in a Biblical context in which action on behalf of justice embodies the preaching of the Gospel. “The gospel itself,” Murphy says, “taken against its Old Testament background, is the proclamation of the intervention of God for the realization of justice (301).” “Constitutive” in this context makes justice “a very condition for the truth of faith (301).” This Biblical perspective needs to be distinguished from a philosophical deduction which might portray justice as an integral virtue but perhaps a nonessential element of the preaching of the gospel. Prior to the start of the synod, Cosmao made this distinction clear when he addressed the French bishops with this inquiry, “Is the participation in the transformation of the world, perceived as unjust, merely a requirement flowing from the faith and expressing itself in the works of charity, or is it constitutive of Christ’s Passover conceived as coextensive with human history, which is the history of human liberation (301)?”

Cosmao’s inquiry speaks to what Murphy characterizes as a significant transition in the church’s magisterium teaching about justice since the writing of Pope John XXIII’s “Mater et

Magistra (MM),” ten years prior to JM in 1971. Murphy describes a paradigm shift from a natural law, rational approach to justice prior to MM to a “biblical imaginative” one that manifests itself in the documents of Vatican II and thereafter (308). The latter interpretation of justice evokes a necessary response to act upon and not just a virtue to aspire towards. In Murphy’s words, “If justice is conceived in the biblical sense of God’s liberating action which demands a necessary human response – a concept of justice which is far closer to agape than to justice in the classical philosophical sense – then justice must be defined as of the essence of the gospel itself (308).”

Soon after the publication of JM, efforts to soften the impact of the word, “constitutive,” emerged. Henriot suggests this word caused “discomfort” among conservatives, especially as awareness of Latin American liberation theology was evolving rapidly (Henriot 2011). In preparation for the 1974 synod of Bishops, which eventually resulted in the apostolic exhortation focused on evangelization, “*Evangelii nuntiandi*,” Bishop Ramon Torrella, leader of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace, made reference to the “ambiguities” and “confusion” that JM had stirred. “The last synod clearly stated that action for justice...is a “constitutive dimension” and not a “unique dimension,” as if the entire evangelization should be carried out exclusively through action for justice (Murphy 302).” In an interview prior to the 1974 Synod, Torrella spoke of action for justice as an “integral part” of evangelization, presenting the work for justice as one dimension of the preaching of the gospel.

The author of the second chapter of JM, Jesuit theologian Juan Alfaro, believed that the 1974 synod clearly served to “weaken the thrust” of the 1971 bold affirmation of action for justice as a “constitutive dimension” of the preaching of the gospel (Murphy, 304). Alfaro claimed that by equating integral with constitutive Torrella made an “unnecessary complication,” which in effect subordinated the action of justice to a “helpful status,” eliciting less of an impact. To what extent, one might wonder, did this evolution of thought widen a gap between direct action for justice and the work of evangelization, the preaching of the gospel? On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of JM, Henriot observed that the discussion guidelines in 2012 for the new evangelization only made passing reference to the work of justice (Henriot 2011).

It is clear, then, the affirmation of the work for justice as “constitutive” in JM, is followed up by an attempt to walk back the dynamic potency of this word. This pattern of weakening the potential power of the documentary tradition of Catholic Social teaching relates to the U.S. Bishops writings on racial justice. Sadly, in applying JM to issues of racial justice today, there is an obvious lacuna given the ubiquitous and entrenched nature of racial injustice. Massingale coins the phrase, “lack of passion,” when describing U.S. Catholic social teaching on race (Massingale 77). He notes that the most remarkable quality of this body of writings is how little that has been said. Since the Brown versus Board of Education decision of 1954 some 67 years ago, only four statements specifically dedicated to racial justice (1958, 1968, 1979, and 2018) have been issued (43). This fundamental “lack of passion” on Church’s teaching on racial justice can be contrasted to the high level of energy and conviction by which the church opposes abortion. Catholics are identified by many for their forceful opposition to abortion, “a major public marker,” as Massingale notes (77). But what about racial injustice, a clear denial of human dignity causing violence to human life and specifically to the bodies of people of color?

Are Catholics even aware that action for justice, such as racial justice, can be a constitutive dimension of their proclamation of the gospel?

“Justice in the World” Moving Forward

How might a recovery of JM help to cultivate an undeniable passion for issues of justice such as racism? How might religious educators and pastoral ministers utilize this jubilee anniversary of JM as an opportunity to address issues of justice in their own communities? In raising these questions, it makes sense to explore some approaches to religious education – both political and activist initiatives as well as more contemplative and introspective processes – that can possibly advance efforts to promote anti-racism and, in return, attempt to restore justice work to its “constitutive” prominence. In so doing, this paper recognizes that in discussing racism, one must expand the conversation beyond a black-white paradigm, and consider how people of Asian, Latinx, Native American, Muslim, and Jewish backgrounds, among others, are the frequent targets of acts of hate and unjust laws and policies. As Courtney Goto says, “the dominant black-white narrative treats black experiences of racial oppression as the standard by which all others are measured, and by doing so, racism against nonblack racialized minorities is minimized if not rendered invisible (Goto 2017, 39).”

Heeding this important caution, we might consider Michael Warren who challenges religious educators to engage people in the work of “politicization” (Warren 1987, 28-40). Warren especially is concerned with young people who are isolated from a working knowledge of the dynamics and diverse range of perspectives in politics. He believes that religious educators and youth ministers must confront a barrage of passivity that is inculcated in young people due to technology, advertising and continues in the “hidden curriculum” of secondary and higher education. Warren’s insights apply well to the contemporary scenario, especially during the pandemic, when total dependence on technology as well as disgust with the political extremes in U.S. culture has forced many – though certainly not all as witnessed by Black Lives Matter and solidarity efforts to support Asian Americans – to withdraw from dialogue about the affairs of the world. According to Warren, churches and schools often “domesticate” young people rather than “politicize” them; ensuring their passivity and reinforcing “powerlessness and voicelessness” (34). He admonishes congregations and schools for not soliciting the feedback of young people in making important decisions. For this reason, he advocates for education about the dynamics of power and social change. Proposing a modest process and emphasizing the importance of trust, Warren encourages religious educators to gather young people and lead them through naming issues, clarifying them, and eventually taking action steps to effect changes in the polis (39).

The Black Lives Matter movement is a movement led by young people who certainly embody the level of activism or “politicization,” that Warren describes. But, except for a few Catholic leaders, namely Bishop Seitz of El Paso, Texas, it has not been endorsed openly by the Bishops. “The Black Lives Matter movement,” Segura says, “was formed in 2013 to highlight the ways anti-Black violence is engrained in every American institution (Segura 24).” The movement is deeply critical of policing in the U.S. which, as Segura maintains, has its foundations in the pre-slavery and Jim Crow eras. “I traced a line from chattel slavery to Jim

Crow to the first police departments in the United States and to the many Black women who have been assaulted and killed by law enforcement (Segura 29).” In highlighting the relentless quest for justice of BLM founders – Alicia Garza, Patrice Cullors, and Opal Tometi – Segura challenges American bishops to sponsor church panels and open forums to dialogue with and learn from these prophetic women. “By incorporating the work of Black, queer women, our church leaders can demonstrate that they want to create a church that vehemently condemns racism and white supremacy, centers and uplifts Black Americans, and truly believes that we ‘are the image of the Mother Church’ (39).”

Segura’s challenge, though, goes beyond the call for open dialogue and discussions. She calls for accountability to the history of the church’s integral role in the evolution and growth of chattel slavery. In assessing “Open Wide Our Hearts,” she says “the first criticism is the bishop’s ahistorical representation of their role in the sin of slavery (46).” Drawing from the scholarship of historian Shannen Dee Williams, Segura traces the church’s involvement in slavery back to the 1500’s. She also discusses Williams’ accounts of people of color barred from Catholic women’s and men’s religious communities, well after slavery was officially abolished (47). Segura demands that church leaders shed their silence and choose transparency in the face of this gross violation of the sin of slavery. Furthermore, Segura joins with the Black Lives Matter movement to insist that the Bishops not align with law enforcement and assume that police violence is the result of a limited number of bad officers. Instead, church leaders, as Segura argues, must admit fully to the systemic failures of policing, apologize for all the suffering church racism has caused, and confess to the failure of the Catholic church to attend to the needs of Black brother and sisters (50).

Segura and others are summoning church leaders to truth-telling sessions, similar to ones advocated by leaders in the restorative justice movement. Civil rights attorney, academic and founder of Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth, Fania Davis, describes the potential of such sessions in these words: “A lot of people think that restorative justice can only address interpersonal harm—and it’s very successful in that. But the truth and reconciliation model is one that’s supposed to address mass harm—to heal the wounds of structural violence. We’ve seen that at work in about 40 different nations; the most well-known is, of course, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.” Davis proposes the formation of restorative circles as part of truth and reconciliation processes in which victims discuss with perpetrators of racial violence the trauma they have inflicted. While promoting transparency and accountability, such circles are also intended to promote healing and re-build communities.

Black Lives Matter, the restorative justice movement and the call for the reckoning of church leaders concerning complicity in racism, all constitute key examples of activist strategies to address issues of justice in bold and direct ways, as proposed by the historic document “Justice in the World.” The movement for reparations would be another example, also in the vein of activism, politicization, and community organizing. Each of these employ multiple strategies that educate, advocate, and promote change. There are also more self-reflective or contemplative steps that need to be pursued by Church ministers and educators as they seek racial justice. The JM document urges such self-examination when it states: “While the Church is bound to give witness to justice, she recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes. Hence, we must undertake an examination of the

modes of acting and of the possessions and lifestyle found within the Church herself (JM, 40).” Later it reinforces this point in saying, “Our examination of conscience now comes to the lifestyle of all: bishops, priests, religious and lay people (48).” Calling for reflection that is ongoing and self-critical, JM understands the role of education to “awaken a critical sense, which will lead us to reflect on the society in which we live and on its values; it will make people ready to renounce these values when they cease to promote justice for all people (51).”

Such a “critical sense” is needed for white educators and ministers to address issues of whiteness and white supremacy. Robin DiAngelo (2011) and others challenge white educators to examine their own “white fragility” and their own insulation from the “race-based stress” (DiAngelo 2011, 55). “For many white people,” D’Angelo says, “a single required multicultural education course taken in college, or required “cultural competency training” in their workplace, is the only time they may encounter a direct and sustained challenge to their racial understandings (55).” In examining the factors contributing to white fragility, DiAngelo invites white educators to consider the segregated lives they may live as well as the level of “racial comfort” they may possess unknowingly. Segura underscores this notion of comfort when she asks white bishops to consider for themselves, “Why does my white skin allow me to move through the world without a fear of authority (Segura 2021, 51)?” As a white professor and minister, I must ask this question and confront my own privilege. In response to Segura’s inquiry to white bishops, I would admit that I too do not have to live my life in fear of authority; I do not suffer post traumatic effects in hearing the sound of police sirens nor do I have the experience of being suspected falsely in stores for being a shoplifter. In a college setting which is primarily staffed by white faculty it is easy to take for granted my own racial comfort and to be blind to my whiteness. As D’Angelo says, whites are taught to view “their perspectives as objective and representative of reality (D’Angelo, 59).” To what extent has my white world view shaped my interpretation of JM and my hopefulness for its recovery? Not having experienced the trauma of racism and the tiredness and pain that repeated acts of bigotry inflict, am I in the position to invite my colleagues of color to examine this document with any sense of hope?

Engaging in such self-reflection with depth and honesty can, as Mary Hess (2017) argues, be aided by Christian mystics. Drawing from Maggie Ross’ understanding of the mystic as one who lives day to day life with “transfigured perception,” Hess highlights the lifework of civil rights lawyer and activist, Bryan Stevenson whom she describes as a mystic. In discussing how transformative change happens in society, Stevenson outlines four practices: “getting proximate to the challenge, changing the narratives, finding where your hope lies, and embracing discomfort (Hess 2017, 46).” As Hess describes each of these practices, she emphasizes that white people engaging in the critical work of seeking to dismantle racism must be open to examining their white fragility, identifying their resistance to new narratives and perspectives, and admitting their complicity in the structures that uphold racism. “It means confessing the original sin upon which the United States was founded, and seeking both to repent of it and to join in new and reconciling community (53).” This work has a rigorous, contemplative nature which involves self-examination, self-honesty, profound openness, intellectual humility, repentance, and a resolve to integrate mind and heart. This inner work helps inform and strengthen the activist stance in the call for racial justice. Both approaches are needed to engage in an effort to foster a robust commitment to justice work as summoned by JM.

Conclusion

“Justice in the World” was written only two years after the Medellin, Columbia conference of Latin American bishops where church leaders committed to action for the “transformation of Latin America” and to “awaken a living awareness of justice (O’Brien and Shannon 1977, 569).” Their thirst for liberation and justice, inspired by the hunger, inequality, and structural poverty of their countries, spilled over into the 1971 Synod of Bishops, as manifested by the unequivocal declaration that “action for action on behalf of justice is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.” The world continues to hunger and thirst for justice. The violence against the transgender community only seems to increase. The gap between rich and poor nations widens while the pandemic has made the world only too aware of the systemic inequalities in the delivery of the health care system. Ecological racism and the hoarding of the world’s natural resources remind us again and again that “the cry of the poor is the cry of the earth.” The longing for justice in this world can be seen in every country, among peoples of diverse races, ethnicities and ways of life. This paper has attempted to recover the sense of urgency for justice that “Justice in the World” demanded while applying this document to the issue of racial justice in the context of the United States. Both activist and contemplative practices are needed to address the current reality of racism in this county. Religious educators and pastoral ministers are challenged to pursue both approaches as they hold fast to the vision of a beloved community, one which can only be achieved if justice is a “constitutive” dimension of the preaching of the gospel.

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Resilient Transformation to Stabilize Our Vulnerability: The Convergence Perspective of Medicine and Theology¹

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Abstract

This study focuses on the vulnerability of our society and environment under the Covid-19 pandemic. The medical descriptions about severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus disease 2019 provide the serious manifestation of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and a new resilient hope of its vaccination. Moreover, with the perspective of feminist practical theology, the authors explore a resilient possibility to reconstitute an ecological relationship between our society and environment.

A new type of coronavirus to be confirmed at Wuhan Jin Yin-tan Hospital in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China on 30 December, 2019 has arisen very huge and transformative changes in our world (Horton 2020, 1). Scientists had already some experiences to encounter similar coronaviruses in the 2003 outbreak of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome) in 2012 (Scudellari 2020, 252). However, the Wuhan outbreak coronavirus showed serious and significant spreading traces in the world. Thus, scientists gave a new name as SARS-CoV-2 to occur severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) to be confirmed by a test called real-time reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (Barton et al. 2020, 725; Horton 2020, 1). Scientists reported that the new coronavirus spike protein of SARS-CoV-2 is at least ten times stronger tightly than preexisting SARS-CoV does, binding to a protein of human cell receptor called angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) (Scudellari 2020, 254). Such viral distinction of SARS-CoV-2 was considered as a main reason to describe the global phenomena of pandemic spread.

The molecular shell structure of SARS-CoV-2 is covered in each spike made of three identical proteins and the binding domain between the tip of the spike and the human ACE2 receptor describes a main reason to infect the host cell by the SARS-

¹ I will enlarge and expand this study with my colleagues, Dr. Soo-Young Kwon (Dean and Professor of College of Theology at Yonsei University and Dr. Nam Hoon Cho (Professor of College of Medicine at Yonsei University in Seoul, Korea.

CoV-2 virus (Fig. 1). Especially, drops of carbohydrates on the surface of the spike protein disturb the active operation of the immune system for the host cell (Scudellari 2020, 253).

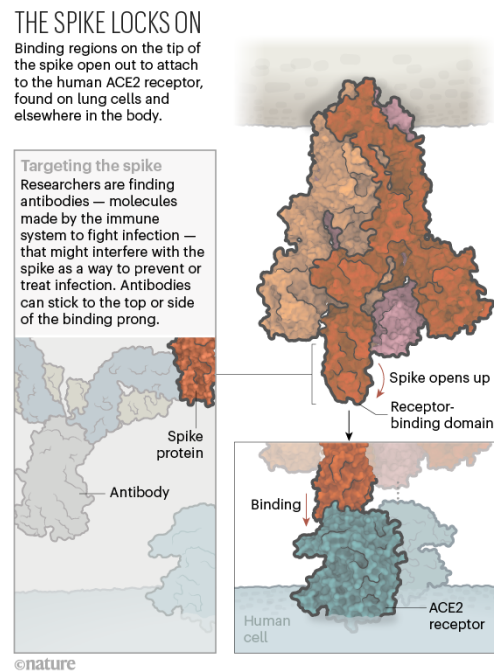


Figure 1. The Spike Locks On (Scudellari 2020, 254)

The symptoms of patients with Covid-19 are diverse and different from asymptomatic experience to mild symptoms such as fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath. But the significant cause of human mortality with Covid-19 is the link with “acute respiratory distress syndrome” (ARDS) due to “*diffuse alveolar damage*” (DAD) having the pathologic distinction of “hyaline membrane formation in the alveoli in the acute stage” (Barton et al. 2020, 726). The figure 2 shows “diffuse alveolar damage in the acute stage” in the lungs of a patient who died of coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19). The sign of arrow (Fig. 2) directs to “hyaline membranes” (Barton et al. 2020, 729). Hyaline proteinous materials are deposited along the dilated alveolar, which are characteristic of diffuse alveolar damage.

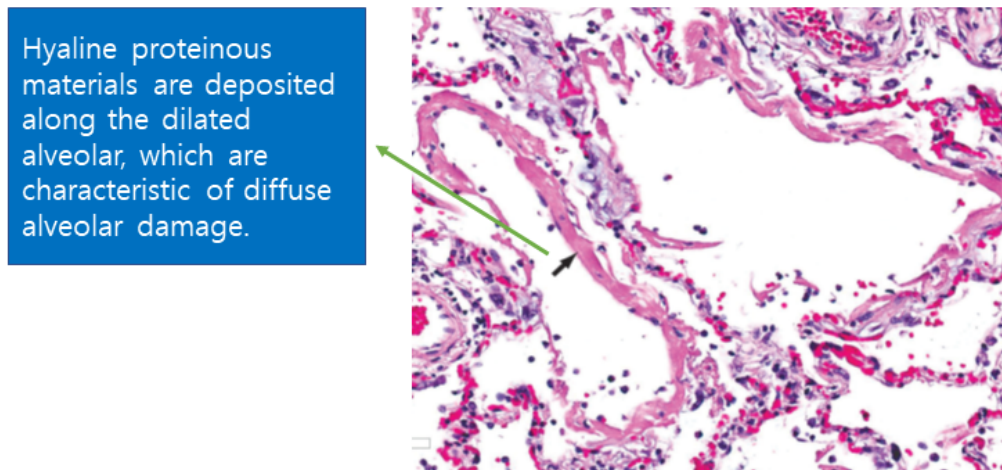


Figure 2. Diffuse alveolar damage (Barton et al. 2020, 729)

The existence of hyaline membranes attached in the alveolar walls is based on the disease manifestation of “acute respiratory distress syndrome” (ARDS) associated with *diffuse alveolar damage* (DAD) in regard to “noncardiogenic pulmonary edema” such as acute lung injury (ALI) (Kumar, Abbas, and Aster 2015, 672).

The effect of vaccines to prevent Covid-19 relates to inducing antibody responses against binding between the trimetric SARS-CoV-2 spike protein and the human ACE2 receptor. Here, antibody responses mean the formation of molecules made by the immune system to neutralize the robust activity of SARS-CoV-2 viral replication (Corbett et al. 2020, 1544-1545). The figure 3 shows the effect of vaccination induced by the mRNA-1273 vaccine candidates called COVID-19 Vaccine Moderna to evaluate in nonhuman primates against forming “virus-cell-membrane fusion” to bind the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein and the human ACE2 receptor (Corbett et al. 2020, 1545). The distinction of antibody levels about ACE2 binding inhibition between two groups of nonhuman primates called Rhesus Macaques with 10 μg or 100 μg of mRNA-1273 is clear (Fig. 3). Here, phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) means a group of nonhuman primates not to induce vaccine as the control group and the letters of “Conv.” means the antibody level of human convalescent-phase serum specimens to have a history of confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection 1 to 2 months ago (Corbett et al. 2020, 1545-1546). The meaningful consequence of this study is that antibody levels to inhibit the receptor-binding domain in serum from the 10- μg dose group and the 100- μg dose group exceed that in serum from the control group as “PBS” and that in human convalescent-phase serum as “Conv.” Moreover, that study reported that the rate of ACE2 binding inhibition in serum from the 100- μg dose group was 938 times as high as that in serum from the control group and 348 times as high as that in human convalescent-phase serum (Corbett et al. 2020, 1548).

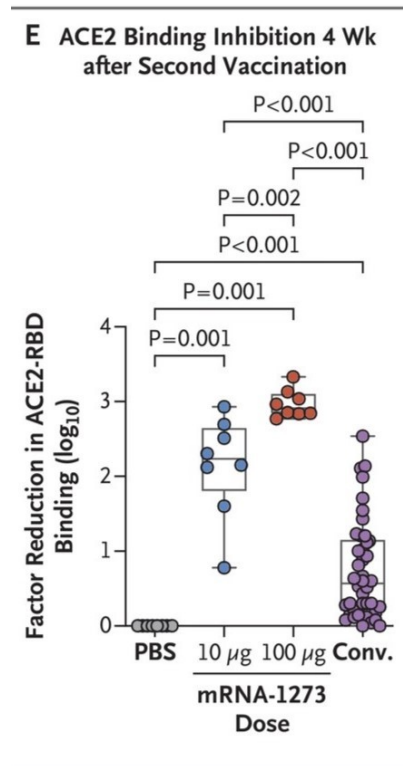


Figure 3. ACE2 Binding Inhibition (Corbett et al. 2020, 1547)

In depth of the Covid-19 pandemic, our society may encounter the significant transformation. The economists predict that the decline from the Covid-19 crisis would be the largest annual drop since the Second World War and then such change after the pandemic relates to the way of the massive government spending (Hanna, Xu, and Victor 2020, 179). If the opportunity of this recovery is not carefully considered, it may be a severe cause of social, political, and environmental fractures. Richard Horton, Editor-in-Chief of medical journal *The Lancet*, warned the impacts of quarantine by the pandemic spread of Covid-19:

Isolation can cause post-traumatic stress, confusion, fear, anger, frustration and, of course, boredom. Some of these effects will be long-lasting. They recommended that periods of isolation should be as short as possible. Working from home might be a welcome pleasure at first. But it also carries the seeds of sometimes severe mental trauma (Horton 2020, 18).

Moreover, the long-term extension of isolation due to the unexpected expansion of

Covid-19 disproportionately affected marginal groups in our society such as colored people, migrants, women and children. Devakumar et al.'s study points out higher risk of infectious diseases in ethnic minority group or lower socioeconomic group due to "limited health-care access, or work in precarious jobs" (2020, 1194). As of the January 9, 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported 86,436,449 confirmed cases of Covid-19 worldwide, including 1,884,341 deaths. Even though one year went after the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, its seriousness remains in much worse condition and tends to produce isolated and discriminatory responses to vulnerable groups in our society due to the absence of "social inclusion, justice, and solidarity" (Devakumar et al. 2020, 1194).

Joyce Ann Mercer focuses on a relationship between "Christian soteriological beliefs" in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the vulnerability of abused and oppressed groups of "children, women, persons living in poverty" with feminist theological perspectives (2005, 27, 112). With a valuable service of feminist theological critiques, she suggested a new opportunity of feminist hermeneutics to "reform, reshape, and reimage" unjust power relations embedded in the subordination of women and children (Mercer 2005, 124-125). I have an idea that that human infection by SARS-CoV-2 encourages the vulnerability of human society in the world. And this vulnerable status of human society relates to the reckless human expansion into the natural landscape. Here we come to know that a relationship between the spread of new diseases and increased encounters of human and wildlife in undeveloped area due to the expansion of deforestation is not unrelated, recognizing the wildlife trade in China as the first coronavirus infections (Tollefson 2020, 176). Likewise, the vulnerability of human being and nonhuman creatures in threat of Covid-19 is comprehensive in our everyday lives.

Fortunately, feminist practical theology carefully considers a relationship between the human and nonhuman creation in the experience of interrelatedness and inter-reliance (Mercer 2017, 304-305). In the perspective of feminist practical theology to criticize the reproduction of oppressive power relations between the human and nonhuman creation, I see a new possibility to reconstruct the ecological resilience of our society and environment (Mercer 2014, 108; Ayres 2020, 24). In the standpoint of feminist practical theology, the Jesus story to carefully consider vulnerable groups such "children, women, and the frail elderly" in the Bible newly works as a "*counter-narrative*" to transform oppressed discourses in our society and environment (Mercer 2005, 45, 48). We can easily relate the historical life and exclusive bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as original resources to "validate and authenticate" the "divine authority" to women in the Bible (Suh 2003, 7-8). Our risen Lord comes in this world through a woman's body: "a woman gave birth to him" (Galatians 4:4). With a new resilient hope of feminist practical theology, our study will focus on reconstituting the vulnerable fragility of our society and environment under the Covid-19 pandemic.

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TEACHING TOWARD A CULTURE OF PEACE: ANALYSIS OF ISLAMIAT AND ETHICS
TEXTBOOK

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Abstract

Textbooks are not only meant to deliver subject knowledge; they are also a medium to convey universal and community-specific values. This study reviews the content of the textbooks (Islamiyat and Ethics) classes 9-10 published by the Punjab Textbook and Curriculum Board (PTCB) and Sindh Textbook Board (STB). The textbook content analysis method is used to analyse and study the textbooks. The textbook content was analysed using the following criteria; (a) positive self-concept; (b) good health and compassion (inner peace); (c) tolerance, solidarity and social responsibility (social peace); (d) respect for life in all its forms (e) care for the environment (peace with nature). The analysis of Ethics and Islamiyat textbooks reveal that the content focuses on (c) tolerance, solidarity and social responsibility (social peace) and (d) respect for life in all its forms. The other aspects are not given place in the textbook. The content of Ethics textbooks also shows that the purpose of the books is to inform students about other religions and this is achieved by writing short texts about major religions but STB textbook does not have a chapter on Jesus Christ while it has included a chapter about all other major religions and their prophet. It is recommended that all students Muslims and Non-muslims should study content developing holistic human beings and promoting universal ethical values. The content should be re-written keeping in mind the cognitive developmental level of 14-16 years olds. The current content has a very high philosophical tone especially the Ethics textbooks.

Keywords: Peace education, textbook analysis, ethics textbooks, Islamiyat textbook, curriculum

Teaching Toward a Culture of Peace: Analysis of Islamiat and Ethics Textbook

The academics have been trying to define and redefine religious education (RE) in the last quarter of 19th century and in the 20th centuries. The 19th century saw religious education embedded in religion and learning about one's religion was religious education, an education with a specific content (about a religion). The fast industrialization in the 19th century changed the world map due to voluntary and forced migration. The structure of societies changed as labour was brought into new unchartered countries from a homogeneous society to a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic. The society has to make way for the new groups and this required in education too. The 20th century's mass emigration to Europe and America, once Christian continents, made them into multi-religious continents with people from all major religions, whether Abrahmic (originating in the Middle East) or non-Abrahmic (originating in other parts of the world such as Asia, Africa and South America). John Dewy (2013) tries to redefine religious education and Archibald (1987) summed up Dewey's idea of religious education in a phrase "any education fit to be" (p. 406). Dewey progressive views of education outlined in his books views education that fits in a society and helps in its socio-cultural, economic and technological progress. His ideas to some extent helped in redefining religious education from 'education about a specific religion' to 'education to become a fit human being' to live in a diverse and changing society. This transformation of the focus of religious education resulted in the transformation of values and this transformation happened as a result of a process and Archibald (1987) called it 'a religious process' (p. 406).

A democratic society should not foreclose any rational thinking and pupils should be allowed to complete their formal education in a setting where they make decisions (on the basis of the information available to them), learn to take responsibility of their consequences of their decisions and appreciate it, they are not indoctrinated (change their decision as new information become available to them), they learn to listen, present their thoughts with reason and become aware of others' right to holding onto a different view than theirs. These decision are not confined just one aspect of life, that is, political but permeates to other aspects such as cultural, social and religious. A society where pluralistic values are cherished and promoted and education should be enabling pupils to freely make decisions about themselves while taking responsibility of their decisions and choices along with one's ability

to accept the choices made by others which are different from theirs as suggested by Johns (1981).

Religious education has been debated for decades in the West and questions such as, 'should it be part of school curriculum?' 'why should it be taught?' 'should students learn about one religion (Christianity in the Western context)?' 'who should teach it (a practicing member) or anyone with sufficient knowledge and possessing teaching qualification?' how it should be taught (faith base approach or objective approach.)' Hulmes (1979) suggested that RE should focus on personal development of both engaged in RE classes, the teacher and the pupil as he believes that a pupils journey to learn about different religious traditions can be hindered by their teachers' beliefs, commitments and practices. The teachers teaching subjective or faith base approach become engaged in explaining their convictions to pupils while those using objective approach develop students' questioning of different religious belief systems. The latter group leave it upto the pupils to develop their own belief system. The school and classroom environment is important in RE classes as both the teacher and the pupil are not engaged in debated to prove the other belief system faulty. Each should appreciate the other's belief system and accept the differences without condemning the other holding onto a faulty belief system and considering that person of lesser intelligence.

The works by Grimmit (1994) looked at RE in a different way. He suggested two approaches to RE which are 'religious absolutism' and 'religious equality and neutrality'. The former requires education to be informed and shaped by the belief and value system by a particular religion (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam) while the latter view education to be shaped by the values of equality and neutrality. The former (religious absolutism) Grimmit claims has is unacceptable and has no place in a world which is continuously shaped by mass migration and becoming diverse in all aspects including religious traditions. This tension is due to the two difference views on pluralism, 'cultural absolutism' and 'cultural relativism' as noted by Grimmit (1994). The former (cultural absolutism) holds the view that one culture, which is theirs is superior culture and only its value system should inform education and these values should be transmitted to the pupils. This perspective of pluralism view society in transition and those coming into this culture are assimilated into this culture and its values. The purpose RE here is the enculturation of the newcomers. This group sees the values as stationary and never changing. This view of RE presents a challenge to the latter (cultural relativism) perspective of RE. The cultural relativism views

RE on equality and neutrality, that is, all belief systems are equal in a democratic society and cultural diversity in such a society is desirable and should be recognized and promoted. The Education values are informed by all the belief and value systems (ethnic, religious, cultural and social) existing in a society and pupils learn about them in a “non-evaluative” and “descriptive” (p. 173) manner. This perspective of RE view the focus of RE to promote understanding of various belief systems in a culture whether the practitioner are from the majority group or the minority. The RE is view as a process inculcating the values of tolerance and respecting different belief systems, outlooks and identities, either of the majority or the minority groups.

What should be the purpose of RE? This is the question that is being answered by many both in different countries differently. For example, the countries in Europe started re-focusing the RE focus from Christian education to inclusive RE. The RE curriculum informed pupils not only about the belief system and cultural values of the majority group (Christianity) but also of the minority groups (Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam). The teachers were prepared to teach pupils using objective approach and preparing them to become aware of diverse belief system and cultural values they live in and learn to listen and respect the cultural, ethnic and religious differences. The United States of America separate religion from formal educational settings (Johns, 1981). The South Asian countries have different perspective on RE. Bangladesh, Hindustan (India), Pakistan and Sri Lanka have different minority groups living. Hindustan and Sri Lanka are secular countries while Bangladesh and Pakistan are Islamic countries. The RE curriculum in the former is inclusive and the education policies do not promote any particular religious and ethnic group. The latter has Islamic Education part of their curriculum. Pakistan’s education policy (2009) says that education should be “embedded within the Islamic ethos as enshrined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan” (p. 2). The document says that this policy is aimed towards making

education system must provide quality education to our children and youth to enable them to realize their individual potential and contribute to development of society and nation, creating a sense of Pakistani nationhood, the concepts of tolerance, social justice, democracy, their regional and local culture and history based on the basic ideology enunciated in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (p. 10).

The policy has dedicated one chapter on Islamic Education. It is taught as a core course from classes III-XII as a separate subject with its own textbook and set of assessments. The policy has clearly stated that “Non-Muslim students shall not be required to read lessons/pages on Islam in the textbook of integrated subject for Grades I and II” (p. 24) but the textbook analysis of English and Urdu textbook (Mahboob, 2009; Gulab and Khokhar, 2018) show that the text in these books have stories with references to Islam, Prophet Mohammad and his Friends (pious caliphs). This highly charged intersection of RE and politics can be traced back in the history. All stake holders in the education process teachers, academics, politicians, religious leaders and people (secular and religious minded groups and general public) hold strong views about RE and its place in the general education and some (Weisse, 2007; Gearon, 2012) approach this debate from a wider perspective, that of, religion and society.

Why Study Islamic Education and Ethics Textbook in 2019

The Islamic Education and Ethics subjects have remained contentious amongst majority (Sunni Muslims and religious minorities (Shai Muslims and non-Muslims). Studying Islamic education, its textbooks is a sensitive issue in Pakistan and not many studies exist analyzing these textbook. The only study about Islamic Education textbooks is by Ali (2008) where she looked at how revised textbooks legitimized the religious rites and rituals of the majority group (Sunni Muslims) and delegitimized the minority (Shia Muslims) groups and their religious rites and rituals. This conflict led to violent clashes in area where Shia Muslims were in significant numbers, especially Northern Areas (now called Gilgit-Baltistan province). The textbook writers who happened to be from the majority group used images to teach students how to pray and they show Sunni Muslims way of praying and did not include the Shia Muslims way of praying. Though this textbook was revised later and now there are two textbooks each catering to the Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims.

The religio-political parties have proved influential in forcing the textbook boards in Pakistan to change textbooks. There was a dispute between the government allies in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province ((AFP, 2014; Zia, 2014). The Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (majority party in the ruling coalition) and Jamiat-e-Islami (minority partner in the ruling coalition) disagreed on whether to include or exclude Koranic verses in the Chemistry textbooks of classes 9 and 10. The Education Minister of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government who was from the minority party (they demanded this ministerial portfolio and their demand was accepted by the

majority party) objected to the changes suggested by the body formed by the provincial government. The changes demanded were related to Islamic Education (addition of verses about Jihad); images used in the textbook (removing pictures of female pupils without headscarf); objectionable material (using Assalam-o-Alaikum” instead of “Good Morning in English textbooks, removal of images from Science textbook); removing content (chapters on Rahja Dahir and Ranjit Singh from History/Geography textbooks). The majority party agreed to the minority party’s demands and all these changes brought in 2006 were reversed as per the wishes of the minority party.

There are reports prepared by the international institute on Pakistan highlighting how education and textbooks are used to radicalize the Pakistani society (Afzal, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Butt, 2016). There are many studies highlight the discriminatory content in English, Urdu, Social Studies, History and Pakistan Studies textbooks, (Rosser, 2004; Dean, 2005, 2008; Saigol, 2005; Raina, 2014b, 2014a; Gulab and Khokhar, 2018). There are many studies analyzing the gender representation on these textbooks since this is not the focus of this article so those studies are not mentioned here.

The Ethics subject was introduced as an alternate subject for the religious minorities (non-Muslims) in Pakistan. The textbooks were prepared without preparing Ethics curriculum framework. These bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education and the Textbook Boards approved the Ethics textbooks written by those who have no background in either Ethics or World Religions. The non-Muslims (Christian, Hindus, Sikhs) were happy to hear this as was reported in a news report (Yousafzai, 2016) but the content in the textbook was representative of their faith. The community workers felt that the textbook content does not teach pupils about different religious communities, their beliefs and practices, life history of their prophet and important people as Muslim pupils learn in Islamic Education textbook. These community members were not consulted in the process of approval of Ethics textbook. This study analyses the content of the textbook using three-tier analytical framework (Table 1).

Methodology

Discourse analysis (SDA) is used to analyse the textbooks in this study. Discourse is a widely used analysis tool in the humanities and social sciences communications, literary critics, sociologists, to name a few, has been using it to study society and how language is changing societies, for the better or for the worst. The language is approached in a systematic way by paying

close attention to text and its context. SDA is founded on ideas adopted and adapted from discourse analysis methods developed and used in other social sciences. Ruiz (2009) refers to SDA as a method that analyse text at textual, contextual and sociological levels to understand the discourse. Richardson (1995) argued that the text ‘display the goals and intentions of human actors’ (p. 200). The human actors in Pakistani context are the textbook writers and bureaucracy in the Curriculum Wing (CW) of each Provincial Education Department (PED) in Pakistan. The analysis unpacks the text to discover the values advocating peace culture through texts and images.

The categories of inner peace, social peace and peace with nature were created. The inner peace value category discover the concept of positive self-concept, while the images and the texts were codified according to the triphase analytical framework (see Table 2). The discourse analysis centered on texts, texts were codified as per the value communicated through the text. Each textbook by state and private publisher was codified and tallied to determine the most frequent peace value in each category. The contextual phase of the analysis looked at participants and their intention by (a) identifying the participants in a discourse; (b) their role in the discourse by comprehending the meaning of the discourse. The discourse analysis also analysed whether these discourses are initiated and sustained by those engaged in the discourse or these discourses are merely reflective of life and social structure of society. The social peace values also explored unequal relationship between and amongst different participants of discourses. The texts and the images are also looked for the messages about peace with nature.

Table 1 - Triphase Analytical Framework

| Inner peace values | Social and cultural peace values | Peace with nature |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive self-concept • Hard work • Achieving one’s goal/dream • Trusting in one’s potential • Healthy body • Attitude and behavior leading to a health life and health body • Sympathy towards the weak sections of society • Compassion towards those who need us | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to listen to others from a different faith • Ability to communicate with those from a different faith • Learning about multi-cultural and multi-lingual world • Learning about the tolerance and working with others • Learning about discrimination and discriminatory practices in a society • Learning about one’s social responsibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for Mother Earth • Respect for life • Respect for eco-system • Role and responsibility in protecting extinct species • Role and responsibility in promoting sustainable world • Learning about the interdependence of holistic peace and sustainable development |

The textbooks (Islamic Education and Ethics) used in secondary schools published by both the state publishers (textbook boards) are analyzed in this study. It was assumed that these textbooks contained messages to promote peace culture in schools and classrooms and these messages could be uncovered embedded in the content and the images. Education with all its related activities including Curriculum design and Textbook writing, in Pakistan is solely the responsibility of the provincial education departments

Table 2 – List of Textbooks analysed in this study

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|
| Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board | 2 |
| Sindh Textbook Board | 2 |
| Total Books | 4 |

Data Analysis, Findings and Discussion

Ethics Textbook Analysis

The philosophers view ethics as a study of moral norms, their history and justification and in contemporary parlance the word ethics has replaced the word moral and now widely used word and phrases such as ethical practices, ethical code of conduct, medical ethics, business ethics etc are used. Ethics is now rooted in human nature, and the elements of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ found in human nature are discussed and explored while discussing ethical dilemmas. The study of ethics is no longer rooted in religion but the Ethics textbook published by the Punjab and Sindh Textbook boards (see Table 3) have used a the old approach, that is, defining ethics in term of religion; finding ‘good’ and ‘evil’ as given in different religions. This section also explains to pupils the importance of religions and how it keep them healthy (physically, socially, emotionally, and psychologically) and transform them into holistic human beings (see Figure 4). The content of Ethics textbook present religion as a savior force that will protect human beings, the structures (social, political, cultural) designed by them to live within and guide their everyday lives.

The Ethics textbooks begin with a very philosophical introduction explaining to pupils the roots of ethics and religion (see Figures 1 and 2). The Preface goes on to explain the objectives of the textbook (Figure 3) stating that the purpose of choosing different texts is to prepare students to live ethical lives and contribute in economic, social and cultural development of Pakistan. The textbook content has chapters (see Table3) informing students about the lives of the prophets of different religions and how what is said in these religions about different social aspects of our lives

such as tolerance, acceptance of differences, respecting the worship places of other faiths and religions, human dignity and other general ethical values (honesty, punctuality, how to behave at public places and use public facilities). The ethics textbooks (see Table 4) asks pupils to see themselves and develop themselves (positive self-concept) through the lenses of their religions; The inner peace (good health and compassion) can be achieved by observing and doing what is prescribed by their religion; social peace (tolerance, solidarity and social responsibility) is also possible only if one follows one's religion and observe its teachings. The textbook does not have any text about peace with nature (Respect for nature, respect for life in all its forms and care for the environment) and does not inform pupils about nature and how to protect it, creatures part of this eco-system, and using resources in sustainable way, not to exploit the resources found in the nature.

Table 3 – Outline of Ethics Textbook Content

فہرست مضامین
List of topics

فہرست نصاب کلاس دہم
List of topics Class 10

فہرست نصاب کلاس نہم
List of topics Class 9

| عنوانات Topics | عنوانات Topics |
|--|--|
| <p>پہلا باب: Chapter 1 مذہب کا تعارف Introduction to Religion مشکلات کے حل میں مذہب کی رہنمائی Religion, Solutions of Difficult Life Situations گناہ اور جرم کا تصور Concept of Evil and Sin</p> | <p>پہلا باب: Chapter 1 مذہب کا تعارف Introduction to Religion مذہب کی ذاتی اور نفسیاتی اہمیت Sociological and Psychological influence of Religion مذہب، سماج اور اخلاق Religion, Society and Ethics</p> |
| <p>دوسرا باب: Chapter 2 عالمی مذاہب World Religions مہادیو - تعارف اور بنیادی تعلیمات Mahavira: Introduction and Teachings</p> | <p>دوسرا باب: Chapter 2 عالمی مذاہب World Religions جین مت - تعارف اور ارتقا Jainism: Introduction and Evolution</p> |
| <p>تیسرا باب: Chapter 3 اخلاق و اقدار Ethics and Values عبادت کے انسانی زندگی پر اثرات Prayer and its Influence on Human Lives مذاہب عالمی کی روشنی میں Perspectives of World Religions عالمی مذاہب میں اخلاقی اقدار Ethics and Values in World Religions انسانی کردار سازی پر احتساب کے اثرات Accountability and its Influence on Human Character مذہبی تعلیمات میں پابندی وقت Punctuality in Religious Teachings</p> | <p>تیسرا باب: Chapter 3 اخلاق و اقدار Ethics and Values خدا کی عظمت Greatness of God عبادت گاہیں اور نظام Worship Houses and پائے عبادت Worship Rites and Rituals انسانی رویوں پر اثرات Impact on Human Behavior ہندو دھرم، بدھ مت، زرتشت، مسیحیت، اسلام Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam</p> |
| <p>چوتھا باب: Chapter 4 آداب Etiquettes عوامی مقامات کے آداب Etiquettes of Public Places ریلوے اسٹیشن Railway Station بس اسٹینڈ Bus Terminal ہوائی اڈا Airport بازار Market</p> | <p>چوتھا باب: Chapter 4 آداب Etiquettes عبادت گاہوں کے آداب Etiquettes of Houses of Worship عوامی مقامات کے آداب Etiquettes of Public Places دفاتر Offices بینک Bank</p> |
| <p>پانچواں باب: Chapter 5 مشاہیر Personalities ارسطو Aristotle کانت Immanuel Kant سری اربندو Sri Arubindu</p> | <p>پانچواں باب: Chapter 5 مشاہیر Personalities امام غزالی Iman Ghazali فلورنس نائیٹ انگیل Florence Nightingale</p> |

Figure 1

مذہب اخلاقیات کے ماخذ بھی ہیں اور انہیں پروان بھی چڑھاتے ہیں۔ ہم روزمرہ زندگی میں دیکھتے ہیں کہ دیانت داری، صداقت، ہمدردی، دریا دلی اور جذبہ خدمتِ خلق جیسی اقدار مذاہب ہی کی عطا ہیں۔ اگرچہ مذاہب مختلف ہیں لیکن یہ اخلاقی اقدار ایک جیسی ہیں۔ عملی زندگی میں آپ نے بہت سے ایسے لوگوں کو دیکھا ہو گا جن کا تعلق مختلف مذاہب سے ہوتا ہے لیکن وہ سب بنیادی اخلاقی اقدار پر عمل پیرا ہوتے ہیں۔ دیانت داری، سچائی، دردِ دل اور دوسروں کا بھلا سوچنا ان کا وطیرہ ہوتا ہے۔ مذہب کی ہدایات پر صدقِ دل سے یقین رکھنے اور عمل کرنے والے ہمیشہ دوسروں کے دکھ سکھ میں شریک رہتے ہیں اور کسی قدرتی آفت کے موقع پر مذہب اور ملت کی تفریق کے بغیر خدمتِ خلق میں پیش پیش ہوتے ہیں۔ وہ کبھی دوسروں کا دل نہیں دکھاتے بلکہ ہمدردی سے پیش آتے ہیں۔ وہ صرف جھوٹ اور ظلم سے نفرت کرتے ہیں۔

Translation:

Religions are the chief source of ethics and should be promoted. It is seen in everyday life that values like honesty, truth, sympathy, generosity, and passion for serving humanity emanate from religion. Although religions are different, these moral values are the same. In practical life, you might have seen many people who belong to different religions, but they all practice the basic code of ethics. They are committed to honesty, truth, generosity, and philanthropy. Those who believe wholeheartedly in the teachings of religion and bring them into practices always participate in the joys and sorrows of others, and at the time of any natural calamity, they serve humanity without any religious or national discrimination.

Figure 2

مذہب انسان کو کئی قسم کی نفسیاتی بیماریوں سے بچاتا ہے۔ حسد، کینہ، غیبت، بدگوئی اور انتقامی جذبے جیسی منفی سوچ سے انسان کے اندر کی کیفیت بدل جاتی ہے اور بدن کے اندر ایسی رطوبتیں پیدا ہوتی ہیں جو اندرونی نظاموں کے لیے تباہ کن ہوتی ہیں۔ مذاہب ان قباحتوں سے بچنے کی نہ صرف تاکید کرتا ہے، بلکہ انہیں گناہ قرار دیتا ہے۔ اس کا مفید پہلو یہ ہے کہ انسان نہ صرف ذہنی خلش اور منفی سوچ سے بچ جاتا ہے، بلکہ وہ صحت مند سوچ بھی اپنا لیتا ہے۔ اس کے ساتھ ہی مذہب منفی سوچ کو روکتا ہے

Translation:

Pakistan is a country of Muslim majority, but besides Christians, Hindus, Sikh, and Parsi there are other non-Muslim minorities living here. There are holy places for Hindus and Sikhs, which are visited by thousands of pilgrims every year. There is a religious harmony and unity among people of all religions here.

Figure 3

پاکستان مسلم اکثریت کا ملک ہے لیکن اس میں مسیحی، ہندو، سکھ، بدھ، پارسی اور دیگر غیر مسلم اقلیتیں بھی موجود ہیں۔ یہاں ہندوؤں اور سکھوں کے مقدس مقامات بھی موجود ہیں اور ہر سال ہزاروں زائرین بیرون ملک سے ان مقدس مقامات کی زیارت کے لیے آتے ہیں۔ یہاں تمام مذاہب کے لوگوں میں باہمی اتحاد اور یگانگت پائی جاتی ہے۔

Translation:

Pakistan is a country of Muslim majority, but besides Christians, Hindus, Sikh, and Parsis, there are other non-Muslim minorities living here. There are also Holy places for Hindus and Sikhs, which are visited by thousands of pilgrims every year.

Figure 4

اخلاقیات کی اس درسی کتاب میں نہایت مفید اور معلومات افزا مواد شامل کیا گیا ہے۔ مذہب کی نفسیاتی اہمیت، اخلاقی اقدار بحرانوں میں اور جرائم کی روک تھام میں مذہب کا کردار، عالمی مذاہب کی عطا کردہ اخلاقی اقدار سے انسانی کردار کی تشکیل، عبادت گاہیں، عبادت کے طریقے اور انسانی رویوں پر عبادت کے اثرات، ارسطو، امام غزالی، عمان ویل کانٹ، فلورنس نائیٹ انگیل اور سری اربندو جیسے مشاہیر کے افکار و کردار کو شامل نصاب کیا گیا ہے اسی طرح عالمی مذاہب میں سے جین مت اور مہاویر کی تعلیمات بھی شامل نصاب ہیں۔ یہ معلومات طلبہ کے لیے مفید ثابت ہوں گی۔

Translation:

In this textbook of Ethics, very informative and useful material has been included. The psychological significance of religion, ethical values in crises, the role of religion in putting an end to crime, personality development through ethical values delivered by internationally recognized religions, places to worship, ways of saying prayers, and impact of worship on attitudes have been made part of the syllabus. Besides this, the schools of thoughts and the personalities of Aristotle, Imam Ghazali, Emmanuel Kant, Florence Nightingale, Sri Arbandu have also been included in the syllabus. Similarly, among internationally recognized religions, the teachings of Jean Mut and Mahaveer have been included in the syllabus, which provides useful information to students.

Figure 5

اخلاقیات پڑھانے کے جو مقاصد طے کیے گئے ہیں زیر نظر درسی کتاب میں شامل مواد انہیں پورا کرتا ہے۔ توقع کی جاتی ہے کہ یہ نصاب پڑھ کر طلبہ معاشرے میں مفید اور مثبت کردار ادا کر سکیں گے۔ وہ مذاہب کی بنیادی تعلیمات، اخلاقی اقدار اور سماجی زندگی کی قدر و قیمت جان کر اور مشاہیر کی زندگی کے عملی نمونوں سے استفادہ کرتے ہوئے خود کو بدلیں گے اس طرح یہ کتاب طلبہ میں بلند اخلاقی، رواداری، دوسروں کا احترام کرنے اور وسیع ظرفی جیسی صفات پیدا کرنے میں معاون ثابت ہوں گی۔

Translation:

The material reviewed in the textbook meets the objectives that have been set out for teaching ethics. It is expected that the students will play a positive and useful role in society after studying this syllabus. They will change themselves while drawing benefits from the basic teachings of religion, merits of ethical and social values, and the practical life patterns of renowned personalities. In this way, this book shall help students to develop high morals, tolerance, respect for others, and broad-mindedness.

Table 4 – Ethics Textbooks Classes 9 and 10

| | |
|--|--|
| Positive self-concept | باب 1: مذاہب کا تعارف Chapter 1: Introduction of Religion |
| | باب 3: اخلاق و اقدار Chapter 3: Ethics and Values |
| Inner peace (good health and compassion) | باب 3: اخلاق و اقدار Chapter 3: Ethics and Values |
| | باب 4: آداب Chapter: Social Values |
| Social peace (tolerance, solidarity, and social responsibility) | باب 3: اخلاق و اقدار Chapter 3: Ethics and Values |
| Peace with nature (respect for nature, respect for life in all forms and care for the environment) | باب 4: آداب Chapter 4: Social Values |

The purpose of religious education (Islamic education or ethics) should be helping “pupils learn about the beliefs, teachings and practices of the great religious traditions of the world” and “learn from their studies in religion about themselves – about discerning ultimate questions and ‘signals of

transcendence' in their own experience and considering how they might respond to them" (Teece, 2010, p. 94). Islam in Pakistan is always used, from its inception a "dominant principle of the Pakistani national character" (Ashraf, 2018, p. 4) and played an important part in the development of different aspects of education in Pakistan, be the buildings (a space is allocated to be used as a mosque); curriculum (references to Islam and its history are found in all subjects, (natural science, social science, languages, pictures used in the textbooks have female characters wearing head scarfs whether in the house or outside the house) and school practices (recitation of Koran and Naat at the morning assembly and all school functions, uniform for boys and girls, separate schools for boys and girls).

There are debates in the West about the role of religious education in schools and its link with the religious studies department in the universities and they should be complement each other (Barnes, 2015). These debates and discussions among the academics on possible ways to help each other (school teacher and university teacher) have suggested frequent interactions between these groups so that they can complement each other's learning and learn from each other's experiences. The academics in the university focus more on ethics and moral aspects of religion while the school teachers remained focus on the basics of the religion or religions, not going beyond the information and the teachings and connecting them to the present times. This interaction will help the teacher to have 'a depth of knowledge about a range of religious traditions and appropriate pedagogies for teaching them' and 'able to cover wider philosophical and ethical issues' (Jackson, 2004, p. 180). The studies have also revealed that a continuous linkages between schools and universities help both the parties to contribute positively in achieving the goals of education set by the state where religious and ethical development of pupils is also an important component of the formal schooling (Stoeckl, 2015; Jackson, 2016; Baumfield and Cush, 2017; Johannessen and Skeie, 2018).

The Islamic education (Islamiyat) textbook have focused more on the second aspect of the analytical framework, social peace (tolerance, solidarity and social responsibility) and very little content address the inner peace (good health and compassions) aspect of pupils. The peace with nature (Respect for nature, respect for life in all its forms and care for the environment) is not found in the textbook, except at one place where it is advised that we should not waste water (see Table 5 & 6).

Table 5 – Islamic Education Classes 9 and 10

| | |
|---|---|
| positive self-concept | سُورَةُ الْمُمتَحَنَةِ (Translation: Al-Mumtahanah, Chapter 60) سُورَةُ الْحَزَابِ (Translation: Al-Ahzab, Chapter 33) |
| inner peace social (good health and compassion) | 7- لَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ لَمْ يَرْحَمْ صَغِيرَنَا وَلَمْ يُوقِرْ كَبِيرَنَا ترجمہ: وہ ہم میں سے نہیں، جو ہمارے چھوٹوں پر رحم نہ کرے اور ہمارے بڑوں کا احترام نہ کرے۔ Translation: He is not one of us who does not show mercy to little ones (children) and does not respect elders. 8- الرِّشِيُّ وَالْمُرْتَشِي كِلَابِمَا فِي النَّارِ ترجمہ: رشوت دینے والا اور رشوت لینے والا دونوں آگ میں ہیں۔ Translation: The bribe and the bribe-taker are both in the fire. 9- مَنْ نَصَرَ قَوْمَهُ عَلَىٰ غَيْرِ الْحَقِّ فَهُوَ كَالْبَعِيرِ الَّذِي رَدَىٰ فُتُو يُنْزَعُ بِذَنْبِهِ ترجمہ: جس شخص نے کسی ناجائز معاملے میں اپنی قوم کی مدد کی تو اس کی مثال ایسی ہے جیسے کوئی اونٹ کنوئیں میں گر رہا ہو اور وہ اس کی دم پکڑ کر لٹک جائے تو خود بھی اس میں جا گرے۔ Translation: If anyone helps his people in an unrighteous cause, he is like a camel that falls into a well and is pulled out by its tail. 10- اِنَّ اَكْمَلَ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ اِيْمَانًا اَحْسَنُهُمْ خُلُقًا ترجمہ: یقیناً مومنوں میں سے کامل ایمان والا وہ ہے جو اُن میں اخلاق کے لحاظ سے سب سے اچھا ہے۔ Translation: The best among believers is one who is good in morals. 19- كَلِّمُوا رَاعٍ وَكَلِّمُوا مَسْئُولًا عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ ترجمہ: تم میں سے ہر ایک نگہبان ہے اور تم میں سے ہر ایک اپنی رعیت کے بارے میں جواب دہ ہے Translation: Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock. 20- خَيْرُ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ ترجمہ: لوگوں میں سے سب سے اچھا وہ ہے جو دوسروں کے لیے نفع مند ہے۔ Translation: The best people are those who are best in benefit to other people. لوگو! میری بات سنا اور سمجھو! ہر مسلمان کا بھائی ہے، کسی کے لیے یہ جائز نہیں کہ وہ اپنے مسلمان بھائی سے کچھ لے سوائے اس کے جسے اس کا بھائی ہر رضا و رغبت عطا کر دے۔ Translation: O' people, listen to my words carefully, behold! Every Muslim is the brother of another Muslim and it is not fair to take anything that belongs to his brother except he allows you to have it with his free will. |

(Continued)

Table 5 Continued

ہمسائے کے حقوق کے بارے میں حضور اکرم ﷺ نے خاص طور پر تا
کید فرمائی۔ آپ نے فرمایا کہ مجھے جبرائیل بار بار پڑوسی کے ساتھ
حسن سلوک کی تاکید کرتے رہے یہاں تک کہ مجھے خیال پیدا ہونے
لگا کہ شاید اللہ تعالیٰ ہمسائے کو وراثت میں شریک کر دیں۔ ہمسائے
کے اس حق کی روشنی میں انسان کو جہاں بہت سی ذمہ داریاں
سونپی گئیں وہاں اسے بہت سے حقوق بھی حاصل ہونے کیونکہ ہر
فرد کسی نہ کسی کا ہمسایہ ہوتا ہے۔

Translation:

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) exclusively expressed about the rights of neighbors. He said, 'The angel Gabriel (RA) asked me repeatedly to treat the neighbors politely and fairly. He emphasized it to the extent that I began to think, Allah Almighty would make the neighbors shareholder in the inheritance.' In the light of these rights where human beings have been entrusted with many responsibilities, they have also been given rights as everyone is the neighbor of another.

اپنے نفس پر اور دوسروں پر زیادتی نہ کرو اور ہاں تمہارے غلام! ان کا
خیال رکھو۔ جو تم کھاؤ اس میں سے ان کو کھلاؤ جو تم پہنو اسی میں
ان کو پہناؤ۔ اگر وہ کوئی ایسی خطا کریں جسے تم معاف نہ کرنا
چاہو تو اللہ کے بندو انہیں فروخت کر دو اور انہیں سزا نہ دو۔

Translation:

Don't inflict sufferings upon yourself nor upon others. You have slaves, treat them politely and gently. Give them to eat what you eat yourself; give them clothes you wear yourself. If they commit any mistake that you cannot forgive, set them free and do not punish them.

peace with nature (respect
for nature, respect for
life in all its forms
and care for the
environment)

خواہ مخواہ پانی ضائع نہ کیا جائے۔

Translation: Do not use water in a careless way and do not waste it.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Education is one of the tools used by states to shape and modify the behaviours of their citizens. Aristotle (Barnes, 2014) proposed the function of education as to create good citizens those can contribute in the economic prosperity of a state. Kant brought in the elements of respect and care as important functions of education as he argues that education should prepare students to add to the value and care system of a society (Siegel, Phillips and Callan, 2018). The twentieth century perspectives (Marxist and postmodernism) saw education as a tool used by the ruling class to use education including its elements to serve their purpose (Kellner, 2006; Sarup, 2017), hence keeping the status quo and contributing to the perpetuation of dominance of the ruling class. John

Dewey suggested that students are not mere passive observers, at the receiving end of a vicious cycle of domination but they are actively engaged in the learning and inquiry process through interaction with the teacher and his/her peers (Siegel, Phillips and Callan, 2018).

Education is a double edged sword, on the one hand it is used to transmit values, attitudes and cultural capital that contribute in the human development and progress of any society. On the other hand it is also used by various group(s) (religious, political, cultural and social) to showcase their power over the other group(s), their ability to control and reform any society. All is done in the name of positive change in the society. There are doubts about the efficacy of the education process and it is suggested that one should be cautious about the ability of education to effect any change in society (Bourdieu, 1977; Gramsci, 2001). The state must continue exploring possibilities of reforming education, but they should also bear in mind the preconditions needed to make use of the educational practices to bring about any change in society including building peaceful societies.

This study argues that peace education should be the focus of the Religious Education (Islamic Education and Ethics) and it should teach students not only about the positive self-concept; inner peace (good health and compassion); social peace (tolerance, solidarity and social responsibility) and peace with nature (Respect for nature , respect for life in all its forms and care for the environment) but also equipping them with the skills to manage conflicts in their classroom, schools and communities, thus extending the focus of religious education from religion to holistic development of individuals.

