

DISSERTATION

THE BODY AND THE WORD: AT THE INTERSECTION OF RELIGION AND RAPE
CULTURE WITHIN CHURCH AS A SITE OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL FORMATION

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ABSTRACT

THE BODY AND THE WORD: AT THE INTERSECTION OF RELIGION AND RAPE CULTURE WITHIN CHURCH AS A SITE OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL FORMATION

The work of this dissertation is to name and understand the intersection of religion and rape culture in the context of Christianity through understanding churches as sites of education and social formation. My positionality as researcher is shaped by my identity as a clergyperson and an activist in addressing gender-based violence. While those aspects of my identity frequently overlap, my roles as a clergy member and as an advocate for survivors of rape culture feel too often like living in parallel worlds. The overlap of these identities seemed readily apparent to me, yet I was not hearing rape culture discussed by other clergy, nor was the church providing space or meaningful support in the fight against gender-based violence.

The perceived gap is where this research began. These two facets of my experience and identity cemented in me a desire to understand the intersection of faith and the lived realities of sexual violence. I interviewed scholars, preachers, and authors contributing to the discourse of the #metoo movement and who work to bridge the space between scripture, ritual, and community praxis. Participants are leaders in the focused and growing movement of addressing rape culture in theological scholarship and church teaching and preaching. Through semi-structured interviews, I sought understanding of three key lines of inquiry centering on the reasons and paths by which rape culture and church both intersect and interact. Through modified constructivist grounded theory analysis of these interviews, I determined that the church is indeed a contributor in the co-creation of rape culture. The duality of this conclusion is

that the church already possesses the pedagogical pathways necessary to serve as a site of disruptive education in rape culture instead.

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To women and men everywhere who have survived, my hope is that the future burn bright with possibilities and that you know you are more than your survivorship.

And to the unnamed woman in Judges 19 – you are still speaking, and we are listening.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION, SIGNIFICANCE, AND BACKGROUND

The Body and The Word

This project has been and is being born in the same span of years as I carried and delivered both of my daughters. I cannot imagine it being any other way. Both the acts of bearing life and carrying this project to full term, the sense of trepidation at every check-up, the fear around delivery, the absolute joy at seeing it take shape along the way, all three experiences are intimately entwined. The experience of becoming a mom and writing a dissertation provide a new understanding of how I connect the two major themes of my life and the two major themes of this project: The Body and the Word.

This dissertation focuses on the intersection of the body in the crisis of rape culture, and the word, which stands in for the many ways the church speaks, teaches, preaches, and shapes culture. Specifically, this research study engages leading scholar-practitioners in the field of religion and rape culture asking them to articulate and synthesize their understanding of the pedagogical processes involved in the church's relationship to rape culture. To understand this point of intersection is to first understand the way the body and the word are already woven together throughout the intricacies of Christian theology. While this project focuses on U.S. Protestant iterations of Christianity, this kinship and pain shared across body and word is a prevailing theme throughout Christian tradition.

The central theological symbols of Christianity are the body and the word. When I took vows of ordination as a teaching elder, I became a Minister of the Word and Sacrament. The Word is both a Biblical reference to Christ as the Living Word, and to the ministerial commitment to proclaim and preach the words of Scripture. The Word and act of sharing words

manifests in different ways for every church and every denomination, and reminds a central endeavor of organized Christianity. Sacrament is a word finding its roots in the Latin and French for *mystery* or *hallowed*, while also strongly connoting the concept of sacrifice (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Specific implications placed on the sacrifice of a body in the story of Christ and the last supper. Christian tradition teaches about bodies in abstraction, such as the espoused virginity of Mary, the images of Christ sharing meals with friends, the horrors of crucifixion. These central to the Christian tradition. Yet these themes are taught in ways that disembodiment and turn the bodily into the theoretical. Yet those ordination vows recall that the Christian tradition is founded on a commitment to caring for the minds and bodies of those on the margins (Isherwood, 2004). Preachers and pastors commit to teaching and proclaiming a prophetic vision of the world as an ancient text tells it might be. It is with those proclamations and themes in mind that I approached this dissertation. To do so, however, meant reckoning with the fact that much of what Christian preachers do and have done has to do with the use of words out of context, or words ignored, to continue to bear out the projects of white supremacy, colonialism, and patriarchy in a way that sacrifices many, many bodies along the way (Dube, 2000).

In recent weeks, a news article arose in some Protestant clergy social media circles. This article discussed a long-delayed acknowledgment by Iliff Seminary in Denver, a United Methodist institution of respected and progressive reputation (Worthington, 2018), regarding a book of Christian history bound in the skin of a Native American person (Patterson, 2020). This book proudly displayed in a glass box for nearly 80 years until 1947. At which point a then-president separated the book from the binding, promptly buried the skin of the Lenape Native American and the knowledge that this had happened at all (Patterson, 2020). In 2013 the current president of Iliff came to learn what his predecessors had all known, such a book existed and was

considered too sensitive an issue to broach openly lest donors be put off (Patterson, 2020). Since then, Professor Tink Tinker of the Osage nation and President Tom Wolf have been publicly working with partners in Native communities to seek ways reparations can begin to be made (Patterson, 2020).

This is, in many ways, the story of Christianity too. What clergy and scholars of religion say and do not say about bodies, what is and is not recognized as a body worth protecting, who speaks and who is silenced all scaffold our influence in the world. It is just this kind of silencing and protecting of a story within a binding of those harmed, showcasing the grim embodiment of the ways the church has contributed vastly to the persistence of rape culture today.

Christian traditions in the U.S. bear responsibility for co-creating rape culture as it currently exists and must play a role in dismantling rape culture. When referencing Christianity and Christians, I am rooting my definition in the same terminology as the World Council of Churches (WCC, 2021) which defines itself as:

The WCC brings together churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 110 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 500 million Christians and including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches. While the bulk of the WCC's founding churches were European and North American, today most member churches are in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific. There are now 350 member churches. As members of this fellowship, WCC member churches:

- are called to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship;

- promote their common witness in work for mission and evangelism;
- engage in Christian service by serving human need, breaking down barriers between people, seeking justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation;
- foster renewal in unity, worship, mission and service. (WCC, 2021)

The WCC's encapsulation of Christian identity is open to but does not currently include the Catholic church. However, given that this dissertation examines the trajectory of church through the ages, my operational definition of church does include Catholicism, alongside the hundreds of denominations included in the WCC. The intersection of religion and rape culture has its genesis in the early European iterations of Christianity, and those roots are necessarily included when describing rape culture's manifestations today.

Rape culture is an invisible system that permeates the way people live our lives, regardless of gender, age, or class, though its diverse manifestations often depend on social context. Rape culture reinforces patriarchy, a conforming approach to gender binary, and heteronormativity (Gavey, 2019). Rape culture impacts the way boys are coached to be aggressive and girls to be demure (Gavey, 2019). It is in the way women have been instructed to allure a heterosexual male gaze but always on guard, and encourage men to prioritize sex as a conquest. It is in the way the construct of virginity or purity is a most prized characteristic in women, and simultaneously abstinence in boys and men is shameful (Gavey, 2019). It permeates our advertising, media, dating and relationship culture, systems of education, and religion.

The emphasis of this dissertation is on the role of religion in the co-construction of rape culture, and church as a site of education to this end. I address two key research questions: How / Do scholar-practitioners and clergy interpret the pedagogical processes of U.S. Christian churches as related to the co-creation and perpetuation of rape culture? And how do participants

see those same pedagogical processes as sites of potential disruption to rape culture? In this chapter, I lay out the framework of the relationship between Christianity and rape culture, from both theological and pedagogical perspectives. From there, I clarify my positionality as a researcher and my investment in this topic of research, as well as identifying the gaps in existing research which this study aims to bridge.

Defining Rape Culture

Since the 1980's, formal scholarship about rape culture has centered on a model that “posits five underlying components . . . : traditional gender roles, sexism, adversarial sexual beliefs, hostility toward women, and acceptance of violence” (Johnson & Johnson, 2017, p. 2). In the context of this study, I am exploring these five components in public (cultural) and private (personal beliefs or ideology) manifestations of Christian theology as reified by the church as a site of education, both as a means of co-creating rape culture and as a potential site of disruption of rape culture.

Understanding Rape Culture and the Christian Church

The organized church, when taken as a plurality but not a monolith, has much to say regarding gender roles (Gabriel, 2015), hostility towards women (Vincent, Parrot, & Peterson, 2011), and acceptance of aggression as a male or masculine trait (Giovannelli & Jackson, 2012). The ostensibly foundational Christian scriptures as codified in the Bible describe instances of violence (sexual and otherwise), the roles of women in specific cultural contexts, and an entrenched patriarchy that includes descriptions of casual hostility towards women (Genesis 34:2, Deuteronomy 21:10, 2 Samuel 13:32, Judges 19, Hosea 2, Ezekiel 16, NRSV translation). In many church settings across history and today, Scripture is read as literal, and taken as prescriptive, rather than descriptive, allegorical, or culturally contextualized (Hoffman & Bartowski, 2008). Only in understanding this

dynamic can one unpack the relationship between rape culture in the U.S. and the role of Christian religion in the 21st century.

With much credit to the #metoo movement, rape culture is becoming a part of the common lexicon. Initiated by Tarana Burke, the #metoo movement sparked a global phenomenon whereby more than 19 million individuals shared through social media that they were part of the #metoo, indicating a self-disclosure of having experienced sexual harassment and/or assault (Me Too, 2021). The point of this movement was to prompt discussion and highlight the sheer overwhelming scope of how deeply rape culture impacts everyone, such that it is a traditionally invisible part of the fabric of everyday life (Me Too, 2021). Social anthropologist, author, and professor Roxane Gay (2017) writes extensively on rape culture and its intersection with white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. She deepens the definition of rape culture, asserting its ubiquity:

Statistics about the scope of sexual violence are always chilling, but even such accountings do little to capture the true breadth and scope of harassment and assault women face... The people we most need to reach — the men who are the cause of the problem and the women who feel moved to excuse them — are often resistant to the idea that rape culture even exists (Gay, 2017).

Denial of the existence of rape culture is a central characteristic of rape culture.

The Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) asserts that a person is sexually assaulted in the U.S. every 98 seconds (BJS, 2015). One out of every six women in the U.S. will be the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime (BJS, 2015). Men in the U.S. experience attempted or completed rape at rate of approximately one in every 33 men (BJS, 2015). Sexual assault is dramatically under-reported and under-prosecuted (BJS, 2015). The effects and implications of sexual assault are broad-reaching; survivors deal with physical

ramifications with often long-lasting emotional and psychological trauma (RAINN, 2016). Rape is the only crime in the U.S. where police, legislators, and the public at large regularly demand that the *victim* prove their innocence (RAINN, 2016). The culmination of these statistics, the pervasiveness of sexual assault, and the preceding definitions, it is clear that rape culture permeates the U.S.

The psychological, social, and emotional toll of rape culture contributes to the necessity of this project and other additional attempts to disrupt the status quo. Rape culture exists in a vastly complex series of systems. This study focuses on examination of one specific intersection: U.S. mainline Christianity and the creation of rape culture and its sustenance. Christianity's relationship with human sexuality manifests in a plurality of ways across the U.S., from Evangelical communities' articulated adherence to purity culture (Moslener, 2016), to the often-dehumanizing descriptions of LGBTQ individuals in denominational proceedings as a matter of public debate (Gehring, 2017), to the rare but more progressive-facing sex-positivity movements (Bolz-Weber, 2019). The United Church of Christ (UCC) and Unitarian Universalist (UU) traditions offer a shared curriculum "Our Whole Lives" (<https://www.uua.org/re/owl>) offers a deeply inclusive sex education from a faith perspective, including LGBTQ participants. "The Our Whole Lives" curriculum dedicates a specific lesson to abuse, exploitation, and rape culture, engaging with human sexuality as both an issue of faith and an issue of justice (www.ucc.org/justice_sexuality-education_our-whole-lives, <https://www.uua.org/re/owl>).

While some progress is being made, the church faces a tremendous uphill battle to address the damage done in its name. The use of religion as a weapon of colonization, and in some cases justification of slavery, is a systemic perpetuation of white supremacy tangled in any discussion of the U.S. church (Gafney, blogpost *When Scripture is Violent*, 17 September 2017).

An Unholy Trinity and the Word Responds: Rape Culture, Colonialism, and White Supremacy

Rape culture, colonial attitudes, and white hetero-patriarchal supremacy are inextricably linked, both in the ways each manifest, and in their central belief: that some bodies are less important and less human than others. Based on race, gender identity and expression, socio-economic position, or some combination thereof, these attitudes prioritize cis-heteronormativity, maleness, and whiteness as positions of power (Herrman, 2020). The result is the increased vulnerability and oppression of women, children, people of color, the poor, LGBTQ persons, the neurodivergent, the differently abled, and other marginalized identities, all of which are at heightened risk of victimization in rape culture (BJS, 2015). While the intricacy of connection between rape culture and other expressions of oppression warrant deep exploration, in this study I focus primarily on rape culture. It is necessary to acknowledge the intersectional nature of oppression.

Oppression is addressed in the church through liberation theology, whereby Christ is understood as an advocate for and peer alongside the oppressed, wherever and whomever they might be (Gutierrez, 1988). To understand the function of the church, I first explicate the pathways and pedagogies of oppression and liberation. Liberation theology is rooted in South American theological interpretations (Gutierrez, 1988). Theologians of the global South, including Gustavo Gutierrez, Juan Luis Segundo, and Samuel Escobar, articulate a theology founded in the belief that Christ is always on the side of the oppressed, and that it is a core responsibility of the church to be active on behalf of the poor and oppressed (Gutierrez, 1988). This was a largely Catholic enterprise and considered a fairly radical re-interpretation of Scripture, engaging the church as a front-line defender of the poor and opponent of oppressive

regimes and individuals (Gutierrez, 1988). Through preaching, teaching, and published analysis, these theologians began shaping a theology that empowered preachers and parishioners alike to become active in their opposition to oppression, and engaged with the building of justice and peace.

Liberation theology began as a predominantly male-led exercise, but in recent decades has found significant overlap with womanist and mujerista theological stances. Black and Latina theologies respectively, often read as responsive to the overwhelming whiteness of Feminist theology, whereby women of color theologically interpret from sites of multiple and intersecting wisdoms and oppressions (Gafney, 2017). In each of these theological approaches, there is an explicit intention that the lived realities of people are both reflected in and affected by the theological work as it is being done.

Returning the Word to the Body: Scholarship into Praxis

Scholarship into praxis refers to how theology is not meant to remain academic, but is instead a part of the reifying nature of the church. Theology reflects upon and co-creates the praxis of the church as an interpretive and educational site of the on-going work of lived faith (Osmer, 2008). In this study, I highlight liberation theology's emphasis on justice and God's alliance with the poor to bear on the ways the church continues to educate and function within a rape culture. My work is influenced by numerous feminist, womanist, and mujerista theologians, most particularly including Phyllis Trible, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Katie Geneva Cannon, Kelly Brown Douglas, Delores S. Williams, Emilie M. Townes, Mitzi J. Smith, and Wilda Gafney. Each has their unique roots and contributions to discourses on the lived realities of the female experience in relation to Christian doctrine, theology, and praxis and

reading their works through seminary and my early years of ministry shaped the way I read scripture and practice ministry.

If the church has influence, it is in the way it teaches. In spite of the church's historical and in some cases current role as a source of oppression, the church remains a source of strong social influence (Wildman et al., 2020). The church has historically been mobilized for education and justice issues (Bouwman, 2018). I posit that the church has also been co-creating rape culture through a combination of silencing (women, survivors, and specific texts), perpetuating rape mythology, and advocating for sex education that upholds rape culture. Furthermore, I posit that the #metoo movement (Me Too, 2021) provides the apt moment for the U.S. church to reckon with historical and current contributions to rape culture, learn, and take steps to become an active presence at the helm of Anti-Rape Culture work.

The Mandate of Christian Teachings to Disrupt Rape Culture

The church has not historically stood at the front lines of confronting sexual abuse or violence, even and especially when such abuse is happening under the auspices of religious leadership (McGillion & Grace, 2014). The church is not on the front lines of combatting the physical and spiritual violence of child sexual abuse, and yet it is within the mandate of Christian theology to stand in alignment with the most disregarded and marginalized populations of humanity, to prophesy an imagined future where lives are fully dignified (Gutierrez, 1988). The ostensible goal of Christianity, as framed in the teachings of Christ, exists to stand beside the oppressed, disrupt the status quo, and oppose systemic violence (Gutierrez, 1988). It exists, in short, rooted in the ethic of love or *agape*. *Agape* refers to one of the Greek words for love used in the New Testament of Biblical scripture, and is used to describe the unencumbered and absolute love that comes from God, and from Christ to those around him (Alank, Aland, &

Newman, 2007). People can demonstrate many other kinds of love (brotherly, romantic, etc.), but *agape* is reserved for the Holy and absolute love of God.

In his essay “An Experiment in Love,” Dr. King (1958) wrote:

At the center of nonviolence stands the principle of love. The nonviolent resister would contend that in the struggle for human dignity, the oppressed people of the world must not succumb to the temptation of becoming bitter or indulging in hate campaigns. To retaliate in kind would do nothing but intensify the existence of hate in the universe.

Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate. This can only be done by projecting the ethic of love to the center of our lives.

An ethic of love insists on recognizing the full humanity of others. The church’s identity as rooted in love is in direct contradiction with the perpetuation of rape culture, and, therefore, a reconciliation is required.

The church is a site of education that has been virtually silent on rape culture, an issue that impacts people in the pews of every church community (Yung, 2014). As such, the church has a unique opportunity and moral obligation to shift the tide of rape culture. Through this research study, I seek to examine and elucidate the role of the church as an educational site in co-creating, perpetuating, and interrupting rape culture in the U.S.

Researcher Positionality

My own pedagogical framework, as informed by feminist and critical pedagogy, is rooted in my experience as a practitioner of ministry and a student of education. I’m an ordained pastor/teaching elder who has served in five different ecclesiastical settings. My framework reflects these experiences in ways that are further explored in Chapter Three. My ministry and

scholarship are both shaped the belief that all lives and bodies have inherent worth. Pedagogical choices must both reflect and honor that worth.

My sense of positionality and subjectivity moves beyond identity and examines the systemic frameworks which shape the spaces I occupy. As a person of faith and an ordained clergy person, I am personally invested in the lived impact of faith communities. I have experienced this impact from both a leadership position as a pastor and preacher as well as a parishioner. In each instance the community of faith has profoundly shaped my day-to-day life and broader experience of the world.

As a woman and a feminist, I am profoundly curious about the lives of women and the power dynamics which shape the way we move in the world. I am aware of the ways my own behaviors and experiences are shaped. I acknowledge living as a cis-hetero female within a rape culture. I have tried to minimize myself in an effort to feel safe. I have watched and even encouraged other women to adapt to a culture that engages all of us as would-be victims rather than running counter to the culture. I am aware of all these voices and influences on my life and my body and am keen to emancipate myself as much as anyone else. I see strength in honoring the dignity of all people and wonder at what an institution (like church) might be capable of if women were truly honored in their full humanity. As a researcher, I am eager to add to the existing body of work and discussion surrounding the emancipatory work regarding rape culture. I see space in the research as connected to religious institutions. With continued efforts, I work to contribute to the propulsion toward a more just future.

Finally, as a human, the mandate of both my faith and my experience as a person is to seek the humanity and dignity of all people. I see and experience the persistence of rape culture as an affront to the dignity of humanity. To let such an affront go uncontested would be a failure of moral courage and basic humanity alike.

Gaps in the Existing Research and Literature

Existing literature on the intersection of religion and rape culture is in rare supply. Topics that range closest to this specific intersection are in feminist theological study (Ruether, 2011), womanist theology (Cannon, Townes, & Sims, 2011), mujerista theology (Isasi-Diaz, 1996), and liberation theology (Gutierrez, 1988). Of those, only a handful directly address issues of sexual violence (Trible, 1984). Furthermore, among those dealing with sexual violence, nearly all contend with it within the context of Biblical literature, rather than as a modern and ongoing problem requiring action (Schroeder, 2007).

The primary ethics of feminist theology are the anti-patriarchal centralizing of the female experience as collaborative, empathic, and anti-violent (Ruether, 1998; Fiorenza & Collins, 1985; Daly, 1994). The epistemological understanding of this dissertation is that authority moves in churches, broadly speaking, from clergy to the congregation to the wider community. Therefore, disrupting the silence of rape culture would logically flow from addressing the pedagogy of preaching (most often the role of clergy), then outward to discussions and educational opportunities which address rape culture. From there, the epistemological movement proposed in this dissertation suggests a move to reclaim space for lament as a part of healing from rape culture, as well as to action to disrupt rape culture beyond the church. Chapter Two contains a fuller explanation of this framework. That said, there is limited literature defining and directing the work of building pedagogically sound approaches to disrupting rape culture in and through the church. It is my hope that the current research will contribute to meeting that need.

Finally, and most significantly, given the extraordinarily high rates of sexual assault and ubiquity of rape culture across the U.S. (Yung, 2014), it is socially and morally necessary to speak out against both sexual assault and the rape culture which permits it. Sites of education,

particularly ones with as many public moral stances as religious institutions tend to declare, have the rare opportunity for supporting liberation in ways that are public, and effective. The church is positioned to effectively contribute to the disruption of the rape culture it has co-created.

An Introduction to the Study, Limitations, and Significance

This research study followed a modified constructivist grounded theoretical analysis of interviews with leading scholar-practitioners in womanist and feminist theological traditions, through a critical feminist theological lens. The interviews focused on building a better understanding of the pedagogical processes by which the U.S. church perpetuates and might disrupt rape culture as held by these scholar-practitioners. The study will be a first attempt to gather the perspectives of these leading scholars and formulate an epistemological theory that will empower faith communities along with their leaders to better understand ways to disrupt rape culture.

The limitations of this study include that the perspectives gathered are select. Therefore, they may represent a narrow and specific field of experience that cannot translate universally across all church contexts. Only one participant is Black, and only one participant is male, further limiting the scope of experiences reflected. Given the gender-based disparity that remains central to many Christian denominations (Masci, 2014), the collected wisdom of female scholar-practitioners may go unheeded by some. Although, the potential for impact on the lived realities of adherents, leaders, and broader society are tremendous if these data and accompanying analysis can be pivoted to create pedagogical strategies to counteract rape culture.

In the paragraphs and pages ahead, I share the path of this project. Chapter Two clarifies the conceptual framework that grounds and guides this dissertation in the principles of critical, liberation, and feminist, womanist, and mujerista thought. Chapter Two also articulates the

review of the existing body of literature on the intersection of religion and rape culture, which formed my line of inquiry and selection of participants interviewed. Chapter Three describes research method and methodology, including my decision to pursue a modification of constructivist grounded theory in analysis of interview transcripts. Chapter Four presents the findings of interviews and transcript analysis, first in a single-case analysis highlighting the striking features of each interview, then in a cross-case analysis by theme. Chapter Five includes further analysis, synthesis of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future work to further pursue the priorities in this project.

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter begins with a brief explanation of the conceptual framework of this project. I discuss concepts of rape mythology, accompanied by a review of existing literature examining the intersection of religion and rape culture and positioning the church as a site of education. Furthermore, this chapter considers the nature of authority in Christian contexts, beginning with religious history and continuing through the transmission of authority in the U.S. church today. Next, I discuss the discourse of rape culture as it is created in and by the church. Subsequently, I review the pedagogical processes by which this discourse is created, moved, and reified in and beyond the church. Finally, this chapter completes with an exploration of a possible future in which the systemic perpetuation of rape culture by religion can be disrupted.

A Conceptual Framework and Pedagogical Framework

Fig 1. maps the conceptual framework I have designed and employed in service of this dissertation. This figure is not an absolute representation of the way knowledge and authority moves in every faith community, but rather is an approximation of the way it moves in many mainline denominations (Burton, 2014). In my conceptual design, the flow of authority is depicted along pedagogical pathways of homiletics, Christian education, and mission.

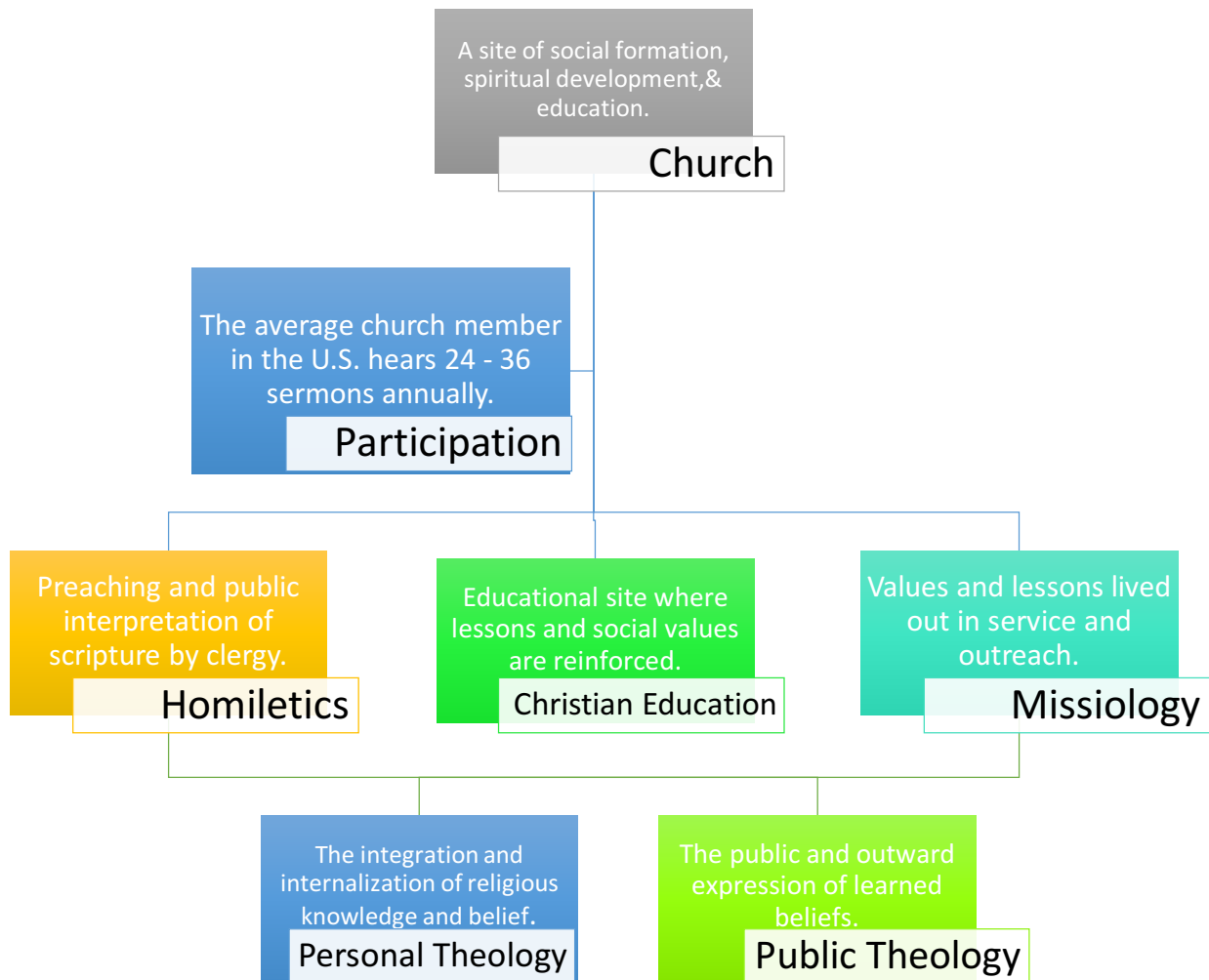


Figure. 1 Pedagogical flow of knowledge in church settings

The church is a collaborative and self-reifying project, in which the participants frequently form, inform, and reform the subject matter covered in these educational pathways. Homiletics, Christian Education, and Missiology are each influenced by who is speaking, who is hearing, and who is responsible for the source material. As priorities such as upholding rape mythology or denouncing gender based violence are communicated along these paths, but in ways that are constantly shifting. Just as individual participants shape the content, individuals interpret Scripture in myriad ways. A foundational claim I make in this study is that Scripture is a pedagogical foundation and simultaneously a subjectively experienced source material. While

some view scripture as immutable, literal, or inerrant, others view scripture as divinely inspired but held in the hands of translators, storytellers, politically motivated decision makers, and listeners today. I fall into the latter group.

My positionality in and understanding of scripture is shaped by womanist, feminist, and mujerista theologies. A central tenet of mujerista theology is the vision of collectivity, in that all who participate in this theological praxis (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). It is indeed a praxis, more than a simple reflective tool (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Self-liberating work protects against in-community fracturing, driving towards shared experiences, goals, and a reclamation of God's presence, image, and drive in the lives of Latina Christians (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Mujeristas strive to reveal structural systems of oppression in the lives of Latinas, be they systems of racial, sexual, or theological injustice (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). The praxis of mujerista theology seeks to dismantle internalized oppression, as well as external systems, and to name, frame, and build different possible futures (Isasi-Diaz, 1996).

Founding godmother of mujerista theology, Ada-Maria Isasi-Diaz names "*Mujerista* theology (as that which) articulates the religious understandings of Hispanic women. It always uses a liberative lens, which requires placing oneself at the core of our own struggling *pueblo*" (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Mujerista theology embraces an unbounded chronology that resists and rejects a binary concept of future and past and, in that, offers a decolonized version of Christian experience (Isasi-Diaz, 1996).

