

READING FOR LIBERATION:
CHALLENGING WHITE SUPREMACY THROUGH DIALOGUE,
PERSONAL NARRATIVE, AND PRACTICE IN WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDIES

By

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis of this project argues that when learners begin with the world in front of the text, critically reflecting on how their social location informs their interpretation of Scripture, dialogue with womanist voices, and engage other (con)texts alongside the biblical text, then they are more likely to become aware of the lenses they use to interpret Scripture and build a learning community in which difference is valued. Consequently, this may lead to more liberative readings of Scripture and solidarity in the work of liberation. The thesis was supported through a participatory action research study in a women's Bible study.

Identification of Topic

As a child, one of the songs I first learned in Sunday School was “The Bible Song.” “The B-I-B-L-E,” we sang, “Yes, that’s the book for me! I stand alone on the word of God, the B-I-B-L-E!” Although the words came easily as a child, by the time I was in middle school, I could no longer affirm this song’s message. The Bible did not seem like the book for me as a woman, a queer person (who was not out yet), or a feminist. Rather, the Bible appeared to be a text created by and for those in power to justify their claim of superiority and the oppression of women, people of color, and LGBTQIA+ persons. In high school, I stopped reading the Bible altogether, believing it to be a patriarchal text whose limited value was not worth the effort needed to unpack and redeem it.

Although I dismissed the Bible as antiquated, there was something deep within me that was still curious about it. When I went to seminary, I took as many biblical studies classes as I could to understand the Bible. During my seminary studies, I read and reread different biblical passages—some familiar and some new—seeking to find hope, liberation, and justice in the text and beyond it. My professors taught me to study the sociohistorical context of the Bible and to critically examine myself as reader. I also learned about biblical hermeneutics and how one’s social location (gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.) and theological commitments impact one’s interpretation of scripture. Through my classes, I realized no one stands alone as they read the Bible; one’s readings are shaped by their families, cultures, and communities. There is no objective reading of the biblical text.

However, as I moved through the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)¹ ordination process, I found that critically reflecting on my identity and theological commitments was discouraged; to be ordained, I was expected to learn and demonstrate mastery of biblical exegesis, an approach that is grounded in white androcentric ways of reading the Bible.

After being ordained, I began serving as a pastor whose ministry focused on adult Christian education. In my ministry, I heard people name that, like me, they struggled with the Bible because of the ways it had been used as a tool of oppression. Additionally, I noticed that rather than wrestling with the Bible, people were walking away from it and/or letting others speak for it, offering authoritative interpretations that reinforced white androcentric values and perspectives. Other adults, especially women, confided that they struggled to have their voices heard in Bible studies where the teacher's voice often dominated the discussion. Bible studies were often experienced as spaces of passive learning rather than of liberating dialogue and self-discovery.

What I heard led me to reflect on my own pedagogical practices, especially how I was teaching the Bible. I realized that my pedagogical practices, like my interpretative practices, were not simply personal, but rather shaped by identity, culture, and community. I also began to recognize more fully how my pedagogical practices, along with those of the congregations where I worked, were shaped by white supremacy. This pattern was not an anomaly. Rather, throughout history, Christian religious education has often been used, both intentionally and unintentionally, to normalize and perpetuate white

¹ Moving forward, I refer to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) by its acronym, PC(USA).

supremacy.² In order to disrupt white supremacy, I would need to transform my pedagogical practices. However, I knew I could not do this work alone; rather, I would need work with others as together we sought to develop more liberative ways of teaching, learning, and reading the Bible.

This endeavor took the form of a six-week women's Bible study. In this project, I engaged in research with a group of seven women who were members at Grace Presbyterian Church, a predominantly white Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregation located in a mid-sized midwestern city.³ My co-learners and I dialogued with the work of womanist and feminist voices, among others, and one another as we sought to dismantle white supremacy in our pedagogical and interpretative practices. Additionally, we sought to develop more liberative ways of learning and reading the Bible. Although I was the initial catalyst of the project, once it began, the seven participants and I co-shaped the study as we engaged in participatory action research together.

Our group met from January 25 to March 1, 2021; however, the seeds for this project were planted much earlier. For me, this project was the continuation of a lifelong journey of unlearning white supremacy and (re)learning more relational, loving, and liberative ways of living, teaching, and reading the Bible. Although it is hard to distill the impetus for this project down to a single moment, a formative experience was taking biblical studies courses in seminary and undergoing the PC(USA) ordination process. Exploring these experiences is important, as it serves to illustrate the insidious ways in which white supremacy functions in the church.

² Katherine Turpin, "Christian Education, White Supremacy, and Humility in Formational Agendas," *Religious Education* 112, no. 4 (2017): 407-410. doi:10.1080/00344087.2017.1300843.

³ I use a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of the church and study participants.

White Supremacy

White supremacy is a formative ideology in the United States that utilizes racism to maintain white dominance and perpetuate racial inequity.⁴ As religious educator Evelyn Parker notes, white supremacy is “the foundational ideology that anchors all other ideologies (economic, political, and so forth).”⁵ Although racism is often equated with personal prejudice, it is best understood as “pervasive, systemic, and deeply ingrained,” shaping all relations and institutions in the United States.⁶ Its purpose is to preserve white socioeconomic and political power, and as a system of oppression, it is closely interconnected with sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other dehumanizing systems of domination.⁷

Because white supremacy undergirds systems and institutions in the United States, it is often hard to identify. As white anti-racist religious educator Mary E. Hess observes, white supremacy is “a discourse, a language, marked more by its invisibility to white people than its presence.”⁸ This invisibility stems in part from its pervasiveness and the way it functions as normative.⁹ As critical race theorists Richard Delgado and Jean

⁴ Evelyn L. Parker, “Teaching for Color Consciousness,” in *They Were All Together in One Place?: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, 331, Atlanta, 2009, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001715628&site=eds-live>.

⁵ Parker, 331.

⁶ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 91.

⁷ Parker, “Teaching for Critical Consciousness,” 331-332.

⁸ Mary E. Hess, “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism: Can We Find a Way?” *Religious Education* 93, no. 1 (Wint 1998), 124. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=lsdah&AN=ATLA0001007771&site=eds-live>.

⁹ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 86.

Stefancic observe, whiteness “sets the standard in dozens of situations.”¹⁰ By functioning as standard, whiteness often appears universal and thus remains unseen, especially to persons who are racialized as white.

Because whiteness often functions invisibly, white persons are often unconscious of how white supremacy functions in their own lives. Specifically, white people do not perceive themselves as having a racialized perspective. As Delgado and Stefancic write, “Whites do not see themselves as having a race but as being simply people. They do not believe they think and reason from a white viewpoint but from a universally valid one—‘the truth’—what everyone knows.”¹¹ Similarly, historian Ibram X. Kendi reflects that one of the greatest privileges of whiteness is “the privilege of being inherently normal, standard, and legal.”¹² White persons are rarely forced to consider their racial identity and how it shapes their perspectives and lived experiences.

This pernicious invisibility makes raising critical consciousness about whiteness an important aspect of anti-racist religious education in predominantly white settings. Once named, white supremacy becomes a problem that can be addressed. Unfortunately, for most of history, Christian education has often perpetuated white supremacy rather than challenging it. As white religious educator Katherine Turpin argues, understanding how Christian education has served as a tool of white supremacy and colonialism is important for anti-racist religious educators who seek to resist white supremacy and colonialist impulses in their pedagogical practices today.¹³

¹⁰ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 86.

¹¹ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 91-92.

¹² Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019), 37, Kindle.

¹³ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 407.

Learning to Read the Bible

In fall 2010, I entered the Master of Divinity program at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago and began the PC(USA) ordination process. In my introductory biblical studies course, I learned to interpret the Bible by engaging its three contexts: the sociohistorical context (the world behind the text), the literary context (the world inside of the text), and the contemporary context (the world in front of the text).¹⁴ Because the primary objective was to learn how to exegete the biblical text, the sociohistorical and literary contexts were prioritized in the interpretative process. Although the contemporary context was acknowledged, critical reflection on the world in front of the text, including oneself as a reader, often came last in the interpretative process and was presented as being of secondary importance. The way the course was taught was intended, in part, to prepare me for the PC(USA) ordination exams.

While in seminary, I sought ordination as a Minister of Word and Sacrament (Teaching Elder) in the PC(USA). The ordination process involved several educational requirements that related to the Bible and biblical interpretation. For instance, like other candidates, I was required to take courses in Greek, Hebrew, and biblical exegesis.¹⁵ Additionally, I was mandated to pass five ordination exams, two of which focused on the Bible.¹⁶ The first exam was the Bible Content Exam, a multiple-choice exam of one hundred questions that involved rote memorization of the Bible's characters, events, and

¹⁴ Mitzi J. Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 2.

¹⁵ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Order* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2019), G-2.0607.

¹⁶ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "Standard Ordination Exams," accessed November 14, 2021. <https://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/prep4min/standard-ordination-exams/>.

themes.¹⁷ The second exam was a biblical exegesis exam, which I took after completing ordination-required coursework in Greek, Hebrew, and biblical exegesis. As its name suggests, the exam focused primarily on biblical exegesis (i.e. attention to original language, historical and literary criticism, etc.). Its purpose was to assess my ability “to interpret an assigned passage of Scripture by demonstrating attention to the original language of the text, an understanding of the text’s historical and literary context, and an ability to relate the text effectively to the contemporary life of the church in the world.”¹⁸ The exam centered the historical critical method and minimized the world in front of the text, including how one’s identity and theological commitments informed one’s reading of Scripture.

Historical criticism is a biblical interpretation method that originated in Europe following the Enlightenment.¹⁹ As an approach, historical criticism seeks to interpret the Bible in an objective, disinterested way that avoids reading one’s personal interests into the text.²⁰ Historical criticism focuses on the historical context of the biblical authors and original audiences and engages in the interpretative task of *exegesis*, which means “‘reading out of’ the text.”²¹ Its early proponents claimed that this hermeneutical

¹⁷ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), “Bible Content Exam,” accessed November 14, 2021, <https://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/prep4min/bible-content-exam/>.

¹⁸ Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates and the Mid Council Ministries area of the Office of the General Assembly, *Handbook on Standard Ordination Exam* (Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly: June 2021), 32, accessed September 23, 2021, https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/prep4min/pdfs/exam_handbook_2021_rel_3-1.pdf.

¹⁹ Leticia A. Guardiola-Sáenz and Frank M. Yamada, “Culture and Identity,” in *The People’s Companion to the Bible*, ed. Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 8.

²⁰ Guardiola-Sáenz and Yamada, 8.

²¹ Fernando F. Segovia, “The Bible as a Text in Cultures: An Introduction,” in *The People’s Companion to the Bible*, ed. Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 18.

approach enables people to read the Bible in an objective and universal way.²² However, in reality, historical criticism was not and is not a neutral, objective method. Rather, it adheres to white androcentric ways of knowing while claiming these as universal.

Historical criticism remained the dominant hermeneutical method in academia until the mid-1970s.²³ Following the Civil Rights and other sociocultural movements, historical criticism's claims of objectivity and universality were exposed as being androcentric and grounded in whiteness.²⁴ Additionally, new interpretative methods emerged. Literary criticism, which focused on the literary aspects of the text, and sociohistorical criticism, which focused on the world in front of the text, both challenged the primacy of historical critical method.²⁵ Biblical scholars such as Fernando Segovia emphasized the importance of critically examining the social locations and contemporary context of the interpreters as part of the interpretative process.²⁶ Other forms of criticism, such as ideological criticism and postcolonial criticism, followed and further revealed historical criticism to be "highly Euro-American, heterosexual, and empire-based."²⁷

Despite the prevalence of many interpretative approaches, my experience in seminary and the ordination process points to a broader pattern: as womanist biblical scholar Mitzi J. Smith notes, "In biblical studies courses in general, especially introductory courses, the standard measure to which students are expected to measure up

²² Segovia, 18-19.

²³ Segovia, 18-19.

²⁴ Segovia, 19-20.

²⁵ Segovia, 19.

²⁶ Guardiola-Sáenz and Yamada, "Culture and Identity," 9.

²⁷ Segovia, "The Bible as a Text in Cultures," 20.

is in their ability to do mainstream exegesis as the only legitimate means of explicating a text.”²⁸ Specifically, biblical studies courses often prioritize historical and literary criticism, thereby reinforcing white androcentric interpretative methods as standard and superior. This pattern holds in many introductory biblical studies courses as well as in the PC(USA)’s ordination standards, which focus heavily on biblical exegesis, requiring pastoral candidates to demonstrate mastery of white androcentric interpretive approaches before they can be ordained.

The Bible, White Supremacy, and Christian Education

Christian education is never politically or theologically neutral. As history shows, over the last four hundred years, Christian education has often served as a tool of colonialism and white supremacy.²⁹ For instance, in the nineteenth century, white Christian settlers used the Bible to teach children, especially young white boys, white male superiority and the inferiority of Indigenous people.³⁰ In the twentieth century, Sunday School curricula and other educational materials promoted white supremacy by “whitewashing” biblical characters and presenting Jesus and God as white men.³¹ Because of this, as Parker writes, “Children in racial-ethnic congregations concretely understood God to be a white male with a long white beard.”³² The whitewashing of

²⁸ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, 59.

²⁹ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 407-410.

³⁰ Parker, “Teaching for Color Consciousness,” 332-334.

³¹ Parker, “Teaching for Color Consciousness,” 334.

³² Parker, “Teaching for Color Consciousness,” 334.

biblical characters also functioned to instill whiteness as both normative and divinely favored amongst children in predominantly white congregations.

Although blatant practices of colonialism and racism, such as insisting on English-only education or utilizing materials that feature a “white Jesus,” are no longer as prevalent in mainline Christian education, white supremacist ideologies and colonialist assumptions persist.³³ As white religious educator Katherine Turpin argues, humbly recognizing—and wrestling with—the legacy of this history is particularly important for white Christian educators committed to antiracism work.³⁴ As she suggests, understanding this history can help Christian religious educators disrupt “traces of these habits of cultural imperialism and nonmutual pedagogies” in their pedagogical practices today.³⁵ Her article “Christian Education, White Supremacy, and Humility in Formational Agendas” is particularly helpful in understanding the connections between white supremacy, colonialism, and Christian education and the ways these supremacist and colonialist assumptions continue to persist in Christian religious education today.

During the colonial era of Westward expansion, European missionaries utilized Christian education to engage in cultural imperialism and subjugate local communities for their own economic gain.³⁶ As Turpin notes, Christian missionaries who traveled to places such as Africa understood their mission as having a twofold purpose of both “saving” and “civilizing” local populations, with salvation being deeply intertwined with efforts to assimilate local populations into white Eurocentric cultural norms, beliefs, and

³³ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 407.

³⁴ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 413.

³⁵ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 407.

³⁶ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 408-409.

practices.³⁷ Underlying the Christian missionary efforts was a supremacist mindset that saw themselves and their beliefs as superior and “right” and local populations and their beliefs as being primitive, demonic, and wrong.³⁸ The supremacist mindset led to pedagogies that lacked mutuality and functioned as a form of domination.³⁹ Specifically, Christian missionaries viewed African persons as ignorant pupils to teach, rather than as peers to learn from.⁴⁰ This approach failed to honor African persons’ diverse ways of knowing, seeing these differences as deficiencies, and sought to assimilate African persons into a singular, white, Eurocentric way of knowing, which was presented as both normative and superior. During this period, Christian education was a political project that served to “create docile socialized subjects” whose labor could then be exploited.⁴¹

Many of these nonmutual pedagogies are present in Christian education today. Specifically, many Christian education classes continue to rely on what critical educational theorist Paulo Freire describes as a “‘banking’ concept of education.”⁴² In the “‘banking’ concept of education,” the teacher engages in narration (lecturing) to deposit information (transfer knowledge) into students.⁴³ As Freire notes, “The more completely she [the Teacher] fills the receptacles [students], the better a teacher she is. The more

³⁷ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 408-409.

³⁸ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 409.

³⁹ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 408-409.

⁴⁰ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 409.

⁴¹ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 409.

⁴² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 50th ed. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos, Donaldo P. Macedo, and Ira Shor (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 72.

⁴³ Freire, 71-73.

mekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are.”⁴⁴ The banking concept of education is a practice of domination that seeks to maintain oppressive power dynamics in and beyond the classroom.

The banking concept of education relies on supremacist beliefs and practices. For instance, it employs a belief that teachers are knowledgeable and students are ignorant; as such, education involves a unidirectional flow of knowledge from the superior, all-knowing teacher into the inferior, ignorant students. As Freire writes, in the banking concept of education, “knowledge is a gift bestowed upon those who consider themselves to be knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing.”⁴⁵ The banking model also fails to recognize the knowledge students bring to the classroom or to see students’ existing knowledge as a valuable asset to the learning process. Additionally, in the banking model of education, the teacher unilaterally decides the curriculum’s content while “the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it.”⁴⁶ In this way, education functions as a form of cultural imperialism. The teacher, who is often part of the dominant group, teaches their own history, beliefs, cultural practices, and ways of knowing, imposing this knowledge on others as normative. Lastly, the banking model of education has “the ideological intent (often not perceived by the educators) of indoctrinating them [students] to adapt to the world of oppression.”⁴⁷ Although frequently undertaken without conscious intent, the banking concept of education functions to

⁴⁴ Freire, 72.

⁴⁵ Freire, 72.

⁴⁶ Freire, 73.

⁴⁷ Freire, 78.

reinforce singular ways of knowing as right and reinforce oppressive realities and structures as normative. The model also functions to disempower people by presenting reality as fixed and suggesting that people lack the agency or creativity to transform the world and engage in their own liberation.⁴⁸

Grounded in supremacist thinking, the banking concept of education is still prevalent in many churches today. For instance, in *Planning for Christian Education Formation*, Israel Galindo and Marty C. Canady observe that many congregations utilize a “religious instruction” model of education.⁴⁹ Like Freire’s banking concept of education, in the “religious instruction” model, the teacher’s voice and knowledge are centered. The teacher functions as the primary possessor of knowledge and engages in lecturing to deposit *their* knowledge into the students. In this model, the student is conceived of as a “novice” who is there to learn from the teacher.⁵⁰ Like the banking concept of education, the religious instruction model lacks mutuality, in which the teacher and students learn with and from one another. It also fails to recognize students’ existing knowledge and lived experience as valuable assets to learning process.

The religious instruction model of education relies on several false assumptions, including that “the teacher is the primary agent for learning” and “people can be schooled in faith.”⁵¹ This pedagogical approach also falsely assumes that it is the most effective method of Christian religious education, despite evidence to the contrary.⁵² Despite

⁴⁸ Freire, 73.

⁴⁹ Israel Galindo and Marty C. Canady, *Planning for Christian Education Formation: A Community of Faith Approach* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2010), 8-9, 66.

⁵⁰ Galindo and Canady, 74.

⁵¹ Galindo and Canady, 10.

religious instruction being proven as ineffective for Christian faith formation, this educational model remains prevalent, especially in Bible studies and topical lecture series in many congregations.⁵³ As Galindo and Canady observe, “In many churches, instruction constitutes the exclusive form of education offered in formal programs.”⁵⁴ The religious instruction model centers and instills one way of knowing—the teacher’s—as superior and correct, thus serving as a form of cultural imperialism.

Focal Point of Investigation

To start challenging the aforementioned interpretive and pedagogical practices that reinforce systems of domination, especially white supremacy, in predominantly white PC(USA) congregations, I initiated a participatory action research study in a six-week women’s Bible study at Grace Presbyterian Church. Although we utilized a womanist biblical interpretation curriculum I had previously created as a starting point, the participants and I co-developed the curriculum together once the project began. During our sessions, the participants and I dialogued with Black female, feminist, proto-womanist, and womanist scholars, writers, and poets, along with other voices and one another, as we read and interpreted various biblical texts. We critically reflected on our social location, theological commitments, and lived experiences, paying particular attention to how our social location informed our interpretations. Throughout this project, the participants and I were co-learners and co-researchers who engaged in participatory

⁵² Galindo and Canady, 9.

⁵³ Galindo and Canady, 66, 74.

⁵⁴ Galindo and Canady, 66, 74.

action research together as we sought to challenge white supremacy and develop more liberative ways of reading the Bible and learning together.

Our initial research questions were:

- *What teaching methods and practices in Bible studies help women in a predominantly white setting critically reflect on their social location, lived experiences, and theological commitments, including how these inform their reading of scripture?*
- *What teaching methods and practices in Bible studies help to raise critical consciousness, facilitate mutual transformation, and encourage people to co-labor for freedom in their lives, communit(ies), and world?*
- *How might dialoguing with womanist voices and one another lead to more liberative ways of reading scripture?*

Once the project began, new questions, such as how we could dismantle whiteness as normative in our pedagogical and interpretative practices and read the Bible in more liberative ways, emerged and subsequently shaped the project.

Thesis

The thesis of this project argues that when teachers and learners begin with the world in front of the text, critically reflecting on how their race, gender, class, and sexual orientation shape their engagement with scripture, dialogue with one another and womanist voices, and engage with other (con)texts alongside the biblical text, then they are more likely to become aware of the lenses they use to interpret scripture and build a learning community in which difference is valued as a gift and strength. Consequently,

this may lead to more liberative readings of scripture and solidarity in the work of liberation in white mainline Protestant congregations.

Limitations and Value of Project for Other Communities

This study was undertaken by, for, and with this community of learners of which I was a part; as such, it was highly contextual. Nevertheless, its findings may be useful to other Christian educators and churches, especially predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations who are committed to antiracism work. This study may also be of value to Christian religious educators who are interested in developing more collaborative and liberative pedagogical practices in Bible studies or other Christian education classes.

Outline of Paper

This paper provides a detailed account of the participatory action research project, including its outcomes and implications for Christian education in predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations. Chapter 2 presents a thick description of the congregational context in which this project took place as well as its larger sociocultural context, which included the Covid-19 pandemic. Chapter 3 establishes the interdisciplinary theoretical framework for this project, which draws on womanist biblical hermeneutics and liberative and anti-racist pedagogies. This chapter also contains an examination of participatory action research and its shared commitments with critical pedagogy. Chapter 4 details how I utilized the participatory action research methodology for this project, including a brief overview of the six Bible study sessions. Chapter 5

offers a report of the data gathered, including the outcomes of the research and methodological successes and failures. Finally, in chapter 6, I interpret the data gathered and discuss its implications for Christian education, especially in predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations.

Research Context

This study took place at Grace Presbyterian Church⁵⁵ from January 25 to March 1, 2021. To preserve confidentiality, I use a pseudonym for the church. I have also generalized identifying details about the church's history, ministries, location, and demographics.

Grace Presbyterian Church

Grace Presbyterian Church is a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregation located in a mid-sized midwestern city. The congregation consists of over 500 members and is almost one hundred percent white. Most members are middle- to upper-middle-class and work in or are retired from white-collar professions. Although the church has many young adults and families, most of its members are 56 years old or older. On Sunday mornings, the sanctuary is filled with long-time members, visitors, people who are actively engaged in the life of the church, but not officially members, and young families from the local neighborhood and larger metro area.

Grace Presbyterian Church is a purple congregation that includes Republicans, Democrats, and Independents; however, it leans theologically and socially left of center. For instance, it is an open and affirming congregation that publicly welcomes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer+ (LGBTQ+) individuals. It also affirms women's gifts and leadership with women serving in a variety of roles including as pastors, elders, deacons, and teachers. In worship and educational programs, gender-neutral language for God is intentionally used. Additionally, the church has diverse artwork and images of

⁵⁵ I use a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of the church and study participants. Additionally, I have generalized identifying details about the church's history, ministries, location, and demographics.

people throughout its building. Throughout the year, it engages in interfaith conversations and invites people of different religious traditions to teach and lead workshops.

In recent years, Grace Presbyterian Church has intentionally focused on racial justice and antiracism work, including by talking about white supremacy. The church has hosted community forums, antiracism trainings, book groups, and workshops led by Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) persons. Additionally, recent sermon series have focused on topics such as racism, white supremacy, colonialism, and non-white Christian traditions. In these sermon series, the pastors have preached on white Christians' responsibility to engage in antiracism work as part of their Christian discipleship. Additionally, the church has partnered with local congregations and organizations to address systemic racism in the community.

Despite deepening its antiracism work, whiteness is normative at Grace Presbyterian Church. For instance, the church's pastors, program staff, and administrative staff are all white. Similarly, the session, the church's governing board, and the Board of Deacons, which provides pastoral care, are also almost all white. In worship, the style of music and worship draw heavily on Euro-American hymns and choral music. Decision-making in the church is often led by the white male senior pastor in collaboration with the Session and utilizes Robert's Rules of Order, albeit loosely. As session members, especially women and people of color, have shared, this form of discussion and decision-making often feels intimidating and makes it difficult to speak. Whiteness gatekeeps the membership process. To become members, people who are not transferring their membership from another church or reaffirming their faith, must profess their faith and

be examined the Session.⁵⁶ As visitors have expressed, having to profess their faith and then be examined by a group of people, especially an almost all white group of people, to become a church member, feels both uncomfortable and antiquated.

White supremacy and colonialism also function in other aspects of the church, such as its youth mission trips. For these domestic and international mission trips, youth travel to other communities, often poor communities of color. These trips, especially international trips, are often billed as adventures to foreign places and function as a form of voluntourism. In the trips, the youth, most of whom are white and American, enter poor communities of color and engage in building projects, teaching, or other short-term community projects. These trips involve going into a different culture or community for a short period, rather than establishing ongoing, reciprocal relationships where mutual learning and transformation can occur. Additionally, these Christian mission trips function as cultural imperialism.