This study also suggests that the content of the Islamic Education textbook should become inclusive addressing the issues faced by the Pakistan from religious intolerance, lack of social cohesion, civic responsibilities, and environment issues to ensure sustainable peace in society. The ethics textbooks should also address these issues and move away from simplistic presentation of content and make students realise how everyone can work towards achieving the same goals of education in general and religious education (Islamic Education and Ethics) in particular which are positive self-concept; inner peace (good health and compassion); social peace (tolerance, solidarity and social responsibility) and peace with nature (Respect for nature , respect for life in all its forms and care for the environment).

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Gender Representations in Religious Education Textbooks in Turkey

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Abstract

Textbooks are important means for transmitting behaviours, attitudes and ideas about gender and gender equality. Representation gender in educational materials are highly significant for student's perceptions on gender issues. Compulsory religious education in Turkey has controversial debates about gender equality. This study uses critical feminist discourse analysis and semiotics to define and analyze gender representations in religious education textbooks. The textbooks which approved by Ministry of Education include gender stereotypes, picture woman in traditional roles, include gender inequality and relate woman to the concepts of compassion, love, care, and self-sacrifice.

Introduction

Gender in the Textbooks

There is not any direct statement about gender or gender equality in the religious education curriculum. But the curriculum states that it aims to educate students with national, spiritual and moral values. In addition to this equality and justice are two core values in the curriculum.¹ From this perspective it can be said that content of the course and the textbooks reflect a common point of view of Turkish society and should be acknowledge gender equality as justice and equality are defined as core values.

Textbooks are written by adults and transfer the cultural and traditional values, behaviours, ideas and presumptions to young generations. And they are also significant indicators of state's politics on education and huge effect on individuals and society. Gümüşoğlu states that it is very important to analyze textbook in regard of gender equality to understand problematic areas and create solutions to them about this issue.²

Research presents that educational textbooks in Turkey contain sexist language and ignore gender equality in the subjects of Turkish Language, History, Science and Knowledge of Life.³ In these textbooks woman is usually pictured in domestic roles. Research also shows that religious education textbooks which are used between 1980-2012 present man in a superior position and ignore gender equality.⁴

Methodology

¹ MoE (Ministry of Education), *Religious Education and Ethic Knowledge Curriculum for Grade 9-12*, Ministry of Education, Ankara, 2018.

² Firdevs Gümüşoğlu, *Ders Kitaplarında Toplumsal Cinsiyet*, Tarihçi Kitabevi, İstanbul, 2016.

³ Canan Aratemur Çimen, and Sezen Bayhan, *Değişen Ders Kitaplarında Sekülerizm ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği Araştırması I-II*, Karşılaştırmalı Eğitim Derneği, İstanbul, 2019.

Gizem Özmeriç Taştekin, *İlkokul Ders Kitaplarında Toplumsal Cinsiyet Temsilleri: Nicel Bir İçerik Analizi (Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, İstanbul, 2019.*

⁴ Mualla Yıldız, İlkokul ve Ortaokul Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Kitapları Görsellerinin Toplumsal Cinsiyet Açısından İncelenmesi, *Dini Araştırmalar*, 16(42), 2013, pp. 143-165.

This paper aims to determine representation of gender in religious education textbooks in Turkey. The research question is ‘Does religious education textbooks in Turkey acknowledge gender equality?’

A qualitative method is employed for this purpose. In this study critical feminist discourse analysis is used to analyze representation gender and gender equality in religious education textbooks from grade 4 to grade 12. A total number of 9 religious education textbooks were analyzed for this study. This study examined the textbook which is written at 2018 after the change of religious education curriculum. So all the books are currently in used at public and private schools in Turkey. this study focuses on the gender perception in the textbooks and it doesn’t include background or the process of formation of the perception.

Feminist discourse analysis offers ‘a critical perspective on such discursive representations vis-a`-vis the prevailing structural relations of power’.⁵ And this analysis consists of coding, creating categories, composing themes, and reaching the conclusions of text and illustrations.⁶ The process of examining the textbooks is done with the UNESCO’s gender equality guide for the textbooks. This quantitative method allows ‘to study and compare large amounts of material with a view to studying gendered identities and gendered social roles as a whole versus simply identifying sexism or discrimination against one sex.’⁷ Examination of the text and illustrations is done with two different questionnaires for the textbooks. With questionnaire for illustration all the characters are counted according to gender and with the questionnaire for text the features of gender descriptions are noted.

Findings

Finding in this research should be examined in two parts; finding about visual representation of genders in the text books and findings about gender inequality in the textbooks.

Visual Representation of Genders

Religious education from grade 4 to grade 12 textbooks include 260 visuals of humans (Table 1). These visuals can be classified as female, male, family, ungendered, group of people and people in mosque. Families and group of people can be described as mixed groups of female and male. And almost all the illustrations represent man or woman, ungendered images are used only 3 times in the textbooks.

| | Female | Male | Family | Ungendered | Group of People | Mosque |
|------------------------|--------|------|--------|------------|-----------------|--------|
| 4 th Grade | 1 | 9 | - | - | 2 | - |
| 5 th Grade | 1 | 13 | 2 | - | 3 | - |
| 6 th Grade | 11 | 28 | 6 | - | 2 | 15 |
| 7 th Grade | 10 | 16 | 1 | - | 7 | 2 |
| 8 th Grade | 2 | 17 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| 9 th Grade | 1 | 18 | - | - | 2 | 6 |
| 10 th Grade | 3 | 25 | 3 | - | - | 6 |
| 11 th Grade | 1 | 10 | 1 | - | - | 2 |
| 12 th Grade | 2 | 16 | - | - | 3 | 1 |
| | 32 | 152 | 14 | 3 | 22 | 37 |

Table 1. Breakdown of the Characters in the Text by Sex

Mosques are used as a meeting, praying, socializing, celebrating and learning center in the textbooks. But all the visuals of mosques include only male congregation. There are 37 photos or pictures of a group of man praying or meeting in the mosques but not any woman. This setting strongly conveys the message that mosques are male-dominant places and woman are not a part of this space. In addition to this woman images are shown usually in the houses and with the family. There are only 3 images that show woman in a working position, in two of these woman pictured as scientists and in the last one a field worker.

⁵ Michelle M Lazar, "Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis", *Critical Discourse Studies*, 4 (2), 2007, pp. 141-164.

⁶ Alice Shanthi, Lee Kean Wah, and Denis Lajium.. "Discourse Analysis as a Qualitative Approach to Study Information Sharing Practice in Malaysian Board Forums." *International Journal on E-Learning Practices*, 2, 2015, pp. 159-169.

⁷ Carole Brugeilles, *Promoting Gender Equality through Textbooks: A methodological Guide*, UNESCO, Paris, 2009, p. 29.

Females pictured as working or studying only three times in the textbooks; a field worker, a scientist and a doctor among male doctors. Other visuals don't express any educational background or competence of females. On the contrary; males are usually pictured as educators, scientists, heroes, scholars, and soldiers.

| | n | % |
|--------|-----|--------|
| Female | 32 | %14,47 |
| Male | 189 | %85,54 |

Table 2. Breakdown of the Image of Female and Male

Representation of woman and man visuals in the textbooks show that there is a huge gap; only 14,4 percent of the visuals includes woman and man characters are over presented by the textbooks. Woman visuals are usually related to themes of love, respect, praying, friendship and submission of God. Man, visuals are usually related to working, praying, wisdom, and responsibility.

Gender Representation in the Text

The language of the books usually neutral and doesn't convey the idea of gender inequality directly. But representation of man and woman in the textbooks, definition of being a good man and woman, qualifications of characters from history demonstrate an inequality between man and woman. In addition to these there are only 2 statements about respecting gender equality in the textbooks. Gender representation of the books can be examined in superior qualifications of man, equality in education, domestic responsibilities, and female examples.

Features of Woman and Man

The books often give examples of male characters in history with the features of heroic deeds, wisdom, courage, educator of the society, and scholar. In the books male characters take part as follows; "He showed heroic attitudes in his young age", "He was a good teacher and warrior", "He became a symbol of courage and heroism".⁸ Despite consolidating the idea of heroic man the textbooks don't include and female examples for the same roles.

Examples of woman characters defined with virtues and values of modesty, self-sacrifice, motherhood, and piousness; "Another example of modesty among young people is Meryem (Mary). Her virtues are modesty, decency and devotion.", "Young girls and woman also converted Islam in that period of time. Omar's sister Fatima, Ebu Bekir daughter's Esma and Ayse were in this group. They suffered and made self-sacrifice for this cause.", "Young mother Fatma raised her children with Islamic values. Thus, Hasan and Huseyin were Islam's shining stars with their exemplary personalities."⁹ Textbooks convey the message that a female can be valuable if she sacrifice herself for others, is a devout person or become a mother and raise her children in a perfect way. This inequality between representation of man and woman assigns specific roles for boys and girls.

Equality

Equality of woman and man takes part only 2 times in the textbook and all of them referred the same hadith of prophet Muhammed. This teaching of prophet Muhammed says to Muslims that "Learning is a religious duty both for man and woman." Textbook emphasized this teaching of prophet in 2 different grades¹⁰ but other than these there is not any statement about equality between man and woman. The illustration which used in these two parts show woman characters are reading Quran, so this right of education is related to learning about Islam or religious education.

Domestic Responsibilities

The textbooks don't refer a specific gender when mentioning about domestic responsibilities and chores. It emphasized that mother, father and children in the family has their own responsibilities and they should fulfil them for favour of the family. But textbooks don't make any distinction or definition of division of labor in the house

⁸ Numan Konaklı, Hüseyin Çınar, Süleyman Emiroğlu, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi 10*, MEB, Ankara, 2018, pp. 46-48.

⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 42-45.

¹⁰ Safiye Özdemir, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi 6*, Ada Matbaacılık, Ankara, 2019, p. 91.
Konaklı, op. cit., p. 81.

and emphasis on personal responsibilities can easily refer to continue of inequal domestic responsibilities and reinforce traditional gender roles.

Exemplary Characters

Textbooks frequently gives examples from historical characters in the context of Islamic cultural heritage, early Islamic scientists, Muslims who contribute their society and the world today. All of the examples of significant individuals are only man and there is no woman is given as an example in this context. The “Science and Religion” theme on the 12th can be an extensive example of this issue. While the book is discussing about the relationship of science and religion it gives examples of only Muslim male scientists.¹¹ There is not any Muslim woman scientist under this theme.

Conclusion

This research results show that religious education textbooks represent man and woman in classical and traditional gender stereotypes. Woman usually is shown in the house whereas man is shown outside of the house. Pictures and illustrations in the textbooks are also demonstrate that woman deal with household and act as caregivers or pictured as devout individuals. Differently from this man usually appear as kings, wise persons, opinion leaders, soldiers and religious leaders. Textbooks relate woman with the concepts of motherhood, love, compassion, care, self-sacrifice, and modesty. Concepts of courage, wisdom, bravery, and intelligence are associated with man.

The textbooks contain indirect messages about superiority of one gender to another. Overrepresenting man characters in the textbooks and giving woman characters limited space with mainly domestic roles cause a lack of role models for girls. And on the other side boys also suffer from lack of role models from the opposite sex. Besides Turkish is a genderless language there is no two different words for third person singular or plural like English. The word ‘o’ refers both sexes. This situation seems like an advantage for create genderless language in the textbooks but inequality in representations of woman and man ruin that positive atmosphere.

The issue of gender equality needs to be find voice in the curriculum clearly and unambivalently. Textbooks should include woman images and examples for every proper subjects; important people from the history, contemporary change makers, as a part of professional life, as a participant of prayers in the mosque. Especially mosques are places that open for everyone and images or discourse that not including woman suggests woman are not belong to social aspects of the religious culture.

The perception about gender, gender roles and gender equality can be change and improve by education. Thus, teaching materials in the school have a significant role on students point of views. Changing the language, gender representation in illustrations and discourse of the textbooks in according to equal rights, gender equality, and contemporary problems can be make a huge difference on education of the new generations. Visuals and notions are important means to shape mind sets thus to create more equal understanding about gender we should start with selection of illustration and concept in textbooks and beyond.

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The Hidden Force of Gender and Sexuality: A Pedagogy of Truth-Seeking

Abstract

This paper analyzes the forces of gender and sexuality that evoke intense controversies in religion, society, and politics, and influence acts of discrimination and violence. Exploring the roots of this violence, the paper analyzes cases of marginalized sexual minorities, anti-abortion violence, and domestic violence in relation to assumed truths. Truth claims carry the force to threaten human life, as revealed by a social psychological and theological analysis of such claims. The paper thus aims to uncover and critique the forcefulness of gender and sexuality in generating truth and post-truth and to pose a pedagogy of truth-seeking that can evoke more liberating truths and social change.

January 6, 2021 was a day of infamy in the United States. It was a day of tragic violence, perpetuated by political leaders in team with a mob, taking human lives and permanently damaging the bodies of people charged with protecting the Capitol and the people in and around it. Further, it was a day of tragic violence to democracy in the U.S. and, by extension, worldwide. Yet, the day is increasingly ignored, excused, even justified by segments of the U.S. leadership and citizenry. Why? In addition to the motivations in these segments to gain votes or win political votes, I argue that a far less visible motivation is in place as well, namely the protection of racial, sexual, and gendered hierarchies that the mobs themselves proclaimed, as did those who encouraged them. These hierarchies and the violence that protects them from being dismantled are vicious in their force, and all the more so because of their invisibility. My focus here is on the U.S. landscape, but the dynamics I describe can be found in many forms in many parts of the world. I hope this paper will be an invitation for introspection by peoples in the U.S. and across the globe.

As I write this paper, the news is now filled with controversy about denying transgender girls the right to participate in school- or community-sponsored sports in some states of the U.S. At the same time, questions are being posed as to whether President Joseph Biden will be permitted to receive the Eucharist in his Roman Catholic Church because of his support for women being granted legal choice regarding abortion. These issues also flare in other parts of the world. Why would these issues reach the level of state or religious mandates, especially when the targeted persons – transgender girls or a President – are focused on human rights and not on mandates for all transgender girls or pregnant persons. What dynamics underly these curiously gendered constructions? While I applaud wide space for diverse opinions on the issues themselves, I seek in this paper to dive beneath surface opinions to underlying values that persons across political and social spectrums take for granted, to their (our) peril.

My purpose here is to analyze the evidence that controversies and violence in religious communities and the larger public sphere are often rooted in dualistic, hierarchical views and structures of gender and sexuality. I make a case that gendered controversies are supported by social psychological and theological dynamics that may be largely invisible but shape highly visible discriminatory practices, even massive movements of hate. Ultimately, these dynamics and practices disrupt the wholeness of the human family. My culminating purpose in the paper is to foster social change through a pedagogy of truth-seeking, recognizing that a fuller understanding of gender and sexuality can uncover deep human issues, assumptions, and untapped powers for social change.

My thesis is that sites of enflamed controversy and violence are often sites where the forces of gender and sexuality are shaping truths and post-truths as absolutist claims that must be defended at all costs. James Wilets (1997, 990), analyzing legal issues in such controversies, draws a connection between violence against women and sexual minorities and “a polar construction of gender, in which nonconformity with gender expectations is enforced by violent and nonviolent means.” He further argues that “violence against both groups is rooted in a system of male dominance.” In such a hierarchical system, I argue for human communities to recognize the dangers of truth claims that are forcefully and absolutely held, and the urgency to develop a pedagogy of truth-seeking.

To dive deeply into this analysis, I will make three moves: (1) *uncover* the dynamics of gender and sexuality, as they relate to violence against women and sexual minorities; (2) *critique* the underlying forces that create or support gendered and sexual hierarchies and the violence that arises to protect these hierarchies; and (3) *propose* a pedagogy of truth-seeking toward the end of liberating people from the destructive patterns.

Uncovering Dynamics of Gender and Sexuality

Uncovering is a formidable challenge in a world so heavily shaped by assumptions about gender and sexuality that the assumptions are taken to be immutable facts. My analysis of the present context draws on particular examples, as explored through data on violence, public discourse in news coverage, and social analyses offered by public commentators and scholars. The public conversations are a source of insight into what rises to the levels of attention and what is barely visible or is missing altogether.

As a port of entry, note the several contradictions in public values in the U.S. Why do prohibitions persist in many countries and communities with regard to birth control? Why do some people rail against abortion, while supporting the separation of children from their families at the U.S. southern border or rejecting federal and state support for children’s health care and schooling? Why do many communities forbid women’s leadership in religion and public affairs with an argument to protect the traditional roles of women and family values, yet ignore and even reinforce domestic abuse against women through religious rules and counseling? Why do persons who identify as LGBTQIA still experience rejection, negation, and active abuse in familial, religious, communal, legal, and political structures? Why do people fear and isolate other human beings who identify as trans or gender non-binary, failing to grasp their widely diverse experiences? Why are these contradictions often mocked as issues of political correctness, rather than matters of human rights? How can people so easily convert the sexual

and gendered diversity of human lives, well documented by science and personal narratives, into labels of sin and ethical mandates?

All of these questions are paired with a more primal reality. People fail to recognize their (our) deeply held values that fuel controversies and contradictions. I argue that these controversies arise from sexual and gendered values roaring beneath the surface. A deep dive into the undercurrents can reveal the pernicious efforts, conscious and unconscious, to preserve structures that control and demean some people in order to preserve heteronormative, largely white, male hierarchies.

While this claim may seem more obvious to some than to others, research reveals a strong connection between acts of social-political violence and the attitudes and actions toward people who seek abortions; seek to preserve the choice of women, even if they themselves would not choose an abortion; or identify as women or gender non-binary. For example, many of the people who committed acts of insurrection on the U.S. Capitol on 6 January 2021, are frequent protestors at abortion clinics, where they shout threats, often violent ones (Vásquez 2021). Never mind that their threats sometimes rise to the level of threatening people's lives with the claim that they are protecting unborn babies. Why and how do people and issues related to gender and sexuality get paired with violent words and actions, and what is the connection between the violence arising from certain ideologies and the violence directed toward people whose gender- and sexual-identities are outside white male dominant norms?

In this paper, I do not assume or argue the absolute truth of any particular position on gender or sexuality; rather, I seek to uncover the close relationship between violence and dominance-reinforcing values that people often hold regarding gender and sexuality. Such values motivate threats, fear, and further subjugation of women and sexual minorities. The numbers of women victims of domestic abuse (far outweighing parallel numbers for men) is one example. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) reports:

... 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience severe intimate partner physical violence ... 1 in 7 women and 1 in 25 men have been injured by an intimate partner... 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men in the United States has been raped in their lifetime ... (NCADV 2021; see also: Truman and Morgan 2014; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control 2011; Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, and Mahendra 2015).

This data sample reveals gendered connections with violence, and similar data reveals the staggering violence and murders of sexual minorities.

In addition to metrics, qualitative studies and news and journalist reports underscore the connections of gender and sexuality with violence. Consider the example noted above of violent actions against abortion clinics and the connections of the perpetrators of that violence with the insurrection on the U.S. Capitol on January 6. One commentator, Tina Vásquez (2021), is a journalist with *Prism*, a BIPOC-led (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) news outlet that focuses on news underreported in other media. She presents data and incidents that reveal a close relationship between the largely white, male protestors at the Capitol and the predominantly white, male protestors of abortion and women's health clinics, who have often harassed, threatened, fire-bombed, murdered, and stalked individuals and the clinics where they work or

seek services. Vásquez presents evidence that increasing numbers of anti-abortion protestors and perpetrators of violence are active in white supremacist groups, and are increasingly active in white supremacist rallies, including the January 6 march on the Capitol, which was peopled by a large number of violent protestors who also participate in violent protests outside clinics. Why do morally complex choices regarding abortion get tangled with absolutist claims, religious and political show-down issues, violence, and threats of violence. Something is at stake here beyond differences of opinion.

I invite you to examine one more case in the uncovering process, namely, the shooting spree in the Atlanta, Georgia, metroplex, on 16 March 2021, targeting three Asian-owned spas and murdering eight people, including 7 women, 6 of whom were Asian. As the courts and media consider whether this spree was an anti-Asian hate crime or a crime motivated by sexual addiction, the conversation itself is revealing. The issues curiously ride on what the shooter has said, himself claiming that the murders were motivated by his sexual addiction and his need to purge temptations. He had gone to the spas in the past. The case is still being considered as I write, so much is not known. What is known, however, both by the shooter's words and those of his pastor, is that the "sin" of sexual preoccupation and addiction are easily and quickly framed within their white evangelical church. It is, after all, a sexual sin. On the other hand, the fact that the shooter claimed no anti-Asian hatred, despite his targeting Asian-owned spas and mostly Asian women, suggests that a race-related crime does not fit so quickly into religious and white cultural frameworks.

The sexual explanation of the crime is also individualistic, focused on the sexual obsessions of the shooter. To name this as an anti-Asian crime or anti-woman crime would be to label it as communal, racial, and gendered; however, the focus primarily on Asian women did not gain traction for either the shooter or his pastor in the initial weeks of interviews and reports. Sexuality, especially focused on women and their appeal to men, again takes center stage in the analysis of sin and violence, but it does so in an individualized way that obscures other social, hierarchical issues. Sex becomes the great detractor, and the focus on the women as temptresses reinforces stereotypical portrayals of Asian women, while leaving the sin of white supremacy and racial hate unexamined. In this case, sexuality is not ignored as a hidden force, but it is individualized and personalized to the neglect of larger social patterns, reinforcing white, male hierarchies.

The issues I raise here are attracting an increase in popular and scholarly attention. Some scholars make a case directly about the shootings in Atlanta, writing in the popular press. Mihee Kim-Kort (2021) points out that the colonial project has created an image of "hypersexualized Asian women, through forced sex and sex work, casting them as docile creatures that brought comfort." The issues Kim-Kort raises are subject to larger, more extensive investigations by multiple scholars. Christine Hong (2020) is one who has studied the forces of imperialism and colonialism, recognizing how these forces are intertwined with the demeaning of women, queer-identified persons, and people of non-white races; they then become victims of imperialistic projects. Returning to the case of Asian women murders in Atlanta, Kim-Kort also accents the cultural heritage of sexual attitudes that span multiple cultures: "The fear of temptation the killer is reported to have had was born decades before his birth. Absolute moral ideals of virginity or marital sex have long been linked to conservative white Christian attempts at what is sometimes called 'sexual containment' or more popularly known as purity culture."

On this latter point, Kathryn House (2020) analyzes the history and continuing legacy of white evangelical purity culture (WEPC), which she describes as enmeshed in the history of slavery and white supremacy in the U.S. She also analyzes women's testimonies to the wounding experiences of WEPC, discovering the three-fold dynamics of shame, misplaced blame, and silence. House argues that purity culture is bound with destructive hierarchies (1-14). WEPC promotes women's passivity with a male God and then with men, and it assigns to women the full responsibility for sexual boundary-setting and the consequent blame if a man transgresses those boundaries. Further, WEPC focuses on individual values and behavior with no attention to social and cultural dynamics. House demonstrates that the denigration of African American women's bodies and sacralized elevation of white women's, reinforced racial hierarchies and also set women's prescribed passivity in opposition to women's rights, e.g., the right to vote. WEPC also emphasized heteronormativity, thus rejecting LGBTQ persons. House seeks to show connections of such purity cultures with racism, sexism, and homophobia, making the point that "the success and efficaciousness of WEPC – and of preceding historical movements for sexual purity – depended on erected gender, racial, and sexual binaries and hierarchies" (14).

The interacting powers of gender, race, and sexuality have been well illuminated in studies of intersectionality, some of which are now written as educative guides for self and communal reflection (Kim and Shaw, 2018). The kind of uncovering represented in this section points to the importance of uncovering in community and educational settings, where people can study challenging issues and complex dynamics, where they can ask new questions with minds open to new discoveries. This is no small task, given the range of public opinions and the hidden forces beneath the surface, especially when the questions pertain to controversial issues and sensitive subjects like sexuality.

Analyzing Forces Behind Gendered and Sexual Hierarchies and Violence

To analyze the hidden forces of gender and sexuality requires a deeper dive. I seek to do this in two ways: (a) case study and analysis of public conversations regarding the 2017 U.S. ban on transgender persons from serving in the military, and (b) social-psychological and theological analysis of the controversy, especially in the face of truth and post-truth claims (McIntyre 2021, 2018; Baldwin 2018).

Bans on Transgender Persons

The force of sexuality and gender in the public sphere is evident in the hotly contested case of banning trans persons from the U.S. military. U.S. bans stand in contrast with many less-restrictive countries, such as New Zealand (Treiber 2020); however, U.S. policies and attitudes can also be seen in worldwide patterns. For example, the United Nations has not succeeded in passing a charter of civil rights principles to protect LGBTQ persons, nor have the UN treaties provided such protections.

The current treaties under which a majority of countries operate are insufficient to protect gender identity as a class of peoples. Of the nine core international human rights treaties, not one explicitly mentions sexual orientation or gender identity, or the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender individuals (285, cf. 283-288).

Issues of sexuality and gender, in several parts of the world and in the international community as a whole, seem to be more controversial and easier to push aside than those related to many other civil and human rights.

The U.S. focus on LGBTQ people in the military has soared in recent years, especially since the Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy was established in 1993, even though the policy itself was intended as a compromise, creating a way for LGBTQ persons to keep their secrets and enter or remain in the military. Heated public conversation at that time revealed the strong feelings people held regarding their diverse perspectives, and the DADT compromise followed a common pattern in which ardent, oppositional views were "resolved" by placing harsh limitations on sexual minorities.

To complicate the situation, sexuality and gender are entangled with other social issues, as noted earlier in the case of the murders in three Asian-owned spas in Georgia. Christine Hong (2020, 195-218) demonstrates how limitations on LGBTQ people are also entangled with U.S. imperialism and racism, as seen in wars in Iraq and Korea. Her analysis reveals deep-seated prejudices against LGBTQ persons and the persistence of discriminatory behavior over time. The 1993 DADT policy was a path of denial, alongside U.S. denials of racial discrimination in the military and at home. These denials defy truth-telling; yet people cannot understand the complex realities and change paths without an open search for truth.

To extend this case study, consider the actions and reactions that erupted with a presidential ban on trans people in the military in 2017, which was fully enacted in 2019. On 25 August 2017, CNN (Cable News Network) reported: "President Donald Trump on Friday directed the military not to move forward with an Obama-era plan that would have allowed transgender individuals to be recruited into the armed forces, following through on his intentions announced a month earlier to ban transgender people from serving." The President's action also included a ban on medical treatment for trans people who were already in the military (Diamond 2017). President Obama had repealed the DADT policy in 2011, and the complete enactment was still in process, halted by President Trump 2017 directive. This paper is not an in-depth study of the policies and practices, but the shifts themselves reveal the strong passions that fuel debates regarding LGBTQ persons in the military, with a particularly strong focus on trans persons.

I have tracked the public discourse through a review of 102 news reports and commentaries on the issues, produced between July and December 2017 and representing a political spectrum. Three major themes emerge: (1) the burden of military policy falls on LGBTQ people themselves, whose lives are dramatically affected by shifting, discriminatory policies, especially bans; (2) the public discourse on the issues has given voice to strongly stated and denigrating descriptions of LGBTQ persons; and (3) political partisanship, sometimes personalized, has affected policy decisions and generated additional heat. The result, as in the cases discussed above, is that an issue related to sexuality and gender-identity becomes a fulcrum issue, even as it limits and targets one group of people. Again, this reveals the gravitational pull of sexuality and gender as hidden forces behind major public controversies, often to the neglect of people most affected.

President Trump had announced the trans ban on twitter a month before signing the August 25 directive. According to FOX News, the twitter announcement “touched off a firestorm” (Chakraborty 2017). The explanations given at the time included the attempt to save a military spending bill of \$790 billion by removing treatments for trans persons, a tiny percentage of the spending package (Davis and Cooper 2017). In fact, the CNN report cites a Rand Corporation study that estimated the health care costs for trans persons between “\$2.4 million and \$8.4 million a year, an amount that would represent an ‘exceedingly small proportion’ of total health care expenditures” (Diamond 2017). The President was making a monetary argument to save a spending bill by reducing it by the 0.0003 to 0.001 percent cost of trans healthcare. The facts here reveal again the power of sexuality and gender in major policy issues in the U.S. The *New York Times* quoted Tony Perkins, then President of the Family Research Council, an influential conservative Christian conservative organization. Perkins shared one of the Council’s daily prayers from the days before Trump’s announcement: “Grant repentance to President Trump and Secretary Mattis for even considering to keep this wicked policy in place ... Grant them understanding, courage and willpower to stand up to the forces of darkness that gave birth to it and wholly to repeal it” (Davis and Cooper 2017). Tony Perkins, after the first Trump tweets in July, had made the following statement: “I applaud President Trump for keeping his promise to return to military priorities – and not continue the social experimentation of the Obama era that has crippled our nation’s military” (Chakraborty 2017). These quotes reveal the religious and political energy that undergirds the move to reject trans persons, even in the face of civil rights and trans advocacy groups and amid critiques of the ban from both political parties. Strong statements for and against the ban were the order of the day (Chakraborty 2017; Johnson 2017).

The consequences of the trans policy shift is that the study commissioned by the former President Obama had opened pathways for trans persons in the military to say openly, beginning in summer 2016, that they were trans. The revocation left those people in a vulnerable place, caught between the 2017 rejection of trans people from the military and their own public witness, making them subject to discrimination, both official and interpersonal, as in the case of Dan Choi (Hong 2020, 195-199). Human Rights Watch responded with these words: “Ejecting capable, qualified individuals from military service solely because of who they are isn’t just discriminatory, it’s arbitrary and cruel. Congressional leadership should turn their condemnation into action and stop this abhorrent policy from taking effect” (Thoreson 2017).

Alongside these political commentaries was another flurry of news stories and commentaries when the final version of the 2017 ban was approaching enactment on 12 April 2019. The conservative outlet Newsmax reported that Elaine Donnelly, of the Center for Military Readiness, argued that “the new policies will lead to a stronger military,” offering data about mental health visits and expenses incurred by trans persons in the military, seemingly making a case with a piece of evidence that runs counter to the Rand Corporation report described in some detail by others. Donnelly also argued that the Obama administration “mandated that everyone in the military endorse the idea that a person of transgender can transform themselves from one gender to the other. There was no room for dissent allowed” (Patten and Hoffman 2019). Such a “mandate” on an idea (or perspective) was not found in the reports of Obama’s action, but the strong statement was consonant with the work of the Center that had focused on banning LGBTQ persons and limiting women in the military since the advent of DADT in 1993. A month after the Newsmax article was published, the American Medical Association made an announcement that built on its own earlier ones regarding the Trump reversal: “The only thing

deficient [in the ban] is any medical science behind this decision. The AMA has said repeatedly that there is no medically valid reason—including a diagnosis of gender dysphoria—to exclude transgender individuals from military service” (McAneny 2019). The perspectives in news commentaries continued to be strongly held and expressed.

The case of bans in the military reveals the complex motivations involved in political actions related to gender-identity. Emma Green (2017) reiterates many points made above, citing the Rand study and explicating the bi-partisan critique of the 2017 action by President Trump, as well as the heavy support for the ban by conservatives and the Trump base. She concludes: “While the decisions have been framed as efforts to protect states’ rights and troop performance, they inevitably hold a culture-war valence.” These views were echoed by many others, and the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) responded similarly:

The mission of the NAACP has always been to ensure the political, social and economic equality of all people – and President Trump’s directive to the military is in complete opposition to that mission. We pledge today to stand with our transgender brothers and sisters as we continue to fight any efforts to codify discrimination into law (Johnson 2017).

The military controversies provide insight into the newly erupting controversies regarding trans girls playing in sports, a controversy that erupted when a sports ban was advanced in Montana on the same day that President Biden announced an executive order to allow trans people to serve in the military, thus reversing Trump’s action (Wax-Thibodeaux and Schmidt 2021). Amid U.S. efforts to end a pandemic, address racism and health inequities, and reestablish economic stability, several states have now enacted laws that ban trans girls from playing sports in their schools and communities. Some commentators argue that this is a diversionary tactic to change the subject from the pandemic, racism, and economics. The cases of transgender bans do clearly reflect the depth of controversy and the ease of turning attention away from other social urgencies toward bans on gender minorities.

Social-Psychological and Theological Reflection

The passions that fuel these controversies can be understood psychologically and theologically. In the U.S. and in many parts of the world, the communication of alternative facts, outright lies, and conspiracy theories is so commonplace that it has created a post-truth landscape in which people unashamedly lie for their own benefit and/or assume that “truth” no longer matters. In such a situation, the common pattern in public discourse is to communicate from an ideology that serves one’s own purposes and power and/or builds upon long established assumptions and prejudices. The situation I describe exists across the world in diverse forms, and it generally exploits sensitive topics such as sexuality and gender while it reinforces hierarchical and oppressive social patterns that benefit persons expounding post-truths.

Questions of “truth” are not easily resolved, but resolution never arises from a strategy of “my word against yours.” Standards of truth, and theories about truth, have traditionally relied on empirical, logical, practical, and/or consensual evidence, even though truth can never be finally settled into absoluteness. *By truth, I mean a search toward knowing the world that is grounded in cultural and religious traditions, observations and experience, reason, consideration of diverse*

perspectives, and openness to new discoveries. This list reveals the complexity of truth-seeking and truth-telling. One narrow focus to the neglect of others will lead to serious skewing of truth. *By post-truth, I mean acceptance of the factuality or certainty of something based on one's own assumptions, preferences, and personal goals, or those of one's cultural group.* Whereas truth reaches toward the broadest understanding possible, post-truth focuses on benefits for a particular person or group, and is easily used as a weapon against others, based on nothing more substantial than potential gains for a person or class or group of people.

Social psychologists have long studied questions of “truth” in human societies. Lee McIntyre’s recent work on post-truth and cognitive bias (2021, 2018) builds on the earlier work of Leon Festinger. McIntyre quotes Oxford Dictionaries to define post-truth: “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (2018, 15). He identifies this phenomenon in the 2016 presidential election and presidency in the U.S. and in the campaign for Brexit in the UK. He also recognizes that inevitable tensions exist between what is true and not, recognizing that truth is never fully definable. People live in the tension between truth-seeking and the unreachability of a final, definitive truth.

One way to hold the tension is to abandon efforts to seek truth altogether, leaving truth to individual choice. Another way is to accept the tension and to pursue “truth,” knowing that the searcher will never reach a definitive end. In the case studies presented above, the individualistic, unquestioned, or abandoned notions of truth do not serve well in helping human beings reflect on distorted truths and the damage they do. Truth-seeking, however elusive, is important to the quest for compassion and justice in the human family.

To understand how difficult truth-seeking is, I turn again to McIntyre, who makes a connection between post-truth and cognitive bias – a mechanism that protects people from psychic discomfort, e.g., regarding their own sexuality or their acceptance by others. Biases can reduce psychological tensions, even when clear evidence points in a different direction. In studies of cognitive dissonance, people may perceive one thing with their senses (e.g., the length of a line) but give a false answer that conforms with what others have said (2021; 2018, ch. 3). Cognitive bias can also take the form of accepting dominant assumptions without questioning, or adopting the perspectives that are most rewarding for you personally or most compatible with the views of people with whom you want to associate. Such biases and post-truths are further fed by news silos that “tell us exactly what we want to hear” (McIntyre 2018, 55). I suggest that, when strong forces of gender and sexuality are involved, the personal and social stakes can be very high for people, thus reinforcing their resistance to evidence, logic, and diverse voices that counter their biases.

Theologically, cognitive bias stands in contrast to the search for truth and it defies the transcendent or unknowable nature of truth. Even so, religious communities participate in cognitive bias, often assuming their truths are definitive and superior. Further, they offer religious justifications for cognitive biases, amplifying the forcefulness. The phenomenon of bias in religious communities is particularly strong in relation to gender and sexuality, where issues of gender identity, sexuality, women’s roles, abortion, and celibacy take center stage, even as sexual abuse of minors or violence in families is often addressed individually and quietly. The

intense focus on some issues (often related to women and sexual minorities) and the near silent focus on others reinforce hierarchies of power.

Every religious tradition has contradictory texts and practices that can be quoted for biased purposes. This is particularly true of religions grounded in sacred texts, which carry religious mysteries from many ages and circumstances. People can easily draw selectively upon their traditions to support their biases, which are rarely shaken by debates. More is at stake than textual interpretation; people hold emotions and self-understandings that are difficult to abandon. Among these are deep-seated beliefs about: the superiority and rulership of men over women; complementary roles of men and women that place limits on women's roles; sexuality as the root of human sin; gender as defined in binary terms; and the sinfulness of same-gender attraction or gender non-binary existence. These patterns have been culturally and religiously reinforced over centuries of male, elitist hierarchies; thus, they endure. Patterns of the past, led in Christianity by powerful male leaders, shaped attitudes about gender and sexuality that they passed to later generations, who perpetuated them. Women themselves have sometimes defended these power hierarchies ardently alongside men (Thomas 2021; Shaw 2021; Darby 2020; Blee 1991).

In Christianity, a counterweight also exists. Biblical texts often witness to compassion and justice that break open hierarchy, as Jesus's challenge to a crowd when religious leaders asked about stoning a woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) or Paul's admonishment that in Jesus is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28). Religious texts do not give recipes for belief and action, but they open windows into truth, inviting people to search. Theistic religions further address the complexities of truth by recognizing that God/Allah/the Holy is Truth, and humans can only receive and reach toward it through a fog of unknowing. True wisdom is in God. People may hold strong theological positions but might at the same time recognize the fallibility of *any* position. Such a view invites people to search for truth, but not to possess it.

Practicing a Pedagogy of Truth-Seeking

Truth-seeking is a liberating practice, or a cluster of liberating practices. The practices reflect acts of uncovering and analyzing, and they are amplified by McIntyre's studies of "post-truth" and the journey toward recognizing falsehoods. A pedagogy of truth-seeking engages in liberating practices of truth-listening, truth-telling, circle-widening, truth-analyzing, and wholeness-seeking. Such is the journey from the bondage of oppression to the promise of wholeness. The practices named here are compatible with those I and others have put forth in the past, but they are particularly focused on uncovering the forces of gender and sexuality and addressing oppression, whether in religious communities or interreligious classrooms.

- (1) ***Truth-listening***. Listening is vital to truth-seeking, beginning with listening to mystery. Truth-seeking is a work of human hubris if it does not include listening rituals, such as prayer, meditation, and study, or listening for the sacred. Listening also includes intense attention to others and their views, including persons in your community, public voices, and the diverse experiences of human and religious cultures across time and space. In settings where people selectively choose what they want to hear, listening can be severely reduced. Educational settings can provide opportunities for listening to one another, to diverse voices in the larger society, to religious traditions, and to deep questions if educators are wise in creating brave spaces of mutual support.

- (2) **Truth-telling.** Truth-telling takes many forms – telling one’s own truth and the truths of one’s people; studying the historical and contemporary truths of a larger society; challenging post-truths, alternative facts, and conspiracy theories; and recognizing that truth is a search toward new discoveries, disrupted biases, and reshaped perspectives. Because people experience different truths, truth-telling is important with diverse persons and cultural communities so people can move out of echo chambers where they hear from people like themselves. Post-truths obstruct truth-telling, accumulating power when groups take them on with absolutist force; thus, post-truths need to be addressed head-on (McIntyre 2018, 122-123), even if the post-truths sound outlandish or highly resistant to change. Research indicates that repeating facts in the face of a lie can finally lead people to question the lie, even reaching a tipping point at which the post-truth no longer seems worth entertaining (124-125). Telling-truth includes telling and questioning all truths, as well as discerning which truths are most viable and worthy of attention. Finally, truth-telling is a work of community, drawing people together to wonder at mystery and wrestle with hard questions, seeking larger truths than individuals can discover alone.
- (3) **Circle-widening.** Another key element of truth-seeking education is widening the circle of people, texts, contexts, and life situations in order to receive and ponder views that are different from those that people encounter in their daily lives. Consider the power of film, narratives, interviews, art, walks in the neighborhood or nearby forests, and other pathways of truth-telling.
- (4) **Truth-analyzing.** A fourth practice is analyzing truth in relation to the experiences and questions of the learning community and the diverse voices that the community has encountered. This practice is important, as I rediscovered in writing this paper. How could I engage the hidden forces of gender and sexuality without analyzing events, political actions, and public discourse? The power of these hidden forces would otherwise be invisible or would hinge on my own imperfect perspective. As more people are involved in analyzing, the textures of understanding grow.
- (5) **Wholeness-seeking.** The practices to this point lead toward a practice that requires abundant courage, namely wholeness-seeking. The word sounds innocent, but seeking wholeness requires an honest and disruptive engagement with the practices named above and then the courage to deconstruct knowledge and systems, even educational systems, that we take for granted, as Christine Hong (2021) proposes for theological education. To seek wholeness requires also that educators reconstruct our own knowledge, systems, and patterns of interaction.

If we can begin to do these things, we can open doors for a wider embrace of patterns of gender and sexuality that honor the dignity of all persons and communities. We will open doors for liberation.

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Practicing Radical Compassion in the Restoration of *Koinonia*: Contextual Analysis of Sexual Abuse by Clergy in the Korean Immigrant Church

Abstract

Faith communities can be a site of harm for young women and even of sexual abuse by clergy. The hierarchical structure of the Korean immigrant church, combined with its androcentric image of God, reinforces the adult-centered educational ministry and its male-clericalism. This essay proposes radical compassion through transformative listening and remembering the disremembered to restore young women's dignity and allow congregants to return to the creation of *koinonia*.

Case Study

Eun-Ha Kim¹ was an adolescent when she began to attend a Korean immigrant church in New York City, where she had just arrived from South Korea. This church was the ideal place for her to meet and socialize with other Koreans. One day, the church secretary mentioned that Pastor Kim, the senior pastor, had invited her for a glass of water in his office. She considered Pastor Kim to be her spiritual father, so she felt no concern about the invitation, but as soon as Eun-Ha entered his office, he put both hands on her breasts. He said, “You are beautiful! Thank God for giving us such a lovely daughter to the church.” She froze. After she left the office, a youth group leader saw the bewildered look on her face and asked her what had happened. After listening to her story, he promised her that he would report it.

The following week, Pastor Kim called her into his office with her best friend. He began by expressing his affection for all of the youth in the church, implying that this justified his behavior. Instead of receiving an apology, the pastor accused Eun-Ha of lying and of being a homewrecker. Nor did the youth group leader follow up on the incident. Her friend who had nothing to do with the incident at the time got extremely upset at why she was also called in to listen to his pathetic excuses because of you. Eun-Ha's abandonment by the church was compounded by her friend's refusal to do something about what had happened to her. Eun-ha publicly addressed the crime, but the congregants ignored her voice and did not take any actions to support her. Externally, Pastor Kim continued to lead the church as if nothing had happened. Eun-ha continued on in silence, believing that in doing so she would be sacrificing herself for the good of the church. She eventually left the church, feeling powerless.² Her story is an example of how women can be marginalized after being sexual abused by clergy. It is even paradigmatic of patterns following sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy in Korean immigrant churches and their aftermath. Eun-Ha received no emotional, physical, or spiritual support from the church.

When sexual abuse is committed within a faith community by its clergy, it is difficult to advocate for victims from within the institution. Because it did not take immediate steps to protect Eun-Ha, the church showed greater concern for its reputation than for a suffering member

1. The story is real, but pseudonyms are used instead of the real names.

2. Pseudonym, “Story #3,” Times Up Moak Yang (blog), Accessed November 27, 2020.
<https://www.timesupmoakyang.com/3>.

of the congregation in its midst. Because Korean immigrant churches are still influenced by Confucianism, which centers strict obedience to authority, their congregants tend to oppose any significant response to crimes committed by senior clergy. The youth group leader had a responsibility to report the abuse to others in the congregation, but he did not take adequate measures to protect the community. Many leaders do not know how to deal with these types of offenses, particularly from a pastor. When sexual violence by clergy is concealed, the victims are left to defend themselves alone. Church leaders’ failure to recognize, let alone respond to, her assault added to the harm perpetrated on Eun-Ha. This had the added consequence that Pastor Kim could continue to sexually abuse young women without any concern for damage to his reputation or his interests.

Thus, the sexual violence described in this story persists because faith communities do not have established restorative practices to respond to violence, particularly sexual abuse by clergy. How to practice radical compassion to restore the communities harmed by clerical abuse? Craig Dykstra describes the church as the community of Jesus Christ. “The deep, almost physical knowledge of the love of God in Jesus Christ that constitutes faith is above all the community’s knowledge. The presence of Jesus Christ is a presence in, to, and through the community of Jesus Christ.”³ For Elizabeth Caldwell, the church, as the place of that community of Jesus Christ, creates a space of a learning community of Christians that extends across the ages.⁴ Thus, the faith community should be a welcoming space where learners engage in communication within vibrant dialogue.⁵

Summary of Thesis

This thesis investigates how religious education could be used to transform faith communities and empower silenced young women who have survived sexual abuse by clergy through the practice of radical compassion. It examines the effects of such abuse witnessed in the Korean immigrant church. My examines what practices can be adopted to transform faith communities and cultivate communal faith that encompasses both young women and congregants as a whole. To fulfill this purpose, I present a small-scale case study of a Korean immigrant church near New York City.⁶ The church can be site of harm and even clerical sexual abuse for young women. An androcentric image of Christ combined with a male-dominant clericalism within patriarchal church structures tends to prevent congregants from supporting young women who have suffered at the hands of those who are high up in that hierarchy. The adult-centered ministry that dominates Korean immigrant churches tends to overlook younger voices. I suggest that the Korean immigrant church should pursue radical compassion to empower vulnerable young women and to develop communal faith within the congregation to lead them to take action in support of young women. I propose that such faith communities should practice radical compassion through transformative listening and remembering the disremembered to restore *koinonia*.

3. Craig R. Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* 2nd ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 40.

4. Elizabeth Caldwell, “Religious Instruction: Homemaking,” in *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning*, ed Jack L. Seymour, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 78.

5. Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known : A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1983), 69.

6. I use publicly available first-person accounts of clergy sexual abuse.

Faith Communities Can Be Sites of Harm

Immigrant churches can be spaces of community, personal growth, and healing for those who are far from home, facing a range of challenges, including poverty and unfamiliarity with the social environment local customs. These religious institutions can be sanctuaries and can serve as a lifeline for immigrants otherwise bewildered by the unfamiliar local culture. Unfortunately, such institutions may not only be communities of support. In Korean immigrant churches in the United States, such communities have been sites of harm, especially for young women who have experienced sexual abuse at the hands of clergy. There have been numerous cases of pastors or other prominent church leaders sexually assaulting female congregants, exploiting the patriarchal aspects of Confucian culture and recent immigrants' vulnerability. Much of Korean culture is rooted in Confucian values, which are patriarchal, hierarchical, and communal ones; these tend to guide Korean immigrant churches' approach, flanked by ethical systems. Coupled with androcentric images of God, these aspects of the culture have a great deal of power in Korean immigrant churches. Sexual abuse by the clergy in these churches can leave vulnerable young women traumatized, marginalized, and cast out from their only support network. This presents a challenge to immigrant communities, where a church scandal may tear a community apart, and it can also lead to a loss of faith for those who have been abused.

The Confucian Influence and Androcentric Images of God in Korean Immigrant Churches

Confucian values, which emphasize respecting hierarchies, giving all authority to elders and leaders, is not only a major influence over Korean immigrant churches but plays a major role in shaping Korean society, relationships, and power dynamics as a whole, leading developing a tendency toward male-dominated leadership along with expectations of total submission to authority.⁷ The patriarchal structure of Korean immigrant churches endows male pastors and church leaders with authority, which they may retain even when it is frequently abused. The dominant male leaders seek to render Korean women obedient within the church, justifying their subordination to men by emphasizing the sexist perspective that women should sacrifice themselves to please male authority figures.⁸ As a result, women in church communities are often restricted to with little authority, such as Sunday school teachers, education department pastors, and church cooks. These cultural effects have been proven to be harmful to women's equality and sense of self-worth.

This combination of the patriarchal and hierarchical values, coupled with androcentric images of God that are drawn from the Christian tradition, reinforces male pastors' authority. This androcentrism leads congregants to grant male pastors a nearly divine authority. This is partially owing to clericalism, which refers to a radical misunderstanding of the place of clergy in Christian churches.⁹ The idea is grounded in the erroneous belief that the clergy, as sacramental ministers, are superior to their congregation. A male religious leader who has unquestioned

7. Jonathan Y. Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 102.

8. Namsoon Kang, *Diasporic Feminist Theology Asia and Theopolitical Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 318.

9. Ally Moder, "Women, Personhood, and the Male God: A Feminist Critique of Patriarchal Concepts of God in View of Domestic Abuse," *Feminist Theology* 28, no.1 (2019): 86.

authority within the church is honored and revered by his congregants, even if he commits crimes, such as sexual assault. More importantly, the combination of the cultural dysfunction and androcentric Christianity in this environment reinforces the marginality of women, particularly young women, who are engaged in valuing the communal practice over the individual practice.

The centering of communalism over the individual practices is a natural outgrowth of the circumstances of Korean immigrant churches. Communal practices, in particular, dictate sacrifice for the church and dedication to others, and these are seen as Christian virtues because they are the primary practice of a love ethic in which one loves one's neighbors to cultivate one's individual faith. The communalist practice of sacrifice, however, creates the expectation that members will prioritize group harmony at the expense of their own individual lives.¹⁰ Churches sometimes require congregants to choose communal goals and harmony of the group when a conflict exists between the group and the individual.¹¹ The individual's values, identity, and experience will likely be ignored and neglected in such churches. These cultural mores lead congregants to practice self-sacrifice to increase obedience to the church. This communal emphasis reinforces congregants' obedience to their male clergy, even in circumstances that would ordinarily damage its reputation.

Fragmented Educational Ministry

The educational structures in the church are fragmented, which can impede young congregants' sense of belonging. The Sunday school model of education is prevalent in Korean immigrant churches, which segregates the children's services from the adults'. The rationale for this is that the developmental needs of children are different than those of adults, and that there is a need for age-appropriate teaching and learning. HyeRan Kim-Cragg writes that “the problem is that this becomes the only or the most dominant way of doing children's teaching ministry without considering the importance of intergenerational and wholesome learning opportunities.”¹² This structure can alienate children youth from the larger church community. Even though youth do actively participate in the church from within the bounds of their own corner of the community, this fragmentation also prevents them from sharing their concerns on a daily basis with adult congregants. As a result, adults do not perceive them as full members of the church.

The focus on teaching silence and obedience in Korean immigrant churches has led youth not to flourish in their lives of faith in the church. This learning is called the banking model of education, as identified by critical pedagogy scholar Paulo Freire.¹³ In the banking model, learners are considered empty receptacles that are to be filled with information and knowledge that can be simply withdrawn at another time when the knowledge is needed. This conception of education prevents youth who have suffered in faith communities from thinking critically about the problems that they, as victims of abuse, have faced. An adult-centered ministry that teaches obedience without critical thinking forms youth not equipped to exercise agency or find

10. Boyung Lee, *Transforming Congregations through Community : Faith Formation from the Seminary to the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 8.

11. Lee, 8.

12. HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Interdependence : A Postcolonial Feminist Practical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018), 58.

13. Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th Anniversary ed (New York: Continuum, 2000).

condoned voices and authentic thoughts.

This project is based on primary source research and a case study of female survivors of sexual violence perpetuated in Korean immigrant churches by church leaders. From the case study, it is clear that victims can often be hidden in plain view due to the detachment of adults from children in Korean immigrant churches. Even if they share the worship space and other rooms, they remain separated within the ecclesiological structure. Moreover, the silenced voices and the self-sacrifice they endure for the church demonstrate how young women can be marginalized and be alienated in the church, even though they its victims. These victims are silenced and hidden within the church structure, which is evidence that the church treats their trauma as acceptable, as something that can continue to exist insofar as it does not disrupt the other limbs of the fragmented church body.

The Challenges of Young Women

The larger society still devalues girls and discourages them from becoming strong women.¹⁴ Like the world they inhabit, many churches are hesitant to focus on or explore the complexities of being an adolescent girl in an ecclesial setting.¹⁵ Churches tend not to see the problems that girls face in becoming young women. For example, church communities may be ignorant of or unwilling to discuss sexism, a central problem faced by young women in these settings. It is not easy to know in detail the context that these young women find themselves in because church leaders do not deal with the problems that women face in their churches. Church leaders tend not to perceive the gravity of sexual abuse when male church leaders groom young women, who might be particularly obedient, dedicated, and pliant in church communities.

Sexual grooming is part of the pattern of sexual abuse, where offenders exploit their power over a young person to ultimately abuse them sexually or emotionally. Here, the abuser builds a relationship that appears friendly, innocent, and without suspicion. Young people frequently experience sexual grooming in faith communities because they implicitly trust adults within these faith communities, so they may not know what is happening. If they do not feel total trust, as is often the case, they may nonetheless feel as if they have no choice but to trust due to the other's authority. In particular, youth who consider the church to be a safe haven, may trust church leaders fully without hesitation. Their fervent faith makes it harder for them to perceive whether a church leader's actions are even wrong, as these moral guides may convince them that they have their own good intentions.

The Challenges of Young Women in The Faith Communities

Since a young age, many Korean American women rely on Korean immigrant churches for a sense of identity, connection, and faith, making them vulnerable to leaders who would exploit their power over them. In churches, female youth often perceive clergy—particularly male church leaders—as significant because they show a strong connection with God. These young women, therefore, tend to see clergy as special or sacramental people. Thus, young women are at

14. Emily, Peck-McClain. *Arm in Arm with Adolescent Girls : Educating into the New Creation. Horizons in Religious Education* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018), 96.

15. Peck-McClain, 96.

risk of suffering sexual abuse from clergy because they confuse clerical power with divine power. When this occurs, young women are constrained from sharing their experiences in girls' groups due to their compulsion to sacrifice their own concerns and ignore their own adverse experience for the sake of the community. The sense of shame is added to by their own personal shame.¹⁶ They often learn that obedience of the clergy is a prime virtue according to the will of God. In their special vulnerability to this abusive form of power, female youth requires a safe space where their voices can be heard.

The faith formation of young women generates internalized misconceptions that can facilitate their grooming by male leaders.¹⁷ According to James Fowler, adolescents express a synthetic-conventional faith, in which values, commitments, and relationships are seen as central to their identity and dignity, at the same time as worth is heavily keyed to approval and affirmation by significant others.¹⁸ Thus, as Fowler articulates, youth feel unrecognized ambivalence about their dependence on others for their identity.¹⁹ At the same time, their connectedness is paramount for them in terms of interpersonal and social aspects.²⁰ When key relationships end or central roles collapse or are lost, people at this stage are put at serious risk. The stage of faith development posits that youth's faith is influenced by significant authority figures, so relationships with clergy can bring a sense of connectedness.

At this stage, young Korean American women struggle with their identities as Asian females as well. In her ground-breaking research on young Asian American women, Christine J. Hong showed that spending time together, allowing them to share their self-perceptions or their individual spirituality instead of in terms of studying an explicit curriculum, provided a comfortable feeling for Korean American adolescent girls.²¹ This means not only sharing their anxieties, but also actively participating with the congregation to allow them to shape personal identity and spirituality. The girls need informed educators who can incorporate their personal, cultural, and social struggles including with sexism and gender-based violence, into conversation about their experience regarding the silence and ignorance of the church in the face of their experience of sexism in the explicit curriculum.²² The church plays a vital role as a place for young women to discover self-affirming, human dignity, and the creation of God.

Sexual Abuse by Clergy the View of Three Curricula

When its congregants do not stand up for the abused and marginalized within their communities, the Korean immigrant church can be a site of harm. Through the lens introduced by Elliot Eisner, it seems clear that Korean immigrant churches educated congregants in three curricula in terms of sexual violence by clergy. Adult teachers and other members have unconsciously adopted the

16. Angella Son, “Confucianism and the Lack of the Development of the Self Among Korean American Women,” *Pastoral Psychology* 54, (January 2006): 325–336.

17. Susan A Ross, “Feminist Theology and the Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis,” *Theological Studies* 80, no.3 (2019): 646.

18. James W. Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 65.

19. Fowler, 66.

20. Fowler, 66.

21. Christine J. Hong, *Identity, Youth, and Gender in the Korean American Church* (Palgrave Pivot, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 81.

22. Hong, 82.

orientation of the Korean immigrant church that champions male clericalism. As part of the null curriculum, the absence of any girls’ group or any other means of hearing these stories prevents a girl from being able to discover her dignity and cultivate her faith identity. In addition, congregants as bystanders do not know how to respond to sexual abuse by clergy or how to stand with the marginalized who are struggling within their communities.

Eisner’s three curricula provide a framework for understanding the reaction or lack thereof from the church congregants who might be expected to support the victims of sexual assault. Young women feel extremely uncomfortable speaking out when they are implicitly taught that their silence was valued, but they are also powerless as subordinate in the hierarchical, patriarchal, and communal culture of church structure.²³ Churches deny their experiences of suffering, silencing them gruesomely, and this is what led Eun-Ha and others in her situation to leave the church, no matter how well beloved.

The Reactions of Asian Young Women

Young women who experience sexual abuse from the clergy often do not stand idly in their victimhood; many have found personal agency and power through their crises and have challenged themselves to confront the church community. They have cultivated a new kind of communal faith that creates a safe space, defends the rights of young women, and speaks out publicly. It takes only one girl to break the silence, using her voice to encourage other victims in her church to speak out as and to create solidarity with others, as was the case with Eun-Ha. Even though Eun-Ha did not find a safe space her church community, another girl who experienced abuse in the same church began to share her experience online through the #ChurchToo movement.

This movement, following #MeToo, has witnessed an outpouring of sexual victimization disclosures on social media. #ChurchToo describes “a space for people who have suffered from the structural sexism they see as embedded in many church cultures to speak about their experiences,” according to Tara Isabella Burton.²⁴ The #ChurchToo movement exposes clerical abuse of youth, regardless of denomination. It seeks justice in society and more specifically within church communities. Its actions support the faith community as it reimagines the functions and roles of the church and the faith lives of young women in particular. In addition, this movement leads young women who have been sexually abused to rediscover their agency in living a life of faith as well as offering congregants a chance to envision a new kind of communal faith.

Interestingly, #ChurchToo has encouraged many other women with similar experiences in the immigrant church to speak out about their experiences as well and find solidarity with others. These individuals seek to facilitate a safe space to share their silenced stories online to remember them and prompt some recovery of church communities. Sharing their experiences and their

23. Boyung Lee, *Transforming Congregations through Community : Faith Formation from the Seminary to the Church*, 16.

24. Tara Isabella Burton, “#ChurchToo: Abuse Survivors Speak Out about Harassment in Their Religious Communities,” *Vox*, November 22, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/11/22/16690384/churchtoo-abuse-survivors-harassment-religious-communities>.

authentic and unedited stories with others has given them the courage to overcome their anxiety to seek justice within the church. Finally, courageously sharing their authentic experiences may ultimately change the minds of some congregants so that they can, ultimately participate in young women’s suffering with solidarity. In this participation, they can work toward the healing of the division and brokenness within that appears throughout the church. When the voices of all these victims are collected, the congregants may develop a sincere awareness of the depth of the problem.