Rooted in these theologies, I approach this project with firm belief that the church has the possibility of profoundly impacting individual lives and societies. The church educates in myriad ways, both explicit and implicit (Osmer, 2005). In Protestant traditions, clergy are referred to as Teaching Elders and the role of pastor as community educator has deep historical roots (Osmer, 2011). Today, churches run Sunday school programs for children and adults, and remain one of few functions where adults gather (virtually or in person) and all hear the same message taught at

once, ostensibly from an individual trained to read, translate, and communicate the stories of the Biblical text to a contemporary congregation of co-learners (Osmer, 2011). The primary pedagogical pathways by which the church functions as a site of social influence and multi-generational education are established by researchers in practical theology (Osmer, 2005; Osmer 2011). While there are certainly variations on these pathways, the primary foci of this study are the homiletical act (preaching), Christian education or Bible study, and missiology.

At the intersection of religion and rape culture, I posit that the following phenomena occur: (1) The homiletical act is used to perpetuate purity mythology and rape mythology while simultaneously continue the silencing of scriptures addressing sexual violence; (2) Bible studies and Christian education perpetuate rape culture in similar ways, with the addition of reinforcement of harmful gender norms and heteronormativity; (3) Mission ideology is often built on the scaffolding of colonialism and white supremacy, inextricably linked with the disembodying and devaluing of certain lives. In each of these pedagogical pathways, then, church leaders and participants learn and educate about what the preacher, a stand-in for the church and a transmitter of the authority of scripture or God, accepts or decries. What I seek to understand, based on this foundation, is how leading scholars and practitioners understand the phenomenon of the intersection of church and rape culture. Furthermore, I explore how these leaders imagine a possible disruption of rape culture via that same point of intersection, particularly in relationship to the three pedagogical pathways outlined above. I approached a select group of scholars and practitioners in the hopes of creating a rich data set that contributes to greater understanding of this framework as it presently functions and how it might function instead.

Rape Culture and Rape Mythology Further Defined

To meaningfully engage in this study, I discuss common definitions of rape culture and rape mythology. Rape culture refers to the combination of statistical realities about sexual violence in a given culture and the social, political, economic, and religious norms that uphold and perpetuate sexual violence as uncommon (Me Too, 2021). Additionally, rape culture places the responsibility on victims (Me Too, 2021). In cases when sexual violence does occur, rape culture promotes it as an acceptable part of life (metoomvmt.org). In the U.S., one in six women and one in 33 men experience an attempted sexual assault in their lifetime (BJS, 2015).

The phrase rape culture is deliberately use instead to convey the expansive nature of a society in which sexual violence is pervasive and normative. Culture connotes that which is ubiquitous, surrounding us and yet often invisible, the ways of life that define society even though they often go unnamed and unnoticed (hooks, 1994). The use of the term rape culture as opposed to a *culture of sexual violence* is deliberate resistance to the sanitization of rape culture.

While rape culture disproportionately victimizes women, it is a shared scar across gender expressions and experiences (metoomvmt.org). Experiencing sexual violence increases the likelihood of psychological disorders, addiction, eating disorders, risk taking behaviors and suicide (RAINN, 2018). It de-humanizes women and men alike by perpetuating inequality, objectification, violence, and justifiable distrust. It dehumanizes victims, overwhelmingly women, by treating them as objects (Edwards et al., 2011). It also dehumanizes perpetrators by removing the humanity of victims (Me Too, 2021).

Rape culture has broad impact across the gender spectrum (metoomvmt.org). For the scope of this research project, I am primarily focused on female-identifying victims of rape culture. This is in no way to undermine the validity of the experiences of male, non-binary, and

others who are victims of rape culture, merely to set reasonable boundaries on the capacities of this study.

Rape Mythology

Rape culture is built on rape mythology, a term that refers to web of widely-held beliefs that rape is over-reported, hyperbolized, and, when it does occur, it is primarily the fault of the victim (Flood & Pease, 2009). It stems from a deep desire to believe that we can protect ourselves and others by reiterating the message that rape is caused or prevented by victim behaviors (Flood & Pease, 2009). Rape mythology is used as a cudgel to control the behavior of women, and it is just as often rooted in a desire to believe that rape is not as common, random, or ubiquitous as statistics reliably insist it is (metoomvmt.org). Here, I am speaking only of the way rape mythology functions, as its roots and histories have been well elsewhere (Kelner, 2013). It is, however, worth noting that these are myths widely held as truth (Edwards et al., 2011). They are not universally perpetuated by malevolence so much as narrow spheres of knowledge, experience, and understanding (Edwards & Nagouse., 2017). This is worth noting because the results of rape mythology are profoundly evil, and it can be a struggle to separate the harm of these results from assigning malevolent intent to those who perpetuate these mythologies. While there was likely no inaugural meeting of the patriarchy club that elected to gaslight women for centuries, it is imperative to emphasize the impact over the intent of rape mythologists. Supported by the socialization of women to be passive, these myths insist that rape can be prevented by choices made by victims (Davies et al., 2012). Victims referring to cisgender women, for rape mythology typically disavows the existence of male or transgender victims (Davies et al., 2012). The narrative of rape mythology insists on heteronormativity because that too becomes a way to explain away victims, and normalize and maintain harmful gender

stereotypes (Davies et al., 2012). That is, if there is no such thing as a male or transgender victim, then rape becomes a lesser threat. Homophobia and transphobia are intrinsically linked to rape mythology (Davies et al., 2012). Rape mythology is sewn throughout the broader rape culture, which insists that certain physical bodies are more worthy of respect, protection, care or autonomy than others. This is an unwritten and minimally articulated rule based on upholding systems which benefit and maintain existing power structures of whiteness, maleness, and heteronormativity (Davies et al., 2012).

One way this shift is being framed in scholarly circles speaks to the way churches enforce unwritten and unspoken codes of behavior, presentation, and dress in women (Ross et al., 2019). Rape mythology relies heavily on the politics of respectability, which refers to the illusion that behaving, dressing, speaking or presenting in a particular way is what determines whether or not one will be victimized (Flood & Pease, 2009). Put another way, if one is a victim of sexual assault, then the politics of respectability insist that they are in some way responsible for it. If only they had acted more in keeping with some imagined social standard, this would not have happened. Rape mythology further insists that certain behaviors coded as *non-victim* can protect all would-be rape victims from systems of inherent misogyny and sexual violence (Davies et al., 2012). By insisting that rape is preventable based on clothing choices, a woman's choice to avoid being alone, avoid drinking alcohol, or maintain purity by abstaining from sex before heterosexual marriage, rape mythologists effectively silence the lived experiences of rape survivors (O'Hara, 2012). Survivors are consistently given the message that they should not speak up and, if they do, they will not be believed (Carr et al., 2014). This is not a set of beliefs held by merely an ignorant few. This is part of the pervasive national culture that immediately interrogates the past and present lives of any rape victim (Abrams et al., 2003). Knowledge that

she will likely be both dragged through the mud and disbelieved should she pursue prosecution or simply articulate her experiences is one of many reasons that so few victims of sexual assault report their experiences (Viki & Abrams, 2002).

Rape culture cannot be extracted from colonialism, white supremacy, and hetero-patriarchy, an ugly counter-trinity that shapes much of Christian history and modern praxis. Dr. Musa Dube, a feminist theologian from Botswana, names the Bible as “imperializing literature”, and her analysis is echoed among others in the school of postcolonial feminist thought (Dube, 2000). Dube argues, and others echo, that the discourse of modern scholarship in Biblical analysis and analysis of church praxis is essentially tied to naming and understanding the historical inextricability of Christian history and white supremacist patriarchal colonialism (Dube, 2000). The goal of Dube’s work and others is not to dismantle Christianity but rather to dismantle the harmful practices that weaponized Christianity as manifestations of the counter-trinity. For Christianity to begin to heal the harmful practices of rape mythology laden patriarchy, white supremacy, and colonialism that brought us to the modern day, an educational shift is required (Dube, 2000). This educational shift will be defined by decolonization and the naming and disarming of rape mythology (Dube, 2000).

Rape culture is, in some ways, universal, with elements that cross race, religion, and nationality. Protests have become commonplace in recent years, from Denver (Weis, 2020) to India’s Uttar Pradesh state (Ganguly, 2020), from Kazakhstan (Wood, 2019), to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Ahmed, 2020). The unity of people protesting the casual acceptance of rape culture is a galvanizing force, but one built on the difficult truth that rape culture is globally pervasive (UN Women, 2019). At the same time, rape culture is nuanced to the communities in which it lives. Eighteen-year-old college women in the U.S. might become party to so-called

whisper networks, whereby women acknowledge they will receive no protection or due process if a campus rape is reported creating informal networks of protection for one another (Kaplan, 2017). In Colombia, widespread protest over the rape of Indigenous children by Columbian soldiers and officers are ongoing, as hundreds of cases have been reported and thousands are suspected (Moloney, 2020).

Rape culture is an intersectional issue. At this intersection, oppression is not measured by degrees of severity, rather by intersecting identities can create multi-dimensional understanding of how rape culture moves and changes. The manifestation of rape culture might look different depending on myriad factors. It is important to understand it as a key aspect of the culture in which the U.S. based Christian church functions today. The U.S. church is neither monolithic nor did it leap into its current manifestation from a vacuum. The historical and social context of church also requires explanation and definition for this phenomenon to be thoroughly explored.

Authority: Historical, Present, and the Genesis of the Discourse

Understanding the history, systems, and nature of Christianity in juxtaposition with rape culture means visiting early discourses and ancient texts, most widely accessed through translations of the ancient Hebraic Old Testament and the ancient Greek New Testament (Alank, Aland, & Newman, 2007), or modern language translations of both. The authorship and codification of Biblical scripture is the subject of innumerable scholarly works and are not the primary subjects of this project. However, it is important that readers are aware that the authority of the text and its presumed inerrancy and immutability are the subject of much debate in ecclesiastical circles and represent a fundamental divide in interpretation of the Biblical story (Powery, 2012). This divide has profound implications in the lived realities of adherents (Rouse et al., 2019).

Scripture is a messy, collaborative, self-warring collection of texts that is used as both the spiritual source material and a guide for understanding leadership models within the church (Village, 2006). The Bible is seen as both the foundation of authority and the litmus test of who might wield it (Village, 2006; Rouse et al., 2019). Primarily, the authority to lead is focused in the prophetic line (Clements, 1983). Throughout Biblical literature, the ancient prophetic role was one which consisted of a confluence of divine appointment, political leadership, and brilliant charisma (Clements, 1983). Two thousand years after Christ was killed on a cross, the role of preacher still retains remnants of the original prophetic scaffolding (Lyter Bright, 2018). Few denominations believe that their community leaders have a direct line to God, but many view their word as elevated, their sense of truth as heightened, and their wisdom as something worth seeking (Lyter Bright, 2018).

Texts are translated, interpreted, and transmitted most often through the preacher or teacher and primarily via the homiletical act, the lived stories told and the ways people behave in the world as members of a faith community (Rouse et al., 2019). Homiletics refers to the practice of preaching, a form of oratory that combines study, story-telling, and interpretation which is meant to have an explanatory and exhortative effect on the listening congregation (Gross, 2002, Childers, 1998). The path to the pulpit is one marked by significant challenges and socially-driven restrictions. The root of preaching authority stems from the institutional legacy of theological education in seminaries, divinity schools, and similar training grounds (Powery, 2012). The silencing of certain voices and the prohibition of certain bodies from the pulpit has a long and impactful history.

Clergy authority today and who may contribute to the discourse

Today, most U.S. mainline denominations require seminary education of their clergy leadership (Pew Research Center, 2015). While many translations of the Bible are ubiquitously available in the U.S. today (biblegateway.com), the knowledge of Biblical text history and creation is most thoroughly taught to and by clergy (Pew Research Center, 2015). By the time the story reaches people in the pews today, it has been through hundreds if not thousands of minds and iterations (Rouse et al., 2019). While every Christian may wish to believe they have come to their own conclusions about their faith, it is more accurate to state that all are shaped by the stories we hear and who gets to tell them (Rouse et al., 2019).

Accessing and contributing to this discourse is often limited by gender-based gate-keeping, among other strictures, including barriers of economics, race, sexual identity, and others (Pew Research Center, 2015). This literature review focuses primarily on gender-based barriers, which are being challenged in an on-going way, albeit a slow-moving one. Despite the early scripture's affirmation of the leadership qualities of women, the medieval church was insistent that women were insufficient to lead and debated hotly the very humanity of women (Ruether, 1983).

Augustine and other Church Fathers never denied that women had a redeemable soul.

But, nevertheless, they believed that the female in her specific femaleness, psychic and bodily, was the opposite of divine... The female is defined by medieval theologians (such as Thomas Aquinas) who use this Aristotelian tradition, as a non-normative human who does not possess human nature fully. (Ruether, 1983, pp. 139-140)

It is this deeply rooted sense of the inferiority and problematic nature of females referring to the belief that Eve is a stand-in for all women (Ruether, 1998). She is the symbol of sin and the fall

of humanity from grace which is used to justify the exclusion of women from leadership roles (Ruether, 1998). Women were and, in many places, remain, forbidden from preaching, teaching, or in any way leading in theological communities (Pew Research, 2015). Where women are still shut out, their voices are silenced, and their stories are unconsidered. Their experiences and narratives do not contribute to the broad understanding of the Christian narrative.

The tree of Christian stories is therefore truncated. If a literature curriculum includes only writing done by white, heterosexual Anglo-European men from 1950 and beyond, a student's understanding of what literature is would be fundamentally flawed. So too is the Christian story reaching those in the pews every Sunday necessarily incomplete. The accepted way of knowing is missing many of its roots and this impacts the discourse in significant ways, particularly where religion intersects with rape culture.

Mujerista, womanist, and feminist theologies each provide a powerful counter-narrative, based on the premise of the Biblical figure of Wisdom as an approximation of the Feminine Divine. Biblically speaking, Wisdom is a woman. Ancient wisdom refers to that which, theologically and otherwise women know in their bones and sinew. It also refers to that which is consistently dismissed and delegitimized in Western epistemology (Isasi-Diaz, 1996).

Hispanic women widely agree that, though we make up the vast majority of those who participate in the work of the churches, we do not participate in deciding what work is to be done; we do the praying, but our understanding of the God to whom we pray is ignored. (Isasi-Diaz, 1996)

Mujeristas, therefore, are cognizant of the ways their work is needed and the ways their knowledge is dismissed, because they can envision an alternate possibility in which they are valued because of, rather than in spite of, the fullness of their being.

Self-knowledge is embedded in theological truths for *mujeristas*, though these truths are deeply buried by systematic and systemic oppression (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Castillo (1994) juxtaposes the mythology of Eve as downfall of women and humanity. There is another possible reading of this concept when interpreted through *mujerista* theology (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Ancient wisdom that comes from an eternal knowledge embodied in women (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). It is then worthy of considering just how much the church has lost by doubly silencing women's voices and the truths held in women's bodies, women's ways of knowing. It is not difficult to see the ways such silencing props up a rape culture within and beyond the theology of Christianity across geography and centuries.

Existing Literature and Discourse: Where Rape Culture and Religion Meet

“We must acknowledge our own personal herstories and collective experiences. We must identify the violence perpetrated against us. We must learn to practice spiritual healing with the same diligence as we do physical healing.”

- Carroway, 1993

Existing Literature

In the subsequent section, I discuss the existing theories and primary writings that approaches the intersection of religion and rape culture from the perspectives of feminist, womanist, and *mujerista* theologies. These theories and theologies are fluid and flowing. The bodies of literature on which they are constructed are growing all the time. Being fixed to a single point or un-changing definition runs counter to the values that course through most feminist theological perspectives (Winter, 1992). Yet at the heart of feminist theology exist a few central ethical principles. To reiterate, feminist theology is consistently anti-patriarchal, centralizing of the female experience, collaborative, empathic, and anti-violent (Ruether, 1998;

Fiorenza, 1985; Daly, 1994). The perspectives of feminist theology are as varied as women themselves. In Lois K. Daly's (1994) compendium *Feminist Theological Ethics*, everything from eco-feminism to reproductive choice to ethics of war are addressed through a feminist lens.

Although the ethics of Christian feminist theology are not singularly codified anywhere, they can be viewed as a body in alignment with Feminist theory. Being fixed to a single point or un-changing definition runs counter to the values that course through most feminist theological perspectives (Winter, 1992). Yet at the heart of feminist theology exist a few central ethical principles. To reiterate, feminist theology is consistently anti-patriarchal, centralizing of the female experience, collaborative, empathic, and anti-violent (Ruether, 1998; Fiorenza, 1985; Daly, 1994). The perspectives of feminist theology are as varied as women themselves. In Lois K. Daly's (1994) compendium *Feminist Theological Ethics*, everything from eco-feminism to reproductive choice to ethics of war are addressed through a feminist lens.

At the center of Christian feminist theology is a desire to liberate both people and texts from the oppression and violence of the historically male standpoint of Christianity (Ruether, 1983). Feminist theology seeks a more just world. "The world as it is constituted by men stands in authority over that of women. It is that part of the world from which our kind of society is governed and from which what happens to us begins...." (Smith, 2014, p. 40). The naming and countering of rape culture is a necessary concern for the work of feminist theologians unpacking a Christian history largely codified by men (Ruether, 1998). By working to de-codify rape culture from the church "... feminism expresses the explicit application of (a) new egalitarian theology of creation to gender, and hence a judgement on patriarchy as unjust and evil, rather than as the order of nature and the will of God" (Ruether, 1983, p. 27). The lens of Christian

feminist theology clarifies that rape culture is undoubtedly unjust, evil, and de-humanizing, and it is therefore curious that so much of Christianity could act so antithetically (Ruether, 1998).

Biblical literature is largely considered the root of education and action in the church, and it is therefore a logical central codex to understanding the church (Rogers & Blade, 1998). In canonical Biblical literature there are a variety of instances of sexual violence against women and men, slaves and royalty, for a wide variety of reasons. Rape functions as a metaphor used by prophets, specifically Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Rape is a means of displaying military might, as in Numbers 31 NRSV translation, in which Moses leaves the virgin female survivors of a military invasion as the only ones to live, giving them to the soldiers. Rape is codified in law in Deuteronomy 22 (NRSV translation), in which any man who rapes a young woman must pay fifty pieces of silver to the woman's father and then marry her. Rape is used as punishment of captives in Zechariah 14:2 and Lamentations 5:11(NRSV translation). It happens to specific people (Tamar in 2 Samuel 13, Dinah in Genesis 34, NRSV translation), and to nameless strangers (the Levite's concubine in Judges 19, NRSV translation). Sexual violence is part of the Biblical story.

Texts of Terror and Other Foundational Literature

Theologian Phyllis Trible's book, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* is the seminal piece of literature in work placing Christianity in conversation with rape culture (1984). The phrase *text of terror* refers to a subset of scripture that specifically deals with sexual violence against women. Trible's work centers on four specific stories. Hagar in Genesis 16, Tamar in 2 Samuel 13, the unnamed woman (sometimes also known as the Levite's concubine) in Judges 19, and Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11 (NRSV translation, Trible, 1984). These four instances are representative of the specific modes and motivations of rape: rape of a

slave, rape for the sake of gaining social power, rape as sacrifice offered to save others (such as males) from suffering, and rape as an act of war.

Trible (1984) codifies prior interpretation and serves as the trunk of this aspect of the feminist theological tree. She highlights four stories as a unique genre within Biblical literature, ones in which female voices are nearly or completely silenced, victims frequently go unnamed or under-characterized, and the subjects of the violent treatment do not function except as subjects of suffering (Trible, 1984). There is much suffering in the Bible, yet these stories stand out in their cruelty, the substitutionary use of women to protect men from suffering violence, and the abject brutality featured in each story. Trible (1984) writes from a feminist perspective, emphasizing the necessity of voice, community, and equality. The abuse of these women as they become subjects to the tyranny of men around them is in violation of any ethos of common humanity, mercy, and love. The move toward critical feminist theology is rooted in a desire to maintain a relationship with Christian beliefs and practice while acknowledging the ways those beliefs are inherently problematic. It is resistant to the dismissal of Christianity as a whole, and an opportunity for feminists of faith to reclaim the liberating aspects from and of their faith.

The texts of terror are uncommon knowledge, even among those entrenched in spiritual practice. None of the texts of terror appear in the Revised Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of recommended preaching texts for preachers in a dozen mainline faiths (Consultation, 1992). The Revised Common Lectionary is meant to be a thorough treatment of the Bible (Consultation, 1992). The reasons for the absence of texts of terror from the Common Lectionary are complex and debatable. Suitability for diverse audiences, theological belief in the text as holistic representation of the word of God, and likelihood of homiletical preferences all

determine which scriptures belong in the Common Lectionary and which do not (Consultation, 1992). The texts of terror are kept silent.

The impact of the absence of texts of terror from the Common Lectionary is arguably the effective silencing of the lived experiences of rape survivors in the pews on an average Sunday. Imagine that the practices and beliefs of a community are reflected in the curation of a curriculum. That curriculum, here, might include the design of worship, sermons preached, and material covered in Sunday school. The absence of the texts of terror reflects the privilege of particular knowledge and experiences (Ruether, 1983). If the collective decision of the church is that rape in the Bible is too sensitive, complicated, or inappropriate as a topic for study, a survivor will not know nor trust that their own lived experience will be treated with compassion. Perhaps in hearing and knowing the extent to which the Bible acknowledges sexual assault, a survivor in the pews might hear their own story resonate, knowing that they too are seen and heard.

The work of understanding the interwoven nature of liberation theology and feminist theology is rooted in re-reading of ancient texts (Ruether, 1983). Scholars must begin by acknowledging that the Bible is often used as a tool of oppression, patriarchal in nature, against women and much of the non-Western world (Kwok, 2005). From there, the concern of use versus intent can be called into question (Dube, 2000). When the Bible is used as a colonizing tool, then re-imagining of the texts as liberating can function in a way that decolonizes both the texts and the reader or listener experience (Kwok, 2005).

Here, I want to pause to consider the complications of speaking about anything as feminist. Feminist theology is a meaningful term, both overlapping with and distinct from its sisters in womanist and mujerista theologies. Feminist theology is rooted in women's experiences and

most broadly codified by white women (DiMiele, 2020). Womanist theology is rooted in the experiences of Black women (Thomas, 1998). The body of work that is encapsulated by the heading womanist theology is broad and global. Womanist theology names and celebrates the unique theologies of Black women (Williams, 1987).

Mujerista theology is rooted in the experiences of Latina women, celebrating that the personal is a gift to the universal and theology is always rooted in lived experience (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Mujerista theologies again have a long-continued history of being codified in response to particular oppressions and ways of knowing that are a part of the Latina experience (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). To pretend all three could be accurately summarized as only feminist theology misses the way these three theologies intersect, interact, and shape the discourse. Here, all three are essential for understanding rape culture in a meaningful way.

De-colonizing texts by and for predominately white, middle class congregations in the U.S. is one task, but dismantling rape culture also requires attention to the limitations of what feminist theology can achieve. Scholars have argued extensively that an inclusive and liberating form of feminist theology must disavow the kinds of essentialist perspectives on poverty that are rife in the church (Vuola, 2002). Intentional inclusion of the feminist theological perspectives of women from the global south, of varying social and economic experiences, and of varying education levels is essential to the study of employing feminist theology to counter rape culture. Here, the critical theoretical perspective is vital. The voices of the oppressed are central to dismantling oppression.

Breaking Silence as a Central Ethic of Feminist Theology

Centralizing female experience must begin by breaking the silence so often enforced on women and disrupting the taboo of never naming rape culture. Naming the texts of terror in a

worship context is a large and anti-patriarchal step that aims toward empathic and collaborative efforts identifying the common experience of rape culture, and dismantling the violence rape culture holds (Trible, 1984). Amplifying voices is a crucial element in the work of advocacy and support for survivors of sexual assault (metoomvmt.org). Here, I refer to an emphasis on creating room for naming, emoting, processing, expressing anger, experiencing sadness, etc. (Me Too, 2021). These emotions are frequently treated as off limits for women in Christian contexts wherein modes of behavior are geared towards quiet, supportive participation (Ross et al., 2019).

The process of lament has a rich Biblical tradition and pairs beautifully with healing practices, for which survivor support groups advocate (Messina, 2015). In feminist theologian Sharon D. Welch's (1990) *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, the naming of painful memories is a necessary act in the processing of experience and the dismantling of oppression. Voicing the texts of terror is one avenue by which the voices of survivors can be amplified, silence broken, and the dismantling of rape culture can begin in the church. Identifying and publicly dismantling the notions of purity and virginity as they contribute to rape mythologies is a powerful action toward elevating the voices and lived experiences of women (Ross et al., 2019).

Counterpoint Perspective

There are, inevitably, arguments against such interpretations of Scripture and praxis. Many adherents believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God and is sociologically fixed in the time it was written (Pew Research, 2015). Yet all interpretation is contextual, including the interpretation that insists on the inflexibility of Scripture. Each theological decision is made by interpreting the material available and discerning perceived validity in one's own context. The presence of theological voices in the Civil Rights movement (Booker, 2014), for example, and

on the frontlines of numerous social justice efforts offer a contextual interpretation that Scripture does apply to contemporary circumstances (Bauwmann, 2018). This presents an effective counterpoint to the idea that scripture lives in some untouchable bubble, never applicable to the modern world. It would appear its applicability is determined only by whether it supports the argument of the interpreter at hand.

Other contrarian voices would disregard the theories posed in this paper on the grounds that they amount to proof-texting, a term which refers to cherry-picking texts to prove a larger point (Allen & Swain, 2011). Proof-texting can be a problematic habit, particularly among preachers, when a specific agenda is being pushed (Allen & Swain, 2011). While the texts of terror do offer a narrow aperture on scripture, they are examples of a larger pattern, not stories to be read or interpreted in contextual isolation. Tribble (1984), Fiorenza (1984), Collins (1985) and Daly (1994) have revisited these same texts with repeated fervor, each maintaining that these stories represent a pattern. Tribble (1984) explores the texts of terror using literary criticism, analysis of the original Hebrew text, and a feminist lens to highlight the similarities in the stories which center on the silenced voices of women, the apparent absence of God, and the particular cruelty of humanity. While elements of these themes certainly appear in other stories throughout scripture, they are a shared refrain in the texts of terror.

Beyond Tribble's (1984) seminal work, groundwork was laid by many prominent women theologians exploring pathways for Feminist pedagogy in the church. Despite the institutional patriarchy of the church, the church has been and continues to be a home for rare but flourishing woman-led and woman-centered practice (waterwomensalliance.org). There are multiple ways for the church to function that are consistent with an ethic of feminist theological thought

(waterwomensalliance.org). These can include the homiletical act of feminist, womanist, mujerista preaching, offering survivor support, and direct confrontation of rape culture.

Among the texts that engage practical theology (the practice of ministry) and rape culture, are Cody Sander's (2017) *A Brief Guide to Ministry with LGBTQIA Youth*; Kate Ott's (2013) *Sex + Faith: Talking to your Child from Birth to Adolescence*; Traci West's (2006) *Disruptive Christian Ethics*; Monica Coleman's (2004) *The Dinah Project: A Handbook for Congregational Response to Sexual Violence*; Jung and Stephen's (2013) *Professional Sexual Ethics*. Each of these texts address clergy and those working in faith community settings around issues of violence prevention, sexual harassment, and how these issues are taught in seminary settings. In *Down Girl – The Logic of Misogyny* by Kate Manne (2016), the theoretical underpinnings of misogyny in the historical practice of the church are explored more fully, with implications on how the lives of parishioners are impacted. While each represents an important section of research, none of these texts combine to address the roots of rape mythology and the active contributions to rape culture that the church is perpetrating today.

If the church is influential in developing, contributing to, and reinforcing rape culture, just as it may be influential in the disruption of rape culture. Any institution that regularly shapes social discourse and actively silences the voices and experiences of women and female self-identified individuals is in collaboration to maintain the status quo in a rape culture. The church is by no means alone in this, but as it is an institution predicated on recognizing humanity in others, standing beside the oppressed, and upending systemic violence, it is particularly problematic for the church to perpetuate rape culture. This discourse is maintained through and rooted in silencing voices and a broadly dispersed rhetoric of rape mythology.

Silencing

Women have historically been silenced in the act of preaching, the roles of leadership, and the contribution to the knowledge from which the discourse is formed (Knirck, 2006). At seminaries across denominations and across the U.S., women make up fewer than 25% of faculty and deans, and 11% of presidents (Christian Century, 2018). While women are inching closer to representing half of seminary student bodies in denominations where women are allowed to be ordained:

Combining 2017 figures from the American Baptist Churches USA, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church, the study found women made up 32 percent of total clergy. (Christian Century, 2018)

Men are significantly more likely to receive job offers to serve in congregations upon graduation (Christian Century, 2018).

When the church was a small band of dispersed and oppressed people, women held leadership positions in the underground movement (Vyhmeister, 1988). Phoebe was a trusted messenger in connection with Paul (Romans 16:1-2), Priscilla led alongside her husband as a source of strength and support for the early church (Acts 18:2-3), and Lydia was an early convert who became a leader in the movement (Acts 16). Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18), sisters Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42), Joanna (Luke 8:3), and Susan (Luke 8:3) all accompanied Christ at various points. Their inclusion by name is a marked oddity in Biblical history and signifies the importance of their role and presence (Savran, 2005.)

Today, silencing takes several forms through gate-keeping that excludes female scholars and preachers, and the silencing of texts which might foster the illumination of rape culture (Remedios, 2016). By minimizing the stories of women, or ignoring the texts of terror (instances of sexual violence in the Bible), the effect is silencing (Remedios, 2016). Silence is a key component of rape culture, and one that disappears voices and bodies alike (Trible, 1984).