White supremacy also masks and manifests itself as a concern about orthodoxy or right belief. At Grace Presbyterian Church, concern about right belief is often expressed in relation to what is taught and talked about in worship and educational classes. For instance, when Indigenous Christians preached in worship about the intersection of their Indigenous and Christian beliefs, some members raised concerns that these sermons were not Christian enough; this coded language inferred that these Indigenous Christians' beliefs were not right or rather "white" enough. When other sermons and workshops focused on antiracism work, other members have called for the church to focus on Christ and Christian doctrine, not politics. Others have demanded that adult education classes

⁵⁶ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Order*, G-1.0303.

focus on the Bible, claiming widespread biblical illiteracy within the congregation. These demands often disguise a desire for the church to teach white Euro-American Christian doctrine, theology, and hermeneutical approaches.

Christian Education at Grace Presbyterian Church

Grace Presbyterian Church values Christian education for children, youth, and adults. On Sundays, Sunday School is offered for children and adults in the morning, and youth group is held in the afternoons. The Sunday morning adult education classes include Bible studies, topical lecture series, and discussion groups. The church also regularly offers small groups, workshops, spiritual retreats, topical lecture series, and kinesthetic learning opportunities, such as art and yoga classes. Additionally, the church organizes programs, such as Confirmation, mission trips, retreats, and workshops, for children, youth, and families.

Grace Presbyterian Church's adult Sunday School classes, Bible studies, and small groups utilize a variety of curricula and resources. Many Sunday School classes rely on books and study guides written by white mainline Protestant pastors and scholars such as Adam Hamilton and N.T. Wright. Other Bible study groups, such as the women's Bible study groups, utilize the Presbyterian Women/Horizons Bible study curriculum. Other small groups utilize curricula written by the adult Christian education committee and/or pastors; these curricula often correspond with the sermon series. Still other small groups use books, articles, or other resources from both religious and non-religious sources as a foundation for their discussions. In all the classes, most of curricula and

resources are written by white persons. Additionally, all the adult Sunday School teachers, except for the occasional guest lecturer, are white.

Grace Presbyterian Church utilizes a variety of pedagogical approaches, including religious instruction, dialogical learning, sponsorship, small groups, and intergenerational learning in its classes, small groups, workshops, and retreats. However, certain offerings tend to rely on specific pedagogical approaches. For instance, most Sunday School classes adhere to a “religious instruction”⁵⁷ model of education and utilize lecture and discussion as their primary pedagogical practices. The goal of the religious instruction model of education is mastery of content and involves what Galindo and Canady describe as “teaching-by-telling,”⁵⁸ in which teachers engage in lecturing with some time for questions and answers. In contrast, the small groups, retreats, and workshops adhere to what Galindo and Canady refer to as a “community-of-faith” approach.⁵⁹ The “community-of-faith” approach asserts that faith is formed within the context of the church community and thus emphasizes relationships.⁶⁰ Many small groups, workshops, and retreats prioritize relationship *with* the living Christ over learning *about* Jesus or the Bible. Additionally, they utilize more diverse pedagogical approaches, including dialogical, intergenerational, and kinesthetic learning.

Christian education occurs in different spaces and involves different people within the church. For instance, the adult Sunday School classes are primarily attended by people sixty-five years and older and are held in classrooms. In contrast, the small

⁵⁷ Galindo and Canady, *Planning for Christian Education Formation*, 8.

⁵⁸ Galindo and Canady, *Planning for Christian Education Formation*, 10.

⁵⁹ Galindo and Canady, *Planning for Christian Education Formation*, 8-9.

⁶⁰ Galindo and Canady, *Planning for Christian Education Formation*, 8-9.

groups, retreats, and workshops are often attended by people in their thirties, forties, and fifties, and are held in more informal settings, such as people's homes or multi-use spaces. Whereas both men and women attend classes that involve lecture and discussion, women mostly participate in retreats, small groups, and classes that involve art, self-reflection exercises, or kinesthetic learning. This may be because art, self-reflection exercises, and kinesthetic learning, such as yoga, are often gendered female. Additionally, few men participate in social justice and racial justice classes, groups, and workshops. This may be because men engage in this work elsewhere or because racial justice often challenges other interlocking systems of oppression, such as sexism and heterosexism, which feels threatening to them.

Women's Bible Study

Several years ago, Grace Presbyterian Church began offering a new women's Bible study. This Bible study, like other women's small groups and retreats, was well-attended and quickly developed a core group of participants. Many of these participants were also active in the church's antiracism and social justice efforts as well as other Christian education classes and small groups. In the Bible study, the group examined a variety of stories in the Bible, including those that featured women, and utilized multiple curricula and resources. In the classes, the group engaged in storytelling and dialogue as they discussed the biblical text in connection to their lives.

In this Bible study, I served as the primary teacher and facilitator. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this group continued to meet monthly online. In addition to the biblical text, we often reflected on current events, such as the insurrection at the U.S.

Capitol building and the toll of the Covid-19 pandemic on ourselves, our families, and our communities. The participants and I also explored biblical concepts such as lament and engaged contemporary texts, such as visual artwork and music, alongside the biblical text. The idea for this project emerged in part from my work with this women's Bible study.

Sociohistorical Context

This study occurred in the wake of four simultaneous crises—(1) the public health crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic; (2) the U.S. economic inequality crisis, which the Covid-19 pandemic laid bare and further exacerbated; (3) the racial justice crisis and reckoning following the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd in 2020; and (4) the crisis of American democracy that culminated in a violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol Building on January 6, 2021. These crises, although distinct, were interconnected by racism, classism, sexism, and nationalism. This project began less than three weeks after the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol Building while the pandemic was still raging. Additionally, racial and economic justice issues were still prominent in the news. Because of these events, many of the participants were already thinking about white supremacy, racism, and racial justice before the study began. Furthermore, these events made this project more poignant and necessary in a predominantly white, affluent community.

The Covid-19 pandemic reshaped this study. Because stay-at-home orders were still in effect, this Bible study was held online via Zoom rather than in person. This study was not intended to engage technology or address how to teach and create community online;

however, the reality of Covid-19 necessitated the use of technology and called for these questions to be addressed. Although this study was moved online, its research questions and methods were able to stay intact.

Theoretical Framework

Social Location and Theological Commitments

I engaged in this research, teaching, and co-learning as a white, upper-middle-class, queer woman who is an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament in the PC(USA). My work was informed by my commitments to love, justice, and collective liberation. As a follower of Christ and Christian religious educator, I seek to love God and others as myself.⁶¹ Loving my neighbor begins with seeing the *imago dei* in them; it also involves deep listening and vulnerability. Love also involves sharing power and working collaboratively with others to co-create a world in which everyone is free.

As a religious educator and researcher, I co-labor with others to dismantle systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism, and co-create new ways of knowing and being that are grounded in love, justice, kindness, and humility. Antiracism work is part of my discipleship and a means of fulfilling the commandment to love God and others as myself. As a white person who has been (de)formed by white supremacy, my antiracism work involves critically reflecting on how white supremacy has shaped my self-understanding and structured the world in dehumanizing ways. It also involves engaging in *praxis* (action-reflection) to transform my pedagogical and interpretative practices. In the classroom, I engage in dialogical practices to raise critical awareness about white supremacy. Through shared *praxis*, my co-learners (students) and I take actionable steps to dismantle white supremacist assumptions and practices in our learning, interpretations of the Bible, and lives. My role

⁶¹ See Matthew 22:37-39.

is a fellow sojourner who journeys with my co-learners as we travel the path of love and justice toward collective liberation.

Interdisciplinary Framework and Chapter Outline

In this project, I utilized an interdisciplinary framework that drew on womanist biblical hermeneutics and liberative and anti-racist pedagogies. The study itself was a form of participatory action research (PAR). In this chapter, I discuss the origin of womanism and the importance of self-naming before turning to womanist biblical interpretation, a specific discipline within the realm of womanist religious thought. Specifically, I examine the various generations of womanist biblical scholars and then discuss key aspects of womanist biblical interpretation. I do not seek to provide an in-depth discussion of womanism or a comprehensive survey of womanist biblical scholarship; rather, I provide a broad overview of womanist biblical interpretation and focus on key aspects that were particularly informative for this project. I then turn to liberative and anti-racist pedagogies. My discussion is limited in scope. I focus on four key aspects of liberative and anti-racist education that were particularly formative for this project: (1) raising critical consciousness leading to justice-seeking action, (2) honoring multiple epistemologies, (3) practicing humility, and (4) dialogue as a transformative practice. Finally, I discuss participatory action research and its shared commitments with anti-racist and liberative pedagogies.

Womanism and Womanist Biblical Interpretation

“Womanist”

The term “womanist” was coined by poet, writer, and activist Alice Walker in 1979.^{62, 63} In *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, a collection of prose published in 1983, Walker provides a four-part definition of a “womanist,” which I abbreviate here:

- From *womanish*. (Opp. of “girlish,” i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color . . . Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior . . . Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.
2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture . . . Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist.
3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.
4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.⁶⁴

As Walker notes, a womanist is “a Black feminist or feminist of color” who is “committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male *and* female.”⁶⁵ In her final line, Walker distinguishes womanism from feminism, suggesting that although related, womanism and feminism are discrete.

⁶² Monica A. Coleman, “Introduction: Ain’t I A Womanist Too?,” in *Ain’t I A Womanist Too? Third Wave Womanist Religious Thought*, ed. Monica A. Coleman (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 2.

⁶³ Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Clenora Hudson-Weems are also credited with developing the concept of “womanism” independently of Walker. See Coleman, 2013.

⁶⁴ Alice Walker, “Womanist,” in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Mitzi J. Smith (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 17.

⁶⁵ Walker, 17.

Womanism, Black Feminism, and Feminism

Womanism emerged as a political movement in the 1980s.⁶⁶ Like Black feminism, womanism centers the lived experiences of Black women and their communities and seeks to dismantle oppression.⁶⁷ As a movement, womanism pays particular attention to how systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, intersect and are experienced simultaneously.⁶⁸ Although womanism and Black feminism share a common cultural background, womanism is distinct from Black feminism and feminism.⁶⁹ As womanist theologian Monica A. Coleman emphasizes, early womanists distinguished themselves from Black feminists for what they perceived as Black feminists' privileging of gender over race and class concerns.⁷⁰ Womanists also distinguished themselves from the largely white feminist movement, which centered white middle-class women's lived experiences, and critiqued its pervasive racism and classism.⁷¹ Womanists also critiqued both Black feminists and feminists for being, as they perceived it, "separatist" from men.⁷² Since the 1980s, all three movements have continued to develop. As Coleman writes, "Feminism, [B]lack feminism, and womanism have all evolved significantly since the 1980s. Many of the critiques have been addressed in the growth and diversification of each movement."⁷³ Nevertheless, womanism, Black

⁶⁶ Coleman, *Ain't I A Womanist, Too?*, 5.

⁶⁷ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, 2.

⁶⁸ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, 2.

⁶⁹ Coleman, *Ain't I A Womanist, Too?*, 5.

⁷⁰ Coleman, *Ain't I A Womanist, Too?*, 5.

⁷¹ Coleman, *Ain't I A Womanist, Too?*, 5.

⁷² Coleman, *Ain't I A Womanist, Too?*, 5.

feminism, and feminism continue to be distinct movements with unique histories and associations within academia and activism.⁷⁴

As such, when Black women name themselves and/or their work as “womanist,” it is a political move that connects them and their work to specific communities, histories, and political and intellectual agendas.⁷⁵ As Coleman writes, “Those who adopt and adapt the nomenclature of ‘womanist’ and ‘womanism’ are making a particular statement about how they want to be referenced and with whom and what they want to be associated.”⁷⁶ The act of self-naming is also important as historically, Black women, like other marginalized groups, have been denied the right to name themselves.⁷⁷ Black women’s naming of themselves and their work functions as an act of agency, power, and self-determination.⁷⁸

Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics

Womanist religious thought emerged in the field of theology in the 1980s.⁷⁹ Recognizing that neither white feminist nor Black liberation theology fully represented their experiences as Black women, Black female theologians developed a new theological

⁷³ Coleman, *Ain't I A Womanist, Too?*, 5.

⁷⁴ Coleman, *Ain't I A Womanist, Too?*, 6.

⁷⁵ Coleman, *Ain't I A Womanist, Too?*, 7.

⁷⁶ Coleman, *Ain't I A Womanist, Too?*, 6.

⁷⁷ Coleman, *Ain't I A Womanist, Too?*, 7.

⁷⁸ Coleman, *Ain't I A Womanist, Too?*, 6-7.

⁷⁹ Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, Semeia Studies (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=nlebk&AN=1434830&site=eds-live>, 3.

approach which they named “womanist.”⁸⁰ Black female theologians utilized their lived experiences as a starting point for their theological reflection and focused particularly on the interlocking oppressions of racism, classism, and sexism in this approach.⁸¹ As womanist biblical scholars Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace note, “It was their exploration of black women’s tridimensional oppression of gender, race, and class that led them to embrace the term womanist to identify their religious thought.”⁸²

Womanist biblical hermeneutics emerged alongside womanist theology.⁸³ As a discipline, it was influenced by feminist biblical hermeneutics and Black liberation theology.⁸⁴ However, womanist biblical scholars emphasized that as Black women, their experiences were distinct from both white feminists and Black male liberationists.⁸⁵ Early womanist biblical scholars critiqued feminist biblical criticism for its racism and classism and Black liberation theology for its androcentrism and sexism.⁸⁶ As womanist biblical scholar Renita Weems recounts, early womanist scholars articulated the particularity of their lived experiences as Black women and began developing their “own vision of

⁸⁰ Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible*, 3.

⁸¹ Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible*, 3.

⁸² Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible*, 3.

⁸³ Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible*, 3.

⁸⁴ Renita J. Weems, “Re-Reading for Liberation: African American Women and the Bible,” in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, edited by Mitzi J. Smith (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 46.

⁸⁵ Weems, 46-47.

⁸⁶ Weems, 46-47.

liberation,”⁸⁷ that was distinct from the vision of liberation that had been created by Black men and white women.

The first generation of womanist biblical scholars were Renita Weems (Hebrew Bible) and Clarice Martin (New Testament).⁸⁸ In her influential article,⁸⁹ “Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics,” Weems reflects on the changes happening in the field of biblical studies and the growing recognition that objectivity and neutrality do not exist in biblical interpretation; rather, all biblical interpretation is subjective and political.⁹⁰ As she writes, “At the center of the re-formation is . . . the recognition that biblical interpretation is not isolated from the social and cultural values of the interpreter.”⁹¹ After critiquing historical criticism’s false claim of objectivity and feminist biblical criticism’s racism and classism, Weems presents a womanist approach to biblical interpretation.⁹² Her womanist approach centers the lives of Black women and addresses “multiple categories of oppression (e.g. race, gender, class).”⁹³ As she remarks, womanist hermeneutics’ nuanced understanding of oppression and commitment to liberation is of particular value to the field of biblical hermeneutics.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Weems, “Re-Reading for Liberation,” 47.

⁸⁸ Mitzi J. Smith, “Introduction,” in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, edited by Mitzi J. Smith (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 4.

⁸⁹ Other important works by Renita Weems include *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women’s Relationships in the Bible* and “Reading Her Way through the Struggle: African American Women and the Bible,” published in Cain Felder’s *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*.

⁹⁰ Weems, “Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics,” 216-217.

⁹¹ Weems, “Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics,” 216.

⁹² Weems, “Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics,” 216-220.

⁹³ Weems, “Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics,” 220.

⁹⁴ Weems, “Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics,” 218.

Like Weems, New Testament womanist biblical scholar Clarice Martin differentiates womanist biblical interpretation from feminist biblical criticism. In “Womanist Interpretations of the New Testament,” Martin examines issues of translation and interpretation in connection to the Greek word, *doulos*, which can be interpreted as “servant” or “slave.”⁹⁵ Martin notes womanist biblical scholars bring “*black women’s* social, religious, and cultural experience and consciousness into the discourse of biblical studies.”⁹⁶ Additionally, womanist approaches have a “‘quadrocentric’ [fourfold] interest” that focuses on “gender, *race*, class, and language [emphasis mine]” in translation and interpretation.⁹⁷ This varies from feminist biblical translation and interpretation which has a threefold focus of “gender, class, and language concerns.”⁹⁸ In her article, Martin examines how *doulos* texts have functioned throughout history, particularly to justify chattel slavery, and how womanist approaches can challenge reinscribing oppression in biblical translation and interpretation.⁹⁹

The second generation of womanist biblical scholars built on the work of Martin and Weems, while also drawing on the larger field of womanist religious thought. Second generation womanist biblical interpreters include scholars such as Raquel St. Clair and Gay Byron.¹⁰⁰ In her book, *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark*, St.

⁹⁵ Clarice J. Martin, “Womanist Interpretations of the New Testament: The Quest for Holistic and Inclusive Translation and Interpretation,” in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, edited by Mitzi J. Smith (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 23.

⁹⁶ Martin, 34.

⁹⁷ Martin, 21.

⁹⁸ Martin, 21.

⁹⁹ Martin, 34-41.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, “Introduction,” in *I Found God in Me*, 5.

Clair utilizes a womanist approach to examine discipleship, call, and suffering in the Gospel of Mark.¹⁰¹ St. Clair's *Call and Consequences* was the first book-length work by a Black female biblical scholar that utilized a womanist hermeneutic.¹⁰²

The third generation of womanist scholars includes Wil Gafney, Mitzi J. Smith, and Love Sechrest among others.¹⁰³ These womanist biblical scholars began utilizing a womanist interpretative lens after completing their doctoral dissertation and publishing their first books.¹⁰⁴ Gafney developed and has written extensively on “womanist midrash,” which she describes as “an exegetical approach to the Hebrew Scriptures [that] is grounded in my womanist, black feminist identity and experience, and my knowledge and love of classical midrash.”¹⁰⁵ In *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Old Testament*, Gafney utilizes womanist midrash to examine women whose names are unknown or stories that are often overlooked in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Smith began to utilize a womanist biblical hermeneutic after completing her first book which was based on her dissertation.¹⁰⁷ In *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, Smith describes her hermeneutic as a “womanist intersectional approach that privileges or prioritizes the experiences, voices, traditions, and artifacts of African American

¹⁰¹ Racquel A. St. Clair, *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

¹⁰² Smith, “Introduction,” in *I Found God in Me*, 6.

¹⁰³ Smith, “Introduction,” in *I Found God in Me*, 6.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, “Introduction,” in *I Found God in Me*, 6-7.

¹⁰⁵ Wil Gafney, “A Womanist Midrash on Zipporah,” in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, edited by Mitzi J. Smith (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 134.

¹⁰⁶ Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017).

¹⁰⁷ Smith, “Introduction,” in *I Found God in Me*, 7.

women (and their communities) as sources of knowledge production, critical reflection, and ethical conduct.”¹⁰⁸ She emphasizes the liberative nature of her approach and its commitment to dismantling oppression.¹⁰⁹

Womanist biblical interpretation is currently in its fourth generation and includes scholars such as Kimberly Dawn Russaw and Febbie Dickerson.¹¹⁰ In this generation, womanist biblical scholars continue to expand womanist discourse while also critiquing earlier generations’ assumptions and practices. For instance, in “Acts 9:36-43: The Many Faces of Tabitha, a Womanist Reading,” Dickerson argues for a “historically informed womanist biblical hermeneutic.”¹¹¹ She utilizes this historically informed approach in her interpretation of Tabitha in Acts 9:36-43.¹¹² Whereas womanist biblical interpretation often prioritizes the world in front of the text, Dickerson calls for womanist biblical scholars to give greater weight to historical critical approaches and pay greater attention to the sociohistorical context of biblical texts.¹¹³ As she argues, this integrated practice will sharpen womanist biblical interpretation’s analysis and expand its reach within and beyond the field of biblical studies.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, 2.

¹¹⁰ Smith, “Introduction,” in *I Found God in Me*, 7.

¹¹¹ Febbie C. Dickerson, “Acts 9:36-43: The Many Faces of Tabitha, a Womanist Reading,” in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, edited by Mitzi J. Smith (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015).

¹¹² Dickerson, 300.

¹¹³ Dickerson, 299-300.

¹¹⁴ Dickerson, 299-300.

Womanist Biblical Interpretation's Impact

Since its inception in the 1980s, womanist biblical interpretation has grown and evolved. However, until recently, the production of womanist biblical scholarship has been limited.¹¹⁵ This is due to a variety of factors. For instance, early works of womanist biblical scholarship were produced by womanist theologians, rather than biblical scholars.¹¹⁶ Additionally, Black female biblical scholars were often discouraged from utilizing a womanist interpretative lens in their doctoral work.¹¹⁷ As such, many Black female scholars, such as Gafney and Smith, did not self-identify their approaches as “womanist” until later in their careers.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, as Byron and Lovelace report, not all Black female biblical scholars self-identify as womanist or use a womanist approach.¹¹⁹ Finally, within the field of biblical studies, the number of Black female biblical scholars remains relatively small.¹²⁰

Despite these factors, womanist biblical interpretation has and continues to impact the larger field of biblical studies. In recent years, the number of published works that utilize a womanist hermeneutic has significantly grown.¹²¹ In the introduction to *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, Smith suggests there is now a

¹¹⁵ Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible*, 3.

¹¹⁶ Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible*, 3.

¹¹⁷ Smith, “Introduction” in *I Found God in Me*, 6-7.

¹¹⁸ Smith, “Introduction” in *I Found God in Me*, 6-7.

¹¹⁹ Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible*, 5.

¹²⁰ Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible*, 5.

¹²¹ Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible*, 5-6.

critical mass of Black female biblical scholars engaged in womanist hermeneutics.¹²² As she emphasizes, this “critical mass” refers to the collective impact of womanist hermeneutics on the field of biblical studies and other disciplines rather than the quantity of womanist biblical scholars.¹²³

Key Characteristics and Principles

Womanist biblical hermeneutics, like other interpretative methods, utilizes diverse methodologies and approaches.¹²⁴ As such, it is impossible to describe a singular womanist interpretative approach. Nevertheless, womanist biblical interpretation does have several key characteristics and principles.¹²⁵ I focus on those which were particularly instructive for this project. Specifically, womanist biblical interpretation’s recognition of the subjective nature of biblical interpretation; its prioritizing of Black women and their communities; its intersectional approach; its practice of reading from the margins; and its commitment to justice and liberation.

Subjective Nature of Biblical Interpretation

A key principle of womanist biblical interpretation is that all biblical interpretation is subjective.¹²⁶ As Smith remarks, in biblical interpretation, “The impact

¹²² Smith, “Introduction” in *I Found God in Me*, 3.

¹²³ Smith, “Introduction” in *I Found God in Me*, 3.

¹²⁴ Weems, “Re-Reading for Liberation,” 49.

¹²⁵ Many of these characteristics are shared by other biblical hermeneutical approaches. For instance, many other interpretative methods, such as feminist, liberationist, and African American biblical interpretation, also recognize the subjective nature of biblical interpretation and have commitments to justice and liberation.

of our contemporary context, like the air in the room, is inescapable.”¹²⁷ Similarly, in “Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics,” Weems notes that biblical interpretation is always informed by the interpreter and their political, social, and cultural values.¹²⁸ Objectivity and neutrality do not exist in biblical interpretation, even when claimed.¹²⁹

Womanist biblical interpretation, as an embodied approach, is undertaken by and privileges Black women and their communities; it is a liberative political project.¹³⁰ Rather than beginning with the biblical text, most womanist biblical interpretation begins with Black women’s lived experiences, using this as starting point for interpretation.¹³¹ As Weems reflects, “The interests of real flesh-and-blood [B]lack women are privileged over theory and over the interests of sacred texts, even ‘sacred’ ancient texts.”¹³² In this way, womanist biblical interpretation varies from other biblical interpretative methods, such as historical and literary criticism, which often begin with and prioritize the sociohistorical or literary contexts of the text, respectively. It recognizes that biblical interpretation is subjective and begins with subject—the interpreter—rather than the biblical text.

¹²⁶ Weems, “Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics,” 216-217.

¹²⁷ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, 2.

¹²⁸ Weems, “Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics,” 216.

¹²⁹ Weems, “Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics,” 216.

¹³⁰ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, 2.

¹³¹ Weems, “Re-Reading for Liberation,” 47.

¹³² Weems, “Re-Reading for Liberation,” 47.

Prioritizing Black Women and their Communities

Womanist biblical interpretation privileges Black women and their communities, utilizing Black women's lived experience as the starting point for theological reflection.¹³³ As Smith writes, a womanist biblical hermeneutics "prioritizes the communal and particular lived experiences, history, and artifacts of [B]lack women and women of color as a point of departure, a focal point, and an overarching interpretative lens for critical analysis of the Bible and other sacred texts, contexts, cultures, readers, and readings."¹³⁴ Like feminist biblical hermeneutics, womanist hermeneutics often begins with the interpreter and the world in front of the text, particularly the lived experiences of Black women and their communities.¹³⁵

Womanist biblical interpretation prioritizes the survival, liberation, and flourishing of Black women and their communities. As Weems notes in her article, "Re-Reading for Liberation," in womanist biblical interpretation, "the interests of real flesh-and-blood black women are privileged over theory and over the interests of ancient texts, even 'sacred' ancient texts."¹³⁶ Similarly, Smith affirms, "Like the Scriptures, black, brown, and yellow bodies and their communities are sacred (con)texts."¹³⁷ Womanist biblical interpretation honors the sacredness of Black women and their communities and reads in ways that dismantle oppression. In this way, it prioritizes Black women and their

¹³³ Smith, "Introduction," in *I Found God in Me*, 8.