However, the #ChurchToo movement cannot be the only alternative for transforming the faith community and healing young women’s trauma. This movement supports the victim’s authentic voice, rights, and dignity, but often it can only assist them after they have already departed the church. As part of a broader social movement, #ChurchToo cannot heal a particular faith community. Faith communities tend to prioritize the congregants who stay within the church and potential members of the church rather than victims who have already left. After the victims leave, their churches often seek to erase the incidents that pushed them out as soon as possible to ensure that the church can continue to flourish. Senior pastors, even new ones, and church leaders avoid making public statements about these problems. However, in spite of the factors that weight against it, one would hope that the church could be a haven as the body of Christ and to could restore *koinonia*, practice standing with victims and educating congregants who experienced sexual abuse by clergy as bystanders.

The Church as *Koinonia*

In biblical accounts of church communities across history, it can be seen that the church considers itself to be metaphorically the body of Christ. That is, the church is not merely a human organization; it is brought into being by the activity of the Holy Spirit, which binds believers into a living union with the crucified and risen Lord.²⁵ The church in its role as the body of Christ can be understood broadly through the Greek word *koinonia*, which can be translated as fellowship, sharing, or communion. Being part of a *koinonia* goes beyond simple membership in a church, involving the sharing of others’ each other’s joy, grace, fear, grief, and suffering. The faith community cares for each congregant’s joy and suffering, particularly for its weakest members, such as young women who have been sexually abused. A *koinonia* can play the role of taking power from the center to the margin and from the margin to the center in a constant motion, making the structures of the faith community more flexible for those who are on the margin with the oppressed persons.²⁶ We must have equal concern for each other to realize the interdependence of all the members of the body.²⁷

The Restoration of *Koinonia*

The educational function of a *koinonia* brings congregants together to participate more fully in

25. Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 214.

26. Letty M. Russell, *Church in the round : Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 26.

27. Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians. Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 173.

the faith community, called a community of practice. The community of practice, as defined by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, is where community members come to participate in a group, bringing the knowledge, experience, and skills to perform in an apprenticeship.²⁸ Similarly, Joyce Mercer writes that the community of practice is the place where participation in the church’s activities, discourse, and diverse ways of meaning-making is shaped in relation to the body of Christ.²⁹ Full participation in church as part of the *koinonia* allows congregants to practice the life of faith to achieve the ideal of the Body of Christ. Congregants can cultivate their faith through the practice they show to others, particularly those who are marginalized, in the church where they have crucial roles within a space of practice. Charles Foster defines a faith community as “a people whose corporate as well as personal identities are to be found in their relationship to some significant past event.”³⁰ The identities of church members are also shaped by the ways that they respond to events in the lives of the faith community, including difficult experiences, especially those involving the negative actions of clergy. In this way, the community of practices is where Christians are called to respond with practices that reflect its values, beliefs, truths, and convictions for marginalized young women in parallel with restoring a church as a *koinonia*.

A faith community lies at the basis of educational principles of practice. Citing Foster’s definition of the faith community, Mary Young describes the faith community as its practice, which leads members of the congregation to social agency.³¹ Practicing and learning allow a faith community to cultivate interdependence as the body of Christ. Indeed, congregants can discover their community’s identity by acting for those who have suffered, with the participation of others who are suffering in their lives. If congregants do not participate in young women’s suffering, they fail to communally actualize the faith community as a *koinonia*. It is familiar to all congregants, that their practices in response to young women who are assaulted by clergy indicate the vision of the faith community that engages everyone in collective sacrifice. The restorative practices empower young women’s dignity and recover collective sacrifice for the weakest among the congregants.

Practicing Radical Compassion Toward Restoring *Koinonia*

Compassion has been defined as “the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another’s suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering.”³² This definition is limited, as it only uses terms of feeling and emotions, thus neglecting to mention how it might relate to action on behalf of others who have suffered. Frank Rogers, Jr., in his book *Practicing Compassion*, describes an embodied practice of compassion in parallel to showing how people cultivate compassionate

28. Jean, Lave and Etienne, Wenger, *Situated Learning : Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Learning in Doing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 23.

29. Joyce. Mercer, *Welcoming Children : A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 172.

30. Charles R. Foster, “The Faith Community as a Guiding Image for Christian Education,” in *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education*, ed. Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 54.

31. Mary H. Young, “Religious Education and Communities of Learning and Practice: Inspiring Advocacy in Public Ministry,” in *From Lament to Advocacy: Black Religious Education and Public Ministry*. ed. Wimberly, Anne Streaty., Nathaniel D. and Annie Lockhart-Gilroy, (Nashville, TN: Wesley's Foundry, 2020), 62.

32. Andrew, Dreitcer. *Living Compassion: Loving like Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 2017), 21.

action toward others by first attending to compassion for themselves.³³ Rogers introduces the four practices of compassion: (1) catching one’s breath, (2) taking one’s pulse, (3) taking another’s pulse, and (4) deciding what to do.³⁴ These four movements indicate the meditation of people who cultivate true compassion for ourselves, for others, and for the world. These practices focus on the embodied practice of cultivating compassion.

In addition to Roger’s meditative practice of compassion, I suggest that radical compassion, which concentrates on transformative action toward others, can be a practice that can reshape the faith community and society in general. Radical compassion accomplishes this through two practices: transformative listening and remembering the disremembered, each of which aids in restoring *koinonia*. Faith communities that have experienced sexual abuse by their clergy require restorative practices, not only for healing young women, but also for transforming faith communities as reflections of the body of Christ. When survivors of sexual abuse by clergy and members of the congregation practice radical compassion together, they can promote awareness toward restoring *koinonia*, empowering survivors.

Practicing Transformative Listening

For survivors and supportive members, transformative listening means not only authentically hearing what people are saying about their experiences of suffering, omitting any bias, but also acting on their behalf to help them find a sense of restorative belonging. Transformative listening is a practice that has the potential to restore the ideal of *koinonia* in the faith community because it builds a foundation of authentic relationships in the trustworthy faith community. Creating a safe space is dependent upon negating the fear of being judged or misunderstood in vulnerable sharing.

Transformative listening in a safe small group lets young women to share their experiences, including finding a healthy sense of belonging. It also enables young women to consider what practices are necessary to create a culture of sexual respect within their faith community. Dori Baker argues that an intentional small group in faith communities for girls can facilitate a safe place where they can share meaningful stories from their lives.³⁵ The bonding that occurs within small groups can enable victims to transform their identities from those of victims to survivors, therefore affirming their agency, together with cultivating a healthy sense of belonging in the faith community that is a more reflective image of the body of Christ. Moreover, young women can develop their camaraderie with other survivors who have suffered gender-based violence by listening to their stories. Their newly cultivated agency and communal support can empower the victims to find their voices without shame.

Transformative listening encourages members of these safe small groups to attend to their harms, cultivate attention to their needs, and re-establish healthy relationships, to the degree possible, with survivors in their faith communities. Unbiased listening to young women’s stories of trauma is not a passive practice but rather an active one that enables faith communities to understand

33. Frank, Rogers. *Practicing Compassion* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 2015), 19.

34. Rogers, 19.

35. Dori Grinenko Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology : God-talk with Young Women* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 30.

survivors’ trauma. Listening to young women who have been sexually abused by clergy without judgment or condemnation invites them into critical thinking about their situations and helps them develop healthy strategies of resistance that do not involve sacrificing themselves or their relationships.³⁶ Transformative listening can lead congregants to act for marginalized young women in faith communities, thus contributing to the empowerment of these young women to (re)discover their dignity and agency. The practice of transformative listening is important for faith communities, as it could be a site of haven for the whole community to hear its own voices and discern the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The practice of transformative listening creates the faith community as the body of Christ that can transcend the harmful elements of the underlying cultural understanding of Confucianism in Korean immigrant churches. As described above, in many of these churches, the relationship between congregants and young women is defined by boundaries that are formed by traditional hierarchical structures, which might make young women hesitant to speak out their genuine stories. Transformative listening, however, encourages church communities to respect young women’s voices, including affirming their agency. This, in turn, changes their church’s supportive attitudes toward young women. Listening to youth’s stories might bring incongruous emotions to the surface for teachers, friends, and bystanders. However, if they can silence their own voices of doubt and listen to the pain of the victims, this will show what the ideal community of Christ can be like.

The existing dynamics between youth and adults in church communities can be a challenge to the pursuit of transformative listening. The language barrier between Korean-speaking adults and English-speaking youth is one such source of alienation.³⁷ However, once a strong relationship is built in a safe small group, including solidarity among teachers who support survivors’ agency and identity, younger members might be willing to do the difficult work of healing old wounds in faith communities. Authentic intimate relationships in safe small groups in the church allow marginalized young women and congregants to have the courage to take faithful action for social change.³⁸ Finally, silenced victims can become empowered without anxiety. These practices can help restore healthy communal faith among members of the group.

Practicing Remembering the Disremembered

Remembering the disremembered is an invaluable opportunity for congregants to facilitate the restoration of *koinonia* and for congregants who are not involved in the incident. The practice of remembering disremembered incidents, such as sexual abuse by clergy, can shape a trustworthy faith community toward becoming a truer body of Christ as well as building an unwavering community. It also allows congregants to practice the restoration *koinonia* after a negative incident of a crime within a church community.

A faith community may struggle with the aftermath of sexual abuse allegations against their clergy. In the case study, the communal bonds between congregants were broken because of the

36. Jennie S. Knight, “Transformative Listening” in *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*, ed. Mary Elizabeth Moore and Almeda M. Wright (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008), 233.

37. Knight, “Transformative Listening,” 235.

38. Knight, 240.

diversity of perspectives on the incidents. Those who believed the victims no longer trusted the pastors and developed animosity against the core members of the faith community who failed to take appropriate action in response to the initial incidents. As a result, some congregants moved to other churches, and some even lost their faith. However, those congregants who did not believe the victim's story instead neglected the victims'. These leaders wanted to let these incidents go and maintain a false sense of unity in the church community. However, when church communities forget the trauma of such victims, they are not only neglectful, but they are also inadvertently harming congregants not directly involved in this type of incident. The church cannot be the body of Christ, which shares the burden of their suffering together and restores *koinonia*, which is based on honesty and trust, due to the absence of any caring discussion and healing of young women's trauma.

Remembering the disremembered, as an act of acknowledging victims' pain, is an essential practice for a church that is to truly transform its community into the body of Christ. To remember the disremembered allows the church to become a transformative community that contains suffering, grief, and sorrow.³⁹ Mary Elizabeth Moore explains that the role of tragic memory in sacred teaching is to allow people to respond to the world, both in its sacrality and its woundedness.⁴⁰ In other words, instead of instantly forgetting the failure of the church community to play its role of the body of Christ, congregants should practice unwavering, steadfast solidarity with victims and preserve their painful memories to truly heal the broken community. This practice, remembering the dismembered, leads communities to gradually grow as the body of Christ, thus cultivating a stronger sense of communal faith by contemplating tragedies in the church.

The church should empower women and grant them dignity, both in the church and in public, instead of burying wounds and scars. For example, in 2008, the Sam-il Presbyterian church in South Korea established the Christian Anti-Sexual Violence Center to create solidarity in the fight for church reform and justice for victims who have suffered systemic sexual misconduct.⁴¹ This is a profound action of remembering the disremembered, and it will function by simultaneously bringing the community closer to restoring *Koinonia* and rectifying the wounds not only by the victims but the community at large.

After the Christian Anti-Sexual violence center was established, the Sam-il Presbyterian Church began to cultivate communal faith for the church to stand up for victims. Specifically, it announced a public statement that the church, as the body of Christ, has a responsibility to deal with these kinds of incidents in the church. The church created an emergency-measures committee for victims to empower their agency and to sustain their faith in the church and for congregants to have the opportunity to practice *koinonia*.

In addition, the Sam-il Presbyterian Church financially, emotionally, and spiritually supports victims of sexual abuse by clergy in any church community. It now works with several professional organizations in the areas of anti-sexual violence to heal victims. Importantly, the

39. Mary Elizabeth. Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 65.

40. Moore, 65.

41. Jinyoung, Kim, "Sam-il Presbyterian Church Facilitates Anti-Sexual violence Christian Center," *Christiantoday*, December 27, 2017, <https://www.christiantoday.co.kr/news/307707>.

numerous victims who have experienced clerical sexual abuse in faith communities are encouraged to speak out through anti-sexual violence centers. This work shows other church communities that, as the body of Christ, *koinonia* is restored when the disremembered are remembered. This exemplary practice of remembering the disremembered gives some insight into what true faith communities look like and can accomplish if they address their wrongdoing and turn them into points of growth rather than pure shame. In this sense, there is hope that the church is in the midst of an ongoing transformation to be the body of Christ by standing with marginalized young women, including honoring their wounds.

Conclusion

Here, I offer a vision of recovering the role of the faith community toward restoring *koinonia*, along with radical compassion accompanied by transformative listening and remembering the disremembered. The church should treat individual's dignity as part of the body of Christ, even when a Korean immigrant church is under pressure from cultural influences and traditions, to allow young women to be empowered and for congregants to cultivate communal faith, including standing with the marginalized. Along with the establishment of a strong communal faith for the weakest members, the church should hold sacred the dignity of each individual member.

Restorative practices enable faith communities to learn who they are, what they live by, and what their vocation is. Solidarity with young women, alongside practices that affirm their dignity, can free those young women from the pressure to conform and from the fear of retaliation.⁴² Through these practices, faith communities can shift the dominant paradigm from a male-dominant clericalism and adult-centered ministry influenced by Confucianism to gender equality and the empowerment of the marginalized through a critical interpretation of the Bible and study of diverse theological perspectives. Religious educators should teach in a manner that nurtures the critical interpretation of the biblical sources that reinforce male clericalism and hierarchical structure in the educational ministry, perspectives that interfere with the prevention of sexual abuse by clergy and the empowerment of young women.

This research might lead to pursuing study (1) embodied pedagogy for young women for healing their trauma, (2) meaning-making work regarding their traumatic experience settings to discover young women's vocation and church's communal vocation. Further exploration is warranted to develop a pedagogical methodology, a model of embodied pedagogy, and an approach to trauma-informed pedagogy. Church leaders must be trained to prevent sexual abuse by clergy and mitigate its negative effects, including healing the survivors' trauma as part of their own discerned vocation.

42. Knight, “Transformative Listening,” 240.

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*Searching for Christian Religious Education:
Embodying the Field*

Abstract:

What is at the heart of Christian religious education? Through a content analysis of over 60 syllabi for introductory classes, this project searches for what holds our field together. The congregation as setting for learning and the praxis of teaching/learning are core tasks found in all syllabi. Yet, the field is more. The differences among the syllabi invite us to consider how we address current cultural realities. Attending to identity formation and the expanding contexts for religious learning enlarge the contributions of our field.

Problem:

“The structures that have organized Christian religious education for the last 100 years are no longer effective. We cannot continue to replicate the practices of the past.” These wise words paraphrase how one of our colleagues begins a syllabus for an introductory course in Christian religious education. We all know these words are true. Indeed, the past visions and practices of Christian education must change – yet, from what, to what?

The paraphrase poses questions that many of us have been asking about our field. What are we about, what are our practices, and what effect do we have? Furthermore, here in the interfaith gathering of the Religious Education Association (REA), we ask a larger question: how does our focus on religious education hold us together? How does Christian religious education contribute to our dialogue?

This paper seeks to offer some answers drawn directly from our teaching. It hopes to help us continue to define our field. It offers a case study of Christian religious education in the U.S. and Canada. I invite others to extend the research from their cultural and national perspectives. Christian education in Europe, Asia, or Africa holds something in common with the North American perspective, but is profoundly shaped by history, culture, and nationality.

We know we are in the midst of religious change in the U.S. The most recent poll of religious life in the U.S. noted that for the first time the number of people actively involved in any regular religious practice had fallen below 50%.¹ In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on the budgets of theological schools and church-related colleges and universities. Fewer jobs are available in religious studies. Several denominational colleges are dropping academic departments, including religion. And “Christian” as an adjective tends to be

¹ Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time,” *Gallup News* (March 29, 2021). <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>

used in the media to represent a particular group of people and misses the wider and more diverse reality of Christian communities.

The formal field of Christian religious education (CRE) was born during a period of religious expansion and developing professions. REA was also organized at that time – in 1903. Sunday schools were expanding as were large teacher training programs. Denominational and interdenominational agencies supporting education were thriving. Catholic parochial school programs were healthy and growing. Preparing teachers for schools, directors of education for parishes, youth and children’s workers for congregations and neighborhoods, church and community workers for community projects, local directors of councils of churches, and pastors fueled the hope that CRE could affect public living. Seminaries and colleges expanded their degrees in religious education and hired faculty in “Christian education or religious education.”² By the late 1920s, some theological seminaries even reported that their largest student population was preparing to be educators.³

While the Great Depression and WWII put a hold for a time on much of the expansion, church attendance increased after the war through the 1960s. CRE saw a resulting resurgence with the expansion of curriculum publishing and denominational agencies dedicated to educational ministries, including the National Council of Churches ecumenical Cooperative Curriculum Project.⁴ Professional groups for Christian religious educators were founded or expanded in the late 1960s and 1970s. Protestants and Catholics joined together in academic societies for the study of education. Of course, while the theories that fueled our work were changing, the future of the church looked secure. CRE was expanding!

In contrast, the last 40 years have been a time of decline. Less church participation, the shrinking of denominational staffs, fewer local church Christian educators, and less vitality in professional organizations has raised questions about the field and its future. No wonder we say: “The structures of CRE are no longer effective.” Yet, educating people of faith, enhancing inter-religious communication and learning, and contributing to public life are as greatly needed in the present as they were at any time in the past.

Project:

This project is one effort to search for the field of Christian religious education. There are many ways to address questions about our field. We could review denominational data, examine curriculum options, or assess congregational practices. We could explore themes in key monographs, examine articles in professional and academic journals, or interview a sample of faculty who teach Christian education. All would be valid efforts. However, this project seeks to explore what is at the heart of CRE by examining what scholars who teach and write in the field actually teach their students.

² At that time, religious education and Christian education were often used as synonyms.

³ Remember that this growth was focused on the white middle class. Efforts to address racism were quite limited.

⁴ The CCD project included mainline Protestant denominations and a group of African American denominations. See CCD, *The Church’s Educational Ministry: A Curriculum Plan* (Bethany Press, 1965).

As we have sought to redefine our field, we have drawn on theology, education, social sciences, and cultural studies. Many of us have written books identifying important themes. We have examined approaches, contexts, and commitments. Yet, the fact is that what we teach in our classes and what we ask of our students is how we “embody” our field – the values that represent us. Our classes reveal what we practice.

This empirical study thus reports the commitments reflected in our courses and the practices we expect from our students. Years ago, Chris Argyris and Donald Schön helped us understand the differences between espoused theories and theories-in-use. An espoused theory attends to what we explicitly say we believe. A theory-in-use is what we in fact engage in our practices. This project therefore reviewed syllabi for basic courses in Christian religious education taught in theological seminaries, colleges, and universities to uncover the clusters of theories-in-use in our teaching.

To provide a hint of the findings, despite differences, we share a field of study. We use a set of texts, we repeat many themes, and our pedagogies facilitate, confront, and create spaces of healing for people and communities. Our syllabi are excellent exercises in teaching and learning. Yet, we also have important differences. We raise important questions which need to be explored to understand the contributions of CRE to faith communities and the wider public. After clarifying the method of study, the analysis of this paper proceeds from a description of themes we share, to raising questions about the differences found, and finally makes suggestions for future work.

Method:

I engaged in a content analysis of over 60 introductory syllabi for courses in CRE taught by Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical, and independent Christian scholars. In the summer of 2019, I invited many of our colleagues who are active in REA to participate and to recommend additional colleagues who attend other professional academic societies. In my invitation, I described the project, requested the submission of a syllabus and a description of CRE requirements at the school, asked permission for the participation of their syllabus in the analysis, and promised to send results. (I also followed up with those who did not respond to the first invitation.)

Initially I received over 70 syllabi. Some were for foundation courses for PhD students. Most were from theological seminaries, yet several were from graduate programs in religion or religious education/ Christian education. Most of the schools offered an MDiv degree, yet others also had MA, MTS, or MRE/ MCE degrees. Of the theological seminaries offering an MDiv, some required a basic CRE course, others provided a set of courses to fulfill a CRE requirement, and still others saw CRE as an option in a group of courses fulfilling ministry requirements. I eventually included 61 syllabi in the study that explicitly fulfilled a foundational requirement.⁵ Some of the syllabi were taught face-to-face; some were hybrid courses using both face-to-face and online components; and others were online courses taught in synchronous or asynchronous formats.

⁵ I thank colleagues who gave me permission to review syllabi. The courses splendidly embodied the best teaching and learning practices. Truthfully, I would have enjoyed participating in all of them.

As I reviewed the syllabi, I sought to discover the “theories-in-use” embodied in them. I read through all of the syllabi and took notes on each attending to the following: (1) class goals; (2) texts and resources required; (3) learning expectations for students; and (4) settings and contexts of CRE that were assumed – congregation, school, neighborhood, wider public. Secondly, using a data file, I listed course titles. Third, as an ethnographer, I read and read until themes and questions emerged for me. Fourth, then using another data file, I listed commitments, practices, expectations, and assignments.

In the midst of reading the syllabi, the pandemics of Covid-19 and racism hit our culture. I then contacted a sample of those who submitted syllabi asking how these two pandemics had affected their classes and teaching. I received a significant number of responses and followed up with conversations with several.

Finally, I reviewed the data and organized the findings. As you are all aware, I know that my personal set of lenses as a scholar in CRE affected what I saw. Look for that as you read. I am a member of a mainline Protestant, overwhelmingly white denomination that is in the midst of crisis and division. While I am sensitive to issues of difference, I also have received the benefits and the blindness of “white privilege.” I have a set of perspectives on CRE: that it is a theological activity connected to the ongoing shaping of a theological heritage, the future of the faith, and the contribution of faith to public dialogue. I also seek to engage and learn from interfaith scholars of religious education.

A significant limitation of this method must be defined. Not all of the content or practices of CRE can be taught in an introductory class. Limits of time, background, and experience affect these classes. While I know we consider much more to be part of the field than what we can “address” in a basic course, the insights from syllabi do reflect what we think is crucial for our students to learn. They provide an embodied definition of CRE.

Course Titles:

As mentioned, I used only those CRE courses that were used to meet foundational requirements. Of the 61 syllabi reviewed, they had 51 different titles. They can be organized into seven groupings.

- Introduction to Christian education is the largest group (15). I also included courses with titles of Foundations in CE, CE Theory and Practice, Educating in Faith, and Introduction to Religious Education (whose content focused on CRE).
- The second grouping focused on congregations: Educational Ministry of the Church, Congregational Formation, or Learning Environments in Congregations (8).
- The third were courses on Teaching and Learning (7).
- The fourth and fifth groupings had 4 each.
 - Educating for Discipleship or Discipleship and Formation is one.
 - Human Development and CE is the other.
- A final group (3) focused on Pastor as Educator.

- The remaining 20 included a variety of electives that could serve as a required course: Global Christian Spiritualities, Critical Religious Pedagogy, and Education for Social Change to name a few.

While the differences of titles seem to denote a lack of clarity within the field and clearly reflect differing emphases, coherence was present throughout. In fact, focusing on content instead of titles could merge the eight into four sets:

- Introduction to CE/RE,
- Teaching and Learning in the Church,
- Congregational Learning, and
- Discipleship and Formation.

What we share:

Three themes are shared through the great majority of the courses: the congregation as setting for learning (for education, formation, or discipleship); teaching and learning; and a search for foundations for CRE. Let us examine each.

Congregation as the primary setting for CRE: Many of us who have written about the history of CRE have suggested that in the late 1960s, the era of “church education” was born (in contrast to previous eras of Sunday school, religious education, Catholic education, or Christian education).⁶ Reading the syllabi, we are clearly still in this church education era. The differences in focus of these courses and those at the beginning of the twentieth century is significant. The earlier classes attended to schooling, religious schooling, public schools, and public education. The recent ones focused almost exclusively on the congregation.

Over 60% of the classes require an assessment of a congregation and/or a plan for engaging it educationally. While many reflect an anxiety about whether congregations are vital, they proclaim that the congregation is the predominant setting for Christian education.⁷ Some classes point students to particular congregations they believe are faithful and making a difference. Others provide an analysis about how congregations are shaped in today’s cultural situation. Many look at education within these congregations through the lenses of educational events, worship, spiritual formation, discipleship practices, social action, or mission.

⁶ See Mary Boys, *Educating in Faith* (Academic Renewal Press, 2001; previously published by Harper & Row) or Jack Seymour, Charles Foster, and Robert O’Gorman, *Church and the Education of the Public* (Abingdon Press, 1984)

⁷ Acknowledging the recent data that over 50% of white pastors have heard conspiracy theories from their congregants, we wonder about the effectiveness of congregational education. See Aaron Earls, “Half of U.S. Protestant Pastors Hear Conspiracy Theories in Their Churches, January 26, 2021, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2021/01/26/half-of-u-s-protestant-pastors-hear-conspiracy-theories-in-their-churches/> & Jack Jenkins, “Survey: More than a quarter of white evangelicals believe core QAnon conspiracy theory,” Feb. 11, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/02/11/survey-more-than-a-quarter-of-white-evangelicals-believe-core-qanon-conspiracy-theory/>.

Assuming Christian education occurs primarily within congregations, these classes seek to form students/ pastors/ educators who analyze ministry contexts, define goals for mission and ministry, and engage in practices that teach and send congregants into ministry.

Teaching and Learning: Almost two-thirds of the basic classes include processes of teaching and learning. Teaching settings include classes, retreats, educational events, youth ministry, or mission outreach. In their content, these classes explore theological reflection, spiritual formation, learning theories, and teaching practices.

All require the development of lesson plans (some with extensive attention to how), analysis of learning contexts(addressed in depth), definition of the students to be taught and their cultural backgrounds, and the practicing of teaching by oneself or with a small group – from micro-teaching to four teaching assignments. The courses draw on a wide variety of resources to show the diversity of personal and cultural learning patterns and the depth of the faith as well as its commitment to personal and social change. For these courses, CRE prepares pastors, teachers, leaders, and “ministers” who teach to make a difference.

Foundations of Christian Education: Almost all of the courses name “learning biblical, theological, and educational foundations of Christian religious education” as a goal. Yet, across the courses, what we mean by foundations varies as different themes and commitments are addressed.

Of course, many books were recommended throughout the 61 classes (over 150), but I was surprised to see a core group of approximately 20 CRE monographs appear on many syllabi. They are the books you and I have written. They honor the diversity of our field, embodying differences of gender, race, and culture. In addition, except for three or four, these books are recommended in Protestant mainline, evangelical, and Catholic classes. We clearly try to read and learn from each other’s work.

Interestingly, most of the resources used from outside CRE focus on theology (e.g., African American, liberation, or Barthian, to name a few), practical theology, or denominational (e.g., Wesleyan or Catholic) foundations. While biblical foundations are mentioned, they receive little attention in most of our classes (except for Bruggeman’s *Creative Word*, originally published by Fortress in 1982).

Furthermore, books and resources from educational theory or educational policy are rare. Except for Freire, hooks, multiple intelligences theory, and an occasional book on development or formation in a particular cultural context, educational literature is absent.

What holds us together: In brief, using these syllabi, while we try to listen to and learn from each other, two themes are embodied in our teaching:

- (1) the congregation as setting for learning and
- (2) the praxis of teaching and learning.

Without a doubt, these two are the foci that hold our field together. The great majority of classes, even electives, often deal with both of these themes, e.g., a class on youth ministry or teaching for social change.

Yet, to move from description to inquiry, I believe that simply defining the field by congregation and teaching misses profound questions included in the syllabi – questions about the purposes of the field, how culture and community affect the formation of identity, and how our field makes a difference in the witness and mission of the Christian faith in the wider world. To these we turn.

Responding to the pandemics: Shifts in practice

As mentioned, in late summer 2020, I wrote a sample of the persons who had submitted syllabi. I asked them if and how their classes had changed as a result of the pandemics of health and racism. That sample cut across the denominational divides. Several persons responded, many enthusiastically. I connected with fourteen by email and conversation.

We all know that a primary change was that the Covid-19 pandemic forced all courses online, complementing those already offered in this format. Some were synchronous meeting in real time by ZOOM, most were hybrid, and some were asynchronous. A surprising result of this change was that students were drawn together from across the world. One colleague described a fall 2020 class – students from 6 US states, 2 from Europe, 3 from Africa, and 2 from Asia. While negotiating the time differences was difficult, the breadth of conversation was amazing.

The bigger questions though were how both pandemics affected the content of classes?⁸ Many colleagues mentioned the gaps that were revealed in their teaching. Many suggested that as a field we need much more attention to the power of culture to shape learning.

First, some said the public conversation about racism and economic disparities simply reenforced what they had already been addressing in their classes. They felt more support from their colleagues. Many of these persons were faculty of color.

Second, colleagues shared that they began to address the “white-centric” realities of their denominations, even when denominations had numbers of persons of color within them. Several colleagues admitted that prior to “Black Lives Matter,” they had dealt little in their classes with their own white supremacy and that of their denominations.⁹ Bibliographies for classes were changed to attend to cultural realities, including the history and experiences of the black church and examinations of the impact of culture on churches. The scope of congregational analysis projects were enlarged to include the communities surrounding the congregations.

Thirdly, colleagues expanded options for teaching projects encouraging more attention to the contexts and communities in which students minister. Some expanded teaching to include advocacy and transformative ministry projects.

⁸ Of course, I do not know if or how the pandemics affected those who did not respond to my inquiry.

⁹ For an outstanding discussion of “white supremacy” in church life in the U.S. see Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (Simon & Schuster, 2020).

Questions for the field:

While we share attention to congregations, teaching practices, and some common CRE readings, other emphases across the syllabi raise questions for us.¹⁰ Let me state the obvious: my lenses clearly affect how I see the differences in syllabi and what I think is important.

I have identified seven clusters of differences appearing in syllabi:

- how the wider culture shapes learning,
- identity formation,
- how we address cultural identities,
- contexts for teaching,
- professions for which we prepare our students,
- drawing on the field of education, and
- the purposes of Christian religious education.

How the wider culture shapes learning: The first grows directly out of the responses to the pandemic. Our colleagues' comments were profound. To quote two of them: "I was 'convicted'." Another said: "I saw what I had missed before. I believe that we desperately need to deal with how culture 'teaches' and how our teaching hopes to address the wider culture."

We all know that culture and context are profoundly educational. No matter how hard we seek to form disciples in Christian practices, cultural messages powerfully shape all of us – from our rising to our sleeping. We can learn much from colleagues in other faith communities who name that their faith practices have been significantly affected by the power of "American" culture. For example, a Japanese Buddhist community in Chicago even has a Sunday school and meets for worship on Sunday.

The impact of our field is limited when we do not explicitly engage how wider "cultural realities" shape learning. Purchasing clothing, watching television, responding to social media, paying taxes, and investing for retirement are practices that profoundly teach us who we are, what we believe, and for what we live.

In Jesus' day, Roman oppression affected Jewish identity and formation. It fueled many of the conflicts about faithfulness. Even with regular rituals of remembrance and identity, addressing Roman culture divided the people. The same is true today.

Many of our mainline denominations were formed in the atmosphere of white supremacy. The definitions of the "good" in our culture profoundly shape a consumerist identity. Who gets public "airtime" reinforces white cultural realities. How both churches' and believers' identities

¹⁰ As noted, the syllabi were outstanding examples of teaching, but the differences reveal questions for our field. In developing this list, I also realize that a syllabus is a guide. The questions I raise may be addressed in a more robust way in the class itself.

are shaped must be a central issue for faithful Christian religious education. The fact is we are both Christians and residents of our communities.

Identity formation: I was surprised to see that human development was addressed in only a few classes. Twenty-five years ago, a CE syllabus would have had to deal with “faith” and “moral” development. While a few classes did address how identity is formed by gender, sexual identity, and race, most did not. In fact, this very 2021 REA conference engages how identities are formed and how our work assists with the thriving of persons and communities. Since identity formation appeared in so few classes, what role should it play in our field?

Addressing cultural identities: Furthermore, some of the classes were taught at schools with a predominant ethnicity or culture. For example, many historically HBCU schools have clear commitments to empower black leaders and black communities. Other classes were rooted in a clear denominational identity. Many faculty were trying to cross cultures and be inclusive. Still other faculty explicitly sought to address the white supremacist realities embedded in their churches. Cultural and ethnic identities are powerful. How do we address culture and ethnicity in our classes? How do we assist students to read and engage their own cultures?

Contexts for education: Since the congregation is primary setting for learning, many classes spend considerable time looking at worship, ritual practices, and events. Some expand to congregational development seeking to help students lead in revitalization. Others challenge traditional congregations by exploring emergent forms of church.

But in addition to church, several of the classes mention other contexts for learning: private schools, home schooling, “freedom schools,” non-profit agencies, new ministries (e.g., internet), and public. Some of our colleagues expand classes by encouraging students to develop action projects or transformative ministry projects. How do we help our students consider the expansive varieties of learning opportunities for faith?

Professions: A few courses specifically focused on the minister as educator. Some syllabi also had class assignments for directors of education or youth ministers. Others used panels, visits, and ethnographic assignments to help students see community organizers and non-profit leaders as educators. At one time we in CRE were clear about the professions in which our students would serve – pastors, educators, and teachers. Are these the primary professions for our students today?

In addition, some of the syllabi acknowledge that many students, even in seminaries, are not preparing for church vocations. In many seminaries, it is 30% or less. Students come with a desire to learn about religious faith and its impact. They hope that their study will enrich wherever they work. To address the diversity of student goals, several of our colleagues provided alternative assignments such as journal, portfolio, or creative project to assist students to develop skills to inspire learning in the contexts in which they find themselves. Do we need to give more consideration to the relationship between our courses and where students will work?

Disciplines of educational policy studies: As mentioned, theological perspectives serve as foundations for CRE in many syllabi. Some are organized around a theologian or school of

theology. For example, several from the “Methodist family” discuss the Wesleyan view of sanctification and “means of grace” as approaches to education. Some syllabi at Roman Catholic schools turned to major theological documents.

Yet, few scholars used resources from education. Backwards design, learning theories, Freire, hooks, media, and multiple intelligence were the primary sources we draw on. In contrast, REA represents a long history of engagement with the philosophy of education and cultural studies. What do we have to learn from educational theory? Much of the conversation about the impact of culture on identity formation and learning is occurring in schools of education. Our conversations about race, culture, and context could be enhanced by our interactions with these scholars of education. Indeed, I wonder how many in REA also attend the American Educational Research Association. At AERA, there is an active group focused on religion and education. Perhaps we need to explore more linkages.

Purpose of CRE: Many of the syllabi stated a definitive purpose for CRE, for example, discipleship or transformation. Several others explored alternatives. Most also required students to complete a paper to define their own “stance” (or, even better, a manifesto, pedagogic creed, or “So what! Letter”).

Yet, as we all would suspect, the answers to purpose that colleagues provided differed. To name a few: the task of CRE is discipleship, forming “Christians,” the realm of God, living a way of life, inspiring faithful congregations, following Jesus, liberation, or transforming persons and communities. What other emphases do we profess? After reading the syllabi, I am convinced we should name in our syllabi the purposes that guide our work. In fact, we should write a “So what” letter for our students and colleagues. Why do we do this work? What vision inspires us? The conversation it would inspire would be lively!

Naming additional emphases at the heart of the field: As noted above, our field is held together by focusing on congregations and the practices of teaching and learning. In addition, from these seven clusters of difference, three additional emphases emerge for the field:

1. *How identity and “Christian” faithful identity is formed is at the heart of our field.* We know that culture shapes learning. We worry about the power of the wider culture to control and shift all of our teaching. We know that identity is formed by race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.
2. *Expanding our awareness of the contexts for teaching and learning the faith is at the heart of our field.* Clearly congregations are the most obvious place. Here we have some direct control and influence. Yet, increasingly some people of faith are expanding faith-based schooling or turning to home schooling as lively and more controlled places where faith is learned. This turn and questions across our syllabi ask: What are the places for religious teaching? While many of us focus on preparing pastors as educators, what role can we have in shaping schoolteachers, pre-school teachers, curators of social and online media, social activists, and community educators? For example, in the late 1940s, “The Eternal Light” was sponsored by Jewish Theological Seminary to educate the public about Judaism. It moved to

television in 1952 and joined “Life is Worth Living,” with Bishop Sheen and “Frontiers in Faith” by the National Council of Churches.¹¹ A parallel today is “On Being” or a set of podcasts. How do we help students become part of this wider network of religious education?

3. *Defining the purposes and foundations of Christian religious education are at the heart of our field* Clearly the primary answer is theology, but what theology or what theologies? How do practical theological methods shape the definitions of our field? What role does the theology of our denominational tradition play in both the content and practices of CRE? And moreover, what role do biblical hermeneutics, educational policy studies, and human development play in defining the purposes for the field?

To quickly summarize, our field does have a core that draws us together. I welcome a conversation about the guiding purposes for our field.

1. We draw on our colleagues’ writings in our courses.
2. We focus on the congregation as the primary setting for learning.
3. We attend to the practices of teaching and learning.
4. We inquire about the roles of the wider culture and social and ethnic contexts on learning.
5. We are aware that we need to expand our attention to the variety of contexts for religious learning.
6. We struggle to define the purpose of CRE and its foundations.

Next steps: So, what?

I would not be surprised that many of us could have named the themes and questions giving our field energy and vitality. I also want to acknowledge again that an introductory course is simply that – introductory. We cannot and do not include all of the field in it. Nevertheless, the syllabi I reviewed do highlight what we consider important.

In this conclusion, I move from description to prescription. I invite you to make the same effort. What is missed? How do the concerns emerging at the edges of our field challenge embedded traditions that we repeat over and over? What do we need to do if our field will “hold space for those in need, discuss topics with human wholeness in mind, and share healing?” (from <https://religiouseducation.net/rea2021/>).

Culture, context, and race: How is Christian identity formed and what difference does it make for persons and communities is the question at the center to our field? We make efforts to understand identity. Our desires to make a difference are expressed. Yet, the power of culture to shape identity (or misshape identity) and control education is extraordinary. The “white supremacy” and “consumer capitalism” that fuel how the public is formed are overwhelming. They provide the backdrop for all patterns of education. They fuel much of what is brought into

¹¹ Bishop Sheen had also begun on radio with “The Catholic Hour.” It moved to television as “Life is Worth Living” from 1952-1957.

and comes out of our churches. Is our attention to congregations as primary sites of learning (even Christ-against-culture patterns of formation and resistance) sufficient to address these embedded realities taught every time we shop, invest, watch television, or leave home? I think not! Furthermore, while efforts to honor diversity are spoken in our churches, seemingly little real effort goes into acts of reparations (penance and acts of justice).

We cannot answer the question of identity by focusing exclusively on Christian religious education. While theology and ethics assist us with this reflection, education and educational policy studies are the primary places where issues of the power of culture and racism are being addressed.¹² Our colleagues in education are engaging how education can assist us to live in an increasingly diverse society and how racism and aggression/ micro-aggressions affect learning.¹³ Our field used to have a robust conversation with our colleagues in education. It is time we restore attention to the work being done in education on race, culture and learning.

Enhanced conversations across religious communities: Some of our syllabi, attend to what we learn from the other great religious traditions. They also suggest ways to empower interfaith education, yet those are few. To continue the conversation about culture, formation, and race, our Jewish and Muslim colleagues have described the power of North American identity to reshape their religious practices and traditions. We are all “victims” of the power of “American” culture to shape identity and to direct public conversation.

We believe that our great religious traditions can contribute to public dialogue, yet we live in a culture where forces are seeking to break any attention and advancement of the “common good.”¹⁴ Enhanced attention is needed in our field to engaging in interfaith conversations about education, formation, and public life. We must learn together.

Attention to the work of our students: For what professions are we preparing our students? Most of our courses are focused on church vocations, yet increasingly we know that fewer and fewer of our students will be employed by churches. One hundred years ago, we would have been preparing the new directors of education, pastors, church and community workers, deacons/deaconesses, and even public education leaders. More and more of our students are seeking careers in public, non-profit, and advocacy. How does our conversation in the field empower this broader network of persons who are leading religious education? What is our role in engaging public, charter, home, and Christian schools? How can we offer educational skills to those working in programs of social justice and social work? Furthermore, how are we assisting in the creation of these new avenues and vocations for CRE?

¹² For an important new book on addressing race in religious communities, see Love L Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, & Amos Young, *Can "White" People Be Saved? Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission* (IVP Academic, 2018).

¹³ See for example the workshops offered by Magna Publications (<https://www.magnapubs.com>) and the latest issues of *Harvard Educational Review*. In fact, the questions of “identity formation” and culture are also important for other faith communities in North America who seek to ask how we can form faithful people who seek to enhance the quality of community life. By engaging education, we enlarge our interfaith conversations.

¹⁴ See for example, Valerie Strauss, “Former lobbyist details how privatizers are trying to end public education,” *Washington Post*, April 16, 2021. See also Gary Peluso-Verdend, “Disappointing Civil Religion,” April 20, 2021. https://www.ptstulsa.edu/rpli_category/blog-posts/

The purpose of CRE: Significant differences are expressed in our syllabi about the purposes of CRE. We mention Christian identity, faith formation, discipleship, following the Way of Jesus, enabling the realm of God, and transformation of persons and communities. I believe there are alternative purposes that can lead and probably together should lead our field. In light of the power of culture, the public perception that Christian faith is embodied in conservative, culture-supporting institutions, we need a robust conversation about the transformative goals of Christian religious education and the impact we seek to have.

Conclusion: The field of Christian religious education is needed today as much as ever. It is true that many of the past practices of enhancing local church education and of creating large denominational structures for curriculum and publishing are no longer viable. Yet, learning constructive, intelligent Christian faith that makes a difference for people and communities is needed now more than ever before. We need to address expressly the embedded cultural practices of “white supremacy” and participate in the cultures of inclusion and hope that can be built.

I encourage us to be courageous, to engage in constructive theological reflection, to build educational partnerships, and to communicate the importance of religion in the language of the wider public. You know my hope. I hope we continue to struggle to seek the Way of Jesus. I hope we follow in the work of the disciples across time and cultures to build communities of redemptive living that nurture abundant living. I hope we stand on the shoulders of those who went before in our field and launch educational practices that engage fully faith and culture.



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OUR WHOLE LIVES: Lifespan Sexuality Education

Abstract:

Our Whole Lives (OWL): Lifespan Sexuality Education curriculum is considered one of the most comprehensive sexuality education curriculums. This collaborative curriculum is produced by Unitarian Universalist Association and United Church of Christ denominations. The curriculum covers sexuality education from Pre-Kindergarten till later adulthood, thus it is a lifespan education. It has seven age specific and developmentally appropriate levels and ***Sexuality and Our Faith*** denominational companions. This collaboration did not stop by publication of the first curriculum in 2000. ***OWL*** is an ongoing, evolving project, and it encapsulates both denominations' commitment to their core values about gender, sex, equality and justice.

OWL came around after a long process of discerning and reconsidering of what self-worth, sexual health, responsibility, justice and inclusivity means for each denomination. This long process brought both denominations together to create this unique curriculum that is used not only by these two denominations, but by several others as well. The result was a product of discernment and commitment to Unitarian Universalist principles and, as is the case for the United Church of Christ, being created in God's image.

Kindergarten Began the Silence

I was born as a girl, but since kindergarten I have understood that I would grow up to be a guy. I did not spend a lot of time thinking about or wondering how it would happen. I just knew.

...

My understanding of my gender identity is the same today as twenty years ago. The differences between then and now are the words I use to describe myself and the way I express my identity. As a child I never heard the word “transgender.” No one ever told me that it was okay to identify as something other than male or female, man or woman.

Excerpts from a true story told by ***Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education Curriculum***¹

We are born in our bodies and our bodies are born with us. Very often our minds and our being in our bodies are synched harmoniously together, and sometimes this experience is not so clear cut. With our bodies being and existing in community with others, our gendered self flourishes and matures. Our bodies are who we are, and we are our bodies as they are. Yet again, this is not as simple for some. Sometimes our bodies are private and sometimes there is more joy in sharing it with others. Would that our bodies came with a ‘how to manual,’ but we do not. It takes us a whole lifetime to be at home with who we are in the bodies that are, and sometimes in bodies that we might be. Values we hold of utmost importance might provide us with answers, but we know life is more complex than overarching, possibly generalized answers.

Sexuality is an integral part of our human existence. Our sexuality is vital part of our self and our ways of being in community with others. Sexuality is everywhere we look, and our communities are bombarded with distorted understanding of what sexuality is. Thus, it is important for communities of faith to equip its members with the knowledge and resources that provide comprehensive answers. Rev. Lena Breen says, “To offer sexuality education in a congregation is to acknowledge that human sexuality is simply too important, too beautiful, and too potentially dangerous to be ignored in a religious community.”² It was this deep conviction that brought United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalist Association together in collaboration to produce ***Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education Curriculum (OWL)***, is an age specific sexuality education in 2000.

However, and more importantly, ***OWL*** is more than a curriculum about sex. Patricia Hoertdoerfer says, “Sexuality education is not just about sex- it is also about the roles, behaviors, and values people associate with being male or female. Sexuality is a basic part of our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual lives.”³ Spurred by this comprehensive understanding of sexuality, this curriculum continues to teach generations about their bodies, their rights and choices. It calls to love their own responsibly as they also learn to respect others and their choices. As such, and owing to this nuanced approach, ***OWL*** does not teach simply abstaining,

¹ Hoertdoerfer, Patricia, *The Parent Guide to Our Whole Lives Grades K-1 and Grades 4-6*. P. xiii

² Morrisss, Makaanah E., Jory Agate, Sarah Gibb, Lizann Bassham, and Gordon J. Svoboda II, *Sexuality and Our Faith: Accompanion to Our Whole Lives Grades 10-12*. P. ix

³ Hoertdoerfer, Patricia, *The Parent Guide to Our Whole Lives Grades K-1 and Grades 4-6*. P. xi

but that it is a good source of joy in life if done right. It does not provide simple answers but explains how to love and respect your own self and others.⁴

To fully appreciate this curriculum, this paper will provide historical background on how this curriculum came about and its foundational principles. After discussing why sexuality education is religious education, the paper will present an overview of the curriculum itself. Lastly, the paper will conclude with highlighting its uniqueness.

I- Historical Background

United Church of Christ

From the United Church of Christ's prospective, the **OWL** curriculum confirms the denominations commitment to its central belief of being created in God's image. Bound in this image, the community journeys "toward deeper faith, faithfulness, and wholeness."⁵ This deep belief in being in God's image, alongside with the understanding of God's continued revelation in unpacking human experience throughout lives of the congregants and time, mark the denomination's trajectory of faith formation. Thus, faith formation aims to prepare persons of all ages for a life embracing all potentials. "As people in the United Church of Christ, we affirm that sexuality and spirituality are intricately connected and that both are gifts from God."⁶ From this deep denominational commitment to sexuality education as an integral part of spirituality education comes this **OWL** curriculum.

The United Church of Christ was concerned with human wholeness and sexuality being an integral part of it since at least the 1960s. With open minds and spirits for the new revelations of God, they addressed fundamental issues of the time, from ethical and spiritual aspects of family planning to producing the "Freedom of Choice Concerning Abortion" resolution by the Eight General Synod in 1971. This prophetic stand continued when the UCC become the first Protestant denomination to acknowledge the ordination of an openly gay man.

Equality of gender is valued in UUC. As early as 1975, the United Church of Christ Task Force on Women in Church and Society invited the denomination to take part in a comprehensive study of human sexuality. As a result, the church published *Human Sexuality: A Preliminary Study* in 1977 and had the work presented to the General Synod the same year.

This study was well received and as a result, in 1983, the General Synod asked the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries to supplement religious education with additional resources on sexuality. The Board conducted a survey, which revealed that 83 percent of the respondents believed that it is church's responsibility to teach sexual education, provide council in sexuality issues and healing from sexual abuse. The findings of this survey became the basis

⁴ Howald, Lindsey, "Unitarian Universalist Church Course Teaches That Sex, Though Wonderful, Is Also a Big Decision."

⁵ Meelanie Davis, Ann Hanson, and Melissa Lopez, *Sexuality and Our Faith: A Companion to Our Whole Lives, Grades 7-9*. P. 113

⁶ Meelanie Davis, Ann Hanson, and Melissa Lopez. P.113

of the adult sexuality resource *Created in God's Image: A Human Sexuality Program for Ministry and Mission* written by Melanie Morison and Eleanor S. Morrison, published in 1993.⁷

Unitarian Universalist

The Unitarian and Universalist tradition's commitment to new understandings and science also affirmed progressive approach to sexuality. As early as 1929, the General Convention of the Universalist Church in America conducted a detailed study and passed a resolution on family planning. The American Unitarian Association was also in favor of 'planned parenthood' as early as 1947. By the 1950s and the 1960s it was not unusual for UU congregations to invite experts to present sex education courses to their members.

The spreading sexual revolution in the 1960s presented ethical challenges to Unitarian Universalism. As the community wrestled with this new morality and parents looked to religious educators for guidance, the dire need for comprehensive sexuality education became clear. In 1967 the UU Liberal Religious Educators Association devoted its Fall Conference to train its educators on human sexuality and respond to the need for guidance.

Since the 1960s, the curriculum team at the Unitarian Universalist Association was already working on developing multimedia resources to better connect with the younger people. The early resource *About Your Sexuality (AYS)* resource followed this same educational approach, but soon became very controversial for containing photographic filmstrips depicting anatomy and sexual behaviors, which only strengthened UU commitment to sexuality education. As the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation movements emerged, new sections titled "Homosexual Lifestyles" were added to *AYS*. In 1980s it was further revised, and new sections were included on HIV/aids, date rape, reproductive rights, and sexual abuse.

It was in the 1990s, during an ecumenical gathering of the National Council of Churches' Committee on Family Ministries and Human Sexuality, that the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ came together to work on the *Our Whole Lives* sexuality curriculum in 2000. This partnership that started in 1992 was fruitful in producing one of the most comprehensive lifespan sexuality curriculums and continues to evolve to this day.⁸

II- Principles and Values Guiding *Our Whole Lives* Curriculum

United Church of Christ Approach

All humans are sexual beings regardless of age, gender or having abled bodies. Sexuality is present from even before birth to the grave and never ceases to be an integral part of being spiritual human beings. Upon this overarching fact the UUC further formulates its stand.

- a. Sexuality is a God-given gift.

In the creation, God looked upon the world and it was all good. Sexuality is part of God's gift to humanity in the creation and it reflects God's goodness.

⁷ Meelanie Davis, Ann Hanson, and Melissa Lopez. P. 113-114

⁸ Millsaugh, Sarah Gibb, "Forty Years of UU Sexuality Education."

- b. The purposes of sexuality are to enhance human wholeness and fulfillment; to express love, commitment, delight, and pleasure; to bring new life into the world; and to give glory to God.
Sexuality is a gift from God that comes with a purpose. It calls humans to “wholeness as individuals.” Neglecting our bodies hurts this gift and celebrating it gives us pleasure and joy. Another equally important purpose of sexuality is “to express love for and delight in other human beings.” It is a source for joy, expressing care and building relationships that glorifies God.
- c. When making decisions about sexuality, the primary guide is God’s call to love and justice as revealed in both Testaments.
This principle stands to be problematic. Although Christians look to scripture to know about God’s will for humanity, in matters of sexuality the curriculum looks beyond exclusive words like sex, marriage and divorce the way they are found and used in the scriptures. Instead, it considers the overarching biblical principles of God’s love and justice in decrement issues on human sexuality. It expands on the themes of God’s continued revelation through human experience and scientific findings to matters of equality and justice to all. The faith companion to the curriculum affirms “[T]he reality of living Spirit that moves where it will and is as active in our day as in the days when the scriptures were recorded.”⁹
- d. From a biblical perspective, sexuality is intended to express mutuality, love, and justice. In judging whether behavior is ethical or unethical, the norms of mutuality, love, and justice are the central criteria.
Sexuality is God’s gift to be cherished and enjoyed but at the same time, because of our freedom to choose, it is open to abuse. We are therefor to be held accountable of our behaviors and choices.
- e. From a biblical perspective, sexuality is distorted by unethical behaviors, attitudes, and systems that foster violence, exploitation, infidelity, assertion of power, and the treatment of persons as objects.
When the worth of a human being is undermined, the gift of sexuality is abused. Abuse happens when a commitment is not kept, trust is violated, power dynamics manipulated, or a person is disrespected. On a larger level, socio-political and economical injustices do also contribute to the distortion of sexuality.
- f. In developing a just sexual morality, we need to avoid double standards.
We cannot have multiple sets of morality for each gender. Sexual morality should adhere to the same criteria regardless of gender, race, ability or age.
- g. A responsible and mature sexual ethic respects the moral agency of every person.
Humans are free to make their own ethical choices as autonomous creatures. Freedom is essential for decision making. It means the individual is responsible for any consequences of their choice. However, in matters of sexuality, they are called to exercise their freedom with a sense of responsibility and respect to their partners.
- h. The church, at all levels, ought to be a context for discussion about human sexuality.
If a responsible choice is the heart of all Christian life, then providing the congregation with sexuality education is the responsibility of the church. The church should provide its

⁹ Meelanie Davis, Ann Hanson, and Melissa Lopez, *Sexuality and Our Faith: A Companion to Our Whole Lives, Grades 7-9*. P. 115.

members with adequate resources and materials about sexuality education for informed choices.

- i. The church ought to encourage and support advocacy with those who are sexually oppressed or the victims of sexual violence and abuse. The church can and must have a role in defining and implementing public policy.

Sexuality education is a call for advocacy for justice beyond the boundaries of individual churches. It is a call to transform the larger community to a society where “justice and human well-being prevail.”¹⁰

Unitarian Universalist Approach

Unitarian Universalism is not centered around a religious dogma or creed; shared values and principles are the foundations of the tradition. Four of its seven principles are in line with the importance of offering sexuality education in UUA congregations.

- a. The inherent worth and dignity of every person. The curriculum emphasizes the worth and dignity of each and every person, teaches the participants to respect their own self and bodies, and to respect others dignity and bodies.
- b. Justice, equality, and compassion in human relations. The curriculum emphasizes justice and equality issues embedded in human relationships, sexuality being just one aspect of it.
- c. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning. The curriculum teaches discernment with both reason and emotion in defining their values and knowledge of how to live by them. It cultivates inclusive and trusting relationships to live by.
- d. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. The curriculum encourages nurturing not only personal values but transcends it to encompass the larger and global society.

These central UU values are emphasized throughout the curriculum and particularly highlighted in the denominational companion books.¹¹

III- Why Sexuality Education is a Religious Education?

One of the any strengths of **OWL** is that it does not use religious language in the curriculum itself, which makes it easy to use in any educational setting and in any denomination. All age levels have the *Sexuality and Our Faith: A Companion to Our Whole Lives* accompanying resource. Only in this resource do the two mother denominations have explicit religious language and content that are congruent with the denomination.

“So, what is religious about **Our Whole Lives**?” the authors of *Sexuality and Our Faith* ask. Their answer is that they believe **Our Whole Lives** is religious because “it seeks to nurture religious community, spiritual depth, prophetic vision and action for justice, values congruent

¹⁰ Morrisss, Mekanah E., Jory Agate, Sarah Gibb, Lizann Bassham, and Gordon J. Svoboda II, *Sexuality and Our Faith: Accompanion to Our Whole Lives Grades 10-12*. P. 52-55.

¹¹ Meelanie Davis, Ann Hanson, and Melissa Lopez, *Sexuality and Our Faith: A Companion to Our Whole Lives, Grades 7-9*. P. 3-4.

with participants' religious beliefs and the skills, attitudes, and knowledge to live out those values, and the worth and dignity of every participant.”¹² In other words, these are some of the core values in Unitarian Universalism and these are foundational to the **OWL** curriculum's pedagogy and content.

If the **OWL** is used alongside the faith companion, it is suggested to start each workshop with rituals of gathering and letting go. These religious rituals help in creating rhythms of learning and building a sense of community. It encourages naming participants' sense of spiritual depth or spiritual journey. Very often sexuality related issues are issues of justice that calls for prophetic vision and action. **OWL** educates on issues of gender, body shape, physical ability, and sexual orientation. By doing so, it also invites the participants towards solidarity with all. As the participants learn how to identify their sexuality issues, make decisions, and take responsible actions, they are also asked to reflect on how their religious values and beliefs are connected to what they are learning.

According to the authors, the “most religious aspect of this curriculum, and the cornerstone upon which it is built, is its belief in the worth and dignity of each person.” They encourage the facilitators to teach this value by modeling it themselves in their attitudes to each other and to the learners. When a welcoming and affirming environment is created and modeled, the participants immersed in the experience learn how to live out this value themselves.¹³

From the UCC perspective, sexuality education is religious education because the church is called out to be a prophetic voice in all matters of human experience. “Creating a sexuality-positive environment in the church will serve to integrate the sexual and the sacred in people's lives and to offer a view of sexuality that is based on justice and inclusivity.” This contributes to the health, wellbeing and wholeness of all in all kinds of love in God. If all Bible narratives are about relationship with God and to each other, then “[e]ducation in the church is about how we know God and how we know ourselves.” If our sexuality is an integral part of knowing who we are, then our knowing of God is not complete if we do not know ourselves.¹⁴

To conclude, all of **OWL**, regardless of using the faith companion, is guided with both denominations' deeply felt religious commitments to the wholeness of human existence and sexuality as being integral part of it.

IV- Our Whole Lives: Overview

The curriculum is divided into 7 age groups:

1. Grades K-1
2. Grades 4-6
3. Grades 7-9
4. Grades 10-12

¹² Morrisss, Makanah E., Jory Agate, Sarah Gibb, Lizann Bassham, and Gordon J. Svoboda II, *Sexuality and Our Faith: Accompanion to Our Whole Lives Grades 10-12*. P. 5.

¹³ Morrisss, Makanah E., Jory Agate, Sarah Gibb, Lizann Bassham, and Gordon J. Svoboda II. P. 5-7.

¹⁴ Meelanie Davis, Ann Hanson, and Melissa Lopez, *Sexuality and Our Faith: A Companion to Our Whole Lives, Grades 7-9*. P. 117.

5. Young Adults ages 18-35
6. Adults
7. Older Adults

All age groups come with *Sexuality and Our Faith* companion with both UUA and UCC separate resources and ***Our Whole Lives*** facilitators' guidebook.

The role of parents depends upon the age group, but it is the most critical for the first two age groups. The curriculum asserts that sexuality education starts at home and provides *Parents Guide to Our Whole Lives* resources to help with this process.

Considering that puberty and adolescence are the most critical periods in a person's life, the Grades 7-9 age group has the most voluminous amount of content. Explored in twenty-five chapters, various topics of sexuality, relationships, sexuality and social media, responsible sexual behavior, lovemaking, consent education, STD, pregnancy, parenting and communicating about sexuality are covered. The rest of the age groups contain 10-12 topics at the most.

OWL also provides the parents and the participants with additional resources to facilitate further learning. For example, *It's Perfectly Normal* is recommended to be used by the grades 4-6.

Parents' and Guardians' Role:

This curriculum is founded on the assumption that parents and/or guardians are the primary sexuality educators of their children. The curriculum is designed to help with this responsibility by providing well informed resources and by initiating the conversation itself.