The Reduction of Women

When women cannot be kept silent, they are instead reduced and treated as objects to be controlled (Kahalon et al., 2019). Deep in the history of Christianity, one can trace efforts to catalogue and control women by categorizing them in three particular archetypes (Kahalon et al., 2019). Mary (mother of Christ) as virgin, Mary (mother of Christ) as Madonna, and Mary Magdalene. In alignment with three key figures in the Christ narrative, these roles for women are meant to both define and confine (Kahalon et al., 2019). With Mary (mother of Christ), virginity is prized as her cardinal characteristic, so much so that it often becomes her name (the Virgin Mary) (Kahalon et al., 2019). This is not unique to her. Virginity was considered a commodity in which men in Biblical literature traded (Deuteronomy 22:13-27, Leviticus 21:13-14, Numbers 31:17-18). Women of the Bible are set up to fail. Expected to marry young and produce offspring, and also expected to maintain a vaguely defined virginity even when it was not considered theirs to have, lose, or give (Owens, Hall, & Anderson, 2020). While legal definitions of consent and forced marriages are certainly different in the modern U.S. than in the Biblical era, there remains a persistent value on the construct of virginity (Kahalon et al., 2019). Men are socially encouraged to have sex often and with many partners (Weeden, Cohen, & Kenrick, 2008). Women who are thought to have sex often or with many partners are diminished, in part because virginity in women is still frequently portrayed as a prize for male partners (Kahalon et

al., 2019). Mary's famed virginity has remarkably enduring influence as she is centered as the ideal female in Christianity (Kahalon et al., 2019; Owens et al., 2020).

Mary's transition, then, to Madonna, someone who maintained the standing of one who is pure (in spite of the fact that Christ had siblings (Matthew 12:46-47), while a global symbol for the placid and docile perfection of motherhood, became another category of impossible standards for women (Kahalon et al., 2019). As achieving simultaneous traditional pregnancy and virginity is a biological impossibility, literally no one can live up to the standard set by the archetype of Mary as the perfect woman. This impossibility is beneficial to the upholding of patriarchal systems by making a woman simultaneously the archetype of female perfection and defined by an unachievable physical feat, all women will be held as lesser-than, diminished by senseless comparison.

Finally, there was and is the whore, a role most commonly associated with the much-maligned Mary Magdalene (Beavis, 2012). Setting aside arguments for the de-stigmatization of sex work as a necessary step toward empowering women today, Mary Magdalene did not fit the description that has followed her for centuries (Beavis, 2012). She is never named as a prostitute throughout Biblical literature, or in her own testimony in Apocrypha literature (<http://gnosis.org/library/marygosp.htm>). Mary Magdalene is also consistently named as the first person to encounter Christ after the resurrection (Mark 16:1-11, Luke 24:1-11, Matthew 28:1-10, and John 20:11-18). Yet her story is disbelieved until a man speaks for her (Gafney, 2015). She is diminished and demonized and with her, women who fit neatly in neither a narrative as virgin nor mother (Gafney, 2015). Women who do not abide by these sexual and societal standards are labeled in a way that is intended to demean, devalue, and control. Ever it was thus: the quickest way to ruin a woman's reputation is to claim that she sleeps around.

Curiously, this narrow-casting of women extends into the realm of metaphor, including the characterization of cities as female and subject to the same degradation as actual women (Moughtin-Mumby, 2008). It is being female or feminized that is the source of shame, and makes one subject to humiliation and violence. These narratives cast women as only virgins, Madonnas, and whores, and is a narrative that persists in hidden curriculum today, appearing as rape mythology re-imagined in the 21st century (Owens et al., 2020). Rape mythology capitalizes on the idea that women can and should choose to remain pure as virgins, should only breach virginity in order to become model mothers, and any other path dismisses them as a whore which, by definition in rape mythology, means she can never be a real victim of rape culture (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Owens et al., 2020). Simply put, there are no real victims in rape mythology. By perpetuating these messages in ways that are both formal and informal, both overt and subtle, the church teaches that women are meant to be easily objectified, categorized, and controlled. Such is the essential groundwork for any rape culture (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Owens et al., 2020).

Narratives are also formed by what is left unsaid. In this case, the silencing of texts which acknowledge and discuss sexual assault are left out of the Revised Common Lectionary and go under- or entirely un-discussed in seminaries and parishes alike (Consultation, 1992). Often, proponents of this silencing are quick to name that these stories take place in a different place and time, and therefore connote something entirely different than sexual assault today (Kahalon et al., 2019). The choice to include or exclude particular texts from the Revised Common Lectionary (Consultation, 1992) is held by a small group of individual scholars and leaders, but the choice to preach or teach on these texts is up to clergy, and their preparation to do so

responsibly and compassionately is in the hands of seminary scholars and leadership (Consultation, 1992).

The choice to leave the texts of terror and other instances of sexual violence out of the Revised Common Lectionary is indeed a choice (Consultation, 1992). Participation in following the Revised Common Lectionary is one that participates in the silencing of these texts. The result, then, is that these texts are not taught, preached, given to exegesis, or explored in the pulpit, the church classroom, or in the examination of outward expressions of religious beliefs. The taboo that sexual violence is unspeakable and therefore silenced is reified.

The discourse of rape culture and religion is, therefore, formed and reified by that which is left unsaid and that which is left undone. In addition to perpetuating rape mythology and gate-keeping pulpits, there is an obvious vacuum of social justice action from the church wherein absence speaks volumes. This is a different revelation of the silencing of scripture or female leadership, but a manifestation of the same root problem. Yet, thankfully, there are always women who will not be silenced. The road to a post rape culture world is unimaginably long and yet scholars, pastors, activists, and congregants depict a hopeful vision of the course toward justice by their continued commitment to the endeavor of disrupting rape culture. One chorus of voices that will not be silenced is mujerista theologians and their conception of the fluidity of time may be a key to a more hopeful future (Isasi-Diaz, 1996).

The Persistence of Hope

By committing to non-binary dualistic concepts of time, mujeristas are welcoming the possibilities of potential futures vastly improved from current realities. Mujerista theology hinges on a creative understanding of time (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). “A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long

struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war” (Anzaldua, 1987, pp. 78-80). Living in temporal ambivalence, in chronological flux, is an embodiment of resistance, by dismantling the hierarchical conceptions imposed by Christianity (Isasi-Diaz, 1996).

In surprising ways, this non-temporal way of knowing and being is deeply felt in the traditions of the early church. Sacramental acts like communion or the Eucharist and Baptism are meant as moments out of time. Each involves bodily participation, and stepping into a tradition that suspends time temporarily (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). At the table, one dines as part of the ancient and eternal feast. At the font, one dips into an ever-flowing stream. All were welcomed to this offering based in love. Radical knowledge and love of self, as expressed through *mujeristas*’ slipperiness through time, slides and struggles towards liberation (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). The methodological implications of the ancient and prophetic non-binary dualism of *mujerista* theology necessitates another act of balance: the interweaving of action and rhetoric (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). “*Mujeristas* are increasingly aware that any attempt to separate action from reflection is false and evil ... Without reflection there is no critical awareness, no *conscientization*, and therefore no possibility of self-definition and liberation” (Isasi-Diaz, 1996, pp. 560). In the knowing and naming of the injustice of rape culture, disrupters of rape culture speak into existence and necessitate action, disruption, and change.

The power of silencing in theological settings is devastating, and the rhetorical reinforcement of rape mythology from the pulpit has demonstrable detriment to parishioners and the culture in which they live. The question then becomes one of trying to understand how, functionally, these lessons, values, and priorities are taught in the church. I turn next to an

investigation of the epistemological movement of knowledge and authority in church, by which these beliefs are communicated.

Pedagogical Processes

This section turns to a fuller explanation of the epistemological pedagogical processes by which knowledge moves within the church to participants or adherents of the faith, as well as the ways religious knowledge transcends and transgresses the walls of the church building.

Internally, knowledge moves from scriptural authority and theological education to the community of faith (Powery, 2012). The teaching process of the church, then, is always in some mechanisms is collaborative and co-creative. However, when considering the church as a site of social education, the preacher is most commonly positioned as educator, the one with access to the source material and knowledge of history, theological formation, and so forth to begin the process (Osmer, 2005). While a preacher must teach in conversation and collaboration with a congregation, the introduction of new and challenging material often begins in the pulpit and with the preacher's voice (Powery, 2012). The following section engages with the homiletic experience, the act of preaching, as a specific style of pedagogical connection.

The Pedagogy of Homiletics

Preaching is unique from other forms of public speaking. While it does contain elements of public performance, it is designed as an educational moment, as well as an interpretive and prophetic act (Powery, 2012). The original concept of prophetic wisdom refers to the ability to read the world as it is, and name it, regardless of potential consequences (Gross, 2002).

Preachers are taught rhetorical skills to be sure, but are also taught history of both church and scripture, social context, and skills for interpreting meaning with and for the congregations they serve (Gross, 2002; Childers, 1998).

Though some denominations have varying degrees of interaction during worship, it is broadly accepted that the preacher leads the room (Gross, 2002; Childers, 1998). What is seen and even heard may shift based on the perspective of the listener, and what is taken away is a co-created product of the listener, the speaker, and the mysterious Other (Spirit, community, society, etc.) (Childers, 1998). The hope is to inspire, to teach, to lead people somewhere new (Gross, 2002; Childers, 1998). The hope is to raise awareness, understanding, and consciousness (Gross, 2002). Preaching can only become a consciousness-raising act if the preacher or educator intentionally meets the community where they are, the world as it is, and imagines a possible future framed both by justice and faith (Powery, 2012).

Homiletics as a Way of Reifying and Reinforcing Rape Culture

Homiletics has been used to reify explicitly harmful elements of rape culture through rape mythology (Owens et al., 2020). The silencing of women in their absence from the pulpit is a particularly unsubtle signal that the voices and stories of women are unimportant (Gardener, 2005). Beyond the ways absence signals and equates to silence, homiletics are used to teach what clergy and the communities they serve deem meaningful (Gross, 2002; Childers, 1998). This absence can visually and audibly cue congregants that the elements of rape mythology which insist that subservience from women will help protect them, are for women's own good, and are supported from the pulpit (Everhart, 2020). Other, more overt expressions of rape mythology are made concrete when preachers emphasize the concepts of sin and temptation as being centered in the stories of women (Owens et al., 2020). Here, with intimations and even exclamations that women are to blame for the temptation of men into sin, the aspect of rape mythology that blames victims is reinforced every time men are treated as helpless victims of their own libidos and desire for power (Bareket et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the reification of rape culture can happen implicitly when the truth of rape culture goes unacknowledged in homiletical work. A pulpit from which rape culture is never acknowledged, where scriptures containing sexual violence are not examined, or where the harmful ideologies of rape mythology are frequently espoused or are left unopposed feeds into the community's knowledge and sense of truth around these issues. Here, the concept of Muted Group Theory is aptly applied (Ardener, 2005). Muted Group Theory names both the ways in which certain groups are silenced (or muted) and the impact of that silencing which is, namely, erasure and neglect (Ardener, 2005). In the case of the homiletical act, the silencing of women, women's stories, and the texts of terror has the effect of erasing both the speaker and her experiences, her story and her voice (Ardener, 2005). Conversely, a disruption from the pulpit could lead to a disruption in the community could lead to a disruption in rape culture (Owens et al., 2020).

Homiletics as Disruptive Possibility

“We must perform visible and public acts that may make us more vulnerable to the very oppressions we are fighting against. But our vulnerability can be the source of our power – if we use it.”

– Moraga and Anzaldua (1983).

A common adage for guiding preachers in their creation of sermons is to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable” a quote originally uttered about newsprint journalism but brought into seminary classrooms nonetheless (Dunne, 1902). Preachers exist to disrupt the status quo and while a message of hope, good news, and peace is central to the ethos of Christianity, there is also a deep well of education and social change in the history of homiletics (Powery, 2012). Feminist abolitionist Sojourner Truth moved from slavery to speaking to

preaching, engaging others in the emancipatory movement (Winter, M. T, 1992). She entered the stage and pulpit, preaching an interpretation of the world as she knew it through the lens of faith, and interpreting her faith through the lens of her experiences as a slave (Painter, 1994). Truth (Painter, 1994), in league with Dr. King (kinginstitute.stanford.edu), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Bonhoeffer, 1937), the Grimkes (Lerner, 1971) and others leading the abolitionist movement, as well as the parables of Christ, nods to the rhetorical influence of preaching as an educational means of disrupting systemic oppression. Teaching, therefore, begins in the pulpit, but the classroom extends beyond the sanctuary.

Christian Education and Bible Study

Of all the collaborative and co-creative acts of church, it is in Christian education settings where the voices of congregants are most frequently encouraged to participate (Osmer, 2005). Christian education includes Bible studies, small group gatherings, Sunday school classes, curriculum for all ages, and similarly explicitly educational aspects of church life (Osmer, 2005). Lay-leadership is an encouraged method of involvement and engagement in worshipping communities (Osmer, 2005). Teachers for both children and adults are brought forth from the congregation itself, often cultivated by pastoral leadership (Osmer, 2005). While they may come from a theological or educational background, they often come from neither and are just willing volunteers who take on the task of understanding and communicating material (Osmer, 2005).

Christian Education and Bible Study as Ways of Reifying and Reinforcing Rape Culture

As it is, the primary resources for Christian education are either silent on the issue of rape culture or tend towards the support of rape mythology. From the Catholic Church, young people are offered *Theology of the Body for Beginners* which claims to address “the most prevalent sexual disorders of modern cultures such as promiscuity, infidelity, homosexuality,

contraception, and disdain for celibacy” (West, 2010). Rooted’s (2018) *Sex Education Curriculum for Families* includes a fuller conversation about intimacy and vulnerability, but emphasizes that sex outside the confines of heterosexual marriage is considered sinful. Again, and again, sexuality is talked about in terms of resisting temptation, the preservation of virginity, and in terms that are entrenched in gender binary (Barnett et al., 2018). Boys are taught to resist temptation, where girls are more often told they must avoid presenting temptation (Barnett et al., 2018). This education perpetuates rape mythology by failing to acknowledge rape culture and missing the opportunity to discuss the problematic nature of objectification that contributes directly to rape culture. In my experiences in ordained ministry, I have answered countless questions from parents concerned about dress codes for girls involved in youth trips and the necessity of one-piece swim suits, shorts surpassing certain length, etc. Not once have I been asked about how boys in the group are learning or not learning to objectify their female counterparts. While schools face endless battles about sex education, often with religious groups themselves, church settings have an opportunity to educate in a more community-centered and progressive, empowering way. Fortunately, there are corners of the church trying to leverage this power in meaningful ways.

Christian Education and Bible Study as Disruptive Possibility

An effective countermeasure to rape mythology in written or unwritten curriculum is a critical pedagogical approach that places the experiences and voices of the learners at the center of the conversation (Owens et al., 2020). The persistence of rape culture and its reification in and by the church is de-humanizing to all, and, as Freire (1970, p.75) states it, “The humanist, revolutionary educator’s efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. (Their) efforts must be imbued with a profound

trust in (people) and their creative power”. Centering an open discussion of rape culture in the church would be a tremendous act toward humanization, perhaps even radically so given the church’s historical reputation as a source of rape mythology. By centering an open discussion, clergy and church educators might clearly and directly claim the existence of rape culture, that it is anathema to the teachings of Christ and the church’s role in supporting survivors and counteracting messages that perpetuate rape culture.

Christian Education is frequently diminished, to the detriment of students, teachers, and the church itself (Hemphill, 1996). It becomes cast aside as a purely pragmatic offering that keeps the children busy for an hour (Hemphill, 1996). Oversight and training for educators is frequently low among budget priorities even in well-resourced communities (Hemphill, 1996). It is the often pedagogically questionable territory reserved for those willing to volunteer as Sunday School teachers, a role almost entirely reserved for women (Marr, 1993). I am adamant that all church-based education should take a much more rigorous, intentional and pedagogically sound approach, and that addressing rape culture will require robust and critical attention to how and what churches teach.

Missiology

Church missiology is the process which enables the church to go from receiving to reaching outward (Farrell, 2018). The church’s mission tends to be what is done for others, usually focusing on short-to-medium range problem solving (Farrell, 2018). For example, serving in soup kitchens, rather than addressing the advocating for systemic economic justice to ensure soup kitchens are no longer required. Historically, the practice of mission has been loaded with patriarchal, colonial, white-supremacist, and misogynist agendas that often ran hand-in-hand with the genocidal practices and cultural destruction of indigenous peoples (Turpin, 2017;

Farrell, 2018). This mutilation of mission has coincided with a global reach of rape culture historically, intersecting painfully with white supremacy and colonialist violence (Turpin, K. 2017). Though elements of this persist, today's mission and outreach tend to be less overt in the violence visited (Turpin, 2017). That said, the objectification of the poor, the othering of diverse communities, and the sharing of theology which indicates women belong in a subservient role to men all perpetuate the oppressive reach of rape culture, white supremacy, and colonialist attitudes on a global scale (Farrell, 2018). Such mission practices can expand the reach of a cultural belief in patriarchal and harmful interpretations of scripture which support rape culture.

Beyond formally conceptualized mission, churches also have their often un—named mission: the lives of parishioners/ adherents. Because of the social, political, and cultural implications of faith practice, the daily actions of adherents to a faith influence all systems in which they participate. The ideas perpetuated in and by the church can extend influence well beyond Sunday morning. Faith leaders and theologians emphasizing social justice recognize the importance and power behind those movements.

... ideas have effects on truth. Whatever their intellectual credibility, ideas do shape the lives of those who are taught them. Even if a particular symbol or doctrine is partial in its incorporation of the scriptural tradition or unfair to the history of doctrine, it may still be powerful. Such symbols or doctrines may be believed by millions and thus affect the lives of believers and nonbelievers (Welch, 2000).

Put another way, what clergy say they believe can influence the way parishioners live which, in turn, influences the lives of those in the surrounding community and spheres of influence of parishioners.

Mission as a Way of Reifying and Reinforcing Rape Culture

The abstract rape mythology that women bring violence upon themselves by presenting temptation to men is reified in dress codes focusing on the covering of women and girls' skin while failing to address the problematic nature of objectification (Fields, 2020). Victim-blaming is reified in ministry that emphasizes the need for women to move in groups or with male accompaniment, or processes of reporting sexual harassment, while failing to interrogate the role of men in creating environmental dynamics that feed rape culture (Fortune, 1983). As objectification is inextricable from rape culture, the mission culture emphasis on othering those being served from those doing the serving is a co-indicated problem (Fields, 2020). Put simply, if I can see someone I serve as different or lesser than my own full humanity, there are no natural bounds to the dehumanizing actions that can accompany such a perspective. This is, fortunately, not as it must be, as mission also contains the possibility of building a world without rape culture.

Mission as Disruptive Possibility

Mission can be a disruptive act that works toward a more socially just world. To evangelize, to carry out mission, literally translates from Greek as "to bear the good news" (Alank et al., 2007). The church in some quarters is indicating a return to this sensibility and reacquainting itself with a focus on the emulation of the acts of Christ in listening, humility, healing, and honoring the words and wisdom of those being served (Farrell, 2018). The teachings of Freire and the teachings of Christ have a lot in common, in theory and praxis.

In the instance of rape culture, a critically informed and feminist-guided approach to education via mission work must include the central voice of women and survivors in leadership positions. As mission as volun-tourism is being eyed with increasing criticality, communities are

turning to a focus on local needs (Guttentag, 2009). Addressing rape culture will require just such a transition, with mission involving internal analysis, and a foregrounding of the intersectionality of experiences. Listening sessions with those being served, and leadership by those in the survivor community, will be essential to disrupting rape culture.

Already, such work is happening in pockets of the church across the U.S., as well as around the world. It is being done, and being done well. The Night Ministry of Chicago emphasizes the intersectional points of LGBTQ community members, homelessness, and sexual violence by meeting community members where they are, and positioning those they seek to serve as leaders in the direction of their ministry (The Night Ministry, 2020). Similarly, an organization I served as chaplain in 2015, the Gubbio Project of San Francisco acknowledges the extreme increase in likelihood of sexual violence in the experience of homeless women. In addition to running a safe-sleep day shelter out of a church in the Tenderloin district, they offer HIV and Hepatitis-C testing booths (out of converted confessional booths), access to counseling support and services, and an overt anti-violence stance in a deeply turbulent community (The Gubbio Project, 2015 - present). Both offer strong examples of the ways the church might position itself as a source of disruption to rape culture.

Summary of Chapter Two

In the preceding pages, I have walked through the rich history of feminist theology and the scaffolding on which I have built an understanding of the church as a site of education and social formation. I have determined the pedagogical flow of knowledge and authority in churches. From this conceptual design, I then explored these pedagogical pathways (homiletics, Christian education, and missiology) as points of collaboration in the construction of rape culture, and as points of possible disruption of rape culture. Any institution providing education

is impacted by and impacting the culture in which it teaches. Culture is co-created by those within it, a cyclical and reifying relationship that merits deep examination in considering such universal harm as gender-based and sexual violence. It is on this scaffolding that this study is built. In Chapter Three, I present the methodological design and guiding theories of my analysis.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In the pages ahead, I explain the research methodology and design of this project. My methodological approach is a modification of constructivist grounded theory, and the design I use reflects both this theoretical underpinning and a critical feminist theological perspective. I further discuss the ways my research has been shaped by *mujerista* and *womanist* theological traditions.

As discussed in the conceptual framework in Chapter Two, I approached this project from a critical feminist theological lens that is further shaped by liberation, *mujerista*, and *womanist* theological frameworks. That research into rape culture should be feminist is unsurprising. “The overt ideological goal of feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in all ways relevant to ending women’s unequal social position” (Lather, 1988, p. 572). This work is not dispassionate. Rather, I am driven by the pursuit of a more just world wherein rape culture does not control the lives of women and girls. My analytical approach is reflective of this ideological goal in both process and motivation. A critical theoretical approach to this topic is vital, and I posit the necessity of a distinctly critical feminist approach. A critical social theory can derive from a variety of schools of thought, each examining specific forms and manifestations of power (Darder et al., 2000). To clarify, a critical feminist approach is one in which the critical concepts of examining power dynamics is applied through a specifically gender-focused lens (Darder et al., 2000).

The format and setting of the interviews conducted were built first on the methodological decision to seek data in this way. I employed a modified Constructivist Grounded Theory in my analysis (Charmaz, 2014). I held closely to the Constructivist Grounded Theory as discussed by

Charmaz (2014), including the use of constant comparison, open coding, axial coding, and focused coding. I did not complete line-by-line coding, choosing instead to follow dialogic themes in the patterns of conversational flow. The early interviews completed did inform the shape of subsequent interviews and coding was reworked after each of the first two interviews. Intensive interviews with a focused batch of selected and invited participants was a logical path in light of the goals of this project. As Charmaz (2014) describes:

Intensive qualitative interviewing fits grounded theory methods particularly well. Both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted. Researchers adopt intensive interviewing precisely because it facilitates conducting an open-ended, in-depth exploration of an area in which the interviewee has substantial experience. (p. 85)

Such openness is an essential component of approaching this topic with humility. I entered these interviews knowing I could not presume to know all the places these interviews would go. Space was intentionally left space for participants to lead in the direction they saw fit. That said, I recognize the reifying nature of data collection and content. Interviews were carefully designed through lines of questioning suited to each participant's specific areas of expertise. Again, Charmaz (2014) guided this process. She writes:

How we collect data shapes their content. We can make concerted efforts to learn about participants' views and actions and try to understand their lives from their perspectives. Yet we do not necessarily adopt or reproduce their views as our own, rather we interpret them. Thus, we must test our assumptions about the worlds we study, and not unwittingly reproduce these assumptions. (pp. 33-34)

The inherent challenge in interviewing such a selected pool of participants is that it does become tempting to assume this perspective represents a broad swath of the community of clergy. I was therefore cautious about presuming generalizability from the data. Rather, I tracked the ways the data were translatable. Similarly, I am mindful that I bring my own assumptions to this research. I was and am challenged to see past my belief that the church does indeed co-create rape culture and is obligated and able to disrupt it instead. I worked to remain open to receiving data that contradicted my assumptions, conducting negative case analysis to review the data for contradictions with my early findings.

Once data were collected and transcribed, differences and common ground were analyzed through language used to describe rape culture and the role religion does or does not play in its persistence or disruption. In applying a modified Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014), as I became interested in the symbolic interactionist tradition, moving beyond being descriptive into being transformative. Charmaz (2014) describes symbolic interactionism as:

A dynamic theoretical perspective that views human actions as constructing self, situation, and society. It assumes that language and symbols play a crucial role in forming and sharing our meanings and actions. Symbolic interactionism views interpretation and action as reciprocal processes, each affecting the other. (p. 262)

Symbolic interactionism is an apt description of my understanding of the pedagogical and epistemological processes of the church as a site of social education and reification of rape culture. Charmaz (2014, p. 263) continues, “This perspective recognizes that we act in response to how we view our situations. In turn, our actions and those of other people affect these situations and subsequently we may alter our interpretations of what is, was, or will be

happening”. This process of building understanding is particularly apt when engaging data across a vast stretch of time, as Charmaz (2014) describes:

With a symbolic interactionist awareness of temporality, you can analyze how the present unfolds and how the present informs interpretations of the past.... As such, symbolic interactionism is a perspective, not an explanatory theory that specifies variables and predicts outcomes. This perspective gives you a way of knowing – a way of growing – that opens your views of meanings, actions, and events in the world you study. Symbolic interactionism encourages you to learn about people and places, times and troubles, actions and accomplishments as members of your studied world understand them. (p. 265)

Symbolic interactionism is an approach that could have been built just for a discussion on the body and the word. Charmaz’s (2014) directive to honor a variety of ways of knowing speaks directly to the necessarily female-centered approach of this project. With each interview participant, it was imperative to know who they are in their scholarly or pastoral work, and to understand the lives they are living and experiences in which they are grounded.

As described on pages prior, I employed a modified Constructivist Grounded Theory through qualitative coded analysis (Charmaz, 2014). While the temptation was strong to apply mixed methodology in an attempt to quantify this study, I recognize that this temptation stems from a desire to have my work deemed worthy in a positivist world, rather than adding any genuine benefit to the nature of this study. My analysis was therefore qualitative in nature, for it is in language, richness of meaning, and cultivation of theory that I am most invested. Stories, whether they scripture or lived realities of participants, have value, even if they are not generalizable nor transferrable in all

circumstances. Truth is not easily measured. It makes itself known through our language and the stories shared.

Researcher Reflexivity

In this section, I will revisit my location in this project in terms of reflexivity. My own perspective and sense of urgency that social change is necessary and that rape culture must be disrupted is, I hope, evident on every page. I am comforted by the idea, though, that scholar Patti Lather (1988) identified regarding the intersectional identities of the feminist practitioner activist researcher. She writes, "... if critical inquirers are to develop a 'praxis of the present,' we must practice in our empirical endeavors what we preach in our theoretical formulations" (Lather, 1988, pp 572). This work is deeply personal, and research and theory are effectively preaching to and listening to one another.

Reflexivity has been an important component in both the data collection and analysis of this project. As I experienced in preparing my literature review and other elements of research, I remained aware of what Dr. Jill Green (2015) refers to as "somatic sensitivity". While her framework is in discussion of qualitative research in dance education, she engages the important issue of acknowledging the somatic experience of research while maintaining credibility. With the body as a major subject in the field, somatic sensitivity or a reflective body awareness may enable researchers to develop systems of reflexivity and "decenter" uncritical assumptions and perceived notions of a found and static reality (Green, 2015). In this sense, somatic practice and sensitivity may resonate with a postmodern turn away from a clear certainty or universal truth. It embraces multiple positionalities, diverse perspectives, and an inner physical struggle with emerging ideas and issues (Green, 2015).

In the case of researching an issue surrounding bodily trauma, I am aware of moments of holding my breath or tightening my shoulders or stomach in tension as I read the traumas presented in scripture, or the re-victimization survivors have experienced in the church's response to sexual assault. In these moments, I intentionally practiced a careful reflexivity in both data collection and analytical processes of this project, wherever possible drawing distinctions between what I bring to the text and data and the impact experienced.

Research Design

To reiterate, the goal of this project is to seek greater understanding of a primary research question: How do scholar-practitioners and clergy interpret the pedagogical processes of U.S. Christian churches as related to the co-creation and perpetuation of rape culture? As a natural extension of that question, how do they see those same pedagogical processes as sites of potential disruption to rape culture?

I conducted a series of interviews with leading scholar-practitioners who have published work in the field of the intersection of religion and sexual assault and rape culture. I also interviewed practicing preachers and pastors who have spoken about rape culture from the various pulpits they occupy. Over the course of these interviews, I gathered and analyzed the wisdom of leading scholars and practitioners on the intersection of Christianity and rape culture to better understand the pedagogical processes by which this intersection is perpetuated. From there, I identified possible futures in which the church can disrupt rape culture. Based on the thorough review of existing literature, I chose to invite participants who have made especially prolific and profound contributions to this topic.

Participants

For interviews, I approached individuals who have contributed significantly to the field of understanding the relationship between religion and rape culture, and each represents a different vantage point in that field. My goal was to understand their collective wisdom on this point of intersection and, furthermore, understand whether and how they see the church as a potential site of disruption of rape culture.

Before describing my interview protocols, this section provides a brief background on the expertise of each participant. I have read selected works of these scholar-practitioners both to ascertain a basis of understanding of their positions on the phenomena of rape culture and religion and to round out a broader understanding of their theological positioning. The subject and the content of the interviews were intentionally semi-structured in the set-up of this study. Knowing that each participant operates within their own niche of expertise and perspectives necessitated a style of semi-structured interviews that was intentionally invitational for more expansive dialogues. Knowing the busy-ness of scholar-practitioners and pastors meant a heavy emphasis on flexibility, understanding, and an openness to having some unexpected additions and subtractions to my interview participant pool. Participants were asked to confirm their willingness to be named in this project, as their expertise includes numerous publications and positions of scholarly and ecclesiastical leadership. All participants agreed to be named in this dissertation.