¹³⁴ Smith, "Introduction," in *I Found God in Me*, 8.

¹³⁵ Weems, "Re-Reading for Liberation," 47.

¹³⁶ Weems, "Re-Reading for Liberation," 47.

¹³⁷ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, 3.

survival, liberation, and flourishing over other texts and approaches, especially those that further oppress Black women and their communities.

Utilizing an Intersectional Approach

In addition to privileging and prioritizing Black women and their communities, womanist biblical interpretation utilizes an intersectional approach. As Weems writes, “Victimized by multiple categories of oppression (i.e. race, gender, class) and having experienced these victimizations oftentimes simultaneously, women of color bring to biblical academic discourse a broader, more subtle, understanding of systems of oppression.”¹³⁸ Historically, womanist biblical interpretation, like womanist thought in general, has focused on dismantling racism, sexism, and classism, recognizing these as interlocking systems of oppression that are experienced simultaneously.¹³⁹ This complex analysis of the interlocking nature of oppressions has differed from feminist scholarship, which historically focused primarily on gender concerns and sexism, and Black liberation theology, which focused primarily on racism.¹⁴⁰ Today, womanist biblical scholarship has and continues to utilize an intersectional lens. For instance, in her book, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, Smith utilizes a “womanist intersectional”¹⁴¹ approach to interpret biblical texts from the New Testament.

Although womanist biblical interpretation has historically focused on addressing racism, classism, and sexism, some womanist biblical scholars, such as Dickerson, have

¹³⁸ Weems, “Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics,” 220.

¹³⁹ Dickerson, “Acts 9:36-45,” 296.

¹⁴⁰ Weems, “Re-Reading for Liberation,” 46-47.

¹⁴¹ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, 2.

challenged this overarching focus.¹⁴² Dickerson claims womanist discourse has often diminished the diversity and multiplicity of Black women’s experiences by utilizing “a strategic essentialism that associates [B]lack womanhood primarily with the struggle against racism, sexism, and classism.”¹⁴³ She asserts this overarching lens erases Black women’s diverse lived experiences and subject positions.¹⁴⁴ Dickerson calls for a womanist hermeneutic that is accountable to the various subject positions and the multiplicity and diversity of Black women’s experiences, allowing these to co-exist and be equally valued within womanist discourse.¹⁴⁵

Reading from the Margins

Womanist biblical interpretation often involves “reading from the margins” and amplifying the voices of marginalized people, both in the biblical text and in the world in front of it.¹⁴⁶ For instance, in her article, “A Womanist Midrash on Zipporah,” Gafney focuses on Zipporah, Moses’ wife.¹⁴⁷ Gafney interprets Zipporah as a Black woman and focuses on her identities and roles as a “motherless daughter,” “sister,” “single mother,” and “church mother,” among others.¹⁴⁸ She draws connections between Zipporah’s

¹⁴² Dickerson, “Acts 9:36-45,” 296.

¹⁴³ Dickerson, “Acts 9:36-45,” 296.

¹⁴⁴ Dickerson, “Acts 9:36-45,” 296.

¹⁴⁵ Dickerson, “Acts 9:36-45,” 296.

¹⁴⁶ Kelly Brown Douglas, “Marginalized People, Liberating Perspectives: A Womanist Approach to Biblical Interpretation,” in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, edited by Mitzi J. Smith (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 82-86.

¹⁴⁷ Gafney, “A Womanist Midrash on Zipporah.”

¹⁴⁸ Gafney, “A Womanist Midrash on Zipporah,” 134-135.

leadership role in the community and that of “church mothers” in the Black church.¹⁴⁹ In this way, Gafney centers the lives and leadership of Black women both in and in front of the text. Similarly, in “Race, Gender, and The Politics of ‘Sass’,” Smith reads the story of the Syrophoenician woman in Mark 7:24-30 through the story of Sandra Bland, utilizing a womanist lens that recognizes “sass” as a language of resistance against oppression.¹⁵⁰ In this way, Smith centers and amplifies the voice of both Bland, a Black woman who was arrested and died in jail in Texas in 2015,¹⁵¹ and the Syrophoenician woman, a biblical character who is marginalized because of her ethnicity, gender, and status as a “Greek, non-Jewish foreigner.”¹⁵² Smith reads both Bland’s and the Syrophoenician mothers’ words as acts of resistance against supremacist assumptions and systems of oppression that dehumanize them.

Commitments to Justice and Liberation

Womanist biblical interpretation is a political project that has strong commitments to justice, liberation, and human flourishing and seeks to dismantle oppression in all its forms.¹⁵³ Weems describes womanist hermeneutics’ goal as that of “changing consciousness and transforming reality.”¹⁵⁴ As an approach, womanist biblical hermeneutics grounds its liberative work in the particularity of Black women and their

¹⁴⁹ Gafney, “A Womanist Midrash on Zipporah,” 151.

¹⁵⁰ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, 28-45.

¹⁵¹ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, 28.

¹⁵² Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, 37.

¹⁵³ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, 2-3.

¹⁵⁴ Weems, “Re-Reading for Liberation,” 49.

communities, utilizing Black women's lived experiences as its starting point for interpretation. Through its particularity, womanist biblical hermeneutics practices solidarity with other oppressed groups who are struggling for liberation.¹⁵⁵ As Weems notes, within womanist writings, a prominent, recurring theme is that human beings "are mutually connected to each other and dependent on one another for our emancipation and our survival."¹⁵⁶ As she reflects, because of this understanding, "African-American women have tended to ground theirs [their struggles for liberation] in the experiences of all oppressed people struggling for liberation."¹⁵⁷ Womanist biblical hermeneutics, while prioritizing Black women and their communities, is committed to the liberation of all persons. In this way, it draws on and embodies Walker's definition, which notes that a womanist is "committed to survival and wholeness of an entire people, male *and* female" and "traditionally universalist."¹⁵⁸ It is concerned with collective liberation.

Dialoguing with the Work of Womanist Biblical Scholars in a Predominantly White Setting

In this project, my co-learners and I learned about womanist biblical interpretation by reading and dialoguing with the work of womanist biblical scholars and theologians, along with other voices. This focus on womanist biblical interpretation and centering of Black women's voices was intentional. Specifically, as a white anti-racist religious educator, I sought to create equity by centering the voices of womanist scholars and other

¹⁵⁵ Weems, "Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics," 218.

¹⁵⁶ Weems, "Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics," 218.

¹⁵⁷ Weems, "Womanist Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics," 218.

¹⁵⁸ Walker, "Womanist," 17.

Black women in this curriculum; this served as a corrective to the centering of white—especially white male—voices in the curricula and Bible studies at Grace Presbyterian Church. Additionally, I hoped that dialoguing with the work of womanist scholars would expand the co-learners’ and my understanding of biblical interpretation, challenge white androcentric hermeneutical approaches as standard, and encourage us to critically reflect on our own social location, theological commitments, and interpretative practices.

Although dialoguing with the work of womanist scholars was important, I recognized my co-learners and I would also need to engage in self-reflection to disrupt and dismantle white supremacy in our lives, interpretations of the Bible, and pedagogical practices. Additionally, if we wanted to practice solidarity with womanists and other people engaged in the struggle for liberation, we would need to couple our critical reflection with justice-action that challenged racism, sexism, classism and other -isms in multiple (con)texts. As a white religious educator who had been trained in a banking concept of education, I also recognized that my pedagogical practices would need to change. This required that I adopt a position of humility, in which I learned with and from my co-learners as we developed anti-racist, liberative interpretative and pedagogical practices.

Anti-racist and Liberative Pedagogies

Recognizing that education has often served as a tool of white supremacy and colonialism, many educators have developed anti-racist and liberative pedagogical practices that dismantle white supremacy and other systems of oppression. In this section, I examine four key aspects of liberative and anti-racist education that were particularly

formative for this project: (1) critical consciousness joined with justice-seeking action, (2) developing new epistemologies, (3) practicing humility, and (4) engaging in co-learning, mutuality, and solidarity. My discussion is limited in scope. I draw on the work of educators whose work was most impactful for this project, rather than providing a comprehensive survey of the literature on these topics.

Critical Consciousness Joined with Justice-Seeking Action

White supremacy serves a formative ideology in the United States, shaping laws, institutions, structures, identities, and relationships.¹⁵⁹ Despite its pervasiveness, white supremacy often functions invisibly and remains unseen, particularly by persons who are racialized as white.¹⁶⁰ Thus, an important aspect of anti-racist religious education, particularly in predominantly white congregations, is raising critical consciousness about white supremacy. However, this critical consciousness is not enough; rather, it must be coupled with justice-seeking action. Paulo Freire's "problem-posing" model of education, which is a form of *conscientização*¹⁶¹ (conscientization), and Evelyn Parker's "pedagogy of color consciousness" are helpful in this antiracism work.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues that educators who are committed to liberation must abandon the banking concept of education and adopt a "problem-posing" approach.¹⁶² In "problem-posing" education, teachers and learners learn with and from

¹⁵⁹ Parker, "Teaching for Color Consciousness," 331.

¹⁶⁰ Hess, "White Religious Educations and Unlearning Racism," 122.

¹⁶¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 35.

¹⁶² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.

one another as they engage in dialogue about a problem, which emerges from reality.¹⁶³ Whereas the banking concept of education is characterized by narration, problem-posing education is characterized by dialogue.¹⁶⁴ Teachers and students, as co-learners, engage in dialogue to critically understand reality and take action to transform it.¹⁶⁵ Central to this pedagogical model is an understanding that reality is not fixed, but rather “a *process*, undergoing constant transformation.”¹⁶⁶ In this model, teachers and students see themselves as persons with agency who can take action to transform the world.

Conscientização or conscientization is an important aspect of problem-posing education. As Freire notes, *conscientização* “refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.”¹⁶⁷ In problem-posing education, students and teachers engage in critical reflection through dialogue. This critical reflection is coupled with critical action to change reality.¹⁶⁸ As Freire notes, “Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.”¹⁶⁹ The work of liberation is a humanizing process which helps people to recognize their inherent dignity and agency to reshape the world.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 81.

¹⁶⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 80-81.

¹⁶⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 80-81.

¹⁶⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 75.

¹⁶⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 35.

¹⁶⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.

¹⁶⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.

¹⁷⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.

Religious educator Evelyn Parker’s concept of “color consciousness” is similar to Freire’s notion of conscientization; however, it focuses specifically on dismantling white supremacy in the United States.¹⁷¹ Parker describes color consciousness as an “awareness of the white supremacist ideology operative in U.S. society that dominates and oppresses African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino/a Americans, and other racial-ethnic people,” noting that its purpose is “to assist people of color and whites with divesting of white supremacy.”¹⁷² Like Freire’s concept of *conscientization*, color consciousness involves both critical thinking about the world and critical action to transform it.¹⁷³ In Parker’s color consciousness, as people become more aware of the reality of white supremacy, this newfound consciousness leads them to take actionable steps to dismantle this oppressive reality.¹⁷⁴

A pedagogy of color consciousness, which involves critical awareness about white supremacy combined with justice-seeking action to dismantle it, can be particularly transformative in biblical studies classes.¹⁷⁵ As Parker states, “When teaching the Bible through this method, each teaching/learning setting becomes a *consciousness-raising group*.”¹⁷⁶ By using a pedagogy of color consciousness in Bible studies, educators can disrupt a banking model of education and create space for learners to engage in dialogue, questioning, and critical thinking. As Parker writes, “Color consciousness moves students

¹⁷¹ Parker, “Teaching for Color Consciousness,” 337-338.

¹⁷² Parker, “Teaching for Color Consciousness,” 336.

¹⁷³ Parker, “Teaching for Color Consciousness,” 337-338.

¹⁷⁴ Parker, “Teaching for Color Consciousness,” 337.

¹⁷⁵ Parker, “Teaching for Color Consciousness,” 345.

¹⁷⁶ Parker, “Teaching for Color Consciousness,” 339.

into awareness and action about injustice by teaching them to question reality on every level. What better way of learning to question than through interpretation of the biblical text. For many students, questioning Scripture is a new experience, if they have been taught through a banking teaching methodology.”¹⁷⁷ Although Parker primarily focuses on teachers and students of color in biblical studies classes in seminary settings, a pedagogy of color consciousness can also be useful in predominantly white congregational settings. Specifically, a pedagogy of color consciousness can raise critical awareness about white supremacy and encourage students to question and take action to dismantle white supremacy in their interpretative practices, lives, and communities.

Honoring Multiple Epistemologies

Anti-racist and liberative education involves developing new epistemologies—ways of knowing—that resist and refuse white supremacy. Central to this work is recognizing that all knowledge is socially constructed; there is no objective knowledge or universal truth.¹⁷⁸ In “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism: Can We Find a Way?” Hess calls for white religious educators to “unlearn racism” and develop anti-racist pedagogies by examining epistemology.¹⁷⁹ Specifically, she argues for white religious educators to shift from a paradigm of “foundational knowledge” to “non-foundational knowledge.”¹⁸⁰ Whereas “foundational knowledge” assumes that there is

¹⁷⁷ Parker, “Teaching for Color Consciousness,” 340.

¹⁷⁸ Hess, “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism,” 116-117.

¹⁷⁹ Hess, “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism,” 116-124.

¹⁸⁰ Hess, “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism,” 123.

common foundation upon which all knowledge is built, non-foundational knowledge asserts knowledge is socially constructed in and by various “knowledge communities.”¹⁸¹ As Hess argues, the United States is an epistemological community that is shaped by white supremacy.¹⁸² To “unlearn” and dismantle racism, white religious educators must become critically aware of how whiteness functions as normative and develop new ways of knowing that refuse white supremacy as their basis; this involves a shift from foundational knowledge to non-foundational knowledge and the creation of new epistemological communities.¹⁸³

White religious educators have an important role in constructing new epistemological communities that resist and refuse white supremacy.¹⁸⁴ Specifically, Hess calls for white religious educators to create a new “border community,” in which the language of white supremacy can be made visible and its practices dismantled.¹⁸⁵ As part of this work, she notes that white religious educators must be “constantly, continually, and consistently critiquing our [their] own practices, assumptions, and languages.”¹⁸⁶ Additionally, white religious educators must create new languages and ways of knowing that are not grounded in white supremacy.¹⁸⁷ As Hess emphasizes, having relationships with “communities who do not benefit from the language of white

¹⁸¹ Hess, “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism,” 116, 124.

¹⁸² Hess, “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism,” 124.

¹⁸³ Hess, “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism,” 123.

¹⁸⁴ Hess, “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism,” 124.

¹⁸⁵ Hess, “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism,” 124.

¹⁸⁶ Hess, “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism,” 124.

¹⁸⁷ Hess, “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism,” 124.

supremacy is crucial in this journey.”¹⁸⁸ However, white persons must not rely on people of color to educate them about racism; rather white persons must educate themselves.¹⁸⁹

Hess continues to examine epistemology in her article, “White Religious Educators Resisting White Fragility.” Drawing on the work of lawyer and activist Bryan Stevenson, Hess applies four transformative change practices to white religious educators’ antiracism work.¹⁹⁰ The second of these practices—“changing the narratives”—is related to epistemology.¹⁹¹ Utilizing the work of Willie James Jennings, Hess notes that over time, Christianity transitioned from a movement that prioritized “right relationship” to an exclusionary movement that prioritized “right belief.”¹⁹² Because of white supremacy and colonialist ideologies, diverse, relational ways of knowing found in early Christian communities were replaced by doctrine and a prioritizing of a singular, “correct” understanding of Christian belief and practice.¹⁹³ This “correct” understanding of Christian identity, doctrine, and practice was grounded in white supremacy.¹⁹⁴

To dismantle white supremacy, Hess asserts white religious educators must “change the narrative of Christianity from one that is about enforcing ‘right belief’ to one

¹⁸⁸ Hess, “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism,” 124.

¹⁸⁹ Hess, “White Religious Educators and Unlearning Racism,” 124.

¹⁹⁰ Mary E. Hess, “White Religious Educators Resisting White Fragility: Lessons from Mystics,” *Religious Education* 112, no. 1 (January 2017): 46, doi:10.1080/00344087.2016.1253124.

¹⁹¹ Hess, “White Religious Educators Resisting White Fragility,” 50.

¹⁹² Hess, “White Religious Educators Resisting White Fragility,” 49-50.

¹⁹³ Hess, “White Religious Educators Resisting White Fragility,” 49-50.

¹⁹⁴ Hess, “White Religious Educators Resisting White Fragility,” 50.

that is about inclusive community centered in kenotic love.”¹⁹⁵ This is an epistemological task that involves white religious educators recognizing—and reckoning with—how their knowledge and commitments have been shaped by white supremacy.¹⁹⁶ Additionally, it involves white religious educators committing to “ways of knowing that are integrating, relational, grounded in place, and open in learning.”¹⁹⁷ This change in epistemological commitment has pedagogical implications. Specifically, it involves white religious educators creating new learning communities in which diverse Christian beliefs, identities, and ways of knowing are honored and valued. Additionally, it involves teaching about the rich diversity of Christian identity and practice rather than presenting a singular narrative that privileges a particular Christian identity, practice, or belief as right.¹⁹⁸ This antiracism work decenters whiteness as normative in the classroom. Additionally, it shifts Christianity’s narrative from one of exclusion and sameness to one of inclusive community that values diversity and right relationship.¹⁹⁹

There are many ways in which educators can create inclusive learning communities that honor multiple epistemologies. One way is by encouraging the sharing of personal experiences and stories in the classroom. As critical theorist bell hooks writes, “Critical pedagogies of liberation . . . necessarily embrace experience, confessions and testimony as relevant ways of knowing, as important, vital dimensions of any

¹⁹⁵ Hess, “White Religious Educators Resisting White Fragility,” 50.

¹⁹⁶ Hess, “White Religious Educators Resisting White Fragility,” 51.

¹⁹⁷ Hess, “White Religious Educators Resisting White Fragility,” 51.

¹⁹⁸ Hess, “White Religious Educators Resisting White Fragility,” 50-51.

¹⁹⁹ Hess, “White Religious Educators Resisting White Fragility,” 50-51.

learning experience.”²⁰⁰ Encouraging the sharing of personal narrative can also help students, especially those who are marginalized because of their race, gender, or class “come to voice” in the classroom and help all participants, including the teacher, see one another more clearly.²⁰¹ As hooks reflects, “Hearing each other’s voices, individual thoughts, and sometimes associating these voices with personal experiences makes us more acutely aware of each other.”²⁰² This can create a classroom community in which multiple identities and epistemologies are honored and in which students and teachers recognize this diversity as valuable to the learning process and work of mutual liberation. It can also help teachers and students draw deeper connections between the theoretical material at hand and their lived experiences and vice versa.

Practicing Humility

Throughout history, Christian education has been shaped by supremacist ideologies, especially white supremacy.²⁰³ Christian religious educators have often adopted a posture of superiority over their students in the classroom.²⁰⁴ Additionally, they have engaged in education with intention of improving or correcting their students’ identities, beliefs, and practices.²⁰⁵ This “improvement” has often involved assimilating

²⁰⁰ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 89.

²⁰¹ hooks, 185-186.

²⁰² hooks, 186.

²⁰³ Turpin, “Christian Education, 414.

²⁰⁴ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 413-414.

²⁰⁵ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 413-414.

their students into white androcentric ways of knowing and being, which are presented as standard and “right.” As Turpin notes, traces of these forms of supremacist thinking continue today when teachers “educate because we believe that people’s thinking or way of being in the world needs improvement and that there is wisdom from our cultural heritage that would lead to a better way of being in the world.”²⁰⁶ As she argues, humility is a critical virtue for Christian religious educators committed to disrupting supremacist assumptions and practices in their teaching.²⁰⁷

Humility is a crucial practice for Christian religious educators that serves as a corrective to supremacist thinking and colonialist tendencies. Turpin asserts that humility begins with “honest self-appraisal.”²⁰⁸ Specifically, it involves a “a clear look and honest evaluation of how individual and collective histories of oppression inform one’s identity, pedagogy, and epistemology.”²⁰⁹ Humility involves Christian religious educators critically examining the history of Christian education, including the ways it has been influenced by and perpetuated white supremacy and colonialism; it also involves taking responsibility for this legacy.²¹⁰ Critical self-reflection, in which white Christian religious educators intentionally examine their motivations for teaching and pedagogical practices, is central to this work.²¹¹ For instance, Christian religious educators can critically examine how they position themselves in relation to their students and why they teach.

²⁰⁶ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 414.

²⁰⁷ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 414.

²⁰⁸ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 414.

²⁰⁹ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 414.

²¹⁰ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 414.

²¹¹ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 414.

Humility also involves Christian religious educators recognizing the limits of their own knowledge and experience. As Turpin reflects, “Seeing clearly requires the humility of understanding that one’s approach or experience does not apply to all persons universally.”²¹² Rather than assuming one’s experiences and ways of knowing to be universal, humility involves acknowledging the limitations of one’s experience and humbly seeking to learn from others who are different than oneself.

In this way, humility involves what Turpin describes as a “conversion to the other,” in which teachers see other people, especially those who are different than them, as bearing the image of God and having inherent value.²¹³ In the classroom, this conversion to other involves teachers honoring the wisdom students bring to the classroom, recognizing this wisdom as a valuable asset in the learning process.²¹⁴ Recognizing the inherent value and existing wisdom of one’s students changes the dynamic from one in which teachers, as the sole possessors of knowledge instruct students, to one in which students and teachers learn with and from one another.²¹⁵

Dialogue as a Transformative Practice

Liberative pedagogies transform hierarchical power dynamics by sharing power and practicing mutuality between teachers and students. For instance, in problem-posing education, Freire argues, “At the outset the teacher-student contradiction [must] be

²¹² Turpin, “Christian Education,” 415.

²¹³ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 415.

²¹⁴ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 415.

²¹⁵ Turpin, “Christian Education,” 415-416.

resolved.”²¹⁶ In Freire’s problem-posing model, teachers become co-learners and students become co-teachers.²¹⁷ As Freire remarks, “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which they all grow.”²¹⁸ Like Turpin’s “conversion to the other,” in Freire’s problem-posing education, the teacher recognizes students as fellow human beings who possess dignity and knowledge. Teachers and students engage in dialogue to critically name and take action to transform reality, so they can become freer.²¹⁹ The relationship between the teacher and students is characterized by mutuality. The teacher acts in solidarity with the students as together, they engage in the “quest for mutual humanization.”²²⁰

Dialogue is central to Freire’s problem-posing model of education. As Freire writes, “Dialogue is the encounter between men (*sic*), mediated by the world, in order to name the world.”²²¹ Through dialogue, teachers and students name the world, which is an act of creation.²²² As Freire notes, “Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*.”²²³ In this way, dialogue is *praxis*, or action-reflection upon the world, and a means of liberation.²²⁴ It is also an act

²¹⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.

²¹⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 80.

²¹⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 80.

²¹⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 88.

²²⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 75.

²²¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 88.

²²² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 88-89.

²²³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 88.

of love and practice of solidarity. As Freire reflects, “Love is commitment to their [the oppressed’s] cause—the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical.”²²⁵ When education is the practice of freedom, teachers engage in dialogue with their students as together, they seek to critically understand and transform the world; this is an act of love for their students and an act of love for the world. Additionally, it is also an act of solidarity *with* one’s students, who are in the world, and like the teacher, are fellow people seeking to be free.

Dialogue is also transformative pedagogical practice that can encourage people to learn with and from people who are different than themselves. As hooks remarks, “To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences.”²²⁶ Similarly, Smith writes, dialogue “encourages critical engagement with others different from ourselves, not in order to dominate, but in pursuit of diverse dialogue partners.”²²⁷ Dialoguing with people with different identities, beliefs, and lived experiences can create empathy and build relationships that transcend socially constructed boundaries, such as race and class. Additionally, it can help people to recognize the particularity of their identities, lived experiences, and beliefs. This can create space for people to critically question and reconsider the assumptions they held about themselves and the world.

²²⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 88.

²²⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 89.

²²⁶ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 130.

²²⁷ Smith, *Womanist Sass*, 54.

Many educational models encourage the sharing of power, mutual vulnerability, and risk-taking within the context of relationship and community. For instance, in *Planning for Christian Education Formation*, Galindo and Canady argue for a “community-of-faith” approach to Christian education.²²⁸ This educational model is relational, dialogical, and occurs in the context of community.²²⁹ Like Freire’s problem-posing model of education, in the “community-of-faith” model, relationships and mutual transformation are prioritized over the transfer and mastery of information. The community-of-faith model’s purpose is to bring people into deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and other people.²³⁰ Galindo and Canady describe the dialogical methods used in a community-of-faith approach as “those that promote deep sharing, mutual accountability, vulnerable transparency, and self-revelation.”²³¹ These pedagogical practices facilitate mutuality, shared vulnerability, and trust between teachers and students.

hooks also emphasizes the importance of mutuality and shared vulnerability in liberative education. As she writes, “When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess.”²³² She calls for teachers to practice vulnerability by sharing “confessional narratives,” in which they link their lived experiences to classroom discussions.²³³ By doing so, teachers demonstrate they are

²²⁸ Galindo and Canady, *Planning for Christian Education Formation*, 8-9.