Considering Grades 7-9 and 10-12, the curriculum requires the parents to attend an orientation session. During this session, the parents meet the facilitators, get to know the content and are given the opportunity to ask questions. The parents are expected to give written consent to enroll their children/youth in the program. The facilitators are advised to establish connection between them and the parents to effectively connect the classroom with home.¹⁵

As for younger ages, the curriculum holds these assumptions concerning parents' and guardians' role for this age group:¹⁶

- a. Parents and guardians are the primary educators of their children and they are responsible for providing sexuality education to their children.
- b. Sexuality education begins, and primarily takes place, at home.
Observing how their parents touch them and touch each other, a child, even as early as infancy, learns about safe touch and love, sexuality and gender. Thus, parents are modeling these relationships for their children unintentionally in natural ways. **OWL** explains and makes these teaching moments possible for guardians.
- c. Children need accurate, clear, and age-appropriate information about sexuality.
OWL provides proper terminology and age-appropriate vocabulary to be used.
- d. Open communication creates a healthy family environment and nurtures trust.
OWL advises not to shy from talking about sexuality with children early and often. It lists supplemental books and resources to facilitate such conversations.
- e. Sexuality education should include information about the misuse and abuse of sexuality.

¹⁵ Meelanie Davis, Ann Hanson, and Melissa Lopez. P. xx

¹⁶ Hoerdoerfer, Patricia, *The Parent Guide to Our Whole Lives Grades K-1 and Grades 4-6*. P. x-xi

Parents and guardians are advised to do this with much care and without frightening the children. When children are informed and educated, they will build the language and vocabulary to identify and talk about the abuse and the hurt.

- f. Sexuality education should center on the gift of sexuality and nurture the values of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. **OWL** is centered on UU and UCC values and it provides the opportunity for families to identify their values and teach them to their children.

How to Start Implementing *OWL* in a Congregation?

OWL is already introduced and implanted in many UUA congregations since the 2000s. However, it also provides a step-by-step description on how to implement it in a new congregation.

Step One: Gain Support

OWL starts with educating and involving the leadership of the congregation first. It is important to have them on board and informed on the curriculum, methodology and values the curriculum is based on. Once this confirmation is achieved and trust is built, the program can initiate the second step.

Here we need to mention that the **OWL** recommends using the *Advocacy Manual for Sexuality Education, Health and Justice* resource to help find and establish allies in the community.

Step Two: Choose *Our Whole Lives* Facilitators

Facilitators are important keystones in **OWL**. They should be chosen wisely and carefully. All facilitators should attend **OWL** facilitators training to be considered qualified to teach. Facilitators teach in pairs in line with ‘healthy congregations’ practices and easier group management.

Facilitators should be:

- Committed to the values of the curriculum.
- Experienced in teaching or connecting with the age group at hand.
- Sensitive to diversity and inclusion.
- Advocate of sexuality education.
- A relationship builder and is able to communicate not only with the learners but also with their parents.
- A person who is dedicated to education and learning to be able to learn and grow beyond what the facilitators training provides.
- A person who is able to establish and maintain healthy boundaries with all involved individuals.

The facilitator’s trainings usual last 3-4 days with intense learning requirement. They learn about and how to articulate the curriculum, teaching and facilitating workshops, effective communication and age group appropriate engagement. During these trainings they experience their denomination’s spiritual focus and depth. The most important aspect of these trainings is that they help the participants asses their own sexuality values and attitudes to check their comfort zone in talking about such issues with others.

These trainings are available year-around and regional trainings are communicated through regional networks.

Step Three: Plan *Our Whole Lives* Program Information Meeting

It's advised to announce the program early enough to give proper time for the congregation and the families to be informed.

Next, plan an information session for the parents and guardians (as it was presented in the earlier section on the role of parents) and guardians and make sure to be prepared with resources and materials to share with parents.

Step Four: Plan a Parent/Caregiver and Child /Youth Orientation Meeting

In this meeting parents and children meet together and separately with the facilitators. The children get to know each other while the adults share their experiences, attitudes and concerns about sexuality education. In the second part of the meeting, they all gather to learn about the **OWL** program and the workshops.

This last step differs depending on age group. Guidebooks for age-specific facilitators provide detailed plans on this information meeting.

V- Highlights and Conclusion

OWL is not the only denominational sexuality education curriculum, but it is unique in many ways. Here are some of them:

- It acknowledges the complexity of human sexuality.
- It does not provide easy answers or lists of 'do's and don'ts'. It teaches decision making strategies based on love, mutual respect and accurate knowledge.
- Although founded on religious principles, and born in religious context, it is conscious of keeping the sexuality education and religion separate. This makes the resource applicable in diverse educational, religious and/or secular settings.
- Provides comprehensive and theologically solid faith component for the denominations to learn from.
- It has a wholistic pedagogical approach by being attentive to physical, spiritual, social and mental wellbeing of the learner.
- It is also wholistic in the sense that it combines the individual, family and faith community as well as society at large.
- It is evolving and is critical of its own shortcomings. Several age level facilitators resource books are already revised, and second editions are available.
- **OWL** is also attentive to provide continuing education to the facilitators through monthly newsletters and Zoom meetings to address new challenges.
- It is attentive to the changes in culture, society, and science.

The busiest and the most 'serious' time in the Religious Education calendar at my UU church is when a certain age group is attending **Our Whole Lives** classes. These weeks are not only blocked out for the given age group, but it is blocked out for the whole church community. All

activities are planned around these classes regardless of their importance. Each age group has its own rituals and culture; the younger children meet early on Sunday and the youth meet in the afternoon for more privacy.

The classes are planned on regular basis, the congregation and parents are informed, and facilitators are picked and prepared. Books are checked out, emails sent around and questions discussed.

Very often I receive calls from other UU church members in the area and even nonchurch members inquiring about **OWL**. We gladly acknowledge and accommodate these requests. For the congregation, this is a service to the larger community in our area. It is an issue of social justice and encompasses the values a UU church stands for. It is about teaching our members how to love and respect their own self in all its complexity and to love and respect their partners. It is about everybody's right to access knowledge that is freeing. In this sense the **OWL** sexuality curriculum is about people of faith responding faithfully to everything that makes them fully and wonderfully loved.

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The Precarity of LGBTQ Catholic Religious Educators: A Theological Provocation to Teaching as a Call

Etched in my memory is this encounter in Singapore with a young gay person at a Confirmation retreat. I listened to this young person as he went on to share the many issues he had about the Magisterium's teaching on homosexuality. As I listened, I wished I could let him know that his questions were as much mine, and that I wrestle with them all the time as a Catholic educator who identifies as gay, cisgender, and male. But I did not.

After having him speak his mind, I finally asked why he had still come for the retreat. "Because I still believe in the goodness of the church," he said.

His reply startled and moved me. It continues to disturb me.

How do we as God's people persist to reveal God's goodness to young people, who experience their sexuality and gender identity as marginal in their faith communities and in society? What is the responsibility called forth for Catholic (religious) educators in their varying contexts? What are LGBTQ educators like myself invested in the mission of Catholic education in schools to do?

In this paper, I explore these questions with focus on the complex positionality of LGBTQ Catholic (religious) educators, particularly in Catholic school settings that are not immune from the heteronormative culture perpetuated by the church and in society. This focus addresses a current gap in research on LGBTQ inclusion in Catholic education, where the emphasis tends to be on LGBTQ students being served. There is an urgent need for research to break the silence on sexual and gender minority teachers in Catholic schools. More specifically, I consider how Judith Butler's (2009) conception of precarity serves as a critical lens to understand their positionality. This precarity, I argue, ought to provoke us to reclaim and deepen a more dynamic and relational theological understanding of teaching as a call, going beyond a language of ministerial identity that has been used to maintain the hetero-normative ecclesial discourse on sexuality in the Catholic church. It is my hope that such a theology of call opens up a pedagogical-formative space that recognizes the gift LGBTQ Catholic (religious) educators for who they are, welcoming their narratives of integrating faith and sexuality that bear life-giving wisdom to others.

Breaking the Silence of LGBTQ Catholic (Religious) Educators

There is an urgent need for more research on LGBTQ inclusion in Catholic education. This urgency is signaled by the recent special issue of the *Journal of Catholic Education* on "The Challenges and Opportunities of Including the LGBTQ Community in Catholic Education." As Karen Huchting and Emily Fisher (2019) note in its introduction, "LGBTQ people, whether students, parents, teachers, or administration, *exist* in Catholic educational institutions, yet there has been a dearth of research on this topic to help guide Catholic educators" (p. 1-2, emphasis mine). In this statement lies the problem: it is one thing to acknowledge the existence of LGBTQ people, and yet another to actually recognize them as they are. Yet, as Judith Butler (2010) argues, "recognizability precedes recognition" as it "characterizes the more general conditions

that prepare or shape a subject for recognition” (p. 5). How, then, are LGBTQ people *rendered* recognizable (or *mis-recognized*) in Catholic education?

This question of recognizability strikes at the heart of the silence around the experiences of LGBTQ educators in Catholic schools, many of whom “work to hide and hide to work” (Frank, 1996, p. 1) in heteronormative, homophobic and transphobic conditions reinforced by the church and in society. This silence is not just particular to LGBTQ educators in Catholic schools. It is the elephant in the room within the discourse on LGBTQ inclusion in education generally, where LGBTQ teachers are still regarded as trouble and a problem should they come out publicly in their classrooms and institutions (Wells, 2017). Writing in the North American context, educational theorist Jen Gilbert (2014) pointedly notes:

It is disheartening that we have divorced the rights of LGBTQ teachers from all our attention to the needs of LGBTQ students and families. That is, we expect queer teachers to take up the fight, protect LGBTQ students, start GSAs, and speak out against bullying, and yet all the while their working conditions are often terrible and homophobic. Many LGBTQ teachers are closeted, worry about harassment from other teachers, students, parents, and administrators. (p. 100)

Breaking this silence on the experiences of LGBTQ educators through research is thus paramount for two reasons. First, it is an issue of social justice. The heteronormative culture that oppresses and marginalizes LGBTQ students also threatens the livelihood of LGBTQ teachers, as well as their allies. Second, LGBTQ teachers are unable to be fully present to their students as their whole selves. This is also as much an issue of justice when the full humanity of LGBTQ teachers is not allowed to show up safely and with dignity. It has implications on how teaching is understood as a call, a point to which I will return and discuss in the next section.

In Catholic education, and K-12 schools in particular, the positionality of LGBTQ teachers is complicated by the Magisterium’s moral teaching on homosexuality that is fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, homosexual “persons” “must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2358). Yet, on the other hand, “homosexual acts” are “acts of grave depravity” and “intrinsically disordered” (ibid., par. 2357). It is worth noting that the *Catechism* does not actually use the language of sexual orientation. Instead, it speaks about homosexuality as “deep-seated ... tendencies” and a “condition” that people do not choose (ibid., 2358). The language of same-sex attraction is also preferred over references to LGBTQ+, which some Catholic bishops deem as ideologically charged and reductionistic of the human person to one’s sexual and gender identity. Ironically, the institutional Church’s language about homosexuality is also entangled in the web of heteronormative ideology that scripts sexual and gender minorities as a defective ‘other’ to heterosexuals. It renders LGBTQ lives recognizable by who they are not, instead of who they already are as whole, relational and embodied persons. Language is constitutive of how we understand who we are in relationship with others and God. For LGBTQ people, as theologian James Alison points out, the language of the institutional Church on same-sex relationships inflects the “Christian story ... as one within which we could only inscribe ourselves by agreeing to mutilate our souls” (cited in Sanders, 2020, p. 2).

Within Catholic moral theology, much ink has been spilled in critique of the church’s moral teaching on homosexuality on account of its limiting anthropology and antiquated understanding of sexuality divorced from human relational experience, and advancements in the

natural and social sciences (e.g. Farley, 2006; Salzman & Lawler, 2008). Despite this critique, the Church has not changed its moral teaching. Under Pope Francis, however, there seems to be a widening “dichotomy between the Church’s moral position and its pastoral position” (Coll, 2021, p. 26). This widened gap was painfully experienced when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) recently issued a responsum that the Church does not have the power to bless same-sex unions. While I do not think anyone was expecting a positive response, the explanatory note that states - God “does not and cannot bless sin” - is especially hurting for LGBTQ Catholics precisely *because* of Pope Francis’ more pastoral stance, and not in spite of it. The responsum reinstates the heteronormativity of the Church’s moral position. It is not simply the language but the teaching itself that disproportionately slaps LGBTQ individuals with the “colloquial Christian expression: ‘Love the sinner, hate the sin’” (Callaghan & van Leent, 2019, p. 38).

It is not difficult to envisage how the Church’s moral teaching poses problems for LGBTQ (Catholic) educators in Catholic schools. For Catholic *religious* educators who identify as LGBTQ, the question is also how they are to teach aspects of the Catholic tradition that marginalize persons based on their sexual orientation and gender identities. Drawing on the work of Judith Butler (2009; 2010), the positionality of LGBTQ Catholic (religious) educators, I suggest, is best described as one of *precarity*.

Precarity is, according to Butler (2009), focused “on conditions that threaten life in ways that appear to be outside of one’s control” (p. i). While lives “can be expunged at will or by accident [and hence precarious],” precarity “designates that political induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (p. ii). In other words, precarity points to a state of relations in which the livability of some is rendered more *socially* vulnerable to being injured and expunged through a complex engendering of social, cultural, political and economic norms that is imbued with power. At the heart of precarity is the question of recognizability, as raised earlier in this section: “who counts as a subject and who does not,” and by whose “terms of recognition” (p. iv)? Gender norms induce precarity when “those who do not live their genders in intelligible ways are at heightened risk for harassment and violence” (p. ii).

Butler’s conception of precarity serves as a critical lens to frame the tenuous, soul-wearying balancing act that LGBTQ Catholic (religious) educators have to navigate in Catholic school settings. At the most obvious level, precarity is tied to issues of employment security for LGBTQ Catholic teachers. They have been dismissed and not hired when their partnerships became public, or for legally marrying their same-sex partners (Callaghan & van Leent, 2019; Janicki, 2020). According to *New Ways Ministry*, a US-based Catholic advocacy group for LGBTQ people, near forty percent of church employment disputes tracked between 2011-2020 involved LGBTQ Catholic educators.¹ In their comparative study of the experiences of LGBTI teachers in Canadian and Australian Catholic schools, Callaghan and van Leent (2019) reported on the “workplace fear and anxiety felt by teacher participants as they were “critically aware that their right to employment in their respective Catholic school systems was contingent upon their ability to uphold the Catholicity clause in their employment contracts” (p. 48). The problem with this Catholicity clause, similar to the ministerial covenant in the US, is not in the expectation that

¹ For details of the cases compiled, see *New Ways Ministry*, “Employees of Catholic Institutions Who Have Been Fired, Forced to Resign, Had Offers Rescinded, or Had Their Jobs Threatened Because of LGBT Issues,” (updated June 22, 2020), <https://www.newwaysministry.org/issues/employment/employment-disputes/>

Catholic school teachers adhere to church teaching and morality. The problem is in its implementation when “LGBTI teachers have been the ones most held to account” (ibid., 39).

At a more profound level, however, the precarity of LGBTQ Catholic (religious) educators is experienced in a mode of fearful survival that drives their self-disciplining into invisibility and silence. Such a mode of surviving does not promote their thriving and flourishing as fully embodied human beings. Rather, it plays into the circuits of heteronormativity, homophobia and transphobia asserted by the Magisterium’s moral teaching on (homo)sexuality, maintained by morality clauses in employment contracts, and monitored by LGBTQ teachers themselves. “The Vatican’s power is ‘panoptic’ and operates by means of discipline, surveillance and self-regulation,” writes Callaghan and van Leent (2019, p. 52). As an Australian teacher participant who identified as lesbian in their study poignantly stated:

So, I myself am gay but *I’m not allowed to be gay*, which I think in itself is a hindrance because I just think of how many – if you were allowed to be open in the education department (whether it be state school or Catholic organization) – it would actually make it normal. (ibid., p. 47, emphasis mine)

Underscored here is the fracturing of self, where the expression of one’s professional identity as teacher demands a suppression of sexual and gender identity, especially when it contravenes the heteronormative ecclesial discourse constructed of sexuality. Sexual and gender minority teachers in Catholic schools are rendered recognizable when they play into the script of privatizing their identities and relationships precisely because they dangerously disrupt an order of relations that hegemonic heteronormativity configures.

It is in light of this ordering that ‘coming out’ is risky for LGBTQ teachers. For those who choose to be out and vocal, they risk being “viewed as direct threats to other LGBTQ teachers who strive to remain hidden and invisible within the school district” (Wells, 2017, p. 280). On saying this, I am not asking or expecting all LGBTQ teachers to be out, loud, and proud. My attention is on the unjust conditions in which any act of disclosure (voluntary and involuntary) renders our lives and livelihoods precarious. In contexts where homosexuality is still a crime, the act of ‘coming out’ and ‘being outed’ could sentence you to death. The precarity of LGBTQ educators in general is induced by a “pedagogy of negation” in which “sexual and gender identity is constructed as a private choice, pathology, sin, or deviant identity that is beyond the bounds of public concern” (Wells, 2017, p. 286). Silence is the language of this pedagogy. In Butler’s (1997) terms, LGBTQ persons are “put in place, given a place, through silence, through not being addressed, and this becomes painfully clear when we find ourselves preferring the occasion of being derogated to the one of not being addressed at all” (p. 27). In Catholic education, further research on LGBTQ inclusion must continue to break the silence on the systemic silencing of LGBTQ educators.

Breaking Open the Question of Vocation for LGBTQ Catholic Religious Educators

What is theologically at stake in this silencing is the vocation of LGBTQ Catholic religious educators. This is a dimension that has been raised but not always drawn out. Vocation is about God calling us to life’s flourishing through our belonging to one another in life. It is a living expression of our life *with* and *for* others in God. Yet, what does it mean for Catholic LGBTQ

persons to be called to life's flourishing in their vocation as religious educators within settings that negate their sexual and gender identity as integral to their experience of being human? As Butler has poignantly asked about lives marked by precarity: "How does one live an unrecognizable life?" (2009, p. xiii)

At the heart of the precarity experienced by LGBTQ Catholic religious educators is how the vocation of the Catholic teacher is reduced to a legalistic language of ministerial identity that has been used to maintain the hetero-normative ecclesial discourse on sexuality in the Catholic church. As Kieran Scott (2019) argues, the teacher of religion in Catholic schools "navigates between two language systems" (p. 14). The first is the "ministerial language, with its mix of theological content, theories and sacramental practices." The second is the "more public language of discourse for public life" that situates the Catholic church as an institutional object of critique, as well as an agentic subject of social change in history. While navigating between these two languages is fraught with tension for the teacher of religion, it is also "fertile ground where the sacred and secular, religion and education, faith and reason, can have creative dialectical relation" (p. 15). Although Scott notes the creative tension and interplay of these two languages, he is adamant that the work of the teacher of religion in Catholic schools is "not to produce committed believers, church membership or 'make good Catholics'", although this could happen in the long term (p. 17). For him, the teacher of religion is "not a church ministerial office" but "a profession of school teaching" that must first serve to facilitate and promote a critical and reasoned scrutiny of religious beliefs (p. 19). It is worth highlighting that Scott does not say that the teacher religion cannot or should not be a witness in faith. Rather, he points us to consider more seriously the *practice* of teaching itself, and whether it changes the meaning of our witnessing as educators to students and in relation to the subject.

While some may view this dichotomy as being overstated, it is important to note that at stake for Scott is the crucial need to create and maintain an open dialogical space for critical inquiry in the study of religion, and where the teacher "ought to be judged by academic standards, not ecclesiastical orthodoxy" (p. 19). This point is especially significant for LGBTQ Catholic religious educators given the ongoing debate on whether they "can serve as ministers of the Catholic faith in schools" (Huchting & Fisher, 2019, p. 8). LGBTQ Catholic religious educators stand at the interface of the two language systems, but their precarity lies in them being absorbed into a totalizing ministerial lens reduced to an adherence of the Magisterium's moral position on homosexuality. What is problematic is not simply the presumption that the Catholic religious educator must "teach as a 'believer'" (Scott, 2019, p. 19). It is rather the presumption that the teacher ought to be a *particular type* of believer in order to qualify

The recent employment disputes involving two gay teachers married to each other but working in different Catholic schools in Indiana attest to this problem. In June 2019, the Archbishop of Indianapolis announced that Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School would be stripped of its status as a Catholic school because it refused to dismiss a teacher in a same-sex marriage. A few days later, it was made known that Cathedral High School in the same archdiocese fired this teacher's partner for fear of forfeiting its Catholic identity. The archdiocese had issued a statement stating that "the issue is not about sexual orientation; rather it is about our expectation that all personnel inside a Catholic school – who are ministers of the faith – abide by all Church teachings, including the nature of marriage" (quoted in Kennedy, 2019). It also went on to say, "To effectively bear witness to Christ, whether they teach religion or not, all ministers in their professional and private lives must convey and be supportive of Catholic Church teaching" (quoted in Roewe, 2019).

There are, of course, several factors at work in this case, including issues of canonical authority, school governance and civil law (Jenkins, 2019). Noteworthy is how drastically narrow and theologically impoverished notions of ministerial identity and witness are in the Archdiocese's statement. This is yet another instance of Catholic leadership in the US invoking the ministerial exception that "exempts them nondiscrimination laws that might otherwise bar someone simply for being openly gay" (ibid.). More pernicious is how the language of ministerial identity is being weaponized against sexual and gender minority teachers in Catholic schools, which impinges on their vocational call *to* life and *for* life. This must provoke us to reclaim a richer theology of call that re-centers ministerial identity in relation to gospel witness that follows the passion and compassion of Jesus's solidarity with the oppressed. We need to recover an incarnational theology of call that returns us more deeply to a Christian vocation of teaching (rather than the vocation of a Catholic religious educator), making space for the witness of LGBTQ Catholic religious educators as gift and not a problem.

Recognizing LGBTQ Catholic Religious Educators as Gift: Toward an Incarnational Theology of Teaching as Call

What am I to do with this document by the Congregation for Catholic Education – "Male and Female He Created Them": Toward a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education? (2019) Its call for dialogue is well-intended. But it is also unfortunately (and unsurprisingly) undercut when we realize that there is really only one pathway: a narrow reinstatement of gender complementarity based on an essentialized understanding of differences in being male and female as normative.

I do not and should not have to put up with yet another document that reminds me that as a gay Catholic educator, I have to be careful to leave pieces of who I am outside a Catholic school. It reminds me that some of our testimonies as LGBTQ persons of faith are not regarded as proper or even desirable for the religious education of young people. I am out not in spite of being Catholic, but because of my Catholic faith that calls me to be true to myself before God, to stand unashamed before God as I am, and bearing God's loving presence to others as teacher, lover, sibling, child. It has been a journey to come to where I am, and this journey toward deeper authenticity continues but not without cost. The Good News of God's presence in coming out honestly to myself and others is still too scandalous and dangerous for the Church. Believing in this Good News has sent me – gifted - into exile, and yet, where do I go O Lord for you have the words of everlasting life?

If we are to move toward a greater inclusion of the LGBTQ community in Catholic education, we need to rekindle an incarnational theology of teaching as a call that is discerned relationally, in the midst of messiness that comes with being and becoming human. The Christian call to teach is discerned in relation to how we dynamically call one another to life in God's spirit "in community, through community, and for the sake of community" (Cahalan, 2017, p. 18). To teach, then, is to respond to the Spirit's summon to participate in God's work of healing in history, co-creating conditions that enable us to learn how to compose a life together in and

through our differences embodied as gift to one another.² Such a conception of teaching as incarnational work – human and divine – must not only move us to resist heteronormativity, homophobia and transphobia that constrain LGBTQ Catholic educators from actualizing the gift of who they are at work and in love. It obliges us to receive and honor their diverse experiences of faith within a wider frame that recognizes sexuality not only as integral to the teacher as a complex person, but more profoundly as erotic life force (Gilbert, 2014) that incites creative passion in education as prophetic work.

Teaching as a Christian vocation emphasizes the centrality of the teacher as person, who brings one's particular historical and socio-cultural existence into the relational practice of teaching. In *The Call to Teach*, educational philosopher David Hansen (1995) writes: "It is the person *within* the role and who *shapes* it who teaches students, and who has an impact on them for better or for worse" (p. 17). Although Hansen is not writing about the vocation of teaching in a theological sense, his work is philosophically useful in at least two ways. The first is his concept of "noninterchangeability" (p. 144) tied to how the teacher is relationally present to students. What this noninterchangeability means is that "no two teachers have the same personal and moral impact on students" (p. 11). Recognition of this noninterchangeability, argues Hansen, is pivotal to the teacher's sense of agency as it can lead "to a conviction that one can make a difference in the classroom and that endeavoring to make that difference is worth the trouble" (p. 145). Recognition of one's noninterchangeability in teaching as a vocation humanizes the person who is teacher to somebody and not something in a relationship.

Second, the sense of teaching as a vocation is most alive when challenged, and the particular creative energy that each teacher brings in the face of challenges is drawn from that recognizable quality of noninterchangeability. For Hansen, the idea of vocation "is a mirror that invites teachers to self-scrutiny and self-reflection" (p. 139). It serves as "an idiom that takes us into, not away from" the experiences of teachers as "[t]hey began to understand students, and teaching, in rich and broader terms" (147-148). Vocation is thus not an idealized standard that teachers are expected to meet. It is rather a point of departure that continually invites teachers to launch into critical reflection and imagination, which "turns the focus of perception in such a way that the challenges and complexity in teaching become sources of interest in the work, rather than barriers or frustrating obstacles to be overcome" (p. 144). It is a lens through which teachers make sense of the reasons for their moral commitments, which sustain not only the 'what' and 'how' of teaching through challenging situations, but also who they are teaching and whose good they are contributing.

In connection with a Christian theology of call, Hansen returns us to discern our vocational call to teach from our biographies. There is nothing static about one's experience of teaching as a vocation; it is in reality more like a place we stumble into discovery while making sense of how to live and love well with others. Where a Christian theological vision of vocation goes farther is to propose that this stumbling into discovery is a growing awareness of falling deeper into the mystery of God's grace that holds, lifts, and carries teachers through their work as a sacred calling. It situates a teacher's experience of noninterchangeability in the context of an encounter with the divine present incarnationally in relationship.

² I am influenced here by Dwayne Huebner, "Teaching as a Vocation [1987]" in *The Lure of the Transcendent: Collected Essays by Dwayne E. Huebner*, ed. Vikki Hillis (Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999), 387: "When we regard teaching as a vocation, acknowledging that *it is a way of living and not a way of making a living*, and if we attend to the meanings and value making of the teacher, we will rebuild our educational communities so that we live more truthfully, justly, openly and beautifully in the classroom." (emphasis mine)

Thus, the sense of teaching as a Christian vocation does not call educators to a life of achievement. Rather, it calls them to a life of commitment, to continually make sense of that which is life-giving in light of God's purposes. To embrace teaching as a call is to ask: what makes me fully alive as an educator such that I teach in ways that give life to others? LGBTQ Catholic religious educators are held back from being fully alive when they cannot bring their whole selves into the classroom. This can be the source of much pain and disconnection with the unfortunate consequence that our educational spaces cease to be holy ground for authentic encounters in teaching and learning. Yet, the Christian vocation of teaching also calls educators to the prophetic work of social justice that strives to dismantle forms of systemic oppression that distort the image of who we are as God's beloved. "Education happens because God attends to our healing – to the re-integration, re-memembering, re-collection of who we are in God's image," writes Dwayne Huebner (1999, p. 397). It is in light of this call to participate in God's healing that "at some times and in some places, Christians [who regard teaching as a vocation] will have to act counterculturally, over and against the norms of their professions" (Schwehn, 2002, p. 404). What prophetic work are LGBTQ Catholic religious educators being called to do from their particular experiences of marginalization?

The call to teach does not remove the precarity experienced by those of us as LGBTQ Catholic religious educators. It must, however, provoke us to rise above it by reclaiming our sense of integrity such that what we teach is who we are, and that we do what we teach. God's radically inclusive love that makes a preferential option for oppressed is the impetus for our prophetic call to teach. This summons us to creativity and courage, in disrupting the circuits of heteronormativity, homophobia and transphobia in curriculum and school culture. Learning to live into teaching as God's call does not mitigate the risk of backlash should we *choose* to come out. Decisions to do so are also never "a simple in/out dichotomy" but contingent on "the intersectionality of identities and concomitant relationships of power and privilege or subjugation" (Wells, 2017, p. 271). Vocation, however, serves as a lens to discern why we would be *willing* to undertake that risk at all in light of faith.

In an ethnographic study of sexual minority teachers as activist-educators for social justice in Canadian public schools, Wells (2017) documents how they transcended their fears to become change agents when they leaned into their narratives of survival, and saw how their coming out could serve and support the livability of LGBTQ students. In my mind, these teacher participants demonstrated a vocational sense of teaching, which called forth unique capacities for creative strategic action in service of others. In Hansen's terms, they recognized their noninterchangeability in coming to terms with their marginality, not as a place of victimization but as a vulnerable place of strength that forms them to be courageously resilient while with energizing their activism. They are prophetic witnesses in education.

A question that arises is this: what would such educational activism look like in Catholic schools? I concur with Callaghan and van Leent (2019) that more research is needed to "uncover instances of surviving, thriving, and resilience" (p. 53) in the experiences of LGBTQ teachers in Catholic schools. Following Wells (2017), there is a need for more studies that examine the processes in which Catholic LGBTQ (religious) educators become critical change agents in Catholic schools. The sense of teaching as a vocation could be a useful theological lens that helps frame such future research. Yet, beneath this question about educational activism lies a more pertinent issue in Catholic education: are there pedagogical-formative spaces that desire the authentic flourishing of LGBTQ Catholic (religious) educators and seek to nourish the prophetic dimension in their call to teach? My best hope is that an incarnational theology of teaching as

call can begin to help us imagine such a space by first recognizing the gift of LGBTQ Catholic teachers as they are. Such is a theology that provokes them to discern their call to teach in their narratives of survival as a rich spiritual resource (cf. Reyes, 2016). Such is a theology that encourages them to recognize their noninterchangeability as educators in and through their personal narratives of struggle to integrate faith and sexuality. Such is a theology that renders their lives knowable as agents, whose stories of struggle and survival bear wisdom that gives hope to all.

I remember being a student in an all-boys Catholic high school wishing that I had a gay teacher as a role model – someone who would mirror to me the possibility of life in the future. Now that I am a teacher, I wish I have LGBTQ mentors who would guide me to flourish in my vocation so that I can also pave the way toward life for other educators, who are my students, and my student's students ...

Conclusion

In the discourse on LGBTQ inclusion in Catholic education, there is much emphasis on hospitality that engenders conditions for dialogue (e.g. Coll, 2021). However, considerations of hospitality to LGBTQ students must also warrant a critical examination of the school environments that Catholic LGBTQ teachers work in. No educational environment is truly hospitable when conditions that induce the precarity of Catholic LGBTQ teachers are not addressed. As Luke Janicki (2020) puts it, “The practice of removing LGBT teachers must end in order for a dialogue to begin.” Beneath this call is the need for research to break the silence on the experiences of Catholic LGBTQ educators in Catholic schools, with the aim of nourishing their vocational call to teach that welcomes the wisdom drawn from their life-narratives. This is a task that serves the reconciling work of God’s healing love, so that with the young man at the retreat, each of us could say, “I still believe in the goodness of the church.”

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Research Interest Group: Vocational Provocations

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Title

In our Mother Tongue(s): Cultural Hybridity and Vocational Exploration

Abstract

This paper names the challenges for people with hybrid identities in engaging three predominant approaches to vocation and identifies inter-referencing in one's mother tongue as a fruitful starting point for shaping an epistemology of vocation from the perspective of cultural hybridity. We propose a framework for hybrid identities rooted in inter-referencing other hybrid perspectives and the particular contexts from which those perspectives arise, and name several constructive elements in fashioning an understanding of vocation for culturally hybrid people.

Introduction

Academic discussions of identity and vocation don't usually involve Disney movies, but we think it may be helpful for this one. In the 2019 film *Frozen II*, much of the story is about how Elsa, one of the protagonists, goes on a quest in response to a strange voice she hears calling out to her.¹ As Elsa puts it in song, this is a journey “into the unknown”—vocational exploration with princesses and ice magic, if you will. While many stories (Disney and otherwise) feature the intertwined storylines of purpose and self-discovery, *Frozen II*'s telling of it gets messier as it goes along. In a pivotal scene, Elsa reaches the source of the voice she's been hearing—”show yourself!” she asks fervently—but simultaneously is shown a vision of a terrible truth about her mixed ancestry. In vocational terms, she learns that her sense of calling is wrapped up inextricably in who she is, and her identity is not only mixed (up) but is actually at violent odds with itself. The scene raises a question for us as culturally hybrid people: What does vocational exploration look like when your identity is not only mixed but also messy?

Vocational exploration as an element of a meaningful life of faith has received much attention in the church and academy in the past thirty-plus years. Clergy, theologians, religious educators, and others have sought to nurture a new generation of purposeful religious leaders through exploring their callings. Volumes have been published mining historical and contemporary resources on vocation, religious educational pedagogies have been developed intended to inspire vocation (particularly with youth and young adults), and theological schools have weaved vocational exploration into their curricula for ministry students. We, Anne and Peter, have participated in this movement as directors for grant-funded programs for the theological exploration of vocation with young people and as scholars of religious education. In

¹ *Frozen II*, directed by Jennifer Lee (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019), Disney+ streaming service (Walt Disney Studios, 2020).

addition, we both inhabit cultural and racial identities that embody mixedness—or, as we prefer, hybridity. As the question that *Frozen II* raises for us suggests, in our experiences we have encountered several significant difficulties in adapting predominant approaches to doing vocational exploration with folx² who possess hybrid cultural and racial identities.

About Us

A word about each of our hybrid identities is in order before we continue. I, Anne, have been shaped by two significant racial ethnic and cultural orientations: I am white (Dutch Irish) and Indigenous (Cherokee Nation), having been raised by a mixed-blood,³ Cherokee father and a white mother. My hybridity is most significantly captured for me as a both/and bicultural person. I have been shaped by and understand the norms of both white and Native cultures. Often, people with monocultural identities mis-recognize my racial-ethnic makeup and can only recognize my Native-ness through some stereotypical performance of United Statesean⁴ indigeneity. I work to resist the pressure to validate my identity through performance, though sometimes performance is inevitable. I am always, at the same time, *both Cherokee and white*.

I, Peter, am the son of a Filipino father who grew up in the Philippines and a white mother of English ancestry who grew up in the US. I grew up in both countries, making multiple international moves between them due to my father's work as a missionary and fundraiser. I grew up never feeling fully Filipino or US/American and the multiple moves meant I also did not

² The word folx is a gender inclusive, non-binary inclusive, and gender non-conforming inclusive form of the word "folks."

³ Mixed-blood" is a term often used in U.S. Indigenous communities to refer to those whose racial-ethnic makeup includes Native American ancestry and ancestry from one or more non-Indigenous racial-ethnic community of origin. Because U.S. Indigenous communities often track tribal citizenship by blood quantum, originating on federal "rolls" counting Indian people in the territories (like the Cherokee Dawes roll on which my ancestors are listed), "mixed-blood" developed as the term used to describe racially hybrid, Indigenous people.

⁴ I (Anne) first encountered the term "United Statesean" in Ivan Petrella's *The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and Manifesto* (Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2006) and use the term to refer to people who are indigenous to that which is now considered the continental United States. I do this so as to avoid speaking to or for the experiences of people who are indigenous to other lands worldwide.

feel fully rooted in either country. My identity has therefore been most deeply formed in the in-betweenness of being bicultural as well as biracial, of being simultaneously both/and and neither/nor, of being at once the colonizer and colonized, and of being perpetually unsure of how to answer the question, “Where are you from?”

We first encountered one another in settings for professional development related to vocational exploration with young adults and quickly discovered that we share affinities in our work. We have both served in roles for administering vocational programs with young people—with children living in group homes, biracial collegiate women, young women with incarcerated parents, and so-called “third culture kids”—and have found ourselves wrestling with identifying fruitful models for vocational exploration with the youth we serve while also asking questions about our own vocational identity development. As we talked, we found that while the particulars of our backgrounds are very different, we both recognized similar experiences in each other’s stories. We felt no pressure to perform as only one part of our identities; presenting and talking explicitly about our hybrid selves was both natural and validating. In conversations about our identities and vocational questions, there is no felt need to legitimate any parts of who we are—to perform for one another—as there often is when we inhabit conventionally monocultural spaces. When we’ve talked with other hybrid folx, we’ve felt a similar ease in finding similarities in cultural formation, life experience, and struggles with self-expression.

Framework for Hybridity

In this paper, we talk about hybridity in terms of the real-life, often messy experiences of having more than one central cultural identity. Granted, all theories of cultural hybridity—which has historically been the domain of disciplines such as anthropology and cultural studies—are

rooted in real-life experiences.⁵ At the same time, because theory tends to obscure particularity, it can minimize not only lived experience but also the agency of the very people who have lived it to name their experiences for themselves. Concrete experiences are the bread and butter (or rice and beans) of practical theology. We therefore aim to keep just enough distance from our experiences to be critical and creative without letting hybridity become abstract.

We take our cue from the work of Courtney Goto, who has called for using the term “hybridity” in ways that keep an eye squarely on actual lived experiences like those we’ve just named.⁶ In an article dedicated to the concept of hybridity, Goto introduces several elements that we’ve found highly useful and that inform the remainder of our discussion. First, Goto uses the terms “mother tongues” and “trade languages” to warn against letting a concept (such as hybridity or vocation) be removed from the real-life experiences that led to the conceptualizing in the first place. Drawing on the work of intercultural psychologists Alvin Dueck and Kevin Reimer, Goto describes a mother tongue as not only a first language but also “the particular languages and practices through which [a person] constructs the world she inhabits.”⁷ In our (Anne’s and Peter’s) case, when we easily relate to each other’s experiences of both/and as well as neither/nor, we are communicating in our mother tongue(s).

Trade languages, on the other hand, are the frameworks, vocabularies, and assumptions of a particular profession or academic guild—say, for instance, psychotherapy or religious

⁵ A seminal work on hybridity is Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004 [1994]), especially the chapters “The Commitment to Theory” (28-56) and “Signs Taken for Wonders” (145-74). See also Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 60-83.

⁶ We should note that several other religious educators of Asian descent have discussed hybridity in their work. See HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Joanne Doi, “Intercultural Threads of Hybridity and Threshold Spaces of Learning,” *Religious Education* 107, no. 3 (May-June, 2012): 262–75, as well as Mai-Anh Le Tran, “Narrating Lives, Narrating Faith: ‘Organic Hybridity’ for Contemporary Christian Education,” *Religious Education* 105, no. 2 (March-April 2010): 188-203.

⁷ Goto, “Hybridity,” 19. For the linguistic analogy, Goto cites Alvin C. Dueck and Kevin S. Reimer, *A Peaceable Psychology: Christian Therapy in a World of Many Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 103.

education. Trade languages tend to be “distant, utilitarian, contractual, and general” and are employed in order to smoothe over the roughness and messiness of lived experience with the sandpaper of extrapolated theory.⁸ Moreover, Goto notes, “Fluency and overconfidence in trade language reinforce the felt rightness of translating any mother tongue into terms that [an expert] takes to be universal, objective, and even superior.”⁹ In other words, if we were to talk about our experiences using only the academic trade languages we have learned, we may not only lose sight of the actual lived experiences but possibly even the sense that the other person “gets” us. It’s because of this that we fully agree with Goto that “the cost of privileging trade language(s) is rarely recognized.”¹⁰ What we share as hybrid folx is relatable and instructive precisely because we both know what it’s like to have lived those specific experiences.

Second, Goto argues that hybridity is all too often treated as a reified concept, “a thing in itself.”¹¹ The term and the discussions that use it often end up in trade language ghettos, detached from the real-life experiences of liminality, ambiguity, and suffering that prompt talking about hybridity in the first place. This, Goto says, is even (if not *especially*) the case among those who most need the term to talk about their identities, such as Asian North American theologians.¹² We also find that some discussions of vocation can treat it as a reified concept, smoothing over the rough edges of specificity and messy, lived experience. The academic and ecclesial trade languages of vocation also often imply (if not claim) universality, when in reality they usually reflect unacknowledged privilege not afforded to all. We will further flesh out this critique later in the paper.

⁸ Dueck and Reimer, *Peaceable Psychology*, 103, quoted in Goto, “Hybridity,” 19.

⁹ Goto, “Hybridity,” 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹² *Ibid.*, 27.

Third, Goto proposes using the term “hybridity” in ways that are “functionally vague,” a term she adapts from philosophical theologian Robert C. Neville. A category is vague, Neville writes, “in the logical sense that it can accommodate positions that contradict one another.”¹³ For Goto, “Using the concept ‘hybridity’ in a functionally vague sense would mean having some notion of what experiences of hybridity look like while deliberately keeping one’s understanding open to difference, tensions, and the particularity of lived experiences.”¹⁴ Vagueness is also helpful for addressing particularly messy aspects of lived hybrid experience itself, as we will detail later.

It is with this functionally vague sense in mind that we use the term “hybrid identity” in this presentation. It is not to symbolize all persons who experience all forms of cultural hybridity nor to assert that our understanding of hybridity should be normative for the term. Instead, we use it as shorthand for a particular set of experiences. Specifically, we use “hybrid identity” to refer to the experience of *someone who has grown up with two or more cultural, racial, and/or ethnic elements in their life that others generally perceive as being distinct from one another*.¹⁵ We think of the experiences of mixed race young women who must navigate questions about their looks and identity, sometimes as blunt as “What are you?”; of missionary kids whose passports are not always indicators of their cultural values, personal identity, or even first language; of children with at least one parent who is an immigrant and who try to honor the immigrant parent’s cultural identity while also wishing they could be “normal.” We also have in mind persons who grew up within hybrid cultural spaces or with parents from different racial/ethnic backgrounds who are now adults—people who are still working to make sense of

¹³ Robert C. Neville, *Ultimates: Philosophical Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 96.

¹⁴ Goto, “Hybridity,” 27.

¹⁵ This definition draws on the work of sociologist Dave Pollock and consultant Ruth Van Reken on “cross-cultural kids.” See Dave C. Pollock, Ruth E. Van Reken, and Michael V. Pollock, *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2017), 15-16, 43.

their identities, because who they are doesn't fit into the neat definitional categories of identity the world often presents. We acknowledge that there are still other forms of hybrid identity beyond the ones we've named. While we hold our definitions lightly (functionally vague, if you will), we want to also hold our focus squarely on the experiences that our understanding of hybrid identity is rooted in. That means focusing on those whose identities are bound up in the experiences of being *both/and* and *neither/nor*—in short, folx like us.

Three Predominant Approaches to Exploring Vocation

As we have traveled the terrain of vocational exploration with young people from all walks of life, and as we have engaged in settings for vocational exploration ourselves, we have encountered three predominant approaches for exploring vocation. While each of these approaches has provided fruit for exploration of vocation in the communities we have served, we continue to turn to one another with questions about what it looks like to engage the particular challenges to identity formation and vocational exploration for folx who possess hybrid identities. These three overarching approaches to vocation include: 1) vocation as living into authentic selfhood, 2) vocation as a process of lifelong development, and 3) vocation as living into the “sound of [one’s] genuine.”¹⁶

The “authentic selfhood” approach to vocation is perhaps most associated with Parker J. Palmer, whose small, pink book, *Let Your Life Speak*, has been a staple of multiform contexts for vocational exploration.¹⁷ Released in 2000, Palmer infuses the text with his characteristic contemplative self-reflection to encourage readers to look within to hear the “voice of

¹⁶ Stephen Lewis, Matthew Wesley Williams, and Dori Grinenko Baker, *Another Way: Living and Leading Change on Purpose* (Nashville: Chalice Press, 2020).

¹⁷ Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

vocation.”¹⁸ In guiding the reader to listen for the internal voice of vocation, Palmer invites us to tap into our inherent giftedness as created by God, which Palmer calls one’s “authentic selfhood.”¹⁹ Palmer calls this authenticity our “birthright gifts,” from which we can be drained away as the world tries to shape and mold who we are to conform to others’ visions of virtue and vocation.²⁰ Palmer encourages us to explore our essential giftedness and passions, along with our darker “shadow” sides, in order to truly understand who we are called to be and what we are called to do. With a Quaker spiritual grounding, Palmer invites processes of community discernment with a contemplative tone as a resource for discovering the authentic self.

Palmer’s approach to vocation has been essential for helping us as practitioners to reflect on how forces around us conspire to distort self-image and draw us away from our own passions and gifts. This approach is immensely helpful in helping to shape a theology of vocation that has optimism as its core—one that invites us to draw upon our essential giftedness and to remember that we are all created in the image of God. This theological orientation is especially important, Palmer says, when we look to the world around us to find purpose, instead of dwelling within. Looking around us (instead of inside us) distorts our authentic selfhood, Palmer says, and draws us away from vocation.

At the same time that Palmer helpfully names the ways that the world distorts who we are, his approach (itself a vocational trade language) glosses over those forces of distortion, their origins, and the ways we must navigate the genesis of those distortions on doing the work of vocational discovery. For many of us—women, queer folx, People of Color, and other marginalized persons—the world has not provided the feedback or reflective resources to identify or hone our particular gifts, and sometimes sitting quietly in order to hear that voice can

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

²⁰ Ibid., 12.

only bring us closer to those voices of distortion in traumatic ways. As Palmer writes, “The soul speaks its truth only under quiet, inviting and trustworthy conditions.”²¹ For some, trustworthy conditions don’t come easy and have not been a part of our core formation into selfhood.

In addition, in naming the distortions that contribute to what might draw us away from vocation, from “that place where your deep gladness meet the world’s deep needs,”²² Palmer fails to take a critical approach in relation to privilege, and eschews any engagement with soteriology and its relationship to vocational identity formation from the perspective of privilege.²³ He neglects to name the distortions to selfhood that have been constructed for many of us as we have been socialized into identities of privilege. Indeed, these distortions and the practices of entitlement and domination that accompany them—including white supremacy, patriarchy, Christian privilege, and heteronormativity, to name a few—are *sinful*, and should be engaged critically as part of our vocational exploration. Our theological approaches to vocational exploration must include recognition of the ways that our practices of entitlement and domination drain life from others. Ultimately, we must seek repentance from the sins we have enacted that have cut life from others, and convert toward a vocation that resists these exercises of privilege.

A second approach to vocational exploration that is often adapted in religious education is a developmental approach, which has roots in the work of James W. Fowler. In *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, Fowler builds upon his theory of faith development to craft a vision for vocational becoming that unfolds across the lifespan.²⁴ In this work, Fowler draws upon the theories of several developmental philosophers—Erik Erikson, Daniel Levinson, and Carol

²¹ Ibid., 7.

²² Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC* (HarperOne: 1993), 95.

²³ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 10.

²⁴ James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development & Christian Faith* (Jossey-Bass, 2000).

Gilligan—who, he claims, have “helped us gain a holistic grasp of the course of human life.”²⁵

Fowler connects these developmental theories with his own empirical study of the ways that faith, “a human universal,”²⁶ develops across the lifespan in predictable ways, and then marries this developmental conversation with Christian theology in order to develop his vision for vocational development. Fowler names “partnership with God in God’s work in the world”²⁷ as the central vocational task:

It means understanding partnership with God as always beginning in solidarity with God’s love and passion for the fulfillment of creation. It means giving oneself in solidarity with God’s passion for the release and reclaiming of those confined in bondage [. . .] participating in God’s *kenosis*—God’s giving of self, God’s spending and being spent in the process of liberation and redemption.²⁸

This partnership with God—expressed in love, solidarity, and justice-pursuing *kenosis*—grows over the course of a lifetime as one grows in faith. During this growth, humans develop in capacity for empathy and love of neighbor as our cognition, moral agency, and faith grow and change.

In this text Fowler weaves a beautiful vision of vocation that pursues empathy, self knowledge, and social restoration, and therefore addresses some of the limitations expressed in Palmer. However, the developmental basis for Fowler’s theory is problematic for people with hybrid cultural identities. The reliance upon conventional and universally applicable frameworks for human becoming often don’t resemble the developmental road-maps of hybrid identity formation. Hybrid people are challenged to form identities in ways that positively incorporate our multiple racial and cultural backgrounds, due in large part to rejections of the validity of our presentations of self from our multiple communities of origin and from society at large.²⁹

²⁵ Ibid., 14.

²⁶ Ibid., 38.

²⁷ Ibid., 74.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Beverly Daniel Tatum, *“Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” And Other Conversations About Race* (Basic Books, 1997).

Therefore, our identity formation does not often follow a predictable path, such as that depicted in Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of development. Because of the many and mixed messages we receive about who we are over the course of a lifetime, our selfhood does not develop in predictable ways and often our formation includes disparate elements which create crises quite different from those that Erikson and Fowler might have imagined. Developmental models do not adequately take into account the ways in which socialization contributes to identity formation, especially when identity formation includes significant cultural and communal disconnects, along with internal conflict.³⁰

A third approach of vocational exploration we have encountered as religious educators is an approach developed by Stephen Lewis, Matthew Wesley Williams, Dori Baker, and the program staff at the Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE).³¹ This approach often begins with reference to the 1980 baccalaureate speech of Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman at Spelman College, during which Thurman tells graduates:

There is something in every one of you that waits, listens for the *sound of the genuine* [emphasis ours] in yourself and if you cannot hear it, you will never find whatever it is for which you are searching. [. . .] The sound of the genuine is flowing through you. Don't be deceived and thrown off by all the noises that are a part even of your dreams and your ambitions that you don't hear the sound of the genuine in you. Because that is the only true guide you will ever have and if you don't have that you don't have a thing [. . .] Cultivate the discipline of listening to the sound of the genuine in yourself.³²

In settings for vocational exploration, Lewis, Williams, and Baker draw upon Thurman as a "muse" who "opens us to images, metaphors, or other artful expressions of soulful existence," posing exploratory questions such as, "Tell a story about a time when you heard the sound of the

³⁰ Bobbie Harro, "The Cycle of Socialization," in Maurianne Adams, et al., *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice* (4th ed. Philadelphia: Routledge, 2018), 45-52.

³¹ Stephen Lewis, Matthew Wesley Williams, and Dori Baker, *Another Way: Living & Leading Change on Purpose* (2020, Chalice Press).

³² Howard Thurman, "The Sound of the Genuine" (baccalaureate address, Spelman College, Atlanta, GA, May 4, 1980). Speech edited by Jo More Stewart for the Spelman Messenger 96, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 14-15. Available online at <http://www.uindy.edu/eip/files/reflection4.pdf>.

genuine in you.”³³ Lewis and colleagues weave Thurman’s contemplative and self-validating vision of vocation as *call* with the more communal, less individualistic notion of *purpose*:

Purpose describes one’s unique role in life, one’s role in society. But such purpose is not only about an individual’s self-serving desires. Purpose is also concerned with the meaning and impact of an individual’s life when viewed from a larger perspective than one’s own.³⁴

By drawing vocation beyond call, toward purpose, Lewis, Williams, and Baker are expanding the location of vocation beyond the individual, toward its cultivation and actualization in community. Drawing upon the power of experience and story as the central starting point for reflection in liberation theologies and pedagogical projects for emancipation, Lewis and FTE build pedagogical frameworks for vocational exploration that include connection to elders and ancestors, invite one’s own story and invoke the stories of the community, and engage in a critical and creative wrestling with the pain present in the lives of many of those who live on the margins. They “widen the sources for vocational imagination,”³⁵ inviting marginalized people to “author their own narratives”³⁶ beyond the confines of Euro-centric Christianity.³⁷ Ultimately, Lewis and colleagues invite us to consider a vision of the vocational person as “warrior-healer,” one who “embodies *liberating leadership*” [emphasis in the original].³⁸ “Liberating leadership is the world of warrior-healers who seek to create conditions in which all creation flourishes and is uninhibited in its ability to live fully into its sacred worth, identity, and potential.”³⁹

As we move toward crafting what vocational exploration might look like from the perspective of cultural hybridity, Lewis, Williams, and Baker open a way for us to draw upon our internal resources in genuine ways, to cull the resources of our ancestors and communities, and

³³ Lewis, Williams, and Baker, *Another Way*, 70-71.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 100-105.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

to reckon with the inner revolution that comes with being a descendant of hostile factions like those bound up in the colonizer/colonized relationship. For culturally hybrid people like us, the sound of our genuine includes a reckoning with the formation of identities as people shaped by *both* privilege and oppression, especially when our both/and-ness includes racial identification with a culture of color and white culture. It includes a necessary confession of our complicity with white supremacy and other forms of domination, while also attending to the ways our communities call us to live in whole, connected, and nurturing ways. While Lewis and FTE do not provide the road map for the particular kind of exploration of self-in-community that hybrid people must grapple with in doing vocational exploration, they invite us into the process of naming our own stories, the gifts and limitations of our communities, and ultimately, have provided the invitation for both of us to engage in the conversation here today. In short, their work has provided the settings and pedagogical resources for us to together re-imagine what vocation from the perspective of cultural hybridity might look like. To them we are deeply indebted, and now turn toward the identification of our own epistemological sources of vocational identification and exploration.

Four Fruitful Starting Points

Drawing upon our understanding of cultural hybridity as a functionally vague identity for vocational development, upon our own experiences of inter-referencing as a source of life, and upon what we know about existing predominant models for understanding vocation in the work of developing pedagogies for vocational exploration, we propose four fruitful starting points for doing vocational exploration with culturally hybrid people: 1) wrestling with hybrid identity formation, 2) honoring particularities, 3) inter-referencing other hybrid people, and 4) working with messiness.

1. Hybrid Identity Formation

Like many approaches to vocational exploration, our starting point for doing vocational reflection draws upon our experiences of and struggles with identity formation. Indeed, as Beverly Daniel Tatum suggests, “[The] ‘looking glass self’ is not a flat one-dimensional reflection but multidimensional.”⁴⁰ The self is not composed in some idealized internal dialogue, or through the composition of one element of selfhood (race, gender, or culture, for instance), but as the complex, multivalent self encounters the social world and as those presentations of self are validated and/or rejected. In contrast to the universally applicable models of vocation posited by our developmentalist colleagues, our starting point involves a deep wrestling with how our identities have been shaped by conflicting cultural forces—forces that are not easily articulated or resolved either in their external relationship to one another or in how we resolve their presence within our individual identity formation.

It is not uncommon for our presentations of self in one or both of our racial/ethnic communities, and in communities that presume monoculturalism, to encounter a lack of validation, questioning, or outright rejection. It is in this sense that our racial/ethnic and cultural identities reflect a *both/and* and a *neither/nor* quality. We are at the same time members of both of the racial ethnic groups that comprise our identities, and because we do not exhibit stereotypical visual, behavioral, or linguistic norms associated with the monocultural communities from which we come, we are also “full members” of neither of our communities of origin.⁴¹ Thus, while the complexity of identity formation that Tatum names is reflective of our experience of racial identity formation, hybrid people do not follow conventionally held patterns of racial identity formation. Therefore, as Lewis, Williams, and Baker suggest, the starting point

⁴⁰ Tatum, *All the Black Kids*, 18.

⁴¹ Though we would posit that, considering the increased hybridization of the U.S. population, monocultural communities are a figment of our colonial imaginations.

for vocational reflection for us must be in the stories we tell about our ancestry, our experiences of the world, the messiness we face, and the truths that we encounter by living in a both/and, neither/nor reality. And, because racial/ethnic becoming for hybrid people sometimes includes a reckoning with our origins as both colonizer and colonized, our identity formation involves reconciling seemingly contradictory elements of selfhood present in the same person, and vocation means trying to forge a path to become a warrior-healer who is healing those particular divisions both within ourselves, within our communities, and in partnership with God toward a vision of both individual and collective wholeness.

2. Honoring Particularities

If one of the shortcomings of the vocational literature reviewed earlier is an inability to account for the particularities of hybrid experience, then a corrective is to give attention to those particularities. The particularities of Anne as a woman of Indigenous and white heritage who grew up in the US are different from those of Peter as a mixed-race male who grew up primarily in the Philippines. Goto's functionally vague understanding of hybridity is helpful here in that it allows for a plurality of experiences. Being hybrid doesn't have to look only one way.

This is important because as hybrid people, we are hardly knowable *except through our stories and the particularities of those stories*. There is no metanarrative, as it were, for hybrid folk, at least not like the metanarratives reflected in Palmer's and Fowler's approaches to vocation. In fact, if there *is* a metanarrative, it's that nobody (sometimes including ourselves) knows exactly what to make of us. One might say that confusion is a mother tongue for many of us. Our experiences of fragmented identity, as well as our need to integrate the pieces of it, do not fit neatly in a world that so often expects integration (or essentialized identity) as default and shows no hospitality for fragmentation.

We see the rubber of this starting point meeting the road of practice in encounters that we have with hybrid people, especially youth and young adults, who are trying to navigate vocational exploration without a model or reference point that fully reflects their experience. This has especially been Peter's experience of working with third culture kids (TCKs). The term TCK has traditionally applied to people who grew up outside their passport country due to a parent's work or training, such as children of missionary, military, or international business families. While young people from these backgrounds tend to be able to relate to others from multiple cultural backgrounds, those who grow up without many TCK peers often feel that they are alone in their hybrid experience, that they are weird, neither/nor, and not fully anything wherever they go.⁴² What, for example, does "authentic selfhood" look like for the young woman of Japanese and African American descent who grew up in Japan, who in Japan is often not acknowledged as Japanese and in the US feels like an outsider on multiple levels? What is the "sound of the genuine" for the young man of white parentage who lived his first eighteen years in Uganda and feels a kinship with Africans that is not always returned?

In thinking about the communities of hybrid people we work with and serve, we agree with Goto:

I find it more helpful to linger with lived experiences of hybridity within a given [. . .] community and to reflect on the intersections of plural mother tongues and plural trade languages. Hybridity works less well as a universal descriptor of [. . .] identity and better as a concept that primarily takes on meaning when discussed in terms of the lived experiences of members of a particular community in a certain context with all its intersecting and clashing cultures, communal narratives, and histories.⁴³

Though Goto here is focused specifically on Asian American forms of hybridity, we believe—in the spirit of being functionally vague—that her observations apply to other communities as well.

⁴² See Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock, *Third Culture Kids*, 183-94.

⁴³ Goto, "Hybridity," 28.

3. Inter-referencing

What reference point might hybrid folk use, then, to develop a healthy picture of self-in-vocation? We propose that they *reference one another*. To flesh out what that looks like, we draw on the work of Taiwanese activist and cultural studies scholar Kuan-Hsing Chen and his idea of “inter-referencing.” In his book *Asia as Method*, Chen argues that Asian postcolonial responses to the West, whether to deconstruct it, de-universalize it, delegitimize it, or to set up native opposition to it, have tended to still keep fixated on the Western “it.”⁴⁴ This fixation simply leads to another form of “the West and the rest” (as Chen quotes Stuart Hall), a binary that maintains the West’s centrality in the very face of efforts to displace it.⁴⁵ As an alternative to this binary fixation, and to avoid nationalism and nativism, Chen argues that Asia must move from “West as method,” in which the West is the primary reference for education, philosophy, business, and so on, to “Asia as method,” in which Asia is the main reference—an “imaginary anchoring point.”⁴⁶ Asian countries can inter-reference with one another, multiplying their frames of reference by looking to each other for ways to move forward. The West is still present, of course, but is acknowledged as non-totalizing “fragmented pieces” that represent “one cultural resource among many others.”⁴⁷

While Chen himself aims his proposal at the macro-levels of nation states and people groups, his work (in a happy coincidence for members of our own guild) has seen a surprising amount of engagement among scholars of education. A number of scholars in Asia and Oceania have discussed ways of putting Chen’s theoretical framework into practice at institutions, in

⁴⁴ Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 217-23. See also the discussion of Chen’s approach from the standpoint of education in Angel M. Y. Lin, “Towards Transformation of Knowledge and Subjectivity in Curriculum Inquiry: Insights from Chen Kuan-Hsing’s ‘Asia as Method,’” *Curriculum Inquiry* 42, no. 1 (2012): 165-67, DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-873X.2011.00571.x.