I interviewed Prof. Johanna Stiebert who is a founding member of the Shiloh Project since the beginning. The Shiloh Project is an international collection of scholars working on scriptural analysis and theological interpretation of scriptures that depict sexual violence. The Shiloh Project also contends with the relationship between religion and rape culture in global modern contexts. Their work has been public since 2016 and therefore came on my radar midway through the work of this project. Dr. Stiebert is a professor of Hebrew at the University of Sheffield in the United

Kingdom, in the department of theology and religion. Her scholarly experiences are global, including significant time working in the U.S.. She focuses on Biblical Hebrew philology and semantics of self-conscious emotions and of rape culture phenomena, ideological-critical and social-scientific readings of Hebrew Bible Prophets, gender- and queer-critical interpretation, and contemporary African-centered readings of Hebrew Bible texts. The Shiloh Project is the only academic organization explicitly dedicated to this goal of understanding the intersection of religion and rape culture and as such offer an invaluable perspective in understanding. In preparation for these interviews, I reviewed the Shiloh Project Blog and the proceedings from their first conference, held in the summer of 2018.

I also interviewed Dr. Caroline Blyth of the University of Auckland, also a founder of the Shiloh Project. Dr. Blyth is an Assistant Dean and Senior Lecturer at the University of Auckland, focusing on gender violence, rape culture and religion, representations of gender, sexuality and the body through feminist and postfeminist lenses, religion in art, film and literature, cultural studies and religion. Her focus on the lens of religious studies as a source for cultural critique and change resonated deeply with my line of inquiry for this project. Dr. Blyth has also conducted research across multiple countries, continents, and cultural contexts.

Dr. Gina Messina is a feminist theologian whose doctoral advisor was Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether, an early leader of the movement of feminist theology. Dr. Messina teaches at Ursuline College, a Catholic institution, as an Associate Professor in their Theology Department. Ahead of the interview, I reviewed much of Dr. Messina's work, including *Rape Culture and Spiritual Violence* (Routledge, 2015), *Faithfully Feminist: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim* (with Jennifer Zobair and Amy Levin, White Cloud Press, 2015) and

Feminism and Religion in the 21st Century (with Rosemary Radford Ruether, Routledge, 2014).

I also reviewed her TEDx Talk "The New Feminist Revolution in Religion" (Messina, 2014).

Rev. Shannon Kershner is the head pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, where she has served as their first female head of staff in their 149-year history. Rev. Kershner has been the senior pastor in this historic church since 2014. Her sermon on the #metoo movement was the first widely publicized discussion of rape culture from a pulpit that became part of the clergy circle zeitgeist. Rev. Kershner is a dynamic writer and speaker and whose body of work includes publicly addressing intersections of justice and advocacy from the pulpit and from her authority as a clergy person.

Rev. Traci Blackmon is a national figure in the United Church of Christ and has spoken at national and international gatherings about the intersections of gender, race, violence, and theology. She is a much sought-after speaker and has both a deep love for the church and a deep respect for the body – she served as a nurse for 25 years before entering ordained ministry. Rev. Blackmon is the Associate General Minister of Justice & Local Church Ministries for The United Church of Christ (UCC) and Senior Pastor of Christ The King United Church of Christ in Florissant, MO. Since the time of our interview, I have begun work in a UCC congregation as a minister for mission and congregational care, and have had the opportunity to host Rev. Blackmon as a virtual guest of honor for a community interfaith event. Both Rev. Kershner and Rev. Blackmon are primarily practitioners and preachers, and transcripts of sermons and speeches were the main sources of preparation for their interviews.

These first five participants were among my initial interview requests. However, two other participants did not respond to my requests, and one responded that while she valued the work, she was unable to participate at this time. I therefore adapted my approach to include

snowball participant sampling. Dr. Stiebert and Dr. Blyth recommended I speak to Dr. David Tombs, a frequent contributor to the Shiloh Project whose work has looked at the theology of Jesus as a victim of sexual violence, as well as the intersection of gender-based violence and Christianity worldwide. Dr. Tombs is the Howard Paterson Professor of Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago, New Zealand, and occupies the in the role of Director of the Centre and the Howard Paterson Chair of Theology and Public Issues since January 2015. Dr. Tombs' work looks directly at violence in Biblical scripture and the ways those texts influence and connect with violence in the world today.

Dr. Stiebert also recommended Rev. Ruth Everhart, who published her latest book concurrently to my interviews unfolding, a book focused entirely on the church and the #Metoo movement (metoomvmt.org). Rev. Everhart and I also share a denomination of ordination (Presbyterian Church, USA). Since our interview, Rev. Everhart has kindly invited me into a group of clergy women writers. Rev. Everhart identifies as a Christian Feminist, has served in ordained ministry for thirty years, and has authored two other books, one of which, *Ruined* (2016) is an account on her personal experiences grappling with Christian identity as a survivor of sexual assault. These remarkable scholars, preachers, thinkers, and leaders comprised the pool of participants for this project.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a series of interviews with each participant lasting approximately one to one and a half hours in length. With each participant's approval, I recorded and later hired an assistant for the transcription of each interview. The interview protocol adapted my inquiry to each participant based on their particular contributions to the field. While all participants were asked about their perspective on the pedagogical pathways of the church and their potential

influence on rape culture, the specific nature of their perspective is framed in the context of their experiences. For example, Rev. Kershner is primarily a preacher and teacher, as such this interview emphasized the pedagogical pathway of homiletics rather than other forms of education. Dr. Messina has written specifically on multi-cultural spiritual practices as healing opportunities for survivors of sexual assault, so her interview focused more on spiritual care. The interview questions are available in full in Appendix A. Due to the participants' vast bodies of work, each represent a unique perspective on the topic. Questions posed were tailored to each participant. While this presents some challenges in terms of analysis, I believe it yields deeper knowledge and richer data.

The interviews were conducted according to the accessibility of the schedule of each participant. After receiving IRB approval, I approached the participants via email to request the opportunity to interview them at their convenience (see Appendix B). Given the geographical spread of these participants, I had already planned to conduct interviews remotely. This ended up being deeply beneficial as all of my interviews occurred since the coronavirus pandemic made travel and face-to-face interviews an impossibility. While I would have preferred in person meetings, this adaptability meant I could have constancy in the space from which I was interviewing.

Privacy was necessarily more difficult to come by for both participants and myself. Invariably, children, pets, and family members were in and out of their interviewing rooms, and occasionally my dogs and children can be heard in the background as well. I conducted member checking with the final analysis to ensure that I have accurately captured the meaning and intent of their words. I did so by sending the final single-case analysis to each interview participant, requesting their feedback on the accuracy of findings, and inviting any additions or clarifications they might like to include. The interviews were semi-structured, with questions serving as a guideline and starting point for a discussion that went in unscripted directions.

Each interview began with general conversation, and tone-setting in which I inquired about how they were coping with the global pandemic. As a feminist scholar, the humanization of participants and establishment of mutual care was important to me. From there, I moved into inquiry into the participants' working definition of rape culture, in part to ascertain that we were speaking a common language. Since participants represent a wide variety of backgrounds and cultural settings, this opening discussion often led into context-specific queries. My questions were designed to cover the work of each participant, their experiences of working in the space of religion and rape culture, their hopes for the future of this work, and the personal and / or professional successes or challenges they have faced for pursuing this field. When participants displayed enthusiasm or passion around a particular question, I pursued more questions around that topic and left others on the page. I was determined to let the participants lead with the aspects of their work they found most compelling. I entered these interviews very aware that there is much I have yet to learn about this topic.

Data Analysis

Transcriptions were completed by a hired assistant who is capable, but is not a professional transcriptionist. When instructed to include para-linguistics in the transcripts, he included descriptions of gestures which I have largely removed except where I felt they provided greater insight into the tone of the interview. I was surprised to find that these descriptions frequently assigned perceived motivations which were, at least in description of my own body language and facial expressions, frequently off the mark. It was eye-opening to consider how these moments appear to someone viewing them as an outsider. It was less eye-opening to experience a male ascribing "frazzled", "frustration", or "anger" to moments I felt passion, focus, and commitment. The transcriptionist spoke openly about having no context on the material being discussed and found

himself moved by several of the conversations. Once the interviews were transcribed, I implemented a form of modified constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014).

Coding was completed in a recursive process. I developed a series of open codes, formed by the first interview, supplemented by subsequent interviews. I completed microanalysis instead of line-by-line coding as the goal of this project is to have broad, thematic understanding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The use of open coding, also known as initial or first-level coding, both reflected the content of the interview, and build a foundation for the constant comparison necessary for thorough analysis (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). From there, I completed memos analyzing the major concepts constructed through initial coding and negative case analysis in my early memos. With those cases in mind, I moved to a second pass with focused coding, with an emphasis on context. Several codes were collapsed into one another when the repetition seemed unnecessary, and in other cases child codes were born to offer deeper nuance.

I appreciate the capaciousness of focused coding. “Focused coding involves making decisions, but these decisions are tentative, not binding. You have the flexibility to pursue the codes that prove to be fruitful and to put aside ones that are not” (Charmaz, 2014, p.144). I created my codebook and complete my coding in Dedoose software as I am familiar with its mechanisms, and found it aided me in keeping my work organized.

In a commitment to a methodological process reflective of my theoretical priorities, I worked with a fluid process of coding in which sections could have multiple codes or partial codes applied. I made specific notations to when this was occurring. For example, I maintained “colonizing or decolonizing” as a single code, and when coding data as such, would add details of which aspects of the code were reflected by this section of data. While this was admittedly more time-consuming than I would have liked, it was also a way to entwine method and theory to resist my own impulses

toward binary thinking. In the example of colonizing or decolonizing, that meant trying to see past the idea that something was strictly colonizing or decolonizing, and instead peer into the ways an excerpt had a multiplicity of meanings.

Memo writing on codes and after each analytical pass allowed space for intentional reflexivity, as well as helping in the process of tracking my own thinking and the built history of this analysis. Focused coding was completed three times at which point I felt I had reached saturation. The memo-writing process emphasized analysis of the movement between my personal reflections on key themes and the data gathered from interviews. Re-visiting memos became a way to keep track of my thought processes along the way and add layers to the codes in development.

Dissertation Writing in a Pandemic

It would be a strange omission to avoid discussing the impacts of conducting research in the time of coronavirus. The impacts of varying levels of quarantine were evident with each participant. Citing the challenges of finding space to work in the homes they share with children and partners also trying to work, several participants expressed a sense of being stalled in their work. Dr. Stiebert, in particular, was keen to travel for work and conferences, and had to reschedule or cancel upcoming research travel. Dr. Blyth was dealing with isolation, though expressed gratitude for the way New Zealand responded to the current crisis. Several participants cited the intersectionality of who was suffering most in this pandemic with issues of racism, classism, economic oppression, and more. While none of us are epidemiologists, the social justice aspects of our shared interests were certainly in conversation with the toll of the coronavirus pandemic. On a personal level, a sudden shift from having my children in daycare three days a week to no childcare made an obvious difference in the physical and mental space I had to code, analyze, research, and write while balancing employment and a partner in graduate school. While we are fortunate in that we are able to be home with our kids

and minimize risk, it moved my writing time to the margins in a way that necessarily prolonged this process. That said, the extra time of sitting with and reflecting on the interviews and data yielded a deeper layer of reflection for which I am grateful.

Credibility, Dependability, and Ethics

Before embarking on data collection and subsequent analysis, I want to describe the credibility, dependability, and ethics of this project. I have used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) elements of research quality as a guideline for discussion. While I am not researching a specific or bound community, I have thoroughly prolonged engagement in the scholarly sense with this community of thought. I have been a part of the community of the church, in the large sense, my entire life. I have attended or led worship regularly in a variety of communities. In training for ministry at two Protestant seminaries and then practicing ordained ministry in five congregational settings as well as several community centers, I have witnessed and experienced the phenomena at the center of this study. This positions me as a colleague in ministry for those I interviewed and in some cases that collegiality facilitated the establishment of rapport. I have a wide breadth of scope in this study. Using multiple data sets as well as several forms of methodology amplifies the likelihood that I have developed a broad and deep concept of the phenomena at hand.

One particular ethical challenge in this project had to do with participant disclosures. Four participants disclosed direct experience with sexual violence, at which point I found myself automatically shifting into pastoral caregiver. However, it was evident this was not a first disclosure for anyone and the interview continued organically. While I was very clear in my request for approval to record and had their acknowledgment of the recording of these full interviews, it felt inappropriate to include any specific disclosures in the analysis or findings of this project. As a feminist scholar, I seek to constantly humanize the participants in this project and honor their

dignity. While the stories came up organically and were shared freely, this dissertation is intended to build broad understanding and not to disclose the personal experiences of any individuals. To meet this end, the best course of action included remove personal experience disclosures from the final document writing unless their inclusion was essential to the demonstration of a finding.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize the necessity of avoiding a close-looped thought process when completing qualitative analysis individually. Furthermore, they advocate the inclusion of a divested peer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). "It is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). I take small exception to the idea that a disinterested peer is an essential component of effective peer debriefing. The definition is adapted to include peers with diverse interests. For example, I debriefed aspects of this study with peers in the clergy community who were able to help reveal gaps in my knowledge or personal biases. Additionally, I debriefed with others who are peers in educational research to reflect on work from that lens. It can be isolating working as an educational researcher in a religious practice from a feminist perspective education.

I see the benefit in engaging with peers who have some distance from the subject matter. However, given the intensely personal nature of the phenomena I am studying, I found some creativity necessary to find relatively neutral feedback from peers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I have been particularly grateful for the feedback of two colleagues from my seminary, both of whom are Feminist theologians and scholars and provided great feedback throughout this process. The discussion, interviews, and feedback of participants were crucial in acknowledging my own implicit biases.

Establishing credibility with the participants of this project was critical. The individuals I interviewed represent diverse life experiences, theological perspectives, races, ages, gender identities, and backgrounds. I approached them with the humility of knowing my own experiences do not necessarily overlap with theirs, regardless of our shared status as clergy-women or scholars.

With Dr. Jennings as my advisor and Dr. Souza, Dr. Anderson, and Dr. Aragon on my committee, and Dr. Gonzalez-Voller in participation in the stages of proposal and early construction, I am confident that the process of these projects has been carefully examined and audited with feedback to improve my practices. Additionally, I have formed collegial friendships with professors and peers, not involved with this committee directly, who have supplied additional feedback and critique. Documenting a trail of the process is a distinct challenge. Therefore, I employed external assistance. Dedoose software coupled with google docs ensured that my work was safe in the cloud, secured with passwords, and stored with time-and-date-stamping built in to minimize the chances of elements being misplaced.

Concluding Thoughts

By way of conclusion to this chapter, I include my first formal memo of this project: I'm (at last!) preparing to hand in my proposal. These pages represent months and in some cases years of thought, study, and work, which is what makes it difficult to admit that they are impermanent. They represent my best efforts and endeavors to prepare for the research project to come and yet these pages will absolutely be shaped and transformed by the research itself. While it is tempting to wish for all of this (any of this) to feel truly completed, it is more honest to recognize that it will continue shifting as long as I'm working with this material. It is influenced by stories I learn every day, new understandings, the exciting fact that this area of study is a field that is growing even as I sit to write these words. I am

changing every day as well. The expanding work of the Shiloh Project and the increased awareness of this point of intersection between religion and rape culture is catching broader attention in theological circles, which is exciting and a growing opportunity to learn. Perhaps the biggest challenge as I embark on this work will be to learn to be at peace with the unknowable and to find space for thoughts-in-motion rather than a pinned down butterfly collection of facts (L. Lyter Bright, personal communication, November 30, 2019).

The preceding chapters are more than preamble. They represent many months of seeking, reading, listening, and building in collaboration with sister scholars across geographies and generations. In establishing my foundations in liberation theology (Gutierrez, 1988), feminist (Ruether, 1983), womanist (Cannon et al., 2011), and mujerista theologies (Isasi-Diaz, 1996), critical theory, and the socio-historical relationship between Christianity and rape culture, I have prepared the scaffolding for understanding this phenomenon. My work is indelibly shaped by the knowledge of foremothers in each of these fields.

Chapter Three highlights the research design and implementation of methodology of the current study. The theories expounded on in Chapter Two found root in methodologies in this chapter giving meaning to my choices as researcher, interviewer, and writer. In Chapter Four, I provide single-case and cross-case analysis of the interviews conducted. The research questions posed and methodologies employed create a layered and nuanced understanding of the ways religion and rape culture intersect and interact.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The interviews I conducted for this project are treasured experiences. While the transcripts of these interviews captured a great deal, they could not convey the depth of feeling, the moments of surprise and awe, or the breadth of knowledge these experts possess. In this chapter I attempt to capture the data in written form. I begin with a review of single-case findings by each participant. These findings are organized in order of interviews conducted to convey the unique data of each interview. Subsequently, I present a cross-case analysis of the themes that arose throughout the layered process of recursive coding, memo writing, and reflection.

The single case studies develop rich understanding of the nuances each participant brought in terms of experiences, perspective, and areas of scholarly or theological expertise. Due to the limited size of participant sample, I pursued a depth of knowledge rather than generalizability. As principal researcher, my goal was to thoroughly explicate the words of each participant prior to placing them in analytical conversation with one another. Through this analytic process, emergent themes presented speaking to a layered and powerful relationship. This relationship between themes and cases are explored through a cross-case section of analysis. The single case and cross-case analyses yield a rich variety of compelling findings. These findings include expansive conceptions of the pedagogies of the church, nuanced histories of the church's contribution to the formation of rape culture, and an exploration of the multiple acts of translation between text, scholarship, faith communities, and the broader cultural context.

Review of Single Case Findings

The presentation of single case findings is my attempt to bring the reader into the interview space with me. The objective is to give the reader an overall sense of each interview's tone and focus rather than conveying every detail of each transcript. Each participant shared far

more than described here. The aim of this chapter is to communicate key themes brought up in each interview. The participants are organized in the order in which they were interviewed, beginning with Dr. Stiebert.

In terms of naming conventions, I wrestled with how best to refer to participants. Several asked me to call them by their first name. Several did not. Setting that aside, this project is rooted in feminist thought. It matters a great deal to honor my participants including their achievements and titles. While worthiness is surely not encapsulated in a title, the systems and spaces clergy women and female scholars occupy certainly care a great deal about titles earned. On this basis, I determined it appropriate to refer to each participant by title and last name.

Prof. Johanna Stiebert

“I have to believe, I have to believe that they can...I have to, I can't live if that isn't the case. I wouldn't see the point in what we're doing.” This was Dr. Stiebert's reply to the question of whether she sees a possible future in which rape culture can be disrupted and dismantled. Her faith and passion around the intersection of religion and rape culture is contagious. Finding Dr. Stiebert's work midway through the writing of this dissertation was a light across a stormy sea, and an entrée into the promised land of shared scholarship and enthusiastic collaborators on a subject that has often felt isolating.

Dr. Stiebert is a scholar who co-founded the Shiloh Project. The Shiloh Project (Shiloh Project, 2020) is the only academic collaboration explicitly dedicated to the goal of understanding the intersection of religion, the Bible and rape culture, and it operates across multiple communities and cultures, including participants from New Zealand, Kenya, Botswana, the U.S., and the UK (Shiloh Project, 2020). Their work became public from 2016 in the form of blogs, articles, grant success, workshops and presentations, collaborations with practitioners, a

book series with Routledge Focus, and, in pre-pandemic times, international gatherings (Shiloh Project, 2020). Dr. Stiebert is Professor of Hebrew at Leeds University in the UK. Her most recent book is called *Rape Myths, the Bible, and #MeToo* (Routledge Focus, 2020). Her other recent works include *First-Degree Incest and the Hebrew Bible: Sex in the Family* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016) and *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (OUP, 2013).

Dr. Stiebert's interview was delightful and warm in tone. She was the first of the participants whom I interviewed from my home, chaotic with kids and pets running around, to her home an ocean away, also filled with life. Having corresponded with Dr. Stiebert regarding other projects over the years, it was a joy to see her face-to-face and connect over the intensity of attempting to work on projects we hold dear during difficult times. Our interview time was one of wide-ranging conversation as we talked about what fuels and energizes her work to raising awareness about the connections between religion and rape culture. Her expertise in and love of the ancient Hebrew written language impact her approach to studying scripture. This is a unique vantage point amongst interviewed participants. She shared her rich knowledge in approaching scripture with individuals for whom it remains sacred text and therefore might be reluctant to read the passages with a critical eye. She shared her profound thoughts and personal experiences of living, teaching, and raising children within a rape culture. As her research has taken her around the world, Dr. Stiebert's efforts emphasize the need for global disruption of rape culture. When asked about how she stays motivated in this difficult and sometimes ostracizing work, Dr. Stiebert cited the value of righteous anger:

It's one of those really, really primal things, and obviously, when it's unchanneled and entirely impulsive, it doesn't tend to work in very effective ways. But I think anger can be a great source of motivation, and channeled activism. So, I have become more angry, I

think, because of having more time to think things through, as also prompted by events in our larger environment, of which Me Too is just the most public and large scale movement. So, I think anger is a part of it, and I don't think it's all bad.

Dr. Stiebert was among several participants who named anger as a motivating factor, albeit doing so with a smile on her face. The impact of the Christian tradition on controlling the bodies and emotions of women is well-documented, and anger is frequently deemed an off-limits emotion for women, particularly in the church community (Davis, 2000). Yet, Dr. Stiebert expressed an almost joyful acceptance of her own anger. Anger has deep religious roots, and harkens to a righteousness that dovetails with Biblical traditions of the prophetic voice. The prophetic voice refers to one that articulates that which everyone knows and few dare to articulate. In doing so, Dr. Stiebert speaks truth to the powerful system.

Dr. Stiebert further emphasized the necessary challenges of bringing new people into the conversation:

What I'm trying to say is, there's no point in being in a kind of place where the only people I talk to, and listen to, are people who feel pretty much the way I do. I think that's another thing that's come out of this, that there is a really important conversation to be had with the people who, it's difficult to glob them all into their just sexist this, that, and the other thing.

Dr. Stiebert articulated the need for a nuanced response in the midst of a global crisis. Her work encourages a response that recognizes the full humanity of everyone involved. This empathetic approach to bringing absolutely everyone in on the conversation of rape culture was a new challenge to me. She emphasizes the capacity for deep understanding of theological and scriptural history as a route to understanding rape culture as it came to be.

Dr. Caroline Blyth

Dr. Blyth is also a scholar and co-founder of the Shiloh Project. As a professor at the University of Auckland, Dr. Blyth works primarily with undergraduate students in their theology program. Her forthcoming book is titled *Rape Culture, Purity Culture, and Coercive Control in Teen Girl Bibles* (Routledge, 2021). Among the participants in these interviews, Dr. Blyth has the greatest breadth and depth of experience in cross-cultural exploration of the impacts of religion and gender-based violence, having worked directly on these topics with communities on three continents. Furthermore, she shared about her experiences of working directly with small gatherings of clergy people in an attempt to begin the conversations this dissertation is hoping to provoke. In these small gatherings she focuses on understanding how the church is already involved in rape culture and how that involvement could become disruption instead. Dr. Blyth's work took her on the path to education in a secular university setting where she meets students in a place near where her own journey in this work began.

I worked with mental health for about thirteen years, and I think at that point... I was always... you know I was a feminist; I was aware of gender violence, and I kind of encountered it, and its impact, during my time as a nurse. And then, when I went back to uni, I think I was just really interested in women in the Bible, biblical stories... I got very intrigued by the way women were depicted. And then when I did my master's degree, I was looking for a story to write about. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do because my education was at Edinburgh, it was a fairly traditional university, there was no sort of feminist biblical studies at all. But I just kind of got into it myself. I found the story of Dinah in Genesis 34, decided I wanted to do that, and then I think I initially just thought, Okay, I'll do a bit of research 'round contemporary rape culture, and how it's perceived,

just for background because I was going to do a fairly traditional master's degree looking at the Hebrew text. But, the more I surveyed what's happening now, the more I realized it's very similar to what was going on in the text. I initially, naively thought, "Well, it must be, you know...things are so much better now."

Though Dr. Blyth reckons daily with all the ways rape culture persists, she struggles with students who treat the Bible as an untouchable text, one that cannot be engaged with in a critical way. This is a stumbling block to the necessary work of connecting the academic to the pragmatic, the ancient world to the current one. Several participants remarked on this connection. Dr. Blyth's openness about her own journey toward a critical reading of Biblical texts offers a parallel for empathetic understanding of the journey her students may be traversing. Furthermore, it resembles the journey of parishioners who might be new to hearing a critical interpretation of the Biblical text.

If you raise a problematic text in the Bible, then you can't... You can't look at say, Ezekiel 16, and say, well you know "can't you see how damaging this rhetoric is?" And they'll say, "No, of course it's not." "You can't say that about the Bible, the women deserved it." You know... I think they feel very defensive (Dr. Blyth).

Dr. Blyth's work therefore involves the kind of translation work that mirrors what is necessary in the world beyond the classroom. Her translation efforts of giving voice to the unnamed women of scripture, reading the texts that are so rarely spoken of in church settings, naming context, and bridging those stories to the rape culture of 2020 are a parallel path that church leaders might employ in the effort to dismantle rape culture. This connection explored more fully in Chapter Five.

Dr. Blyth has worked directly with a variety of clergy groups to invite participation in that journey, and met with both interest and whole new collection of questions.

“How do we start these conversations?” They seemed really keen but were very aware that it would be quite tricky to navigate with their parishes. But we talked about things like, you know, Bible study groups and even just a more kind of institutional level. “How do we ensure gender equality in a church?” You know, “who gets to do the readings, or the preaching, or... in terms of committees. Do we have gender parity there? These things can help as well.

Dr. Blyth offered these and other pragmatic steps for church communities to systematically examine their personal investment in sustaining rape culture by upholding its history of gender inequality, silencing of female voices, and stifling a sense of trust in non-male leadership. Questioning those standard practices and disrupting them offer a meaningful, scalable approach to addressing rape culture.

As echoed by other participants, Dr. Blyth highlights the deeply personal and internal nature of the work of disrupting rape culture. While systemic and broad-sweeping change may be the goal, Dr. Blyth made it plain that change occurs one person, one relationship, and one community at a time. As with Dr. Stiebert and other participants, Dr. Blyth’s discussed “healthy rage”:

June Jordan, who is a poet, I think she was writing poetry in the seventies and eighties, but she talks about a place of rage that women... She was talking about women of color in particular, but I think about being in a place of rage, but it’s a healthy rage, and it can be quite empowering to give us... it legitimates our kind of kicking out metaphorically and it lets us do our research with integrity, but also in a way that we feel like we’re

doing something. And I think that helps as well, just thinking “I’m doing something, I’m doing something small.” And, if we all do something small, maybe it’ll make a difference.

This dual-sided theme of hope and anger became a prominent finding across interviews as well. Dr. Blyth’s sense of place in this work also drew a surprising finding. She highlighted the balancing of the public and the personal in how one engages the work of disrupting the intersection of religion and rape culture. Her words make me aware of how public-facing my own interest in this work is, as I am invested in opportunities to change policies or seminary courses or clergy trainings. Through interviewing Dr. Blyth and Dr. Stiebert, I began to understand how much of this work also involves internal awareness and divestment of the internalized oppression of working in a patriarchal structure like the church or, in many cases the academy.

Rev. Traci Blackmon:

Rev. Blackmon is a national leader as the Minister for Justice Associate General Minister of Justice and Local Church Ministries for The United Church of Christ, as well as the Senior Pastor of Christ The King United Church of Christ in Florissant, MO. As a national figure on a multitude of justice issues, I was happily surprised to be able to get on her schedule for an interview. Rev. Blackmon is something of a clergy heroine to me and her insights as a clergywoman, public figure, justice coalition builder, and her voice as a Black woman added necessary depth to this project.

Rev. Blackmon is a powerful preacher and speaker and her articulation of the nature of justice in the church offered specifically theological and spiritual insights that were unique among these interviews. As someone who has served in church leadership as well as broader

community organizing, her sense of education is defined both by the pastoral need and the need to seek justice. She paired the concept of discipleship, with justice, dovetailing the concepts of what congregations teach and what congregations do as an expression of faith. Rev. Blackmon describes:

Discipleship is something one aspires to, and justice is something that one executes.

When, in my opinion, they are one in the same; that one cannot be a disciple unless one is operating justly. Seeking justice is what discipleship is all about. So those are some of the nuances that come up, that for me, cause people to view justice as an optional thing and discipleship as an essential thing to the gospel, and I just don't agree with that.

Our conversation delved deepest when discussing how communities of faith manifest priorities in mission and justice work. Rev. Blackmon's work revolves frequently around anti-racism. The church I now serve is using a curriculum she co-wrote around applying theoretical anti-racism understandings to our community praxis and individual behaviors (UCC 2020). I solicited her insight into intersectionality in justice concerns. Rev. Blackmon's public work includes racial justice, police reform, LGBTQ inclusivity, prison reform, education, health care access, and more. This multidisciplinary approach renders her a keeper of insight into the ways intersectional justice is seen through the lens of church. I inquired specifically about how to address an issue of justice when the injustice is as invisible, as rape culture tends to be.