²²⁹ Galindo and Canady, *Planning for Christian Education Formation*, 8-9.

²³⁰ Galindo and Canady, *Planning for Christian Education Formation*, 8-9.

²³¹ Galindo and Canady, *Planning for Christian Education Formation*, 9.

²³² hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 21.

²³³ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 21.

willing to be vulnerable in the classroom; this is a practice of solidarity with one's students and means of disrupting the traditional power dynamics in teaching.²³⁴ This practice also humanizes teachers. Rather than teachers being self-actualized persons who are there to enlighten students, teachers reveal themselves to be people who are still in the process of becoming and are also there to grow as human beings.²³⁵ In liberative pedagogies, teachers and students engage in mutual learning and personal growth.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research (PAR) is a collaborative research approach in which “researchers and participants [work] together to understand a problematic situation and change it for the better.”²³⁶ PAR utilizes diverse qualitative and quantitative methodologies and is best understood as an approach to research rather than a clearly delineated method.²³⁷ As an approach, PAR has strong commitments to justice and liberation²³⁸ and often focuses on challenging “structured power dynamics,” such as racism, sexism, and classism.²³⁹ Like the broader field of action research, PAR is oriented toward action. Adult education professors Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdale

²³⁴ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 21.

²³⁵ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 21.

²³⁶ Institute of Development Studies, “Participatory Action Research,” accessed September 23, 2021, <https://www.participatorymethods.org/glossary/participatory-action-research>.

²³⁷ Institute of Development Studies, “Participatory Action Research.”

²³⁸ Organizing Engagement, “Participatory Action Research and Evaluation,” accessed September 25, 2021, <https://organizingengagement.org/models/participatory-action-research-and-evaluation/>.

²³⁹ Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, Fourth ed., The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 57-58.

emphasize that PAR studies seek to “engage in people in taking action on their own behalf as part of their own communities.”²⁴⁰ Similar to Freire’s problem-posing model of education, in PAR, the researcher and community members partner together as co-researchers to critically examine a problematic situation and take action to transform it. Participants are knowledgeable subjects who utilize their agency to engage in their own liberation.

Participatory action research is a form of action research.²⁴¹ In the 1940s, social psychologist Kurt Lewin developed action research based on his work on democratizing decision-making amongst factory workers.²⁴² In the 1950s, educators began using action research to improve their pedagogical practices and conduct research in their classrooms.²⁴³ Today, action research is utilized in many fields and disciplines. As Bruce Martin observes, it is especially “popular amongst critical theorists in education and the social sciences who see its possibilities for social action and social transformation.”²⁴⁴

Action research begins with a problematic situation and seeks to change this problematic situation through a cycle of action.²⁴⁵ Referencing Kemmis and McTaggart’s definition of action reaction research, Martin notes action research is “a cycle or spiral of

²⁴⁰ Merriam and Tisdale, 58.

²⁴¹ Merriam and Tisdale, 53-54.

²⁴² Bruce Martin, “‘Living’ Education: Action Research as a Practical Approach to Congregational Education.” *Religious Education* 95, no. 2 (Spr 2000): 152–66, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=lsdah&AN=ATLA0000912551&site=eds-live>, 153-54.

²⁴³ Martin, 154.

²⁴⁴ Martin, 153.

²⁴⁵ Merriam and Tisdale, *Qualitative Research*, 50.

research and action involving four phases: *planning, action, observing, reflecting*.²⁴⁶ In the *planning* phase, the co-researchers “collaboratively observe the realities of their situation” and *plan* what they plan to do.²⁴⁷ In the *acting* phase, the co-researchers implement their initial plan.²⁴⁸ In the *observing* phase, the co-researchers *observe* what happened and collect data.²⁴⁹ In the *reflecting* phase, the co-researchers *reflect* on what they have learned and develop their next steps based on what they learned from this cycle of action.²⁵⁰ The reflection phase often transitions into a time of planning, thus beginning the next turn of the spiral cycle.²⁵¹

PAR shares many similarities with the broader field of action research. Both are problem-based, collaborative, and action-oriented. Additionally, both utilize iterative cycles of action that are intended to solve a problem or improve a situation.^{252, 253} However, action research is often used by professionals, such as teachers to improve their pedagogical practices or administrators to improve organizational outcomes.²⁵⁴ In contrast, PAR is community-based and more collaborative in nature; additionally, it is focuses on effecting societal change.²⁵⁵ However, Organizing Engagement notes, “There

²⁴⁶ Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

²⁴⁷ Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

²⁴⁸ Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

²⁴⁹ Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

²⁵⁰ Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

²⁵¹ Merriam and Tisdale, *Qualitative Research*, 51.

²⁵² Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

²⁵³ Merriam and Tisdale, *Qualitative Research*, 51.

²⁵⁴ Organizing Engagement, “Participatory Action Research and Evaluation.”

²⁵⁵ Organizing Engagement, “Participatory Action Research and Evaluation.”

are multiple—and sometimes conflicting definitions of the two related concepts.”²⁵⁶

Thus, the designation of a study as action research versus PAR is often subjective rather than objective.

Many religious educators have noted the value of PAR in Christian religious education that is oriented toward justice. For instance, in “Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice,” Christian religious educator Elizabeth Conde-Frazier examines PAR as a tool for “unit[ing] scholarship and teaching with the purpose of building up community and moving toward social justice.”²⁵⁷ Referencing the work of Freire, Conde-Frazier describes justice-oriented religious education as “where the history and present realities of oppression no longer paralyze us but instead their hold on us is slowly and steadily overthrown.”²⁵⁸ In justice-oriented religious education, students and teachers work together to critically reflect on and take action to transform the world. As she notes, “This change begins . . . with everyday life, in the realm of *lo cotidiano*.”²⁵⁹ As such it pairs well with PAR, which also begins with a problematic situation that arises in the lived experiences of a specific community and seeks to facilitate social change that is undertaken by and for that community.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Organizing Engagement, “Participatory Action Research and Evaluation.”

²⁵⁷ Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, “Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice,” *Religious Education* 101, no. 3 (Sum 2006): 321, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=lsdah&AN=ATLA0001537301&site=eds-live>.

²⁵⁸ Conde-Frazier, 321.

²⁵⁹ Conde-Frazier, 325.

²⁶⁰ Conde-Frazier, 325.

Similarly, in “Changing the World Without Doing Harm,” educator Mark D. Chapman notes the congruency between critical pedagogy and PAR.²⁶¹ He examines the implications of Freire’s critical pedagogy for participatory action research within the context of teaching field research to “activist oriented insider student researchers.”²⁶² As he argues, utilizing a critical pedagogy approach to PAR can help student researchers to (1) better understand their community context, (2) become more aware of power dynamics involved in research, (3) recognize “the importance of participation and dialogue” in research, and (4) maintain a “commitment to social change.”²⁶³

Chapman’s discussion of Freire and PAR is particularly helpful for considering the role of the teacher/researcher. As he writes, “While Freire sometimes talks as if the liberation process is entirely collective . . . there is always an implicit instigator in the process.”²⁶⁴ Like in critical pedagogy, Chapman notes that in PAR, “Somebody has to instigate but not control the action.”²⁶⁵ Once dialogue with the participants begins, the researcher must transition from being an instigator to a co-researcher who works with a community as they seek to change their own situation. As Chapman emphasizes, because of participant involvement “both the destination and approach to the research can

²⁶¹ Mark Denis Chapman, “Changing the World without Doing Harm: Critical Pedagogy, Participatory Action Research and the Insider Student Researcher,” *Religious Studies and Theology* 38, no. 1–2 (2019), doi:10.1558/rsth.38715, 106-107.

²⁶² Chapman, 100.

²⁶³ Chapman, 106-107.

²⁶⁴ Chapman, 107.

²⁶⁵ Chapman, 107.

change.”²⁶⁶ Like teachers who utilize liberative pedagogies, PAR researchers must be humble and adopt to the needs, questions, and knowledge of the group.

Participatory Action Research and Liberative Education

PAR and liberative pedagogies share many common values and commitments. For instance, like liberative pedagogies, PAR recognizes the inherent value of people and honors their existing knowledge.²⁶⁷ As Conde-Frazier emphasizes, in PAR, “Knowledge comes from the people.”²⁶⁸ In PAR, the researcher and participants work together as co-investigators, learning with and from one another as they seek to critically understand and take action to transform their situation. Like in liberative education, in PAR, the researcher practices solidarity *with*, rather than superiority *over*, the community.²⁶⁹ In this way, PAR challenges the hierarchical power dynamics in traditional research wherein the researcher is set apart from the community and assumed to be the sole *possessor* and *producer* of knowledge. In PAR, the researcher stands alongside the community as together they co-generate new knowledge and take action to improve their situation.

Both PAR and liberative pedagogies are oriented toward action and seek social change.²⁷⁰ Like Freire’s problem-posing model of education, PAR functions as a form of

²⁶⁶ Chapman, 107.

²⁶⁷ Conde-Frazier, “Participatory Action Research,” 324.

²⁶⁸ Conde-Frazier, “Participatory Action Research,” 324.

²⁶⁹ Conde-Frazier, “Participatory Action Research,” 325.

²⁷⁰ Chapman, “Changing the World,” 107.

conscientização. People become critically aware of the oppressive aspects of reality and then take action to change them. As Conde-Frazier remarks, PAR is intended to “contribute directly to change efforts on the part of the participants.”²⁷¹ Although awareness of one’s ability to act and change one’s situation is often liberative in itself, PAR also involves persons in justice-seeking outward-facing action.²⁷² As Tisdale and Merriam remark, PAR’s purpose is to engage people to “challenge power relations and initiate change in their own community.”²⁷³ Like liberative pedagogies, PAR encourages people to use their agency to challenge oppressive systems and transform the world to make it more just and free.

In PAR research is undertaken by and for the community.²⁷⁴ The researcher is often a community member or someone who has invited in by the community.²⁷⁵ Like in liberative education where the teachers and students work collaboratively together as co-learners, in PAR, the researcher and community members partner together as “co-researchers.”²⁷⁶ In PAR, the researcher serves as a “facilitator and/or catalyst, trainer, and coach” who gathers resources and walks alongside the community.²⁷⁷ The researcher and community members engage in research and generate new knowledge together. Like liberative pedagogies, PAR recognizes that all knowledge is socially constructed and

²⁷¹ Conde-Frazier, “Participatory Action Research,” 324.

²⁷² Merriam and Tisdale, *Qualitative Research*, 57-58.

²⁷³ Tisdale and Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 57.

²⁷⁴ Chapman, “Changing the World,” 106.

²⁷⁵ Merriam and Tisdale, *Qualitative Research*, 57.

²⁷⁶ Merriam and Tisdale, *Qualitative Research*, 57.

²⁷⁷ Conde-Frazier, “Participatory Action Research,” 325.

highly contextual. As such, PAR is undertaken with and by the community to generate new knowledge for that community; in this way, the research is “attached” to the community that produced it.²⁷⁸ This research practice is important for as Conde-Frazier observes, “Unattached research tends to create policies that continue to oppress.”²⁷⁹ When knowledge produced in one community is applied to another community, this can often function as a form of domination. To counter this concern, PAR studies produce knowledge that is specific to and directly benefits the community in which the research occurred.

²⁷⁸ Conde-Frazier, “Participatory Action Research,” 324.

²⁷⁹ Conde-Frazier, “Participatory Action Research,” 324.

Research Methodology

This participatory action research (PAR) study took place in the context of a six-week women’s Bible study, which was held on Zoom. In this study, the participants and I were co-investigators who engaged in co-learning and research together. In this study, we sought to address the problem of white supremacy in our interpretative and pedagogical practices. However, white supremacy was not a simple problem that could be “solved”; rather, it could only be transformed through continuous *praxis* (action-reflection). As such, we used a spiral cycle of action consisting of the following phases: *plan-act-observe-reflect*.²⁸⁰ Through this ongoing spiral cycle of action, we sought to raise critical consciousness about white supremacy and take action to dismantle it in our pedagogical and interpretative practices. An intended outcome was to interpret the Bible in liberative ways that resisted reinscribing oppression in our or others’ lives. I was an inside researcher and the initial instigator of this study. However, once the study began, my co-learners and I shaped the project together. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not needed for this study.

Data Collection Methods

My co-learners and I met for six Bible study sessions, which were held over six consecutive weeks on Zoom, starting on January 25, 2021. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes. Over the six sessions, we utilized an ongoing spiral cycle of *plan-act-observe-reflect*²⁸¹ to collect data, reflect on our findings, and plan for the next

²⁸⁰ Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

²⁸¹ Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

session. The ongoing action spiral allowed us to use new insights to shape what and how we learned together in the following session. Our data collection methods included group debriefs, analysis of class transcripts, a teaching journal, and a final reflection assignment. Data was also collected through weekly written reflection assignments; however, this data was not analyzed.

Group Debriefs

As noted above, this study utilized an ongoing spiral cycle consisting of the following phases: *plan-act-observe-reflect*.²⁸² Each session began with learning together; this was the action phase. At the end of each session, we engaged in a group debrief in which we shared observations, engaged in reflection, and planned for the next session. The group debriefs involved questions, such as, “When did you feel most engaged in the session?” to solicit observations about our pedagogical practices. As a group, we shared reflections, discussed changes to make for next time, and planned topics to explore in the next session. Our reflections and learnings shaped both *what* and *how* we planned to learn in the following session. After the group debrief, I further developed our initial lesson plan. I located resources, such as readings and videos, created reflection assignments, and crafted a more detailed lesson plan. The lesson plan served as the starting point for the following session. However, when the session began, the lesson plan evolved with the input of the group. At the end of the session, we engaged in a group debrief to share observations, engage in reflection, and plan for the next session; this began the next turn of the spiral cycle of *plan-act-observe-reflect*.²⁸³

²⁸² Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

Analysis of Class Transcripts

Each class session was audio-visually recorded on Zoom. After each session, I transcribed the recording and analyzed it for recurring themes. I then shared a summary of these themes with my co-learners via email. At the beginning of the following class, we discussed the emerging themes as a group. This validated the findings and served the pedagogical function of reviewing what we had done the previous week. As we discussed the emerging themes from the previous class, we used our emerging insights to tweak the lesson plan for that day.

Transcribing and analyzing the class transcripts also provided important data about our pedagogical practices. The transcripts showed the frequency with which pedagogical practices—such as lecturing, storytelling, or dialogue—were used. This helped us to see the gaps between our intended learning strategies and the actual pedagogical practices employed. As a facilitator, this data was particularly useful as it helped me to become more aware of my pedagogical tendencies, strengths, and growing edges.

Teaching Journal

After each session, I reflected on the class, my pedagogical successes and failures, and self-learnings in a teaching journal. For instance, I reflected on what pedagogical practices brought excitement and energy to the classroom and which ones did not and why. I also reflected on how I felt while teaching and where I was experiencing transformation. Although I did not share the teaching journal entries with my co-learners,

²⁸³ Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

I did share my observations, reflections, and learnings in the group debriefs. I also used my teaching journal to expand on ideas from the group debriefs and further develop the lesson plan for the following session. The teaching journal served as an important avenue for synthesizing ideas and learnings and using these learnings to plan for the next session.

Final Reflection Assignment

Prior to the final class session, the co-learners completed a final written reflection assignment. This pedagogical exercise yielded important data about what the co-learners had learned about themselves, womanism and womanist biblical interpretation, and liberation. It also provided data about what pedagogical practices were most transformative, how this Bible study differed from others they had participated in, and what value a Bible study like this one might have for other predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations. Prior to the final session, the co-learners emailed their reflection assignments to me. I analyzed the assignments to see what the co-learners had learned and what impact, if any, this series had had on them. In the final class, the co-learners discussed their final reflection assignment responses with one another.

Data Collection Methods Integration

In this study, the data collection methods were integrated and built on one another. For instance, in the group debriefs, we shared observations, reflections, and insights and then used these insights to plan for the following session. After the group debrief, I engaged in further reflection in my teaching journal and prepared a tentative lesson plan that built on our initial planning in the group debrief. In between sessions, I

transcribed and shared emerging themes from the class transcripts with my co-learners. At the beginning of the next session, we reflected on the emerging themes and reviewed the lesson plan for that session, making changes as needed. Utilizing our initial lesson plan as a starting point, we implemented our plans by learning together. At the end of the session, we shared observations and reflected on what we were learning in the group debrief. These reflections, insights, and emerging questions helped us to plan for the next session and thus engage in continuous *praxis*.

Sample Group Selection Criteria

I invited eight members of Grace Presbyterian Church to participate in this study. The participants met the following criteria: (1) members of Grace Presbyterian Church, (2) self-identified as female, (3) participated in the women's Bible study group I previously led, (4) had an interest and/or had previously been involved in social justice work at the church or in the larger community, and (5) participated in other Sunday School classes or small groups at the church. These criteria were intentional and strategic. I invited women as a means of centering women's voices and experiences in this study. This practice also allowed us to reflect on our shared and divergent experiences as women. Because we had already been learning together as Bible study group, the participants and I knew one another, albeit to different degrees. This provided a foundational level of trust within the group. I intentionally invited women who were interested in and/or had previous involvement in antiracism or social justice work because they were familiar with concepts such as white supremacy and racism. A familiarity with these concepts allowed us to build on our existing knowledge and

experience, rather than focusing on basic definitions and concepts. Because the participants were members at Grace Presbyterian Church and participated in other Bible studies or small groups, they were familiar with the pedagogical practices commonly used in other classes. This allowed them to compare how their experience in this Bible study was similar or different than in other Bible studies and small groups at the church.

The group was intentionally kept small, so we could hear one another's voices and develop greater intimacy. The small group size also made facilitation easier on Zoom. Of the eight women I invited, all agreed to participate in this study. However, one participant removed herself because of a scheduling conflict before the study began.

Learning Community (Sample Group)

The co-learners (sample group) in this study consisted of seven women, in addition to me. I utilize initials, based on pseudonyms selected by the participants, to identify them. The participants were:

- C.B.: 67-year-old white, heterosexual, middle/upper-middle-class woman
- M.M.: 81-year-old Black, heterosexual, middle-class woman
- C.B.: 65-year-old white, heterosexual, lower-middle-class woman
- D.S.: 65-year-old white, heterosexual, middle-class woman
- B.R.: 71-year-old white, heterosexual, middle-class woman
- L.D.: 53-year-old white (Irish American), queer, upper-middle class woman
- M.B.: 63-year-old African American, queer, working-class woman²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ L.D. and M.B. are married to each other.

All the women identified as Christian, except for M.B. who identified as agnostic. All the co-learners participated in every session and completed additional readings and reflection assignments outside of class.

Curriculum Design and Common Elements

This project utilized a curriculum on womanist biblical interpretation that I previously created as its starting point. The curriculum provided a general scope and sequence along with potential learning activities, readings, and resources. I designed the first session and after that, the co-learners and I co-developed the following sessions together. These sessions focused broadly on critically examining our social and theological commitments as interpreters, learning about womanism and womanist biblical interpretation, and reading the Bible in liberative ways. Rather than creating the entire curriculum at once, we planned the sessions from week to week, using a spiral cycle of *plan-act-observe-reflect*.²⁸⁵ By designing the curriculum as the series unfolded, we were able to continually incorporate new learnings and insights. Additionally, we were able to explore new questions as they emerged.

The Bible study sessions shared several common elements.²⁸⁶ First, the sessions included pre-class readings and reflection assignments. Second, the beginning of the class included an opening sequence that consisted of a welcome, embodied centering practice, and opening prayer. This opening sequence was followed by a discussion of the emerging themes from the previous session and an overview of the intended lesson plan for that

²⁸⁵ Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

²⁸⁶ Some of these elements varied from session to session. These variations are noted in the session overviews.

day. Third, the sessions involved reflecting on multiple (con)texts. To do so, we often engaged multiple texts, including articles by womanist biblical scholars and videos that featured the work of proto-womanists, womanists, or feminists who were Black women. Fourth, the sessions included interpreting a biblical text together. We often dialogued with the work of womanist biblical scholars and one another as we read the Bible in liberative ways. Fifth, the sessions included listening to a song about freedom. Sixth, the sessions included sharing of key take-aways and lingering questions. Seventh, the sessions involved a group debrief, where we shared observations, reflected on our learnings, shared insights, and planned for the next session. Finally, at the end of the session, we offered a blessing for one another. The sessions were approximately 90-minutes, including the group debrief.

Each element of the lesson plans had a specific pedagogical purpose. For instance, the pre-class readings allowed us to read and familiarize ourselves with the work of womanist writers, biblical scholars, and others, along with the biblical text, before coming together as a group. Short reflection assignments enabled us to engage in self-reflection and dialogue with the work of the persons we were reading. The embodied centering practice and opening prayer helped us to connect with our bodies and show up—mind, body, and spirit—in this online learning space. Discussing the emerging themes enabled us to review the previous session and reflect on the topics, questions, and liberative practices that were emerging in our data. This information helped us to tweak our lesson plan for that day. Utilizing multiple texts helped us to critically reflect on oppression, agency, privilege, power, and mutual liberation in multiple (con)texts, including our lives, communities, and the biblical text.

In most sessions, we read and interpreted a biblical text. Dialoguing about the biblical text encouraged critical question-asking and reflection on issues of identity, justice, power, and agency in the biblical text, ourselves, and the world. To facilitate critical reflection, I often asked questions such as, “What are the power dynamics in this text?” “What does this passage say to you about justice?” and “What does this passage say to you about co-laboring for mutual liberation?” As we interpreted the biblical text, we dialogued with the work of womanist biblical scholars and others whose work we had read prior to class. Dialoguing with the work of these scholars expanded our understanding of how the Bible could be interpreted and raised new questions of ourselves, the biblical text, and the world. It also challenged us to critically reflect on our social location and theological commitments as interpreters. Listening to a song about freedom helped us to contemplate mutual liberation in a different way than simply talking about it. These songs also inspired us to go into the world and co-labor for liberation. Sharing key take-away and questions allowed each person to name what they were learning and still pondering. This practice of sharing questions reminded us that we did not have all the answers. The group debriefs allowed us to share observations, reflect on our learnings, generate new insights, and plan for the next session. Lastly, blessing one another was a means of honoring one another’s presence and our shared work.

Multiple Voices in the Curriculum

Womanist biblical interpretation was a central topic in this project. As such, we engaged the work of womanist biblical scholars, such as Mitzi J. Smith and Kimberly Dawn Russaw. We also read “Marginalized People, Liberating Perspectives,” by

womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas; although not a biblical scholar, Brown Douglas's article offered a helpful overview of womanist biblical interpretation.

Additionally, we engaged the work of womanists, such as Alice Walker; feminists, such as bell hooks and Roxanne Gay; and proto-womanists, such as Sojourner Truth. The inclusion of diverse voices was intentional. It offered a pedagogical opportunity to learn about womanism, Black feminism, and feminism and their similarities and differences. It also provided an opportunity to reflect on the importance of self-naming and clarified that not all Black women identify as womanists nor do all Black female scholars utilize a womanist approach.

Overview of Lessons

This six-week women's Bible study began on January 25, 2021. Below I offer a broad overview of each session, including its primary objectives and components. I then describe the major adaptations that occurred as the lesson unfolded and offer a brief summation of the group debrief. The lesson plans, handouts, and reflection assignments are available in the appendix. Data from the group debriefs are presented more fully in the following chapter.

Session 1

In Session 1, the primary objectives were to learn about participatory action research, to discuss liberative pedagogical practices, to reflect on the meaning of liberation, and to critically reflect on how we had been socialized to read Scripture. The pre-class readings were "Participatory Action Research (PAR)," "Paolo Freire & bell

hooks: A Few Important Ideas and Concepts,” and “I Found God in Me: The Mitzi J. Smith Interview” (a video). Each text had a corresponding reflection assignment. The initial lesson plan’s opening activities were a welcome, introductions via mutual invitation, and an embodied centering practice and prayer. The first learning segment included an introduction to the Bible study, a short introduction to PAR, followed by an observation exercise, and the creation of a community learning covenant. The next learning segment focused on biblical interpretation and liberation. This learning segment involved interpreting Genesis 2:4-8, 13, 21-25, discussing Maya Angelou’s poem, “And Still I Rise,” and reflecting on the meaning of liberation. The final learning segment involved developing our research questions and delving further into PAR and the spiral cycle of *plan-act-observe-reflect*.²⁸⁷ The closing activities were listening to “Spirits Calling” by Beautiful Chorus and sharing key take-aways and emerging questions. Lastly, we engaged in a group debrief and blessed one another.

We made multiple changes during the lesson. First, the participatory action research lecture and discussion took significantly longer than anticipated; as such, we briefly dialogued about what kind of learning community we wanted to create and how to do so, rather than creating a formal learning covenant. The original plan also included stopping after each learning activity to share our observations using the chat function; however, this observation practice was disruptive and time-consuming. Additionally, the group members’ various levels of technical expertise made using the chat function difficult. As such, we shared our observations in the group debrief at the end of the session rather than via the chat function throughout the class.