⁴⁵ Chen, *Asia as Method*, 216-17.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 212

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 223.

classrooms, and among students.⁴⁸ Angel Lin, a Hong Kong-based educator, poses questions prompted by Chen's work that hit quite close to home for us as practitioners:

When engaging in curriculum and education inquiry and practice as a Hong Kong scholar located in post-British Hong Kong, where can I look for frames of reference (e.g., theoretical frameworks, methodologies, epistemologies)? Should I stick to Anglo-European theories and epistemologies, so as to publish in international journals[?] [. . .] (How) Should I look to different Asian, African, and South American traditions for insights? (How) Should I introduce and apply foreign curriculum and pedagogical theories and methodologies in our local contexts?⁴⁹

As religious educators, we find many points of resonance with Lin's questions, and even more so as hybrid folx. In line with our discussion of vocational exploration earlier, we might ask similar questions about our frames of reference for vocation. Should we stick to privileged, white vocational frameworks and trade languages? How might we look to communities of color for guidance, even when they're not our own? How might we look to other hybrid people whose insights on vocation aren't published by major presses or cited in *Religious Education* journal articles but *are* accessible in the mother tongues of hybridity?

Taking Lin's appropriation of inter-referencing a step further, we propose that hybrid folx can likewise inter-reference with each other. Aside from the connection that we (Anne and Peter) found with each other, our proposal is rooted in formational practices with hybrid communities, specifically of Peter's experience of working with TCKs. I (Peter) have been a leader for groups made up of international TCKs and other hybrid folx at Christian institutions for over 10 years. One of the consistent features of these groups is how much individual TCKs look to each other for support and advice, especially those US passport-holders who struggle to adjust to US

⁴⁸ See Hongzhi Zhang, Philip Wing Keung Chan, and Jane Kenway, *Asia as Method in Education Studies: A Defiant Research Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2015); Leonel Lim and Michael W. Apple, "The Politics of Curriculum Reforms in Asia: Inter-Referencing Discourses of Power, Culture and Knowledge," *Curriculum Inquiry* 48, no. 2 (2018): 139-148, DOI: 10.1080/03626784.2018.1448532; Yoonmi Lee, "A Critical Dialogue with 'Asia as Method': A Response from Korean Education," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 51 no. 9 (2019): 958-69, DOI: 10.1080/00131857.2018.1427579.

⁴⁹ Lin, "Towards Transformation," 165.

culture.⁵⁰ One night after a gathering that ended with peer-sharing, I realized that Chen's vision of inter-referencing was happening naturally on a small scale in the group: instead of turning to their (white) American peers as points of reference for how to adjust, make friends, and simply *be* in the world, these hybrid young people were turning to each other. They already had multiple frames of reference by having lived in (and having within them) multiple cultures; the West (and whiteness) was still present, but it was not totalizing.

In terms of vocation, inter-referencing can serve as a way of framing why hybrid folx need other hybrid folx. As discussed earlier, many communities of color take this approach naturally—Indigenous communities turn and *return* to native resources, Black communities draw on African and African-American traditions, Latinx folk look to *familia*, and so on. Lewis, Williams, and Baker make explicit the connection between community and vocation, especially for people of color. But what about hybrid folx, particularly those of us who bear the West and whiteness in our blood as well as our minds? Perhaps “hybrid as method,” so to speak, could be a way forward. It allows each cultural piece within us to be present without being totalizing, each providing one resource among many. Within “hybrid as method,” our main frame of reference is each other. As we inter-reference, we find space where worry about communal acceptance melts away, where performance is not (as) necessary,⁵¹ and encounter with one another becomes its own kind of “mother tongue.” This is also a space where we can honestly grapple with what it means to make sense of the conflicting elements of our identities and how we might reconcile and repair those contradictions both in our identity formation and in our vocational expression,

⁵⁰ Others have noted this as well. See Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock, *Third Culture Kids*, 15-34; for a nuanced discussion in relation to perceived social capital, see Danau Tanu, *Growing Up in Transit: The Politics of Belonging at an International School* (New York: Berghan Books, 2018), 134-64.

⁵¹ On some level, hybrid people are always performing aspects of our identities in communities of others. And, let's be honest, almost everyone is “other” in our cross-cultural encounters.

toward the kind of social repair of colonialism and white supremacy that partnership with God in God's work in the world necessitates.

4. Working with Messiness

We understand elements of our own cultural identities, descended from both colonizer and colonized, as embodying inherent contradiction that renders our epistemology functionally vague. At the same time, parts of our identities (colonizer) have and in many ways still are literally working to blot out other parts of who we are (colonized). In a sense, like Queen Elsa, we are at war within ourselves: epistemic tension is always there, causing the epistemological fight between colonizer and colonized to never cease. When we cannot make space to find peace among these warring factions, trauma is expressed as domination of others (borne of our Euro-American whiteness) and as practices of self-hatred internalized in our bodies (for the pieces of ourselves that are dominated), which often takes shape as anxiety, depression, over-working, over-eating, and a host of other generational somatic coping mechanisms for responding to trauma.⁵² A form of expression is even seen in the film scene we opened this paper with: on learning the terrible history of both her ancestors, Elsa literally freezes up. Trauma suspends life itself, let alone vocational exploration.

This vague, messy space extends to our experiences of the world, with encounters that include misrecognition and force an oversimplification of our identities. In the midst of this misrecognition, we can feel forced to perform particular elements of who we are in stereotypical ways or to don “exotic” garments from the communities of color to which we have emerged in ways that mis-represent our epistemological relationship with those cultures. In this sense, vocational exploration includes a messy dance with the world around us (or a magical conjuring

⁵² Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2017).

a la Queen Elsa, if you will). This includes embrace of the vague when others can't quite figure us out, to avoid any sort of vaudevillian performance of ethnicity, especially in the midst of it's inexplicable complexity. This is a creative, revolutionary space that can hold the tensions, critically engage and resist practices of domination (from both the perspective of dominator and dominated), resist performance, and find creative forms for self-expression, and personal and collective healing. This, for us, is (at the very least) a fruitful starting point for vocational exploration.

Conclusion

We think it may be helpful to close this paper with one more reference to *Frozen II*. The first person Elsa thinks of when confronted with the messiness of her identity, as well as the one who is able to help break Elsa free of her frozen, suspended state, is someone who shares the same story—her sister, Ana. It is telling, we think, that our protagonist turns to someone she knows she can reference, who shares a mother tongue despite differences in the particulars of their lives. That's the one, it turns out, who helps make vocational exploration possible again.

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Significant Others: Friendship as Vocation in a Queer, Storytelling Bar Church

ABSTRACT

As a result of receiving a grant of \$30,000 for the purpose of innovative experimentation, a church on the northeast side of Chicago decided to make friendship their vocation for an entire year. This paper focuses on Gilead Chicago, a five-year-old congregation located (loosely defined -- they have no permanent physical space) in the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago. Through a series of events: parties, retreats, community projects, and even brewing beer, Gilead took a deep dive into the ways young adults feel lonely and yearn for community, specifically through the bonds of friendship.

The long hallway outside the college auditorium was finally empty – all the books covered and all the other reps out having dinner with the faculty. Except for me. I was still there, the dinner break too short for me to pack up my expensive wares, get dinner, and return in time to open up again. This was the annual theology conference at a well-known Christian college in the Midwest, and I was selling books on behalf of the college bookstore. I was not the only one, however—every major religious publishing house in the Midwest was also there selling their publications to everyone who walked by: students, staff, faculty, visitors. The official bookstore's job was to carry what those publishers could not – the rare stuff. The books by conference speakers that were intended only to be bought by libraries. The books whose prices were in the triple digits; ones that I felt I needed to put on white gloves to touch. Books with titles like *Mortuary Feasting in New Ireland* (I promise I'm not making it up). These books were

too valuable for me to leave simply covered with a cloth while getting dinner. So I stayed, and ate my Subway sandwich I bought that morning, and read my own little book in the quiet, semi-dark hallway.

“Jennifer!” I heard down the hall, after the elevator ding echoed through the air. It was one of my former classmates, a chatty blond yoga-and-crystals type. I remember once she said she studied for her comprehensive exams by soaking in the bath with lit candles and one of our textbooks. She approached the table and asked me how I was doing since graduation (she still had to finish her thesis) and, you know, why was I still working at the bookstore when I had a master’s degree and all. I told her about looking at other grad programs and trying to decide where to go and mentioned that I have ties keeping me here. “Oh, I didn’t know you have a significant other!” she said, jumping to a conclusion that was not obvious to me but seemed plain as day to her. “I don’t,” I said, “I have significant *others*.”

The prevailing assumption in the United States is that there is one true and significant relationship, defined as a spouse or romantic partner, that is the most important and most enduring reason that we make certain decisions and have the opportunity to have our needs met. For many of us, however, this has not proven to be true. For young adults in the US, whose average age of first marriage now hovers in the late twenties and doesn’t show any signs of getting younger, marriage and home ownership are not front of mind when it comes to five-year (and even ten-year) plans. Young people are postponing the American Dream in favor of furthering their education (the master’s degree is the new bachelor’s degree – more and more careers that once required “some college” now require post-graduate work). Young adults in developed countries can reasonably expect to live much longer than their ancestors (with one

notable exception in the United States – uneducated white women¹). Deciding to marry at 22 could mean a seventy-year-long marriage for many (I remember mentioning this to a young woman about a month before her wedding. I thought I was telling her something exciting! She looked ashen. Not surprisingly, the marriage didn't last). Buying your first house in your twenties can mean setting down roots somewhere for fifty or so years. While some young adults certainly find security and comfort in that, many if not most are simply uninterested in making those kind of long-lasting decisions so young.

This doesn't mean, however, that these “failing to launch”² young adults are having the time of their lives. Since young adults are marrying later, putting off homebuying, and are generally more transient than ever before in history, loneliness is a reality that many face. To address this problem, Gilead Church Chicago, a church of “open and affirming, anti-racist, local, organic, slow-church, just peace, free range, real butter Christians,”³ decided to focus an entire year on the theme of friendship as a result of receiving a grant from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary of \$30,000. This grant was provided via the Lilly Endowment Young Adult Initiative, a five-year program to encourage congregations to experiment with ways to minister to and with young adults in any way they chose. With Gilead's growing acknowledgement of the loneliness that young adults face, they focused on friendship – in other words, the importance of significant *others*. To this end, they planned events such as train parties

¹ Gina Kolata and Sabrina Tavernise, “It's Not Just Poor White People Driving a Decline in Life Expectancy,” *The New York Times*, November 26, 2019; Updated February 18, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/26/health/life-expectancy-rate-usa.html> (accessed May 14, 2021).

Note: Since the publication of the original article, the global coronavirus pandemic has changed the life expectancy rate for all groups of middle age Americans as well.

² This is a phrase I very much dislike, but it gets at the general presumption that American culture has of transient young people.

³ Gilead Church Chicago, gileadchicago.org.

and fort-building parties; couples retreats for friends; and themed services dealing with loneliness, authenticity, and love between friends.

In addition to the official descriptor found on their website, members of Gilead describe it as a “Queer, storytelling, bar church.”⁴ This is because the membership of the church is around 50% self-identified Queer people; the main liturgy of the church is the practice of trained storytelling related to the week’s sermon,⁵ “true stories that save lives;”⁶ and – before Covid – meeting in a series of bars instead of having a permanent location.

Gilead is a new congregation – just about five years old – and is itself the product of a friendship. Rebecca Anderson, founding co-pastor and trained, professional storyteller,⁷ started this church with her close friend, Vince Amlin. In our interview, Rebecca commented:

He [Vince] had been living a very happy life in Florida for like seven years... [and I said] you should get back to Chicago and that we should start a church together in Rogers Park. And he said, “let me talk to [my wife]...actually I think you should move out to Chicago.” And I was like, that’s confirmation and we should start a church in Rogers Park. Like, I don’t know, it’s just a call. Like there was, there was a point at which like the rationale kind of ran out and I was like, I don’t know, cause that’s where, that’s where it’s supposed to be.”

Rebecca and Vince grew Gilead out of their friendship, creating a church that was welcoming and affirming of all people, including LGBTQ+ Christians and non-Christians who were looking for a place to be themselves, listen to good stories (the true kind that save lives),

⁴ I learned this from the congregation’s president during an interview.

⁵ Founding co-pastor Rebecca Anderson is clear on this: “So, as you know, but for the record, when people tell stories and they have prepared them, they’re not open mics. They prepared them on the same theme that the sermon, the sermon the preaching was preaching on the scripture and all that. They’ve prepped well.... So after people tell those stories usually to a service, one of the people leading says, ‘This is the word of God for the people of God’ and everyone says, ‘thanks be to God.’ And we don’t, it should be noted that it is true. Instead of scripture being the word of God, they’re all true stories that, uh, God is working in. Um, we can’t have any more publicity saying that we use stories instead of scripture!”

⁶ A quote from my interview with a Gilead Church intern.

⁷ To hear and see Rebecca on The Moth: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmahwHyU_Is

and share in community what they had (during the pandemic, Gilead offered a Zoom bread baking lesson to anyone who wanted to participate and then delivered bread to anyone who signed up saying they wanted some, regardless of whether they took the class or made some themselves). There is a strong sense of community and chosen family within Gilead, even though many members, including the leaders, live fairly recognizable “normal” lives. Vince is married and has a child, and Rebecca lives by herself like many single women do. However, their relationship to friends as chosen family is clear. Rebecca says:

So I’m somebody who has, um, I’m single, I live alone. I don’t have any kids and my, my biological family lives at a distance. But I have, um, I have a really big network of people and I have a pretty big network of intimate people. Like, and I definitely have like five or six people that I would go to in a crisis that I had, people who I would ask to, like, borrow thousands of dollars or people who I ask to take care of me after surgery or something.... I have a lot of intimacy in my life and I think that for me, I don’t know like to define friendship, but I guess like for me the markers of close friendships are, um, I mean they just feel like buzzwords but like intimacy, vulnerability, which it just maybe feels like another way of saying honesty.... And intimacy is like knowing and being known.

The decision to focus on friendship as a means of alleviating loneliness came naturally to Rebecca, and the rest of the team. Izzy⁸, a very bright and thoughtful former young adult intern at Gilead, found that her most foundational faith formation came because of a group of friends in her teens:

I got hooked in with a Methodist youth group in town. My friends were going and their older siblings had gone and it was a really dynamic program.... So all through my middle school and high school days, I was involved in this youth group... And I mean, I felt so connected to God and to my friends. And both of them were like totally intertwined for all of those seven years.... So there were like, six or eight or ten girls who were like, really connected to each other. And like six of us went to the same high school, and we were friends at school, and we were friends church and there’s like, like we were, we were committed to the church and to God and to each other.... Like, those friendships were really meaningful.... In the middle of that time my parents got divorced. And so that community, those friends, like thank God I had them and thank God we had practiced having hard conversation, and you know, being present with each other. Like, I

⁸ Not her real name

found out my parents got divorced. The next day, I went to church camp, and my best friend could like cry with me because she knew my family and loved me. It was my friend, you know, like was my actual friend.... My connection to God is, has been regularly through my friendships with people.

Izzy was one of the main architects of the plan to focus on friendship for Gilead's grant-receiving year. She began going to Gilead when she relocated to Chicago:

So it was really mostly by happenstance. So I had this pastor that I served with in college, he, his church he was about to plant... so he was kind of keeping an eye on various church plants around the country and what they were doing. And so somebody sent him like, oh my, you know, I know somebody who's doing this church plant in Chicago. And so I had just moved there, you know, within the last couple months. And so he sent their website to me. And on the top of their website, there was a woman playing a cello. And I was like, alright, I'm sold! And there's never been a cello.

And I don't know, like that and the rest of our website, I mean, just saying who they were was really captivating to me.... And I was like, not connecting with the traditional churches around.... I was looking for something weird anyway, and it just came along.

Due to her intelligence, grace, and warm inviting nature, Izzy was chosen to be a Young Adult Fellow with the Garrett Seminary grant initiative. This meant that she would interview three fellow young adults using a protocol she helped develop with FTE Senior Research Fellow Dori Baker and sociologist Tobin Belzer. It was during that time that she began exploring the theme of loneliness and friendship. She explains:

Right around that time an article came out about loneliness and young adults. So, so that came out and that was really, that just became like one of our, you know, central texts you know, of our ministry somehow and like, so looking at both the results of the interviews that we did.... So yeah, there's this, both this like longing for connection and a sense of like, alienation from communities, you know? Yeah, I mean, I think it's something you're all, were longing for.... And so like young adults are transients and you know, have these painful past experiences in a church and have been alienated from people [because they are] Queer and you know have difficult or complicated or no relationship with family.

Izzy was instrumental in the planning of events that bridged both the need for genuine fun and deep connection, events that would both create friendships and solidify existing friendships. She drew from her own life experiences and the role she plays in friendships to help discover what might work well for the Gilead community:

I can have a strong, strong presence and so my friendships that have meant the most to me are friendships with people who, who like see themselves as like, firmly co-equals with me and can say hard truths to me and can, like, and can be really funny and do silly things and like, allow, help me to do, that helped me to, like, do things that are ridiculous and unproductive and fun. And so I think that was a piece for us. It was like, you know, how do you make friends like through fun experiences and then also through like, heartfelt connection. And so we tried to have, you know, activities that did both of these things. Both the fun and the, the more deep connectedness of, you know, of hearts or whatever.

One of the most notable and unique events held during their year of friendship was a party on a CTA (Chicago Transit Authority) train. Gilead Chicago president Sarah Pressly, who has been a part of the Gilead community since the beginning, describes it as such:

The funnest thing that I did not even know was possible. Sorry – funnest? – was a uh, a party on the train where we rented two, not even three, train cars on the CTA and an, an engine to drag them by and drove, rode the train for two hours. And in that two-hour time there was a catered meal. And you could look out the window and see the truly lovely lights of Chicago, Illinois. And uh, there were storytellers and, um, because there's not, there's no way to go between the cars. We had storyteller A in the front and storyteller B in the back. And then we made, uh, a scheduled stop for people to get off and go to the bathroom and they swapped. And then we listened, uh, then the other two cars listened, and um, it was amazing. It was amazing. And it was, um, they decorated the inside of the car and had Smack Dab⁹ bakery, food, which was delicious and in holdable bites. Um, and it wasn't very expensive because they were able to get funding from the Young Adult Initiative, but it just brought together in this, you know, you're in this closed space, you don't have much of a choice but to talk to each other, but it was just innovative and fun.

Izzy had this to say about her experience at the party on the train:

And there are people, it was like, there are people who came who never before had been to Gilead and have, you know, like would not have necessarily be looking for and so...

⁹ <https://smackdabchicago.com/site/> For your snacking enjoyment.

then there are people even that, like, on the train platform who like hopped on our train even though, like, they weren't gonna be able to get off until the end, you know? And yeah, so, you know, the great evangelism tool and like we're forever the church that had a party on a train, you know, and so it says something about us and it says something that we want to have said about us: we do fun things together, because we think that matters.... Looking back now, like train cars are like, not designed for connection, right? Like, they're just like, not designed for that. And, and so it's just and I mean, I think people connected and I felt, I mean, I do feel like I made a couple good connections with people and one guy who's a, was a parishioner at Gilead, you know, came up to me, like, halfway through the party and he was like, I've been so depressed and like, I knew I just had to get out and do this and like, because this is happening, like it was cool enough for me to get out of bed for you know, and so I, I knew I had to go and like, this is exactly what I needed, you know? And, yeah, so just I think it's, I think having things that are worth getting out of bed for. Because they're unique and they're probably not ever going to happen again, and they're going to be fun. Like, that's what's required of the church right now.

“Having things that are worth getting out of bed for.” For older generations, this might sound like exactly the kind of entitlement that they believe young adults (the much-maligned Millennials, to be exact) experience – a lack of ability to do something that they don't feel like doing. However, it is worth noting that all three of the Gilead folks that I interviewed (aged between 25 and 55) mentioned mental illness and/or anxiety and depression amongst young adults as something they felt was a real issue. In fact, the CDC noted in 2019 that depression rates were highest among those aged 18-29: a full 21%.¹⁰ “Having things that are worth getting out of bed for” is not an indicator of entitlement – it is an indicator of depression. Now, no one at Gilead, nor I, is claiming that their events can cure depression. It is simply notable that Gilead, as a church, is taking the prevalence of loneliness, and the depression that can be related, seriously.

¹⁰ Maria A. Villarroel and Emily P. Terlizzi, “Symptoms of Depression Among Adults: United States, 2019,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention NCHS Data Brief* no. 379, September 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db379.htm> (accessed May 14, 2021).

When Izzy says, “that’s what’s required of the church right now,” I think she is right. As Rebecca notes, loneliness (and its cousin, depression) is a life-threatening illness:

I mean, I came in with this super robust practice of friendship. Yeah. I think I always believed in church as a place of community.... Um, but to understand that loneliness is, is a life-threatening disease¹¹... that also undercuts your ability to treat loneliness. Loneliness literally depletes your ability to address loneliness¹².... If the gospel is lifesaving, then that would be one of the ways.

In hopes of helping to alleviate this loneliness, in addition to fun, party-type events that would get people out of bed and together, Gilead invested in planning events that would draw friends together in deeper, more vulnerable ways. One such innovative event, that is truly breathtaking to me, was a couples retreat – *for friends*. It is quite typical for US churches, even the most theologically and socially progressive, to focus very heavily on the married couple as the core relationship that needs nurturing and spiritual direction and care. It is assumed (and true) that couples need time away together to bond, destress, have fun, etc. It is also assumed (but not true) that friendships are just unnecessary add-ons in life, and don’t require any effort to maintain, or that they couldn’t benefit from something like dedicated time away together to bond in deeper ways. As my friends and I can attest, married and unmarried alike, our time together is sacred. We make a conscious effort to carve out time together, support each other in times of distress, and celebrate each other’s victories and blessings. The church does not create these spaces for us in the same way they do for married couples, and the fact that Gilead specifically names friendship as necessary and embraces friendship as a means of God’s grace and care, as something that is truly lifesaving, is innovative, spirit-filled, holy work.

¹¹ Anderson is referencing here an article by Cigna Insurance that was part of their initial proposal for focusing on friendship: <https://www.cigna.com/about-us/newsroom/news-and-views/press-releases/2018/new-cigna-study-reveals-loneliness-at-epidemic-levels-in-america>

¹² In the same way depression depletes your ability to “cure” your depression, I would add.

Given the belief that friendship is a work of the gospel that is lifesaving, it is not surprising that a self-described Queer church would embrace deep, meaningful friendships (Rebecca calls these a “combination of fun, joy, intimacy, vulnerability”) as a means of what anthropologist Kath Weston calls “chosen family.”¹³ A chosen family is made up of the people you rely on, trust, are vulnerable with, and make a life with that are not your relatives, often because you are estranged from your family of origin. Chosen family finds its roots in the Queer community. A chosen family meets the needs and provides the support, celebration, and care that can be missing in the lives of Queer people.

The American Dream of one true love that meets every conceivable need and that creates children and homeownership has not typically been accessible to all populations: unmarried people, LGBTQ+ people, Black and Brown people, lower middle-class people, etc.¹⁴ The vision of one significant other that compels the acquisition of the American Dream is based in the ideal of heterosexual life-long marriage and the means to acquire wealth to support one’s own nuclear family. Everything other than that is considered a waiting exercise: single people are waiting for a spouse; people who rent are waiting until they can afford to buy; childless couples are waiting for the right time to start a family.¹⁵ The American Dream is accessible only to those willing to narrow the scope of their lives to those attributes.

What Queer churches like Gilead, and other congregations that trouble the normative view of “the good life,” are doing is making space for folks whose lives don’t fit the American Dream narrative, regardless of what age range they fall into. Many traditional churches are stuck in the rut of focusing almost exclusively on nuclear families, even to the point of scheduling

¹³ Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

¹⁴ Mia Birdsong, *How We Show Up: Reclaiming Family, Friendship, and Community* (New York: Hachette Books, 2020).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

activities during the typical school year and expecting and encouraging individual family units to do everything together. They neglect to include the building and nurturing of friendships – significant *others* – into their plans and they wonder why young adults aren’t showing up. Young people are expanding the boundaries of what is normative regarding which relationships qualify as significant and churches like Gilead Chicago are paving the way. Meanwhile, communities of color, queer communities, and others whose life circumstances preclude their invitation into The Dream have created their own ways of living together and caring for each other that are less isolated, less constricting, and often more able to sustain the pressures of adulthood and aging than the one significant other nuclear family model.¹⁶

Where significant *others*, as a concept I have proposed here, expands on chosen families is that it is my belief that we *all* need more than one significant other. Even if we have a spouse or partner, friendship is key to living a more healthy, longer life. Friendships, in fact, have been found to be more important for the health and well-being of older people than family relationships.¹⁷ The Golden Girls were right! It is healthier in old age to live with or adjacent to friends, regardless of where your family lives.

The goals and practices that have assumed to be part of a “normal” life trajectory – lots of friends as a child, adolescent, and young adult; followed by marriage to one significant other whom you live with exclusively and create children with; the making or remaking of superficial friends or acquaintances based on your individual needs and the needs of your family, while

¹⁶ Aminatou Sow and Ann Friedman, *Big Friendship: How We Keep Each Other Close* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020).

¹⁷ Kim Hayes, “Friends Can Boost Health, Well-Being Among Older Adults.” *AARP*, July 6, 2017, <https://www.aarp.org/home-family/friends-family/info-2017/friendships-improve-health-older-adults-fd.html> (accessed May 14, 2021).

letting more significant relationships wither due to time constraints; empty nesting and retirement with one significant other, perhaps with a relocation to be near grandchildren; and ultimately the loss of a partner (in the ideal American Dream situation, both partners would die together) – are expanding and changing based on new realities. People are living longer, many far past the age of retirement and/or the death of a partner. When you have invested so much of your adult life into that one significant other¹⁸, to the detriment of your other relationships, you can feel lost at sea. It is not surprising at all that so many older Americans experience profound loneliness. It is not just young adults.

My concluding point here is to say: everyone, regardless of age, needs significant *others*. There are lots of books and articles about this; anecdotally, many senior citizens extol the virtue of having friends later in life; and my friends and I, middle-agers that we are, know that we could not have gotten through many life changes without each other. Where it is not often uplifted, except in youth group, is in church congregations. Churches can do much better in encouraging and creating spaces where friendship is lifted up as the sacred relationship that it is. Gilead Chicago is, I'm sure, not the only church that has embraced friendship as a holy act. My challenge is for churches to think beyond the one significant other model of “normal” adulthood and embrace multiple significant others as crucial in the life of the Christian.

¹⁸ As you have been taught to do! To be clear, I am not trying to shame people who have put all of their eggs in the One Significant Other basket. I am simply pointing out that the idea that one person is meant to meet all of your needs and assuage all loneliness is, to me, absurd, and should not have been a common practice in the first place.

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Where is God when I need One right now?

Abstract

No one wants to be sexually assaulted, especially when you are in the middle of doing ministry. This paper reflects the struggle in faith of a seminary female student who had been raped. A common theme is that she felt sad and guilty while blaming herself for being so stupid to prevent this from happening. She felt so close to God before the incident happen, but where was God in times like that? A process in reconceptualizing relation with self, others, and God is outlined, not necessarily linear, changing from text-related teaching and understanding to experiential learning. The final step is a concept of God as Omnipresent who understands pain and suffering.

Keywords: doctrinal concept of God, experiential concept of God, rape, struggle in faith

Introduction

During the last two decades, increase in sexual violence has been noted by Komnas Perempuan (National Commission on Violence against Women). More specifically, rapes is often occur in personal areas where victims and rapist engage in personal domain or familial and close relationship, such as husbands and wives, fathers and daughters, brothers and sisters, uncles and nieces, grandfathers to granddaughters or between employers and house helpers living in the same house and between dating partners.¹ In the year 2001, Komnas Perempuan reported that the number of reported violence against women around Indonesia was 3168 and in 2002, increased to 5163², but in 2019 jumped to 432,471³. In the year 2020, the cases increased 60% from the year 2019 in personal domain, and sexual violence still has the second ranking after physical violence. However, in public domain, sexual violence, mostly rapes, has the highest ranking, 55 % of all reported violence⁴.

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 2. Komnas Perempuan (2003). Gambaran nasional kekerasan terhadap perempuan 2002: Kumpulan Data dari Lembaga Pengada Layanan di berbagai daerah. (*National mapping of violence against women 2002: Data from various service providers*). <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ofXFBFVrUDI001VYkpETNHvo-5o-5uZf/view>. Accessed on May 13, 2021.
 3. Komnas Perempuan (2020). *Ibid*
 4. Komnas Perempuan (2021). Catatan tahunan kekerasan terhadap perempuan. (*Annual report on violence against women*). <https://komnasperempuan.go.id/siaran-pers-detail/catahu-2020-komnas-perempuan-lembar-fakta-dan-poin-kunci-5-maret-2021>. Accessed on May 13, 2021.

Before Komnas Perempuan was established in 1998, victims and their families or concerned others did not report the incidents to the police due to numerous factors, such as fear of being subjected for more violence and humiliation in addition to being stigmatized by local communities.⁵ Before Komnas Perempuan was established in 1998, victims and their families or concerned others did not report the incidents to the police due to numerous factors, such as fear of being subjected for more violence and humiliation in addition to being stigmatized by local communities⁶. As sexual violence affected many areas of the survivors, a special concern for the religious communities is on providing support and guidance so that they would still feel accepted rather than feeling rejected and stigmatized.

The objective of this study using a case study of Alisha (not her real name) is to identify ways how counselors and religious communities can help rape survivors regain their faith in God and believe that through bitter experiences God still prepares good futures for them.

The research questions for this study are several: How having experienced rape, the survivor deal with herself and other people in her immediate environment? How does she perceive God, and how the perception affects the way she relates with God? How religious communities can provide supports and protection to ensure their faith in God as a Loving Being?

Theoretical Framework

Cornish and Wade⁷ list some opportunities and barriers in issues of spirituality and religions are discussed between clinicians or counselors and clients. While spirituality and religion are seen as sources of strength for those in need, the counselors lack of training in spirituality and religion or that spirituality and religion is not important issues for the counselors might prevent them to discuss this matter with the clients.

Walker, et al⁸ remind counselors working with sexual violence clients that the religious experiences of the clients should be taken into account when discussing spirituality and religious issues with the clients.

More specifically, Frazier, Conlon, and Glaser⁹ identified several positive changes following trauma from survivors of sexual assaults. These include changes in becoming more empathetic, better relationships with other people, and greater appreciation of life, following even after two weeks of the traumatic event. But negative changes in terms of less trusting to other people, more distress in the areas of self and spirituality also occur after two weeks of the event and stay for some time.

5. Komnas Perempuan (2001) *ibid*

6. Komnas Perempuan, 2001) *ibid*

7. Cornish, M. A., & Wade, N. G. (2010). Spirituality and religion in group counseling: A literature review with practice guidelines. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 41(5), 398 – 404

8. Walker, D. F., Reese, J. B., Hughes, J. P., & Troskie, M. J. (2010). Addressing religious and spiritual issues in trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy for children and adolescents. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 41(2), 174 – 180.

9. Frazier, P., Conlon, A., & Glaser, T. (2001). Positive and negative life changes following sexual assault. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 69(6), 1048 – 1055

Earlier, it was mentioned that Komnas Perempuan was founded following gang rape in May 1998. Until now it is not clear who were responsible of doing this gang rape. But this event became the starting issue for a group of concerned female academicians and practitioners to establish Komnas Perempuan which was supported by President B. J. Habibie who replaced Soeharto. One of their goals is to help women find shelter and protection from forces that destroy them. May '98 can be regarded as a milestone to acknowledge nationally that rape is human savage that is against humanity.

Indonesian newspapers and magazines were split in regard with reporting this gang rape incident: some did not report it all, and some put brief descriptions. Out of this chaos, Sahabat Peduli (SP) where I joined since its first meeting was founded to help people feeling depressed and anxious to mingle in the melting pot of Indonesian society. SP service was aired through several local radio stations and religious communities.

Before SP started its first service, the volunteers consisted of counselors, psychologists, and religious clerics were designing strategic ways to help its clients. Since the SP volunteers were from various faiths, even though the majority were Christians, the strategies ways should not only reflect one specific faith. The clients SP would serve also come from various faiths.

In 1998, sources that offer helps for rape survivors were still scarce. Several of the group members had experiences handling female clients with sexual harassment but not with sexual violence, more specifically rape. After several meetings, a set of guidelines was established, based on Biblical principles applied for counseling women in general. The guidelines are explained briefly below.

First. The most important rule is that rape survivors should not go deeper into blaming themselves of what had happened. The incident happened because there was some criminals who could not handle their sexual lust and used easily targeted women as their victims.

Second. If the survivor became pregnant, she could choose whether to continue the pregnancy or to abort. It is quite possible if the woman rejects the baby in her womb because of the hatred she carries toward the rapist. In the long run, this will affect her mental health and how she upbringing the child.

Third. The objective of helping the survivors is to have them rise and not deepen with feeling unworthy. They still have good futures despite the bitter experiences they have.

Fourth. The speed of recovery varies individually, depending to factors related with the personality of the survivors. The counselors should understand this and should not push clients to reach a certain milestone in a specific period of time.

Fifth. Try to use a religious perspective when engaging conversations with clients. Find out about their conceptions of God and the roles God has in their lives. The concepts that God is the Creator of the whole universe and that everything God creates is good should be understood well. God never wants anything bad happen to the creation. The tendency to label people seeking for help as “having no faith” is quite common among Indonesian people. Or, even worse, those

who experienced bad incidents were actually being punished by God. Part of the labeling caused by the popularity of Theology of Success¹⁰.

Sixth. Involve the clients' family so that survivors get full support which is beneficial for their recovery. The last thing the survivors does not want to hear is blaming from other people including those from their inner circle. They should not push the survivors to get over it as soon as possible.

Seventh. Help that is provided for the survivors should be free of charge. This free service should encourage those in need to seek help rather than feeling hopeless.

This guidelines were applied when I interacted with Alisha.

Method

Participant. Alisha was 23 years old when she was raped. Her ethnical background was from Sumatera.

Research Design and Analyses. A qualitative research paradigm, using interviews as data collection technique was applied. The narratives of the interview were analyzed to find answers to the research questions set earlier.

The narratives

Setting. Above it has been explained that SP opened a hotline service for those seeking for help to ease their depression and anxiety related to gang rape issue. People who contacted SP were Chinese and those looked like Chinese even though they were not necessarily so. Alisha was one of the last category.

Alisha was a fourth-year seminary student who did a three-month internship before she could enroll for the fourth academic year. She was placed in a church about 900 km southeast of her seminary but still in the same island of Sumatera. As part of the assignments, she needed to conduct Bible studies and prayer fellowships in people's houses, not always in the church. She also visited church members to find out how they were in daily life and what struggle they were facing. During her internship, she stayed with church male pastor who could monitored her in addition to become her mentor. Alisha always did all assignments responsibly. In the seminary, she already dated Gary, a senior and they had planned to get married after she graduate. They were from different ethnic background but Gary's family did not bother about that. Alisha's own family did not care that much since she had converted into Christianity.

How the rape incident happened. One afternoon, during her final weeks of internship, she was assigned to lead a fellowship in one church member's house as the pastor had another meeting to

10. da Silva, A. B. (1986). The theology of success movement, *Themelios*, 11(3), 91 – 93.

attend. Realizing that Alisha was not familiar with the area, she was accompanied by the pastor's daughter, Siti, 12 years old. Even though they were given the code number of the public transportation they should take, Alisha worried whether or not they could reach the destination on time. She kept asking several times to the fellow passengers, both males and females, whether the car would lead her to the right location. They assured her that she would be there in time.

When they reached the bus terminal, the driver prevented Alisha and Siti to change to a different public transportation as told earlier by the pastor. He promised to bring them to the right location. Beside the driver, three male passengers were also in the car. Again Alisha asked whether she had already took the right car. All other passengers assured her that it was the right car. Then the driver drove the car to a forest nearby. Alisha was raped in front of Siti by all four men and was left there. Only with difficulties Alisha and Siti could go back to the pastor's house. It seemed that the area was a quiet place with not many people around. In 1998, the use of mobile phone was scarce.

When the congregation knew what had happened, many of them blamed others for not giving rides to Alisha to the designated house. But most of all, they blamed Alisha for being so naïve and nervous by asking directions so many times, indicating that she was not familiar with the area. Those surrounding Alisha were surprised noticing that she kept crying after two weeks of the incident. She was afraid to go outside the pastor's house, did not have appetite, stayed in her room all day through, and had difficulties sleeping at night despite the showers of prayers they offered. The pastor himself finally decided to ask for professional help of psychologists since Alisha kept crying for days. At that time, no psychologists offered practice in that area. A pastor from my church denomination was referred to contact Sahabat Peduli who then assigned me to be the counselor for Alisha.

The counselor-client interaction. Since Alisha was not able to come to Jakarta where I lived and I also could not leave my works to meet her personally, we agreed to do phone counseling sessions. The first phone counseling occurred in second week of August 1998 and the second was a week after, each lasted for about 40 minutes. Each session was filled with Alisha's crying. I barely got information from her. I just assured her that it was alright for her to cry anytime without considering other people's reactions. It was also alright if she did not feel like meeting anyone, except her fiancée. I emphasized that it took time to grieve over what had happened to her. Alisha mentioned that her fiancée was the only one she could trust at that time. I also calmed her that she could contact me anytime she felt to, giving both my office and home phone numbers.

In the third session, early September, Alisha slowly shared what had happened. She felt a bit stronger than when we first talked a few weeks earlier. Since the seminary courses started in September, Alisha had gone back to seminary and promised she would contact me when needed to. In October, I received news that Alisha's father-in-law-to-be died of heart attack. The death was related to the fact that he could not bear the shame of having a daughter-in-law being a rape survivor. In Indonesian culture, unholiness of bride is highly respected. Following this news,

Alisha wrote a letter, blaming herself as the cause of the death of her father-in-law-to-be. I replied and suggested that Alisha should come and stay with me to have a break from all these. But Alisha insisted to stay finishing the semester's course. The following letter from Alisha informing that she could forget the event and how she felt if she kept herself busy doing things from morning until late night. I replied that in God's time, she would be able to recover from her trauma.

The path to recovery. In second week of December, Alisha came and stayed in my house for three weeks. The first week she was so quiet and kept a distance from four other university students who also stayed in my house for some other reasons. I only told Alisha that she could talk to me privately if she felt ready to do so. We had a custom to do morning fellowship for about 20 minutes which started with a devotion and ended with a prayer. Everyone had their turn to lead the fellowship but I did not give Alisha a turn.

The opportunity to talk privately came on the second week at night around 9 when Alisha shared a need to talk. We talked in her room as this was the only room no one else did not dare to enter. The first 10 minutes was spent by crying. She apologized several times that she was often crying. I reminded her that crying was the easiest way to express her sadness and it might last for two years after the event occurred. Alisha then shared that she still felt very heavy and confused even though she already forgave the rapists. As a seminary student, she knew that forgiving others who did wrong to her was very biblical.

After this, Alisha was crying again for several minutes. When she was a bit calmer, I commented that forgiving the rapists was appropriately practicing God's command. However, forgiving other should also align with forgiving oneself. For a minute or two, Alisha stopped crying. But then she cried even louder, while uttering how stupid she had been by being so naïve. She also mentioned that God might have punished her for being so stupid and naïve.

As I could not stand letting her timelessly crying like that, I cut her by asking, "Do you think God would forgive your rapists but not forgiving you? We know that God is forgiving and so loving. How come God cannot forgive a person who did a mistake accidentally? She was quiet, starring at me, then slowly said, "Yes, God is so good, very good. God surely will forgive me, a person who did a mistake accidentally." Her face seemed so relieved when she said this, as if she was just releasing a heavy struggle off her shoulder. We hugged each other tightly then ended the conversation with my prayer while having tears in our eyes.

The following morning, Alisha shared briefly in our morning fellowship about her traumatic event and asked for our prayer supports so that she would have courage to witness in the court next January. Her voice was firmed and she spoke continuously without even stopped to think. For me, this indicated that she was in the right path to recovery.

The following week she went back to her seminary to finish all courses. We kept in touch for the following two years during which she got married and had a baby boy. Then she and her family came to stay in my house for two weeks because her husband was transferred to a congregation nearby Jakarta and they did not have any other place to stay while waiting for the church to provide housing for them. Alisha was a happy person, so much different compared to the first I

met her. She also talked a lot and showed how she cared for her husband and son. Her husband also shared that Alisha had recovered from her traumatic event. She fully supported the ministry of her husband by getting involved in many church activities. Until now we keep contacting each other as friends, not as counselor-client any longer. Her husband had been transferred again to a different city. They have two late teenagers. All family members are active in church activities.

Results

How Alisha deals with herself and other people in her immediate environment

From the narratives it is clear that Alisha had first regarded herself in a level below others. First, that she felt guilty over the death of her father-in-law-to-be. Second, that she perceived the rapists as deserving forgiveness while denying herself as the party that worth receiving forgiveness in the first place. As shown in Frazier, et al, the majority of sexual assaults' survivors felt decreasing self-worth after two weeks of the traumatic event, and had slowly regained self-worth over a year of the incident. In this sense, the many activities that Alisha got involved with might be beneficial in twofold: to forget that she experienced the traumatic event and as a proof to others that she was very helpful and capable of making accomplishments.

What she did might be perceived by the congregation as what should be properly expected from a pastor's wife. During our last conversation, she shared that her congregation was never told about her rape incident. But she admitted that discussing sexual matters with teenagers was very important since this would make them being careful of being manipulated by other people.

Alisha's perception of God and relationship with God

The narratives show interesting changes in Alisha's perception of God. She had tried hard to obey God's commands in forgiving others who did wrong to her. We remember this as part of the Lord's prayer. But the first part of the phrase, "*And forgive us our debts...*" (Matthew 6: 12a, NRSV) comes before "*as we also have forgiven our debtors*" (verse 12b), or as written in Luke 11: "*And forgive us our sins, ...*" (verse 4a) comes before "*for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.*" (verse 4b). As a seminary student Alisha should have known this specific prayer or even memorize it as we say this weekly in worship services. Taking the forgiving others' part as more important rather than understanding the whole part as two-sided of forgiveness entity is very much possible in people's experiences.

Those from the psychological discipline also tend to separate *forgiveness of self* from *forgiveness of others* and even *add forgiveness of situations*. By *forgiveness of self*, individuals can have positive view of oneself, even after they did mistakes and experiences the consequences of those mistakes¹¹. With the ability to *forgive oneself*, comments

11. Mansfield, Pasupathi, & McLean, (2015) Mansfield, C. D., Pasupathi, M., & McLean, K. C. (2015). Is narrating growth in stories of personal transgressions associated with increased well-being, self-compassion, and forgiveness of others? *Journal of Research in Personality*, 58, 69-83.

and feedback an individual receives from others are not perceived as destroying him- or herself^{12 13}. We can relate *forgiving of self* as related with *self-worth* discussed above which was found impaired in Alisha's case.

With *forgiveness of others*, individuals are able to understand reasons why people do wrong things¹⁴. From here, it is expected that individuals might be able to repair their relationships with the wrongdoers, which probably won't be easy for the rape survivors in public domain as they hardly known the rapist before.

With *forgiveness of situation*, individuals can have sense and insight to analyze situations – good and bad – before considering that everything is God's destiny for them^{15 16}.

Ryff¹⁷ includes forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, and forgives of situations as part of her concept of *psychological well-being*, and names them as *self-acceptance*, *positive relations with others*, and *environmental mastery*.

In Alisha, we can see the relationship between religious aspect and psychological aspect. She cannot say that she has a positive image of God as loving while degrading herself even below the rapists. The imbalanced view of God had impacted her and even prevented her to recover from the traumatic event. Since she came from a theological seminary, she was more familiar with all biblical verses reminding that everything would turn good again in no time. All the prayers and advices she received from many people can be regarded as the compassion and caring people have for her, but at the same time, these increased her guilty for not recovering soon enough as if things go back to normal. Until now, Alisha sometimes feels having low self-esteem but she soon remembers that in God's eyes, she is very worthy. From this traumatic experience, she learned that after bad and sad situations, God waits with rainbows. Suffering and pains cannot separate people from God, because God always accept His creation and loves unconditionally. This reminds us of Job who said “*My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.*” (Job 42: 5, NIV). In short, it is not overly stated that through her traumatic event, Alisha now has an experiential understanding of who God is for her personally.

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How religious communities can provide supports and protection to ensure their faith in God as a Loving Being

Within the church and seminary communities, Alisha found much expressions of love and compassions even though some might also sound victim blaming. Full support was given by her husband (then fiancée) who never blamed her and kept encouraging her to remember how much she was worthy and loved by God. That the rape occurred while she was doing God's ministry should not be interpreted as God's punishment; rather, it should be inspiring her that evil forces never support people to be God's faithful servants.

Protecting those with negative life events and providing supports for them cannot include stigmatization and blaming. Even if the negative life experiences cause one individuals' own mistakes or wrongdoings, the last thing they want to hear is being stigmatized as receiving punishment from God because they have committed sins. When people learn that their mistakes lead them to unwanted consequences, they would be able to learn that they should be more careful next time without being blamed and reminded that all these happen because of their own stupidity.

The case of Alisha teaches us that the doctrinal teaching of God should come first through personal experiences. As Scazzero¹⁸ reminds us, church should always pay attention to balance the teaching of doctrines with clear instructions on how to apply the doctrines in daily life. A healthy church is a church who have members with emotionally healthy spirituality, meaning that loving God, loving ourselves, and loving others should be considered as a unity (Matthew 22: 37 – 40). While loving God is vertical, loving others as much as loving ourselves is horizontal. To be in balanced, loving others and loving ourselves should be on the same weight.

As negative and traumatic events can happen to anyone at any time, we should not wait until someone was struck by bad events before the clear instruction and guidance in applying God's command is provided. Since early age, individuals should first be ensured of having views of God as loving and caring before other attributes of God are also learned.

Implication

Through Alisha's rape incident, the implications for several parties can be possible, as the following. Seminary students should be equipped with practical skills on how to interact with strangers and in unfamiliar settings. Church communities should learn how to provide support and protect those with negative life events so that they can still feel belonging to a loving children of the same God they believe. Religious education for youngsters and adults should include discussion on how life struggles are shared, experienced and overcome by using biblical principles that are appropriately applied. Counselors should include religious or spiritual

18. Scazzero, P. (2014). *Emotionally healthy spirituality: it's impossible to be spiritually mature, while remaining emotionally immature*. Zondervan.

dimension when interacting with clients. Clients who share the same faith as the counselors will have benefits with the opportunity to discuss religious aspects of the struggles to overcome problems. But for clients of different faith, counselors should be very careful of not enforcing their own faith perspectives to the clients. Living in Indonesia with so diverse faith and beliefs, this brings challenge to counselors who want to perceive clients as whole persons including the religious dimension.

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The Concept of God by LGBT People

Stephen Suleeman and Erich V.M. Elraphoma

Abstract:

For many Christians and people of other religious beliefs, LGBT is often viewed as people who are living in sin, condemned by God, and living outside the faith. This view has caused many LGBT people leaving their faith community and feeling unaccepted. Jakarta Theological Seminary has for many years conducted programs related with LGBT themes. Although at first many LGBT friends looked at our programs with suspicion and fear of being to be converted into being Christian and persuaded to leave their LGBT lives, they later realized that JTS never had those intentions. It even held its programs by inviting speakers from Muslim backgrounds.

When our LGBT friends find out that JTS is always open and embracing towards them, they feel that God is good and they have allies who are accepting to them. Many of them felt they can reconcile with their previous faiths that they had left behind.

Keywords: LGBT, God's condemnation and acceptance, embracing community, reconciliation with their identity.

Introduction

Jakarta Theological Seminary has been running LGBT-related activities for around eighteen years. It was started from our early observation of the students at the Seminary, and we thought that some of them showed a more feminine gesture. So we joined a gay Yahoo

group on the internet, and in about one month, we found that one of our students appeared with his real name on the chat group.

After having some exposure and meetings with some LGBT friends and professors in Chicago and Berkeley, USA, we felt that we were ready to our own LGBT-related activities at JTS. In 1993 we sent some of our students to do their field work in some LGBT organizations, but in 2009 we started an LGBT conference at the seminary. This program became annual and was followed by more programs. By 2014 an international conference was organized and attended by around 70 participants from South East Asia, India, Hong Kong, Africa, Europe, United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. This conference was also supported by the World Council of Churches' program for Women in Church and Society by sponsoring 11 participants from Africa, Australia, Canada, etc. The speakers always come from various religious backgrounds, particularly Christians and Muslims.

Since then, JTS' programs on LGBT issues have expanded into other related issues, such as Peer Educators and Peer Counsellors Camps, IDHOTB celebration day, World Suicide Prevention Day training, Queer Film Festivals and International LGBT Conferences. Furthermore, now JTS is well known with its Center for Gender, Sexuality, and Trauma Studies.

Problems

After some break in 2007, we tried to expand the program to include transgender people and lesbians. We found out that all of the staff members of the Ardhanary Institute, an LBT organization in South Jakarta, had become either agnostics or atheists. We tried to convince them that we did not have any agenda to convert them into Christianity or change

them into heterosexuals. Our purpose was only to help our students know what it meant to be an LGBT person.

After about two years, our contacts were convinced that we did not have any religious agenda, nor did we try to convert them into heterosexual persons. A few of them confessed that they had started to return to church or to do their daily prayers as Muslims.

In Indonesia, most or perhaps all churches and other religious organizations believed that LGBT people were sinners and had to be healed or cured to gain salvation from God. From a very young age, children are taught that God created only Adam and Eve and that marriage is only meant for males with females only. However, at JTS, we began to question those ideas. Today, most of our lecturers at JTS have embraced a more open view of people, that heterosexuality is not the only norm, that LGBT people are also God's creatures whom God loves, and that means we also have to love and embrace their sexual orientation and gender expressions. Many people had stigmatized JTS as a pro-LGBT seminary, that it has left the true Christian doctrine and left Christ also. Our then president finally felt that he had to write an open letter on the internet that JTS is an open academy and that we tried to expose our students to all kinds of issues in society and let our students choose whatever view they wanted to choose.

Relationship and Interaction Influences and LGBT Perspectives on God

In a social context where sexuality is considered taboo as a productive discourse, LGBT and spirituality become a topic that seems impossible to reconcile. Generally, people perceive the issue of spirituality and sexual orientation as two conflicting issues.¹ Spirituality is often assumed to be the same as religion. Therefore, it is not surprising that religious

¹ Patrick Love et.al., "Identity Interaction: Exploring the Spiritual Experiences of Lesbian and Gay College Students," *Journal of College Student Development* Vol. 24 No. 2 (March/April 2005): 193, Project MUSE

communities of various denominations who reject LGBT consider them a group of people who do not have spirituality.² They monopolize spirituality only as belonging to the heterosexual group.

Various experiences of LGBT people show that they can also have the same spirituality as heterosexual people; sexual orientation does not influence or change one's spirituality. Human sexuality in general, regardless of differences in sexual orientation, is related to human existence as a whole, as an organism, psyche, and spirit:

“As an organism, we experience the physical desire for sex; our psyche desires the comfort, bliss, and emotional ecstasy associated with sex; and our spirits are drawn to sexuality's relationship to the intimacy with, caring for, and dedication to other people.”³

That means, whatever a person's sexual orientation, she/he can still have and develop her/his spirituality, and that spirituality is closely related to the relationships and interactions that one experiences with and among others.

Therefore, in a social context, negative messages and actions towards LGBT people can affect their perception of God, or in other words, it can affect the process of their spiritual development. The treatment of a person or group of people in the name of religion towards LGBT people impacts their perception of God towards them as a marginalized group in society. Juswantori Ichwan proved this view of spirituality through his field research in 2016-2017. He found that his resource persons, in general, have rejected the church teaching, not

² Patrick Love et.al., “Identity Interaction,” 193.

³ David Carr and John Haldane (eds.), *Spirituality, Philosophy and Education* (London & New York: Routledge Falmer, 2003), p. 206.

necessarily based on robust biblical or theological arguments. “Most of them have never read gay-affirming theological books. They believe that their relationship is not sinful based on their lived relationship.”⁴

We have interviewed six LGBT persons from different backgrounds and faiths who have encountered us and our programs at JTS.

Omar was born as a female in a very pious Muslim family.⁵ His family ran an Islamic boarding school, and his social-cultural community is very strictly oriented towards the Divine. His family also ran an Islamic boarding school, which is called *pesantren*.⁶ Students tend to both to live and learn there, so they become very close.

Omar’s understanding of his community is related to how he sees God: culturally, family relationships, the *pesantren*’s students, and the neighborhood, which is majority Muslim. Growing up in such an atmosphere, Omar saw people, not God. He saw the beauty of our people and our warmth, all the connection, and celebrations with their religious activities.

He began to reconcile his faith with justice and gender equality and found his queer identity with the support of his parents. Queer people are often forced to meet *ustads* and *ustanis*⁷ who are very queerphobic. However, somehow, Omar met with religious leaders who taught him about equality in Islam. Omar also remembered being in Jakarta for an interfaith community meeting, and he met with an ulama, Husein Muhammad, who moved him. He said that God does not see your gender or your racial identity. What God sees in you is your *taqwa*, the deeds you do when you are practicing your faith.

⁴ Stephen Suleeman & Amadeo D. Udampoh (eds.), *Siapakah Sesamaku* (Who is My Neighbor), Jakarta: Jakarta Theological Seminary, 2019, 240-241.

⁵ Interview on July 9, 2020, by e-mail.

⁶ *Pesantren* is a term used for the Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia.

⁷ *Ustads* and *Ustanis* are Persian term for male and female teachers in Indonesia.

Our second resource person is Joanna. She was born as a boy named Harry, in a very pious Catholic family in Papua.⁸ She is now 37 years old. Being active in the church since her childhood, she had always wanted to become a priest. She wanted to live like Jesus, who was close to the poor and the marginalized. So her family sent her to a lower seminary in Merauke.

In 2012 she was ordained to be a frater in a high seminary in Yogyakarta. During her study, she often received bullying from her friends because she looked very feminine. She often spent her time in the garden and the kitchen to avoid meeting with her friends and their bullying, who often called her a *faggot*. She often screamed like a possessed person.

In 2017, she could not stand her life in the monastery, so she ran away to Papua. She began to live a new life in Merauke, Papua. She worked as an activist in HIV/AIDS prevention there. At the end of 2017, she decided to return to Yogyakarta in Central Java and worked in an orphanage. It was there she came out to her superior and confessed that she was now a woman. Her superior tried to give her counseling. He talked with her from 7 pm to 11 pm, but to no avail. Joanna was determined that she was a woman and could not live as a man anymore. In Yogyakarta, she met with Mama Rully, the founder of the Islamic Boarding School named Pesantren Al Fatah. She asked for Mama Rully's help to let her sleep at her *pesantren* and dress up like a woman. She also lived for some time at the *pesantren* while remaining as a Catholic.

From the discussion above, we can see why LGBT spirituality can be influenced by how other people treat them. Spirituality acts as a motivation in a person to search for meaning, purpose, wholeness, and the existence of her/his life that occurs in her/his relationship with other people.⁹ Thus relationships and interactions with other people,

⁸ Interview with Joanna, May 14, 2021, by email and telephone.

⁹ Patrick Love et.al., "Identity Interaction," 197.

whether it is fun or painful, influence a person's spirituality, which further influences the development of her/his identity. It means that every experience of LGBT people in the family, society, and religious communities also significantly impacts developing their spirituality and personality.

As an important note, LGBT people in society have a higher sensitivity to respond to the treatment of others towards them. This issue is what we can find in the case of Calvin. He is a transman who is doing his master's program at JTS.¹⁰ "My life journey shows the problems of LGBT's acceptance not only by church members but also by the pastors. I realize that acceptance towards an LGBT church member is already tough. What more would happen to an LGBT pastor. However, I give thanks so much to some church members who are open to me, although they have not fully understood my real existence. I also thank some pastors who continue to support and accompany me until now." Calvin is lucky because some of the pastors in his denomination have understood LGBT and SOGIESC through some training organized by the PERUATI (the Association of Theologically Educated Women in Indonesia), and now they could better understand Calvin's struggles.

The most easily observed example is how homophobic attitudes towards LGBT as a sexual minority group in society (in the form of homophobic language, bullying, discrimination, and violence) make them two or three times more likely to commit suicide than heterosexuals.¹¹ In contrast, non-hostile environments allow them to survive, grow, and thrive.¹² A son of a pastor, named Bobby, committed suicide by throwing himself from the 6th floor of the parking lot of one of the shopping markets in Jakarta.¹³ , Luckily the acceptance that Calvin received from the female pastors in his denomination had helped him to become

¹⁰ Interview at JTS on May 14, 2020, at 4.40 p.m.

¹¹ Kris Wells, "Beyond Homophobia: We Need to Make it Better," in *Beyond the Queer Alphabet: Conversations on Gender, Sexuality and Intersectionality*, eds. Malinda Smith and Fatima Jaffer (Edmonton, AL: The University of Alberta, 2012), 84.

¹² Wells, "Beyond Homophobia: We Need to Make it Better," 85.

¹³ "Jatuh dari Lantai 6 Atrium Senen, Pria ini Diduga Bunuh Diri karena Depresi." *Kompas*, April 8, 2016.

stronger to face the many questions addressed to him from some other pastors and church members. However, Calvin is still struggling about his future – whether he could really be ordained as a pastor in his denomination.

The same thing happened to Mario, 39 years old.¹⁴ Since very small, he did not like to wear a skirt, but then he tried to follow the school's regulation. Only during his graduation from his master's program, going against the traditional in Indonesia, he decided not to wear a *kebaya*, a traditional woman's dress in Indonesia. His mother really wanted to take a photograph with him wearing a *kebaya*, but he refused sit. He came out to his father and elder sister, who lives in the Netherlands. "My father's response was beyond my expectation." His mother passed in 2010. At that time, his father had just received his inheritance. Mario asked for some time from his father to have a short time to talk together. There and then, he confessed to his father, "I am not a woman, Dad. I am a man." "Oh, ok. That is fine," said his father. "Just take good care of yourself."

Mario knew that his father is a progressive man. He has a close friend who is a neurosurgeon of an international level. One day the doctor told him that the brain structure of a hetero person is different from a non-hetero one.

Mario also asked his father about his opinion if he transitioned by cutting his upper part and taking hormones. His father disagreed because Mario is approaching 40 years old. It might be dangerous and hurt him.

The experiences from our resource persons above shows that acceptance and programs that show care and love towards LGBT people help them in growing into resilience and successfully transition into higher personality development.¹⁵ These can support the development of their acceptance of themselves, and their spirituality.

¹⁴ Interview on May 11, 2021, 7.13 p.m.

¹⁵ Wells, "Beyond Homophobia: We Need to Make it Better," 85.