So, how people understand and operate in justice depends on what matters to them, and what they're exposed to in their areas. In my particular context, we do justice issues that span the gamut, from environmental justice to racial justice to economic justice, to LGBTQ issues, to women's issues and typically churches have their... areas of justice that impact them the most, and those are usually relational. So, if you go to a church that

is predominantly Black, racial justice is going to be up at the forefront. And occasionally there are white churches for which racial justice is up in the forefront. I'm not saying that people don't care about all the justice issues, but their capacity to really address them in any meaningful way seems to be greatly impacted by proximity to that pain, if you understand what I mean.

This analysis tracks personal experiences in church settings echoed by other participants. The question then prompted is how clergy might aid congregations in knowing their proximity to rape culture, the statistical likelihood of survivors in their pews, and the church's participation in perpetuating rape culture. If proximity to pain is a necessary precursor to justice, naming and knowing that pain must be a forerunner in the pedagogy of disruption. Rev. Blackmon's sobering look at the uphill climb that is church engagement with justice work was supported by a strong sense of hope, "And so the things that move the Church are the people, and if we allow ourselves to forget that, then we run into problems. But as long as we remember that, yeah, there's great hope." Hope that comes with a plan. Rev. Blackmon's ministry is marked with strategy and a keen sense of public theology as a mechanism for community formation and education.

Rev. Blackmon offered a plethora of alternative pedagogical approaches to consider how clergy teach the communities they serve. We discussed homiletics, mission, and Christian education, and she additionally elevated the placement of books on a pastor's office shelf, the use of public prayer as a pedagogical tool, and the clear-eyed examination of church policies and practices all as methods to invite conversation around faith and rape culture.

Rev. Blackmon brought to the fore the need to bridge the gap between pastoral caregiving and education that comes with the role of pastor. If clergy are to engage our communities on our historical role in creating injustices, including rape culture, we must do so

from a place of relationship and rapport, not from a place of outside expertise held aloft. In reflection of Rev. Blackmon's words and work, to disrupt or end oppression comes from loving people. A pastor's leadership toward justice cannot be solely disruption or solely pastoral care it must be both.

Dr. Gina Messina:

Dr. Messina expounded, "the one acceptable case is, 'If you are raped, that you could commit suicide,' because God can heal any injury, except for a broken hymen." Dr. Messina is a feminist theologian who teaches at Ursuline College in Ohio. Her work in *Rape Culture and Spiritual Violence* (Routledge, 2015) and *Feminism and Religion in the 21st Century* (with Rosemary Radford Ruether, Routledge, 2014) deems her a resource for specific spiritual practices in community response to rape survivors, as well as rape culture in the broader sense.

Dr. Messina was a warm, engaging participant who openly shared her autobiographical journey in this field and the way her spirituality directs her work. Our conversation was marked by laughter, open discussion of difficult parts of her journey, and an awareness of the complexity of discussing gender-based violence and rape culture in a historically patriarchal institution. Raised Catholic, Dr. Messina's journey has taken her to a more personalized spiritual expression with clear adherence to the great ends of the church as a maker of justice in the world. Dr.

Messina shared:

I really connect to certain aspects of the Catholic tradition that we often turn our back on, and that connect directly with the foundational teachings of Jesus. So, this is my spiel and you may have heard me say that, "but this is my spiel." I say, Jesus had four foundational teachings that come through in all his ministry, and those are love, inclusion, liberation, and social justice.

On the theme of liberation, Dr. Messina emphasized the need for a widespread uprooting of all that holds rape culture in place. Her articulation of this need led to a key finding within this current study, intersectionality. While rooted in the need to achieve genuine gender parity, also articulated by Dr. Blyth, Rev. Everhart, and Dr. Tombs, Dr. Messina's expansive understanding of the interweaving structures supporting rape culture illuminated a sense of scope:

Okay, so this is what I want to say. I said it needs to be disrupted here [in religion], first, but I always say this... you have to uproot in all places. You can't uproot one without uprooting others, so it's ongoing work that is interwoven across religion, society, whatever. But if we're talking about religion, to begin with, my first thought is discipleship of equals.

In Dr. Messina's view, an emphasis on roles of gender in religion and the way those roles lead to inequality in representation, leadership, and trust, are inextricably linked to the perpetuation of rape culture. If the church is teaching and reinforcing messages of inequality between men and women, then addressing gender-based violence and rape culture becomes a secondary step to first achieving genuine parity. The sense that women and men are unequal is such common knowledge that no participants named the scriptural root of it. Among others, Paul's letter to the church in Corinth states "women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says" (I Corinthians 14:34, NRSV translation). It is this statement and a handful of other texts taken out of context determining, for many denominations across many generations, that women should be kept from the pulpit, the opportunity to teach, and positions of leadership. This matters a great deal, especially when male pastors are then quick to enforce cherry-picked texts endorsing harmful rape mythology. Furthermore, it encourages a sensibility that says women bring violence upon

themselves and are beholden to their abusers. To the last point, whereby churches shame victims into staying with abusers in cases of intimate partner violence was a critical element in Dr.

Messina's choice to pursue this field of work:

In my past life, before I went to grad school for religion, I worked with rape and domestic violence survivors for about a decade and that is actually what drew me into the field.

That is actually why I went back and did my master's degree in religion, and then eventually my PhD is because the primary question that I dealt with, working with these women, was what role God was playing in their victimization. A lot of it, especially within domestic violence, is like "This is my cross to bear", "my pastor told me I need to stay married".

Interpretations of scripture that perpetuate violence are anathema to the teachings of Christ yet are perpetrated across denominations, cultures, and geographies.

Dr. Messina was one of several participants who openly disclosed the ways her personal journey intersects with the lived realities of domestic and gender-based violence. Her experiences and theological responses weave into her scholarship in important and incisive ways. Her interview elevated the theme of needing to balance the academic and the pastoral, an act of translation in itself. As with each participant who is primarily a scholar, the concepts of the Bible and church structures being used as props for rape culture were evident. The challenge becomes one of translating this knowledge to the parish setting, and to pastorally illuminate injustices in the name of disrupting rape culture today.

Dr. David Tombs

Dr. Tombs is a British author and scholar who focuses on liberation theology in his role as a professor in New Zealand and a global theological thinker from the Anglican tradition. His work centers on public theology, violence, religion, and Christian responses to gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and torture. His article on the specifically sexually abusive nature of the crucifixion story and the subsequent backlash he faced for an article on that topic first caught my attention. Entering into dialogue with scholars and communities alike means naming that which the church trains us to never discuss openly: sexual violence and abuse. Dr. Tombs spoke in powerful ways about his experiences of personal and professional backlash for trying to initiate these conversations. Our interview began with his description of the challenges of even writing a dissertation on the concept of Christ as a victim of sexual abuse. Dr. Tombs met with rejection from a mentor as a starting point “He literally wouldn’t touch the paper that I was writing on.”

The course of our interview was marked by energetic exchanges and shared understanding as we discussed the sense of relief that comes with finding others who believe this work is important. Connection with others in this setting helps validate our respective journeys. He went on to describe the roots of his journey, emphasizing the urgent need to look carefully at the realities of suffering rather than skate around those realities as incidental to theological thinking and teaching. This theme became abundantly important in the findings as the fulcrum to bringing this theoretical work to engagement with people who find their lived experiences reflected in the sexual violence of scripture. Having the right language became a key theme, referring both to the translation efforts of scripture from ancient languages and contexts to modern eyes and ears, as well as the translation from abstraction to lived reality. It was Dr. Tombs’ willingness to share his own challenges in living these translation efforts that brought

this theme to light. His work began with a need to largely restart his doctoral work, prompted by a misogynistic public execution of a health care worker in El Salvador and the pall of silence from progressive churches about the sexually violent aspect of her death and sexual violence more generally:

Maybe in hindsight it might have been sensible to say, Look, I'll get the PhD on the Christology of Jon Sobrino finished, and then switch to looking at sexual violence, but it never really occurred to me that that would be the better way to go. I was always going to go with what seemed important and that seemed, to me, the inevitable logic of what I was looking at. If I was looking at theology that took seriously the crucified people, then I didn't feel there was a genuine option to not actually look at how people were crucified. It just would not make sense to do that work and not actually look. So, there were two things which grabbed me, that it was both the extremity of the violence, the extraordinary way this woman was executed in a sexualized way; but second the silence on sexual violence in Liberation theology. In El Salvador, everyone knew that sexual violence was part of the counter-insurgency. For example, the four churchwomen who were raped and murdered in El Salvador in 1980, there was just nobody in any sort of progressive church circles who was not aware of that. Yet it is the murder not the rape which received all the attention, the rapes were barely mentioned, and if they were mentioned they did not get any serious theological attention.

Here, Dr. Tombs named a central challenge of this work. That which is universally known but goes unnamed remains unchallenged.

Dr. Tombs' work moves through numerous cultural contexts, first in London where he studied liberation theologies from other contexts. Then working in Northern Ireland with

particular emphasis on conflict reconciliation and resolution work. He is now in New Zealand working with a Peruvian colleague and he collaborates with universities in South Africa. As with Dr. Blyth, Dr. Tombs articulated the delicacy of crossing social and cultural contexts. He communicated ways in which this work is both steeped in local tradition and simultaneously unbounded as rape culture represents a global crisis.

His work also identifies the specific complexities of the roles gender plays in victimhood and survival experiences. Several of his pieces focus on the concept of Christ as a victim of sexual violence as a part of the crucifixion. The particular shock and rejection of this idea seemed to surprise him, as it certainly surprised me. While it was not a read on the crucifixion I had encountered before, it fits logically with the well-known narrative of not only Christ's crucifixion narrative but the historical record of crucifixion in general (Tombs, 1999; 2018). The shifting of the narrative of rape culture to include not only male victims, but arguably the best-known male victim in history, was jarring to readers as evidenced by the backlash to the article experienced by Dr. Tombs (Tombs, 2018). While his work does not explicitly translate that instance of sexualized violence to the modern manifestations of rape culture, Dr. Tombs went into great depth exploring the nature of prescribed and perceived masculine and feminine identities influenced by rape culture.

Dr. Tombs also identified the sense of *otherness* he experienced as a man writing about sexual violence as applicable to a man, and the resistance with which he was met in some feminist theological circles. His nuanced understanding of why this occurred initiated the theme of needing to ground any and all disruptive work on religion and rape culture in feminist, womanist, and mujerista theories, and to bring those theories to bear in how scholars and clergy share this work. He articulated a need for grounding:

There's certainly a legitimate concern that male experience can push out women's experience, and there've been some cases of people in Feminist theology pushing back or resisting the idea, or, I feel, mistakenly sensing that I'm saying Jesus' experience is more important than a woman's experience. And I can see some legitimacy for that, or at least the concern, but it seems to me, there's plenty of room to have a bigger sense of victimhood here, it is neither an either /or. The understanding of sexual violence in my work is very much informed by Feminist analysis. Feminist analysis is essential for understanding men's experience of sexual violence as well as women's experience.

It's not that they're completely the same, but many of the dynamics are exactly what Feminist writing has illuminated. It would be extraordinary to try and understand sexual violence against male victims without drawing on Feminist work.

Extraordinary indeed, yet, commonly done. Dr. Tombs amplified a key theme in the necessity of gender parity for this work to have any traction. That is, in centuries of feeling and being unheard, women are gaining space to use their voices. Supporting the participation of all genders by the priorities of female-built thought is not just a matter of appearances. Dr. Tombs' credits feminist work in his work on sexual violence and religion. This is a model for the church, a historically male institution that must learn to engage the female voice and experience if it hopes to become a site of disruption.

Rev. Ruth Everhart

After initially commenting on her experience preaching on rape culture and inquiring her experience, Rev. Everhart responded, "I don't have that church anymore, that's how it went for me." Rev. Ruth Everhart is an author, ordained minister, and intermittently practicing pastor, the last identity of which we spent a good portion of our interview discussing. She's published

several books as a memoirist. Her most recent work, *The #MeToo Reckoning* (Intervarsity Press, 2020), also includes aspects of memoir. Her work was recommended to me by participant Dr. Stiebert and shares stories of the ways misogyny and rape culture have impacted lives of clergy women (Everhart, 2020). Rev. Everhart and I met over zoom, as with all participants, from the throes of pandemic life and in a season of transition.

Our interview centered on Rev. Everhart's most recent work, in addition to her personal clergyperson who is striving to bring attention to the ways rape culture impacts and is manifested in the church. Amongst the participants, Rev. Everhart is the one most explicitly and consistently attempting to bridge this gap in understanding. As a result, she knows well the challenges of engaging congregations on journeys they are may not be keen to take.

To begin, Rev. Everhart shared her theoretical practices and exegetical approach to scripture. As a Presbyterian pastor, her training is similar to mine. Her experiences speak to the training we share in how to approach, translate, and engage with the Bible as a text for the purposes of homiletics and teaching. Our shared training in the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s preparation for ministry underscores the necessity of solid translation work at every stage in the journey of reading, understanding, and communicating scriptural moments of sexual violence. Furthermore, she highlighted translating that work into practical and impactful teaching for congregations.

You know that the filter through which we read scripture hasn't been questioned enough, our hermeneutic hasn't been questioned enough, so the lens of looking at something as a victim or as a potential victim is, you know, still this really unusual lens. And it's the lens I used in the book when I looked at Scripture... That means that the status quo way of approaching Scripture in the public, in the pulpit, or in the classroom, is going to be from

a more male-centered perspective, the more... the person in power. Just ironic because we follow Christ who personally divested himself of power.

This last point is theological and a key theme throughout the findings. Relationships and conceptions of power can and must shift rape culture. A major challenge in communicating the urgency of rape culture in church communities is that, even when a woman has achieved the role of preacher, pastor, and teaching elder, she is still doing so within a patriarchal structure that is not built to foster relationships or personal divestment of power. Rather, the church in 20th and 21st century iterations, is built to strive always for self-preservation. In Rev. Everhart's, and Dr. Messina's, interview it became abundantly clear true gender parity would be an enormous challenge to achieve within the church, and essential to any education to be done around rape culture. Rev. Everhart pointed to what seems profoundly true. She discussed Jesus embodying a great deal of feminism. In emphasis on community over self, divestment of power (called *kenosis* in ancient Greek) (Alank et al., 2007), in the willingness to sacrifice for the good of others, Jesus was antithetical to the values of patriarchy (Abrams et al., 2003). Maybe understanding Christ as a *mujerista*, feminist, or womanist in a different guise can help guide the journey ahead.

Rev. Everhart's interview profoundly revealed the depth of challenges women face in bridging the gender gap in ministry. Additionally, she showcased the added layers of difficulty when this includes engaging congregations in the work of dismantling rape culture. Her most recent experience in serving a church ended acrimoniously, and emphasized the depth of the gap between scholarship and the practical theologies of church. It is extraordinary that a church could see themselves as other-than or separate from the need to address a cultural crisis like rape culture. Yet Rev. Everhart's experiences speak to the unfortunate reality that many faith

communities would love a justice-oriented preacher so long as that justice orientation does not call for the congregation or congregants to change from the pulpit.

And I mean I do have thirty years of experience, I mean I'm actually really good at this, that's part of why it shocked me so much. I was like, Wow! I sidestepped so many landmines, you know, I did so many things right, and I think on some level it's that mom can't write a book and love us. They literally said, you know, "Maybe you just love your book more." And I'm supposed to work for them 20 hours a week... and they said, "Listen, you're a successful published author, you don't need us, you just go out there and be in your books." There's a lot of animosity, it was one of the nastiest things I've ever been through (Rev. Everhart).

Rev. Everhart's thoughtfulness and openness about her experiences in bringing the conversation to bear in church communities she's served further highlighted just how much work needs to be done. Churches are, broadly speaking, not prepared to engage in meaningful conversation about rape culture. Nor address how rape culture is impacting the lives of people within their communities. Rev. Everhart's transcript raises the point at issue of whether her experiences would look different if the same message was coming from a male pastor. Through her interview, Rev. Everhart brings about the matter of how denominations are or are not preparing clergy of every gender to engage in this material.

Rev. Everhart further articulated the challenges of entering into the fray of justice issues in faith communities, as the way churches select their mission or social justice involvement is often highly personal and highly politicized. As Rev. Everhart discussed, many churches are learning to speak the vital language of anti-racism. Through her position as a leader in the rape culture awareness movement, Rev. Everhart highlights the particular challenges of addressing

justice from an intersectional vantage point in the context of a church. When asked about whether she has seen or experienced churches meaningfully engaging with anti-rape culture work, Rev. Everhart replied;

I mean, I think some churches are trying to raise awareness. The denomination I grew up in, the Christian Reformed Church, which is very small, and quite conservative... I'm doing a webinar for them next week that they're going to distribute to their Safe Church Teams, and... I mean, they've had me back... And considering that they've had me back three (or) four times in a year and a half, they're trying to spread awareness. Around me, our Presbyterian churches are really engaged in racial justice... Right now, that's what's on front burner for everybody here, in the DC area, and that's fine. But I think sometimes there is this thing about only one justice issue can be on the front burner.

You can't quote me on this, but in terms of justice issues, race comes before gender. Well, you can quote me on that, except that it sounds... Race comes before gender, which is why Barack Obama was elected, and not Hillary Clinton. And it's just... sometimes we pretend all this is so damn complicated...and it's not. So, I mean, I'm all for racial justice, and I do my reading and I participate in that stuff, but I'm also noticing that the gender justice behind that. Of course, now it's falling under the umbrella of intersectionality.

When probed through further questioning how this shows up in her work, Dr. Everhart responded:

How it shows up for me is, I don't get any invitations because I'm white. Or, because I'm the age I am, or because ...I'm the person I am. ... In terms of leadership in my local

PCUSA culture, there's a lot of doors that feel I'm a little too old, and a little too white, to walk through them.

Rev. Everhart's personal experiences highlight a broad challenge. Churches have finite resources, bandwidth, and capacity. Churches remain the single most segregated communities in the U.S. The necessary work of Black Lives Matter (Black Lives Matter, 2020) and other organizations in response to systemic racism and race-based violence is finding purchase in white communities of faith (UCC 2020). From my experience pastoring across multiple Christian communities, I have witnessed a growing passion for learning, understanding, and disrupting racism. Rev. Everhart's words demand an answer if church communities have the capacity to understand the intersectionality of race and gender and the interplay of white supremacy and misogyny. She articulates why churches must address these justice needs holistically instead of competition for attention in the pulpit and the pews.

Rev. Shannon Kershner

Rev. Kershner is senior pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, which is one of the largest Presbyterian Church (USA) congregations in the country (Presbyterian Church (USA, 2013). She is one of a handful of women at the helm of large churches in our denomination, and the first female senior pastor in their nearly 150-year history. Rev. Kershner and I share both the denomination of our ordination, and several friends in common. A board member from the non-profit I previously made our introduction. Rev. Kershner's interview was especially appreciated. She was out of state on her first genuine vacation since the pandemic had begun and she was quite generous with her time and open about her experiences.

Rev. Kershner's sermon (Fourth Presbyterian Church, 2020.) responding to the #metoo movement and the hearings around the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh was a source of

inspiration to me in the early days of this project. In it, she shared deeply with full possession of her authority as a clergy person, teaching her congregation through the homiletical act. She taught in a way that was distinctly vulnerable, honest, and engaging in the hard work of translation between abstraction and lived experiences. In November of 2018, Rev. Kershner preached:

But after Thursday I felt, like most of my preacher friends across the country, that I had no real choice anymore. For one thing, the nation's most recognized hotline for those who have experienced sexual assault had a 147 percent increase in calls as the hearings played out on television. If nothing else, that reality demands a pastoral response. But even more than that, my seventy-one-year-old father, the one whose memories had returned in his fifties, reached out to me and invited me to work together on a sermon we both felt needs to be spoken from a pulpit like this one, with faithful folks like you. So, this morning we are going to preach about the church and its response to sexual assault.

(Fourth Presbyterian Church, 2020)

In the course of this sermon and our interview, Rev. Kershner expounded on how the church's silencing effect on survivors of rape culture has only perpetuated the power of rape culture and done nothing but shame and harm survivors. Silence is not the answer, not the silencing of difficult texts nor the silencing of the "unspeakable" in church. Rev. Kershner affirmed the omnipresence of rape culture, revisiting both how it has impacted her life experiences as a woman and how it shapes her world as a mother:

"[It's] ... The way women are taught to be perpetually aware, you know, lock your car door, all of that. This is the air we breathe." Rev. Kershner named the myriad insidious ways rape culture shapes the everyday movements and thoughts of women around the world, like a language telegraphed underground that prevents us from knowing there might be another way to

speak. Making use of the pulpit afforded her, she named that ubiquity of rape culture and accompanying silencing damage. Yet, despite the omnipresence of rape culture, Rev. Kershner spoke of hope of having an impact, a theme articulated by Rev. Blackmon and Dr. Stiebert as well. She shared her conviction:

Preaching is an act of pastoral care to survivors. The church's job is to have the language, language of sin and powers and principalities, language of redemption. We have to preach to the heart, not the head, using pastoral care language, the images of care. We've got to avoid language that will immediately shut down half the congregation.

The church's response to her #metoo sermon was overwhelmingly supportive (Fourth Presbyterian Church, 2020). In our interview, Rev. Kershner relayed that many, many older members expressing gratitude. Some shared they had experienced something similar to her father as a victim of child sexual abuse, feeling seen for the first time as a result of her sermon. Rev. Kershner's responded to the gratitude with overwhelming sadness, asking, "How could we [the church] have missed the boat by so much for so long?"

Rev. Kershner expressed more than once a need for clergy people to be prepared with appropriate language and skills to name the unspeakable. She discussed her own experiences in seminary training, echoing my own. She identified that preparation for women entering ministry includes a general sense that you will likely have to deal with sexual harassment or assault. Boundary setting training tends to be maintenance of boundaries beyond reproach in how clergy protect those under their care. Boundary setting rarely engages with how female clergy might be protected from harassment and how churches could be positioned as sites of disruption instead of casual acceptance of ubiquitous sexual harassment and assault.

Surprisingly, part-way through our conversation, Rev. Kershner recalled her own experience surviving a severe sexual harassment by a supervisor as a seminary intern. She recollected pressing charges and her abuser losing his jurisdiction. It is a rare for an intern in ministry to confront a supervisor's behavior in such a way. Women experience harassment so commonly that it becomes the exception rather than the norm for a woman to speak out and seek justice. Her experience of harassment and strength in pursuing justice is a tremendous thing, and yet this all seems like an afterthought to Rev. Kershner.

Rev. Kershner expressed the careful consideration she gave before preaching her #metoo sermon (Fourth Presbyterian Church, 2020), and the prioritization of pastoral care in her effort to educate and communicate about rape culture. Rev. Kershner gave voice to a tremendous challenge in this work, saying, "We have to resist the urge to shame or cause harm to people who may have caused shame or harm to others. We've got to hope for repentance, reparation, repair of some sort." Rev. Kershner named that which I had been avoiding; the particular problem of recognizing that as clergy preach and teach with survivors, clergy are simultaneously likely preaching and teaching with perpetrators. Our interview focused primarily on the homiletical act as the pedagogical tool to engage a congregation in rape culture and Rev. Kershner offered nuance not considered elsewhere. Rev. Kershner suggests a more expansive understanding of human nature and the pastoral obligation to aim, always, for a better possible future by inspiring people to repent and repair.

Single-Case Analysis Synthesis

Each interview in this process was a gift of time, expertise, and perspective. In spending time with each participant, I gained a sense of the emotionality of this work and the degree to which it is held personally and closely by professors and preachers alike. Each participant

experienced both the public and the private implications of working directly on sensitive and sometimes traumatizing stories, from Biblical literature and from the modern world. As affirmed in my interviews with Rev. Blackmon, Rev. Everhart, and Rev. Kershner, engaging in study or preaching about gender-based violence is fraught territory, in part because it holds a mirror to the ways the church implicitly and explicitly teaches the rape mythologies that continue to uphold rape culture.

Participants shared their personal experiences within rape culture, including being frequent recipients of disclosure from church members or students. The naming of rape culture by a figure in authority is a signal of permission. Seemingly, the taboo of discussing sexual violence has been lifted, it is safe to disclose. This implies the necessity of leaders engaging this work to have a grounding network of support for their own experiences, as the proximal trauma of receiving so many stories carries personal risk for the listener.

Participants also shared their experiences of being ostracized or met with professionally punitive responses for talking about rape culture in a religious context. While each participant identified the need to speak up as a motivating factor, each acknowledged the private and public risk. This makes for a complex dynamic and, in some cases, a dramatic journey of scholarship and parish leadership. All participants affirmed the necessity for further public education around rape culture and supported the herculean challenge of the church becoming a powerful avenue for the disruption of rape culture. While key themes varied by participants, there were moments of overlap among them, and these cross-cases are further explored by theme in the next section.

Cross-Case Analysis by Theme

Given the complexity of rape culture, I began each interview by asking participants for their working definitions of rape culture and their unique understandings of how rape culture and

religion intersect and interact. That final distinction, between interaction and intersection, became prominent in the way I categorized and considered these findings. Intersection and interaction became part of this study's operational framework. Recognizing my personal bias toward binary thinking, I conceptualized all findings as a fluid spectrum of thought rather than sorting into discrete batches. These two concepts arose as conduits of that fluidity, with intersection describing points where ideas and subjects met one another and interaction describing the movement caused by those points of meeting. This helped create a form of layered understanding as I considered each code and theme and helped counteract my learned impulses toward binary thinking by maintaining fluidity and multidimensionality.

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to exploring cross-case analysis by themes, beginning with participants' understandings of rape culture, as noted in Table 1, below. Themes are groupings of concepts that are naturally in close conversation with one another. From a practical standpoint, findings built on frequently overlapping focused codes, where the same concepts were telling multiple facets of a larger story. To begin, the first theme, Defining Rape Culture, examines the ways each participant constructs their understanding of rape culture, parameters of their definitions, and the interaction of rape culture and the work as scholars and theological practitioners. The second theme, Incarnation, examines participant positionality and how find themselves within their work, particularly focusing on aspects of hope and anger. The third theme, The Sacred and the Silenced, examines how participants have witnessed scripture and theological histories treated as untouchable and therefore not subject to critique. This theme extends to how untouchability causes harm. Within the theme of The Sacred and the Silenced, special examination is given to participant understandings regarding role of gender binary and hierarchy within Christian tradition. Additionally, encoding of these traditions, the silencing and

damages occurred are further addressed. In the fourth theme, *Mission and the Mind*, I analyze participant understandings of the complexity of the historical tradition of *mission*. Furthermore, missiological practices and pedagogies are understood as inextricable from colonizing attitudes and the subsequent need for decolonization. In these findings, mission is also consistently co-coded with the shaping of ideologies that reflect intersectionality. In the fifth theme, *Speaking the Word*, concepts of silence breaking, exploring the pedagogies of homiletics, the use of curriculum and unwritten curriculum, the presence of literature, and prayer as pedagogy are confronted. The final theme *Into the Unknown Future*, examines paths forward as participants imagine them. Specifically discussed is the central theme of compassion as an essential guide in meaningful work toward the disruption of rape culture.

Table 1

Final Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1: Defining Rape Culture

Theme 2: Incarnation

Hope and Anger

Finding the Self in the Work of Religion and Rape Culture

Theme 3: The Sacred and the Silenced

The Untouchable Text

Jesus as a Foreshadow of Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Theologies

Gender Binary, Hierarchy, and Disparity in Christian Tradition

Theme 4: Speaking the Word

Pedagogy and Homiletics

Mission and the Mind: Decolonizing Mission Work

Theme 5: Into the Unknown Future

Compassion as a Guide

Challenge and Necessity

Theme 1: Defining Rape Culture

Defining rape culture is a pivotal initial theme. Each participant spoke from a broadly accepted understanding of rape culture and added nuances resulting from their own professional focus. Significantly, bridging the space between talking about rape culture as a lived reality versus a theoretical, abstract, or historical idea was consistent with participants despite profession as scholars or preachers. Their common definition centered on the idea that rape culture is ubiquitous, largely hidden, and perpetuated by rape mythology. Each participant affirmed that rape culture is the reality of high rates of sexual violence and assault within a culture that simultaneously hides the extremity of sexual violence by upholding the structures and systems that allow it to take place. Participants identified that rape culture is communicated in and co-created by media, social taboos and expectations around gendered identities, and rape mythology. Each also identified rape culture as intersecting with religion in important ways.

Among the scholars I interviewed, Dr. Stiebert in particular conveyed a sense of urgency and an understanding of a cultural moment that was drawing these conversations into the light. She cited the ubiquity of the vulnerability and painful experiences of women living in rape culture:

Why now? It's one of those things where, I think, it was simmering under the surface for so long. So, of course something like Me Too is an example I keep coming back to, just because it was such a Flashpoint, wasn't it? Because it hasn't gone away, it's still very much around. I mean, what that says is just the level of need, and the level of pain, and the level of crisis, really, that has been there for so long. I think, most of us, when we think back, we knew that, didn't we? But it took something that accelerated in the way it did to make that clear, and to throw it into relief. Certainly, there's not a single woman I

would talk to who hasn't had experiences of unwanted attention, and much worse. There just aren't any. It was kind of just waiting to happen, wasn't it?

The sense of inevitability to which Dr. Stiebert refers is a hallmark of rape culture. The concept that rape is inevitable, the threat of sexual violence is ubiquitous, and is an unchangeable part of the fabric of reality bounds the experiences of those living within rape culture. Rape culture as immutable is an expression of rape culture. The initial step of resistance to rape culture is to name its existence and question its permanence, a sentiment echoed by Dr. Stiebert and other participants as well. Dr. Stiebert addresses the phenomenon of the #metoo movement (Me Too, 2020), and subsequent public response to it:

What I find also very interesting is the backlash to it (the me-too movement). That's quite an interesting reaction isn't it, the defensiveness that is also there. I remember when that Gillette ad came out "The Best Men Can Be" or something. And I remember showing it to my kids sort of thinking "Tell me what you think of this" and they couldn't see what the big deal is, but clearly a lot of people did and found it just so offensive to tell a man to be gentle, and not to be kind of grab women when he feels like it. And this was seen as a huge human rights violation, to sort of attempt. It was very telling and really awful, and really indicative of the long way there still is to go.