²⁸⁷ Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

In the group debrief, we shared our observations, reflected on our co-learning, and planned for the next session. My co-learners and I observed that we felt most engaged while dialoguing with one another, telling stories, and interpreting the biblical text together; as such, we decided to incorporate these pedagogical practices into the next session. For the next session, we decided to critically reflect on ourselves as interpreters and learn about womanism. To do so, we planned to engage in a pre-class self-reflection exercise to help us understand how our race, gender, class, and other factors shaped ourselves as interpreters. At the end of the group debrief, we blessed one another. After the lesson, I reflected on the class in my teaching journal and further developed the lesson plan for Session 2 by locating readings and creating reflection assignments. I also transcribed the class, analyzed it for themes, and shared these themes with my co-learners for their review.

Session 2

Session 2's main objectives were to learn about the concepts of "social location" and "intersectionality," to critically reflect on our social location and theological commitments as interpreters, and to reflect on issues of power, agency, and liberation in Exodus 1:8-21 and our lives. The pre-class readings were "Womanist" by Alice Walker and a social location and intersectionality summary. The "Womanist" reading included corresponding reflection questions. The co-learners also completed "A Self-Inventory for Readers" assignment.²⁸⁸ In this assignment, the co-learners critically reflected on how

²⁸⁸ "A Self-Inventory for Readers" was adapted from *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible*.

their social location, lived experiences, and theological commitments informed their interpretation of the Bible.

The initial lesson plan's opening activities were a welcome, an embodied centering practice and prayer, a review of the community covenant, a review of the emerging themes, an overview of proposed lesson plan, and a reminder about observation. The initial learning segment involved watching and discussing Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I A Woman" speech, read by Alice Walker, and a short presentation on social location and intersectionality. The second segment was "Telling Our Stories," an exercise that involved sharing stories and reflecting on how our social locations and theological commitments informed our interpretation of the Bible. The third segment was interpreting Exodus 1:8-21, with particular attention to issues of agency, power, justice, and liberation in the text. The closing activities were listening to "Everybody Deserves to Be Free" by the Resistance Revival Choir and sharing key take-aways and questions. Lastly, we engaged in a group debrief and blessed one another.

As the lesson unfolded, significant adaptations were made. After discussing Truth's "Ain't I A Woman" speech, we turned directly to Exodus 1:8-21 as the group was excited to interpret the biblical text after listening to Truth's subversive reading of Scripture. We then listened to "Everybody Deserves to Be Free," shared key take-aways and questions, and engaged in the group debrief. In the group debrief, we shared our observations and reflections. We noted that pairing Truth's speech (a contemporary text) with a biblical text helped us to engage both texts in new ways. We also observed that we felt most engaged while discussing Truth's speech and interpreting the Exodus text together. While discussing these texts, we shared stories and reflected on agency, privilege, power, and

the cleverness of women. Multiple co-learners named a desire to learn how to read the Bible in liberative ways that resisted reinscribing oppression in their or others' lives, like Truth had done in her speech. As such, for the next session, we decided to focus on biblical interpretation. As we began the planning process, I shared an impromptu overview of biblical interpretation methods, in which I contrasted historical criticism and womanist biblical interpretation. I also shared my "Sharing Our Stories" assignment, so the group could decide if we wanted to do something similar in the following session. The co-learners and I decided to a similar exercise in preparation for the next session. We also decided to learn about womanist biblical interpretation as a means of expanding our awareness of liberative biblical hermeneutical traditions. After the lesson, I reflected on my learnings in my teaching journal and further developed the initial lesson plan for Session 3. I also transcribed the class, analyzed it for themes, and shared these themes with my co-learners for their review.

Session 3

Session 3's objectives were to critically reflect on how social location, lived experiences, and theological commitments informed our reading of the Bible, to understand the differences between womanism, feminism, and Black feminism, and to learn about womanist biblical interpretation's key characteristics and commitments. The pre-class readings were "Womanist," by Alice Walker, "Introduction" from *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation* by womanist biblical scholar Mitzi J. Smith, and "Marginalized People, Liberating Perspectives: A Womanist Approach to Biblical Interpretation," an article by womanist

theologian Kelly Brown Douglas. The co-learners reflected on two quotes or ideas that stood out to them in each article. They also completed “Telling Our Stories: Reflecting on Ourselves as Interpreters,” a self-reflection assignment in which they used visual and written elements to critically reflect on how their social location (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.), lived experiences, and theological commitments informed their interpretation of Scripture.

The initial lesson plan’s opening activities were a welcome, an embodied centering practice and prayer, a review of the emerging themes, and an overview of proposed lesson plan. The first segment involved each person sharing a three-to-four-minute personal narrative about their social location, theological commitments, and formative lived experiences and how these factors informed their reading of the Bible. The second learning segment was a short presentation on social location, race, gender, and intersectionality. The third segment was discussing “Womanist” by Alice Walker and watching “What Is: Womanism,” a video by Kat Blaque, a Black woman, to learn about the differences between womanism, feminism, and Black feminism. The fourth learning segment was discussing Smith’s and Brown Douglas’s articles and womanist biblical interpretation’s key characteristics and commitments. The closing activities were reflecting on a quote about liberation by Indigenous activist Lilla Watson, listening to “We Labor onto Glory” by The Porter’s Gate, sharing key take-aways and questions, a group debrief, and blessing one another.

We made significant adaptations to the initial lesson plan. The “Sharing Our Stories” took significantly longer than anticipated. Rather than rushing, we decided to give each person as much time as they needed to share their story. This activity ended up

taking the entire session and most of the group debrief time. After everyone shared, we reflected on the experience of sharing our stories, listening to others' stories, and the similarities and differences we heard in the stories. In the group debrief, we observed that sharing our stories was a powerful practice that helped us to build a learning community in which each person's presence was valued and voice was heard. At the end of the group debrief, I shared an abbreviated presentation on race, gender, social location, and intersectionality. For Session 4, we decided to focus on womanist biblical interpretation and cover the material we did not get to in this lesson. We closed the session by sharing key take-aways and questions and blessing one another. After the lesson, I reflected on the class in my teaching journal and planned for Session 3. I transcribed the session but did not analyze it for emerging themes as the group had already identified and discussed the recurring themes in one another's stories during the session.

Session 4

Session 4's main objectives were to learn about womanism and womanist biblical interpretation, including its key characteristics and commitments, to identify liberative reading strategies from Smith and Brown Douglas' articles, and to reflect on solidarity and our responsibility to one another in the shared struggle for mutual liberation. The pre-class readings were Mark 7:24-30 and "Race, Gender, and the Politics of Sass: Reading Mark 7:24-30 Through a Womanist Lens of Intersectionality and Inter(con)textuality," an article by womanist biblical scholar Mitzi J. Smith. The co-learners also completed a reflection assignment related to Mark 7:24-30 and Smith's article.

The initial lesson plan's opening activities were a welcome, an embodied centering practice and prayer, and an overview of proposed lesson plan, which primarily consisted of the learning activities we did not have time to complete in the previous session. The first learning segment focused on womanism. It involved watching "What Is: Womanism," a video by Kat Blaque, reading Alice Walker's "Womanist," and then discussing these texts. The second segment involved a short presentation on womanism and womanist biblical interpretation followed by a discussion about womanist biblical interpretation's key characteristics; this presentation and discussion drew on Smith's and Brown Douglas' articles. The third learning segment involved dialoguing with Smith's article and one another as we interpreted Mark 7:24-30. The closing activities were listening to "We Labor onto Glory" by The Porter's Gate, sharing key take-aways and questions, and blessing one another.

We did not have significant adaptations to this lesson plan. However, we shortened our discussion about Smith's and Brown Douglas's articles so we would have time to delve into the biblical text. In the group debrief, the group observed that they felt most engaged when dialoguing with Smith and one another and interpreting the biblical text. Multiple group members noted the combination of digging into the Scripture; dialoguing with Smith and one another as we interpreted the Scripture passage; critically reflecting on the Sandra Bland's death, which Smith discusses in her article; and connecting these (con)texts and the issues they raise about power, privilege, agency, racism, and resistance to oppression was a transformative practice. For Session 5, we decided to read the work of womanist biblical scholar, Kimberly Dawn Russaw, and dialogue with her work and one another as we read and interpreted Genesis 3 together. We decided not to do written

reflection assignments for Session 5. After the lesson, I reflected on the class in my teaching journal and engaged in further planning for Session 5. I also transcribed the class, analyzed it for themes, and shared a summary of the sessions 3 and 4 themes with my co-learners for their review.

Session 5

Session 5's main objectives were to interpret Genesis 3 in a liberative way that resisted racism, sexism, and classism; to dialogue with the work of womanist biblical scholar Kimberly Dawn Russaw and one another; and to discuss intersectionality in womanism and feminism. The pre-class readings were Genesis 3:1-7 and "Wisdom in the Garden: The Woman of Genesis 3 and Alice Walker's *Sophia*" by Kimberly Dawn Russaw.

The initial lesson plan's opening activities were a welcome, an embodied centering practice and prayer, a review of the emerging themes from Sessions 3 and 4, and an overview of the proposed lesson plan. The first learning segment was critically examining issues of race, gender, and class in images of Adam and Eve in popular culture and art. The second segment was watching and discussing an excerpt from "Confessions of a Bad Feminist," a TedTalk by Roxane Gay, a Black queer female writer. The third segment was a short presentation of womanist biblical interpretation, which drew on Smith's and Brown Douglas's articles. The fourth segment was dialoguing with Russaw, Gay, and one another as we interpreted Genesis 3. The closing activities were listening to "I'm Gonna Walk It With You" by Brian Claflin and Ellie Grace, sharing key ideas and

questions, a group debrief, and blessing one another. We did not have significant adaptations to this lesson plan.

In the group debrief, the group shared observations and reflections about the entire series. Multiple co-learners noted that this Bible study had deepened their awareness of themselves, broadened their understanding of womanism and feminism, and changed how they read the Bible. Several co-learners named that dialoguing with the work of womanist scholars and one another was particularly impactful as it had broadened their awareness of others' perspectives, introduced them to new ways of reading the Bible, and helped them to think differently about solidarity and liberation. The co-learners expressed appreciation for one another and named a desire to continue meeting. We brainstormed possible topics to explore in future Bible studies and ways to continue meeting after this study ended. For the final session, we decided to read and discuss Matthew 14:13-21 and "'Give Them What You Have': A Womanist Reading of the Matthean Feeding Miracle (Matt. 14:13-21)," an article by Mitzi J. Smith; reflect on our co-learning; and share affirmations. After the lesson, I reflected on the lesson in my teaching journal and transcribed the session. Because of time constraints, I was unable to analyze and share the emerging themes with my co-learners before our final gathering.

Session 6

Session 6's main objectives were to reflect on what we had learned and what transformation, if any, we had experienced as we engaged in this Bible study together; to reflect on our responsibility to one another in the shared work of mutual liberation; and to affirm one another; and to celebrate the work we did together. The pre-class readings

were Matthew 14:13-21 and “Give Them What You Have,” an article by Mitzi J. Smith. In the final written assignment, the co-learners reflected on themselves as interpreters, what they had learned about womanism and womanist biblical interpretation, and how their understanding of liberation had changed over the course of this Bible study. They also reflected on what value, if any, a Bible study like this one might have for other predominantly white mainline Protestant churches.

The initial lesson plan’s opening activities were a welcome, an embodied centering practice and prayer, and an overview of proposed lesson plan. The first learning segment was watching and discussing “Harriet Tubman: Fearless Freedom Fighter Who Liberated Hundreds of Slaves | Biography,” a video about Harriet Tubman. The second segment was dialoguing with Smith’s work and one another as read Matthew 14:13-21 together. The third section was reflecting on this series and what we had learned, both personally and collectively. The fourth segment was sharing affirmations for each group member, celebrating our collective work, and planning for future gatherings. The fifth segment was listening to “We Are the Ones” by Sweet Honey in the Rock and blessing one another. There were not significant adaptations to this lesson plan. In the group debrief, I shared about the next steps for the project. We also made plans for a reunion gathering. After the session, I transcribed the session and analyzed it for themes. However, I did not write an entry in my teaching journal.

Data Gathered

As this project unfolded, my co-learners and I explored concepts such as social location, intersectionality, and mutual liberation through self-reflection exercises, dialogue, storytelling, and interpreting the biblical text alongside other (con)texts. In the group debriefs, we shared observations and reflections about our co-learning, using these insights to plan both what and how we learned together in the next session. This ongoing *praxis* (action-reflection) invited us into a process of continuous transformation. Over the six sessions, four primary themes emerged in the data: challenging whiteness as normative, the value of engaging multiple (con)texts, womanists as transformative dialogue partners, and liberative readings of Scripture and mutual liberation. These findings were intricately connected to one another and appeared across multiple data collection methods.

Challenging Whiteness as Normative

Since whiteness often functions as normative and thus remains invisible, particularly to persons who are racialized as white, raising critical consciousness about white supremacy is an important part of antiracism work in predominantly white communities. In this study, the co-learners and I became critically aware of whiteness by critically examining how it shaped our interpretations of Scripture. In the first session, after reading the story of Adam and Eve, six of the eight of us noted we imagined the characters as white.²⁸⁹ Multiple group members reflected that whiteness was the normative default in their minds, even when this was not their intention. As M.B., who is

²⁸⁹ B.R., who is white, and M.M., who is Black, did not imagine the biblical characters as white.

Black, shared, “In the end, even though I resisted seeing the two white people holding an apple, that's the image that overtook everything else.”²⁹⁰ For many participants, becoming aware of how whiteness functioned as normative was a form of consciousness-raising. As D.S. reflected, “Before this class, I probably imagined everybody [in the Bible] as white.”²⁹¹ Recognizing whiteness was an important first step in challenging its pervasiveness and power. As C.B. reflected early on, she hoped for “a rewiring of my brain, so I don't automatically see white. Like white in charge, white in charge of the world.”²⁹² As with any problem, learning first to see it is fundamental to addressing it. Critical reflection enabled us to recognize and articulate the problem of whiteness as normative. The articulation of whiteness as normative was an important first step that enabled us to then take actionable steps to dismantle this normativity and develop more liberative and pluralistic ways of interpreting the Bible in its place.

Many biblical interpretative practices, such as historical criticism, center white androcentric ways of reading the Bible and present these practices as objective, universal, and standard. Additionally, these approaches often ignore the world in front of the text, particularly how one's social location and theological commitments inform one's interpretation of Scripture. To challenge these white androcentric ways of reading, we critically reflected on who we were as readers, including how our social locations (i.e. race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.), theological commitments, and lived

²⁹⁰ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, January 25, 2021), 406-410.

²⁹¹ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 1, 2021), 589-590.

²⁹² Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, January 25, 2021), 467-470.

experiences informed our reading of Scripture through reflection exercises, dialogue, and the sharing of personal narratives. In Session 3, each co-learner and I shared a personal narrative about who we were as an interpreter. This practice, along with others, increased our awareness of our social locations and theological commitments, including how these informed how we read the Bible. In the final reflection assignment, four of the five white women in the group noted that in this study, they had become more aware of how their social location, particularly their race, gender, and class, informed their reading of Scripture. For example, in her final assignment, D.S. noted, “I have learned that my whiteness is a greater influence on me than I knew,” adding that “the exercises we did really have increased my awareness of the lenses through which I read the Bible. These lenses such as age, race, gender, class etc. are things I want to continue to acknowledge and be aware [of].”²⁹³ Becoming more aware of how her identity and theological commitments informed her reading of Scripture also helped her to “realize that everyone has these lenses through which they read the Bible.”²⁹⁴ As she noted, “it would be valuable for everyone to have some consciousness of their lenses.”²⁹⁵ Becoming aware of her social location thus helped her to realize that everyone reads the Bible from a particular subject position and the importance of naming and critically examining one’s positionality as part of the interpretative process.

²⁹³ D.S., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

²⁹⁴ D.S., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

²⁹⁵ D.S., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

All six sessions deliberately used pedagogical practices that were intended to challenge whiteness as normative. These practices included self-reflection exercises, the sharing of personal narratives, and dialoguing with one another and works by womanist biblical scholars and other Black female voices. Whereas the self-reflection exercises helped co-learners to critically reflect on themselves as interpreters, dialogue and the sharing of personal narratives facilitated connection across various socially constructed differences, including race, age, sexual orientation, and class. These practices named the particularity of white perspectives, thus challenging whiteness as the normative and universal experience in the classroom. They also recognized the value of each person's voice, wisdom, and unique perspective. Dialogue challenged the supremacist notion that there was one "correct" Christian identity or way of knowing that everyone should strive for. Dialogue with the work of womanist biblical scholars and other Black female voices also decentered whiteness as normative and expanded people's awareness of diverse identities, lived experiences, and interpretative practices.

These pedagogical practices helped us to reflect on our shared and divergent experiences, which fostered appreciation of difference as well as practices of solidarity in the shared struggle for mutual liberation. As M.B. remarked at the end of the Session 3, "Even though our backgrounds are all very different, there are quite a few similarities,"²⁹⁶ to which M.M. responded, "And that may be because we are all human."²⁹⁷ Dialogue and storytelling fostered empathy and deepened relationships as people listened to and

²⁹⁶ Kristin Riegel, "Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom" (class transcript, February 8, 2021), 1023-1024.

²⁹⁷ Kristin Riegel, "Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom" (class transcript, February 8, 2021), 1026.

learned from one another. As L.D. noted, “our discussions, our conversation, the storytelling—that’s the important part of our connection.”²⁹⁸ These connections, along with a recognition of both our differences and shared humanity, were central to the work of solidarity in the shared struggle for liberation from white supremacy.

Dialogue also helped us to recognize the importance of listening to different voices, especially in the shared work of liberation. As C.S., who is white, noted in the final group debrief, “We cannot be serious about liberating ourselves and other people if we don’t start to listen to voices other than our own.”²⁹⁹ Additionally, listening to and sharing with one another through mutual exchange helped us to recognize the limitations of our own experiences and thus to adopt a posture of humility, in which we sought to learn with and from others. As M.B. reflected in the Session 1 debrief, “Listening to each person, what they have to say, opens up my mind.”³⁰⁰ Dialogue was a liberative practice that enabled people to reach across socially constructed boundaries, transforming people’s understandings of themselves, others, and the world.

These pedagogical practices also fostered a learning community in which co-learners felt seen and valued in the classroom. For instance, M.B. noted that in other Bible studies at the church, she often felt “invisible.” As she shared, “[In this Bible study], I didn’t feel invisible as a woman. I didn’t feel invisible as a person of color; even as a queer person, I didn’t feel invisible.”³⁰¹ Whereas white supremacy seeks to

²⁹⁸ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (group debrief, February 22, 2021).

²⁹⁹ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (group debrief, March 1, 2021).

³⁰⁰ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (group debrief, January 25, 2021).

invisibilize people, especially persons of color, and/or marginalize their experiences in the classroom, liberative pedagogical practices foster learning communities in which each person is seen and presence is valued. In this project, sharing personal narratives and engaging in dialogue helped to create a learning community in which we recognized the particularity of each person and honored the unique wisdom they brought to the classroom.

Engaging in liberative education involves changing one's pedagogical practices to create learning communities in which power is shared and everyone's voice is heard. Engaging in an ongoing spiral cycle of *plan-act-observe-reflect*³⁰² enabled us to critically reflect on our pedagogical practices and take action to transform them. For instance, in the first group debrief, I observed I had often engaged in lecturing. In response, M.M., who is Black, reflected, “[lecturing] is the way white people teach.”³⁰³ Her comment helped me realize that despite my commitment to mutuality and sharing power, I was reverting to lecturing, a nonmutual pedagogical practice that centered my voice and knowledge; this was a practice of domination. In the group debrief, other co-learners noted they felt most engaged while sharing stories and dialoguing about the biblical text. As a group, we incorporated these insights into our planning for the next session.

After the first session, I noted in my teaching journal, “This project is going to push me,”³⁰⁴ and it did. The weekly group debriefs, along with further reflection in my

³⁰¹ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (group debrief, March 1, 2021).

³⁰² Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

³⁰³ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (group debrief, January 25, 2021).

teaching journal, helped me to become critically aware of my pedagogical practices, including how practices such as lecturing often furthered white ways of knowing and sharing knowledge. Through engaging in *praxis* with my co-learners, my pedagogical practices—our pedagogical practices—became more collaborative and dialogical in nature. As B.R. shared in the final group debrief, “It’s going to be really hard for me to go back to a traditional teaching environment of a Bible study where participants are mute . . . [and expected to] nod your head as the convener leads.”³⁰⁵ Others expressed similar sentiments. As a teacher, I realized I was unwilling to return to a banking model of education. Although challenging, this process of co-learning and *praxis*, had helped me to develop more life-giving relationships with my co-learners and experience greater freedom in teaching.

A central theme in this data was challenging whiteness as normative. We did this by engaging in critical reflection about how whiteness functioned as normative in our lives and interpretations of the Bible. This allowed us to articulate the problem of whiteness as normative and take actionable steps to dismantle it in our interpretative and pedagogical practices. To challenge whiteness as normative, we also engaged in self-reflection on our social location and theological commitments as readers, shared personal narratives and stories, and engaged in dialogue with womanist and other voices and one another. Challenging whiteness as normative was an ongoing process that involved continually raising critical consciousness and coupling this newfound knowledge with

³⁰⁴ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (teaching journal, January 25, 2021).

³⁰⁵ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (group debrief, March 1, 2021).

justice-seeking action. Engaging in *praxis* as a group enabled us to experience ongoing transformation as we engaged in this liberative work together.

Engaging Multiple (Con)texts

In this study, we engaged multiple (con)texts in each lesson. For instance, in Sessions 2, 4, 5, and 6, we watched videos that featured Black female poets, scholars, and activists and then dialogued with the work of these women and one another before turning to the biblical text. In these dialogues, we critically reflected on concepts such as intersectionality, racism, white privilege, sexism, classism, agency, and power that were not usually discussed in Bible studies at Grace Presbyterian Church. For instance, in Session 2, we watched proto-womanist Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I A Woman" speech, read by Alice Walker. We then reflected on how Truth challenged the interlocking systems of racism, sexism, and classism in her speech and through her subversive reading of Scripture. As C.S., who is white, reflected, "For Sojourner Truth to use the same Scripture that white folk were using, especially white men, and turn it around on them would have been head spinning."³⁰⁶ Group members reflected on biblical interpretation as a political project that could perpetuate justice or injustice. Additionally, they named an interest in learning to read the Bible in liberative ways that resisted reinscribing oppression in their or others' lives. This was not an academic exercise, but rather deeply personal. As M.B. noted in the group debrief, "I'm really holding onto this idea of learning how to read the Bible in a liberative way because I really struggle with this text.

³⁰⁶ Kristin Riegel, "Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom" (class transcript, February 1, 2021).

I have a very difficult relationship with it, and I want to have a better relationship with it.”³⁰⁷

Beginning with a contemporary text helped us to critically examine issues of power, agency, oppression, and liberation in the world in front of the text (contemporary context), including our lives, before turning to the biblical text. This practice changed how we read Scripture. As B.R. observed in Session 2, “[We’re] starting with our contemporary context and reading Scripture from there.”³⁰⁸ As I noted in my teaching journal, utilizing multiple texts “created the opportunity for people to read these texts together and draw connections between these texts and their own lives/communities.”³⁰⁹ For instance, in Session 2, M.M. noted Sojourner Truth, Shiphrah, and Puah used their cleverness to work for justice. As she shared, alluding to these women as well as our group of both Black and white women, “Two sets of women—different cultures, different backgrounds, but still the same cleverness.”³¹⁰

By engaging multiple texts in the same lesson, our understanding of these texts as well as ourselves and our experiences in the world was deepened. For instance, in Session 5, we engaged the work of feminist Roxanne Gay before turning to the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Gay’s reflection about being labeled as a woman who does not

³⁰⁷ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (group debrief, February 1, 2021).

³⁰⁸ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 1, 2021), 646.

³⁰⁹ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (teaching journal, February 1, 2021).

³¹⁰ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 1, 2021), 1013-1015.

“play by the rules” led M.M. to ask, “playing by the rules—well whose rules?”³¹¹ Co-learners reflected on the “rules” set for them because of their race, gender, and/or sexual orientation and shared stories about how they had used their agency to break these rules. This discussion informed our reading of the story of Eve. As M.B. noted, “I question the story and the [traditional] interpretation.”³¹² Rather than seeing Eve as disobedient, sinful, or ignorant, the co-learners interpreted Eve as a wise, courageous woman who broke the rules that were meant to keep her in ignorance. M.B. noted, “Eve was not playing by the rules,”³¹³ while M.B. described Eve’s actions as oriented toward “liberation and transformation.”³¹⁴

Whereas many Bible studies often begin with and prioritize the biblical text, in this series, we engaged multiple (con)texts. This allowed us to critically reflect on issues of identity, power, agency, justice, and liberation in multiple (con)texts, including our lives and the world. Beginning with a contemporary context also facilitated critical reflection on the world in front of the text, including ourselves as readers, before turning to the biblical text. This helped us to become more aware of the subjective nature of biblical interpretation and our social location and theological commitments as readers. It also led to new insights about the biblical text and other contemporary (con)texts.

³¹¹ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 22, 2021), 294.

³¹² Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 22, 2021), 675.

³¹³ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 22, 2021), 678.

³¹⁴ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 22, 2021), 705.