Since they are in a marginalized situation, LGBT people have a more vital self-awareness than people who do not experience discrimination in their environment. LGBT's self-awareness arises from their self-awareness that they are outsiders who constantly ask, "who am I, why am I different, and whether this difference is OK."¹⁶ Furthermore, to answer those questions, they try to find answers, but no longer in the church because the church tends to judge, convict them of guilt, as shown by the conservative Christian group.¹⁷ Such a church has become toxic to LGBT people so that at this point, LGBT people need spiritual assistance that enables them to experience God's grace which is not limited to anyone. Some of our resource persons did not experience the toxicity of religion or church in our interview because they were able to hide their LGBT identity. This is the experience of Paul (24 yrs).¹⁸ Not many people know that he is a gay man. He often questioned God why God created him that way.¹⁹ Since he was about five years old, he already liked to play with the girls, playing as a mother in a family. When he was in his senior high school, he often spent most of his time with nerd students. He did not play with those who like to play futsal and other boy's games. After classes, he usually would go home; therefore, his friends never asked him why he did not try to approach the girls in his class.

When he was 17, he experienced a wet dream from a dream of having sex with a young man. "I felt deeply guilty, and I prayed, Lord, forgive me, please forgive me." He felt that God hated LGBTs very much. Paul then lived in denial. When he was 20 years old, he had his first sexual relationship and felt even more guilty and questioning his identity. However, after participating in various LGBT events at the Seminary, Paul realized that God's love was much broader. God can be present anywhere, and now he tried to help his

¹⁶ Derek Jay, "Trends in the Spiritual Direction for LGBT People," in *Contemporary Christianity and LGBT Sexualities*, ed. Stephen Hunt (Burlington, VT.: 2009), 161.

¹⁷ Derek Jay, "Trends in the Spiritual Direction for LGBT People," 161.

¹⁸ Interview with Paul by phone on May 13, 2021, 8.00 a.m.

¹⁹ Interview at JTS on July 3, 2020 at 10.20 a.m.

LGBT friends to relate with God. Paul is now doing a graduate program in another city, without knowing what would happen in his future. His synod has been struggling for a long with the issue as well and has not been able to come up with a positive position on LGBT, although quite a number of their younger pastors have become more progressive due to their participations in JTS and PERUATI's activities.

According to Carl Gustav Jung, a well-known psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, "Often [gay people] are endowed with a wealth of religious feelings, which help [them] to bring the *ecclesia spiritualis* into reality, and a spiritual receptivity which makes them responsive to revelation."²⁰ This sensitivity and wealth of religious feelings unique to LGBT people deserve attention in any religious community.

Christianity that genuinely refers to the teaching of Jesus Christ believes that God accepts anyone who comes to God. Jesus Christ himself never said anything about homosexuality, even though Jesus was in a context with the Romans who practiced same-sex relationships.²¹ So with this understanding, a community that provides space for LGBT spiritual development can become a "church" for them.²² This is the experience of many LGBT friends who came to JTS. Many of them would say that they had found an oasis there, a place where they can be themselves, without any judgment at all.

Moreover, a positive environment in this context of the religious community, which accepts and gives freedom for LGBT people to be themselves has a very positive impact on a person's brain development. Lisa Miller, the editor of *the Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality*, notes that a person's brain experiences change with intense spiritual lives. Positive or healthy spiritual experiences and practices will impact cortical thickening in the

²⁰ C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Pantheon, 1959), vol. 9, part 1, 8687.

²¹ Darren Main, *Hearts and Mind: Talking to Christians about Homosexuality* (Forres, Scotland: Findhorn Press, 2008), 86-88.

²² J. Empereur, *Spiritual Direction and the Gay Person* (London: Chapman, 1988), 57.

prefrontal cortex, and conversely, negative experiences that lead to chronic depression will make the cortical in the same brain region depleted.²³ Alternatively, in other words, the pathological religious belief system that tends to reject LGBT people for superficial religious reasons can be rooted in their unconsciousness, which impacts resistance to healthy self-acceptance;²⁴ religious teaching about homosexuality is one of the leading causes of identity conflict in LGBT people.²⁵ Rejection of the church or religious community forces LGBT people into a dark and hopeless situation, which often makes them fear, suffer, and ultimately experience a dysfunctional search for intimacy with God.²⁶

Therefore, those researches show that providing an open space for LGBT people to experience the divine in their lives is necessary. LGBT people, together with others, have the exact needs and opportunities to celebrate their spirituality regardless of their sexual orientation. An environment that accepts LGBT people as they are and treats them with the same respect as others is a method to support healthy growth and develop a spiritual identity among LGBT people.

This is the experience of Paul. During his high school, he often asked God, “Why do you give me this cross that I have to carry?” But his experience of studying and living in the JTS community has changed his concept of God. Paul came to JTS with the hope that he would be “cured” from his same-sex attraction. During the first six months at JTS, Paul was living in denial. However, after participating in the many LGBT-related programs at JTS, Paul began to change. His participation in LGBT programs at JTS had opened his eyes that

²³ Maria Cohut, “What happens in the brain during a spiritual experience?” *Medical News Today*, June 9, 2018, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/322092#Spirituality-against-depression?>

²⁴ John J. McNeill, *Taking a Chance on God: Liberating Theology for Gays, Lesbians, and Their Lovers, Families, and Friends* (Boston, MA.: Beacon, 1996), 16.

²⁵ Shaunna Payne Gold & Dafina Lazarus Stewart, “Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students Coming Out at the Intersection of Spirituality and Sexual Identity,” *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling* 5 (2011): 238.

²⁶ Marilyn Bennett Alexander and James Preston, *We Were Baptized Too: Claiming God's Grace for Lesbians and Gays* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 27.

God is not judgmental. He believed that being a gay man is just part of his life experience. He did not feel that it was a cross that he had to carry, nor a thorn in his flesh.

Acceptance, personal relationship with the divine, and interactions with others are the elements of spirituality. For LGBT people, an open and safe place is seen as a gesture based on mutuality and equality relationships built on humility, respect, and the desire for truth-telling and justice-seeking, which are then connected to God's infinite grace.²⁷ It could be a place to overcome hatred, rejection, alienation and then transform into joy, happiness, and freedom, a place where God's grace is shared and celebrated together.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how spirituality is an essential element in the life of some LGBT people, especially those interviewed in this paper. We have also tried to show that a positive environment and atmosphere that an LGBT person found themselves could help them realize that God is not judgmental nor punishing. It helped them change their old views that tend to show God as a punishing God into a loving and embracing one.

Our program had also changed most of our students. Our seminary has become an LGBT friendly place, and our students become very open towards our LGBT friends. Many have even become allies to them.

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²⁷ Alexander and Preston, *We Were Baptized Too*, 100.

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Accompanying and Learning from Reconciling United Methodist Youth at A Time of Denominational Upheaval

Abstract

United Methodist Church polity bars “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” from ordination and prohibits same-sex wedding celebrations in their churches or by their clergy. Recently the consequences for disobeying church polity have increased in severity and the denomination is expected to split. This paper profiles three churches who openly disagree with the denomination and disregard these policies. Interviews with youth and adults who work with them show that reconciling youth and their churches have insights to offer about how young people can intentionally practice their faith, teach their congregations, and learn from their congregations as they seek to find their way through disagreement with their own denomination.

Introduction

The United Methodist Church (UMC), founded in 1968 by the merger of the Methodist Church (MC) and the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) church, is the second-largest Protestant denomination in the United States. This global denomination meets quadrennially to make changes to its polity, which is done through a process the denomination calls “holy conferencing” by a representative democracy based on population of church membership in geographical areas called annual conferences. The denomination’s membership is declining in the United States and increasing in areas outside of the U.S., especially on the continent of Africa.¹ The meeting of the denomination is called the General Conference of the United Methodist Church (GC) and is the only body in the denomination that can speak for the denomination on any issue.

The first time the denomination made a statement about homosexuality was at its 1972 GC; that statement was printed in the resulting *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* 1972. The GC combined the social statements of the Methodist Church and the EUB into what became the first *Social Principles* of the UMC. The predecessor EUB statement included the phrasing that marriage was between one man and one woman. The predecessor MC document made no mention of marriage or human sexuality.² At GC1972, delegates voted that homosexuality was “incompatible with Christian teaching.” That phrase has been in the *Discipline* ever since.

¹Heather Hahn, “US Dips below Majority of Membership,” United Methodist News Service, November 25, 2019, <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/us-dips-below-majority-of-membership>, April 27, 2021.

² Robert W. Sledge, “The Saddest Day: Gene Leggett and the Origins of the Incompatible Clause’,” *Methodist History* 55, no. 3 (April 2017): pp. 145-179, <https://doi.org/http://archives.gcah.org/bitstream/handle/10516/9938/Methodist-History-2017-04-Sledge.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, 165.

The Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) is a caucus within the United Methodist Church of pastors, laypeople, small groups, churches, and Annual Conferences who support the full inclusion of all people in the denomination's polity and practice. RMN was founded in 1984 as a "faith-based response to institutionalized homophobia braided into the fabric of The United Methodist Church."³ Currently the network reports membership that "spans four continents, 1,000+ churches, and 40,000+ individuals."⁴

GC2016 gathered for its regular quadrennial meeting in Portland, Oregon. The debate on what the *Social Principals* call "human sexuality" and whether there would be any changes to the *Discipline's* language about it became quite heated. Delegates came to the floor of GC and voiced their concern that the gathering, and the denomination, was at a crossroads. Delegates then passed a nonbinding resolution to ask the Council of Bishops of the UMC to provide a plan to help the GC proceed. The Bishops provided a plan the following day that called for debate on human sexuality at GC2016 to cease, a commission to be put together to study the *Discipline* on the issue, and opened the possibility of calling a special GC⁵ to take place in between the regular quadrennial 2016 and 2020 General Conferences. This plan passed by a vote of 428-405.⁶ In the end, the "Commission on the Way Forward" was formed. The Commission came up with three plans to present for a vote at the special called GC, which took place in February of 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri. The delegates to GC2019 were the same as the delegates to GC2016, meaning that updates to the representative democracy would not happen until the next quadrennium. The most conservative of the options proposed by the Commission, called the Traditional Plan, was adopted by a vote of 438 to 384.⁷

Only 7% of the delegates to GC2019 were "young people," which according to the UMC is anyone up to age 35. Delegates are members of the United Methodist Church who attend worship regularly, meet as a delegation regularly, pour over hundreds of pieces of legislation, and give their time (away from school if they are youth) to be a part of the legislative body of the denomination. At a time when mainline denominations are losing members, and losing young members at a particularly rapid pace,⁸ these young people may be an anomaly, but they are a dedicated and faithful anomaly who take their faith seriously. There were also youth present as non-voting observers.

³ "Who We Are," Reconciling Ministries Network, accessed May 14, 2021, <https://rmnetwork.org/about/who-we-are/>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Although Bishops do not have a vote in the General Conference, they do have the ability to call the General Conference to meet. This is called a special called General Conference because it happens outside of the regular quadrennial meetings of the denomination. Such a meeting of the GC is extremely rare.

⁶ Heather Hahn and Sam Hodges, "GC2016 puts hold on sexuality debate" UM News, May 18, 2016, <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/bishops-ask-for-hold-on-sexuality-debate> accessed April 27, 2021.

⁷ Kathy L. Gilbert, Joey Butler, and Heather Hahn, "2019 General Conference Passes Traditional Plan," United Methodist News Service, February 26, 2019, <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/gc2019-daily-feb-26>, accessed April 27, 2021.

⁸ For example, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, June 9, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>; Michael Lipka, "Mainline Protestants Make up Shrinking Number of U.S. Adults," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, July 27, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/18/mainline-protestants-make-up-shrinking-number-of-u-s-adults/>; Cat Wise and Kira Wakeam, "Millennials Are Leaving Organized Religion. Here's Where Some Are Finding Community," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, January 2, 2020), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/millennials-are-leaving-organized-religion-heres-where-some-are-finding-community>; all accessed May 14, 2021.

Some of the young people present at GC 2019 (including both delegates and observers), including several youth (middle and high school), read a statement prior to voting on the plans from the Commission. In this statement, young people asked delegates to support the One Church Plan, which would have allowed individual churches and annual conferences to have different practices around LGBTQ+⁹ rights in the church. The full statement was circulated online before it was read from the GC floor so that young people who were not in St. Louis could also sign. Within the 13 hours of circulation, it garnered 15,529 signatures from United Methodist young people. In part, what the young people at GC read said:

We the young people of the United Methodist Church are not of one mind when it comes to inclusion of our LGBTQ siblings in Christ. And yet through working together, sharing stories, and worshipping side by side we have seen each other's gifts and fruits for ministry! We have witnessed the incredible ways that God is working through each of us in our own unique contexts. We believe that if we are truly a body we need each other. We need one another, in all of our diversity- to fulfill our call to be the Body of Christ. We as the church need to stop the harm that is done when we debate one another's humanity and worth, and focus on our shared mission to live into our primary identity as God's children.¹⁰

This statement shows a deep theological commitment to the unity of the Body of Christ in the presence of differences around theologies about human sexuality. Those who are committed to Christian religious education with youth must take the young people's statement from GC2019 seriously and respond to the leadership they displayed.

I began to research what reconciling UM youth (those who identify as part of the Reconciling Ministries Network) think about what is happening at the denominational level in February of 2020. This seemed an interesting time to find out what young people were thinking. The next GC was scheduled to take place in May of 2020, and a year had passed since GC 2019. The Traditional Plan solidified the denomination's stance that homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching" and strengthened consequences for any clergy who celebrate the marriages of same sex couples inside or outside of the church building. It also sought to ensure that annual conferences would not continue to disobey the *Discipline* and ordain practicing homosexual clergy.

My conversations represent a small sampling of reconciling youth in the UMC. What those conversations reveal is consistent with the leadership exhibited by young people at GC 2019. When it comes to faithful responses against the church's stance, indecision, and response around human sexuality, it is the young people who can, should be, and are teaching the wider church. This is especially true of youth raised in congregations who teach their youth to be leaders and educate them about UM polity. Each of the churches I researched for this paper identifies as progressive and does not agree with the decision made by the denomination at GC 2019. I wondered what formation and education looks like for young people raised in churches who disagree with and disobey the *Discipline*.

⁹ This acronym stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and others who identify across the sexuality and gender spectrum.

¹⁰ "Young People's Statement - General Conference 2019," UMC YoungPeople, accessed May 14, 2021, <https://www.umcyoungpeople.org/lead/young-peoples-statement-general-conference-2019>, accessed April 27, 2021.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my research of youth stopped shortly after it began and GC 2020 has been delayed until 2022, keeping the church in its current state of liminality. I shifted my research plans, focusing on adults who work with youth as everyone's lives moved online. Those youth I was able to speak with and the adults who minister with youth during this difficult time in the denomination offer important insights to how youth think about human sexuality, their theology around how engage with a denomination they disagree with, and ways they intend to live out their faith.¹¹

Three Churches

For this paper, I profile three different churches and their ministry with youth: Grace United Methodist Church in a suburb of Washington, D.C., Boston Avenue United Methodist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma and Trinity UMC in Manhattan, New York City.¹² These three churches are in different places in their relationship to the Reconciling Ministries Network. Grace became a member of the network within the last several years, Trinity has been a member since 1991, and Boston Ave is not a member, but their youth groups (along with several other small groups within in the church) are.

Grace United Methodist Church

At Grace UMC, in addition to interviewing the pastor, the Rev. Paul Emerick, I also interviewed three youth: Michael, who is 17, believes he is straight, and is mixed Asian American;¹³ Leo B., who is 15, questioning his sexuality, and white;¹⁴ and Peyton, who is 17, bisexual, and mixed race white and Asian. All three youth identify with the male gender. Grace is in a wealthy suburb of Washington, D.C. and the congregation is described by the pastor as being progressive with many members who have been in the Methodist denomination for their whole lives.¹⁵ The congregation is economically privileged, reflecting their surrounding community. They are a majority white congregation, with about 25-30% of their Sunday attendance being 18 and under. Grace's journey to becoming a reconciling congregation began with the youth group. Paul said that the youth group, "assisted and equipped" by some adults who worked with them, "had been doing their own work and felt that the congregation was called to be a reconciling church." The youth group brought the proposal to church council about 10 years ago, which the community responded to by beginning a discernment process. The congregation went through a period of high conflict – most of it not related to the reconciling discernment process – and lost about 100 people from the church right as Paul was beginning his

¹¹ My protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary, and I am grateful for their support and insights even as I adapted to interviewing online due to the pandemic.

¹² My interviews at Grace UMC took place before the COVID-19 pandemic and included youth. My conversations with Trinity and Boston Ave took place during the pandemic and included only adults. In order to protect the youth at Grace, I use pseudonyms chosen by the people I interviewed and am not using the real name of the church. The adults I spoke with at Trinity and Boston Ave. consented to having their real names use in this paper. The pastor I interviewed from Boston Ave. gave permission for the name of her church to also be used in this paper. However, Trinity is not the real name of that church.

¹³ Michael's parents are from two different Asian countries, one of which is in south Asia.

¹⁴ Leo B. presents as white although he is 25% Asian. He says he usually just says he is white because people don't believe him when he says he is Asian American.

¹⁵ Interview with the Rev. Paul Emerick, in person, February 6, 2020.

pastorate these. Upon his arrival, the congregation took a year off from the reconciling discernment process and then restarted it over from the beginning.

After 6 years in total, including small groups, speakers, discernment, and the year-long pause, the congregation voted 90% in favor of becoming a reconciling church. At the meeting where that vote took place, the youth came to remind the congregation that they had been the ones who initiated the process and encouraged it to keep going. They expressed their pride that the congregation had listened to them and shared with the church that based on their own context for ministry, namely their high school, this vote needed to happen so that they could help their peers know the church was a safe place. They saw it as necessary for evangelism. However, they also held the church accountable for how the process happened. Paul remembers, “and then they also said, we have seen the way that you treat each other in this process. And we are surprised at the way Christian adults treat each other sometimes and we’re really disappointed.” He says that adults theoretically know that “the kids are always watching,” but to hear it from the mouths of the youth in the church made a big difference because “they’ve seen and they’re disappointed and yet still they’re choosing to be fully invested here.” There was a cost to that disappointment, though. Paul worries that youth who experienced the process at the church and left for college shortly thereafter may have a “wilderness experience that maybe they wouldn’t have had if people hadn’t been so mean to each other.”¹⁶ The youth at Grace are incredibly active in the congregation. There are youth who were on the reconciling discernment team and the General Conference response team, which was a group set up to respond to denominational actions and was most active after GC2019, and on the inclusion team, which has been active since 2016. The youth attend congregational meetings regularly and according to Paul are some of the most informed people in the room.

He also notes that the youth who are most involved come from families who are the most involved and active in the church.¹⁷ Paul reflects that the youth, like the rest of the church, seem to be committed to inclusion as a justice issue first and as a theological issue second. He says that faith is very important to the youth and that “reason and experience have necessarily shaped [their] theology especially when it comes to these most divisive and significant issues in the church and the world.”

Leo remembers hearing about the decision of GC2019. He says that on the day of the vote, he was refreshing his phone while at school. He found out in his science class and says it was “really disheartening to hear how it went...At that point I didn’t know what to do because we had been really hopeful”¹⁸ Michael reflects as an ally to LGBTQ+ people and agreed that “disheartening” was the right word for it. He grapples with the implication of being affiliated with a church that “didn’t make the vote” but being associated with the denomination that did. He says it felt like “a betrayal of what I felt the church stood for.” He is on a journey when it comes to his Christian formation, saying that he has always been confused and “a bit hazy” when

¹⁶ The concern over what happens to youth when they are involved in a congregation in conflict is not Paul’s alone. For more insights about what this can mean for youth, their faith development, and their vocations, see Joyce Ann Mercer, “Calling amid Conflict: What Happens to the Vocations of Youth When Congregations Fight?,” in *Greenhouses of Hope: Congregations Growing Young Leaders Who Will Change the World*, ed. Dori Grinenko Baker (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2010), pp. 165-190.

¹⁷ This is consistent with the research from the National Study on Youth and Religion, as explained and expounded upon in Kenda Creasy Dean’s book *Almost Christian*, for example, p. 3: “the religiosity of American teenagers must be read primarily as a reflection of their parents’ religious devotion (or lack thereof)...” Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Leo in the interview with Michael, Leo B., and Peyton, in person, March 1, 2020.

it comes to “God and Scripture,” but that he is not at all unclear about what he calls “the staple values of the church.” For him, these are things like “loving thy neighbor, being accepting to everyone in the community, and treating everyone besides yourself as kind of like your brother or sister.” It is the youth group that has fostered this expectation of what Christian community should be. He says when the denomination voted for the Traditional Plan, they rejected the opportunity to make the community more open and to subvert “archaic” norms that do not apply today.

Peyton recounts that of all the youth, he was following GC2019 the most closely. He was actively involved in the inclusion team, helped create informational brochures to help educate the church about what plan the denomination was considering at that Conference, and helped individual members of the church sign up as individual members of the Reconciling Ministries Network. He says it was “incredibly disheartening” but that the main feeling he had in response was anger. He also says, “I guess I should have learned my lesson after 2016, but I was surprised and I was angry that something that I saw as such a core value of the United Methodist Church was, in my view, being ignored. And the platform that I saw that should be used for inclusion and love and such was being perverted in such a way.” He also says that his first reaction was that their congregation should leave the UMC because the denominational vote went against the vote that the congregation had recently taken to become reconciling. I asked Peyton how he feels now. He says even though leaving was his initial reaction, he knows that was a product of his anger. He sees that Grace can play an important role in being reconciling within the denomination to bear witness to inclusion and keep working for change. He believes that a denominational split is a foregone conclusion and wants Grace to be a part of helping whatever emerges from a split to be as inclusive as possible.

Boston Avenue United Methodist Church

At Boston Avenue United Methodist Church, I interviewed the Rev. Sara Montgomery, who is an associate minister at the church with responsibilities in missions, outreach, social justice ministries, and their modern worship service. They are a larger church; between their worship services at the church and their television ministry (which has been a part of their church for about forty years) they have about 1500 people who worship with them each Sunday. Their congregation is urban, predominately white, and upper middle class. They have about 10% of the church who identifies as people of color, including Native American, which is a fairly large segment of the population in Oklahoma. They are a vocal and progressive church in the Oklahoma Conference of the UMC, though they do also have some more conservative members. Like Grace, the youth at Boston Ave. are leaders in the church when it comes to choosing to be a welcoming space for Christians who identify as LGBTQ+. Sara says the senior pastor of the church has said that becoming a reconciling church would be “too controversial and hard for them to be able to vote on.”¹⁹ However, the church is known in Tulsa to be a progressive and welcoming place; in fact, the city’s Gay Pride Parade kicks off from the church. Additionally, in December of 2019 the church voted to allow their clergy to officiate over same sex weddings in the sanctuary of the church; both actions are prohibited by the *Book of Discipline*.²⁰ The congregation is aware of what is happening around sexuality in the denomination. They have

¹⁹ Interview with the Rev. Sara Montgomery on April 20, 2021, conducted through Zoom.

²⁰ ¶341.6 of the 2016 *Book of Discipline* states “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.” *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2016* (Cokesbury, 2017), 278.

engaged in congregational conversations, heard sermons about it, and engaged in prayer around it. Some of the conversations began before GC2016. In the lead up to GC2019, the church also held monthly “resistance worship” services.

Both youth groups at Boston Ave. responded to GC2019 by beginning the process toward becoming reconciling; two other groups in the church followed suit. The youth initiated this process by reaching out to Sara and another of the associate ministers, who had been pastor of another church when it became reconciling. After the groundwork had been laid, the process took about two-and-a-half months for the youth groups to each take the vote and become reconciling. The process involved conversations with the youth councils and then included the full youth groups and parents of youth. Sara notes that there was no pushback at the time and the youth groups encountered no roadblocks with the church or their parents in their process. Importantly, she says when two other groups, Sunday school classes, chose to become reconciling and were crafting their reconciling belief statements, they asked to use the youth groups’ statements on which to base their own.

When asked what helped the youth embrace leadership in this area, Sara points to a few things. One is that the youth work on inclusivity outside of the church. For example, several youth are responsible for forming LGBTQ+ ally groups in their high schools. One youth formed such a group at her Catholic high school, where they were not permitted to meet. Instead, this group met at Boston Ave. Adults from Boston Ave. provided pizza and supervision for those meetings. When the youth groups went through the process of forming ally groups at their high schools, they also came to the church to look for resources. Sara thinks the adult leadership in the youth group also helped form the youth for leadership toward explicit inclusion. For three years the senior youth group had a youth pastor who uses they/them pronouns and identifies as LGBTQ+. Their presence and ministry helped the youth have conversations about the importance of inclusivity in the church prior to GC2019. The youth group also has members who are LGBTQ+ and the groups “wanted to make sure that they were creating a safe place for everyone that was a part of their youth group.” Similar to the youth at Grace UMC, these youth also felt it was important to create a safe space for anyone who was not a part of the youth group or church but might be in the future. In other words, this decision was partly about evangelism. It was also about a negative experience from summer camp in 2017. That summer, several youth attended an Oklahoma Conference camp where they experienced policies, such as their policy around bathing suits, that made it “a very unsafe space for some of our youth that were gender non-conforming or a little bit more gender fluid or just present within a way that was not what everyone else was expecting.” Upon returning from camp, the youth helped rewrite the Safe Sanctuaries policies at their church so that they would be “better for youth that are non-gender conforming and are more gender fluid or are even transitioning.”²¹ Sara sees this process was especially empowering for the youth. They were able to respond to an unsafe experience in a constructive way by making sure their church policies were safer.

Perhaps the most important reason that the youth knew they could lead the congregation in becoming reconciling is that Boston Ave. cultivates leadership in youth. Youth are involved in worship leadership every week; they are the choir for the early worship service. Youth give the reports on youth ministry to the Administrative Council. Sara thinks that their worship leadership is a big part of why the youth feel empowered to speak up in committee meetings and to the

²¹ Safe Sanctuaries are policies adopted by congregations to prevent child abuse. The adoption of these policies and trainings that accompany them for any adults who work with youth are required of many United Methodist Churches because of Conference legislation and/or insurance.

whole congregation. She says that this leadership has “shaped and framed them.” Confirmation students also write their own creed as part of their class. The creed is used in worship for Confirmation Sunday and for a few following Sundays. Boston Ave. also has an intentional and unique leadership program for youth called Leaders In Training (LIT). Despite the name, it is clear that the youth are leaders in the present and not only training for leadership at some point in the future. When the youth serve with the children’s ministry programming, Vacation Bible School, or in the nursery, for example, they earn “LIT credit” which can be turned into money for youth mission or choir trips. Sara is careful to note that when being leaders with children the youth are not babysitting but are instead helping to facilitate conversations about faith. These are not new parts of ministry with youth at Boston Ave. Sara points out that some of the staff at the church grew up at Boston Ave. and these leadership aspects were part of their experience in youth group when they were teenagers.

Trinity United Methodist Church

At Trinity United Methodist Church, I interviewed the youth director, the associate pastor, and the senior pastor. The Youth Director is Carter Baxter, a seminary student. The Associate Pastor is the Rev. Lea Matthews whose responsibilities include children and family ministries as well as oversight of the youth director. She is also a youth parent. The Pastor is the Rev. Dr. K Karpen, who has no direct responsibility over the youth and is a former youth parent. Lea describes Trinity as a “mid-size urban church that prides itself on being a diverse group of folks that is in the congregation and that serves the direct community around it. And it is an unabashed and proud progressive Christian hub.”²² This church has been a reconciling congregation since 1991. K noted that the vote was unanimous, “and I chalk that up to the power of Scripture if you really spend time with Scripture and also the power of the Holy Spirit and the power of people who are just steeped in the faith in such a way that they have the ability to discern what’s gospel from what’s not.” Unlike Grace and Boston Ave., the youth at Trinity have never known their church to be anything other than reconciling. Carter points how, however, that the term “reconciling” seems to have fallen by the wayside. He has been at Trinity since January 2020 and has never heard people use the word because “a lot of people don’t feel like it goes far enough.”²³ He says that the “LGBT+ presence in the congregation and in leadership is so strong and intentional and feels like a very mindful choice of how people identify.”²⁴ K agrees, saying that he feels the term “reconciling” just didn’t work anymore after GC2019, and the congregation “parted company with it” after that. Lea recounts that when the congregation went through a process of rebranding, which included a new mission statement and new images and symbols for the church to use, they took an intentional step away from using “reconciling” and instead embrace “affirming” because the church celebrates different pieces of identity, including sexuality and “we put them specifically in our membership vows and our confirmation vows and our baptismal vows.”

Trinity as a whole, including the youth, was “acutely” aware of what was happening with the UMC leading up to and including GC2019. Carter notes that the youth now really are not that aware of what is happening in the denomination, which may be an indicator of how the church has moved past “reconciling” and the “issues” of the UMC as they seek to embrace their own

²² Interview with the Rev. Lea Matthews and the Rev. Dr. K Karpen over Zoom, March 17, 2021.

²³ Interview with Carter Baxter over Zoom, March 16, 2021.

²⁴ The ministerial leadership at Trinity is a good example of this intentionality; Carter is transgender and Lea is queer.

identity as a church invested in queer liberation. He says that the youth group now is younger, mostly in middle school, and about half of the youth are brand new to the church. The youth are just “generally aware that [Trinity] is an affirming and welcoming place to everybody; and I think they think it’s cool that there’s queer people in leadership and they are aware that that’s unique sometimes in Christianity in the United States.” As the next GC has gotten pushed back twice now, there have not been ongoing efforts to educate the youth about how the denomination works and the ongoing conflict. Instead, the youth, and the whole church, have focused on anti-racism, housing unhoused people during the pandemic, and immigration justice. Once the next GC dates draw near, the church will likely begin those efforts again, as they did in the time leading up to GC2019.

Trinity sent 20 church members to GC2019 - not as voting delegates, but as witnesses for inclusion. Two of those members were youth, whose way the church paid. These two youth were a part of a cohort of older youth at the time (who are now out of youth ministry) who were very involved in the lead up to GC2019. Lea remembers that they were “a part of that history and that justice work and Gay pride, so [going to General Conference] was a natural connection for them.” According to K, the church decided to pay to send the two youth to GC2019 because they wanted to make sure youth were present, but also for two other reasons: one, the youth wanted to be there, and two, because of their vocational interests. One of the youth is a videographer and the other is a photographer. K remembers that the youth were “both interested in being there also to...figure out how to interpret whatever happened, especially to a younger crowd.” Lea recalls that one of the youth mothers saying to the youth, “don’t you want to be there to witness? Don’t you want to be a part of what’s happening in your church, it’s *your* church, too, they aren’t telling you that, but it is your church.” Lea says, “they did want to witness it and they did want to document it. And it became *crucial* for them to be there to document it, as it turns out, which we would have had no way of knowing. But they got into places that they really should not have been.” K laughed in agreement as he remembers that these two youth somehow talked themselves into getting press credentials. They were able to tell the story of what was happening, just as they had hoped. Some of their work even made it into national news. Like the youth at Boston Ave., the youth at Trinity are part of a church that supports them as leaders and supports their leadership outside the church as well as inside the church.

Some of the youth at Trinity, including the photographer mentioned above, were aware of what was happening on a denominational level, and had taken a confirmation class before GC2019. This group of youth decided not to join the church because of the denomination’s exclusive stances against LGBTQ+ members and clergy. Surprisingly, after GC2019 these youth decided to join their local church, even as the denomination voted to become more conservative. K recounts they made this decision “because of the witness that they saw of church members putting it on the line, taking over the stage, whatever they were doing – we were doing – that witness gave them (and [two of them] were queer) and they decided yep, we’re joining, we’re signing up for this, whereas they had ‘no, thank you’ after the class.” This decision on their part helped lead the church to take more seriously what it means to be a member of the community of their church. Lea notes that now there are conversations for new members classes and confirmation classes about what it means to be in a community and connected to an institution “knowing that institutions will *always* fail us.” Church members share their stories of the complexities of belonging and how they made the decision to join the church. Lea says that now “we make it as transparent as possible so that kids don’t get the wrong impression to think [they are] joining a perfect place.”

One of the current youth, a 12 year old, wrote a devotion for the church's 2020 collection of daily Lenten devotions. In it she described the effect of the 2019 Judicial Council ruling, which largely upheld as constitutional the Traditional Plan that was voted into practice at GC2019.²⁵ She felt the impact of that decision personally, as the child of two mothers (one of whom is a clergy person in the UMC). She started experiencing anxiety and needed the help of a doctor to understand what was happening. She wrote that doing meditations with her mama helps and so, too, does reminding herself that, "God isn't excluding queer people, the denomination is."²⁶

Moving Forward

It is clear that the United Methodist Church not "go forward" by simply the adopting the Traditional Plan across the denomination, even though it was one of the options offered by The Commission on the Way Forward and approved by GC2019. The denomination will also not remain as it was before GC2019. Instead, as Peyton assumes, it does seem a foregone conclusion that the denomination will undergo some kind of split when the GC meets next in 2022. A new denomination, The Global Methodist Church, formed by the most conservative churches of the United Methodist Church has already emerged.²⁷ For United Methodists, what their denomination will look like after the next GC is an unknown. Those who are in ministry with UM youth have a lot to learn from the three congregations profiled in this paper.

Youth who have been formed and educated in inclusive congregations have already been teaching their churches, even as the churches also teach them. The youth at Grace led their congregation in becoming reconciling. They initiated the process and were involved at every level. Then they taught and held accountable the adults for their behavior leading up to the vote to become reconciling. They expected better from the adults who were raising them, and made sure to let them know. The youth at Boston Ave. taught their church that affiliating with the Reconciling Ministries Network matters to them as they seek to evangelize and create a safe space for LGBTQ+ people. Two Sunday school classes followed their lead. At Trinity, the youth learned from their church that the way they interpret Christianity matters. They in turn, documented and shared the story. They also taught their congregation that if they bear witness to inclusivity and resistance to the denomination, they will join the congregation and join with that effort. The 12-year-old who wrote a Lenten devotion for Trinity taught her congregation that the denomination's decisions impact its young people in very real and embodied ways.

²⁵ The Judicial Council is the judicial branch of the United Methodist Church and was asked to evaluate the Traditional Plan, including its amendments for constitutionality with the *Discipline* by GC2019. "What Did the Judicial Council Decide about the Traditional Plan?," The United Methodist Church, April 29, 2019, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-did-the-judicial-council-decide-about-the-traditional-plan>, accessed May 12, 2021.

²⁶ Youth, "April 21" in *Lenten Devotional 2020: Written and Shared by the [Trinity United Methodist Church] Community*. This devotional booklet is available online, but to protect the identity of this youth, and due to the fact that I was not given permission to use the real name of this church, I will not include the link for it here. It was uploaded to the church's website March 1, 2020 and accessed May 11, 2021.

²⁷ David Crary, "United Methodist Conservatives Detail Plans for a Breakaway," AP NEWS (Associated Press, March 1, 2021), <https://apnews.com/article/global-methodist-church-breakaway-lgbt-f599979835addfd354856ff5b2024989>, accessed May 11, 2021.

The congregations profiled in this paper do youth ministry differently than what is often seen in mainline churches. They educate their young people as a part of the whole church about denominational polity and how decisions are made in the church. They form, teach, and raise the youth to take their faith seriously. They teach youth that when their faith leads them to an inclusive stance on the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the church, they must be public in their witness to this faith claim. These churches have taught their young people leadership and faith-based values of inclusion and love of neighbor. They have shown the youth how to bear out those values and love in action in the denomination and in their local congregations.

It is clear that reconciling youth can lead in the denomination and help create a more inclusive church in the future, whatever it may hold for the connection and organization of people who now call themselves United Methodists. Youth formed and educated in these churches are ready to lead now and feel empowered to do so. The denomination has broken their hearts, but not their spirits. They are faithful and strong leaders who are ready to do what Peyton said he sees as the responsibility of reconciling communities as the UMC does go forward: to make sure that whatever emerges from this transition will be as inclusive as possible.

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Rehearsing the Kingdom through *Lectio Visceralis*: Science, “Native Pragmatism,” and Pedagogies of Integral Liberation

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Religious Education Association 2021 Annual Meeting

Lectio visceralis is a form of embodied theological reflection rooted in critical pedagogy, participatory aesthetics, and a holistic understanding of liberation. If movement has been part of Christian prayer and formation from the beginning,¹ *lectio visceralis* seeks to make movement critical. If critical thinking can save Christian formation from the dangers of indoctrination,² *lectio visceralis* makes critical thinking more explicitly creative; less abstract; more enfleshed.

In this paper I introduce a few examples of *lectio visceralis* from online ritual and online/in-person classroom practice, laying out the historical and conceptual underpinnings of the practice. First, I discuss its roots in the liberationist art-making and critical activism of Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed. Then, I outline its basis in the science of neurocognition. Next, I offer a philosophical framework of “inculturated semiotic realism” that unpacks its premises and can be used to sharpen its practice. And finally, I situate it in a theological framework of “integral liberation,” in order to underline its Christian bona fides and encourage its adoption by Christian religious and theological educators.

In an incarnational faith, spiritual conversion must be both embodied and intellectual, both a “turning” (Hebrew: *sûr*, *šûb*) and a “change of the mind” (Greek: *meta-noia*).

“Turn away from evil.” (*sûr* Pr 3:7)

“Turn back to me.” (*šûb* Jl 2:12)

“Repent!” (*metanoëô* Mk 1:15).

I propose that practicing *lectio visceralis* can help participants turn more attentively to the body, to the poor and marginalised, and to the Spirit. My goal is to encourage leaders in North American Christian formation (ministers, catechists, and the academics who train them) to adopt a more embodied approach – because such an approach is more effective at promoting deep and sustainable Gospel-oriented change.

As modern Westerners, our intellectual formation is deeply shaped by dualisms that only new physical practices, new habits of thought, and new root metaphors can dislodge. Across much of the critical theory that shapes liberationist thinking, the discussion of embodiment focuses largely on how the body “is formed by culture and history” rather than on “how physical bodies shape ideas.” Even theologies of embodiment have often functioned at the abstract or metaphysical levels, eliding real bodies and bodily functions, as Bonnie Miller-McLemore has pointed out. Practical theologians “talk a lot about embodied theology or embodied knowing but less so about the body itself or what it means to know in and through material bodies.” What

¹ Mark 16:18; Acts 6:6, 13:3; 1 Tim 2:8, 4:14; Marilyn Daniels, *The Dance in Christianity* (New York : Paulist Press, 1981); David John Shirt, (2015) “Whirling, and ring dancing” and “Dancing with God” in “*Sing to the Lord with the harp: Attitudes to musical instruments in early Christianity – 680 A.D.,*” Durham theses, Durham University, 221-226, available at DurhamE-ThesesOnline: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11249>.

² Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education* (San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1980), esp. 107-134.

often results is a “new kind of platonism” in which bodies are simply a cipher for culture and power.³

Although some theological scholars have begun to redress this, including feminist, Practical, and New Materialist theologians,⁴ this perspective has yet to make much headway across the field of religious and theological pedagogy. It’s no use repeating the mantra that “we not only have bodies, we are bodies.”⁵ We need a critical pedagogy of religious formation that is not only “not only *of* the body ... but *from* the body.”⁶ *Lectio visceralis* is such an approach.

Embodied Critical Thinking in Ritual Formation

In this season of Covid, I and some UK ministry colleagues created a number of interactive Zoom prayer services where *lectio visceralis* played a central part. Our Creationtide 2020 service, on the Feast of St. Francis, explored the transition from lamentation to hope. Our post-Epiphany service for clergy similarly explored how prayer (*incense*) can help us move through pain (*myrrh*) and towards hope (*gold* for the Kingdom of Heaven). Our service on the eve of St. George’s Day invited participants to consider how connection can overcome isolation (as St. George slew the mythical dragon). And our ecumenical service for “Thy Kingdom Come” 2021 (the season of prayer between Ascension and Pentecost) invited East Londoners to consider the movement from exclusion to welcome, so that others can “make nests in God’s shade” (Mk 4:30-32). Each service involved no more than a dozen people, so as to keep it truly interactive.

Several days before the service began, those who signed up were invited to take pictures of their lived environments (home, neighborhood, etc.): two representing the negative side of the transformation, and two representing the positive theme for which we all hope. (In the post-Epiphany service, we asked for an additional two pictures representing prayer: six in all.) We collected these images and turned them into a photomontage with instrumental worship background music.

The services themselves were structured by prayer throughout: at the opening, at the closing, and at the beginning and ending of each *lectio visceralis* exercise. The online prayer experience begins with an “name game” icebreaker, where each participant states their name and makes an improvised movement (as silly or serious as they like). They offer their name and movement to the other participants, who repeat the name and the movement back to them in (relative) unison, as precisely as possible. We call this exercise “The Gift,” framing each name and movement as a

³ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “Embodied Knowing, Embodied Theology: What Happened to the Body?” *Pastoral Psychology* (2013) 62: 743-744, 748.

⁴ For practical theologians who focus on bodily practice, see Dorothy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997). For feminist practical theologians who pay close attention to bodies, see Bonnie Miller-McLemore, e.g., *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Courtney Goto, *The Grace of Playing: Pedagogies for Leaning into God’s New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016). For the New Materialism, see Tamsin Jones, “Introduction: New Materialism and the Study of Religion,” in Joerg Rieger and Edward Waggoner, eds. *Religious Experience and New Materialism: Movement Matters* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 1-24.

⁵ Miller-McLemore, “Embodied Knowing, Embodied Theology,” 744.

⁶ Miller-McLemore, “Embodied Knowing, Embodied Theology,” 748. The phrase is from sociologist Loïc Wacquant, *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), viii; Miller-McLemore uses it to describe the kind of “theological knowledge” that good practical theologians should seek.

gift to the group, and framing the precise repetition as a symbol of caring attention and grateful embrace. The Gift exercise has multiple purposes. It builds solidarity and reduces inhibitions: we are all being silly (or serious) together. It introduces the practice of close attention to bodies and facial expressions, which will be crucial to the *lectio visceralis* to come. And it trains participants to show feelings and share reactions in front of the group. (The Gift is sometimes followed by a Scripture reading; or an anthem of praise – a chant or a simple refrain to which participants can sing along muted with the text on their screen).

Then the *lectio visceralis* begins in earnest. We play the photomontage that was assembled from participants' images; and we invite them "to watch with their eyes and to listen with their hearts." We then invite them to create an image in response to the video. We begin with an image of the theme that we are moving "from." The front end of the process is held by a prayer of invocation, such as the following:

Spirit of God,
You pray through us,
and You guide our unspoken prayers.
Help us to explore what our bodies are saying
in response to the images we have seen.
Help us to express what it feels like
to exclude and to be excluded,
to be separated from each other,
from community, and from You.

Then, with eyes closed to minimize self-consciousness and self-censoring, the prayer leader guides the participants step by step in creating a body sculpture, using hands, arms, face, and head (and any other body part they are inspired to use). Opening their eyes, participants are invited to adjust their sculpture to fit in the Zoom frame, and then to hold it – noting the feelings or tensions in their bodies while we take a screen shot of this composite group sculpture.

The next step is reflecting on the image we have created: "personally" (feelings or thoughts about one's own sculpture); "objectively" (things that everyone can see: how people are holding their hands, directing their eyes, shaping their faces, etc.); and "subjectively" (memories or insights that the sculptures bring up; what the images might be "saying;" what the composite image might mean).

The reflection ends with closing prayer, such as the following:

God, our Mother and Father,
wherever your children are excluded
gather us in with fierce compassion.
Kindle in us a desire for community,
that can burn through our prejudice and fear.
We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We then invite participants to create a second sculpture. Thinking back to the photomontage, they are guided through a similar set of steps to create and analyze an image of the theme that we want to move "towards" again using prayer ("Spirit of God, you pray through us ..."), guided movement, analysis, and ending once more with a collect ("God, our Mother and Father, ...").

The third sculpture is one of transition. Participants think back to their previous two sculptures, and are guided in transforming themselves from the first to the second, with their eyes closed, in three discreet steps. They are invited to pay close attention to what they are feeling throughout the whole process of transformation: does it feel free and flowing? choppy? natural? forced?

There are no screenshots here, just an invitation to notice their own felt experience, and then a period of sharing what they discovered. The service ends with a prayer and a song.⁷

I. The Roots of *Lectio Visceralis* in Theatre of the Oppressed

Lectio visceralis combines traditions of religious formation with self-reflective practices of embodied teaching and learning. The embodied learning techniques are inspired by the classroom work of Victoria Rue; the “Bibliodrama” or “Bibliolog” of Peter Pitzele; and most especially the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) work of Augusto Boal.⁸

Rue’s work focuses on performance and embodied teaching methods for the college and university classroom; as a religious studies instructor and a phenomenologist, she encourages students to feel their way into the spiritual experiences that they are studying. Pitzele’s Bibliodrama has taken root mainly among US Jews, and in Christian and interfaith circles in Europe; a Roman Catholic version has been developed by catechists in SE Asia. It is based in psychodrama, role play, and midrashic approaches to Scripture.

TO is the longest established of these three practices. It was born in 1960’s Brazil as Augusto Boal (1931-2009) and his colleagues experimented with classical and popular theatre, agit-prop, docu-drama, and audience feedback. Boal combined the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire; the Marxist theater of Bertolt Brecht, and the character acting methods of Konstantin Stanislavski. From Freire he learned to help people re-present their own reality to themselves, so that they could investigate it together. From Brecht he learned how to break down the fourth wall, and how to create theatre that instigated conflict instead of resolving it. From Stanislavski he learned how to help people dig into their body memories, in order to generate performances that are both beautiful and true to life. Through political exile and decades of international work, Boal and others (including his wife Cecília, a trained psychoanalyst; and his son Julian, a community organizer) developed TO for use in prisons, health clinics, schools, and community groups and movements, especially in the Global South.

⁷ For detailed descriptions and reflections on these “Image” techniques, see Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, trans. by Adrian Jackson, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 174-186. Available for free download at <https://www.deepfun.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Games-for-actors-and-non-actors...Augusto-Boal.pdf>.

⁸ Victoria Rue: *Acting Religious: Theatre as Pedagogy in Religious Studies* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010 [2005]). Peter Pitzele: *Scripture Windows: Towards a Practice of Bibliodrama* (Los Angeles: Torah Aura, 1998); <http://www.bibliodrama.com/> (accessed 1 June 2021); Joy Caldelario, Rudi Pöhl, Martin Jaggi, and Oscar Alunday, *Talitha Kumi – Play!*, Bibliodrama vol. 1 (Manila: Episcopal Commission on the Biblical Apostolate, 2009). Augusto Boal: *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, trans. Adrian Jackson (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. For an excellent overview of Theatre of the Oppressed, see Marie Claire Picher, “Democratic Process and the Theatre of the Oppressed,” in Sandra Hayes and Lyle Yorks, eds., “Arts and Societal Learning: Transforming Communities Socially, Politically, and Culturally” [special issue], *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 116 (Winter 2007): 79-88.

TO proposes that we are all natural-born artists, and that spontaneous expression can be a rich source of insight. It holds that our thinking is always embodied; that our body/minds are “mechanised” by work and habit, formal education, socialisation, and numerous forms of oppression; and that limbering the body can limber the mind. In TO, expressions and insights are treated like artworks: they can produce multiple interpretations, so we must discern carefully which meanings or options make sense for our lives. Accordingly, TO offers the following counsels (with “you” here in the plural):

- Don’t try to think your way into new ways of acting; try to act your way into new ways of thinking.
- De-mechanise your bodies in order to de-mechanise your minds.
- Slow down and notice what body / senses / spirit are trying to tell you.
- Look for the hurt; it can lead you to the truth.
- Look for options; see what fits or works best.
- Be true! True to the testimonies and the people that you are working with; true to the spirit speaking in your hearts and in your surroundings.
- Rehearse the revolution. Creativity, bravery, discernment, and collective critical investigation, can be learned – but only through repeated practice.

The first stage of TO is to come to know the body in a new way; the second, to make the body expressive; the third, to use theatre as a new language for action and thought. Good facilitation takes practice, but even novices can participate or lead in fruitful ways. First stage exercises build a sense of “theatrical communion” by demechnizing the body together; through moving and speaking in unaccustomed ways, participants become comfortable with each other while simultaneously uncovering and breaking down muscle and mental habits. Second stage games drill players in physical meaning making, improvisational problem-solving, and creative intervention. Third stage performances collectively dissect and re-imagine social situations, inviting onlookers to become “spect-actors” rather than passive spect-atoms. In this way, participants take charge of their own learning.

Using LECTIO VISCERALIS in Formal Prayer

Our prayer services built a sense of communion not only by using shared religious language and prayer, but also by using an initial game / exercise which invited spontaneous movement in unaccustomed places (worship and Zoom). This led to a three-fold “Image Theatre” performance in which participants created, analyzed, and explored their own social and spiritual situations. The Image work invited participants to interpret and think critically in a shared format, while listening carefully to the spirit moving within. Participants who may not have considered themselves eloquent or extemporaneous had space to create, to reflect, and to contribute at the levels of movement, introspection, concrete observation, and abstract interpretation. Because of the newness of the experience, we used only two TO modalities: a simple game, and variations on one Image technique. We also held the space tightly, using detailed and carefully scripted directions, and verbal repetition in the prayers.

Other Zoom-based prayer experiences incorporating *lectio visceralis* can be imagined. One might focus more squarely on the experience of embodiment: building up through a series of

guided movements to a period of spontaneous dancing (a mini-“dance party”), and then using Image Theatre to reflect on the experience of moving freely together during formal prayer.

Another might focus on the dynamics of solidarity: each participant thinks of a challenging situation that they actually experienced, then the group is divided into breakout rooms of four participants and one leader each. Once in their breakout rooms, and guided by their leader, each participant uses “mirror-sculpting” to shape the other three into an ensemble that captures the essence of their experience, before inserting themselves as the last piece of the sculpture. (In mirror-sculpting, one employs one’s own body to show exactly what sculpted pose others should create.) Each ensemble is screenshot and discussed in the breakout room before everyone reconvenes for prayer, song, and reflection.

II. The Basis of *Lectio Visceralis* in Neurocognition

Lectio visceralis is supported by the science of neurology and cognition. The empirical data, and scientific theories that have grown up to interpret it, convincingly suggest that we do in fact think and learn with our bodies.

We know that bodily and mental states are closely connected. Our thinking affects our bodies: frustration and pessimism weaken the immune system; placebos have measurable effects on physical health. It also works in the other direction: our bodies affect our mental capacities and dispositions. Stress hormones and diet affect mood and cognition; exercise, yoga, and martial arts can alleviate depression.⁹ These connections between thought and body can get quite granular. For example, feeling warm generates “warm” emotions; feeling cold generates thoughts of isolation; feeling wobbly makes us feel less secure about our romantic relationships.¹⁰ “Weight manipulations influence perceptions of importance. Smooth textures promote social coordination, and hard textures result in greater strictness in our social judgments.”¹¹ In fact, the same areas of the brain seem to be involved in warmth perception and in trust decisions; in the perception of touch and the judgement of social situations.¹²

It has become more and more clear how thinking and learning *reside* in the nerves. Nerves concentrate and organize our responses as organisms to the external and internal environment. “Place cell” and “grid cell” neurons help us keep track of where we are and where we are

⁹ Tobin Hart, “Embodying the Mind,” in John P Miller and Kelli Nigh, eds., *Holistic Education and Embodied Learning* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2017), 302-3;) Rebecca Fincher-Kiefer, *How the Body Shapes Knowledge: Empirical Support for Embodied Cognition* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2019), 35-48, 130-133; Sudha Prathikanti, et al., “Treating major depression with yoga: A prospective, randomized, controlled pilot trial,” *Public Library of Science (PLOS) One* 12, no. 3 (2017): e0173869.

¹⁰ A. L. Forest, D.R. Kille, J.V. Wood, and L.R. Stehouwer, “Turbulent Times, Rocky Relationships: Relational consequences of experiencing physical instability,” *Psychological Science* 26 (2015): 1261–1271.

¹¹ Mark J. Landau, Michael D. Robinson, and Brian P. Meier, “Introduction,” in *The Power of Metaphor: Examining Its Influence on Social Life* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2014), 10; cf. Fincher-Kiefer, *How the Body Shapes Knowledge*, 134-136. Of course, these connections are culturally inflected; for example, standing tall always elicits some change in our thinking: it accompanies thoughts of dominance in some cultures, of fairness in others, and shame in yet others (40-42).

¹² Michael Schaefer, Hans-Jochen Heinze, Michael Rotte, Claudia Denke, “Rough Primes and Rough Conversations: Evidence for a modality-specific basis to mental metaphors,” *Social Cognitive and Affective neuroscience* 9 no. 11 (11/2014): 1657.

going.¹³ Memories reside in the neural pathways that they generate: the pathways record feelings and perceptions as units, and they bring memories to life as we reassemble these units into (aptly named) recollections. Learning new thoughts and behaviors comes from repetition and habit, as neurons that fire together wire together.

The link between thinking and movement is particularly clear. Injury studies show that movement plays a key role in thinking. People with spinal injuries find it harder to *perceive* certain kinds of human motion; people with injury to the motor cortex find it harder to *name* actions (although interestingly, not objects).¹⁴ This link between thinking and movement has only become clearer with the discovery of mirror neurons, which fire both when an animal acts, and when it observes a similar action by other creatures. Mirror neurons run through areas of the brain linked to movement *and* language; they have been connected with empathy, imitation, and learning.¹⁵

Perception, feeling, and thinking is a whole-body process. Emotion and thinking are not restricted to the brain. The central nervous system contains both the brain (with its sense, memory, and judging centers) and the spinal column (through which sympathetic and parasympathetic nerves regulate bodily functions and instigate “fight-or-flight”/stress dispositions). In addition, the enteric (gut based) nervous system is “an independent site of neural integration and processing” which affects motivation, sociability, and withdrawal, the making hunches and the managing of predictions. The enteric nervous system produces just as many different neurotransmitters as the brain; it may even have its own psychoneuroses. What is more, the body often “knows” things before those things become present to consciousness: galvanic skin responses (like those used in lie detectors) show that a hunch can tilt our choices in a certain direction well before we are able to articulate what’s going on.¹⁶

Movement can prevent us from thinking in some ways, and it can also help us to think in other directions. Holding one’s facial muscles stiffly in place (or receiving a botox injection) blocks the ability to recognize or finely distinguish certain emotions.¹⁷ When our physical behavior contradicts our words or ideas, our brain cells work harder, and our movement becomes measurably more labored. This goes for simple movements (e.g., waving, stomping) and also for conceptualized actions (e.g., directing our attention “towards” or “away” from ourselves). Conversely, it is measurably easier to do a movement, when we are hearing that movement described.¹⁸

¹³ Fincher-Kiefer, *How the Body Shapes Knowledge*, 52)

¹⁴ Fincher-Kiefer, *How the Body Shapes Knowledge*, 145-6)

¹⁵ David A. Hogue, “Brain Matters: Practicing Religion, Forming the Faithful,” *Religious Education*, 107:4 (2012): 348; Fincher-Kiefer, *How the Body Shapes Knowledge*, 73, 76, 77, 118.

¹⁶ Michael D. Gershon, *The Second Brain: A Groundbreaking New Understanding of Nervous Disorders of the Stomach and Intestine* (NY: Harper Collins, 1998), viii, xix, 17, 461; Emeran A. Mayer, “Gut Feelings: The Emerging Biology of Gut–Brain Communication,” *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 12, no. 8 (2011): 455; Tobin Hart, “Embodying the Mind,” in John P. Miller and Kelli Nigh, eds., *Holistic Education and Embodied Learning* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2017), 302-304.

¹⁷ Fincher-Kiefer, *How the Body Shapes Knowledge*, 109-112; Miller-McLemore, “Embodied Knowing, Embodied Theology,” 753.

¹⁸ Fincher-Kiefer, *How the Body Shapes Knowledge*, 140; 70-73; 35-48.

In sum, the current state of neuroscience backs up the postulate that our thinking is always embodied. It clearly suggests that thought, intuition, movement, and will, all interpenetrate. It supports the work of sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu, who argue that bodily habits and physical disciplines shape our ideas about value and belonging.¹⁹

In the past, some have imagined the human person as a ghost in the machine. Others have envisioned the human consciousness as tiny person in a brain-shaped control-room. Others still have imagined the mind as a computer which maps thoughts and perceptions onto abstract symbols, and then links them together through logical chains. Contemporary neuroscience suggests that thinking, feeling, and sensing are organic, “integrated,” “bidirectional”, constantly affecting and effecting each other.²⁰ It supports the contention of Boal that de-mechanising and rehearsing our body-minds can help us to act our way into new ways of thinking, feeling, and desiring.²¹

Image Theatre: A Closer Look

A rigorous practice of aesthetic analysis is central to *lectio visceralis*, as illustrated in the following example.

Some time ago, I worked with a group of theology graduate students. Their school had just undergone some significant structural changes, and it was the end of their first full year of studies. In an in-person session, we decided to analyse the theme “Community at our Graduate School” using a similar “Image of the Word” technique as the one employed in the prayer services described above. One by one, the five students created a 3-dimensional image. One knelt in prayer; one stared off into the distance with arms crossed; one stood with an imaginary drink in her hand. A fourth reached out in pantomime greeting with a hearty handshake and a smile; the fifth reached back, almost meeting the handshake while pointedly looking away.

My first action was to step into each person’s image, taking their place so that they could walk around the entire sculpture and take the view in for themselves. Then I stepped back out to snap a photo, and projected the image on a large screen, so that we could all analyse it together.

“Physically,” I asked, “what do you notice? What physical aspects of this image strike you? Don’t interpret, just tell me what you see.”

- ♦ No one is looking each other in the eye; no one is touching.
- ♦ I’m ignoring them.
- ♦ It looks like some people are checking others out.
- ♦ One is on her knees, while all the others are standing.
- ♦ Some have closed-off body language; some have open body language.
- ♦ Everyone is in a different plane; I’m looking at five separate pictures.

“Now let’s interpret this image. What might these physical attributes mean?”

- ♦ No one is genuine – fake postures.

¹⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984 [1979]), esp. 99-256.

²⁰ Hart, “Embodying the Mind,” 304; Fincher-Kiefer, *How the Body Shapes Knowledge*, 85.

²¹ Mary E. Hess has similarly suggested that imitation may develop empathy in all learners, just as repetition seems to stimulate mirror neuron development in therapies for autistic children. “Mirror Neurons, the Development of Empathy, and Digital Storytelling,” *Religious Education* 107 no 4 (Jul - Sep 2012): 407.

- ♦ Only one person looks happy. Anger.
- ♦ Spirituality in the midst – praying is very individual.
- ♦ People are disinterested and indifferent.
- ♦ There is a grudging acknowledgement of each other.
- ♦ Drinking: having a “Social” means consuming alcohol

One of the key challenges in *lectio visceralis* is to maintain the tension between consensus and divergence. In TO games and performances, the director or MC is the “Joker”: the player who steps into different roles and shakes up the game. For Boal, the Joker is a facilitator, but also, and more importantly, a “difficultator.” She cultivates a keen eye for outlying data and brings it to the attention of the group. She raises questions, interrogates answers, and challenges participants. “What else could that image represent? Is that interpretation realistic, or just wishful thinking?”

The leader’s role within *lectio visceralis* is likewise to tack between generating, assessing, and consolidating interpretations. To reach an actionable group conclusion (the aim of the work is to prepare people for action), the leader drives the conversation toward points of synthesis. She may ask, “What is your main take away from this image? What’s the most important thing that this image says about your school? If this image were an artwork called ‘Our School,’ what might it’s subtitle be?” At the same time, the leader seeks out contradictory data and welcomes contrary interpretations. “So you see indifference in this image; but also grudging acknowledgement. Can they exist both at once? How does that work?” This sort of rich and nuanced exploration is a key benefit of using images to generate themes and to pursue practical or qualitative research.