Dr. Stiebert's illustration is powerful on two levels. First, she demonstrates the ubiquity of rape culture in our media consumption by naming the absolute outcry that transpired when a corporation's advertisement tried in a small, capitalist way to push against rape culture. That type of response to a disruption of the status quo is a hallmark of gaslighting, especially on a cultural level. Dr. Stiebert's analysis of this example of rape culture in media representation is a generalizable and oft-cited component of rape culture. In the second level, Dr. Stiebert

demonstrated the power in the midst of immense cultural changes of bringing the discussion to the micro-level. She explains talking within families and engaging children about what they see and know is also an important fulcrum in changing cultural norms.

Participants named rape culture as urgent, global while being contoured uniquely in each culture, and impactful across gender and sexual identities. Two participants cited a sense of stronger urgency and self-awareness of the impacts of rape culture on women than men, while every participant acknowledged the existence of male victims in addition to females. In the view of several participants, it is the nature of relationships, power, and autonomy within a patriarchal structure, such as the church, that determine the silencing effect on survivors. Survivors are statistically more likely to be women (BJS, 2015).

Each participant framed rape culture as the confluence of social, political, religious, and cultural influences. The convergence of these influences constructs sexual assault as inevitable, continued support through rape mythologies, and entrenched behaviors and expectations positioning sexual assault as an immovable aspect of what it means to live in the world as a woman. Each participant contributed to this study in part because of the connections they articulate between religion and rape culture. As such, it is unsurprising that each locate some level of onus for co-creating rape culture, and responsibility for its disruption, on religious communities. Dr. Messina noted her belief that “the foundation of rape culture, in what we experience in society, is grounded within our religious traditions,” underscoring that “we see that in so many different ways, and it has to be disrupted there first.” Dr. Messina’s belief is a clarion reminder of the significant role the church plays in co-creating rape culture, which can and must be a site of disruption of rape culture.

Preacher participants tended to approach the interaction of religion and rape culture from the lens of pastoral care. Rev. Kershner and Rev. Blackmon advocated nuances in response. Each argued that tending to this, or any large-scale justice issue, is the moral responsibility and pedagogically-just path to engage parishioners as recipients of pastoral care first and foremost. Rev. Blackmon emphasizes addressing rape culture in public ways as a method of delivering pastoral care:

There is a teaching moment, many people in the pews know what their pastors care about because of what their pastors pray about. So, if you never pray about the oppression of women, or the silencing of women, or the rape of women, then how would one's congregation know that that matters to you? Because even if you follow the lectionary, you're not going to preach those texts. And even if you occasionally veer from the lectionary, and do preach those texts, you spend more time, more consistent time, praying. And I mean, your public prayers. That's something that happens in almost every worship service. If you never pray about those things, or make space for those things, then where do the people that you worship with get that? If you have people in your church who have been raped, and that is something not to talk about, there's a level of shame that is implied with that, right? Not that you get to put somebody's business on Front Street, that's not what I'm saying. But if you never talk about it, if you just pretend it never happened, it's like abuse in the church. If you know that people are being abused, and you don't say anything about it, then you're complicit in that abuse, right? And we see that in communities of faith, not just churches, in communities of faith all the time. Rev. Blackmon and other participants encouraged this form of acknowledging experiences of those in the pews, even experiences that have not been named to the preacher or teacher,

including experiences that have not and will not be named to anyone. By resisting the silencing power of rape culture, preachers can lead a congregation into a space of public acknowledgement, knowing and naming the realities of rape culture.

Several participants acknowledged the multiple challenges of preaching about rape culture. Several discussed the temptation to reverse the powerful force of shame and direct it towards those who codify rape mythologies and perpetuate harmful constructs, while acknowledging that this is unhelpful and may even be harmful. The efforts of understanding rape culture lay the necessary ground work that must be done before it can be disrupted. With knowledge of the silencing and sense of ubiquity of sexual assault, preachers and teachers can move into the next layer of engaging with rape culture resistance, incarnation. I use the word incarnation intentionally for its Christological connotations. Through incarnation, the process of becoming human, gaining flesh around the Spirit, the story of Jesus becomes spiritually meaningful. Likewise, through the process of recognizing the connection between the words of survivors or the knowledge of rape culture and the physical realities of rape culture on the body the gravity of rape culture becomes apparent. Each participant acknowledged the weightiness of this connection through their own experiences incarnating the work of disruption.

Theme 2: Incarnation

I began the work of understanding the relationship between incarnation and rape culture from a very simple place. Every participant in this study, every author and scholar who contributes to the body of existing literature, every survivor and every perpetrator, every person in every pew has a body. In the coming subsection, I will be discussing specific ways the work of religion and rape culture is embodied in the people who are writing, researching, teaching, and

preaching it. Among the participants in this study, the common experiences cited were the dualities of hope and anger, and the challenges of finding themselves in this work.

Hope and Anger

With gratitude to *mujerista* theology, the non-binary dualism of many of the themes and findings of this project were readily apparent (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). *Mujerista* theology emphasizes the aforementioned slippery relationship with time (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). A manifestation of that slipperiness is the sense that time is fluid rather than fixed (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Furthermore, it acknowledges the constant reification of the ancient and the future in the present (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). The spaciousness of temporal understanding pushes an understanding of the world as existing beyond binary, and holding more than one thing as true at once. A common finding supporting this theme is the coexistence of hope and anger as motivating factors in the pursuit of this particular work. Hope and anger are not opposing forces but rather poles on a spectrum of experiences. Participants showcase how it is possible and perhaps preferable to work towards disruption of rape culture from a place of anger and hope in tandem.

Rev. Blackmon stated, “And so, the things that move the Church are the people, and if we allow ourselves to forget that, then we run into problems. But as long as we remember that, yeah, there’s great hope.” Dr. Stiebert illustrates, “Anger is an emotion that compels to action, or that’s certainly the effect it has on me. There are other emotions that are just as strong. I think there is something about anger that is quite primal.”

As Dr. Stiebert and Rev. Blackmon elucidate, both hope and anger are rooted in the desire for change. Hope signifies the belief that things could be different than they are, and anger signifies the disbelief that things must stay the way they are. Acceptance of things as

unchangeable would be numbing, while motivation to create change is rooted in belief that it can be done, whether expressed as anger at injustice or as hope in a more just world.

For Dr. Stiebert, Dr. Messina, Dr. Blyth, and Rev. Everhart, anger is a motivator, one that serves as a call to action.

I mean, very clearly, the marks of rape culture, and of violence under the surface, were always there. I've become more aware of it. I've become angrier about it. And I've found ways to make my work work towards addressing it (Dr. Stiebert).

"I'm certainly more... I don't know if the word's cynical. I think I get angry, more. Not about everything, just about this" Dr. Blyth stated.

Yet anger dovetails consistently back into hope. Hope and anger are not diametrically opposing ideas but rather different manifestations of the same sensibility. Each may elicit the awareness that something is not right here and it could indeed be different. Dr. Messina framed this call for change as foundational to the teachings of Jesus:

I really connect to certain aspects of the Catholic tradition that we... we often turn our back on, and that connect directly with the foundational teachings of Jesus. So, this is my spiel, and you may have heard me say that, I say, Jesus had four foundational teachings that come through in all of his ministry, and those are love, inclusion, liberation, and social justice.

This theological interpretation is the seed from which the church can and should become a sight of disruption of rape culture. Dr. Messina's expression of the key themes, promises, and mandates of the Christian tradition is inextricable from the necessity of the church acting toward justice. Interpreting the relationship between these four foundations and the current intersection of rape culture and the church, posits a clear call to action. The challenge to include means

creating a space where survivors can safely exist. The calls to liberation and justice mean working to amplify survivors' voices, providing a public counter-narrative to one that insists rape culture remain inevitable.

Finding Self in this Work

The next layer of understanding incarnation as a subtheme is underscored by feminist theory. Within this finding, specific attention is given to understanding the participants' incarnation. Imperative to identifying this theme is digesting how participants find and position themselves within the work of studying, teaching, and preaching at the intersection of religion and rape culture. Each participant responded to how they anchored themselves in the difficulty of disrupting rape culture while balancing an awareness of the urgency of people's well-being in a rape culture alongside the practicalities of doing this work. A theme arising in the interview with Dr. Tombs, in addition to other participants, is the need to be intentionally reflective and reflexive when working at the intersection of religion and rape culture. Dr. Tombs described the need to balance the sense of self and the gravity of the work:

Most of what I did for the first sort of fifteen years or so was text-based and document-based, and I suspect it would have had a different impact if it would have been people based, actually talking to people. It was one step removed.

"I think researching this does change you," discussed Dr. Blyth. Dr. Messina explained, "We assume these are things that happen to other people, and don't happen in our own lives."

Dr. Messina, Dr. Blyth, and Dr. Tombs point to a singular aspect of their shared intellectual focus: that you bring yourself into this work in ways that are peculiarly personal. Working at the intersection of religion and rape culture involves layers of personal experience, living within a rape culture and personal implications of religious belief or spiritual praxis. The work can be

internalized, and even incarnated. Attentiveness to the ways in which this work is personal requires reflective and reflexive approaches to research, analysis, writing, teaching, and preaching.

The work of translating self to the project at hand in disrupting religion and rape culture, then translating the language of the project to the communities of faith where education transpires, may feel like mountainous terrain to cover. For example, Dr. Stiebert explained the importance of thoughtful, intentional research work as challenging and necessary:

That can be really difficult, but then there's also the feeling that as long as I'm reading about it, writing about it, I feel I'm kind of making myself stronger. I feel very strongly that good research is really important. I've done so many things just by being well-meaning, or out of a kind of emotional response, and that hasn't always been a good thing. I think I've possibly done damage, you know, just from good intention. I do actually think good intentions are important, but to have them be underpinned with responsible research matters a great deal.

Dr. Stiebert's experiences highlight the importance of recognizing internal motivation in pursuing this work, and the value of acknowledging that within clergy and scholars of religion and rape culture which might hinder more impactful research. Good intentions alone are insufficient because research then runs the risk of being more self-therapeutic than contributory to a larger body of knowledge which might in turn affect meaningful changes. That is not to say that scholars or clergy check ourselves at the door. Instead, as Prof Stiebert and Dr. Blyth alluded, scholars and clergy at the intersection of religion and rape culture begin by acknowledging the self they are bringing to the work, and then resist reifying their own pre-conceptions. Instead, scholars at this conjunction must pursuing responsible research that

translates meaningfully to experiences beyond their own. In acknowledging that scholars bring their own experiences to the work, they can then approach the text. Scholars and clergy alike bring our bodies to the work, and incarnate the weight of knowing how pernicious rape culture is, and how mountainous the task of moving such a historic structure as Christianity promises to be. Clergy and scholars bring our bodies to the work, with memories of our own survival, the victimhood of those we love and those whose names go unknown. And clergy and scholars bring our bodies to the work prepared to see in new ways, committed to understanding that is framed in our experiences but not limited to them. Such work begins from knowing what is said and what is omitted, who is encouraged to speak and who is silenced, and acknowledging that both the speaking and the silencing are often held as sacred.

Theme 3: The Sacred and the Silenced

The silencing of particular sections of scripture and the silencing of particular experiences including survival of sexual assault emerged as parallel themes. In each interview, participants explore religious history and practice interacting and intersecting with rape culture. Rape culture's omnipresence in the U.S. and much of Western culture is linked to the historical activities of the Christian church. Three participants were particularly keen to outline the ways the silencing of scriptural texts and or the silencing of experiences of rape victims feed into the persistence of rape culture.

In this section, the notions of the sacred and the silenced are explored as an aspect of the body and an aspect of the word. Participants from scholarly and practitioner realms named two ways in which the Biblical text is seen as untouchable. First, some portions cannot be spoken or acknowledged. Second, cases in which the text as a whole is treated as beyond critical engagement. Furthermore, the silencing of certain stories, experiences, voices, and bodies

presents as a natural outgrowth of these perceived-as-sacred silences. Consideration is initially given to the untouchable nature of the Biblical text as that which is perceived as beyond critique.

The Untouchable Text

The idea of Biblical scripture as an untouchable text has two meanings. One is physical. One participant encountered a reader who literally refused to touch the paper on which the participant had written about Christ and sexual assault. The other untouchable nature of scripture refers to the sense that these are texts which are so sacred, so beyond-human, they are not open for critique. The challenge of Biblical education and religious education based on scripture hinges on how scripture is formed is more fully discussed in Chapters One and Two. If the Biblical text is treated as divinely written, inerrant, and beyond human, it becomes impossible to approach it through a critical lens. Yet the impact of this text on lived realities is incalculable, affirmed by each participant. Analysis of that impact begins with the necessity of approaching, analyzing and critiquing scripture. Dr. Stiebert acknowledges the genuine challenge of inviting students into that critical mindset regarding scripture. She recalls, “*Hinterfragen* means to question the behind of something, the kind of background of something, and I think there’s a real loathing with students to do that.”

One such manifestation of silencing of scriptural texts is the resistance to critical engagement with Biblical texts, even among students in non-theological educational settings. Often even students who do not identify as Christian struggle to engage with it as critically as they might any other text. Part of the educational process then is a necessary demystification and humanization of the context in which Biblical literature arose. As Dr. Stiebert articulated, regarding the inconsistencies within “The Biblical text, given that it was written over such a vast span of time. And I say to them, ‘There’s nothing radical in saying that.’” The challenges facing

educators who would approach the Biblical text and trace its historical and present relationship to rape culture are myriad. It first requires overcoming the belief that specific fact and accuracy are the point of this sprawling, multi-century, geographically dispersed historical document that contains allegory, poetry, drama, and song. Inconsistencies can be discussed and critiqued in a story. It is a struggle to name and challenge the inconsistencies and problematic nature of scripture if it is accepted as divine and untouchable by human minds.

Indeed, Dr. Stiebert's statement is completely accurate, and yet it would seem that perhaps truth has become a radical thing. The subjectivity of truth to whim and human will is a topic for another project but the inerrancy of scripture is a facet of Christianity to which many hold dearly. To suggest a critical gaze on the text begins with acknowledgement that the story was composed in complex ways by diverse minds across expanses of both geographic distance and chronological time. To take this first step can lead to an unraveling of faith. Yet, the invitation to engage with the way Christianity has been lived out and manifested across centuries and continents hinges on the ability to name that it is indeed a document written long ago and far away by many voices. From there, clergy and congregants are enabled to engage with what the text does not say, but is understood to mean. Dr. Messina enlightened me on several aspects of church history, framed by some of the patriarchs of the church's foundational documents:

There is no written rule, it's just an obvious piece. The church fathers, if you look at teachings of Jerome, Irenaeus, Augustine, very much they talk about the idea that suicide is never acceptable except in the case of rape. If you're raped, that is the one time a person can commit suicide.

This interpretation of scripture to the ends that are most violent and, most frequently violent to women as victims of rape, is a poison pill that has shaped generation after generation of harmful theological teachings (McClure & Ramsay, 1999).

As Dr. Messina concludes, it is not a written rule anywhere that sexual violence is considered so damaging that one is recommended to end life rather than live with the shame, and that this ugliness is directed toward a victim but not a perpetrator, is an unwritten curriculum that massively shapes how Christians conceptualize sexual violence. A feminist, womanist, or mujerista lens would quickly reveal the impossible cognitive dissonance that is the claim of Christ as a loving figure on the side of the oppressed and the tacit acceptance of sexual violence and victim blaming by the church.

Dr. Blyth spoke of an educational approach that might welcome even those who read the Bible as literal, encouraging instead an examination of our existing rape culture:

I think that if we change our mindset in the here and now, then I think that we'll change the way we read, we hear, and see religious teachings or read religious scriptures. Maybe if you start with the Bible, people are automatically going to say "Hands off, that's our sacred text." I wonder if we start here, and say, okay let's talk about domestic violence for example... I'm sure everyone now is going to say "Well yeah, that is unacceptable and terrible". And then go back to the text and say "Well, what's happening here."

These ways of reading, as named by Dr. Blyth and suggested by other participants, are a fulcrum on which clergy and scholars might critically engage the way that harmful theologies lead to lived violence. Such understanding is imperative to making any meaningful change in the church's relationship to rape culture. Changing the way readers understand, means shifting the modes of thought, the truths accepted, and the lenses through which scripture is interpreted. It is

possible that a reading rooted in modern cultural understanding and lived knowledge, as rooted in womanist, mujerista, and feminist theological thought, may open the door to better unlocking the chain links of religion and rape culture.

Jesus as a Foreshadow of Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Thought

The sense of a feminist reading of scripture as a radical consideration in many Christian circles emerged as another common theme. Similarly, the sense that feminist thought was crucial to the unpacking of religion and rape culture as connected ideas rose as a common theme. The professors interviewed had a variety of experiences introducing feminist theological thought to their students, who arrived with varying degrees of familiarity or self-identification as feminists. Dr. Messina teaches at an all-women's university setting, and engages students who are slowly recognizing their own feminism:

My students are very engaged. First of all, most of my students don't identify as feminists. They don't like it, the word, they have a problem with it they have particular ideas about it. Which is why I think in some ways, it's made a comeback, because people are saying "Why aren't you a feminist?" But I think they very much have feminist values in recognizing their own struggles as young women in the world, and what they anticipate will be when they leave college and look for careers in the world. I have many students that come to talk to me about their experiences with sexual violence.

Womanist praxis, mujerista theology, and feminist thought insist on the parity of genders. In as much as popular culture has characterized rape culture as a women's issue, despite the existence of many male victims as well as the obvious point that it is an issue largely perpetrated by men and therefore very much a men's issue, one could indeed find it difficult to teach about rape culture in a culture that insists that women are lesser (Viki & Abrams, 2002). A feminist

lens helps begin to untangle this web. Dr. Tombs believes one must be feminist to work against rape culture via the church, a deeply patriarchal structure:

I mean, certainly the understanding of sexual violence is very much informed by Feminist analysis. And the understanding applies to women, and to men ... it's not they're completely the same, but many of the dynamics are exactly what Feminist writing has illuminated. You know, it would be extraordinary to try and understand sexual violence against male victims without drawing on Feminist work.

Several participants named that while they esteemed this work as necessary and valuable, they also perceived a great deal of professional rejection. Such rejection would follow the pattern of socially encoded silencing. That is, a common sense of not speak about these things. While any child's response to such an edict would be "why not?", social taboos do not respond kindly to such interrogatives, as was reflected in the experiences of several participants. Yet, they continue to speak out. For Rev. Blackmon, this is a matter of fidelity to the Gospel:

I think it's important for the authenticity of the Gospel, right? And you know, there's something that has to be said about what it means to worship in a sanctuary. That Sanctuary has to be a safe space, and it has to be a safe space for the woman's body as well as for the man's body. And to not have a space that is courageous enough to address head-on the rape of women and the denigration of women, in a way, makes it not safe

The "head-on" way of addressing matters is a matter of creating safety and for living out the teachings of Christ. Centering Christ as an ally to those who have been victimized is both a pedagogically sound theological approach, and one that can contribute greatly to the creation of a genuine sanctuary, a space that is indeed safe (Fortune, 1983). A well-evidenced protective factor against child sexual abuse is talking about bodies and ensuring children from a very young

age know the proper names for body parts (Ryan, 1989). While that can lead to some uncomfortable moments among more traditional mindsets, it is a protective factor for the simple fact that children who know the proper names are more likely to disclose if their boundaries have been violated (Ryan, 1989). The same concept is translatable to rape culture and the church. Speaking up can save lives and it is no different in the case of rape culture in the church.

Gender Binary and Hierarchy in the Christian Tradition

One area of resistance to this field needing interruption is the church maintaining a strict and coded concept of gender binary as well as a male-over-female hierarchy. Keeping sexual violence unspeakable is its invisible existence preserving coded roles of men as decision-makers and keepers of power and women as subservient and obedient. Rape culture is not a violation of the dynamic, it is a perpetuation of it. It remains a clear source of struggle within the community of scholars endeavoring to engage religion and rape culture. Dr. Blyth spoke of her experiences engaging clergy around rape culture:

My colleague Emily and I had a workshop talking to a group of pastors about “How do we start these conversations?” And they seemed really keen but were very aware that it would be quite tricky to navigate within their parishes. But we talked about things like, you know, Bible study groups and even just a more kind of institutional level. How do we ensure gender equality in a church? You know, who gets to do the readings or the preaching or in terms of committees, do we have gender parity there? These things can help as well

These nuanced understandings of the necessity of gender parity were echoed by Dr. Messina and Rev. Blackmon. Again, such translation work is necessary for the expression that this is not just a *women’s issue*, and to bring the urgency of rape culture to bear for the full

breadth of a church community and beyond. This perpetuation of what belongs to women and to men continues to promote harmful heteronormative gender-binaries. Preserving this perpetuation misses an opportunity to upset the patriarchal myth that only two genders exist and are in opposition to one another.

The perpetuation and propping up of a binary understanding of gender and a hierarchical understanding of gender contribute heavily to the normalization of rape culture (Viki & Abrams, 2002). Lifting the taboo on the topics of gender identity spectrum and fluidity, beyond binary interpretations of gender, and an anti-hierarchical appreciation of gender identity are all important steps toward disrupting rape culture (Viki & Abrams, 2002). The participants articulate the need for change through naming a need for gender parity, dismantling the idea that rape culture is a women's issue, and challenging the status quo of silence. One area where rape mythology and gender disparity are rampant is mission, according to participants, and the subsequent theme discusses this dangerous status quo.

Theme 4: Mission and the Mind

The most consistent overlapping themes among the findings include intersectionality, mission and decolonization. These concepts seem inextricably linked, particularly in U.S. protestant expressions of faith and conceptions of mission (Turpin, 2017). It is worth noting that mission historically emphasized the concept of evangelism (from the Greek, literally "sharing the good news") and introducing people to the teachings of the church (Aland et al., 2007). The individuals interviewed understand mission as the expression of faith through generosity, hospitality, and the work for justice in the name of faith.

Aspects of this complex theme form one another in mutual reflection. Participants framed missiology, though ancient, as an act of bringing compassion, justice, and mercy into the world,

as well as the work for and by which reparations are critical. This need for repair stems from the deeply embedded roots of colonization and white supremacy, a violent part of the church's historical pedagogy that continues to cause harm today (Gonxhe & Farrell, 2020). In Western cultures, the very concept of church history is largely rooted in Euro-centric, white, heteropatriarchy (Jones & Tajima, 2015). The church of Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, etc., the church of white men in European nations are the centralized experiences of nearly all Protestant U.S. churches today (Jones & Tajima, 2015). The fact that the early church was born in Palestine, and the disciples who traveled with Christ made their way first to Africa and India long before Europe became involved, seems to have largely disappeared from self-understanding in white, mainstream churches in the U.S. today (Oliver, 2014). This centralizing of the white heterosexual male experience, history, and perspective is at the heart of the need to decolonize and disrupt the patterns of perpetuation of rape culture in the church. Dr. Blyth in particular gave reason for hope, articulating her experiences as a white female scholar working with primarily Indigenous students in New Zealand:

I'm always very aware if we go into a classroom and start talking about, you know, the problematics of a certain biblical text, or the problematics of a man having authority over his wife. You know, I've never had a student say this to me, or they've talked about problematically themselves, or they say, "that's just part of our culture." You know, "Your ideas of gender equality would be seen as a Western import." "It's part of colonialism, it's something we don't want. It's not part of who we are." Now, I think that it's kind of generational, in that the majority of our students we see are younger, and that younger generation that millennial generation is much more attuned to the problems of that. And, they're also really, really interested in engaging with it, and trying to kind of

wrestle with it, both in terms of gender equality and also with- LGBT identities. Because their churches are traditionally very homophobic...but they see themselves that that's not... they say that's not part of our culture, that shouldn't be part of our culture. So, yeah, it's always trying to navigate between cultural identities and Christian identities, but also how do we educate people about gender equality and gender violence. I think it's something I've not quite worked out how to do. I think in class, I'm very clear about, "Okay, this is my viewpoint, and there's no debate here." But I always make clear to say to people, "You don't have to agree with me, but I cannot be nonpartisan when it comes to something like rape culture or race.... White supremacy, or transphobia, homophobia, rape culture, patriarchy... and I sort of said, "I am completely partisan." And the students were fine, yeah, they were like, "Yeah, I think you should be."

Dr. Blyth spoke to the complexities of cross-cultural mission, historically and in the present context. There are undoubtedly missionaries in both contexts for whom the primary goal of mission work is pedagogical. Pedagogical in this case referring to teaching newcomers about the teachings of the church and Jesus Christ. For many, this appears a sincere effort toward education with a belief that eternal salvation is hinged on the acceptance of those teachings. The morality of such practices is beyond the scope of this project, with the exception of acknowledging that treating pedagogy as a way to manipulate the fates of others, even toward ostensible good, is a distillation of the ways in which all mission is colonizing to some degree.

Professor Gonxhe and Professor Farrell (2020) of the University of Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary respectively, have outlined the problematic ways this colonizing aspect of mission continues to wreak socio-cultural havoc:

In the midst of this historical and even present-day reality, the majority of those who have reaped and continue to reap the benefits of such injustice seemingly choose to have selective amnesia, refuse to repent, and deny reparatory justice. This is our US contextual reality: on the one hand glaringly obvious racial discrimination and on the other, perpetual, vehement denial of it...There is a long legacy of white churches sending missionaries or supporting white-run Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to do work for impoverished communities throughout various countries in Africa. Oftentimes these so-called partnerships are extremely lopsided as it relates to recognized value for the other, the sharing of assets with the other, and the affirmation of dignity. In essence, these unbalanced actions often result in the white people from America big brother-ing the black people from these African nations. The problem is all the more exacerbated by the fact that most of these same congregations do not seek true partnership and lack accountability with the black people in their own local contexts. It appears that to assuage their white guilt experienced by being benefactors of the enslavement of Africans and systemic racism in this country, these congregations would rather deal with the black people over there in a relationship which they can control, than deal with the societal reality of the black people here with whom they would be systemically accountable. American mission has historically involved a strong affinity toward affecting change in other people's societies with little to no connection toward affecting change in our own (p. 194).

This tension of mission as a pedagogical mechanism for empowerment or a tool for maintaining a status quo is a fulcrum in understanding the ways the church teaches rape culture or disrupts rape culture. In the realm of mission work, churches can continue to

represent the forces of white supremacy, patriarchy, and colonization, or can present active sites of resistance in decolonizing mission in both pedagogy and praxis, or can indeed fluctuate on a spectrum between those two poles (Gonxhe & Farrell, 2020).

Should a congregation choose a decolonizing approach to their conception of mission as a means of disrupting rape culture, understanding intersectionality is a crucial starting point.

Intersectionality is, compared to mission, a new term, forged in the reflective fires of oppression traced centuries into the past (Crenshaw, 1991). The concept of unique identities and self-hood that is shaped by intersecting experiences in the crucible of oppressive systemic practices is crucial to understanding how rape culture and religion collide and co-inform (Crenshaw, 1991). The historical roots of modern mission work are the collision of misogyny, white supremacy, and the dehumanization of colonized people (Gonxhe & Farrell, 2020). If the roots of the soil are misogyny and colonization, any fruit born will be in part shaped by that soil. The fruit born, then, from the collision of mission and the enactment of unjust ideologies leads to lived violence.

Dr. Tombs, out of all participants, works most closely with accounts of modern experiences of sexual and gender-based violence and theological points of connection with those experiences. He clarifies the particularities of violence, citing the unique challenges of engaging honestly with the ways unjust ideology leads to violence. He illuminated how to speak about violence in a way that does not contribute to the dehumanization of victims. Below, Dr. Tombs explains his approach alongside that of Dr. James Cone, author of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011).

We will talk about lynching and crucifixion. I have no doubt at all James Cone is fully aware of the sexual violence in lynching. You know, this is not something that is going to be new to him. I suspect he has not gone into detail because he wishes, completely understandably, to affirm the dignity of the victims, or at least to not re-inscribe further dehumanizing, degrading violence on them in his depiction of them. And that is a challenge for anybody who is going to write about lynching, with attention to sexual violence. How do you do that in a way that at least seeks to avoid that, and hopefully avoids it to some extent? But it's complicated by the fact that you do have these hostile, negative reactions that get thrown at you for any attempt to speak sensibly, and honestly, and clearly about what violence was actually done. And, there's a danger of not recognizing that being silent about the violence is itself a form of violence, or at least complicity with a form of violence. So, it's entirely understandable for any particular scholar to say, "That's not where I'm going to go." But, if all scholars do that, then what actually happened in terms of this violence gets sanitized out with the complicity of scholars. So, you know, there's no ideal alternative, and what I was trying to do with that paper was try to put on the agenda that if we're talking about lynching and crucifixion, then one of the things crucifixions might allow us to do, is to reintroduce the element of sexual violence in crucifixion, in the light of lynching. And because Jesus is the victim, in the case of crucifixion, to speak about victims of lynching, in a way that's not degrading and dehumanizing, ...but is akin to the experience of Christ.

Dr. Tombs draws out the nature of complicity when scholars, educators, preachers and practitioners deny the violence of the text and the violence that has been perpetuated out of a silencing and sanitizing of the violence in the text. His particular focus on re-humanizing victims

of religiously-adjacent sexualized violence is returning the reader a sense of the soul and humanity of the victim. Disruption of rape culture in the church is misdirected if it goes only so far as to decry the physicality of violence without recognizing the ways such violence dehumanizes victims, undermining their station as a beloved and whole child of the community of faith and, by extension, God. In order for rape culture to be truly disrupted in the church and mission extensions of church, mission must become decolonized.