Womanists as Transformative Dialogical Partners

In this project, my co-learners and I dialogued with the work of Black women, including feminists, womanists, proto-womanists, and others. However, our primary focus was womanism and womanist biblical interpretation. Learning about womanism and womanist biblical interpretation was transformative in multiple ways. All seven co-learners noted that learning about womanist biblical interpretation expanded their awareness of how the Bible could be interpreted; additionally, it caused many of them to critically reflect on and/or change their own reading practices. For instance, in her final reflection, C.S., who is white, described learning about womanist biblical interpretation as a “revelation,” noting that, “looking at it [the Bible] through the eyes of people whose experiences go beyond mine prompts some soul searching that can result in greater understanding.”³¹⁵ M.B., who is Black, remarked that, because of this series, she had begun to “look at the Scripture from a womanist point of view,”³¹⁶ which added a new liberative dimension to how she read the Bible. D.S. noted, “Womanist perspectives lead to different questions and concerns being addressed” in biblical interpretation and reflected that dialoguing with the work of womanist biblical scholars had helped her to ask new questions as she read Scripture.³¹⁷

Co-learners critically reconsidered their perspectives, interpretations, and lived experiences as they dialogued with womanist biblical scholars’ work; this served to raise

³¹⁵ C.S., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

³¹⁶ M.B., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

³¹⁷ D.S., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

critical consciousness about whiteness. For instance, in Session 4, B.R. noted she had a “big a-ha moment” after reading an article by womanist biblical scholar Mitzi J. Smith about the Syrophenician woman, Sandra Bland, and Black vernacular as subversive speech.³¹⁸ B.R. shared that, in college, a Black friend’s “word pictures” were confounding to her and other white friends.³¹⁹ After reading Smith’s article, B.R. realized her friend’s confounding language was likely intentional and a means of resisting whiteness. She noted, “I am absolutely OK with that.”³²⁰ In addition, she realized that “Perhaps my pictures were confounding to her.”³²¹ By dialoguing with Smith’s work and engaging in critical self-reflection, B.R. developed a different understanding of both her friend’s subversive speech and her own language. Specifically, she began to recognize her friend’s words as resistance to white supremacy. She also realized her “word pictures” were particular and grounded in white ways of knowing, rather than universal; instead of seeing herself and her words as simply being that of any person, she now saw her own racialized identity and how her word pictures and language functioned as a form of domination. In her final reflection, B.R. wrote, “I did not understand the language, the need and utter frustration in Womanist sass. I now have a better appreciation and understanding.”³²² Dialoguing with Smith had helped B.R. to understand how whiteness

³¹⁸ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 15, 2021), 708.

³¹⁹ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 15, 2021), 712-715.

³²⁰ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript), February 15, 2021), 716.

³²¹ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 15, 2021), 716.

³²² B.R., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

functioned as normative in her own life and womanist sass as resistance against white supremacy.

As a predominantly white group, my co-learners and I wrestled with appreciation versus appropriation as we dialogued with the work of womanist scholars and other Black women. In Session 4, L.D. raised the question of whether white women could identify as womanists. After dialoguing about Walker's definitions of "womanist," the group concluded that white women could not identify as womanists, as this term was particular to Black women. Solidarity involved respecting womanism as a political movement that centered Black women and honoring this boundary. Attempting to co-opt the term "womanist" for white women's own use and benefit would have been an act of domination, grounded in white supremacy. Although the group concluded that white women could not be womanists, they did note that white women could be allies who practiced solidarity with womanists in the struggle for mutual liberation.

Learning about womanism led multiple co-learners to critically reflect on their practices of feminism. As L.D. stated in her final assignment, "As a life-long feminist, I really appreciate the broader scope of womanism."³²³ She reported that she was working on "understanding my place as a 'white woman' in relation to womanism and in the shared struggle for liberation."³²⁴ C.B. also remarked, "I think some of us white women in the study are disappointed that we cannot be womanists. But we can certainly be inspired by womanism and live by its very inclusive commitments to all people."³²⁵

³²³ L.D., "Final Reflection Assignment," Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

³²⁴ L.D., "Final Reflection Assignment," Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

Learning about womanism had expanded the co-learners' understanding of liberation, including their responsibility to others in this struggle for freedom. Womanism also challenged white women to critically reflect on how they could, from their own social location, use their agency to practice solidarity with Black women in the work of justice and liberation.

Liberative Readings of Scripture and Mutual Liberation

An intended outcome of this project was to read the Bible in liberative ways that resisted oppression. This project was also meant to help co-learners think about the meaning of liberation and their responsibility to others in the shared work of mutual liberation. In this series, I often used the language of “co-laboring” to emphasize the shared nature of this work. I also used the term “mutual liberation” as a recognition that our freedom is intertwined. This mutual liberation, including our responsibility to one another, was a central focus in five of the six sessions. The group reflected on mutual liberation through self-reflection exercises, dialogue, and listening to songs about freedom. Liberation was also explored through dialogue with different voices, including womanist voices, and one another, especially as we interpreted the biblical text.

In Sessions 1-3, multiple co-learners named that they struggled with the biblical text because of the ways it had been used to perpetuate white supremacy, sexism, and heterosexism. For instance, in Session 3, M.B., who is Black, shared that she loved looking at her family's Bible as a child. One day, while looking at the Bible with her

³²⁵ C.S., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

mom, she realized, “We’re not in here. I’m not in here.”³²⁶ The Bible contained only images of white persons. M.B. told that she was named after a biblical character and thus, Black people were in the Bible. M.B. reflected, “I remember being really happy that my name was in there but also this sadness about there being no pictures of us . . . I really felt anger about it.”³²⁷ As she grew older, M.B. reflected that whiteness was perpetuated not only in pictures, but how the Bible was interpreted. As she remarked in the group debrief, “I really struggle with this text.”³²⁸ Similarly, C.S. and L.D. noted they struggled with the biblical text because of how it had been used as a tool to justify homophobia and sexism.³²⁹ In the Session 2 debrief, the group named the problem of the Bible being interpreted in ways that dehumanized and oppressed themselves or others. Additionally, they named a desire to take action to change this reality by reading the Bible in more liberative ways.

Reading the Bible in liberative ways involved beginning with the world in front of the text. To do this, co-learners critically reflected on and read from their particular social locations rather than attempting to read “objectively.” This disrupted hegemonic interpretative practices that often require people to adopt a white androcentric gaze and read in disembodied ways. At the end of the series, M.B., a Black queer woman, reflected that she had learned how to read the Bible “through my own lens and develop a

³²⁶ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 8, 2021), 220.

³²⁷ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 8, 2021), 223-226.

³²⁸ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (group debrief, February 8, 2021).

³²⁹ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (group debrief, February 8, 2021).

perspective that reflects my own life experiences” rather than reading “from someone else’s view/interpretation.”³³⁰ Similarly, D.S., who is white, observed that she had become aware of her social location and theological commitments, noting that she now realized “whiteness is a greater influence on me than I knew.”³³¹ Becoming more critically aware of how whiteness unconsciously shaped her interpretations enabled D.S. to consciously challenge whiteness as normative in her interpretative practices. This critical awareness of her own social location and subjectivity also helped her to realize that “everyone has these lenses through which they read the Bible”;³³² there was no such thing as a singular, objective reading of Scripture, even when claimed. As she reflected, this knowledge “allows me to trust my instincts when an interpretation of the Bible doesn’t feel ‘right’ or inclusive.”³³³ She realized she could trust herself as an interpreter and question interpretations, especially those that perpetuated injustice, rather than passively accepting these interpretations as authoritative and “right.”

Resisting the notion that only a single interpretation of a text could be correct, the co-learners honored multiple liberative interpretations and utilized dialogue to clarify, correct, and deepen their own and one another’s interpretations. At times, this liberative work of honoring multiple interpretations was challenging as a teacher. After Session 5, in my teaching journal, I expressed my frustration that the co-learners had disagreed with

³³⁰ M.B., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

³³¹ D.S., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

³³² D.S., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

³³³ D.S., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

the interpretation by Kimberly Dawn Russaw, a womanist biblical scholar. However, after reading the class transcript, I realized this was a sign that the co-learners felt empowered as biblical interpreters. As I wrote, I realized, “The group was not only engaging in liberative readings but also adding a lot more texture to the discussion and interpretation of this passage by asking questions, holding multiple interpretations at once, and thinking independently and interdependently.”³³⁴ The co-learners were raising critical questions and generating their own liberative readings of Scripture that resisted oppression in and in front of the text. This was an act of agency and a practice of liberation.

At the beginning of this series, co-learners named their desire to learn how to read the Bible in liberative ways; by the end, the discussions, group debriefs, and final reflection exercises suggested they felt they were doing so. Six of the seven women described how their way of reading the Bible had changed over the course of the series. For example, C.B. reflected, “My social location, lived experiences are reflected in this new way of analyzing what I am reading.”³³⁵ Furthermore, she reported now reading the Bible in ways that sought for it to be “an instrument of liberation” rather than oppression.³³⁶ In her final reflection, L.D. declared that she had been liberated from “old, patriarchal interpretations of the text that have oppressed women, people of color,

³³⁴ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (teaching journal, February 22, 2021).

³³⁵ C.B., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

³³⁶ C.B., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

LGBTQ persons.”³³⁷ As she noted, new ways of reading the Bible had helped her to discover “a book full of subversive, wise, sassy women.”³³⁸

In each session, we reflected on freedom, including our responsibility to one another in the shared struggle for mutual liberation. In the first session, the co-learners defined liberation as freedom to be oneself and concluded their responsibility was to “make room for each person.”³³⁹ Over the course of the series, liberation moved from being individualistic and focused on “me” to being more interconnected and focused on “we.” For instance, in Session 2, C.B. noted, “We liberate ourselves when we seek freedom for everyone,”³⁴⁰ while at the end of Session 4, C.S. noted her take-away was “Your liberation is bound up with mine.”³⁴¹ In her final reflection, M.M. wrote, “We are our brothers’/sisters’ keeper, our lives are intertwined, what affects one of us affects us all.”³⁴² The co-learners’ recognition that their humanity and freedom was intertwined with others’ humanity and freedom changed antiracism and justice work from something they were doing *for* others to something they were doing *with* others as they struggled together for mutual liberation.

³³⁷ L.D., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

³³⁸ L.D., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

³³⁹ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, January 25, 2021), 621.

³⁴⁰ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 1, 2021), 962-964.

³⁴¹ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 15, 2021), 966.

³⁴² M.M., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

In this Bible study, an important pedagogical question when discussing the biblical text was “What does this passage say to you about justice or mutual liberation?” This question encouraged the co-learners to reflect on issues of power, justice, and liberation in their own lives and how they were called to act. In Session 2, C.B. reflected on this question by saying, “My personal challenge as a white person is to take the power that I have and empower another person with it. Share it, give it away, do something, so I’m not just sitting over here in my safe little white world.”³⁴³ Similarly, C.S., who is white, reflected, “The chances of me losing my life for justice are not real high and as I think about the two Hebrew midwives really risking their lives to do justice, it’s inspiring. There’s more I can do.”³⁴⁴ This question and the reflections it elicited helped co-learners critically consider how they could use their power, privilege, and agency to engage in justice-oriented action in their lives.

In the shared struggle for liberation, solidarity was an important practice. For many white co-learners, solidarity involved listening to other voices, especially Black women. In the final reflection assignment, four of the five white women noted that one their responsibilities in the shared struggle for mutual liberation was to listen. As C.S., who is white, wrote, “We cannot be serious about liberating ourselves and other people if we don’t start listening to voices other than our own.”³⁴⁵ D.S. stated part of her responsibility was to “listen to each other and especially those who are oppressed” and to

³⁴³ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 1, 2021), 886-888.

³⁴⁴ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, February 1, 2021), 890-892.

³⁴⁵ C.S., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

challenge “the influences of being in the dominant group.”³⁴⁶ It also involved taking action to challenge white supremacy. As C.B. reflected, “My responsibility is to not to get comfortable in my very white, safe space. Our responsibility to each other is to listen, form relationships, learn from one another.”³⁴⁷ The Black women in the group also noted that they had an important role to play in the struggle for mutual liberation. M.B. wrote that her responsibility was to help “develop a dialogue of understanding our differences,”³⁴⁸ while M.M. said her responsibility was to “share, lead, teach, counsel.”³⁴⁹ Solidarity involved listening to one another and struggling together for mutual liberation. Solidarity also involved recognizing we had different roles and responsibilities in this shared struggle.

Liberation also occurred through our pedagogical practices, which were grounded in mutuality and sought to honor each person’s voice; these practices served to challenge a banking model of education. As B.R. reflected at the end of the series, “As much as I adore some of the longstanding Bible study groups at church, it’s going to be really hard for me to plug back in to where I am a passive recipient to information.”³⁵⁰ To which C.B. responded that it would also be hard to learn from “people who are not used to or

³⁴⁶ D.S., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

³⁴⁷ C.S., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

³⁴⁸ M.B., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

³⁴⁹ M.M., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

³⁵⁰ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, March 1, 2021), 1140-1142.

happy to be questioned or challenged.”³⁵¹ Rather than being passive objects, the co-learners were empowered as co-learners and co-teachers. I also experienced mutual liberation through co-learning, sharing power, and engaging in *praxis* with the group. As I wrote in my teaching journal after Session 4, “Doing this work together, I am being transformed.”³⁵² By the end of the series, I had become more comfortable sharing my own story and practicing vulnerability. I had also developed a deep trust, love, and admiration for my co-learners and found a new joy and freedom in teaching.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Research Methods

Participatory action research (PAR) worked well for this project because of its shared values, commitments, and practices with anti-racist and liberative pedagogies. Furthermore, the spiral cycle of *plan-act-observe-reflect*³⁵³ allowed us to engage in *praxis* and incorporate new insights and questions into the project as it unfolded. PAR’s intended outcome of action was also a strength. In this project, we challenged whiteness as normative in our pedagogical and interpretative practices and developed more liberative ways of reading the Bible and learning together; this was a form of action. A weakness of PAR was that it was messier than traditional research. The emergent design of the project required constantly adapting to new insights, findings, and questions. Rather than testing a set hypothesis, PAR involved continually refining our research

³⁵¹ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, March 1, 2021), 1146.

³⁵² Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (teaching journal, February 15, 2021).

³⁵³ Martin, “‘Living’ Education,” 154.

questions and methodologies based on new insights and questions. Through *praxis*, our research methods were continually transformed alongside our pedagogical and interpretative practices. Although this was liberating, it was also harder to clearly identify what practices were most transformative.

In this PAR study, we utilized multiple data collection methods that worked in tandem. Each data collection method had its own strengths and weaknesses. For instance, the group debriefs were valuable for gathering data about what pedagogical practices were transformative, engaging in reflection, and co-planning the next session together. A positive, unintended outcome of the group debriefs was that they fostered community, built trust, and created space for new questions to be raised. Because our sessions often went over time, however, the group debriefs were frequently rushed, thus we did not have time to delve as deeply into the reflection or co-planning process as we would have liked. Additionally, the same reflection questions were not asked from session to session, which prevented direct comparison. Lastly, although all participants spoke in the group debriefs over the course of the study, not every person spoke in every group debrief; thus, not everyone's voice was included equally in this data collection method.

The group debriefs were conducted alongside an analysis of class transcripts, a teaching journal, and a final reflection assignment. These practices enabled the identification of recurring themes across multiple data collection methods and from session to session. It also enabled us to reflect on our pedagogical practices, including the frequency of lecturing, sharing personal narratives and stories, and dialogue. Because the class met in consecutive weeks, there was limited time to transcribe and analyze the transcript before the next session, so I was the sole person who engaged in this analysis.

Although I shared the emerging themes from the transcripts with the group for their review, clarification, and correction, a more collaborative method would have been to co-analyze the transcripts together; this may have led to the emergence of additional themes or insights.

The teaching journals were a form of individual *praxis*, in which I reflected on the class from my unique role as the facilitator. These reflections, along with insights from the group debrief, informed how I taught in the following in the next session. The teaching journal also allowed me to reflect on what I was learning about myself as a teacher, co-learner, and human being. An unintended outcome of this method was that it allowed for me to process my emotions and provided a space for more comprehensive planning. At the end of the teaching journal entries, I often synthesized insights from the group debrief and my own reflections and used these pieces to inform the lesson plan for the next session. A weakness of this method was that I did not share the teaching journals with my co-learners, thereby missing the opportunity to engage in greater collective reflection.

The final assignment was designed as a pedagogical tool, but it also functioned as a method of data collection. In this assignment, which was completed in preparation for our final gathering, the co-learners reflected on themselves, our pedagogical practices, and how their interpretative practices had changed during the Bible study. They also reflected on how this Bible study varied from others they had participated in and what value a similar Bible study might have in predominantly white mainline Protestant churches. A strength of this data collection method was that it allowed for the co-learners to engage in self-reflection about how they had changed, what they had learned, and how

they were being called to co-labor for mutual liberation in their lives. Sharing our responses with one another in the final session was also a strength as it allowed us to process this experience together, generate new knowledge about liberative interpretative and pedagogical practices, and celebrate our journey of co-learning together. There were no apparent weaknesses to this method.

Limitations of Study

This project was effective in helping women to become critically aware of how their gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, along with other factors, influence their interpretation of Scripture. By dialoguing with multiple voices, particularly womanist biblical scholars and one another, it also helped us to understand difference as a gift and strength and develop a deeper understanding of mutual liberation. Although this study offers insights on how to engage in anti-racist and liberative pedagogical practices in Bible studies in a predominantly white mainline Protestant congregation, there are limitations to how far these conclusions can be taken. For example, this study took place in a progressive, predominantly white mainline Protestant church, and all the participants had an interest in and/or previous involvement in antiracism or social justice work. Furthermore, all the women were socially progressive and had a foundational knowledge of concepts such as racism, white privilege, and feminism. Although the findings of this study might have value to other communities, the findings are likely most applicable to similar learning communities and contexts. In predominantly white churches where people are unfamiliar with concepts such as racism, sexism, or feminism or disinterested in antiracism work, the findings of this study may be less applicable.

Another limitation is that womanist biblical scholars did not participate in co-teaching or co-learning in this study. Specifically, we engaged with womanist biblical scholars' and other Black female scholars' work rather than dialoguing directly with them. This reality presents a next step for further work. Dialogue with womanist biblical scholars would likely lead to richer discussion and deeper transformation than simply dialoguing with the work as we did in this study. However, the feasibility of including womanist biblical scholars, activists, and other voices in a Bible study would likely be logistically challenging.

Remaining Questions

Although this project did not “solve” racism, sexism, or classism, it did challenge whiteness as normative, deepen people's understanding of themselves as interpreters, broaden their awareness of womanism and womanist biblical interpretation, and lead to reading the Bible in liberative ways. In addition, it revealed several liberative and anti-racist pedagogical practices that challenged a banking model of education. This study addressed all three of the initial research questions, along with many of those that emerged in the group debriefs. Nevertheless, some questions remain. This project was originally designed to take place in person; thus, one remaining question is how meeting virtually on Zoom impacted this study and its outcomes. Similarly, further research is needed to see if meeting in person would change the group dynamics or result in different outcomes. Questions of applicability are also worth investigating – for instance, additional research should explore whether the same liberative pedagogical practices

would be effective in Bible studies with teenagers or younger persons, in theologically conservative churches, mixed gender groups, and/or congregations of color.

Interpretation and Implications

The thesis of this project argues that when teachers and learners begin with the world in front of the text, critically reflecting on how their race, gender, class, and sexual orientation shape their engagement with scripture, dialogue with one another and womanist voices, and engage with other (con)texts alongside the biblical text, then they are more likely to become aware of the lenses they use to interpret scripture and build a learning community in which difference is valued as a gift and strength. Consequently, this may lead to more liberative readings of scripture and solidarity in the work of liberation in white mainline Protestant congregations. The findings from a six-week women's Bible study support this thesis.

The project participants and I worked together as co-learners who engaged in participatory action research together. By continually planning, acting, observing, and reflecting together, which was a form of *praxis*, we became critically aware of how whiteness functioned as normative and took actionable steps to address this problem in our pedagogical and interpretative practices. Four important findings emerged in this study: challenging whiteness as normative, the value of engaging multiple (con)texts, womanists as transformative dialogue partners, and liberative readings of Scripture and mutual liberation.

This study's findings offer important insights for Christian religious educators who are committed to developing liberative pedagogical practices that challenge white supremacy and other forms of supremacy in Bible studies. Although these findings may be most useful to white Christian religious educators and/or those who teach in predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations, these findings may also be

applicable to other religious educators and/or those who work in non-white or non-Protestant settings. In this section, however, I focus on the implications of the study's findings for white religious educators and those who teach in predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations.

Challenging Whiteness as Normative

In this study, whiteness was found to function as normative, unconsciously shaping the co-learners' imaginations and interpretative and pedagogical practices. Becoming critically aware of this problematic reality was an important first step in challenging it. My co-learners and I raised critical consciousness about whiteness through self-reflection exercises and dialoguing with womanist voices and one another. We also took action to dismantle whiteness as normative by engaging in *praxis* to transform our pedagogical and interpretative practices.

Challenging whiteness as normative has significant implications for Christian religious educators leading Bible studies in predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations. This study suggests that it is imperative that Christian religious educators raise critical awareness about whiteness in Bible studies to disrupt its normative function. As Hess remarks, "In predominantly White churches, race is still not 'seen.'"³⁵⁴ Raising critical consciousness makes whiteness visible and disrupts its presumed universality. This practice of raising critical consciousness about whiteness is particularly important in classrooms where all people—or most people—are white, as it is in these classrooms especially where whiteness can function invisibly and be presumed to be standard. This

³⁵⁴ Hess, "White Religious Educators," 48.

study suggests multiple pedagogical strategies that may be helpful in the work of raising critical consciousness about whiteness.

First, Christian religious educators can provide reflection exercises for learners to critically reflect on their social location (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.), lived experiences, and theological commitments and how these factors inform their interpretation of Scripture. These self-reflection exercises can help learners to see the racialized nature of their perspectives and their particularity as interpreters. They can also help people to recognize the subjective and political nature of all biblical interpretation. These self-reflection exercises can also encourage learners to discuss topics, such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, that are often not discussed in Bible studies. Through these discussions, learners can become more aware of how structured power dynamics, such as those based on race, gender, and class, inform their and others' lived experiences.

In addition to self-reflection exercises, teachers can challenge whiteness as normative by inviting learners to share personal narratives about their identities, lived experiences, and theological commitments in the classroom. By listening to one another, co-learners can see themselves and one another more clearly and discover places of shared and divergent lived experiences and theological commitments. Sharing personal narratives can foster empathy and help to create a learning community in which difference is valued as a gift and strength. It can also challenge whiteness, which seeks to "other" people who are non-white or assimilate them into whiteness, by creating space for and honoring diverse identities and ways of knowing. When Christian religious educators share their own personal narratives, in which they name their social location,

theological commitments, and lived experiences, they model humility by acknowledging the particularity and limits of their own knowledge and experiences. This practice can encourage students to also practice vulnerability and humility as they share their story and learn with and from others.

Dialogue has been shown through past research and this study to be a liberative pedagogical practice. In this study, dialoguing with the voices of womanist biblical scholars, activists, and other Black female voices was a transformative practice that challenged whiteness as normative by expanding participants' understandings of others' lived experiences and perspectives. It also helped them to reflect on the particularity of their own lived experiences and interpretative approaches. This finding suggests that Christian religious educators should include works by persons who are located differently than most participants and create opportunities for co-learners to dialogue with these voices and one another. For instance, teachers can include readings, videos, music, and artwork by persons who are located differently and facilitate discussion with these people's work and one another in class. However, dialogue with the work of diverse voices must be paired with self-reflection, in which white learners unpack and take action to challenge white supremacy in their own beliefs, practices, and lives.

Dialogue can, as it did in this study, decenter the instructor or facilitator's voice as a teacher and create space for co-learners to ask questions, share knowledge and wisdom, and learn from one another. Christian religious educators can utilize dialogue to share power with students in the classroom. Through dialogue, the teacher as co-learner can practice solidarity by learning with and from their students as they address the problem at hand, raise new questions, and engage in the work of mutual liberation. Being a co-

learner is a posture of humility that challenges the presumed superiority of the teacher and their knowledge in the banking concept and religious instruction models of education.

White supremacy is a complex, multifaceted problem that cannot be “solved”; as such, it requires ongoing effort to dismantle it. This study’s findings suggests that *praxis*, a continuous process of action-reflection, is a transformative practice that can challenge whiteness as normative in Bible studies. Through *praxis*, teachers and students can critically reflect on their pedagogical practices and generate more collaborative and liberative pedagogical methods that create space for diverse identities and ways of knowing to be honored. Additionally, *praxis* radically transforms the power dynamics between teachers and students to one in which they learn with and from one another as they co-develop transformative practices that challenge white supremacy.

Engaging Multiple (Con)texts

Whereas many Bible studies begin with and prioritize the biblical text, this Bible study began with the world in front of the text and invited participants’ critical self-examination as readers. Additionally, we engaged multiple (con)texts throughout the lesson. In several sessions, we began by watching a video that featured a Black female poet, scholar, or activist and then dialogued with the work of this woman and one another. Beginning with a contemporary text helped us to critically examine issues of power, agency, oppression, and liberation in “the world in front of the text” before turning to the biblical text. Dialoguing with the work of these women and one another also fostered critical reflection on our shared and divergent identities and lived

experiences as women before we opened the Bible. When we turned to the biblical text, we were more aware of ourselves as readers and the different perspectives from which we each were reading. Additionally, as we read and interpreted the biblical text, we often read the Bible alongside the other texts we had engaged earlier, thus shedding new light on both (con)texts.