III. A Philosophical Framework: Inculturated Semiotic Realism

A plausible conceptual framework to ground this kind of *lectio* and to help practitioners deepen and discipline their own practice, would clarify the embodied nature of leaning and link critical reflection with solidarity, creativity, pluralism, and justice.

For religious educators in the United States, the most effective such framework might be a more deeply inculturated version of Classical Pragmatism – a version that builds on the pedagogical, democratic, and methodological commitments of John Dewey and Charles Sanders Peirce while incorporating the insights and commitments of the many non-Anglo wisdom traditions in these lands.²² (Without rejecting the wisdom of this essay, practitioners of *lectio visceralis* in other parts of the world are invited to develop cogent frameworks in dialogue with their own local cultural and intellectual traditions.) The wisdom of First Nations is particularly valuable in North America, both because it challenges us to address the violence that is foundational to our current social reality (including our enclosure and expropriation of the land that we live on) and because it can suggest lifeways that make life more sustainable for all Americans. Books like Scott

²² My inspiration for speaking of a more “inculturated” American Pragmatism comes from Donald Gelpi, SJ, who sought to “inculturate” orthodox Catholic theology in the thoroughly “Yankee idiom” of Peircean Pragmatism. Donald L. Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience: Rethinking the Relationship between Nature and Grace* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 174. In this paper, I attempt to go one step further than Gelpi, grounding Pragmatist thinking more deeply in its Native soil. *Quis inculturabit inculturatores?*

Pratt's *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy*, McPherson and Rabb's *Indian from the Inside: Native American Philosophy and Cultural Renewal*, and Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* invite non-Native educators to adopt insights and dispositions that can make our teaching more hospitable, critical, sustainable, and pluralist.²³ Without pretending to "master" this First Nation wisdom (by mining it for decontextualized proofs, for example, or by ignoring the commitments to shared struggle that the sharing of knowledge demands), we can build an inculturated vision that helps North Americans and others better teach, learn, and live in the world.²⁴ I propose that a truly inculturated Pragmatist framework for Christian religious education in North America would be shaped by five key dimensions which support and inform one another:

1. a mindset of thinking in place;
2. a metaphysics of continuity;
3. a spirit of adoption;
4. a vision of pluralism; and
5. a practice of Semiotic Realism that weaves together inquiry, creativity, and heart.

1. Thinking in Place. An inculturated American Pragmatism would cultivate the virtue of thinking in place. As Pratt and others have argued, Native traditions do not see place as real estate to be bought, sold, and exploited, but as "the complex of [living] interactions" involving a space, the earth, and its human and non-human inhabitants.²⁵ For example, Pratt contends that the problem for many Natives with early White expansion was "the failure to maintain proper relations" *after* land was exchanged.²⁶ Analysing the discussions between the Lenape leader Teedyuscung and Pennsylvania authorities during the French and Indian War, Pratt concludes that the Lenape and other Natives did not view property as alienable from *relationships*, although they did see it as alienable from one's tribal or national *habitual use*. Selling ancestral land to White settlers did not give Whites the right to bar Natives from hunting or gathering on it in order to survive. "Buying" land does not give us the right to desolate it, to destroy it, or to break the relationships that keep humans, animals, plants and other elements in healthy relation with each other through that land.²⁷ Everyone needs a place of one's own; a place that includes room to grow and develop; a place where one can live and learn to make room for others to live.

The Native tradition of thinking in place has strong parallels in Classical Pragmatism. Charles Peirce emphasized that all thinking is thinking in place: never "disinterested," always validating or re-evaluating the thinker's schemas and values. Josiah Royce advocated a "wise provincialism" that serves and "adorns" local communities and public spaces; cultivates

²³ Scott L. Pratt, *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2002); Dennis H. McPherson and J. Douglas Rabb, *Indian from the Inside: Native American Philosophy and Cultural Renewal*, 2nd Edition (Jefferson, NC & London: McFarland, 2011 [1995]); Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (London: Penguin, 2020 [2013]).

²⁴ On the anti-Christian dynamics of "mastery" in theological education, see Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).

²⁵ Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 139, 152.

²⁶ Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 180.

²⁷ Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 163-183.

individuality; and welcomes outsiders.²⁸ A truly inculturated American Pragmatism puts relationship and liveability at the center of ethical thinking and of moral resistance to outrageous behavior.²⁹

2) Metaphysics of Continuity. An inculturated American Pragmatism would cultivate a metaphysics of continuity. Metaphysics provides the basic metaphors by which we imagine, explore, and understand reality. The basic metaphors of many Americans are permeated with dichotomies and discontinuities: spirit and matter, mind and body, reason and feeling, male and female. When these are understood as distinct essences or disjunctive experiences, they become harder to understand and easier to twist into invidious hierarchies.

Classical Pragmatists like Dewey, James, Mead, and Royce embrace a metaphysics of continuity. Other wisdom traditions also embrace this kind of unifying vision; and some Western thinkers are returning to it, for example Process Philosophy; “Theories of Everything” in modern physics; theories of panpsychism, which posit that mindlike qualities are not extraneous but fundamental to matter; and the so-called New Materialism, which focuses on the deep entanglement of matter, life, consciousness, and social meaning. Many Native worldviews likewise express a sense of the continuity of all things. The Algonquian concept of *manitou* (“supreme power, spiritual power”); the Iroquois concept of *orenda* (“self actualizing power, expression, song”); and the Lakota/Dakota concept of *wakinyan* (“thunder”) all signify the underlying dynamic which both unites and differentiates every thing that exists.³⁰ These traditions especially underline the continuity between human and other-than-human persons.

Imagine a deep practice of universal consideration for all beings (including what Euro-Americans would call “things”), a consideration (perhaps a considerateness) that is not instituted as a moral principle or rule governing behavior, but is a dimension of one’s very *perception* of the world. Such a conception is present in the notion of “respect” for all beings that is pervasive in indigenous cultures.³¹

The implications are deep and wide-ranging. A basic metaphor of continuity helps us imagine with neuroscientists how the rational, the aesthetic, the emotional, and the kinesthetic are all integral to each other; it undermines the “Enlightenment folk theory of faculty psychology,” in which practical and pure reason, body and emotion, are categorically distinct.³² We respond to our environment in a spectrum of ways, from the less complex and less self-directed, to the more sophisticated and more self-controlled, because we are *made of* our environment.

²⁸ Josiah Royce, “Provincialism,” in *Race Questions, Provincialism, and Other American Problems* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1967 [1908]), 1086-1087.

²⁹ Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 163-181.

³⁰ McPherson and Rabb, *Indian from the Inside*, 150-153, 157; Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 144, 192-197; Scott L. Pratt, “Persons in Place: The Agent Ontology of Vine Deloria, Jr.,” *APA Newsletter* 6 no. 1 (Spring 2006): 4-9; L.N. Meyer and T. Ramirez, “Wakinyan Hotan: The Inscrutability of Lakota/Dakota Metaphysics,” in S. O’Meara and D. A. West (eds), *From Our Eyes: Learning from Indigenous People* (Toronto: Garamound, 1966), 89-105. This vision of basic process rather than basic substance is in line with Process metaphysics, and also with a number of other wisdom traditions from outside North America, such as Advaita Vedanta, Buddhist philosophy, and even pre-Socratic philosophers like Heraclitus, who famously argued that *panta rhei* “All things flow.”

³¹ Lee Hester, Dennis McPherson, Annie Booth, and Jim Cheney, “Indigenous Worlds and Callicot’s Land Ethic,” *Environmental Ethics* 22 no. 3 (2000): 279, original emphasis.

³² McPherson and Rabb, *Indian from the Inside*, 109-111.

A basic metaphor of continuity helps us think like Boal. Most of us learn to live with systemic oppressions (including adultism) very early in life. Whether we are brought up in an oppressor identity, or socialized as a member of a target population, we learn the *habitus* of sexism, racism, class status, or homophobia long before we are able to dissertate, argue about or analyze it with words. A basic metaphor / metaphysics of continuity can help us to grasp – and remember – *why* the most efficacious approaches to unlearning racism, sexism, etc. may also be the most visceral.

3. Spirit of Adoption. An inculturated American Pragmatism would cultivate a sense of becoming indigenous, which Christian religious educators might frame as a spirit of adoption. Robin Kimmerer, a botanist, educator, and Potawatomi traditioner, opens *Braiding Sweetgrass* by sharing the story of Skywoman Falling. Skywoman fell pregnant from the land far above, through a hole that shone onto the dark waters below. One by one the animals came to her aid, placing her on turtle's back and gathering mud from the depths to put under her feet. Grateful, she opened her hand, dropping saplings and seeds that she'd grabbed from above. And when she herself had given birth, Turtle Island at last was complete. Kimmerer writes,

It was through her actions of reciprocity, the give and take with the land, that the original immigrant became indigenous. For all of us, becoming indigenous to a place means living as if your children's future mattered, to take care of the land as if our lives, both material and spiritual, depended on it.³³

Kimmerer invites all Americans to think, live, and desire in solidarity with our human and other-than-human neighbors: to become truly “indigenous” where we were once only guests.

Tragically, many of us have been conditioned – by exploitation and competition – to take advantage of hospitality; we have been taught only to grab what we can. Ours is more like the *windigo* experience: the “cannibals” of the Algonquian and Iroquois traditions. In these stories, the family encounters a being easily recognized as a cannibal (Ojibwe: *windigo*) – a potentially dangerous, even man-eating, spirit. But in many of these tales, rather than fighting the spirit or trying to drive it away, the family welcomes it in, treating it as a close, honored relative. Sometimes, the spirit becomes a faithful ally, or even an actual peaceful human being.³⁴ These stories reflect the way that strangers (including pivotal figures in White history, like Roger Williams) were actually treated on the Algonquian border for hundreds of years. They also provide “a pattern for the process of welcoming dangerous others into a community.”³⁵

Windigos are dangerous, but they can sometimes be tamed and even humanized. The story of gentile “adoption” into the people of Israel can prepare Christians for this kind of taming. Willie James Jennings insists that (non-Jewish) Christians must remember how we have received “a spirit of adoption:” we enjoy liberation as outsiders who have been adopted and grafted onto God's covenant (Rom 8:15, 11:17). For Jennings, adoption is “the ultimate deconstructive statement regarding Gentile ethnocentrism.”³⁶ none of us can boast except to say that that we were invited (quite late!) to God's party. As non-Native guests on this Turtle Island, we need a spirit of adoption that can shape us for more indigenized ways of life.

³³ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 9.

³⁴ Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 89-96.

³⁵ Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 104, 111.

³⁶ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (Yale University Press, 2009), 271.

4. Vision of Pluralism. An inculturated American Pragmatism would cultivate a vision of pluralism, in which people learn to respect both their own place, and the places of others. For example, McPherson and Rabb describe a deep ethical commitment in many Native communities to “non-interference” (they borrow the term from Mohawk child psychologist Clare Brant.)³⁷ Multiple observers – across many centuries – have remarked on the Native sense of cultural “horror” towards restraint or active interference in the life of another. From childrearing to adult interaction, Native cultures tend to see “the act of directly interfering in someone’s life” as inappropriate, unwelcome, and “rude.”³⁸ For educators, the most striking observation may be the widespread Native approach to childrearing. Among Native communities, parents often allow children much more freedom to play messily in the environment (in comparison to the ways in which middle-class White children are typically raised). They value exposing children non-directively to “the example of the elders;” they tell of stories without explicit morals; they even encourage children as young as nine years old to pursue rigorous vision quests on their own in the wild.³⁹

A spirit of non-interference encourages people to respect both their own place/ways, and the places of others. Some Native societies may have developed this kind of cultural tolerance as a flexible response to historic necessities. After contact with Spanish, French, and English invaders, many original nations were decimated, forcing refugees to consolidate their numbers and form new, multi-ethnic “nations” such as the Seminole, the Creek, and even Teedyuscung’s own Lenape / Delaware people.⁴⁰

A Native-shaped vision of pluralism includes resistance to assimilation, a resistance with strong spiritual dimensions. Pratt argues that the Native Prophetic Movement of the 18th and 19th centuries was “an active commitment to promoting and maintaining cultural difference” through the preservation of Native traditions and through innovative, constructive engagement with the religion and teachings of colonists (as encountered in White frontier and missionary schools, for example).⁴¹ This kind of resistance continues to this day in the Sun Dance, in Peyote religion, and in the scholarship of theologians like Vine Deloria. A truly inculturated American Pragmatism weaves resistance and non-interference into spiritual practices that it nurtures and shares.

5. Semiotic Realism. An inculturated American Pragmatism would cultivate a perspective of semiotic realism that weaves together inquiry, creativity, and heart.⁴² As Peirce describes it,

³⁷ McPherson and Rabb, *Indian from the Inside*, 105-106.

³⁸ Examples range from the observations of Jesuit missionaries in the 17th century (“horror”: Paul Le Jeune, *Jesuit Relations from New France*, 1637), to the observations of Native researchers among the Western Apache and the Cree and Ojibwa in the late 1990’s (“rude”: Lorraine Mayer Brundige, “Continuity of Native Values: Cree and Ojibway,” Masters Thesis, Thunder Bay: Lakehead University, 1997). McPherson and Rabb, *Indian from the Inside*, 105-108.

³⁹ McPherson and Rabb, *Indian from the Inside*, 98-101, 158.

⁴⁰ Woody Holton, “Starting with the Indians: a response to Scott Pratt’s Native Pragmatism”, *Philosophy & Geography* 6, no. 2 (August 2003): 241.

⁴¹ Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 154.

⁴² For more on semiotic realism and religious education, see John P. Falcone, “Body and Spirit Together: Theatre of the Oppressed, Pragmatist Semiotics, and Practical Theological Method.” *ARTS: Society for the Arts in Religious*

semiotic realism affirms a world where data (facts, feelings, testimonies, impressions) push back against our constructed and imagined interpretations. Semiotic realism takes all data seriously, while remaining open to the possibility that we may be interpreting it less than accurately. Semiotic realism also affirms a world where every thought and experience is mediated by imaginative sign-making and interpretation. As Peirce says, “We have no power of thinking without signs.”⁴³ While questioning all our interpretations at once would be psychotic, no part of the interpreted world that we construct can be immune to question and reinterpretation.

Semiotic realist inquiry is a version of the scientific method: we encounter problems, develop hypotheses, search for evidence to sustain or disprove our interpretations, and check our conclusions with peers. Or seen another way, semiotic realist inquiry is like writing a good essay: come up with a thesis, gather evidence pro and con, correct and refine, and then polish your work so that it is as true, well-crafted, and persuasive as you can make it.

Maurice Hammington has recently argued that hospitality can be understood as a form of inquiry, since good hospitality develops practical wisdom about how to give guests space so that they can be known on their own terms.⁴⁴ Semiotic realist inquiry seeks to give all kinds of data the space it deserves. Many Native traditions embrace and exemplify the kinds of hospitable inquiry that theorists like Hammington have proposed. Native approaches to hospitality can help us make inquiry more rigorous without making it more destructive. Pratt highlights the Narraganset concept of *wunnégin*, which Roger Williams in his 17th century Narraganset-English dictionary translated as “welcome,” “civility,” “generosity,” and “benevolence.” *Wunnégin* implies seeking to know another, in ways that one’s words and actions give no offense to the other. It “establishes a pattern of mutual cooperation that at once preserves the distinctiveness of the participants and fosters their connectedness.”⁴⁵ It is the virtue exemplified in *windigo* stories.

Embracing *wunnégin* suggests that relationships, rather than isolated study or manipulative experimentation, should be at the foundation of inquiry. It suggests that inquiry should begin with “the actual quality of lived experience,” rather than grand metanarratives or abstract questions of right and wrong.⁴⁶ Questions of justice and truth remain central, but they do not lead to wisdom unless they remain grounded in attentive relationships.

Lectio Visceralis in Theological Reflection

There are countless ways to adapt the techniques of Rue, Pitzele, and Boal for the religious and theological classroom. Here are a few that I have found useful:

and *Theological Studies* 30, no. 1 (2018): 57-71; “Peirce, Pragmatism, and Religious Education: Participating More Deeply in God’s Imagination.” *Religious Education* 111, no. 4 (July/September 2016): 381-397.

⁴³ Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 1-6, ed. by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-1935), 5.262.

⁴⁴ Maurice Hamington, “Hospitality as Moral Inquiry: Sympathetic Knowledge in the Guest–Host Encounter,” in Maurice Hamington and Celia Bardwell-Jones, eds., *Contemporary Feminist Pragmatism* (London: Routledge, 2012), 200-216.

⁴⁵ Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 103-4, quote on 104.

⁴⁶ Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 251.

Rashomon.⁴⁷ The name of this exercise is taken from Akira Kurosawa's 1951 film *Rashomon*, where the story of a sexual assault is presented entirely in flashbacks from four different characters' points of view. To explore a narrative Biblical text through Rashomon, the full text is first read aloud, with each character represented by a participant speaking or moving through their own part. Then, except for the narrator, each actor as the character she is playing, creates an image of how she sees the other characters in the scene. The sculpting actor goes round to each of the other characters, placing them in poses, giving them expressions, and if possible whispering to them their thoughts and motivations, all according to how her character has experienced them during the scene. These images should not be naturalistic since the technique is designed to show the character's own personal, subjective feelings, opinions, sentiments – but they should be “true,” however deformed, expressionistic, surrealistic, allegorical or metaphorical they may be. The group then reruns the text, stuck in the postures they have been given. Then the next actor becomes the sculptor, and the story is rerun again.

Scriptural Interview:⁴⁸ In this exercise, the characters in a Biblical narrative (including inanimate characters) can be assembled for a panel interview. Again, the narrator and Godself are usually not ideal as interviewees. This is because the narrative “baggage” that the omniscient narrator carries, and the emotional/theological baggage that “God” carries for many believers and readers, makes it difficult – if not perilous – for actors to embody these characters in spontaneous exercises like these. While a Scriptural Interview can be conducted without using embodied exercises to prepare the participants, the result can be much richer if each participant is invited to sculpt themselves into character, and further invited to “dynamize” (see below) their character with movement, sound, a repetitive phrase, and a minute or two of continuous “internal dialogue. Internal dialogue is non-stop stream-of-consciousness talking out loud, informed by the sculpture that the character has taken on, and within which she remains frozen throughout the dialogue exercise.)

The Image or the Machine of the Word.⁴⁹ Image Theatre – the technique at the center of our online prayer services – can be used to explore any theological concept or theme. For example, by creating a composite “Image of the Word ‘Church,’” whether on screen or in three dimensions, participants and onlookers can explore and analyze what might lie within, or behind, their current experience of Church. The image can be “dynamized” by turning static poses into repetitive movements, then adding a repetitive sound to the movement, and then changing that sound into the repetitive word or phrase which that movement elicits from each participant. Leaders can explore the tableau further by asking participants to speed up the action, or slow it to a crawl. Another similar approach *begins* with dynamic movement: creating the “Machine of Church,” in which one, then another, then another participant take the stage to represent what church means to them through a repetitive movement and sound. In all these Image creations, each individual participant is always “vis-à-vis” every other; even if they are facing away from each other at opposite ends of the room, they are creating an overall image which the leader invites the group to interpret as a whole.

⁴⁷ Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*, trans. by Adrian Jackson (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 115-117; Boal, *Games for Actors and Nonactors*, 236-7.

⁴⁸ Rue, *Acting Religious*, 74-79; Pitzele, *Scripture Windows*, 39-51, 221-224.

⁴⁹ Boal, *Games for Actors and Nonactors*, 94-95, 176-184.

IV. A Theological Framework: Integral Liberation

The concept of “integral liberation” demonstrates how *lectio visceralis* and embodied learning both square with and deepen Christian understandings about learning and salvation.⁵⁰

The idea of “integral” (holistic, comprehensive, integrated) liberation was first prominently articulated by CELAM, the council of Latin American Catholic Bishops, at their Puebla conference of 1979. Gustavo Gutierrez made it central to his own work, and it has influenced liberation theologies around the world. An integral vision of human salvation includes three distinguishable but ultimately inseparable dimensions:

- (1) *Socio-structural liberation* – from collective misery, institutionalized violence, disenfranchisement; from police repression and extortionate rents; from the forced erasure of languages, customs, and ways of life; *for* taking social, legal, cultural, and economic forms of resistance and action.
- (2) *Personal liberation* – from psychological and ideological violence; from value systems, worldviews, personal and communal identities that shape our thinking, feeling, and imaginative powers into twisted, stunted, or inhumane forms; *for* healthy personal agency and creativity.
- (3) *Theological liberation* – from sin; from alienation towards God, others, and the deepest self; from the hopelessness and doubt that bubble back to the surface despite all the social and personal triumphs we might win in our lives; *for* self-giving and self-actualizing love. (This level of liberation can come through implicitly spiritual transformations, or through explicitly religious realizations, choices, and practices.)⁵¹

Framing salvation as integral liberation alerts us to the fact that neither sin nor human freedom can be rightly understood if we ignore their material, concrete dimensions. Pope Francis has recently restored this language to the center of Catholic Social Teaching by describing environmental justice as a call to practice “integral ecology” in *Laudato Si*.⁵² *Lectio visceralis* extends the vision and practice of integral liberation – the promise of “life to the full” (Jn 10:10) – explicitly to include body/mind liberation.

This integral vision is nothing new in Christianity. The Biblical witness sees oppression and liberation as simultaneously political, social, economic, personal, and bodily. In the Hebrew Bible, the poor are *ani* / *anawim* “impoverished, afflicted, bowed down”;⁵³ *shalom* encompasses

⁵⁰ As Daniel Castillo argues in the context of political theology, “the concept of integral liberation is not only defensible but ... also retrievable” for the purpose of “clarify[ing] the shape of Christian orthopraxis today.” Daniel P. Castillo, “The Dynamism of Integral Liberation: Reconsidering Gustavo Gutiérrez’s Central Concept after ‘The End of History,’” *Political Theology* 18 no. 1 (February 2017): 56.

⁵¹ *Documento de Puebla III Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano* nos. 141 ff, esp. 321-329; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Essential Writings*, ed. by James B. Nickoloff (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1996), 229-231; Daniel P. Castillo, “Integral Liberation” in *An Ecological Theology of Liberation: Salvation and Political Ecology* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2019); James B. Nickoloff, “Church of the Poor: The Ecclesiology of Gustavo Gutiérrez,” *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 514.

⁵² Daniel P. Castillo, *An Ecological Theology of Liberation*.

⁵³ E.g., Ps 18:27; 2 Sam 22:28; see Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 291-296.

bodily health, and interpersonal and spiritual well-being.⁵⁴ In the New Testament, “salvation” is “holistic human health,” biological, social, and spiritual. (As theologians of disability have insisted, not normalization, but reintegration into community, relationship, and a network of physical / mental well-being).⁵⁵ English translators often render the New Testament word *sōzō* as “saving” or “saved you” (e.g., Mt 10:22); but in healing stories it is invariably rendered as “made you well” (e.g., Mt 9:21-22). A truly integral vision of liberation would translate consistently: “You are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people and make them well from their sins” (Mt 1:21).

In a sensitive reading of Romans, Dorothee Sölle explores how the “members” of our “mortal bodies” (our parts, our dimensions, our capacities) are inextricably embedded in the complex webs of physical, cultural, political, and economic reality. “While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death” (Rom 7:5). Without radical and integral liberation (this is how Paul understands resurrection), the powers around us work to cultivate slavery and death in our members. These powers include the political economy, the social imaginary, the drivers of our consumption – the very logic (or “law”) that structures our lives.⁵⁶ Sölle argues that integral liberation – both for Paul and for us – must encompass the entire social, psychological, and physical body.⁵⁷

Sölle is not alone in her intuition. Among Latin America’s liberation theologians, Rubem Alves has articulated a “theology of human hope,” which stresses how God’s gifts are “tangible and savourous;” liberation means not just surviving, but thriving: living zestful and sensual lives.⁵⁸ Among queer liberationists, Marcela Althaus Reid has argued that the task of integral theologians is to uncover “the excessiveness of our hungry lives: our hunger for food, hunger for the touch of other bodies, for love and for God.” This for her is what makes all good theology, “indecent theology.”⁵⁹ Among North American theologians of culture, Vincent Miller has described the complex and resilient webs of trade, finance, built environment, and ideology that keep us embedded in consumerist, world-killing ways of life – the vast systems which order our lives and our actions, keeping us resigned to practices of powerlessness. Integral liberation requires exploring and exposing these networks of injustice, denouncing them, and announcing God’s vision for transformation. But it also requires breaking and rewiring our habits and our patterns of life.⁶⁰ *Lectio visceralis* breaks and rewires those patterns at the bodily level. It brings integral liberation down into the muscle and nerve, into the gut and the heart.

⁵⁴ E.g., Ps 38:3, 73:3; Is 38:17, 57:18f.; see John Wilkinson, “The Concept of Health in the Old Testament,” in *Health and Healing: Studies in New Testament Principles and Practice* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1980), 3-8.

⁵⁵ Wayne Morris, *Salvation as Praxis: A Practical Theology of Salvation for a Multi-faith World* (London and New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 135.

⁵⁶ Theodore W. Jennings, *Outlaw Justice: The Messianic Politics of Paul* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

⁵⁷ Dorothee Sölle, *Thinking about God: An Introduction to Theology*, trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1990), 89-94.

⁵⁸ Rubem A. Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (New York: Corpus Books, 1971 [1969]), 133-158.

⁵⁹ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 199-200.

⁶⁰ Vincent Miller’s *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003).

Conclusion

The barriers to embodied teaching and learning are steep, especially in the academic settings where many teachers are formed. Improvisational games and physical exercises can seem more like “icebreakers” than rigorous intellectual formation; more like the tools of children’s programming, teenage retreats, and Residential Life orientation sessions than the work of content exploration and theological reflection. What is more, teachers tend to teach as they were taught. If we want religious and theological educators to engage students holistically, we need to expose them to embodied forms of inquiry and reflection, and we need to do so in theoretically and theologically compelling ways. *Lectio visceralis* offers a pedagogically engaging, critically rigorous, and theoretically, theologically cogent approach to embodied teaching and learning in religious and theological settings. By using it, we can help each other to “rehearse” the life of God’s Reign in more concrete, critical, creative, and liberating ways.

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Religious Education Undoing Heteronormativity: A Case Study of Christian Adolescents' Perception on LGBTIQ Issue in Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Abstract

This paper is based on a quantitative research study on Christian adolescents, who are studying in junior and senior high schools, in mainline churches in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, concerning their perception about LGBTIQ issue, which is related to church teaching and adolescents' acceptance of LGBTIQs. This study shows that adolescents' perception portrays LGBTIQ as sin and abnormalities that must be cured, but they also consider LGBTIQ as sexual orientation that has to be respected. For them the Bible and church teachings do not favor to LGBTIQ, but in daily live and in the church they can accept LGBTIQs. Using normalcy perspective in disability study, this finding shows that for Christian adolescents in Yogyakarta heterosexuality is the norm; therefore, other sexual orientation is recognized as abnormal. Even though this finding is pessimistic, there is a hope that through Christian Religious Education they can learn how to undo heteronormativity, and change their perception on LGBTIQ.

Introduction

LGBTIQ issue has been controversial in Indonesia. There were many tensions over this issue, some of which created violence. For example, in Yogyakarta on February 23, 2016 there was a great tension between two groups of people involved in a big demonstration pro and against LGBTIQ. In a smaller scale, there have been tension over LGBTIQ issue caused by a pastoral letter from the Communion of Churches in Indonesia saying the church was in solidarity with LGBTIQ. Most grown-up church members were worried, because this issue could change some concepts of family, sexuality, sexual orientation, human relationships etc. More specifically, they were worried if their children would be contracted to become LGBTIQ. In contrast, some readings show that many young people see this issue as a private domain where people are free to choose a sexual orientation.

This paper's objective is to describe and analyze the dynamics of Christian adolescents' perception on LGBTIQ issue, focusing on two points: their understanding of Christian teaching on LGBTIQ, and their acceptance of LGBTIQ. The methodology is quantitative, through electronic questionnaire. The results of this research will be analyzed through the lenses of normalcy, both from LGBTIQ and theology of disability studies. And finally, I will recommend how to develop a Christian Religious Education which could help undoing heteronormativity as the standard of normalcy.

Background and Context

Indonesia is an archipelago state consisting of 17,508 islands. This geography shows that Indonesia has naturally fostered pluralism. There are 1,340 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups, as well as hundreds of languages spoken in Indonesia.¹ Various world religions came to Indonesia over centuries,

¹ Leo Suryadinat, Evi Nurvidya Arifin, and Aris Ananta (2003). *Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2.

causing a great deal of religious diversity. The 2010 population census described the population of Indonesia at 237,641,326. They were 87.18% Muslims; 6.96% Protestants; 2.91% Catholics (it made up 9.87% Christians); 1.69% Hindus; 0.72% Buddhists; 0.05% Confucianists; 0.13% others; 0.06 did not answer; 0.32 were not asked.² Even though Indonesia has always been diverse, it is not always easy to deal with pluralism. There have been ethnic and religious conflicts over decades in some parts of Indonesia. Because of this situation, it is understandable that some other issues of pluralism, including gender and LGBTIQ, are not always easily accepted.³ A survey done by an NGO “Lingkar Survei Indonesia (LSI)” in 2012 showed the increasing intolerance of Indonesians towards minority groups, including gays and lesbians.⁴ A recent survey, however, showed a better acceptance of LGBTIQ, which gave some hope for a future where LGBTIQs could live without fear of persecution. 2018 research from Saiful Mujani Research & Consulting (SMRC) shows that respondents aged below 25 years old were more accepting toward LGBTIQ family members. A year later, the United States-based Pew Research Institute polled 38,426 respondents across 34 countries from May to October 2019 and found that 9 percent of Indonesians agreed that homosexuality should be accepted by society, an increase from only 3 percent in 2013.⁵

Even though the acceptance of LGBTIQ in Indonesia increased, rejection still existed. Amnesty International Indonesia researcher Ari Pramuditya said that his agency recorded at least 15 cases of Indonesian National Army and Indonesian Police members being fired on the basis of sexuality during 2019-2020, even though there is no regulation that prohibits citizens with a sexual orientation other than heterosexuals from entering the two institutions. The reason raised was that such a sexual orientation was considered disgraceful and could be detrimental to the discipline of soldiers. This negative stigma is a form of hatred against LGBTIQs.⁶

In Yogyakarta, which is described as ‘the city of tolerance,’ tensions and conflicts related to LGBTIQ issue have happened. The largest was a demonstration of the pros and cons of LGBTIQ on February 23, 2016.⁷ The group against LGBTIQ was FUI (*Forum Ukhuwah Islamiyah* or Islamic Brotherhood Forum). The group pro LGBTIQ was SPD (*Solidaritas Perjuangan Demokrasi* or Solidarity of Democratic Struggle). To avoid direct violence, the police put them in separate areas, and finally asked the SPD to disband themselves. There were several cases of violence against the SPD reported to the police. As a result, LGBTIQ groups in Yogyakarta were afraid of persecution. They hid themselves from public, and stopped their activities at an Islamic

² Badan Pusat Statistik, *Kewarganegaraan, Suku Bangsa, Agama, dan Bahasa Sehari-hari Penduduk Indonesia: Hasil Sensus Penduduk 2010*. Jakarta: Badan Pusat Statistik, 2011. E-book:

<http://sp2010.bps.go.id/files/ebook/kewarganegaraan%20penduduk%20indonesia/index.html>, accessed on April 3, 2013, 10. The same data can be accessed at: <https://sp2010.bps.go.id/index.php/site/tabel?search-tabel=Penduduk+Menurut+Wilayah+dan+Agama+yang+Dianut&tid=321&search-wilayah=Indonesia&wid=0000000000&lang=id>, accessed on August 30, 2020

³ James Banks and Cherry McGee Banks in the book they edited explain that multicultural education includes race, social class, gender, language, and disability. Banks, James A., and and Cherry A. McGee Banks, eds. *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010.

⁴ Galink/ Lingga Tri Utama, *Seksualitas Rasa Rainbow Cake: Memahami Keberagaman Orientasi Seksual Manusia*. Yogyakarta: PKBI, 2013, 48.

⁵ “Survey on acceptance in Indonesia gives hopes to LGBT community”. <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/06/28/survey-on-acceptance-in-indonesia-gives-hopes-to-lgbt-community.html>, accessed on May 10, 2021.

⁶ This explanation was given to VOA Indonesia on Monday, December 30, 2020. <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/soal-lgbt-komisioner-komnas-ham-serukan-tni-polri-buat-aturan-lebih-jelas/5683077.html>, accessed on May 10, 2021.

⁷ https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2016/02/160223_indonesia_demonstrasi_lgbt, accessed on May 10, 2021.

transgender *pesantren*. It was ironic, that in the city of tolerance there was an intolerant action against LGBTIQ. Another ironic was that in November 2006, in this city, the *Yogyakarta Principles* were signed, which contained principles for safeguarding basic rights related to the LGBTIQ community by 29 international human rights experts from 25 countries. The name “*Yogyakarta Principles*” was not a guarantee there was tolerance in this city, and that LGBTIQs were accepted.

Not long after the incident in Yogyakarta, Communion of Churches in Indonesia (CCI) launched a pastoral letter about LGBT, signed on May 28, 2016.⁸ Based on the biblical faith that all human beings were created by God in diversity, and the newest research in the field of medicine and psychiatry that no longer included LGBT as a disease or mental disorder, CCI recommended its church members to accept LGBTs as part of the church, prepare families to accept their LGBT family members, and fight for the rights and dignity of LGBTs. This pastoral letter was a great change for CCI, but, unfortunately, not all its members could accept. There were again the pros and cons groups, which showed that LGBTIQ was still not fully accepted in the church.

Theoretical Framework

Adolescents, who are studying at junior and senior high schools, were born between 2003-2009; it means they are part of Generation Z (those who were born between 1995-2010). According to James Emery White, there are five characteristics of Generation Z, namely, recession marked, wi-fi enabled, multiracial, sexually fluid, and post-Christian.⁹ Recession marked refers to the fact that Generation Z was born during economic recession and terrorism attacks, which cause them being prepared for any circumstances, and want to make differences in their lives. Wi-fi enabled is related to Generation Z as digital natives, which makes them familiar with digital technology. Multiracial refers to Generation Z as the most racially diverse, and they are globally connected. Sexually fluid is related to the increasing acceptance of same-sex marriage, which influences Generation Z to see everyone as having the freedom to make his/her choice of sexuality and sexual orientation. Post-Christian means Generation Z still believe in the existence of God, but no more attend weekly religious services; they recognize themselves as being agnostic or religiously unaffiliated or the nones.

From these five characteristics, only one is the most relevant to the topic of this study, namely, sexually fluid. Generation Z has the nature of accepting diversity and differences, which leads them to strong support for LGBTIQ. White writes, “For Generation Z, the idea of ‘acceptance’ is often interchangeable with the idea of ‘affirmation’.”¹⁰ This process of acceptance has to do with the shift in attitudes and behaviors of Generation Z toward many previous issues, like divorce, abortion, gender role etc., which later leads them to accept same sex marriage and LGBTIQ issues. Generation Z becomes sexually and relationally amorphous, and sexually fluid – refuses either the homosexual or the heterosexual label, because both labels are repressive.¹¹ Everyone has the freedom to follow his or her desire of sexuality and sexual orientation.

Due to the Indonesian context, where LGBTIQ issue/persons has not yet been fully accepted, this research is not about sexual orientation of respondents, but it is about respondents’

⁸ Stephen Suleeman and Amadeo Udampoh, Eds. (2019). *Siapakah Sesamaku? Pergumulan Teologi dengan Isu-isu Keadilan Gender*. Jakarta: STFT Jakarta, 2019, 311-315.

⁹ James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017, 39-49.

¹⁰ James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*, 46.

¹¹ James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*, 47.

(adolescents') perception on LGBTIQ issue, especially related to their understanding of LGBTIQ, Christian/church teaching on LGBTIQ, and acceptance of LGBTIQs.

Methodology

This study used a quantitative approach by distributing electric questionnaires (using Google form) to Christian adolescents, who are studying in junior and senior high schools, from 12 churches in the city of Yogyakarta. The distribution of questionnaires uses the stratified random sampling method. Questionnaire compilation, questionnaire trial, collection and inputting of quantitative data (surveys) were conducted between April and May 2021. Data analysis was carried out in May 2021. The research questions were:

1. How Christian adolescents understand LGBTIQ and Christian/church teaching about LGBTIQ?
2. How Christian adolescents accept LGBTIQs?

Based on these research questions, there were 16 questions asked in the questionnaire: ten questions on respondents' (adolescents') understanding and acceptance of LGBTIQ, four questions on personal data (all surveys were anonymous), and two open questions on sources of their understanding of LGBTIQ. Correlation analysis (Bivariate) was used to measure the correlation or association between two variables by examining Pearson's correlation coefficient (r).¹² I measure how strong the significant association is shown from the dependent variable (understanding of LGBTIQ) on the independent variables (gender, level of education, having LGBTIQ family members or close friends, and church activities). The association shown through correlation analysis (Bivariate) can be interpreted as a social location or a characteristic of the dependent variable related to the independent variables. As common in social sciences, I categorized 0.05 as the margin in Pearson's correlation: related if less than 0.05, and not related if more than 0.05.

Once the questionnaire was ready, I asked permission from 12 churches' Presbyterian Session to allow me distribute the questionnaire to adolescents in those churches. After more than one week, I got 204 questionnaires filled out, one of which was not valid for survey. The data collected from the questionnaires filled out by the respondents were processed using SPSS 22 software.

Table 1: Demographic Data of Respondents

| Characteristics | | N | Percentage |
|--|--------------------|-----|------------|
| Gender | Male | 87 | 42.9 |
| | Female | 116 | 57.1 |
| Level of Education | Junior High School | 58 | 28.6 |
| | Senior High School | 145 | 71.4 |
| Having LGBTIQ family member or close friends | Yes | 53 | 26.1 |
| | No | 150 | 73.9 |
| Church Activities | Members | 142 | 70 |
| | Leaders | 61 | 30 |

N total = 203

¹² Manfred te Grotenhuis and Theo van der Weegen, *Statistical Tools. An Overview of Common Applications in Social Sciences*. Assen: Royal van Gorcum, 2009, 91-93.

Based on the results of descriptive statistical tests, the distribution of respondent characteristics tends to vary. The composition of male and female who filled out the questionnaire was quite balanced, with a percentage of 42.9% male respondents and 57.1% female respondents. However, regarding the education level, the composition of respondents currently pursuing junior high school education is 28.6%, less proportional to respondents who are currently studying at high school, which is 71.4%. The next characteristic is based on the presence or absence of relatives or family friends who are LGBTIQ. As many as 26.1% of respondents have a close relationship with LGBTIQ, and 73.9% have no close relationship with LGBTIQ. The last characteristic is church activities, most respondents are members (70%), and only 30% are leaders.

Results

There are 10 questions asked in the questionnaire. Here is the graph accumulation of each question:

- 1 = Strongly disagree (SD)
- 2 = Disagree (D)
- 3 = Not sure (NS)
- 4 = Agree (A)
- 5 = Strongly agree (SA)

Table 2: Graph Accumulation of Each Question

| No | Statement | 1 SD | 2 D | 3 NS | 4 A | 5 SA |
|-----|---|---------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. | LGBTIQ is a sin. | 17 (8.4%) | 20 (9.9%) | 45 (22.2%) | 38 (18.7%) | 83 (40.9%) |
| 2. | LGBTIQ is a disorder that has to be cured. | 23 (11.3%) | 19 (9.4%) | 34 (16.7%) | 52 (25.6%) | 75 (36.9%) |
| 3. | LGBTIQ is a "sexual orientation" (emotional, sexual, and romantic attraction) that should be appreciated. | 33 (16.3%) | 27 (13.3%) | 61 (30%) | 42 (20.7%) | 40 (19.7%) |
| 4. | People who are LGBTIQ are accepted and active in the church. | 7 (3.4%) | 10 (4.9%) | 73 (36%) | 62 (30.5%) | 51 (25.1%) |
| 5. | The Bible prohibits LGBTIQ. | 2 (1%) | 11 (5.4%) | 65 (32%) | 42 (20.7%) | 83 (40.9%) |
| 6. | There are Bible verses that can be the basis for accepting LGBTIQ. | 26 (12.8%) | 31 (15.3%) | 107 (52.7%) | 22 (10.8%) | 17 (8.4%) |
| 7. | I can accept LGBTIQ in my daily life, but not in church. | 34 (16.7%) | 54 (26.6%) | 66 (32.5%) | 30 (14.8%) | 19 (9.4%) |
| 8. | There is no reason whatsoever that can make me accept LGBTIQ. | 42 (20.7%) | 48 (23.6%) | 51 (25.1%) | 33 (16.3%) | 29 (14.3%) |
| 9. | I can accept LGBTIQ existence, but I don't want to make friends. | 63 (31%) | 67 (33%) | 53 (26.1%) | 15 (7.4%) | 5 (2.5%) |
| 10. | LGBTIQ is dangerous, it can influence me. | 96 (47.3%) | 47 (23.2%) | 43 (21.2%) | 9 (4.4%) | 8 (3.9%) |

N total = 203

Those ten questions are categorized as acceptance and understanding of LGBTIQ.

Table 3: Categorization of Questions: Acceptance

| | |
|---|------------|
| Positive acceptance | Question 4 |
| Conditional positive acceptance related to church | Question 7 |

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Conditional positive acceptance related to human relationship | Question 9 |
| Negative acceptance related to norms | Question 8 |
| Negative acceptance related to human relationship | Question 10 |

Table 4: Categorization of Questions: Understanding

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Positive understanding | Question 3, 6 |
| Negative understanding related to health issue | Question 2 |
| Negative understanding related to religion | Question 1, 5 |

Descriptive Statistics of Open-Ended Questions

Some of the question items in the questionnaire were how adolescents know / learn about LGBTIQ. This question is open-ended. The following is a pooled data from the answers to these questions.

Table 5: Sources of Knowledge about LGBTIQ

| Sources of Knowledge Regarding LGBTIQ | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Others | 3% |
| Books/Literatures | 4% |
| Society | 4% |
| Do not know | 2% |
| Friends | 12% |
| Parents/Family | 7% |
| Church | 5% |
| School | 15% |
| Internet/social media | 48% |

The majority of teenagers (48%) know/ learn about LGBTIQ issues from the internet/ social media – through news uploaded on social media or content uploaded by public figures uploaded on social media channels (tiktok, Youtube, Instagram). As many as 15% know/ learn at school, and 12% know/ learn from friends – through conversations/ discussions with close friends or friends' experiences that are directly seen by adolescents. The minority of adolescent knowledge/ learning about LGBTIQ is obtained from parents/ family (7%), church (5%), society (4%), and from literature/ books (4%). As many as 3% of adolescents know LGBTIQ from various other sources, such as seminars, films, or from personal experience, while the other 2% do not/ have never known about LGBTIQ issues.

Table 6: Sources of Knowledge Related to Church Teaching about LGBTIQ

| Sources of Knowledge Regarding LGBTIQ | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Not yet | 24% |
| Seminar, workshop | 7% |
| Society | 2% |
| Friends | 2% |
| Family | 3% |
| Internet | 22% |
| School | 10% |
| Catechesis | 2% |
| The Bible | 9% |
| Pastor, Coach, Sunday Service | 10% |
| Christian Education for Adolescents | 10% |

As many as 24% of adolescents admitted that they had never received church teachings related to LGBTIQ. For those who had received church teachings related to LGBTIQ, the majority (22%) of the church teaching was obtained from the internet (social media, articles uploaded on influencer social media accounts). Others obtain the knowledge of church teachings from schools

and pastors/ coach/ Sunday service (10% each), the Bible (9%), family (3%), community, friends, and catechisms (2% each), and from other sources (seminars, books, experiences witnessed through relatives).

The items in the questionnaire were processed using the Pearson correlation test to determine the relationship between the question items and the socio-demographic dimensions of the respondents. The results of statistical data processing with a correlation test are following:

Correlation based on Gender

Table 7: Analysis of Item Correlation Test Results by Gender

| Item | Statistical Testing | Correlation |
|--|---------------------|-------------|
| Acceptance | | |
| 1. Positive acceptance | Pearson Correlation | .010 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .889 |
| 2. Conditional positive acceptance related to church | Pearson Correlation | .134 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .057 |
| 3. Conditional positive acceptance related to human relationship | Pearson Correlation | -.232* |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 |
| 4. Negative acceptance related to norms | Pearson Correlation | -.109 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .120 |
| 5. Negative acceptance related to human relationship | Pearson Correlation | -.160* |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .023 |
| Understanding | | |
| 1. Positive understanding | Pearson Correlation | .076 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .279 |
| 2. Negative understanding related to health issue | Pearson Correlation | -.186* |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .008 |
| 3. Negative understanding related to religion | Pearson Correlation | .031 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .665 |

*. The correlation is stated to be significant on $\alpha=5\%$

**. The correlation is stated to be significant on $\alpha=1\%$

N total: 203

Based on the results of the Pearson correlation test, it can be concluded that gender has a strong relationship with the following items: 1) conditional positive acceptance related to general relationships, 2) negative acceptance related to relationships, and 3) negative notions related to health. The error tolerance level used as a reference is 5%, so results below 0.05 are stated to have a significant correlation.

Female respondents seem to be incompatible because of the negative correlation with “conditional positive acceptance related to human relationship,” “negative acceptance related to humanrelationships,” and “negative understanding related to health issue.” It means female respondents show a more open attitude towards LGBTIQ and do not agree with the rejection of LGBTIQ in both understanding and acceptance.

Correlation based on Education Level

Table 8: Analysis of Item Correlation Test Results Based on Education Level

| Item | Statistical Testing | Correlation |
|------|---------------------|-------------|
|------|---------------------|-------------|

| Acceptance | | | | |
|---------------|---|---------------------|--------|-------------|
| 1. | Positive acceptance | Pearson Correlation | .119 | Not related |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .092 | |
| 2. | Conditional positive acceptance related to church | Pearson Correlation | -.097 | Not related |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .171 | |
| 3. | Conditional positive acceptance related to human relationship | Pearson Correlation | .000 | Not related |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | 1.000 | |
| 4. | Negative acceptance related to norms | Pearson Correlation | -.179* | Related |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .011 | |
| 5. | Negative acceptance related to human relationship | Pearson Correlation | -.150* | Related |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .033 | |
| Understanding | | | | |
| 1. | Positive understanding | Pearson Correlation | .074 | Not related |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .292 | |
| 2. | Negative understanding related to health issue | Pearson Correlation | -.120 | Not related |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .073 | |
| 3. | Negative understanding related to religion | Pearson Correlation | .017 | Not related |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .812 | |

*. The correlation is stated to be significant on $\alpha=5\%$

**. The correlation is stated to be significant on $\alpha=1\%$

N total: 203

Based on the results of the Pearson correlation test, it can be concluded that the level of education has a strong relationship with the following items: 1) negative acceptance related to norms and 2) negative acceptance related to the relationship. The error tolerance level used as a reference is 5%, so results below 0.05 are stated to have a significant correlation.

Respondents in senior high school level have a positive correlation with the concept of “positive acceptance” and a negative correlation with “negative acceptance related to human relationship”. It means that respondents in senior high school level show that they can accept LGBTIQ existence and activities and cannot accept understanding that LGBTIQ is dangerous and contagious.

The correlation based on the presence/absence of close LGBTIQ family/friends

Table 9: Analysis of Item Correlation Test Results Based on LGBTIQ Family/Close Friends

| Item | Statistical Testing | Correlation |
|--|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Acceptance | | |
| 1. Positive acceptance | Pearson Correlation | .305** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| 2. Conditional positive acceptance related to church | Pearson Correlation | -.151* |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .031 |
| 3. Conditional positive acceptance related to human relationship | Pearson Correlation | -.339** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| 4. Negative acceptance related to norms | Pearson Correlation | -.265** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| 5. Negative acceptance related to human relationship | Pearson Correlation | -.235** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .005 |

| Understanding | | | |
|---|---------------------|---------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Positive understanding | Pearson Correlation | .210** | Related Berhubungan |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .003 | |
| 2. Negative understanding related to health issue | Pearson Correlation | -.322** | Related Berhubungan |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| 3. Negative understanding related to religion | Pearson Correlation | -.137 | Not related Tidak Berhubungan |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .051 | |

*. The correlation is stated to be significant on $\alpha=5\%$

**. The correlation is stated to be significant on $\alpha=1\%$

N total: 203

Based on the results of the Pearson correlation test, it can be concluded that the presence / absence of close family / friends who are LGBT has a strong relationship with the following items: 1) positive acceptance, 2) conditional positive acceptance, 3) conditional positive acceptance related to general relationships, 4) negative acceptance related to norms, 5) negative acceptance related to relationships, 6) positive understanding, and 7) negative understanding related to health. The error tolerance level used as a reference is 5%, so results below 0.05 are stated to have a significant correlation.

The highest correlation is the negative correlation between “negative acceptance related to norms” and “having LGBTIQ family members/close friends.” This confirms that when they have LGBTIQ family members/close friends, they are increasingly opposed to “negative acceptance related to norms.” This is very strong, and it is in line with the result of a strong positive correlation with “positive acceptance.” This means that those who have LGBTIQ family members/close friends can accept LGBTIQ and reject negative attitudes. They also reject conditional aversion to friendships (negative correlation with “conditional positive acceptance of human relationships”) and rejected “negative acceptance related to human relationship,” because they have experiences living with LGBTIQs and they are sure that LGBTIQ is not contagious.

The highest significant correlation is the negative correlation between “negative understanding related to health issue” and “having LGBTIQ family members/close friends.” This means that those who have LGBTIQ family members/close friends reject the attitude that LGBTIQ is a disorder that must be cured. Obviously shared experiences with LGBTIQ family members/close friends provide a positive understanding. And this goes hand in hand with the positive correlation with the “positive acceptance,” where their understanding is positive and open to LGBTIQ.

Correlation based on membership in the church

Table 10: Analysis of Item Correlation Test Results Based on Church Membership

| Item | Statistical Testing | | Correlation |
|--|---------------------|-------|-------------|
| Acceptance | | | |
| 1. Positive acceptance | Pearson Correlation | .022 | Not related |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .755 | |
| 2. Conditional positive acceptance related to church | Pearson Correlation | -.062 | Not related |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .381 | |
| 3. Conditional positive acceptance related to human relationship | Pearson Correlation | -.026 | Not related |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .714 | |
| 4. Negative acceptance related to norms | Pearson Correlation | -.119 | Not related |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .091 | |

| | | | | |
|---------------|---|---------------------|-------|-------------|
| 5. | Negative acceptance related to human relationship | Pearson Correlation | -.036 | Not related |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .610 | |
| Understanding | | | | |
| 1. | Positive understanding | Pearson Correlation | .088 | Not related |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .213 | |
| 2. | Negative understanding related to health issue | Pearson Correlation | .054 | Not related |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .441 | |
| 3. | Negative understanding related to religion | Pearson Correlation | .059 | Not related |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .404 | |

*. The correlation is stated to be significant on $\alpha=5\%$

**. The correlation is stated to be significant on $\alpha=1\%$

N total: 203

Based on the results of the Pearson correlation test, it can be concluded that the membership items in the church (leaders/ members) have no relationship with the items in the questionnaire.

From these four correlation indicators, it can be concluded that family or close friends who are LGBTIQ have the strongest relationship with the items on the questionnaire compared to other indicators. The results show that female respondents, senior high school level respondents, and respondents who have LGBTIQ family members/ close friends have more positive perception toward LGBTIQ.

This result also shows that Christian adolescents in Yogyakarta do not really meet the criterium “sexually fluid” of Generation Z, which is explained above. They still have a long way to go to reach that criterium. They are still struggling to accept LGBTIQs with a proper understanding of LGBTIQ.

Discussion and Analysis

In analyzing the results in this research, I use two perspectives, namely undoing normalcy and undoing heteronormativity.

Analysis of the results from the perspective of undoing normalcy

LGBTIQ issue share the same concerns with disability issue in terms of normalcy standard that is still used by many people. Both persons with disabilities (PWD) and LGBTIQs are recognized as “abnormal” by those who use normalcy standard. This then leads to some efforts to fix them into normal standard, especially through medical ways, and also through non-medical ways (like exorcism, which is still happening in Indonesia). By juxtaposing both LGBTIQs and PWD I do not mean that both are the same or that LGBTIQs are PWD. Rather, as a person with disability, I could see, feel, and share the same concerns, experiences and feelings with LGBTIQs. Both PWD and LGBTIQ are often discriminated in many ways, and become target of bullying, persecution, and other forms of intolerance and violence. All these happen because both LGBTIQ and PWD are recognized as different from the normal standard. Therefore, in order to undo normalcy, people need to accept and appreciate differences.

In disability study, there are some books that analyzing disability by unpacking and rethinking normalcy. For example, Gareth M. Thomas and Dikaio Sakellariou in the book they edit, entitled *Disability, Normalcy, and the Everyday*, unpack the concept of normalcy within a context of how disabled people go about their everyday lives.¹³ They cite L. J. Davis (in his book

¹³ Gareth M. Thomas and Dikaio Sakellariou, *Disability, Normalcy, and the Everyday*. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018.

Enforcing Normalcy; Disability, Deafness, and the Body, 1995) who argues that, in order to understand disability, we must revisit the concept of ‘the norm, the normal body,’ because disability is still perceived as a disruption, a rebellion of the visual, of normalcy. The universalizing classification of disability is problematic as it denies bodily variation.¹⁴ Chapters in the book they edit show that in everyday life persons with disability live normally, regardless of the complexity of different and distinctive conditions due to the variations of disability. Another example, Tanya Titchkosky and Rod Michalko, in their book entitled *Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader*, argue the need to rethink normalcy as the only standard of life, through which everyone should be measured whether he or she has a good life, because in it PWD become passive object in many disciplines, and recognized as inferior.¹⁵

Using these theories in LGBTIQ issue, there is a need to unpack and rethink heterosexuality as the normalcy or normal standard of human beings, because it looks LGBTIQ as abnormal, or as a disruption, a rebellion of the visual, of normalcy. In fact, LGBTIQ is a sexual orientation that is equal to heterosexuality. LGBTIQ is a variation of human’s sexual orientation that must be accepted and appreciated.

From my research findings, respondents’ perception on LGBTIQ portrays it as a sin (Strongly Agree 40.9%), and a disorder that has to be cured (Strongly Agree 36.9%). They are not sure that LGBTIQ is a sexual orientation that has to be appreciated (Not Sure 30%). However, when the data is correlated with education level of respondents, which has to do with their age, there is a hope that as they grow up their perception becomes more open toward LGBTIQ (see Table 8). The respondents’ perception on LGBTIQ is also more open when they have LGBTIQ family members or close friends (see Table 9). Personal meeting and knowing LGBTIQ change respondents’ perception; they become to understand that LGBTIQ is not dangerous or will influence or will spread to them. Everyone has his or her own sexual orientation that must be accepted and appreciated.

Analysis of the results from Christian religious education for undoing heteronormativity

Here I use Jack L. Seymour’s theory of mapping of Christian education, which classifies four approaches to Christian education, namely transformation, faith community, spiritual growth, and religious instruction (homemaking).¹⁶ The goal of Religious Education for social transformation is assisting people and communities to promote faithful citizenship and social transformation. The goal of Religious Education for faith community is building communities that promote authentic human development; helping persons enact community. The goal of Religious Education for persons or spiritual growth is helping persons enhance the inner life and respond with outward action to others and the cosmos. The goal of Religious Instruction is enabling learners to be grounded in the biblical faith and make connections between the content of the faith and living. Even though each approach has its own aspects and emphases, they overlap and share similar characteristics, namely, (1) they face into the world; (2) they see the congregation as the primary setting; (3) they use theological reflection as the methodology, and (4) they have religious learning occur in hospitable, just, and open spaces for conversation and truth-telling.¹⁷

¹⁴ Gareth M. Thomas and Dikaïos Sakellariou, *Disability, Normalcy, and the Everyday*, 7.

¹⁵ Tanya Titchkosky and Rod Michalko. *Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader*. Toronto: Canadian Scholar Press, 2009.

¹⁶ Jack L. Seymour, ed., *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.

¹⁷ Jack L. Seymour, ed., *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning*, 18, 21, 121-127.

From these for approach, I use faith community approach in my research, as I ask respondents about their perception on other people as LGBTIQ. I do not ask respondents' sexual orientation, which can use spiritual growth approach. Also, I do my research in churches, not individually outside the church; therefore, the atmosphere of the research is in the context of the church, the community of faith. For me it is very important to prepare adolescents to accept and appreciate LGBTIQ, and do not judge it as a sin. On the one hand, it is sad to find the result of the research, which show that the number of respondents who recognize LGBTIQ as a sin and as a disorder that has to be cured is still high (Strongly Agree 40.9% and 36.9%). Respondents understand that the Bible prohibits LGBTIQ (Strongly Agree 40.9%). They are not sure there are Bible verses that can be the basis for accepting LGBTIQ (Not Sure 52.7%). On the other hand, this research also finds some hopes of transformation of respondents' perception on LGBTIQ. Female respondents, senior high school level, and experiences of having LGBTIQ family members or close friends contribute to the more positive understanding and acceptance of LGBTIQ. This is an opportunity for churches to develop a Christian education that uses faith community approach to help adolescents more open to LGBTIQ.

The research also finds that the churches do not contribute much to respondents' understanding and acceptance of LGBTIQ. Church activities do not have any correlation with their perception on LGBTIQ (Table 10). Table 5 shows that respondents learn about LGBTIQ mainly from the internet/ social media (48%). Table 6 shows that 24% respondents say they never receive church teachings on LGBTIQ, and 22% say they obtain it from the internet/ social media. This finding is a "wake up call" for churches to start teach adolescents about LGBTIQ in a more open way, that they have proper understanding of LGBTIQ, church teaching on LGBTIQ, and accept LGBTIQs as brothers and sisters in their everyday lives – in the church and anywhere.

For the Indonesian churches there are some resources written in Indonesian language about biblical teaching on LGBTIQ. One of them is a comprehensive biblical book, written by Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, entitled *Menafsir LGBT dengan Alkitab: Tanggapan terhadap Pernyataan Pastoral Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia (PGI) Mengenai LGBT (Interpreting LGBT with the Bible: Response to Pastoral Statement of the Indonesia Council of Churches Regarding LGBT)*.¹⁸ In this book Singgih interprets biblical passages that look pro LGBT (1 Samuel 18:1-4 and 2 Samuel 1:26; Isaiah 56:1-8; Daniel 1:1-21; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Matthew 19:11-12; Acts 8:26-40) as well as passages that look anti-LGBT (Genesis 19:1-29; Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Deuteronomy 22:5 and 23:17-18; Rome 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10). Through his interpretation on these biblical passages, which pros and cons toward LGBT, Singgih invites readers to be more open to accept LGBT, because the Bible has to be dialogued with science and present cultures/ experiences. Learning important theological concepts is part of Christian education, as Seymour mentions in his book entitled *Teaching Biblical Faith: Leading Small Group Bible Studies*, chapter five: Living the Themes of Faith: Studying Important Theological Concepts.¹⁹

Christian religious education for undoing heteronormativity is not limited to learning biblical passages. It also includes learning about the proper understanding of LGBTIQ as a sexual orientation, sexuality, right/ false choice of sexual orientation, dilemmas faced in friendships,

¹⁸ Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, *Menafsir LGBT dengan Alkitab: Tanggapan terhadap Pernyataan Pastoral Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia (PGI) Mengenai LGBT (Interpreting LGBT with the Bible: Response to Pastoral Statement of the Indonesia Council of Churches Regarding LGBT)*. Jakarta: STFT Jakarta, 2019.

