

Gender, Sexuality, and Wholeness: Religious Education for Confrontation and Healing

As scholars and practitioners of Religious Education (RE) and as members of the Religious Education Association (REA), we approach teaching and learning as a holistic endeavor, and that is what often sets our work apart from other theological and religious fields. Taking the etymology of Religion and Education seriously, we engage people's wholeness beyond their cognition for gaining information. As an organization, we have recently held annual conferences with themes on coexisting, encountering, imagination, (un)masking violence, religious identity formation in a global age, and others, which clearly show our commitments to the wholeness of people and the world. We educate people not only to understand justice but also to live justly with compassion. In other words, the cognitive, emotional, physical, gendered, sexual, and spiritual dimensions of human nature and experience are inseparable and intricate parts of every education anchored in religion. This holistic nature of our discipline, combined with the deeply contextual nature of *e-ducare/e-ducere* enterprises, now urgently calls us to delve into critical dialogues and studies on human sexuality and gender identities. What and how do we teach about being a holistic and religious person in the age of

the growing global #MeToo movement;
the news of sexual abuse by religious leaders;
the conflicts and divisions of religious institutions over LGBTQIA+ issues;
the increasing hate crimes against people with non-heteronormative gender identities;
the surging and resurging hypermasculine developmentalism?

The 2020 conference invites participants to critically engage gender and sexuality as a fundamental way to pursue holistic religious teaching and learning with the awareness of the above and other situations that many of our contexts face. Concretely, by addressing three general areas, I hope we can deepen scholarly discussions to generate pedagogical frameworks for constructive gender and sexuality discourse for various religious contexts:

- 1) pedagogies to help **facilitate** informed conversations on often avoided, misunderstood or contentious topics related to sexuality and gender identities;
- 2) pedagogies to **confront** institutionally suppressed recognition of sexual and gendered violence in order to open a way for just healing;
- 3) pedagogies to **create** the space of healing and **restore** the wholeness of people and communities from trauma.

Some guiding questions and possible topics include but are not limited to the following. Please know that the list is provided not to force you to choose among them, but to show you expansive examples you can engage with the theme:

- Pedagogical models and strategies to frame constructive conversations on body, sex, sexuality and gender identities in non-judgmental and defensive ways
- Meaning of embodied religious learning as it relates to the body and human sexuality
- Human body and sexuality as a text/context of learning and divine experiences

- Religious education in hypermasculine/post-hypermasculine developmentalism eras and settings
- Religious education undoing heteronormativity
- Sex education in religious contexts
- Religious education and the #MeToo movement
- Healing pedagogy for victims and communities of sexual abuse within religious institutions
- Queering and queer religious pedagogy
- LGBTQIA+, non-binary and fluid gender identities - issues and contributions to religious education
- Queer anthropology for teaching and learning in religious contexts
- Religious education as a bridge-builder for communities in conflict over LGBTQIA+ issues
- Healing rituals, arts, and embodied pedagogy for sexual and gender/gendered violence survivors and communities
- Religious education with/for survivors of intimate partner violence
- Religious education in the context of state-sanctioned sexual violence, e.g., comfort women, rape victims of war and in refugee camps
- Religious education in conjunction with recovery from PTSD and moral injury
- Contemplative pedagogies for healing
- Performative pedagogies and healing

Various fields of study have done a great deal of critical research on gender and human sexuality in general, and on sexual violence, trauma and healing, LGBTQIA, and queer studies in particular. Through inter-, cross- or transdisciplinary conversations with these other fields, religious educators are invited to further define and explore concepts in a more holistic way that honors human wholeness. We can also shed light on gaps in the work in other fields.

I understand that these are topics that are uncomfortable, difficult, or not encouraged ones, depending on contexts. What I hope and ask is that you will avoid taking sides and, instead, explore the issues at stake, hold space for those in need, discuss topics with human wholeness in mind, and share healing and generative religious education models and approaches with one another.

I look forward to fruitful conversations!