Engaging multiple (con)texts was shown to be a critical pedagogical tool for dismantling white supremacy. As such, Bible studies that wish to engage more liberative and anti-racist pedagogies may benefit from integrating multiple (con)texts into their curricula. Specifically, teachers would do well to begin with discussion about a contemporary (con)text before turning to the biblical text. Contemporary texts can include readings, videos, music, and artwork. By using diverse media, teachers can generate excitement in the classroom and engage different learning styles. Including videos, music, and other works by persons who are located differently can also allow co-learners to hear from these voices directly.

By raising questions about identity, power, agency, (in)justice, and liberation, teachers can help people to critically examine and reflect on these issues in their lives, the world, contemporary (con)texts, and the biblical text. When co-learners then turn to the biblical text, they may read with an eye to these same questions of power, justice, agency, and liberation in the biblical text. In this way, co-learners may interpret the biblical text alongside other (con)texts, generating new insights about multiple (con)texts, their lives, and the world. This practice may lead to multiple liberative readings of texts, including the biblical text, being produced.

Womanists as Transformative Dialogue Partners

Dialoguing with the work of womanists, feminists, and other Black female scholars, poets, and activists was central to this Bible study's objectives of challenging whiteness as normative and developing more liberative ways of knowing, learning, and interpreting the Bible. To implement this dialogue in our sessions, we read articles, watched videos, and listened to music created by these women. The practice enabled us to hear directly from them and dialogue with their work and one another before turning to the biblical text. The inclusion of multiple forms of media recognized the diverse means of knowledge production. Poetry, music, scholarly articles, and personal narrative were all honored as valuable forms of knowledge.

Although we dialogued with the work of womanist, feminist, and other Black female voices, our primary focus was on learning about womanism and womanist biblical interpretation. All seven co-learners remarked that learning about womanism and womanist biblical interpretation was transformative. As C.S., who is white, reflected, "Womanism . . . is a real eye opener to people exposed to a predominantly white culture. It helps us to relate. And for women, even white women, to be exposed to the liberating interpretation of womanist voices in Scripture is very freeing and affirming."³⁵⁵ Reading the work of womanist biblical scholars expanded the co-learners' understanding of how the Bible could be interpreted, and it encouraged them to develop more liberative ways of reading. Dialoguing with womanist biblical scholars and one another also generated several liberative interpretations. Rather than insisting on one interpretation as "correct"

³⁵⁵ C.S., "Final Reflection Assignment," Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

or that everyone read the Bible the same way, the group honored multiple interpretations and ways of reading, seeing this diversity as a gift.

In all these ways, dialoguing with the work of womanist voices, particularly womanist biblical scholars and others, proved to be a powerful pedagogical practice in the process of dismantling white supremacy. As Smith notes, “One way to incorporate and encourage student dialogue with persons different than themselves is through required readings that represent diverse voices and locatedness.”³⁵⁶ Including articles and other works created by persons who are located differently can be an especially effective approach in fostering empathy in predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations where there may be few people of color. In addition to readings, other media such as videos, poetry, music, and artwork can also be ways of centering the voices of people who are located differently than the dominant group. Facilitating dialogue, especially across lines of socially constructed difference, can help people to see the *imago dei* in others and cultivate practices of solidarity. For instance, in her final reflection, B.R., who is white, remarked, “I have really learned from the Womanist essays that have accompanied the [b]iblical texts . . . Kelly Brown Douglas and Mitzi Smith were powerful authors who provided perspective on power structure[s] in the church and the language of sass respectively. I learned so much from each of these women.”³⁵⁷ Similarly, L.D. emphasized that in the shared struggle for liberation from white

³⁵⁶ Smith, *Womanist Sass*, 54.

³⁵⁷ B.R., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

supremacy, she was called to practice “sisterhood” and “solidarity” with womanists and others struggling for freedom.³⁵⁸

Dialoguing with womanist biblical scholars and other voices can also help learners to critically reflect on issues of (in)justice, agency, and liberation in and in front of the text and reconsider their agency, power, practices of solidarity in the shared struggle for mutual liberation. Such critical reflection, coupled with action, is important in predominantly white settings because it can transform the work for justice and liberation from something that is done *for* others to something that is done *with* others. This realization can facilitate practices of solidarity in the shared struggle for mutual liberation.

Teachers would do well to consider including the work of womanist biblical scholars or other people who are located differently in their Bible study lessons. Facilitating dialogue between co-learners and the work of these scholars generates multiple liberative interpretations. Rather than insisting on single interpretative approach or interpretation being correct, dialogue can allow for diverse perspectives to be honored and valued. The honoring of multiple liberative interpretations decenters white androcentric interpretations as standard and superior and can create a learning community in which multiple ways of knowing and interpreting the Bible are valued. Additionally, including diverse voices, particularly of biblical scholars, can introduce learners to different hermeneutical methods.

³⁵⁸ L.D., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

Liberative Readings of Scripture and Mutual Liberation

An intended outcome of this study was for co-learners to read the Bible in liberative ways. Many co-learners had a difficult relationship with the Bible because of the ways it had been used to support racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other systems of domination. Other group members reflected that they often felt invisible as participants in Bible studies. Reading in liberative ways involved interpreting the Bible in ways that did not reinscribe oppression in their or others' lives. It also involved interpreting the Bible as embodied persons, bringing our full selves to task of interpretation rather than attempting to read in objective ways that masked a white androcentric gaze. Dialoguing with one another and other voices, particularly womanist biblical scholars, was another important component as we interpreted the biblical text together. Through dialogue, we learned both the limits of our perspectives and the transformative value of listening to and learning from others' interpretations. This dialogue deepened our understandings of ourselves and the Bible, broadened our perspectives, and helped us to generate an appreciation of difference as a gift and strength. Using the language of mutual liberation was also important as it shifted liberation from being something one did *for* others to something one did *with* others, recognizing that others' freedom was interconnected to one's own.

These findings offer multiple insights for Christian religious educators in predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations. First, they suggest the importance of recognizing the ways in which the Bible has been (mis)used and caused deep harm to people. Christian religious educators must create space for people to name the pain this text and its (mis)interpretations have caused, so the work of healing can

begin. It can also serve as a reminder of the consequences interpretations can have on people's lives. Second, these findings suggest the importance of introducing diverse biblical hermeneutical methods and traditions in Bible studies. Rather than relying on historical or literary criticism, Christian religious educators should introduce diverse forms of criticism. Learning about how others interpret the Bible can help learners to reflect on their own interpretative practices. Engaging with these scholars' work can also encourage learners to ask critical questions of the biblical text, the world, and themselves as interpreters. Dialoguing with diverse scholars and one another also generates multiple interpretations and thus challenges any single interpretation or interpretative approach as "correct." Third, Christian religious educators can also ask questions about power, agency, justice, and mutual liberation. These questions can help learners to reflect on issues of justice and liberation in their lives, the biblical text, and the world.

Lastly, in predominantly white mainline congregations, educators can consistently and continually talk about *mutual* liberation as a means of emphasizing the interconnectedness of humanity and freedom. Framing discussions about justice and liberation in terms of mutual freedom and flourishing can help learners to recognize that their humanity and freedom is intertwined with others and the importance of co-laboring together for freedom. This framework challenges white saviorism, which often focuses on doing work for others, who are often objectified, and instead champions working together as fellow human beings for our mutual liberation. It shifts the conversation from focusing on "me" and "my freedom" to "we" and "our freedom." These practices are important for educators who seek to encourage liberative readings of the Bible and practices of mutual liberation that challenge white supremacy in their classrooms.

Personal Transformation

This study helped me to grow as an educator and follower of Christ. Specifically, it helped me to practice vulnerability, teach in a more embodied way, engage in co-learning, and realize the importance of relationships and community in liberative education. At the beginning of the study, I often hesitated to share my own story for fear of letting my co-learners see the real me. As the study progressed, I learned to practice greater vulnerability by sharing about my identity, lived experiences, and struggles with the Bible. The first time I shared my own story, the words poured out. I had not realized how much I wanted to be heard and known. Although it initially felt risky to share about my identity, especially that I was queer, I found that when I practiced vulnerability, it encouraged other participants to also share their story. Several women observed that in this group, they had shared stories they rarely told to others. As C.B. remarked, “The candor in this small group is something I have never experienced before.”³⁵⁹ Practicing vulnerability also helped to build trust and deepen my relationship with my co-learners. This trust laid the foundation for co-learning, risk-taking, and engaging in the shared work of mutual liberation in this study.

I also learned to teach in a more embodied way. Rather than speaking as if I were coming from a universal perspective, I named my social location and theological commitments and shared how these factors informed my pedagogical and interpretative practices. Locating myself as a teacher and interpreter challenged whiteness as normative by making my racialized perspective visible and the limits of my lived experiences known. I was not a disembodied teacher who purported to teach objective knowledge, but

³⁵⁹ Kristin Riegel, “Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” (class transcript, March 1, 2021), 1169.

white, female, upper-middle-class, queer teacher whose knowledge and ways of knowing were highly contextual. Naming my particularity as a teacher encouraged my co-learners to also name and reflect on their particularity as learners. Recognizing our diverse identities and theological commitments helped to create a learning community in which we could see—and be more fully seen by—one another. It also created a learning community in which discussions of structured power dynamics, such as those based on race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, could occur.

Co-learning involves humility, power sharing, and continuous transformation. Early in the study, I often reverted to lecturing in my teaching. By engaging in *praxis* (action-reflection) with my co-learners, I realized that lecturing was one of the ways that I sought to exert control in the classroom. Lecturing prioritized the content I wanted to teach over the questions the participants were asking and the knowledge they brought to the classroom. Engaging in dialogue with my co-learners helped me to see the limits of my own knowledge and lived experiences; I realized that I had a lot to learn from my co-learners. Rather than holding tightly to my lesson plans, as the study progressed, I learned to trust my co-learners and myself, to loosen up, and to let the Spirit lead the conversation. Dialogue created space for new questions to be asked, everyone's voice to be heard, and power to be shared. Rather than being the all-knowing teacher, I was a fellow learner who was also engaged in the shared struggle for mutual liberation.

I also learned the importance of community in liberative education. Liberative education occurs in the context of relationships that are characterized by respect, humility, and mutuality. Without these factors, education becomes a unidirectional project that reinforces singular, supremacist ways of knowing. As I learned in this study,

sharing personal narratives and dialogue are transformative pedagogical practices that build community in the classroom. These practices can also deepen people's understanding of their own perspectives and broaden their awareness of others' perspectives and lived experiences. When learners trust and love one another, they are more willing to take risks and practice solidarity with one another in the shared struggle for mutual liberation. Additionally, they begin to see liberation as a shared struggle and their fellow learners' freedom as intertwined with their own.

Unresolved Issues

This participatory action research (PAR) study addressed the problem of whiteness as normative through its research methodology, pedagogical practices, and curriculum. A beautiful aspect of this project was its multifaceted approach. As B.R. reflected,

This Bible study has completely flipped “Bible study” on its head. Participants became the lesson as much as the Biblical text. Everyone was on the same level in the class because we were all learning together. A variety of media were used as discussion topics. We shared personal life experiences about ourselves that influence the Bible and what we believe.³⁶⁰

However, this integrated approach also made it difficult to identify one or two primary factors that made this Bible study “work.” Although this inability to name a dominant factor could be seen as an unresolved issue, it may also suggest something different. Specifically, this finding may suggest that there are multiple, simultaneous changes that must be made to dismantle white supremacy and other forms of supremacy in Bible

³⁶⁰ B.R., “Final Reflection Assignment,” Submitted in the course Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom (class assignment, March 1, 2021).

studies. Racism, heterosexism, classism, and other -isms will not be addressed through piecemeal changes or small tweaks here or there. Rather, radical changes in pedagogical practices, power dynamics, interpretative practices, and curricula are needed to facilitate liberative transformation in Bible studies in predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations.

New Questions and Avenues for Subsequent Research

This study generated several new questions and avenues for subsequent research. One question is if learning about other liberative hermeneutical traditions, such as feminist, queer, or Latinx biblical hermeneutics, would lead to similar results. Another question is if dialogue, the sharing of personal narratives, and engaging multiple (con)texts would also dismantle white supremacy in other Christian educational settings, such as small groups and classes. An area for subsequent research is to see if this study would produce similar results if it involved high school students, college students, or young adults. Another area for research is to see if this study would produce the same results and lead to the same conclusions if it were undertaken in a theologically conservative congregation.

Reflections on Process

There are several things that I would do differently if I were to do this project again. First, I would include more time in between classes, so the co-learners could read through and co-analyze the transcripts for themes. This practice would make the project more collaborative and be a way of further sharing power. Second, I would include more

time for our group debriefs at the end of each session. Additional time would allow us to engage in deeper reflection and more extensive planning for the next session. Lastly, I would invite the co-learners to lead different parts of the lesson, such as the opening prayer and embodied ritual, discussions, and closing rituals. Co-leading would be a way of centering the co-learners' gifts and knowledge and deepening our co-learning.

If I were to do this project again, there are also several things I would preserve. For instance, I would engage in participatory action research and use a spiral cycle of *plan-act-observe-reflect* again. I would also use the same data collection methods—analysis of class transcripts, a teaching journal, group debriefs, and a final reflection assignment—as these research methods produced insightful data and worked well together. Additionally, I would focus on womanism and womanist biblical interpretation again. Learning about womanist biblical interpretation and dialoguing with the work of womanist biblical scholars and others expanded people's awareness of others' lived experiences, introduced new interpretative approaches, and helped the co-learners to critically reflect on their own identities and interpretative approaches. I would also utilize the same liberative pedagogical practices, such as dialogue, storytelling, and using multiple (con)texts as these were effective practices that helped to build a learning community in which the co-learners felt heard and seen and in which diversity was valued as a gift and strength.

Liberative Pedagogical Practices for Bible Studies

Several liberative pedagogical practices emerged in this study. Although these practices may be most useful for Bible studies in predominantly white mainline Protestant settings, they may also be useful in other settings.

1. *Articulate the problem of white supremacy.* To challenge white supremacy, teachers and students must first “see” whiteness and become aware of how whiteness functions as normative. To raise critical awareness about whiteness, teachers should ask critical questions and facilitate dialogue and reflection about how whiteness functions as normative in the learners’ lives, communities, and faith. Once named, whiteness becomes a problem that can be addressed through *praxis*.
2. *Engage in praxis to dismantle white supremacy.* White supremacy is a complex problem that can only be dismantled through continuous *praxis*. Engaging in *praxis*, in which teachers and students reflect on and take action to develop more liberative and collaborative practices, can lead to mutual liberation from white supremacy. It can also create new ways of knowing, being, and learning that are more relational, inclusive, and holistic in nature.
3. *Practice humility as an educator.* Recognize the limits of your knowledge and experience and adopt a posture of humility in which you seek to learn with and from your students. Practice humility by engaging in dialogue, listening to your students, and changing your assumptions and pedagogical practices based on the feedback you receive.

4. *Build relationships and community.* Transformation occurs within the context of relationships that are characterized by trust, love, and mutuality. Christian educators can facilitate practices, such as sharing personal narratives, engaging in dialogue, and practicing humility, to foster trust, deepen relationships, and develop inclusive learning communities where everyone's presence is valued.
5. *Critically reflect on one's social location and commitments.* Teachers and students should critically reflect on how their social location, theological commitments, and lived experiences informs their reading of the Bible through self-reflection exercises, the sharing of personal narratives, and dialogue. These practices can help teachers and learners to recognize their particularity as interpreters, challenge whiteness as normative, and honor the diverse identities, experiences, and ways of knowing that are present in the classroom. Educators should name their own social location and theological and pedagogical commitments as a means of locating themselves and acknowledging the limits of their knowledge and experiences.
6. *Share personal narratives.* Educators and learners should share personal narratives about their social location and their relationship to Scripture with one another before turning to the biblical text. Sharing personal narratives can build trust and deepen relationships between learners. It can also help learners to recognize their shared and divergent identities, lived experiences, and theological commitments and build a learning community in which diversity is honored as a gift and strength.

7. *Engage multiple (con)texts.* Rather than focusing solely on the biblical text, engage multiple (con)texts. Begin with “the world in front of the text” by critically reflecting on oneself as a reader. Additionally, include multiple types of media, such as videos, artwork, and songs, in each session. Engaging multiple (con)texts, particularly at the beginning of Bible study sessions, can spark discussion about agency, power, justice, and liberation in and across multiple (con)texts. The use of multimedia can also create energy in the classroom and engage different learning styles.
8. *Dialogue with diverse voices.* Educators include readings, videos, music, and artwork that have been created by people of color, women, and historically marginalized groups as a means of centering their voices. Christian religious educators should also facilitate opportunities for learners to dialogue with the work of these voices and one another in Bible studies. The inclusion of diverse biblical scholars can broaden co-learners’ awareness of other perspectives and introduce them to diverse biblical hermeneutical traditions.
9. *Dialogue with one another.* Dialogue is a liberative pedagogical practice that decenters the teacher’s voice and knowledge. When engaging in dialogue, teachers and students become co-learners who learn with and from one another. Dialogue is also a humanizing practice that honors the existing knowledge and wisdom each person brings to the classroom. Christian religious educators should minimize lecturing and instead, practice dialogue in Bible studies.
10. *Encourage the sharing of personal experiences.* Create space for people to share stories and relate their personal experiences to the topics and materials being

discussed. Honor these lived experiences as valuable ways of knowing. As an educator, share your own personal stories to illuminate the material at hand and demonstrate connections between theory and practice. Sharing your own story can also be a means of practicing vulnerability and solidarity with your students.

11. *Focus on mutual liberation.* No interpretation of the Bible is politically or theologically neutral. Christian religious educators should raise questions about agency, power, (in)justice, and liberation in the world in and in front of the text. They should also invite learners to reflect on what different biblical texts suggest to them about co-laboring for justice or mutual liberation. Christian religious educators should invite learners to reflect on how they are being called to struggle for mutual liberation with others in their lives and communities.

Conclusion

In this study, my co-learners and I sought to dismantle white supremacy in our interpretative and pedagogical practices by developing more liberative ways of learning and interpreting the Bible. To do so, we critically reflected on ourselves as interpreters, dialogued with the work of womanists, particularly womanist biblical scholars, and other voices, and engaged in liberative pedagogical practices, such as dialogue, sharing personal narratives, and *praxis*, that challenged a banking model of education. Through these pedagogical practices, we created a learning community in which diversity was valued as a gift and strength.

This study resulted in the co-learners reading the Bible in liberative ways that resisted white supremacy and other forms of oppression, such as sexism, classism, and

heterosexism. As the study unfolded, the co-learners' understanding of liberation and their responsibility to one another evolved from being primarily focused on "me" and their personal freedom to "we" and co-laboring for mutual liberation. The co-learners practiced solidarity with one another and others struggling for freedom by listening, honoring diverse identities, practices, and beliefs, and reading the Bible in liberative ways. They also practiced solidarity by engaging in *praxis* to challenge white supremacy and other forms of oppression in their lives and communities. The co-learners recognized their humanity and freedom was intertwined with that of the other women in the group and all others struggling for liberation from white supremacy. They would not be truly free until their neighbors were also free and able to flourish.

This study suggests that to challenge white supremacy and systems of domination, such as racism, sexism, and classism, in Bible studies in predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations, white Christian religious educators and learners must engage in continuous *praxis* to transform their ways of knowing, learning, and reading the Bible. This liberative work involves transformation in perpetuity. By co-laboring together, Christian religious educators and students can develop more loving and just relationships with God, themselves, and others who are located differently. Additionally, they can find new hope, deeper joy, and greater love as they work alongside others in the struggle for mutual liberation.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form

“Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom” INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Researcher

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Project Advisor

Dr. Christine J. Hong, Assistant Professor of Educational Ministry and the Director of D.Ed.Min. Program, Columbia Theological Seminary (701 S. Columbia Drive, Decatur, GA 30030). Email: HongC@ctsnet.edu; Office: 404-687-4659.

This participatory action research (PAR) project is being conducted by Kristin Riegel, a student in the Doctor of Educational Ministry (D.Ed.Min.) program at Columbia Theological Seminary. This project is being supervised by Dr. Christine J. Hong, Assistant Professor of Educational Ministry and the Director of D.Ed.Min. Program at Columbia Theological Seminary.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project is to investigate what teaching methods and practices in bible studies help women in predominantly white settings to critically reflect on their social location, lived experiences, and theological commitments, including how these inform their interpretation of scripture. This project will also explore how dialoguing with womanist voices and one another might raise critical consciousness and lead to more liberative ways of reading scripture. The types of questions and themes this project will explore include:

- *What teaching methods and practices in bible studies help women in a predominantly white setting critically reflect on their social location, lived experiences, and theological commitments, including how these inform their reading of scripture?*
- *What teaching methods and practices in bible studies help to raise critical consciousness, facilitate mutual transformation, and encourage people to co-labor for freedom in their lives, communit(ies), and world?*
- *How might dialoguing with womanist voices and one another lead to more liberative ways of reading scripture?*

As this is participatory action research, these themes may evolve as the project unfolds and new themes and research questions may emerge.

A secondary purpose of this project is to help the researcher successfully complete the requirements of the D.Ed.Min. program.

Context, Curriculum, and Participants

This research project will take place within the context of a six-week women's bible study, which will be held via Zoom, starting in early 2021. The bible study will focus on womanist biblical interpretation and will utilize a curriculum, which the researcher designed in consultation with Dr. Christine J. Hong, as its starting point. A group of 7-9 women, most of whom have participated in Second's Women's Bible Study and/or Anti-Racism Group, will be invited to participate.

Time Commitment

Participants will be asked to commit to attending six 1.5-hour bible study sessions. In addition, participants will be asked to complete weekly readings and assignments, which will generally take no more than 1-1.5 hours to complete.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained by the researcher. When the research is shared, the identities of the participants will remain confidential, unless the participant gives written permission to have their name made public. In addition, the name of the church where the research took place will remain confidential, unless the Session gives written permission for its name to be made public.

Research Procedures & Data Collection Methods

The research procedures chosen for this project are: (1) audio-video recordings of the bible study sessions, which will be held via Zoom and later transcribed; (2) field notes; (3) written, verbal, and/or creative assignments; (4) written, verbal, and/or creative assessments; (5) Zoom chat transcripts; (6) document analysis; (7) teaching journal; (8) observation; and (9) group debriefs, which will be held via Zoom and audio-video recorded.

- **A/V Recordings and Transcripts:** The bible study sessions will be held on Zoom and audio-video recorded. These recordings will later be transcribed by the researcher for analysis. The A/V recordings and transcripts of the class sessions will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.
- **Field Notes:** The researcher will take field notes during the classes. These notes will focus on topics such as the researchers' thoughts, observations, emerging themes, and questions or ideas.
- **Written, Verbal, and Creative Assignments:** Participants will be asked to complete written, verbal, and/or creative assignments before, during, and/or after the bible study sessions and submit these to the researcher via email, text, or hard copy for analysis. The assignments will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted or reproduced (in the case of artistic/creative assignments) for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.
- **Written, Verbal, and Creative Assessments:** Participants will be asked to complete written, verbal, and/or creative assessments before, during, and/or after the bible study sessions and submit these to the researcher via email, text, or hard copy for analysis. The assessments will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

- **Zoom Chat:** Participants will be asked to respond to questions and/or engage in discussion via the Zoom chat feature. The Zoom chat transcript will be saved for analysis by the researcher. The chat will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.
- **Document Analysis:** The researcher will analyze lesson plans and other planning documents along with any documents shared by the participants before, during, or after the bible study sessions. Documents will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.
- **Teaching Journal:** The researcher will keep a teaching journal. This journal will focus on topics such as her personal reflections about teaching, observations about the class, themes or ideas that are reoccurring, and new learnings.
- **Observation:** Participants will be asked to observe and reflect on their and the group's energy, engagement, and learning process. Participants will be asked to share their observations with the researcher and co-participants, especially during the group debrief sessions. The observations will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.
- **Group Debriefs:** Participants will be asked to participate in group debriefs at the end of each bible study session. These debriefs will focus on topics such as where they felt the most engaged, what teaching methods and practices helped to raise critical consciousness, what questions or ideas are emerging, and what they observed about their and the group's engagement, growth, and transformation. These group debriefs will occur at the end of the bible study session, which will be held on Zoom, and will be audio-video recorded. These recordings will be later transcribed by the researcher for analysis. The A/V recordings and transcripts of the group debriefs will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

Data Storage

Data will be stored on the researcher's personal laptop and iCloud account, both of which are password protected. The data will also be backed up onto an external hard drive. The data will be kept for two years after the final research report is published and then destroyed.

Risks and Benefits

Participants may be able to reflect on their identity, lived experiences, and theological commitments, including how these inform their interpretation of scripture. Participants may be able to learn about womanist biblical interpretation, critically reflect on their own practice of interpretation, and learn about others' stories, commitments, and interpretative practices. In addition, women may find a sense of community and learn new, liberative practices for reading scripture. Conversely, some participants may feel some personal or social discomfort in discussing one's social location (including but not limited to discussions about race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and class), and issues of identity, power, privilege, and (in)justice. Some may experience discomfort in reading scripture passages in new ways. Be assured that there will be a list of pastoral counseling references, should any follow up be needed.