¹⁹ Jack L. Seymour, *Teaching Biblical Faith: Leading Small Group Bible Studies*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, 34-39.

homes, church, and society regarding LGBT.²⁰ All these themes support the process of undoing heteronormativity, because through them adolescents get to know LGBTIQ and how to deal with it, both inside themselves and in their relationships with LGBTIQs.

Christian religious education for undoing heteronormativity can start with experiences of adolescents in meeting LGBTIQs. As the research shows, 26.1% respondents have LGBTIQ family members or close friends. Their experiences can become a starting point of knowing LGBTIQs. Without knowing anyone LGBTIQ, it is easier for someone to judge. By knowing LGBTIQ personally, he or she could understand the life and struggle of LGBTIQs. This experience is then dialogued with biblical passages, both the pros and cons to LGBTIQ, in order to understand better both LGBTIQ and the biblical passages. Experiences can renew or understanding and interpretation of the Bible. This process is part of theological reflection.

Conclusion

This research shows that participants' perception about LGBTIQ is not always positive. Their understanding of LGBTIQ is still vague, as many of them strongly agree that LGBTIQ as a sin or a disorder that needs to be cured. They are not sure about LGBTIQ as a sexual orientation. But, the more they grow up, the wider and better understanding they have. Regarding acceptance of LGBTIQs, female respondents, older adolescents, and those who have LGBTIQ family members or friends show better acceptance. These positions are starting points to develop a Christian religious education for undoing heteronormativity, where biblical passages that pros and cons to LGBTIQ are studied and dialogued with real experiences of meeting and knowing LGBTIQs.

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²⁰ Glenn T. Stanton, *Loving My (LGBT) Neighbor: Being Friends in Grace and Truth*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014.

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Sex Education in Islamic Primary schools in the Netherlands

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Abstract:

This contribution is situated in the discussion on sex education, in relation to ‘Islamic Pedagogy’ and ‘Islam and Pedagogy.’ Both positions function as a background for the development of teaching materials for sex education designed for Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands. Sex education is a compulsory, yet sensitive subject in Dutch primary schools, included in the subject of Citizenship Education.

This chapter focuses on sex education included in Islamic religious education (IRE) in primary schools. For (future) teachers active in this area of education, personal reflection on their cognitive and affective relation regarding their own sexual positioning, with Islam and with sex education, is recommended. It is expected that this kind of deep reflection will stimulate the development of normative professionalism among sex educators in Dutch Islamic primary education.

0. Introduction

In the 1960s, ‘guest workers’ from Turkey and Morocco were recruited to contribute to the post-war reconstruction of the Netherlands. In the 1970s, the families that many guest workers left behind – women and children – began to arrive in the country. As a result, the Dutch public and denominational schools were overtaken by the arrival of pupils with an Islamic background. At the time, Islam was an unknown life orientation in the secularised Christian Dutch context. Different methods were explored to include these children in Dutch school culture (Ter Avest 2009). However, the schools did not meet the Muslim parents’ needs in terms of the religious education (RE) they wished for their children.

In 1988, pioneering Muslim parents founded the two first Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands (Budak et al. 2018). Since 1988, the number of Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands has risen sharply (*Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs*; DUO; Organisation for the Realisation of Education). This creates a high demand for qualified Muslim or Islam-dedicated teachers, who possess the competences to instruct Muslim children in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and non-religious subjects (such as languages, biology, geography and mathematics) from an Islamic perspective.

When the first Dutch Islamic primary schools were founded, Muslim parents were concerned about the RE given to their children, especially the dress codes at school. Nowadays, sex education is a hot topic. This chapter focuses on this last topic, and on the issue of adequate teacher training.

In this contribution, first the Dutch ‘pillarised’ education system is presented, together with an outline of the ideas on sex education as part of Citizenship Education as this was presented by the Ministry of Education. This is followed by an outline of the discussion on ‘Islamic Pedagogy’ and ‘Islam and Pedagogy’ and an example of Islam and Pedagogy based sex education, offered by Abdulwahid van Bommel (2003) in *‘Islam, liefde en seksualiteit’* (Islam, love and sexuality). The core subject of this presentation is the praxis of sex education in Islamic primary schools. Teaching materials developed for this education are described and reflected upon from a constructivist point of view, taking ‘Islamic Pedagogy’/‘Islam and

Pedagogy’ into consideration. The presentation concludes with recommendations for the training and professionalisation of teachers.

1. The Dutch Pillarised Education System

As the Netherlands moved into the 20th century, ‘pillarisation’ became the core characteristic of its education system. Education was separated into three ‘pillars’: Catholic, Protestant and Humanistic.² In the schools belonging to these pillars, a distinct Catholic, Protestant or Humanistic ‘flavour’ permeated the lessons (Ter Avest et al. 2007). In Christian schools (both Catholic and Protestant) the day began with prayer, and during the week Bible stories were told and hymns sung in class. In so called ‘neutral’ public schools, no attention was devoted to any worldview, as the school was seen as an environment, welcoming every child irrespective of its background. These pillars not only marked the boundaries that ran through the education system: other institutions like the media, health organisations and sports clubs were also organised according to these pillars. Nowadays people would call these the ‘bubbles’ they live in.

As a result of secularisation most denominational schools (Protestant and Catholic) have become liberal Christian schools by 2020, where school rituals are restricted to the Christmas and Easter season. Public schools nowadays do pay attention to worldviews following a pedagogical strategy of ‘teaching about,’ first under the subject of ‘Philosophical Movements’, nowadays under the subject of Citizenship Education.

1a. Islamic Education in the Netherlands

A challenging factor for the two pioneering Islamic schools in 1988 was that most of the available teachers were of Dutch origin, adhering to a Christian denomination. In 2020, of the total of 6268 primary schools in the Netherlands, 54 were Islamic schools. This creates a high demand for qualified Muslim or Islam-dedicated teachers, who possess the competences to instruct Muslim children in IRE in the Dutch plural context. Teachers are expected to guide their pupils in the process of becoming literate in Islam as part of their religious identity development, with a focus on making pupils well-aware of their own identity and open to others.

When Islamic primary schools were first founded in the 1980s – nearly forty years ago – a particular concern of the parents was the RE given to children, especially the culturally and religiously inspired dress codes at school. Nowadays, in the postmodern Dutch society, sex education has become a hot item. In this presentation the focus is on the tense subject of sex education.

1b. Sex Education in the Netherlands

The ‘*Rutgers Kenniscentrum Seksualiteit*’ defines sex education as “coaching the child in its sexual development from birth onward. Children under 12 are assisted in discovering their bodies, their feelings, what they like and don’t like, and in forming relationships. Children

² In 1988 two Islamic primary schools marked the ‘birth’ of a new pillar: the Islamic pillar.

older than 12 are coached in making their choices regarding their sexuality” (*Rutgers Kenniscentrum Seksualiteit*; Rutger Knowledge Centre of Sexuality; www.rutgers.nl). In 2012, the Dutch Ministry of Education published primary objectives for sex education, based on the ‘Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe’ (WHO/BZgA 2010). In general, the Ministry’s aim is to prevent sexual harassment and misconduct, as well as ‘gay bashing.’ Pupils must be educated about the core aspects of the worldview movements that are prominent in the Dutch multicultural society, and they must develop a respectful attitude towards the different sexualities in Dutch society (primary educational objective no. 38; www.sexuelelevorming.nl). Various school subjects can serve as a point of departure for sex education, like ‘Biology’ and ‘Social Studies.’³ The European guidelines and those of the Ministry of Education function as minimal guidelines for the implementation of sex education. Although RE is not explicitly mentioned as a possible starting point, in the actual practice of Islamic primary schools, sex education falls under IRE.

2. Islamic Pedagogy/Islam and Pedagogy

As outlined by Kaplick & Skinner, ‘Islamic Pedagogy’ is an interdisciplinary field that explores education in relation to Islamic sources, using this knowledge to bring human beings into flourishing – cognitively, emotionally and spiritually (cf. Kaplick & Skinner 2017). Although these authors focus on *psychology* and Islam, in our view their approach is also interesting for the relation between *pedagogy* and Islam – as these fields of research are intertwined. Islamic Pedagogy is therefore an academic pedagogy rooted explicitly and solely in Islamic sources.

Building on this, ‘Islam and Pedagogy’ refers to a relationship between Islamic sources and (Western) social sciences as practiced in academia.

The focus of ‘Muslim Pedagogy,’ thirdly, lies on the daily behavioural practices, patterns therein, and religious experiences of faithful Muslims (cf. *ibid.*, p. 199).

2a. Critical Religious Education

In her study of the different ways in which IRE is taught in schools, Uçan (2020) refers to Confessional IRE as “teaching according to Islam” (Uçan 2020, p. 2). In the approach of Confessional IRE, Uçan states – following Al-Attas (1979) – all knowledge comes from God, while human beings are expected to receive this knowledge. The goal here is *tarbiyah*, the socialisation of the learner in Islam. The main teaching methods to achieve this objective are repetition and memorisation (see also Meyer 2006, p. 71ff.). The focus lies on delivery and transmission of knowledge – the knowledge of texts and shared Muslim practices. Uçan points to the difference with teaching methods based on a constructivist approach, which are commonly used in Western countries. In this approach, the pupils’ autonomous religious development is the objective. A critical stance towards diversity – both within Islam and between different traditions – is understood as a condition *sine qua non* for the development of pupils’ individual religiosity (Uçan 2020, p. 4). Both of these educational goals, an autonomously developed individual religiosity and a critical stance, constitute a challenge for

³ The Dutch website www.seksuelelevorming.nl offers ‘examples of good practices’ in primary schools for the subject of sex education.

contemporary IRE according to Uçan. Inspired by the work of, among others, Bilgin (2007), Selçuk (2012, 2020), and Sahin (2013), Uçan introduces the concept of Critical Religious Education (CRE) which encourages “pupils to engage in an attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible learning process” that aims at the development of “new and powerful ways of perceiving an object or phenomenon by introducing students to varied accounts of it.” According to Uçan, this means that CRE “can create possibilities for Muslim pupils to develop a deeper discernment of Islamic knowledge through the use of variation” (ibid., p. 12).

2b. Islam, love and sexuality

In his well-thought out publication *‘Islam, liefde en seksualiteit’* (Islam, love and sexuality) Abdulwahid van Bommel (2003) clarifies his perspective on the tense issue of sex education by referring to a comment of Yusuf Ali, stating that “Sex that so much defines our physical life and exerts so much influence on our emotional nature and higher feelings is not something to be feared or merely seen as entertainment, but is deserving of our respect and reverence, in the best sense of the word.” (Van Bommel, 2003, p. 83). Core Qur’anic concepts regarding sexuality are purity and honour.

Purity, according to Van Bommel is needed to get near to God. For our earthly love we make the sacrifice of unpurity; subsequently to prepare ourselves to get near to God Muslims practice the ritual washing. Ritual washing is a way to start anew, a kind of rebirth. Purity is the connecting thread in Muslims’ daily life. Purity is not limited to physical hygiene, and the preparation to get near to God. It has to do with the whole of life, with clothing, with the relationship between men and women, with the way Muslims live their daily lives (ibid., p. 85).

Honour, being the second important concept, refers to connectivity with (extended) family. Good as well as poor behaviour casts its shadow ahead. This holds for prestigious performances (*sjaraf*), as well as for poor ethical or moral behaviour (*ird*). Honour in the sense of *sjaraf* is to be earned, *ird* only can be lost. Regarding sexuality, for women *ird* is closely related to virginity, that means that “the female hymen has not yet been broken by a male penis.” But, Van Bommel states, “there are many other ways by which a woman can lose her hymen unnoticed and sometimes already from birth. The expectation that a woman must be a virgin before the wedding night is by definition a false assumption” (ibid., p. 87). The use of showing a bloodied sheet as a sign of defloration cannot be legitimized from the Quran (ibid., p. 88). And just in case intimacies between a man and a woman took place before the marriage, Van Bommel points to the mercy of God, which humans should take as an example (ibid., p. 89).

Regarding sex education Van Bommel points to the difference between young children’s curiosity and young adolescents’ emotions that go with physical attraction. The first needs to be responded to with information, the second with love. Children must learn the distinction between love that enables sacrifice and for which sacrifices are made and sheer lust that exploits the other for self-gratification, masturbation (ibid., p. 107).

Very often, Van Bommel states, “everything that has to do with sex is labeled as dirty and filthy, while it is something very beautiful in which one can initiate children” (ibid., p. 97). Following Van Bommel’s line of thought it is important to start sex education in the family, even when a child did not yet raise any question. For boys it is good to know about a girl’s physical development, and the other way around a girl should become familiar with a boy’s development. Muslim children in the Netherlands grow up in a world with a variety of worldview based perspectives on sexuality. One of the taboo issues is homosexuality –

accepted in the Netherlands, condemned as something beyond all bounds in Islam. Condemning actions, but respecting persons is something to be learned and internalized.

3. Teaching Materials for Sex Education in Islamic Schools

In 2019, two booklets were published for pupils of Islamic primary schools, which give information on topics like puberty, bodily changes, purity, relationships, sexuality, etc. A separate booklet was made for boys and girls (Claassen 2019).⁴ The title of the workbook for girls is: *'Help! Ik word volwassen. Mijn lichaam, mijn sieraad'* ['Dear Me! I'm Growing up. My Body, My pride']. For boys, the title is: *'Help! Ik word volwassen. Mijn lichaam, zo werkt dat dus'* ['Dear Me! I'm Growing up. My Body, So That's How It Works']. The two booklets are structured in a similar way (Claassen 2019). Sources used for these two publications are the Qur'an, the Islamic jurisprudence treatise *Fiqh us Sunnah* by Sayyid Sabiq (1992), the Dutch info website *Mens en Gezondheid* ('Humanity and Health'), and a 1993 report on youth prostitution in the city of Rotterdam (*'Het zal je zusje maar zijn'*; 'Imagine It Is Your Little Sister').

3a. Dear Me! I'm Growing up

The cover of the girls' booklet shows a girl wearing a colourful headscarf and backpack, looking at a daffodil on her shoulder, turning her head away from three boys in the background, who are silhouetted in black against a grey-and-white drawing of a school. The boys' booklet shows two boys, one wearing a green hoodie and the other a green backpack, talking to each other, with two girls silhouetted in the background against a light green-and-white drawing of a school.

The preface to the booklets states that, for many years, information on sexuality was pussyfooted around in Islamic schools, with the result that teachers developed *ad hoc* lesson plans on this sensitive subject. Because of profound differences between the Islamic and the secular-society approach to sexuality, the publication of sound teaching material on sexuality was seen as a necessity to protect children from the pitfalls of the society they live in. It is stated that the content of the two booklets is published as a tool for the education of pupils into Muslim adults (ibid., p. 5). The point is made that, since the Islamic primary school is for most children the only environment where they can be clearly informed about these issues from an Islamic perspective, it is important to already touch upon the topic of sexuality in primary school. The content of the booklets conforms to the compulsory educational objectives formulated by the Ministry of Education for primary school children aged 10-12 and secondary school children aged 13-15. It is further explained that a separate booklet for girls and boys is published since in most schools boys and girls are separated for lessons on sexuality. The booklets are structured in the same way, except that in the girls' booklet, a section of one lesson is dedicated to "the monthly period and the religious duties that go with it," while for boys, the emphasis is on "issues that are particularly relevant for boys." Finally, it is emphasised that all lessons were piloted in Islamic primary schools, and that comments

⁴ The method caused a great deal of commotion in the Dutch educational world, because of its negative tone in regard to Dutch views on sex education. This was reason enough for the Inspectorate to conduct a further investigation. In 2020, the Inspectorate declared that this method complies with the legal requirements of sex education in the Netherlands.

from pupils, RE teachers and critical friends were incorporated into this second edition (ibid., p. 5).

The two booklets consist of eleven lessons: Introduction, Puberty, Bodily Changes, Purity and Hygiene, More Things to Know about Growing up, *Zina* (Illicit Sexual Relations), How Babies Are Made (!), Relationships and Sexuality in Western society and in Islam, Homosexuality in Islam, Not Feeling well, Loverboys and Prostitution: Don't Fall for It! Each chapter begins with an introduction to the theme. This is followed by information, interspersed with different texts: verses from the Qur'an, sayings by the prophet or his wife (from the *Hadith* and the *Sunnah*), or statements by Islamic scholars. The texts taken from tradition, in Arabic or Dutch, emphasise the Islamic foundations of the presented information, or function as illustrations of what was known in Islamic tradition long before social sciences scholars in the West recovered this knowledge. Assignments are given to the pupils to test their understanding of the presented information, to relate the information to their own lives, to initiate conversations with classmates, etc.

Puberty

The content of the second chapter – on puberty – differs for boys and girls. To begin with, hormonal activity is explained to boys and girls, followed by a fact checking assignment: what are hormones, and what do they do? By way of a case study, 'falling in love' is discussed – for boys the example of a boy is considered, for girls the example of a girl. In an assignment, the pupils are invited to give advice to the character in the example.

For girls, this is followed by information about 'friends' on social media, accompanied by warnings about what could go wrong, summarised in five rules: 1. don't add 'friends' to your account that you don't know, 2. never show yourself (in real life or social media) in a way that would make you feel ashamed, 3. don't keep anything from your parents, 4. don't chat privately with boys, unless it is necessary for your schoolwork and 5. take care of each other, and give good advice to your friends about social media.

For boys, the introductory part is followed by a paragraph on 'sexual attraction,' illustrated by the story of Yusuf. This is followed by seven lessons that must be retained: 1. sexual feelings are normal, 2. Yusuf's strong will is a gift from Allah, 3. it's difficult to say 'no' to something you might like (for example when a girl is inviting you), 4. don't get yourself into trouble, never isolate yourself with a girl, 5. illicit behaviour will bring you from bad to worse, 6. don't judge others – you never know what you might end up doing in a tempting situation and 7. illicit behaviour is never so bad that Allah won't forgive you. The next paragraph focuses on the question "Would you want your sister to be approached in that way?," referring to a newspaper article about the sexual harassment of a pop star. Here a link is made to key lessons that can be learned from Yusuf's story. This section is then followed by the paragraph on social media.

Bodily Changes

In the third chapter, 'bodily changes,' the focus for girls is on the monthly period and the religious duties that go with it; for the boys the focus is on wet dreams. In the introduction to the fourth chapter on 'purity and hygiene,' both sexes are advised to remove pubic and armpit

hair to prevent unpleasant smells, or to use a neutral deodorant, or – even better – “to mix 100 grams of coconut oil with 1 teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda and a few drops of lavender oil, and to rub a fingertip of this mixture into the armpit daily” (p. 30 boys, p. 34 girls). After these practical matters, the *Sunan Al-Fitrah* is introduced – cleanliness habits that fit the natural constitution of boys and girls. In both booklets, circumcision is presented as a hygienic measure (for boys) and as a culture-related (not religiously based!) habit (for girls). Subsequently, key concepts such as *ghusl* (full-body ritual purification), *janabah* (state of ritual purity after sexual intercourse) and *mukallaf* (the accountable person) are introduced and the comprehension thereof tested. Chapter five, entitled ‘more things to know about growing up,’ provides more in-depth knowledge about puberty. For boys and girls, additional information is given on the development of the other sex. Dress codes for men and women in regard to covering intimate parts of the body (‘*awrah*’) is the main topic of this chapter, a topic covered in greater detail for girls than for boys. Chapter seven on *zina*, illicit sexual relations, has the same content for boys and girls. AIDS is mentioned as one of the consequences of *zina*, being a sexually transmitted disease. Chapter eight, on ‘relationships and sexuality in Western society and in Islam,’ focuses on differences between Islamic values and secular-Western values. Giving in to illicit feelings is explained as the work of Shaitan.

Concrete Regulations

Chapter eight gives regulations on how to look for a partner, together with some advice: 1. think about the question: is this the person you want to share your life with? 2. attach more importance to character than attractiveness, 3. is this a person you can trust and respect?, 4. don’t get married just because you think the other will make you happy!, 5. if you want to marry a girl who has not been married before, you need the permission of her (Muslim) father. This chapter ends with the reassuring affirmation: “Don’t worry, Allah already decided long ago who you will marry” (p. 68 for boys, p. 72 for girls). The subject of chapter nine is ‘homosexuality in Islam.’ This theme is introduced with the story of Loet. In both booklets, a case about a lesbian woman who is insulted invites pupils to talk about this issue, and to relate this to what Islam says about ‘gay bashing’ (p. 27 for boys, page 78 for girls). The Qur’anic texts quoted here centre on the message not to use violence in case of severe disagreement. Chapter 10 focuses on ‘not feeling well’ about your figure and appearance. Key here is the message that Allah created human beings as ‘good.’ In Islam, changing one’s appearance or – in case of drug and alcohol abuse: one’s behaviour – is condemned. The same prohibition applies to men who behave like women, and vice versa.

‘Don’t Fall for It!’

The theme of the final chapter is ‘loverboys and prostitution,’ whereby the subtitle contains a warning: ‘don’t fall for it!’ The introduction in both booklets consists of two parts: the story of Doenia broaches the theme, followed by information about the percentage of young people in Rotterdam who have come into contact with loverboys or prostitution. A conversation in smaller groups about the pupils’ own experiences and convictions, followed by a class discussion, is one of the assignments. The chapter – and the booklets as a whole – ends for boys and girls with a knowledge test on sexual development – knowledge derived from

sayings of the prophet on biological facts (gender-specific), and from Islamic precepts on homosexuality.

In what follows, the described teaching materials become the object of reflection, taking the point of view of ‘Islamic pedagogy’/‘Islam and Pedagogy.’

4. Reflection on ‘Dear Me! I’m Growing up’

Striking are the covers of the booklets: a girl with a headscarf, turning her head away from a trio of boys; and two boys talking to each other, not paying attention to two girls. This sets the tone for a first impression of the material. An impression triggered by the drawings (what about the identification of girls who do not wear headscarves, for example Alevi Muslims?), but also by the subtitles of the booklets. For girls, their body is something to be proud of, to care for, like jewellery. For boys, their body is something of which they need to know how it works. The covers and subtitles give a first glimpse of the gender-specific approach used in the teaching material, for example in chapter 2 (puberty) and 3 (bodily changes).

In the introductory chapter, an opposition is articulated between the Islamic and secular-Western attitude (here in the Netherlands) towards sexuality: “It cannot be but necessary to tell our children that Islam looks at this from a different angle, before they take as their norm what they see and hear around them” (p. 5). This position makes it understandable that sex education in these booklets is directly linked to sayings of the prophet Muhammad, taken from the *Hadith* and the *Sunnah*. The texts, especially those on falling in love, are characterised by a cautionary tone.⁵

Taking a closer look at the didactics, the material shows a child-centred approach in establishing a relation with the pupils’ life world: introducing newspaper items, inviting the pupils to discuss a topic, linking Qur’anic texts to their everyday lives. The focus is on texts from the Islamic tradition. The material is text-centred, testing the pupils’ correct understanding of the presented information and/or Qur’anic texts (instruction, response, evaluative approach).

From the viewpoint of the *minimal* guidelines for sex education stipulated in the ‘*Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe*’ and the corresponding educational criteria of the Dutch Ministry of Education, the ‘Dear Me!’ teaching material meets the requirements of helping children to “discover their bodies, their feelings, what they like and don’t like” and transmitting knowledge to them about “sexuality and diversity in the Dutch society, including diverse sexualities.” Minimal sex education focuses on knowledge of facts – biological facts, facts about Islam and Western societies. *Maximal* sex education is about the whole person, including their consciousness of emotions evoked in various relationships (falling in love), and their solidarity and respect for the ‘otherness’ of others. Maximal sex education creates a space for bonds of mutual affection and love in relationships, including in sexual intercourse.⁶ Maximal sex education is similar to Uçan’s recommended approach in RE, called CRE,

⁵ For a detailed account of love and sexuality, see Van Bommel (2003).

⁶ For this interpretation of minimal and maximal sex education, we follow McLaughlin’s line of thought on minimal and maximal citizenship (McLaughlin 1992, p. 236-237; see also Miedema & Ter Avest 2011).

which she sees as a challenge for contemporary IRE teachers (Uçan 2020, p. 11 ff). Meeting this challenge is quite a task!

5. Recommendation

IRE teachers in Dutch Islamic primary schools have passed their primary school teacher exams, and have a degree in theology. During their studies, they are not explicitly trained in classroom conversations on the tense issue of sex education. For (future) teachers active in this area of education, this chapter recommends personal reflection – in a systematic way – on their individual cognitive and affective relation with Islam and sex education. Such self-reflection creates resources for integrated sex education, in the way this is offered in ‘*ZelfVerbindenOnderwijs*’ (Self-Connector Education; Holman 2020), an instrument based on the Valuation Theory and the Self Confrontation Method (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen 1995). Building on this, the exchange of these personal reflections with colleagues is recommended, in structural team conversations, with a focus on the religious, ethical and moral consequences of the school’s vision and mission in concrete classroom situations – so-called Narrative Moral Consultations (NMC) (Ter Avest 2019).

To develop the dialogue competency of teachers in regard to sex education, both in the classroom and in teacher teams, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) point to different ‘capitals’ a teacher must be able to use. They interpret capital as “one’s own or a group’s worth, particularly concerning assets that can be averaged to accomplish desired goals” (Hargreaves & Fullan 2012, p. 1). Hargreaves and Fullan distinguish between different types of capital, emphasising the importance of decisional capital. Decisional capital can be defined as “the capacity to judge and judge well in situations of unavoidable uncertainty when the evidence or the rules aren’t categorically clear” (ibid., p. 93). In order to deploy this capability, a moral compass – rooted in the Islamic worldview, for example – is essential, a *sine qua non*. The significance of a moral compass brings us to the concept of normative professionalism (NP) (Van Ewijk & Kunneman 2013). The concept of NP points to a professionalisation that goes beyond the technical aspects of teaching, which provides room for professionals’ personal values and norms, and their life orientation (Bakker & Montesano Montessori 2016).

As Van Bommel stated, in general sex education must be framed in Islam’s ethics and morality. Teachers should know their own positionality regarding the Islamic ethics on sexuality; by consequence psycho-education on sexual development, and Islamic ethics regarding purity and honour must be part of the professionalisation of teachers in Islamic education.

To make IRE professionals aware of their capabilities, deep reflection is recommended during teachers’ first years of practice, focusing on their own and their colleagues’ value orientation – a process of normative professionalism. This reflection, first of all, should explore their own positionality – as a teacher, as a religious person, as a loving and beloved person-in-context. In this reflection should be included the variety of ‘voices’ in the Islamic tradition on the issues of ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ – taking into account – as Selçuk suggests – the context and the origin of the respective texts (Selçuk 2012). From a deeper understanding of these texts a moral compass develops. In addition, the teacher must be aware of the mission and vision of the school community (including both teachers and parents) in which s/he is appointed. Last

but not least, s/he must be well informed about the cultural context and the accepted ideas about sex, and its representations in the media. In deep reflection of this type, the complexity of the issue-in-context is taken seriously, and consciousness is reached about the role the different aspects play in the final normative positionality of the teacher in her/his classroom conversations. Taking up this challenge in modern teaching is a considerable task (!) for an interdisciplinary team of scholars and teachers alike.

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Trying to be a Muslim American Woman in a Desi World: A Pedagogical Perspective

Abstract

In this paper, I will offer pedagogical perspective for education and re-education about Islam for first generation Muslim Americans, specifically those of *Desi*, or South Asian background. The insights and the perspective offered will also be beneficial for Muslim Americans of other ethnicities, as well as individuals of other faith backgrounds, looking for a healthier and deeper understanding of Islam and the practice of Islam in the context of the United States.

Paper

In this paper, I offer a pedagogical perspective on learning and practicing Islam through the circumstances and experiences of my own life as an ethnically South Asian, Muslim American woman growing up in the United States. However, this paper is not exclusive to the South Asian Muslim American community; and I pray that individuals beyond this group also benefit from what I have written below. God-willing.

I begin my paper acknowledging my primary audience, religious educators in the United States. Of the approximately 314 million Americans in the United States, only about 3.45 million, or 1.1 % of the national population, are Muslim.¹ While people in the United States certainly have knowledge of Islam and Muslims, it is also important for me to provide background on Islam, Muslims, as well as South Asians as I begin my discussion, making what I write accessible and understandable to my readers. First, I would like to define the word *Desi* in the title of my paper. *Desi* and South Asian are often used interchangeably to refer to someone ethnically South Asian. South Asia includes Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, and Bangladesh, as well as the smaller countries of Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives. It is also beneficial to mention a few notable figures in the United States who have *Desi* background. Kamala Harris, the first female vice president of the United States, is half South Asian, or half *Desi*. This historical win is a source of pride for South Asian and African American communities. Harris was raised by her South Asian, Indian mother, and while her mother was Hindu, Kamala Harris is Christian Baptist.² Priyanka Chopra, another South Asian woman, is a popular actress; she is

¹ Besheer Mohamed. “New Estimates Show U.S. Muslim Population Continues to Grow,” *Pew Research Center*, January 3, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/03/new-estimates-show-u-s-muslim-population-continues-to-grow/>.

² Korin Miller, “How Vice President Kamala Harris’ Religion Has Impacted Her Life Over The Years,” *Women’s Health*, January 20, 2021, [What Is Vice President Kamala Harris’ Religion? \(womenshealthmag.com\)](https://www.womenshealthmag.com/what-is-vice-president-kamala-harris-religion/).

an immigrant, specifically from India and Hindu.³ An award-winning playwright and author, Ayad Akhtar recently made it onto President Obama's reading list with his book *Homeland Elegies*. Akhtar is also ethnically South Asian, specifically Pakistani, and the child of immigrants; he identifies as a cultural Muslim.⁴ Ethnically and culturally, the three individuals are similar; however, religion is different.

Of the three individuals mentioned, Akhtar is a child of South Asian Pakistani Muslim immigrants, with his parents immigrating to this country in the 1960s.⁵ However, Islam and Muslims came to the United States, or rather North America, much earlier, with the beginnings of the African slave trade in the early 1500s.⁶ According to Diouf, 15 – 20 % of the African slave population, on both American continents and the Caribbean Islands, was Muslim;⁷ and amongst the slaves were Muslim scholars and Muslim royalty from the African continent.⁸ The harsh conditions of slavery were such that Islam was eventually lost in this group. Some African Americans, descendants of early slaves, retained their Islamic heritage in their names and other practices. Later in the United States, Islam did re-emerge in the African American population through organizations like Nation of Islam (NOI) and figures like Malcolm X. Nation of Islam, however, was a black power movement under the leader Elijah Muhammad,⁹ and it was not until the leadership of his son, Imam Warith Deen, that NOI came under mainstream Islam.¹⁰ Malcolm X, a member of NOI, dissolved ties with NOI and its leader in the early 1960s and came to mainstream Islam after a journey to Mecca, the holy city where Muslims annually travel for the pilgrimage of Hajj.¹¹ African-American Muslims, thus, by the trajectory of Islam in this group, are often considered indigenous Muslims.

Free Muslim immigrants started coming to the United States in waves as early as the 1800s. My parents, as well as the parents of Akhtar, mentioned earlier, came to the United States in the 1960s and 70s. At that time, my father received a scholarship to a university in New

³ HT Entertainment Desk, "Priyanka Chopra talks about her Hindu, Christian, Islamic upbringing during interview with Oprah," *Hindustan Times*, March 19, 2021, [Priyanka Chopra talks about her Hindu, Christian, Islamic upbringing during interview with Oprah. Watch new promo | Hindustan Times](#).

⁴ Ayad Akhtar, "'Homeland Elegies' Novelist Reflects on Homesickness and the Immigrant Experience," interview by Dave Davies, *Fresh Air*, NPR, September 14, 2020, audio, 35:45, ['Homeland Elegies' Novelist Reflects On Homesickness And The Immigrant Experience : NPR](#).

⁵ Alexandra Schwartz, "An American Writer for an Age of Division," *The New Yorker*, September 14, 2020, Accessed May 12, 2021. [An American Writer for an Age of Division | The New Yorker](#).

⁶ Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹ Hakim M. Rashid and Zakiyyah Muhammad, "The Sister Clara Muhammad Schools: Pioneers in the Development of Islamic Education in America," *Journal of Negro Education* 61, no. 2 (1992), 179 – 180.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

Jersey. After completion of his degree, he drove himself and his belongings to Silicon Valley in the Bay Area, California. He then returned to Pakistan, married, and settled down with his wife, and I was born. Then, after the birth of my youngest sibling, we moved to Sacramento Valley. This was and continues to be the norm for many South Asian Pakistani immigrants even today, i.e. education in the United States, marriage back home, and then settling down in the United States. The generation of Pakistani immigrants who came to the United States in the 1960s and 70s were very educated, skilled, and an important part of Silicon Valley. Aside from their specific professions, this generation also built many *masajid* (houses of worship) as well as established several Muslim non-profits, and the Bay Area is home to many such institutions and organizations.¹²

This is the external appearance of this group, but what is the internal reality? Some members of the Muslim community may have contentions with what I am about to write below. Muslims are often under unnecessary and harsh scrutiny by national and global communities. However, this paper is about something different. The national and international rhetoric on Islam is not a reason to not talk about the other realities that do exist in the Muslim community, and I pray readers are able to make a distinction between the often misinformed and harsh narrative about Muslims and what I have written in this paper. I spent the better part of a decade addressing these matters by first approaching individuals, then small groups and organizational leadership, all the while honoring privacy and confidentiality as I followed the appropriate channels in seeking rectification and justice for injuries incurred. People, groups, and organizations were given multiple chances and avenues to rectify and remedy, whether those people were family members, in an immediate sense, or brothers and sisters in Islam, in a broader sense. However, it was to no avail. Then, the responsibility of surviving challenging circumstances is to speak about them, in an honest and open way. This is healing for me as a person, and this is beneficial for the Muslim American community, where others are being hurt by these internal dynamics as well.

I begin with the family environment in which I grew up. We were a nuclear family, a dad, a mom, and three daughters, and I was the oldest of the three. As a child, I remember there was a great deal of emphasis on education and good grades in our home, but not a whole lot of emphasis on religion. I was taught to read the Arabic *Quran*, the primary religious text in Islam, but with Urdu phonetics, Urdu being the language of my South Asian immigrant parents, not the language of the *Quran*. However, I did not understand the *Quran*. It was in fact in grade school, when inquisitive classmates would ask about Islam, I would share that I could read the *Quran* but not understand it, and they would curiously react. This brought my attention to the unusualness of this reality, a reality which was the norm in our home and the South Asian Muslim community. Many of the *masajid* and organizations at the time, and still today, had Sunday schools, and I attended Sunday school at the *masjid*. At home and in Sunday school, I learned basic rituals such as prayer, memorized a few short chapters of the *Quran* (called *Surahs*) and the names and stories of the Prophets, and that was mostly it. There were other teachers and

¹² Nadeem Ahmed Memon, *From Protest to Praxis: A History of Islamic Schools in North America*, PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2009, 131.

tutors along the way, who would come to the home and teach me to read Urdu and *Quran*; overall, however, it was a very rudimentary, superficial engagement with Islam.

As I entered my teens, the familial emphasis on education continued. However, another emphasis started to manifest as well, an emphasis on marriage. Sadly, it turned out the educational emphasis in childhood was not about who I was as a person, necessarily; it was not about my skills, talents, or dreams. Rather, education and degrees were necessary for a woman to get married. In those teen years, I transformed in the eyes of parents from being a child to being a burdensome woman who would eventually need to be married to an unknown man, a man primarily of their choosing. There were a few reasons behind this connection between education and marriage. Education was necessary for marriage because a man could be severely negligent or even abusive of his wife. In that case, a woman would need to exit the marriage, and if the woman was educated and had the ability to earn an income, the exit would be easier. It was not a prepare for the worst, hope for the best attitude, but rather prepare for the worst because the worst will happen. This stance in our home had a great deal of support from the circumstances of many female cousins in Pakistan who genuinely suffered in difficult marriages, and their stories and challenges weaved in and out of my childhood, teens, and twenties. Prepare for the worst because the worst will happen. Another connection between education and marriage had to do with pride and prestige in the South Asian Muslim community. The more of your children earned graduate degrees, the more standing you had in the community. If all your children became doctors, then you had the highest rank in the community. In fact, for some time, my father had the following professions designated for his three daughters: doctor (that was me), lawyer, and engineer. There was some consideration of our individual interests and inclinations in this selection, which is why he did not insist that each one of us become a doctor; still, nothing less than a graduate degree was acceptable, and we all knew that. An educated woman, especially a woman with a graduate degree, was also just a more viable prospect for a South Asian Muslim man. Why? Money. She would have an income, which would augment the income of their joint household; she would be a financial asset for him and his family. Women also have expensive habits, and they can be careless spendthrifts. Therefore, she should have an income for her expenses, expenses beyond what a husband may feel obligated to cover. Along with educated children, married children, especially married daughters were also a means of standing in the community; and if an educated, earning woman would be more palatable to a South Asian Muslim man, then education of a woman was necessary.

Parents do participate in the decisions of education and marriage for their children, they do want to see them happy, successful, and monetarily sound. Certainly, parents would also want a daughter to be safe and secure in her marriage. However, genuine parental concern was not the driving force behind the atmosphere of our home; the driving forces were fear and pride rooted in social and economic realities of a world left behind, further sanctioned by select religious principles.¹³ I will explain. There was certainly fear that a daughter could end up in a difficult

¹³ Religious principles - Some of the specific religious principles in this paper come directly from the *Quran*, and some come from other religious literature such as the life and wisdoms of the Prophet Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, may God's peace and blessings be upon him.

marriage. However, even that fear was rooted in pride, or rather shame, the antithesis of pride. If a daughter ended up in an abusive marriage and divorce was the only solution, it would be a source of shame for parents. Her education and potential monetary value in her husband's home would make it less likely that he would be negligent or abusive, and therefore less likely that there would be divorce. With the possibility of divorce significantly reduced through the education of a daughter, then parents were able to retain their honor and pride and avoid any possible shaming from the community. This was one path to pride in the potential life circumstances of children. The other way to maintain and intensify the experience of pride was to make sure each child was not just educated, but educated with a graduate degree, ideally a medical one. These were the education and marriage dynamics in our home, our family friends' circle, and the South Asian Muslim American community.

Islam – Where did Islam figure into all of this? Neither parent had a very deep or sound practice of Islam; they would be qualified as cultural Muslims at best. They did, albeit incorrectly, utilize select religious principles to justify that which was rooted in fear and pride. For example, a central tenet of Islam is *obedience to parents*;¹⁴ and this religious principle was misappropriated by parents to give themselves infallibility. Any decision or action by a parent was religiously sanctioned through this tenet, rendering it above scrutiny. *Marriage is half of religion*,¹⁵ another principle misused by parents. While they would insist on marriage and on marriage to a person of their choosing, they would position marriage to children as a means of attaining a higher station with God. Another principle commonly misused by parents was *men are caretakers of women*.¹⁶ It is the responsibility of the male member of the household to caretake the women, and the decisions for caretaking included what degree to pursue and which person to marry. This was the underdeveloped, often unilateral, understanding and exercise of male caretaking. Some South Asian Muslim parents may argue that they do in fact give their children agency in education and the marriage selection process. To some extent that is true; while every household is different, there were common threads that ran through my home as well as the homes of many childhood friends and peers. We did, at times, have the decision of whether or not to meet a potential spouse. However, there were also several instances in which if we, my siblings or friends, did not feel comfortable meeting with a particular potential spouse and/or continuing on with further consideration beyond a certain point and parents did not agree with this decision, we would be met with often very abrasive and belligerent behavior from both parents. That was also true. It was a difficult existence.

Additionally, in our home, I recall, I was specifically told not to talk about religion during any meeting with a potential spouse; and this pull back on religious discussion was being supported by the religious principle, *obedience to parents*. Parents did not want me to appear too

¹⁴ Asad Tarsin, *Being Muslim: A Practical Guide* (United States: Sandala, 2015), 206-7.

¹⁵ Rabbani, Faraz. "40 Hadiths on Marriage – Recapping the Live Seminar with Shaykh Faraz Rabbani." SeekersGuidance. January 25, 2018. [40 Hadiths on Marriage - Recapping the Live Seminar with Shaykh Faraz Rabbani - SeekersGuidance](#).

¹⁶ M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., *The Qur'an: English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 85.

religious as I may scare away a potential spouse, depriving them of an opportunity to augment their standing in the community if I made a successful match. The headscarf, a religious obligation when a woman enters adolescence, this was completely out of the question in our home. Instead, we were expected to participate in any such meeting, dressed as if going to an evening party, often in full make-up. Again, this was being driven by the religious principles of *obedience to parents* and *marriage is half of religion*. If any such meeting coincided with a prayer time, or if I attempted to schedule a meeting after or before prayer time, I was told to miss the obligatory prayer if necessary, as it was not as important as meeting a potential spouse. From my mid-twenties to my early thirties, this was the reality. There is no question in my mind: This was emotional, psychological, and spiritual abuse. It was difficult, disheartening, overwhelming, and it was being legitimized by cultural Muslim parents in the name of Islam. However, the reality was, it had nothing to do with Islam. I firmly believed that even then, but it would be a few more years before I had an opportunity to study Islam beyond the rudimentary and superficial engagement of my early years.

In my teens and early twenties, there were also many non-specific ailments that I began presenting with, and this state of health served as a safeguard and prevented parents from inundating me with marital prospects. There were still some to meet, but not that many. The toxicity of the home environment was impacting my health, but for the sake of brevity and staying on topic, I will primarily talk about how venturing into alternative health modalities at the time provided a path to spirituality that countered the home environment and eased the journey through my twenties and early thirties. Starting at about age 19, I made many changes to my diet, changes I have maintained to this day, and I am now in my early 40s. Those changes were beneficial in stabilizing my health. Additionally, of the various modalities I engaged at the time, I primarily maintained longstanding care routines with an acupuncturist and myofascial release (MFR) therapists. However, it was not just the treatments and herbal remedies, but the conversation with these individuals and the books and authors they would share that helped sustain me and strengthen my heart, mind, and soul. I voraciously read books by Louise Hay, Harriet Lerner, Wayne Dyer, Marianne Williamson, Peter Levine, Don Miguel Ruiz, and others. I learned to deeply practice forgiveness, gratitude, and many other positive emotions; these are necessary when you are suffering with ill health and your home environment is challenging. I did continue to pray, in the Islamic way, but these modalities and the world of alternative health and positive psychology provided me with additional layers of depth and perspective into human psychology and human spirituality, and I got through most of my twenties by God's mercy.

Then, one day at school, at age 26, I came across the book *Purification of the Heart* after a difficult week with both parents. I remember sitting next to the shelf at the school bookstore, reading, and soaking in the book's contents. In this book, there were short, very accessible chapters on anger, greed, heedlessness, and many other such topics. The translator (and commentator) was unpacking these negative emotions from an Islamic perspective, offering both an explanation for the negative emotion as well as a remedy.¹⁷ I still have this book, with the

¹⁷ Imam Mawlud, *Purification of the Heart*, trans. Hamza Yusuf (Bridgeview, IL.: Starlatch Press, 2004).

original receipt, now faded but with a print date of June 2005. In the past, I did try and find solutions to challenging family dynamics in books on Islam; I tried to understand the Islamic principles that were often being positioned to justify my abuse, but there were not that many books available when I was younger. This book, *Purification of the Heart*, was the first of its kind I had come across. It was very reminiscent of the books I had been reading since I was a teen, such as the books of Louise Hay, Harriet Lerner, and others. On the cover of the book is a man, holding his hand over his heart, which to me symbolized peace in the heart. All praise is for God. Peace in the heart. I had found an Islamic book that could potentially address my problems. I was excited, and I held on to it tightly.

However, as I approached age thirty, a problematic number for South Asian immigrant parents when it comes to an unmarried daughter, there was a resurgence in the panic associated with my lack of a spouse. I had achieved a stable state of health through nutrition, acupuncture, and MFR; however, the resurgence of this panic destabilized me once again. This time, however, I had the alternative health and positive psychology tools from my early twenties, and I was able to pull myself out of this destabilization. Additionally, through other circumstances in the home environment and some maneuvering, I was able to make a significant exit to Berkeley, California. All praise is for God. In Berkeley, I began the next leg of my religious and spiritual journey. I enrolled in an Islamic college environment, beginning with an Arabic Intensive in 2008, hosted by the translator of the book, *Purification of the Heart*. It was a relief to be at this program! I was learning Arabic; I was learning about Islam. A lot of windows into religion were opening for me, and eventually two years later, I enrolled in the college's inaugural four-year undergraduate program. Year after year, I was experiencing extraordinary relief in this environment as I learned about Islam. I had opportunities to improve my ritual prayer and learn about other ritual practices, correctly and accurately. I had the opportunity to learn about Islamic History, Islamic Spirituality, Islamic Law, Ethics, and more. With every passing semester, the books and the classes were providing additional depth and perspective to my childhood, teens, and twenties. Additionally, I could see the connections between my secular alternative health/positive psychology practices and Islamic spirituality. This coalescence was healing. I also more specifically learned the dimensions behind the statements which had been used to sanction my abuse in the home environment. Layer upon layer of healing. All praise is for God.

However, while I was certainly experiencing religious and spiritual relief in one sense, I was also simultaneously learning about the culture of Muslim male clergy at the college. Just as my South Asian immigrant parents had a particular understanding, or lack thereof, of Islam, Muslim male clergy also have a particular culture around Islam, as I sadly learned. Often having learned overseas, Muslim male clergy are knowledgeable in the various subjects of the Islamic tradition. However, the cultures of their overseas learning, often all-male environments, also get imported with their knowledge; and these cultures are patriarchal, gender-oppressive, and misogynistic, based on the way the teachers would position class material and behave in the school environment. My experiences at the school are deserving of their own paper. For now, it is sufficient to say, I did not immediately see it, because I was not expecting this type of behavior at an Islamic college. However, with every passing semester, it was becoming manifest and clear; and I was becoming increasingly nauseous as this status quo never changed in the six years

I was in that environment. I did reach out to individuals and school leadership several times, respectfully bringing these heavy matters to their attention. No remedy, no recourse, no rectification. No remedy, no recourse, no rectification. No remedy, no recourse, no rectification. In the end, I was happy to graduate and leave the school. As much as learning about Islam was important to me, as much as I enjoyed the classes and books in one sense, it was also a huge relief to graduate and leave the college in 2014. At this point in life, I have distanced myself from the school and associated groups. I have confidence in what I learned; and I also do not want to be affiliated with a group of people who did not understand and respect me as a human being, as a woman.

In the years after the Islamic college, circumstances necessitated I return to my South Asian family home for another four years before my complete exit came from there as well. I did have to re-enter, recalibrate, and apply my newfound knowledge of Islam with a reinvigoration of the alternative health modalities and positive psychology practices from my teens and twenties. I started re-reading books by Louise Hay, and I also introduced new authors such as Fred Luskin and Kristen Neff into my repertoire. Additionally, I went deeper into Islam, the formal prayer and recitation of *Quran*; by means of the Islamic college program, I now had the tools and ability to do this on my own. All this was necessary for me to have a more complete exit from my *Desi* life. All praise is for God. Part way through this period, in the summer of 2016, individuals also started approaching me organically, wanting to study Islam; and I began a new and interesting journey of teaching and learning from others. Below I will share how I used secular alternative health/positive psychology practices along with my newfound knowledge on Islam to work with students, offering a pedagogical perspective that transpired from my own life experiences, self-education, and formal education in Islam.

From July 2016 to about January 2017, I worked with two teenagers, children of South Asian immigrants. They organically approached me one day at a social gathering. They knew I had gone to an Islamic college; they had questions about Islam, they were curious, and they wanted answers. Their questions as well as their home environment were reminiscent of what I had experienced in life, but there were also some differences. As millennials affected by social media and iPhones, they did not have the same presence of mind I had at that age, and positive psychology/alternative health modalities require a state of presence for optimal benefit. Additionally, the use of social media and iPhones does not just affect a young person's state of presence, but their self-perception as well. How? They often believe that they understand matters deeply, when in fact their understanding is very surface-level.¹⁸ Penetrating and dissolving that self-perception, for their own benefit, also takes time and care. Through my own graduate work in student-centered pedagogy, I was aware of these challenges with millennials prior to working with the two teenagers. However, I only had six weeks in person with them before they had to return to school in the fall; and I simply infused mindfulness/positive psychology practices and my knowledge of millennials into our six sessions. How? There were several ways I did this, and I will share a few. I required them to leave their phones in the car when coming into my home,

¹⁸ *Screenagers*, directed by Delaney Ruston, Indieflix, 2016, Screening.

which is where I held our sessions. When I gave them assignments, I asked, on their honor, they do assignments with the phone powered off. In our first session, I also included the work of Fred Luskin who teaches classes on positive psychology at Stanford University.

My primary focus with the two teenagers, however, was on Islam and Islamic rituals beyond the rudimentary and elementary experiences of my childhood as well as their childhoods. Just as I had memorized *Surahs* from the *Quran* as a child, so had they. Just as I had learned basic information on Islam and certain Islamic rituals at home and in Sunday school, so had they. This information was certainly important, and memorization is absolutely part of Islamic learning. However, there are additional dimensions of depth and relevance necessary for young people to take their childhood practices of Islam into adulthood, which is what I was seeking and found at the Islamic college program. My attempt now was to fill in these gaps for these two young people as well. Our structured *Islam 101*, as I titled it, had the following weekly topics: 1) *Godly Character and Happiness*, 2) *Fiqh of Purity*, 3) *Fiqh of Prayer*, 4 and 5) *Quran*, and 6) *Shari'ah Law*. In the first session, I brought together Fred Luskin's work¹⁹ with the work²⁰ of M.A. Azeez, a Muslim American religious leader, helping to draw parallels and connections between positive psychology and Islamic spirituality. For *Fiqh of Purity and Prayer*, sessions on rulings associated with ritual purity and prayer, I used sections from the book *Ascent to Felicity*, a book from the Islamic college program. We talked about the formal rulings²¹ in reasonable depth, and we also talked about how to apply the rulings in situations specific to them, such as purity in physical education (P.E.) classes at school or prayer in between classes at college. For the *Quran* sessions, we watched a multi-part YouTube series²² by a Muslim American scholar, and each student prepared a Google Doc with notes for each video. We had a schedule for the due date for each part, and I offered interlinear commentary on their notes. The videos were about *Surah Al-Fatihah*, the opening chapter of the *Quran*, the recitation of which is required for each unit of ritual prayer. By doing this video series with them, I had a few goals. First, by means of the videos, they would understand *Surah Al-Fatihah* beyond memorization, which would help them to maintain a state of presence in ritual prayer. Additionally, because they were millennials, the writing back and forth in the Google Doc was intended to mimic texting back and forth, so that the material could enter that same space in their minds.²³ For the *Shari'ah Law* session, we used a book by Mohammad Hashim Kamali, a book, again, I became familiar with through the Islamic college program. We had regular emails and discussion during and beyond those six weeks, well into the early weeks of 2017. They were eager to learn, diligent, and hard-working. In the end, however, reminiscent of my own life experiences, their parents had an unrelenting preoccupation with grades and degrees in pursuit of medical and engineering professions; and this destabilized a very functional and beneficial relationship I had with the two

¹⁹ Link to YouTube video: [Fred Luskin at TEDxGunnHighSchool - YouTube](#)

²⁰ Link to YouTube video: [Building a Godly Character - رباتية - YouTube](#)

²¹ Abu L-Ikhlās Al-Shurunbulali, *Ascent to Felicity: A Manual on Islamic Creed and Hanafi Jurisprudence*, trans. Faraz A. Khan, (Santa Barbara, CA: White Thread Press, 2010), 41-125.

²² Link to YouTube series: [Ramadan 2014 - Tafsir Surah al-Fatihah - YouTube](#)

²³ *Screenagers*, directed by Delaney Ruston, Indieflix, 2016, Screening.

teenagers. However, I did feel that I went back in time and gave two young people that which had not been a part of my own early experiences with Islam. I pray they benefitted.

The other format of my teaching, starting in 2016, was one-on-one sessions with various Muslim women in the community. The age range of women varied from early 30s to mid-50s; however, their life details were similar. Many of these ladies learned Islam as children, retaining those early impressions and experiences. They were all married and raising children; some were working, some were not. When they could spare time for themselves, they tried to piece together a self-education of Islam through various community classes and seminars, onsite and online. However, it was not a focused or directed self-education. In my case, I had graduated from the Islamic college program which afforded me a formal degree in Islam; and post-graduation, I had the ability to also continue my Islamic education, but with focus and direction. Out of a sense of responsibility and gratitude, as ladies approached me, I basically designed sessions for each individual person to reflect what they wanted to do as well as what they needed to do as a more mature practitioner of this faith. To honor the privacy of each person, however, I will present an amalgamation of what I did, focusing on the three religious principles that were misunderstood and misused in my younger years as well as theirs.

To begin, many of the ladies were struggling with family relationships. Part of this struggle was connected to childhood impressions of *obedience to parents* as well as *maintaining kin relationships*,²⁴ the latter being another religious principle often cited with the former. With the benefit of the Islamic college program, I learned the additional dimensions and the interplay of these and many other religious principles, and this informed how and what I presented to each lady. To illustrate the dimensions and interplay of these religious principles as well as positive psychology practices, I offer the example of a woman whom I will call Aisha. Aisha was struggling with praying at her parents' home on regular Friday evening dinner visits. She was taking her own small children to the home of her cultural Muslim parents, their grandparents, with the intention to maintain kin relationships. However, her parents did not have a regular relationship with formal ritual prayer; and in fact, they would become harsh when Aisha would try and leave the dinner table to pray the mandatory evening prayer. Consequently, she regularly missed evening prayer on those dinner visits. Aisha brought this situation to our sessions, and we then worked on how to address the matter by first understanding the missing dimensions behind the religious principles she was using to prioritize family visits over prayer. We had substantial discussion on how *obedience to parents* and *maintaining kin relationships* were not about giving indefinite infallibility to parents and other relatives. Honoring familial relationships is weighty; however, honoring your relationship with God takes precedence. Additionally, for months, we worked through positive psychology practices of self-compassion and healthy boundaries²⁵ so she could gain courage and conviction in prioritizing God, prioritizing her own life practices, and setting boundaries with her parents. Healthy boundaries, as we discussed, were not about disrespecting parents, but about respecting herself and her relationship with God. Loving herself was an act of mercy on herself, not an act of selfishness. By both addressing the religious

²⁴ Tarsin, *Being Muslim*, 207-208.

²⁵ Link to Kristen Neff's website: [Self-Compassion](#).

principles and helping her to cultivate self-compassion, Aisha was able to reduce her dinner visits to once a month and she had the internal strength to stand firm and pray the evening prayer at her parents' home on those monthly visits as well.

I also revisited the principle of *marriage is half of religion* with the ladies. With them, this principle came up in connection to character development in Islam. First, many Muslims do not know that character development is central to Islam. In support of this, I shared with them the *Hadith of Gabriel* and the concept of *ihsan*, which points to the importance of good character in a Muslim.²⁶ Marriage is a significant relational space where character is developed as husband and wife walk through the challenges of life. Each challenge experienced together is an opportunity for both husband and wife to practice and experience positive emotions such as forgiveness, gratitude, trust, and justice, further developing character. By sharing the religious and spiritual importance of character, I encouraged the ladies to understand and reframe the challenges of marriage as opportunities²⁷ to develop substantial practices of forgiveness and gratitude, among other positive emotions. Weaving religious legitimacy through positive psychology practices, giving the practices religious support, motivated each lady to work hard to succeed. The practices we used, specifically, would come from work by psychologists such as Fred Luskin,²⁸ Kristen Neff, and Robert Emmons²⁹ featured by the Greater Good Science Center (GGSC) at UC Berkeley in Berkeley, California.

In discussions about marital relationship dynamics, the principle of *men as caretakers of women* also surfaced. Several of the women justified their complacency or stepping back in times of marital difference or strife with this principle. In some situations, women were even using this principle to justify missing a prayer because the spouse wanted to see a movie or not wearing a headscarf because the spouse himself was uncomfortable with this practice. This was akin to my younger years when *obedience to parents* was being positioned to keep me from honoring my religious obligations such as prayer and the headscarf. Again, I unpacked this principle, adding additional layers and dimensions to their childhood experiences and impressions. Men as caretakers of women does not give them unequivocal liberty to impose their views and decisions on women. In fact, here, it became important to look very specifically at the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings upon him), and how he interacted with his wives. He (pbuh) consulted them, guided them, but did not impose his will on them.³⁰ Additionally, every human being, woman or man, will be held accountable in front of God for their religious and spiritual accomplishments, as well as failings, independent of each other.³¹ If the spouse is destabilizing a woman's religious and spiritual obligations, then it is incumbent on

²⁶ Yahya Rhodus, *Spiritual Struggle: Understanding the Science of Tasawwuf*, (Rihla Program, Rumi Bookstore, CD, 2007).

²⁷ Ibid.; Hamza Yusuf, *The Seventeen Benefits of Tribulation*, (Santa Cruz Deen Intensive, Sandala, CD, n.d.).

²⁸ Link to Fred Luskin's profile at GGSC: [Fred Luskin | Profile | Greater Good \(berkeley.edu\)](#)

²⁹ Link to Robert Emmons' profile at GGSC: [Robert Emmons | Profile | Greater Good \(berkeley.edu\)](#)

³⁰ Tarsin, *Being Muslim*, 135, 143, 203, 205-206.

³¹ M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., *The Qur'an: English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text*, 50.

her to open this discussion and change this dynamic in the home. Cultivation of self-compassion and healthy boundaries became important in these situations as well, helping the lady to lift her own religious and spiritual responsibilities from a place of subordination in her relationship with the spouse. I did additionally work on *Quran* recitation and *Fiqh*, as well as other topics, with the ladies; however, the treatment of these topics with them was more advanced than with the two teenagers. My one-on-one sessions with Muslim lady practitioners afforded me wonderful opportunities to share my amalgamation of alternative health modalities/positive psychology practices with Islam. As I was a peer or junior to some of my students, I also greatly benefitted from their life experiences and wisdom.

The details of the *Islam 101* arrangement with the two teenagers as well as the one-on-one sessions with Muslim lady practitioners is what I offer my readers as a pedagogical perspective on learning and practicing Islam in the context of the United States. While the majority of the individuals I worked with were ethnically South Asian, there were a few individuals who were Muslim, but of other ethnicities. I also presented the work from *Islam 101* at a one-day seminar hosted by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) and the John Templeton Foundation (JTF).³² For young practitioners, helping them to harness and understand Islam and Islamic rituals in a relevant way was necessary.³³ When working with more mature practitioners, it became important to have a working knowledge and relationship with positive psychology practices to help the ladies reopen and recalibrate early childhood impressions and experiences with Islam, as well as help them with specific topics in Islam. I pray my readers found the content and perspective I shared in this paper beneficial, and I look forward to more conversations in the future.

³² Faiqa Mahmood, *Islamic Weekend Schools: Are They Preparing Children for Life Ahead?* (Washington D.C.: Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2018), 9, 10, 20.

³³ Zeba Iqbal, *Meeting the Needs of Generation 9/11: Strengthening Religious Literacy* (Washington D.C.: Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2016).

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