De-colonizing Mission Work

All is not lost. Though the tree rooted in the soil of colonizing mission is steeped in misogyny, hetero- patriarchy and white supremacy will most certainly bear bitter fruit, it is possible for seeds of a new generation to claim and clear a new path (Farrell, 2018). Actively decolonizing the pedagogical praxis and historical understanding of mission work begins with listening, building partnerships, and recognizing the ways faith groups prop up colonization today (Farrell, 2018). Dr. Stiebert was one of several participants to name the capacity of Biblical scripture to bridge cultural divides:

Both of those projects use Biblical texts to be a shared medium to use by communities that maybe don't have much in common with each other. Mine, and a community in Botswana, or the LGBT community we work with in Kenya. But the Biblical text gives us something shared, something common that can open up, we found really, really exciting conversations, and they can be at the root of making things better.

Throughout the analysis consistent overlap emerged between the dual coding of colonization (in some instances decolonization) and intersectionality with mission. The data revealed much of how church is done and traces the role of rape culture in mission, and of mission in rape culture. Also, emergent in the data is the general concept of mission within

theological education and seminary training, the understanding of mission at the local church level, and the particularities of mission trips or programs. This is emblematic of an evolving discourse, particularly with current attempts to decolonize missiology in the life of the church. Such involvement deepens understanding of the past and imagining different possible futures.

We serve the Jesus that we seek, right? And I think that we don't have these conversations enough, about who was this Afro-Semitic Palestinian who came to disrupt life as it is, right? Jesus didn't come to make bad people good. Jesus came to give life to dead things, to dead people, right (Rev. Blackmon)?

Rev. Blackmon provided this potent reminder of what James Cone (2011) refers to as “the transvaluation of the world.” The teachings of Christ include a prophetic proclamation that the things of greatest value in the world (power, wealth, might) should be inverted with grace, compassion, and weakness (Cone, 2011). This is excellent news to those who would seek the disruption of rape culture. This conceptual and practical flip of power is common parlance in the Christian tradition and one that comes into sharp relief against the backdrop of rape culture (Cone, 2011). It is the call toward the concept of Christian prophetic imagination, in which leadership casts a possible future in which the victimized hold power and the oppressed can become unafraid. Such prophetic imagination is an ancient pedagogical practice, going back to Moses and similar Biblical figures (Deuteronomy 18:15-22 NRSV translation; Breuggemann, 2018). It is a technique that bolsters the community as it exists and challenges it to become better (Breuggemann, 2018). In any discourse about disrupting a power structure like rape culture within the context of Christianity, the core values of that context must be a factor (Breuggemann, 2018). Once again, one fruitful pathway toward contending with rape culture and Christian context is feminist theology.

Feminist theology (Ruether, 1983; Ruether, 2011) names Christianity's basis in patriarchal violence from which stems culture and geography crossing degradation of and harm towards women. Womanist theologians (Cannon et al., 2011), acknowledge the same socio-historical and current function of Christianity in the lives of Black women, naming the ways gender and race are bound together. Liberation theology recognizes the economic and social implications of Christianity's exploitation and abuse of the Global South (Gutierrez, 1988). Mujerista theology adapts all three and weaves them into the fabric of the lives of Latina women. This is achieved, in part, by proving the malleability of otherwise fixed notions of time (Isasi-Diaz, 1996).

For Mujerista theology to decolonize Christianity, the simultaneous existence and belief in wisdom that is ancient and the possibility of the prophetic are required elements (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Like the celebration of a Eucharistic supper, in which the bread and wine hold symbolic force as both temporary and omnipresent, ageless and future (Barth, cited in Hunsinger et al., 2020) Mujerista theology accesses the eternal and immediate, the ancient and the yet to be (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Participants in a Mujerista theology are empowered by becoming, "simultaneously...archaeologists and visionaries of our culture. We may contribute a collective vision toward the development of an alternative social system" (Castillo, 1994, p. 226).

The praxis of Mujerista theology runs counter to both colonization and whiteness as forms of systemic oppression. The implications of non-binary dualism are that there is another way, beyond rejection and blind acceptance (Castillo, 1994, p. 101). Entering the potentialities of a decolonized Christian experience is an act of both internal healing and external *gringostroika* (Bebout, 2016). "Gringostroika is a critical intervention against whiteness on the border both because it names the linkages between racial and national projects and because it imagines their

dissolution, gesturing toward a new future” (Bebout, 2016, p. 213). Removing whiteness from the center of Christianity gives space for the memory that the foundation of the faith was an itinerant, poor, Palestinian Jew working against empire and killed for sedition, to rise to the surface (Luke 2, Luke 8:1-3, Luke 9, Luke 23:26). Such a theological understanding surely makes more sense in the hands of *mujerista* theologians and activists than wealthy white men.

By centralizing *mujerista* theology in contending with rape culture, scripture can be recoded for anyone from anywhere can critically engage. Clergy and scholars remove our tacit consent to the violence preserved in ideologies of whiteness, maleness, and heteronormativity. Dr. Blyth illuminated the connection between harmful ideologies and their preservation in silence:

I think Esther Fuchs says something like, “we become complicit in preserving these ideologies.” We become complicit in the idea that it’s acceptable to write about or to hear about a husband disciplining his wife by using sexual or physical violence. So, we give a pass to the narrator or the author. And when we do that that can seed in or seep in, to contemporary understandings of gender violence by saying, “Well, God said it’s ok to hit your wife, it must be ok”. Or even just “here’s a story, here’s a narrative, and there are all these elements of rape culture and rape myths. You know, this text says women, it’s her fault... she’s to blame if she gets sexually assaulted. The Bible says it’s okay so it must be okay. And I think we can do that in kind of explicit ways, and I hope it doesn’t happen as often. But by basically saying “If God says it’s okay to hit your wife, then it must be okay.” But also, as Biblical scholars, as pastors, as preachers, to let that pass... to not highlight it and say “This is really problematic, let’s talk about this” is almost

encouraging people to normalize gender violence. Or to say well, you know, it's no big deal.

Dr. Blyth's insight is a strong call to clergy and clergy educators alike, particularly in predominantly white denominations in the U.S., many of which have held hugely damaging public arguments about the inclusion of LGBTQ members and leaders in their communities (Gehring, 2017). Denying the centering of whiteness, heteronormativity, maleness, and other forms of privilege, is to effectively choose blinders against the damage done by such ideologies. It is tantamount to claiming that the violence, despair, and destruction realized by these ideologies either does not exist or is no big deal.

Theme 5: Speaking the Word

Merely knowing that these ideologies exist is not enough. Recognition of the damage caused if preachers, teachers, and seminary educators who are not equipped to speak that knowledge into action must be acknowledged. If rape culture is known but allowed to continue thriving in the shadows of chosen unseeing, it is as though the knowledge never existed in the first place (Trible, 1984). This next section explores the ways the previously silenced words of scripture and survivors can be spoken.

Pedagogy and Homiletics.

In response to self-understanding and the unearthing of silenced texts, theory can illicit action. Educational translation work takes a few directions, including homiletics (Gross, 2002). Amongst the participants there was a consistent sense of homiletics as the primary pedagogical pathway for education in the life of the church. Several participants affirmed the perception of power and respect for the position of preacher. The question then becomes whether and how this power is wielded in relationship with rape culture. The movement of power is crucial in

understanding how a system of oppression exists and is resisted. Participant views returned to a theme of sin of omission as a way of naming the unspoken nature of rape culture from the pulpit.

As Dr. Blyth explained:

In most cases, it would be in terms more of a sin of omission. So... not addressed. I don't think there are many churches who stand up and say, "Ezekiel 16. Listen husbands this is what you have to do. I hope!"

Her sentiments were echoed in other interviews. Rev. Blackmon's perspective as a preacher reiterated the power that is associated with the pedagogical act of homiletics:

I think that a lot of that guidance comes from the pulpit. There is still a lot of reverence and respect for those who preach the Gospel, especially for those who attend church, and even for those who don't. And so, it's all about how we present the Jesus that we say we're following, right? And so, if the Jesus that we say we're following is only the aspects of Jesus' character that were sacrificial, or were miracle-making, then we get a different view of Jesus than the one who went and hung out with the undesirables, and who provided food when people were hungry, and who used his powers not to collude with government, but to confront government.

In this excerpt, Rev. Blackmon framed the way preachers translate the power and limit or silence parts of the text, to communicate a particular aspect of the figure of Christ. The latter description is one that speaks to justice and alignment with the oppressed, as hallmarked by liberation theology (Gutierrez, 1988). It is important to recognize that not every story in the Bible gets told, not even every story about Christ, in following the Revised Common Lectionary (Consultation, 1992). It is perfectly possible to preach only a very limited selection of the stories of Christ's life

and thus omit the stories which represent a clear call to critique structures of power. Dr. Stiebert similarly identifies the power of the pulpit and the preacher as community educator and leader:

[Those] whose words in the pulpit can really get people listening, and then talking in their own settings and communities. Because they're very often gatekeepers, aren't they? They're very often the people to whom disclosure is first made, say, or whose words in the pulpit can really get people listening, and then talking in their own settings and communities. So, I think what you're trying to do with church leaders is really important, and likely to do great things. I'm absolutely persuaded of that. With the little work I've done in that area, very much persuaded.

Dr. Stiebert's affirmed of power of preaching, from the perspective of a scholar not practitioner, religion amplifies the function of preachers as translators of text page and the culture in which they live to the participants in the faith communities they lead. Yet the pastoral response is not necessarily straightforward. The act of translation begins with contending with how preachers engage Scripture, described by Rev. Blackmon:

So, simultaneously to the external forces, we are always battling inside what we need, and how we act, and how we respond. And I think the preacher has a huge role to play in that, to remind us that we do live in the and-and-and of those things, internally and externally. And that Jesus came to call us to our higher selves around the areas where we have access, and to call us to lift our voices in the areas where we lack access. The Scripture lends itself to that, if that's what you want to do with the Scripture, but not everyone does.

Each participant identifying as preacher in this study experienced engaging in the homiletical act for the purposes of naming and disrupting rape culture. Rev. Blackmon stands by

her refusal to continue silencing texts, including those aspects of well-known stories that are taught in incomplete ways. Her persistence in naming the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11- 12), for example, as one of coercion, violence, and the rape of Bathsheba is a bold analysis and one she has taught and preached on numerous occasions. The narrative of David as a shepherd boy battling Goliath, as the King who dances for joy before God, and the leader chosen for God's people is one taught with great frequency and familiarity in Sunday school rooms across the country and around the world (Long, 2018). Rev. Blackmon's analysis deepens the story by naming that David is human, and a contributor to the cultural acceptance of violence against women. Through a painful re-rendering of David, Rev. Blackmon provides the profound strength of critical analysis in teaching in new ways. Given David's role in the lineage of Christ (Matthew 1:1-17), it matters that clergy not gloss over texts to give them a good shine, but rather teach a full story that challenges the ways Christians casually accept, teach, and reify violence visited on bodies throughout the ages, including Christ's own body.

So, mostly, when I've done that sermon, I've done it maybe about four or five times in my ministry. I do David a lot, so whenever I talk about David, whenever I preach about David, whether I'm preaching that or not, I remind people that David raped Bathsheba (Rev. Blackmon).

That the root of that sin of omission lies in the unwritten curriculum of theological training was also suggested by several participants. It is worth noting the use of the word sin is a loaded term. Yet the interviewees used this word with full knowledge of its deeper meaning. A theological understanding of sin as any act that separates people from God (Peels, 2011). The sin of silence has the effect of perpetuating violence. To envision that as a violation of the world as

it could and should be has meaning in the context of giving rise to an anti-rape culture movement in the church.

Silencing comes from this unwritten curriculum that says rape culture is to taboo to discuss in church (Shiloh Project, 2020). It also emerges from a sense of fear and self-preservation among preachers, as clarified in my interviews with Rev. Everhart and Rev. Blackmon. This is where preachers, like all educators, are financially tied to the institutions they serve, and the comingling of institutional power with the need to speak difficult truth to power is usually a challenging proposition. Rev. Everhart described her experiences of preaching on the same subject she has written about in her most recent book, the #metoo movement (Me Too, 2021):

I preached some of these sermons because I wrote this article. One of the Christian Century cover stories was about preaching Me Too, and I was like, “You know, you really haven’t actually done that, so you ought to do it.” So, I did, and I think I preached three sermons, and... So then, there was really interesting mix where some people were coming just to hear these sermons, but the people who were there were like, you know, they were flipping out.

It is fear of just such “flipping out” and other professional consequences that can lead to pastors avoiding the challenging topic of rape culture, even among those who are aware of its persistence and damage. Rev. Blackmon described this ambivalence:

I’m just saying the risk(s) that we take are definitely tied to the risks we think we can afford to take. And many preachers, for various reasons, don’t take those risks, or have become comfortable without taking those risks. If you’re going to be true about being a pastor, it is not the unharnessed position of a Prophet, right? So, yes, you get to preach

the Truth, and you get to preach the Gospel, but you also do that understanding that your ability to stay employed, and stay hired, depends on people being in the pews. And depending on what kind of church you serve; they may be more prone to justice messages than others. So, I've had people say to me, "You know, you preach too much politics, you preach too much justice," and I say, "I preach the Gospel, and the Gospel is what the Gospel is. So, if you don't like what I'm saying about Jesus, then I don't know what to say to you, right? It's hard for pastors to speak authentically what they know, and how they know it, even if they want to, and some don't want to.

Rev. Blackmon's stance is firmly grounded in understanding Christ as a bearer of justice and an ally of the oppressed, and her philosophy of preaching reflects that grounding. Simultaneously, she recognizes the inherent personal riskiness of reckoning with rape culture, particularly from the pulpit. One of the more paradoxical challenges of engaging with rape culture from the pulpit is that sexuality of all kinds, including sexual violence, is held as taboo in many faith communities (Shiloh Project, 2020), and too political because of the groundswell of movements like #metoo (Me Too, 2021), which has been politicized as a liberal cause. The consequent paradox arises from the reality that it is the church which helped build a rape culture now deemed too dangerous to talk about in church. There is a risk in breaking a taboo in a public forum. Those that do expose themselves to potential professional backlash and the personal psychological toll of the subsequent divulging of survivorship and spiritual need that arrives in the form of anger.

Participants cited multiple other pedagogical pathways by which the preacher and teacher of a faith community educates and leads community members. Rev. Blackmon elevated the concept of prayer as a moment of education, which highlights the pedagogical understandings of

prayer that differ by tradition, community, and practitioner (George-Davidson, 2014), r. There is a confluence of performance and petition that is public prayer. While traditions vary from the extemporaneous to the rote to the written and so forth (George-Davidson, 2014), there is naiveté to assuming prayer is unfiltered by the motivations of the speaker. This concept returns to the translation work illustrated in figure 2. Those who pray in public are certainly bringing their own knowledge, history, and exegetical work to the practice of praying out loud (George-Davidson, 2014). Rev. Blackmon names this:

A teaching moment, as well as an interesting- moment, and many people in the pews know what their pastors care about because of what their pastors pray about. So, if you never pray about the oppression of women, or the silencing of women, or the rape of women.

This was echoed in Rev. Kershner's experiences of addressing rape culture from the pulpit and met with numerous disclosures of survivorship from those in the pews. Her congregants now know she cares. The taboo had been broken. They were free to speak.

Freedom can also be found through the difficult practice of addressing the presence of rape culture within the walls of the church. There is riskiness inherent in naming that a community requires self-scrutiny, particularly through policies as Rev. Blackmon suggests. In many ways churches are fragile family systems and the desire to protect the sense of who we (think) we are as a community is esteemed higher than the actual protection of those victimized in rape culture. Policy work as a pedagogical track in the church is one commonly necessitated through background checks, mandated reporter training, etc., all of which are commonly required by companies insuring churches (Brotherhood Mutual, Southern Mutual Church Insurance

Company, GuideOne Insurance, etc.). Many faith communities still remain insular and limited in their sense of accountability to the best practices of the wider world (McGillion & Grace, 2014).

Rev. Blackmon described her own encounters with the resistance addressing rape culture at a policy level within the faith communities she has led:

[Describing the introduction of new policies in a community as a pedagogical pathway] It was personal, like “we all know each other, we would never do these things,” and implementing policies like no closed doors in the church, no children in rooms without windows, no one child-one adult situation, just basic policies, right? And I was able to say these policies also effect the viability of our insurance coverage, but then to have the larger conversations about the fact that the church is one of the last frontiers for pedophilia, because we don’t do the things we are supposed to do. And we had conversations about putting resources in the bathroom stalls and they said, “Well, why do we need to do that?”. Because you may have women who are being abused and they can’t or don’t feel empowered to verbalize that to you or even to me, and they come here every Sunday, and maybe their abuser comes with them. Maybe that’s their spouse or their parent. And so, they need to have access to emergency numbers in the church, and even if they don’t need them, them being in the church says what kind of church we are.

Here, Rev. Blackmon demonstrates some of the challenges involved in leading congregations to have sound policy as a way of disrupting rape culture. One challenge is the speed with which discussion of rape culture in church veers directly to concerns of child sexual abuse. While churches must absolutely be concerned about pedophilia and rigorously work to prevent such behavior in their communities, it is only one facet of rape culture. Churches miss the opportunity to have broader conversations that examine the ways in which they do or do not uphold rape

culture in practices of leadership, worship, and community outreach. In doing so they overlook addressing these issues in the form of policy changes.

A further pedagogical pathway suggested by participants was curriculum and the mindful presentation of literature in the pastor's study. While examination of the Sunday school curriculum for the minefields of gender disparity, casual displays of white supremacy, misinformation about gender and sexuality are all important, it is perhaps the most obvious place to consider how the church acts as a site of education and social formation. Considering the books on the pastor's shelves when parishioners visit for meetings or pastoral care is a pathway I had not previously contemplated. Rev. Blackmon clarifies the intentionality with which she displays her own collection of materials.

The Sunday School book is an instrument of education... The orchestration of books, in my study, are so that when people sit down, the books that are on the eye level are the books I want you to know I care about, right? Even though it's a wall to floor bookcases, when you sit in the chair, the books that you can see at eye level are books about gender bias, and transphobia, and homophobia, and racism, and the books that, you know... In addition to my Bibles and my concordances, the books that move the justice lens. I'd learned it a long time ago, to make them easily visible to the people who come to my study. So that you should know that your pastor's open to talking about these things because your pastor is interested in these things.

Rev. Blackmon signals her interests to her congregation in other ways. She illuminates the possibilities of teaching without words or in unconventional ways. Her consciousness about book placement, policy and curriculum review, and the situation and co-creation of a sanctuary space are all aspects of one central point. She posits everything done in the name of the church

becomes a part of the pedagogy of the church. In this way, the reflection and reflexivity marked in the beginning of this chapter should be revisited often by those hoping to engage in rape culture disruption. Those seeking the pedagogy of the church in relation to issues of justice must also engage in reflection and reflexivity.

Theme 6: Into the Unknown Future

There is a cultural groundswell for naming and disrupting rape culture as evidenced in the #metoo movement of recent years (Me Too, 2020). There is a long and storied history of churches working toward a more just future (Booker, 2014). The work to understand the connection of religion and rape culture is already a powerful if nascent discourse in action (Moslener, 2016; Bolz-Weber, 2019; Ross et al., 2019), as discussed in Chapter Two of this project. What remains, then, is the question of how this work can become pedagogical practice for the communities of faith in which this education is taking place. Below is just one instance in which the participants' ideas spoke directly to one another.

Even just starting conversations in the church will be very hard because you don't want to kind of traumatize anyone by standing up in a pulpit on a Sunday saying, "Okay we're going to be talking about rape culture today (Dr. Blyth).

Let me say right away that this will be a messy sermon. It might not be poetic or well honed. It could feel fragmented and not very polished. It is a messy sermon. The reason is that it has been a messy week—with the last few days particularly messy. I had a feeling it might be, so on Tuesday I sat in our program staff meeting and proclaimed to my colleagues that I was not going to preach a sermon about any of the issues being discussed in the Supreme Court hearings. "Y'all are going to have to figure out a different way to address what's going on," I declared. The primary reason for that

declaration was because it feels very close to me, perhaps too close. I am the daughter of a survivor of childhood sexual assault whose mind kept those horrific memories at bay until my father was in his fifties, forty years after the fact. Add to that truth that I have many other loved ones who, in high school or in college, lived through very similar experiences as the one I anticipated being described in the hearing. So, on Tuesday I did not know how I would be able to speak of any of it without my knees knocking and my voice wavering. Those things might still happen. But after Thursday I felt, like most of my preacher friends across the country, that I had no real choice anymore. For one thing, the nation's most recognized hotline for those who have experienced sexual assault had a 147 percent increase in calls as the hearings played out on television. If nothing else, that reality demands a pastoral response. But even more than that, my seventy-one-year-old father, the one whose memories had returned in his fifties, reached out to me and invited me to work together on a sermon we both felt needs to be spoken from a pulpit like this one, with faithful folks like you. So, this morning we are going to preach about the church and its response to sexual assault (Rev. Kershner, sermon, September 30th, 2018, Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, Illinois).

One of the more important things we can be doing right now is asking religious communities to think about rape culture, or to even be aware of it, and for religious leaders and pastors or whatever denomination or religious group is to say, how can you be change-makers and leaders in this? And I know at the moment we're worried about one pandemic that's very real and instant, but we're also living in another pandemic which is gender-based violence. And we cannot afford to lose sight of that (Dr. Blyth).

This juxtaposition of Dr. Blyth as a scholar of religion and rape culture and Rev. Kershner as a pastor-practitioner highlights the possibility of connection between these realms. Dr. Blyth's call to the leaders of religious communities is seemingly met with the response of Rev. Kershner, and pastors like her who are cognizant of the pandemic of gender-based violence.

This demonstrates the ways the scholarly and the praxis of church life are called to unify. Furthermore, the scholarly and the praxis are beckoned to resist the sense that the scholarly and the pragmatic have nothing to do with one another. This suggests a need more fully discussed in the Chapter Five. Seminaries and other sites of faith leader training need to be sources of updated and continuing education that prepares preachers to responsibly disrupt rape culture in the communities they serve.

Challenge and Necessity: The Duality of Rape Culture Disruption

“I love it. This idea that we're engaged in. You know, our actions in the world of social justice, that is where we find the divine,” expressed Dr. Messina. A common thread among participants was the spiritual and moral imperative of the disruption of rape culture within and stemming from religious communities. This was consistently framed by the need to take their own broad perspective and focus in on individuals, communities and relationships. It is in the grounded nature of loving communities and relationships that the seeds of change can be planted with a hope of flourishing. It is in relationship that clergy can ask the hard questions of parishioners about why the very topic of rape culture is so taboo, and to help create a culture of self-reflection as communities scrutinize their participation in rape culture. Success in this self-reflection means asking questions that both challenge and include, as Dr. Blyth articulated: “How do I not push people away... clearly, it's hard, but you want to keep the conversation

going, and sort of saying ‘Why are you walking way?’ Think about what’s problematic, think about what’s troubling you.”

These are the questions that must be asked if rape culture is to be disrupted on the granular level of individuals and communities. Leaders must navigate the pedagogy of one sermon, one book study, one pastoral conversation serving as the usual form of instruction and care while simultaneously a counter-narrative to destructive norms. In the cases of the participants interviewed, the answer lies in a combined commitment to continued education in the realm of social justice work, and in a willingness to participate in the difficult, personal, and vulnerable work of speaking out in a climate of silencing. As Dr. Blyth suggests, the power of broad scale movements is only realized in the particularity of relationships and communities. The challenge remains, however, to discern who ought to be the goal for inclusion in this work. Specifically, these interviews led to the consideration of whether perpetrators and bystanders are meant to be included and how they can best be engaged.

Compassion as a Guide

In answer to those questions of where to begin and with whom, participants consistently recognized their understanding of compassion as essential to this work. This stems in part from the fact that disclosure is an almost constant byproduct of this work. Every participant cited either their personal experiences with gender-based violence or their experiences as being a person to whom such experiences are regularly disclosed. In some cases, participants discussed both. This is delicate work and it is worthy of remembering that these stories are not just abstractions. They are the lived realities of survivors, as noted poignantly by Dr. Messina, reflecting on her mother’s victimhood:

No matter how much experience you have with it, I'm thinking, "Ten years, and had no clue." And, also looking at the pain, and the shame, that my mother carried throughout this experience, and how humiliating it was for her, that she felt like she couldn't tell any of us, and, you know, what damage that did to her spiritually. And so, it was ... I was already on this path with this work, and I actually had applied to a doctoral program saying, "This is what I want to focus on." And then, all of a sudden, I had this very personal experience with it that pushed me in this whole way to continue thinking about this work. And so, in the book, in the preface, I write about my mom's death.

Rev. Blackmon also named power and precariousness of being a resource for people who wish to disclose their experiences of surviving gender-based violence:

I talk about that in terms of making those comparisons with what happens to women every day, and what happens to... So, when I did it with those women, about afterwards, there were a lot of tears in the room, and afterwards, eight of those women, in their greeting of me, said to me that they had been raped. And some of them had never shared that they had been raped with anyone.

Rev. Blackmon, Dr. Messina, and other participants recalled an experience echoed in the written portion of this study. In the course of developing this research, when women asked about the work, they respond with either a close connection to a survivor or their own story of survival of sexual violence. Though anecdotal, this experience has consistently confirmed the power of silence breaking and the need for compassion as one works toward the dismantling of rape culture. Rev. Kershner's sermon and the responses she received are prime examples how discussing rape culture in church can unlock painful memories kept secret or suppressed. These

examples showcase how leadership dismantling rape culture must be prepared to engage professional mental health support.

As previously mentioned, each interview and the overall research study is a gift. The most poignant aspect of this gift was a calling toward compassion for self and others. Tied to concepts of liberation theology in many cases, compassion and pastoral care are the underlying tones for those in the pews when engaging with the issue of rape culture (Gutierrez, 1988). Justice is often best served by gracious courage rather than outrage. This does not diminish appropriateness of outrage. A compassion-centered focus is tied to concerns of keeping people engaged, resisting automatic tuning-out, and centered on a pastoral care model. Several participants remarked, bracing to learn this call of compassion includes the need for compassion toward those in the pews who have perpetrated sexual violence. Through these interviews I became starkly aware of the challenges for inclusive compassion must include the abusive.

Two key reasons create this challenge. Firstly, it challenges preconceptions about the need to meet a hard issue with a hard stance. Preaching philosophies at the seminaries I attended varied, but Princeton Seminary definitely upheld the idea that the call of preaching is to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable” (Dunne, 1902). This is inherently problematic because it assumes that clergy will know who is comfortable, who is afflicted, and why. I know my own impulses when preaching on or around the idea of rape culture is to come at it head on and call Christians to collectively account for what we have allowed to happen.

Two participant preachers, Rev. Blackmon and Rev. Kershner, mentioned this need for compassion. Specifically, they discussed promoting benevolence instead of operating from the idea that people will shut down with phrases such as rape culture. Instead their goal is to remain

invitational and compassionate to how difficult it might be to hear about rape culture for a variety of reasons.

Secondly, two participants explicitly argue the need for compassion of abusers as well as abused. There are layers of complexity to this viewpoint. Sometimes abusers are also abuse survivors. They may not be fully aware of what they have done or the impact of it. The church is meant to be a place of mercy for all people. None the interviewees suggested there should not be strong boundaries, consequences, and appropriate legal action against known abusers. The idea of including compassion toward abusers in our theological methodology was a challenging finding. Paths forward in church's pedagogy as a source of disruption to rape culture need to be explored especially in regards to this finding.

Summary of Cross-case Analyses

Conducting cross-case analysis on the interviews for this project proved a rich source underscoring the parallels of scholarly analysis of rape culture and religion, and pragmatic application in church life. While the participants come from a range of experiences, beliefs, and professional vantage points, the core findings suggest a great deal of common ground. The cross-case analyses emphasize the funnel of translation illustrated in figure 2. Following a path of internal awareness building and reflexive and reflective study, parishioners are likely to experience an understanding of the intersection of religion and rape culture. The consideration of a variety of pedagogical pathways and the particular emphasis on acknowledging the damage done by missiology upholding colonialist beliefs are keys to building sound practices of justice-centered education in the church.

Summary of Chapter Four

This chapter concludes with an enriched awareness for careful historical understanding. Each participant brought knowledge of the word and the body, of the text of scripture and the lived realities of those in cultures shaped by that scripture to the study, ultimately the findings outlined in this chapter. Diminishing, silencing, and isolating experiences of sexual violence in scripture and in the lives of church members lead to the sustained empowerment of white supremacy, patriarchy, and colonialism. These actions directly preserve the violent stronghold of rape culture. The nature of rape culture and its intersection with religion is built on an intricate web of theological perspective, socio-cultural practice, scriptural interpretation, and access to shared knowledge. Knowing the shape and dimensions of this web is integral to understanding how to disrupt rape culture within systems.

CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Through single case and cross case analyses of practicing pastors and scholars, I sought to examine nuanced understandings of rape culture, the church, and the confluence of the two as mechanisms of education and cultural formation. This chapter considers the theoretical implications (see figure 2), in addition to implications for practice, as well as suggestions for future research. Finally, the need for disruption of rape culture is pressing and should not be left to theoretical exercises. Therefore I conclude by outlining several possible directions for action in developing church pedagogies as sites of dismantling rape culture within and beyond the confines of church walls.

Research Questions Addressed

The first guiding question of this dissertation was a desire to know and understand how the participants in this study understood the pedagogy of the church as a site of education and those pedagogies' intersections with rape culture. Participant responses were deeply rooted in historical understandings of the church, positioning the translation, interpretation, and communication of scripture as a central starting point of the church's co-creation of rape culture. Participants espoused a focus on the influence of understandings of scripture, more so than scripture itself, in shaping the early church. This history of (mis)interpretations and translations operate in a reifying fashion in the modern church, where early Euro-centric cultural influences become elevated to fact in the way the U.S. church understands the ancient Palestinian writers. Participant areas of focus (homiletics, prayer, public action, Christian education, mission, etc.) were all rooted in the trail of knowledge in church history. This bears the greatest significance on

the pedagogies of the church today, particularly around issues of gender disparity, hierarchy, and virginity mythology popularized in purity culture.

The subsequent guiding question was how / whether participants thought these pedagogical processes might serve as sites of disruption of rape culture instead. The resounding response among participants was that silence must be broken. The historical taboos that support rape culture today thrive unless they are named, addressed, and disrupted. This disruption is indeed possible within the pedagogical channels of homiletics, Christian education, and mission, and other pathways exist within the church for disruption as well. The nature of these possible disruptions center on developing meaningful relationships, shaped by a sense of compassion and inclusion, and an emphasis on the personal over the large-scale political, public, or policy. The latter three are indeed crucial elements, according to participants, but the forward motion in disrupting religion and rape culture today is meeting with the greatest effectiveness in the context of pastoral or educator-learner relationships.

Theoretical Implications

Modified constructivist grounded theory served a sacred role in this project, illuminating points of connection between the personal and the public, the structures of church and the symptoms of rape culture in ways that were made plain through this conceptual approach (Charmaz, 2011). In 2011, Charmaz wrote that “the constructivist version of grounded theory attends to context, positions, discourses, and meanings and actions and thus can be used to advance understandings of how power, oppression, and inequities differentially affect individuals, groups and categories of people” (p. 362). Significantly, grounded theory methods provide tools to reveal links between concrete experiences of suffering and social structure, culture, and social practices or policies (Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2011). The movements of

power, voice, authority, and possibility became core components of understanding of how religion and rape culture co-function structurally from the perspectives of the participants.

The findings of this project formed sets of ideas moving from the internal to the external. Taken together, these participants' voiced experiences made visible how the internal work of disrupting internalized misogyny, resisting rape culture, and survivor support runs parallel to the internal work of self-translation, between the experiences readers bring to scripture and the things their bodies know as they read the Biblical text in their own minds. The balancing of hope and anger, and the locating of the self in the need for this work are both crucial.

It is from a place of self-knowledge, clergy, scholars, parishioners, and students begin to build understanding of what is sacred, what is silenced, and how repression and suppression of voices can lead to a sense of uncritical acceptance of hierarchy and gender binary. A tipping point of coming into a place of knowing what is or is not on the page as informed by knowing what lies inside individual scholars, preachers, people, gives spaciousness to explore the missiological history of the church's pedagogical practices. Such explanation encourages an honest appraisal of the impacts of mission in various forms and intersecting with acts of profound oppression. Finally, the weekly pedagogical praxis of church as it looks in the U.S. in the modern age is a focal point for this study. I have developed an explanation of the ways the preceding explorations inform preaching, teaching, engaging curriculum, and convey the messages of rape culture or disruption of rape culture. That leads to an unknown future, one guided by compassion and critical disruption of an unholy practice of Christianity that accepts rape culture's persistence.

The implications drawn from these findings comprise the remainder of this chapter, as shaped by the three key concepts. The first concept addresses the homiletical act as oft employed

to perpetuate rape mythology and silences the scriptures which address sexual violence. Secondly, rape mythologies and silences are perpetuated further in other pedagogical formats, such as Christian education and Bible study. Finally, missional theology embodies the church's external expression of these ideologies.

Implications

This study was approached from an assumption of the church as a site of education and social formation. From a place of curiosity, these foundational chapters outline the potential of pedagogical avenues the church may exploit to perpetuate rape mythology, and simultaneously continue the silencing of scriptures which address sexual violence. Based on analysis of participant responses, pedagogy of homiletics emerges as cyclical in nature when applied to rape culture, depicted in figure 1.

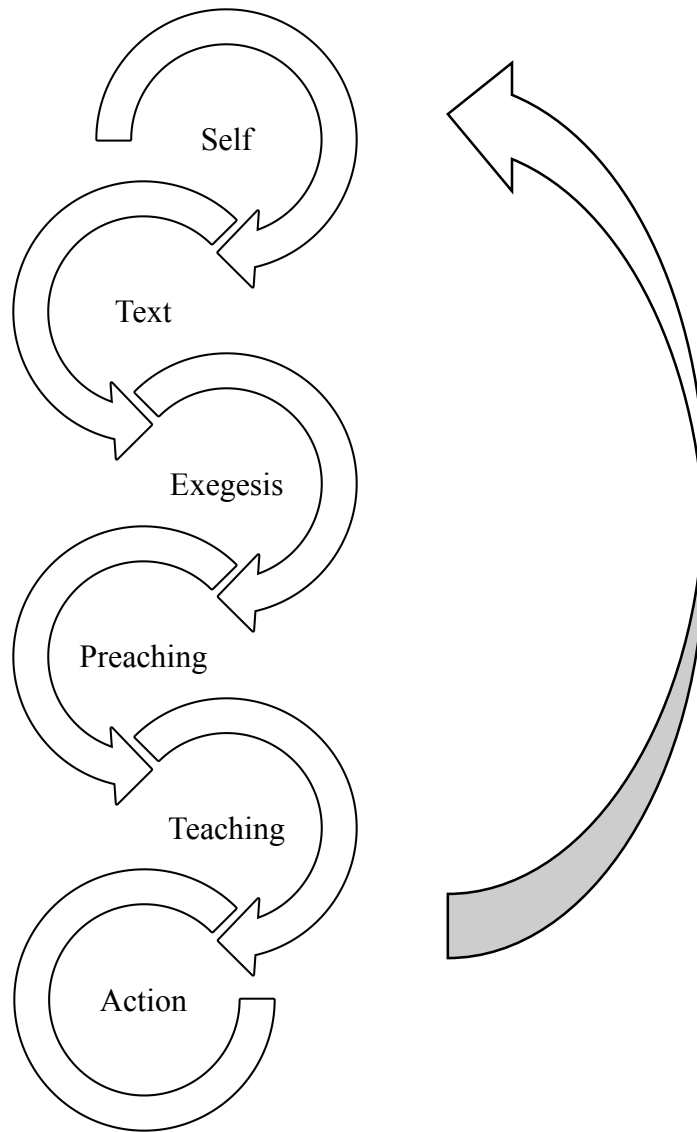


Figure 2. Illustration of the cyclical nature to pedagogy of homiletics

Although it is possible to enter this funnel from any level within, the findings support that word does not exist without first passing through the interpretive and interpreting self. A text contains no meaning without a reader. This is not an earth-shattering perspective, but when used as the lens through to examine rape culture, it is of paramount importance. Any reader brings to bear their own perspectives, experiences, and understandings. As the self-engages with the text

throughout the exegetical, homiletical, educational, and action-building funnel, the culture (and indeed rape culture) within which one lives is necessarily interacting at every stage of the funnel, through the reader.

As figure 1 suggests, the process is an act of translation within the self and translation on behalf of and in collaboration with the surrounding community and culture. By this process, beliefs are constructed, reified, questioned, or changed. None of which happens in the vacuum of one mind. In the instance of rape culture, this process of engaging with the text involves necessarily confronting the text in full, including instances of silenced scripture and texts of terror. It involves the reckoning of community and culture as they are, not as preferred. Engaging the text necessitates acknowledging the realities of rape culture within and surrounding the community of faith. To this end it requires a historical lens that can honor that no text is more sacred than a person.

Furthermore, this finding highlights the need for communities of faith and their leaders to have a rich understanding of the ways gender binary and gender disparity present in the history of Christianity and present manifestations of church. In doing so they might lead with appropriate vocabulary and understanding for the disruption of rape culture. Preachers need the right words with which to do this. Preachers must participate in the work of self-understanding, and the translation of self, the scriptural text, the work of exegesis, and the act of education for justice.

The pedagogical forms by which translation occurs vary significantly. Initially, presumptions placed responsibility on a broad set of church expressions (homiletical, Bible studies and Christian education, and mission ideologies) for the co-creation of rape culture. Therefore, these would be the most likely avenues for dismantling rape culture in the church.

Participants in this study focused heavily on interpretation of scripture and the homiletical act as pedagogical pathways in church life. They highlighted the need for structural and systemic change. Participants spoke poignantly about the absence of gender parity and the damaging impact of gender binary norms and heteronormative practices within the church contributing to rape culture.

A surprising conclusion to this work materialized, in the trouble with tolerance. The act of showing love to the persecutor as well as the persecuted brought up frequently in Christian circles, often to the detriment of abuse victims. The purpose of education is, in part, to reach those who have not yet heard or understood this particular message. The need to dismantle rape culture is a message equally important, if not more necessary for those who have perpetrated sexual violence. My initial reaction of shock and some outrage at this suggestion to be indicative of its radical nature. These interviews prompted me to deeply consider how to bridge the gap of the head and the heart, the scholarly and the homiletical, and to recognize my impulse to disregard, or worse, shame, those in the pews who have perpetrated harm against others. My impulse to protect survivors and prevent further victimhood is strong. That said, I have arrived at the conclusion that the goal cannot be focused on shaming anyone, as shame is just using the master's tools in rape culture to try to dismantle the master's house. Further exploration is essential to determine whether this suggestion is a gracious and imperative step for further education, or simply an unacceptable violation of the sanctuary space.

I further concluded that church rhetoric and self-understanding must develop new practices that dignify the body as highly as the word. The church is rich in words, from scripture to liturgy to histories to preaching and teaching. We clergy have so very much to say. Yet participants reminded me that words only carry so far. In the case of addressing the historic role

of the church in rape culture, tending to the bodies of clergy and congregants alike matters a great deal. The church's historic tendency toward reducing and disappearing bodies and their stories runs parallel to the tendency to silence certain voices and certain scripture. As I seek paths toward the disruption of rape culture, the role of the body must play a prominent role.

Given these reflections, analyses, and conclusions, I am left with a recommendation that feels almost too obvious to bear writing. Teaching seminarians must aim higher and be better. Students training to become teachers across the country are now regularly introduced to concepts like implicit bias, systemic racism, and other relatively new pedagogical practices that are rightly becoming fundamental to teaching in the 2020's. So too, must training to become teachers in the pulpit include awareness and critical assessment of the culture in which they teach and preach. Teachers would not be sent into the classroom without understanding the grave importance of bodily autonomy for their students. Preachers should not be placed in parishes unaware of the same need for dignity and autonomy for parishioners, as well as awareness of the ways that dignity and autonomy is regularly threatened in a rape culture. It is necessary that preachers learn to think as feminists, womanists, and mujeristas, and understand rape culture through these lenses regardless of their own gender identity:

Some people ask: "Why the word feminist? Why not just say you are a believer in human rights, or something like that?" Because that would be dishonest. Feminism is, of course, part of human rights in general—but to choose to use the vague expression human rights is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender. It would be a way of pretending that it was not women who have, for centuries, been excluded. It would be a way of denying that the problem of gender targets women. (Adichie, 2014, page 3)

Recommendations for Future Research

To further develop the ideas examined within this dissertation, future research is needed to uncover best practices for bridging the gap between academic research and the practical theology of educating in church. Specifically, future research may explore understanding how seminaries prepare those going into parish ministry to encounter, understand, and disrupt rape culture as a theological and moral manifestation of the calling to ministry. Simply adding rape culture to the pastoral lexicon in both seminary curriculum and continuing education for practicing pastors would be a meaningful step forward. Future research may benefit from an examination of whether and how disruption of rape culture is currently taught in U.S. seminaries and a collection of best practices to share in theological settings.

One additional area of exploration is the pedagogy of the Sacraments themselves. The Protestant tradition celebrates only two Sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper (Mattox, 2015). Although there are many holy rituals (weddings, funerals, ordinations, etc.), Protestants only recognize those two as sacred. Conversations with Rev. Blackmon and others raised awareness of the many and surprising ways preachers teach beyond the single homiletical act. If church policies, public prayer, and placement of books on a shelf can all be pedagogical acts, it seems reasonable that the sacraments are as well. While most traditions follow set dialogue that signifies the moment of each ("this is my body, broken for you, do this in remembrance of me" for the Lord's supper and "in the name of the Father / Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit" for baptism, (Mattox, 2015), there is plentiful freedom in the surrounding prayers and liturgies. In those spaces, clergy also declare what they think is important for our congregants to remember. A powerful teaching moment could be entwined with the familiar and the sacred if liturgy offered remembrance of those who have experienced a violation of sacred bodies due to rape culture.

This study only glances the surface of the deep entanglements of colonization and rape culture in mission. Further research is necessary to examine pedagogical possibilities for raising the sacredness of bodies in ways that provide counter-narrative to colonization, white supremacy, misogyny, and rape culture. Attached in Appendix D and Appendix E are two early iteration of suggested practical steps. The first is a proposed workshop for clergy entering this work. The second is a small group liturgical exercise engaging the apocryphal Gospel of Mary Magdalene and the effort to decolonize and re-center the humanity of Mary Magdalene. Both elements are inspired by womanist (Smith, 2015) and mujerista theologies (Isasi-Diaz, 1996).

Mujerista theology preaches survival, bodily and spiritual, and the strength of women, with the full knowledge that shared survival has come at great costs (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). What is known and internally held can take the shape of reliable and shared ontologies (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Women as keepers of ancient truth is a direct line to the project of acknowledging divine presence in and among Latina Christians, and the decolonization of Christianity depends upon shifting the centrality of focus away from stories that are so eternally white, male, Western, and heteronormative (Isasi-Diaz, 1996).

Conclusion

The work of this dissertation has been to name and understand the intersection of religion and rape culture in the context of Christianity. I have done so by exploring churches as sites of education and social formation. To do so, I interviewed scholars, preachers, and authors contributing to the discourse of the #metoo movement (Me Too, 2021) and who work to bridge the space between scripture, ritual, and community praxis. Participants are leaders in the focused and growing movement of addressing rape culture in theological scholarship and church teaching and preaching. Through semi-structured interviews, I sought understanding of three key

pedagogical avenues: homiletics, Christian education, and missiology as potential paths by which rape culture and church both intersect and interact. Through single case analysis of each interview, I explored the ways each scholar-practitioner or clergy member has experienced these pedagogical pathways in their own journey in the field of religion and rape culture. In cross-case analysis through modified constructivist grounded theory analysis of these interviews, I determined that the church is indeed a contributor in the co-creation of rape culture on multiple levels. The silencing of scripture and lived experiences of sexual violence, disparity in gender, entwining with white supremacy, colonialism, and misogyny were each important elements of the church's historical and persistent role in perpetuating rape culture. Multiple acts of translation, a balance of hope and anger, and an openness to alternative pedagogical pathways were also key findings. This conclusion leads to the circuit of pedagogy: if the church already possesses the pedagogical pathways necessary to serve as a site of disruptive education in rape culture instead.

Closing Thoughts

This dissertation represents the beginning of what I hope to be a career-long pursuit of disrupting rape culture. When I first mapped out a vision of the epistemological journey of this work, Dr. Jennings pointed out to me that that was a career, not a dissertation. She was absolutely correct. This project has developed my sensitivity to exactly how nuanced this work is, and the area for action that must be rooted, above all, in listening to the Body as much as the Word.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER BASIC TEMPLATE

Dear _____,

I am writing to thank you for your work, and to request the opportunity to interview you for my dissertation, which focuses on the intersection of religion and rape culture in the U.S. I am a doctoral student in the school of education at Colorado State University, and an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA). It is my hope that my project will contribute to the conversation and empower local churches to actively dismantle rape culture.

Given your expertise and contributions to the field in your translation work, your Biblical analysis, and your direct engagement with the way sexual assault manifests in Biblical literature, I am very interested in knowing more about how you envision the church and rape culture intersecting.

I would be very happy to interview you via phone / zoom or in person, depending on what your schedule will allow. I expect the interview to take approximately an hour. I also plan to check in with participants and request their reflections on my analysis when the project is complete.

Please let me know whether this is a project in which you'd be willing to participate. I can be reached at email at laurielyterbright@gmail.com or by phone at 224-577-8291.

Thank you for your work, and your consideration!

Sincerely,

Rev. Laurie Lyter Bright

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Cover Statement:

The purpose of this study is to explore routinely silenced elements of Judeo-Christian scripture which expressly discuss sexual violence. These texts (and their absence in the pulpit / Bible studies / church classrooms) serve as the foundational path of exploring the pedagogical movement and epistemology of U.S. church communities as co-creators of the existing rape culture. This study further explores the possibility of that same pedagogical movement and epistemological structure as a path for the disruption of rape culture, acknowledging the church as a site of informal adult education and social influence.

To this end, I am interviewing a series of scholars, preachers, and scholar/preachers who have published significantly on the topic of the intersection of religion and rape culture. As this study is through the lens of a feminist critical theology, the interview participants are all female-identifying and leaders in this field of study. It is the goal of these semi-structured interviews to provide a rich and deep understanding of the intersection of religion and rape culture, and to clarify how these thought leaders imagine the church has been / might be involved in the co-creation of rape culture and / or the disruption of it.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do you see as the church's role in rape culture?
 - a. Follow up: how do you see this role expressed in the pedagogy of the church?
2. How do you envision the church as a possible site of disruption of rape culture?
3. How does analysis of scriptural instances of sexual violence impact rape culture as it is lived today?
4. How does the voice of a woman preacher or scholar influence the interpretation of scripture as it pertains to sexual assault?
5. What drew you to do the work of exploring the intersection of Biblical scripture and rape culture?
6. How do you maintain the momentum for this work? How do you protect yourself in the process of engaging in this work?
7. As professors and scholars, do you see students being equipped to understand the intersection of religion and rape culture? As preachers, do you see congregants prepared to engage with this intersection? How does that manifest? How do you imagine it might manifest in the future?
8. How do you bridge the gaps of cultural context from when scripture was written to modern readers / students / parishioners when sexual assault is the subject?
9. In your work *Rape Culture and Spiritual Violence*, you offer some very concrete practices to aide healing for survivors of sexual assault. Do you see anything existing in the Christian tradition that could offer the same healing opportunity? (GM)
10. How does the voice of a woman preacher or scholar influence the interpretation of scripture as it pertains to sexual assault?
11. What do you see as the church's role in rape culture?
 - a. Follow up: how do you see this role expressed in the pedagogy of the church?
12. How do you envision the church as a possible site of disruption of rape culture?

APPENDIX D

A Workshop / Liturgy for Helping Churches See Rape Culture: An Outline

While a nascent field examining the intersection of religion and rape culture exists, little is available by way of practical steps to aid communities of faith in engaging with this work. Isolated academic theology does little to help survivors, nor to prevent the perpetuation of rape culture. This workshop aims to apply the academic work of my own research and the wisdom of others to the creation of practical, experiential opportunities to help faith community leaders better understand rape culture, how communities of faith perpetuate it, and how communities of faith can be sites of disruption and healing instead. I aim to bridge what has been learned and what can be done about it. I propose a retreat workshop comprised of the following:

I. The Head:

Protestant faith tends to reside in the mind. We begin in the most comfortable space, with a theologically robust exploration of the nature of rape culture, the Biblical context of texts of sexual violence, and the points of intersection of the modern U.S. Protestant church and rape culture. On the premise that Protestant faith has / can co-create rape culture in the U.S. through theological messaging, restrictions on identity acceptance / expression, and media representation of monolithic “Christian beliefs” about sexuality, participants will also engage in identifying their own historical formation of their understanding of faith and sexuality.

II. The Heart:

We’ll turn toward the duality of disruption of injustice and the creation of space for spiritual healing. We’ll move to an experiential and arts-based component in which we first discover what it means to confront the injustice of rape culture in the context of a faith

community. Then, participants will engage in the creation of a Holy disruption – in the context of worship, a workshop, a public performance piece, etc. An arts-and-justice-based worship leader will be engaged to co-lead this part of the project as we collaboratively create artistic multi-media expressions of lament, grief, protest, and possibility for use in personal spiritual reflection and communal worship.

III. The Body, Somatic Restoration:

Informed by the somatic sensitivity involved in the visitation of scriptural violence, this workshop finishes by aiming to equip participants to understand the ways mainline Christian worship styles disembodied parishioners, and the additional impacts of this disregard for the body for those who are survivors of sexual trauma. We will incorporate practices of mindfulness, breathing techniques, guided meditation, and more as we consider the ways we might re-humanize others.

Participants will leave with a comprehensive understanding of their own positionality in this point of intersection, a vocabulary for approaching the subject of rape culture as faith leaders, and a victim-conscious plan and pathway for incorporating this knowledge into the life of the community they lead and serve.

APPENDIX E

The following is a brief, reflective ritual designed as a project for a Feminist Psychology course at Colorado State University and subsequently used in multiple church settings. It is designed for two voices, one in black, one in purple, with minor stage directions in blue but could easily be adapted to a chorus of voices. It is intended to provide both commentary on and amplification of the voice of Mary Magdalene in the scroll written contemporarily to the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and was discovered in 1856.

The Gospel According to Mary Magdalene

Chapter 4

. . . Will matter then be destroyed or not? Will it matter if we are destroyed? Will I matter? And ain't I a woman too? (extended silence, ended with a chime)

22) The Savior said, All nature, all formations, all creatures (There is no male nor female, slave nor free, Jew nor Greek) exist in and with one another, and they will be resolved again into their own roots.

23) For the nature of matter is resolved into the roots of its own nature alone. Except there are male and female. And until the female is known and seen and heard, the roots remain parched, the existence remains unresolved.

24) He who has ears to hear, let him hear. She who has a voice to speak, speak.

25) Peter said to him, Since you have explained everything to us, tell us this also: What is the sin of the world?

26) The Savior said There is no sin, but it is you who make sin when you do the things that are like the nature of adultery, which is called sin. (Evil is not a force that happens to you, but rather that which you construct. Adultery is not the sin of female seduction. Adultery is the sin of betrayal.)

27) That is why the Good came into your midst, to the essence of every nature in order to restore it to its root. Mary sees good and hears it. Good, not God.

28) Then He continued and said, That is why you become sick and die, for you are deprived of the one who can heal you.

29) He who has a mind to understand, let him understand. She who has a mind to ask, let her ask.

30) Matter gave birth to a passion that has no equal, which proceeded from something contrary to nature. Then there arises a disturbance in its whole body. We listen to our bodies' expression of all. We understand our silent screams. When we feel, we feel fully.

31) That is why I said to you, Be of good courage, and if you are discouraged be encouraged in the presence of the different forms of nature. It is an act of courage to be a woman and to speak in a world that insists on silence and submission. To see Good in all the forms, including female. To claim only self in a colonizing world.

32) He who has ears to hear, let him hear. She who has words to speak, let her speak. (silence).

33) When the Blessed One had said this, He greeted them all, saying, Peace be with you. Receive my peace unto yourselves. Sisters, a holy word, disarm. Peace be with you.

34) Beware that no one lead you astray saying Lo here or lo there! For the Son of Man is within you. (Something about gender norms here) -- Her spirit will not leave you nor forsake you. ?

(Whenever I hear this, I think, "He will not leave you nor forsake you" I was hoping that by saying this, we could posit that the Holy Spirit is inherently a female force?)

35) Follow after Him! Seek after her.

36) Those who seek Him will find Him. She who knows herself will understand.

37) Go then and preach the gospel of the Kingdom. Seek ye first the kin-dom, the rule of love not the rule of law, seats around the common table instead of the royal crown.

38) Do not lay down any rules beyond what I appointed you, and do not give a law like the lawgiver lest you be constrained by it. When we try to constrict and constrain, we diminish and destroy.

39) When He said this He departed. In the absence of the Good and the God, trust disintegrates.

Chapter 5

1) But they were grieved. They wept greatly, saying, How shall we go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel of the Kingdom of the Son of Man? If they did not spare Him, how will they spare us? Safety is no great guarantee for those who would risk the truth. “For to suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women.”

2) Then Mary stood up, greeted them all, and said to her brethren, Do not weep and do not grieve nor be irresolute, for His grace will be entirely with you and will protect you. A woman who reassures even those who deny her. She speaks wisdom. She tells the truth. She who would remain at the crucifixion when all the rest ran for their own lives. She remained, visible, vulnerable, unflinching.

3) But rather, let us praise His greatness, for He has prepared us and made us into Men. I’m not sure you will hear my voice unless I drop it to an octave at which it will resonate. I’m not sure

you can see me unless I am androgynous or male. I'm not sure you want to know me, unless I am just a mirror of you.

4) When Mary said this, she turned their hearts to the Good, and they began to discuss the words of the Savior.

5) Peter said to Mary, Sister we know that the Savior loved you more than the rest of women. Is it any wonder these stories were not made canon? Mary, sister to the disciples. Mary, beloved disciple.

6) Tell us the words of the Savior which you remember which you know, but we do not, nor have we heard them. Mary, keeper of secrets, bearer of words. Like Mary the mother, a theotokos - a bearer of God, a bearer of The Word.

7) Mary answered and said, what is hidden from you I will proclaim to you. A light in the dark places of uncertainty and doubt.

8) And she began to speak to them these words: I, she said, I saw the Lord in a vision and I said to Him, Lord I saw you today in a vision. He answered and said to me,

9) Blessed are you that you did not waver at the sight of Me. Unflinching, unblinking women. We face the unfathomable. Mary the one who stayed in the darkest final hours, immovable even at the crucifixion. For where the mind is there is the treasure.

10) I said to Him, Lord, how does he who sees the vision see it, through the soul or through the spirit?

11) The Savior answered and said, He does not see through the soul nor through the spirit, but the mind that is between the two that is what sees the vision and it is [...] The story goes missing...

(pages 11 - 14 are missing from the manuscript)

(long silence)

Chapter 8:

. . . it.

10) And desire said, I did not see you descending, but now I see you ascending. Why do you lie since you belong to me? Mary knows how the soul ascends, but the disciples they cannot hear this from her.

11) The soul answered and said, I saw you. You did not see me nor recognize me. I served you as a garment and you did not know me. Still, I rise.

12) When it said this, it (the soul) went away rejoicing greatly.

13) Again, it came to the third power, which is called ignorance.

14) The power questioned the soul, saying, where are you going? In wickedness are you bound. But you are bound; do not judge!

15) And the soul said, why do you judge me, although I have not judged?

16) I was bound, though I have not bound. And so, it is with women everywhere.

In the U.S. each year women experience about 4.8 million intimate partner related physical assaults and rapes; 6 to 25% experience interpersonal violence. (Burns p 26) 60% of female homicide victims were wives or intimate acquaintances of their killers. (Burns p 28) 17.7 million American women have been victims of attempted or completed sexual assault in their lifetime- that's one in six women or 16.6 percent. (more stats on p 31) The UN estimates that worldwide, one in five women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. (p 31)

17) I was not recognized. But I have recognized that the All is being dissolved, both the earthly things and the heavenly. She is not recognized. Mary knows why the caged bird sings.

18) When the soul had overcome the third power, it went upwards and saw the fourth power, which took seven forms.

19) The first form is darkness, the second desire, the third ignorance, the fourth is the excitement of death, the fifth is the kingdom of the flesh, the sixth is the foolish wisdom of flesh, the seventh is the wrathful wisdom. These are the seven powers of wrath. The numbers come in groups - the seven nations, the deadly sins, the seven demons Christ chased out of Mary back when their story began. Sevens and twelves and threes - always threes. The trinity of God - father son and holy ghost. Or the trinity of Mary's - Mother, Virgin, Whore. Neither one limited to their parts, always more than the sum.

20) They asked the soul, whence do you come slayer of men, or where are you going, conqueror of space?

21) The soul answered and said, what binds me has been slain, and what turns me about has been overcome,

22) and my desire has been ended, and ignorance has died. Free at last, free at last!

23) In an aeon I was released from a world, and in a Type from a type, and from the fetter of oblivion which is transient. Even eternity is in motion, in progress, possible.

24) From this time on will I attain to the rest of the time, of the season, of the aeon, in silence.

Who here will be silent for an aeon? Christ? Or Mary, somehow knowing the silence all women were to endure for century after century? In spite of insight and belatedness, kept quiet and shamed and out of sight.

Chapter 9

- 1) When Mary had said this, she fell silent, since it was to this point that the Savior had spoken with her.
- 2) But Andrew answered and said to the brethren, say what you wish to say about what she has said. I at least do not believe that the Savior said this. For certainly these teachings are strange ideas. Already it begins. Silence her! We don't understand what she means and therefore *she* must be wrong.
- 3) Peter answered and spoke concerning these same things.
- 4) He questioned them about the Savior: Did He really speak privately with a woman and not openly to us? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did He prefer her to us? The thunder is building - distrust her. Quiet her. Ruin her reputation, lest we face our less-than-favored status.
- 5) Then Mary wept and said to Peter, my brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I have thought this up myself in my heart, or that I am lying about the Savior? The broken heart of a woman disbelieved. Echoed on lips across the centuries and landscape. Why were you dressed that way? You shouldn't have been drinking with those guys. I don't believe you. I don't believe you. I don't believe you.
- 6) Levi answered and said to Peter, Peter you have always been hot tempered. A "good guy" comes to her rescue. Yet her voice is still lost.
- 7) Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries.
- 8) But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well.

9) That is why He loved her more than us. Rather let us be ashamed and put on the perfect Man, and separate as He commanded us and preach the gospel, not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior said.

10) And when they heard this, they began to go forth to proclaim and to preach.

She is both woman particular and woman universal. And her voice is worthy. Who are we indeed to reject her?