Projected Outcomes

This project is intended to benefit the researcher as well as the participants (see the potential benefits to participants listed in the section above). This research will be published as part of the researcher's Doctor of Educational Ministry (D.Ed.Min.) dissertation in print, electronic, and online formats and shared in public presentations. In addition, this research also may be shared publicly in articles, blogs, workshops, classes, sermons, videos, podcasts, and other print, electronic, and online formats. Before the research is published, it will be shared with the participants for their feedback.

Costs and Payments

There are no costs for participation in this study. Participation is completely voluntary, and no payments will be provided.

Informed Consent Form *(continued)*

I, _____ (← *please print name*) hereby agree to participate in the above named research project (detailed description above). I understand that the research is for Kristin E. Riegel's D.Ed.Min. dissertation, tentatively entitled, "Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom" and will be published in print, electronic, and/or online formats. In addition, this research may be shared publicly in articles, blogs, workshops, classes, sermons, videos, podcasts, and other print, electronic, and online formats.

Bible study sessions (description above) will be held via Zoom, audio-video recorded, and transcribed for analysis. The A/V recordings and transcripts of the class sessions will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

I do _____ do not _____ give permission for my audio and video to be recorded on Zoom and quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

Participants will be asked to complete written, verbal, and/or creative assignments and submit these to the researcher for analysis (see description above). The assignments will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted or reproduced (in the case of artistic/creative assignments) for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

I do _____ do not _____ give permission for the assignments I submit to be quoted and/or reproduced under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

Participants will be asked to complete written, verbal, and/or creative assessments and submit these to the researcher (see description above). The assessments will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted or reproduced (in the case of artistic/creative assignments) for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

I do _____ do not _____ give permission for the assessments I submit to be quoted or reproduced (in the case of artistic/creative assignments) under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

Participants will be asked to respond to questions and/or engage in discussion via the Zoom chat feature. The Zoom chat transcript will be saved for analysis by the researcher. The chat will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

I do _____ do not _____ give permission for what I write in the chat to be quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

The researcher will analyze lesson plans and other planning documents along with any documents shared by the participants before, during, or after the bible study sessions. The documents will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

I do _____ do not _____ give permission for any documents I share to be quoted or reproduced (in the case of artistic/creative assignments) under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

Participants will be asked to observe and reflect on their and the group's energy, engagement, and learning process. Participants will be asked to share their observations with the researcher and co-participants, especially during the group debrief sessions. The observations will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

I do _____ do not _____ give permission for any observations I share on Zoom and/or in writing to be quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

Group debriefs (description above) will be held via Zoom and audio-video recorded. These recordings will be later transcribed by the researcher for analysis. The A/V recordings and transcripts of the group debriefs will not be shared with anyone, unless quoted for the project under a pseudonym and other non-identifying markers.

I do _____ do not _____ give permission for my audio and video to be recorded on Zoom.

I do _____ do not _____ give permission to be contacted with any follow-up questions following the research.

I would _____ would not _____ like to receive a copy of the final research report

If yes, please share your email address:

I understand that I have the right not to participate in any activity or answer any question during this project. I also understand that any answer is acceptable. I understand that I have the right not to complete any assignment or assessment/that anything I turn in is acceptable. I understand I may stop participation at any time. I understand that I may withdraw any or all of these consents at any time up to the date that the class ends. I understand that if I have any questions about the project, I may write, email or phone the project advisor at any time.

Signed (participant): _____ Date: _____

Signed (researcher): _____ Date: _____

**Appendix 2:
Pre-Class Assignments for Session 1 (January 25, 2021)**

January 18, 2021

Hi friends,

Good morning! It was wonderful to see many of you yesterday. My apologies in advance for the length of this email! I promise future ones will be much shorter!

On Monday, Jan. 25th, 10-11:30 a.m., we'll being "Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices in Practices of Freedom." (*Here is the Zoom link.*) This is a Bible study, but it is much more than that. Together we'll explore how we can engage in practices of freedom as a learning community committed to justice and liberation.

This series will be different than most Bible studies. Rather than having a set curriculum that has already been fully developed, we'll develop our questions, focus, and learning processes together as we go. The general themes for the project, at least to begin, are centered around (1) exploring how our identity, theological commitments, and lived experiences (who we are as readers) informs how we read and interpret scripture; (2) exploring what practices help to raise critical consciousness, facilitate mutual transformation, and encourage us to co-labor for freedom in our lives and the world; and (3) how dialoguing with one another and womanist (aka Black feminist) voices (which we'll do through engaging the work of womanist biblical scholars, theologians, writers, and poets) might lead to more liberative ways of reading scripture and being/living in the world.

Throughout this process, my role will be that of a facilitator, convener, guide, and conversation partner rather than a teacher who prepares a lesson and then lectures about the material I've prepared (if I start to fall into this, let me know!). As a group, we'll not only learn together but also reflect critically on what we're learning about ourselves, one another, and the world; *how* we're learning; and *where* we're experiencing shifts in our thinking, ways of being, etc. and *why*.

At our first gathering, we'll begin formulating our work together. **To get ready for this gathering, I have three "assignments" I'd ask you to complete and send to me via text by Sunday, January 24th.** This will help us to have a shared framework for this project as we develop where we'd like to go and how we'd like to get there. A few notes about these assignments:

- **Hard Copies** – I'll be mailing these assignments to you in the mail but they're also attached, in case you want to take a look or start working on them.
- **Don't Worry About Writing A Lot** – For the assignments, feel free to draw, doodle, respond with bullet points. Write enough down to give me the gist of what you're thinking but don't worry about writing full sentences or fleshing out your

ideas. Again, words, images/doodles, or phrases all work – no treatises are needed. Also, there are no wrong answers (promise!).

- **Text Me Your Responses by Sunday Evening** – Please text me a picture of your responses (I only need the pages where there are questions) by **Sunday, January 24th**, so I can look these over before we meet. My cell is XXX.XXX.XXXX. Please also keep a file with these and any other assignments that you do until the project is done as we'll be coming back to these assignments at our last session.
- **Womanist Biblical Interpretation Video** – One of the assignments involves watching a video on womanist biblical interpretation. The video is 5 minutes long and available at: bit.ly/wmnist. Full disclosure: Dr. Smith, who is featured on the video, is one of the readers for this project :)
- **What the Assignments Are About** - These assignments will help us to have a shared framework for this project. Each assignment is a different “strand” of thought/questions/ideas that we'll be weaving together. Here are more details:
 1. **Participatory Action Research (PAR):** This assignment offer information about PAR, the research methodology for this project. This assignment will help us to become more familiar with what PAR is and how it works, especially the action research spiral.
 2. **Educational Theory (Freire & hooks):** Paulo Freire and bell hooks are two education theorists who write about education as the practice of freedom. We'll be exploring their ideas as we seek to engage in liberative practices together as a learning community. This assignment will help us to begin thinking about what we mean by freedom/liberation and how we want to do our work together as a group.
 3. **Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Voices (Womanist Biblical Interpretation):** This assignment will help us begin thinking about why it is important to critically reflect on who we are as readers when we engage scripture. It will also help us to reflect on how engaging with one another and womanist voices (particularly through engaging the work of womanist biblical scholars and theologians) can help us to read scripture and live in the world in more liberative ways.

Again, I'll be mailing these attachments to you tomorrow, so no need to print them out unless you want to start working on them. If you run into any issues or have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me anytime.

With gratitude and excitement,
Kristin

Paulo Freire & bell hooks | A Few Important Ideas and Concepts

Educators Paulo Freire and bell hook are committed to education as a “practice of freedom.” They prioritize dialogue, storytelling, justice, liberation, excitement, joy, and bringing one’s lived experiences and emotions in the “classroom.” For them, education isn’t about “teachers” depositing facts and figures into “students”; it’s a liberative process in which teachers and students—as a community committed to mutual liberation—learn to see the world not only as it is, but as it could be.

Freire and hooks emphasize that education is communal undertaking in which “teachers” and “students” labor together in their commitment to freedom. Community is built through dialogue, storytelling, reflection, and the sharing of personal experiences. Through these practices, both “students” and “teachers” begin to understand the world and themselves better. This equips both teachers and students to live differently in the world.

Below are a few important and ideas and concepts from Freire and hooks that relate to this project, along with some reflection questions.

Paulo Freire

- In the late 1960s, Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, wrote a book called *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that transformed education. In it, he argued against a banking model of education in which teachers “deposit” information into their students. He argued this banking model of education is an act of domination that serves to support the status quo by disempowering people and making them believe the way the world is now is how it is always going to be. This serves to keep the status quo intact and the majority of people “oppressed” and disempowered. Freire argues *against* this “banking model of education” and *for* “education as the practice of freedom.” He calls his pedagogy (method of teaching) the “pedagogy of the oppressed.” In the pedagogy of the oppressed, the relationship/divide between “teachers” and “students” are transformed into one of co-learners who share in the project of liberation together. Through dialogue, the raising of critical consciousness, and *praxis* (action-reflection), communities work to transform reality and in the process, participate in their own liberation.
- Dialogue is central to the pedagogy of the oppressed. In this model of education, communities come together to share dialogue, which is undertaken with humility, in love, and in hope. Through dialogue, critical consciousnesses is raised. People begin to not only understand the world “as it is,” but as it could be. They also realize that they have the ability to change it. Freire calls for people to engage in *praxis* (action-reflection) on the world in order to change it.
- Freire argues that the task of the “oppressed” (those who are not free and experiencing oppression) is “to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 44). Liberation doesn’t mean simply switching positions with the “oppressor.” Rather, it means transforming reality so that we can all be free to pursue our primary vocation of becoming more human.” This is a collective project that is undertaken together.

- **A few important definitions from Freire:**
 - **Critical consciousness (conscientização):** “refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions [the things that keep people from experiencing freedom] and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 44). It is a process of becoming more aware of the realities of the world, especially those that perpetuate oppression, and realizing that we, as humans working on community together, can transform this reality.
 - **Praxis:** “the action and reflection of men and women upon *their world* in order to transform it” (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79)
 - A quick note about “action”: Action isn’t simply protesting, being in the streets, or a public thing we do, etc. “Action” encompasses thinking, reflecting, conversing, and being. Anything and everything we do, think, express, believe is “action.”
 - **Liberation:** “the process of humanization” or becoming more fully human (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79). This isn’t something we can do for others; rather liberation is a project and process we undertake together as we seek to transform the oppressive elements of reality.

bell hooks

- bell hooks is a writer, critical theorist, educator, feminist, and social activist who has written extensively about the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality. She coined the phrase, “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (a phrase that is often used in critical theory and feminism) to describe the structures/reality of the United States (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 71). She is a Black woman who was raised in the segregated South. Her pedagogy is informed by her experiences of being nurtured by Black teachers in elementary school, the failures of integration in the public school, her experiences as a student and teacher, and the work of Paulo Freire, among others.
- Quotes about education, especially education as the practice of freedom:
 - “[Education] is never politically neutral.” (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 30)
 - “As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by her interest in one another, and hearing one another’s voices, and recognizing one another’s presence . . . Any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone’s presence is acknowledged.” (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 8)

Reflect: When have you felt your presence acknowledged in the classroom? When have you felt “heard”?

- “There must be in ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes. These contributions are resources. Used to constructively they enhance the capacity of any class to create an open learning community. Often before this process can begin there has to be some deconstruction of the traditional notion that only the professor is responsible for classroom.” (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 8)
- **Dialogue:** “To you engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be directed by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences” (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 130)

Reflect: Do you agree that dialogue can help us to cross boundaries and barriers? When is a time that dialogue has been transformative for you?

- A few ideas and quotes from hooks about racism and the relationship between Black and White women:
 - Hooks suggests that historically White women in the feminist movement have often been unwilling to talk about racism, have not listened to Black women, and have often marginalized them when they have brought up concerns about racism (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 102-103). She writes that although there is greater openness to addressing racism within feminism today, this has led to Black women often being put in “the position of serving white female desire to know more about race and racism, to ‘master’ the subject” hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 103). She notes that many white women want to focus on race and difference and talk about diversity in regard to women of color but don’t want to do their own analysis of race and the way racism functions in their own lives (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 103). She suggests that White women need to do their own work and reflect on their own social location, including critically reflecting on “the meaning of whiteness in their lives.” (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 104.)
 - She suggests that is important to critically examine one’s social location and the positionality from which one writes [and teaches and reads the Bible]. Without doing this, feminists can re-inscribe and perpetuate systems of domination and oppression. (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 77-78)

Reflection Questions

Please complete p. 5-7 by Sunday, January 24th and text pictures of these pages to Kristin Riegel.

***Don't Worry About Writing A Lot!** Feel free to draw, doodle, respond with bullet points. Write down enough to give me the gist of what you're thinking but don't worry about writing full sentences or fully fleshing out your ideas. Again, words, images/doodles, bullet points, or phrases all work -- no treatises are needed. Also, there are no wrong answers (promise!).*

1. Think about the words, “freedom” and “liberation.” What words, images, or idea comes to mind? Use this space to write, draw, or doodle your thoughts and ideas.
2. Freire describes **liberation** as *the process of becoming more fully human*. He argues that “liberation” (becoming more fully human) is our primary vocation as human beings. What do you think it means to become more fully human? Do you agree that freedom is our primary vocation as humans? Why or why not? Use this space to write, draw, or doodle your thoughts and ideas.
3. hooks suggests that many white women want to focus on race and difference and talk about diversity in regard to women of color but don’t do their own analysis of race and the way racism functions in their own lives (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 103). Do you agree or disagree with this assessment? Why or why not? Use this space to draw, doodle, or respond with bullet points.
4. Why might it be important to interrogate one’s social location (race, gender, class, etc.) in the classroom, especially in predominantly white settings? Why might it be important to interrogate one’s social location as we read the Bible? Use this space to draw, doodle, or respond with bullet points.
5. Freire and hooks suggest that dialogue, undertaken in love with humility and hope, is central to education as a practice of freedom. In our first gathering, we’ll spend time creating a group covenant together. This covenant will help us be intentional about how we engage in dialogue and relationship together. Below are questions to begin thinking about how we want to create community. Use this space to brainstorm, write, draw, or doodle ideas to these questions (*you do not need to respond to every question!*)
 - *How can we build community?*
 - *How can we create space for honesty, vulnerability, and sharing?*
 - *How can we support one another?*
 - *How can we create space for everyone’s stories to be heard?*
 - *How will we share power?*
 - *What will we do when we experience disagreement or conflict? How will we repent and seek to repair relationships when hurt is caused?*

- *What are our hopes for this group as we seek to engage in education as the practice of freedom together?*

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

For this project, we'll engage in Participatory Action Research together. Below is more information about PAR.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an intuitive research process. We often use PAR—or a similar process—without even thinking about it. We have a problem or issue we want to address in our lives/community/etc., so we put a plan together, carry out the plan, observe how things go, and then reflect, determining what went well and what we want to change for next time. In this project, we'll work through this same process. However, we'll be more intentional about each of these steps, especially collecting data and reflecting on what we're observing/finding.

PAR utilizes an *action research spiral* of “**Plan**” → “**Act**” / “**Observe**” [collect data] → “**Reflect**” [integrate learnings, insights, etc.] → “**Revised Plan**” → etc. Two strengths of this research methodology are (1) it allows us to incorporate new insights and learnings as we go and (2) it creates space for new questions emerge and be addressed as the process unfolds. It's also a more democratic form of research that is done “for the people by the people.”

PAR starts with a community, invites the community to articulate a question/problem/topic together, and then does research *with* people, not *on* them. As such, PAR is highly contextual. In PAR, a researcher's role is that of a co-learner, coach, and convener. The research itself is intended to benefit the community and people participating in the project, not another community, such as the Academy.

In this project, at the end of each session, we'll reflect about what we did, how we did it, and what we observed, both about ourselves and our process as a group. We'll spend time reflecting on *why* we did things and what new questions are emerging for us. We'll explore which practices were liberative and transformative, which ones were not, and why. And we'll use all of this to revise our “plan” of how we learn together in the next gathering. In addition, I'll do further analysis and reflection outside of our gatherings. I'll share what themes, ideas, and questions that I see emerging as part of the “validation” process.

Participatory Action Research (another brief description from Participatory Methods)

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an approach to enquiry which has been used since the 1940s. It involves researchers and participants working together to understand a problematic situation and change it for the better. There are many definitions of the approach, which share some common elements. PAR focuses on social change that promotes democracy and challenges inequality; is context-

specific, often targeted on the needs of a particular group; is an iterative cycle of research, action and reflection; and often seeks to 'liberate' participants to have a greater awareness of their situation in order to take action. PAR uses a range of different methods, both qualitative and quantitative.

Source: <https://www.participatorymethods.org/glossary/participatory-action-research>

PAR: Practical Theology that Embodies Social Justice

- **Participatory** = “Participatory recognizes the value of including practitioners, community members, citizens, employees, and volunteers as essential to the generation of useful knowledge regarding mayor social, political, economic, technical, cultural, and organizational problems. The knowledge comes from the people.” (Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, “Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice,” 324)
- **Action** = “Action indicates that the research is intended to contribute directly to change efforts on the part of the participants.” [Action doesn’t mean simply mean “doing.” Action encompasses learning, thinking, relating, dialogue, etc.] (Conde-Frazier, “Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice,” 324)
- **Research** = “Research indicates a systemic effort to generate knowledge. It may include historical, literary, theological, and scientific forms. The [major] thrust is to focus the knowledge generated on changes that better the quality of living. It is research that is attached to the humanization of persons in communities.” (Conde-Frazier, “Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice,” 324)

PAR Questions

Please complete this page by Sunday, January 24th and text pictures of these pages to Kristin Riegel.

Don't Worry About Writing A Lot! Feel free to draw, doodle, respond with bullet points. Write down enough to give me the gist of what you're thinking but don't worry about writing full sentences or fully fleshing out your ideas. Again, words, images/doodles, bullet points, or phrases all work -- no treatises are needed. Also, there are no wrong answers (promise!).

Spend a few minutes jotting down *bullet point responses* to these questions (~30-50 words or less).

1. A friend asks you what PAR is. What would you say? (think elevator speech)
2. How is PAR similar or different from other research methods you're familiar with?
3. What, if anything, about this process excites or resonates with you?
4. What questions do you have about PAR?

Engaging Ourselves, Scripture & Womanist Voices (Womanist Biblical Interpretation)

Read through these questions and then watch the “Womanist Biblical Interpretation” video (5 minutes). To access the video, type this web address into your internet browser: bit.ly/wmnist

After watching the video, respond to these questions. *Don't worry about writing a lot!* Write down enough to give me the gist of what you're thinking but don't worry about writing full sentences or fully fleshing out your ideas. Words, images/doodles, bullet points, or phrases all work -- no treatises are needed. Also, there are no wrong answers (promise!).

Please complete these pages by Sunday, January 24th and text pictures of these pages to Kristin Riegel.

1. Smith suggests that what we're taught about the Bible and what it says can influence our lives in many ways. What are some of the things you were taught about the Bible growing up? What are some of the ideologies you were taught? How have these changed over time?
2. What lived experiences, theological commitments, or aspects of your identity influence how you currently approach the Bible and read scripture? (if you have no idea—that's ok, too. Just write “no idea”).
3. Describe womanist biblical interpretation in ~30 words or less.
4. Describe the differences between womanist and feminist biblical interpretation in ~30 words or less.
5. Why do you think it might be important to engage with both ourselves (who we each are as readers), one another, and womanist voices/learn about womanist biblical interpretation as we seek to engage in practices of practices of freedom as a group?

**Appendix 3:
Session 1 - Lesson Plan (January 25, 2021)**

Primary Objectives

- To get to know one another
- To develop a learning covenant together
- To reflect on how we've been socialized to read scripture and share questions, reflections, and wonderings about biblical interpretation
- To reflect on the meaning of liberation and liberative pedagogical practices based on the hooks and Freire readings
- To discuss participatory action research (PAR), including its purpose, commitments, and process
- To discuss and co-develop our initial research questions, recognizing these questions may evolve or change as the project progresses

Opening Activities

Welcome

- Welcome people to study
- Share gratitude for their participation

Introductions

- Share introductions via mutual invitation
- Name & What are you excited about for this group?

Centering Practice & Opening Prayer

- Play "Resonance Meditation" By Beautiful Chorus
<https://insighttimer.com/beautifulchorus/guided-meditations/resonance-meditation>
- Lead opening prayer

Observation Exercise

- Invite co-learners to engage in observation by responding to the following questions in the chat function
 - *How are you feeling?* (word or short phrase)
 - *Observe the energy of the group. What do you notice?* (word or short phrase)

Learning Segments

"Beginning Our Work Together: An Introduction" (lecture, discussion)

- Introduce Bible Study and Purpose of Group
 - Engaging:
 - Ourselves (who we are as readers)
 - Scripture
 - Womanist Voices

- In Practices of Freedom
 - Share that these initial topics and themes emerged from work together in women's Bible study and that they will continue to evolve as project unfolds
- My role: facilitator, convener, guide, co-learner
- How this Bible study will be different than others:
 - Co-develop curriculum together
 - Co-learning
 - Participatory Action Research
 - Spiral cycle of action: *plan-act-observe-reflect*
 - Observe and reflect on:
 - *How* we're learning
 - *Where* we're experiencing shifts in our thinking, assumptions, ways of knowing, etc., and *why*

Participatory Action Research (PAR): A Brief Introduction

(lecture and discussion)

- Briefly introduce PAR:
 - What it is
 - How it's used
 - Why it's helpful
- Spiral cycle of *Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect*
 - Discuss differences between observation and reflection
 - *Praxis*: action-reflection
 - Co-generating knowledge and questions together
- Introduce observation practice

Observation Exercise

- Throughout lesson, we'll pause to engage in observation, usually after completing a specific learning activity
- Observation questions (respond with a word or short phrase in the chat)
 - **How are you feeling?**
 - **How engaged are you? (Scale of 1-5)**
 - 1 = I feel completely checked out
 - 2 = I feel less engaged than normal
 - 3 = I feel engaged. I'm getting something out of this.
 - 4 = This is really good. I'm really engaged and feeling like something is shifting. I'm getting a lot out of this.
 - 5 = Sparks are flying, mind blown. This feels really challenging, transformative, meaningful . . .
 - **What do you notice about the group's energy or engagement? (observe only!)**
 - **What ideas and questions are emerging for you?**
- Let's practice: Engage in observation using questions above and the chat function

Creating a Community Learning Covenant

- How we engage in work together is as important as the work we do
- **Reflection Exercise:**
 - Take 1-2 minutes to reflect on these questions by drawing or jotting down words or phrases:
 - *What does it feel like to be heard by others?*
 - *What does it feel like to be part of a community?*
 - *What does it feel like to experience freedom?*
 - *What does it feel like to experience transformation?*
 - Discuss responses with one another
 - Discussion Questions:
 - *How can we build community?*
 - *How can we create space for honesty, vulnerability, and sharing?*
 - *How can we create space for everyone's stories to be heard?*
 - *How will we share power?*
 - *What will we do when we experience disagreement or conflict? How will we repent and seek to repair relationships when hurt is caused?*
 - *What are our hopes for this group as we seek to engage in education as the practice of freedom together? What are we hoping to experience?*
 - Suggested starting guidelines/food for thought:
 - Share the mic (step forward, step back)
 - Speak from your own experience (use "I" statements)
 - Turn to wonder. (Be curious rather than critical)
 - Share lessons but not others' stories – confidentiality of identity and stories, not lessons
 - Intention, not the same as impact

Observation Exercise

- Observation questions (respond with a word or short phrase in the chat)
 - **How are you feeling?**
 - **How engaged are you? (Scale of 1-5)**
 - 1 = I feel completely checked out
 - 2 = I feel less engaged than normal
 - 3 = I feel engaged. I'm getting something out of this.
 - 4 = This is really good. I'm really engaged and feeling like something is shifting. I'm getting a lot out of this.
 - 5 = Sparks are flying, mind blown. This feels really challenging, transformative, meaningful . . .
 - **What do you notice about the group's energy or engagement? (observe only!)**
 - **What ideas and questions are emerging for you?**
- Let's practice: Engage in observation using questions above and the chat function

Engaging Ourselves, Scripture, and Womanist Biblical Scholars

- **Engaging Scripture**
 - Read Genesis 2:4-8, 13, 21-25
 - Discussion Questions:
 - *When we read this story, how did you imagine the characters? What did they look? Why do you think you imagined them this way?*
 - *Have you heard this story before? If so, what have you been taught about it?*
 - *How would you describe the man? How would you describe the woman? How are they similar? How are they different?*
 - *How does who you are as a reader and your social location (define social location) inform your reading of this text? Do you often think about who you are and your commitments when engaging scripture? Why or why not?*
- **Engaging Ourselves and Womanist Biblical Scholars**
 - Dr. Mitzi Smith is a womanist biblical scholar
 - Smith suggests that what we're taught about the Bible and what it says can influence our lives in many ways.
 - Discussion Questions:
 - *What are some of the things you were taught about the Bible growing up? What are some of the ideologies you were taught?*
 - *What lived experiences, theological commitments, or aspects of your identity influence how you currently approach the Bible and read scripture?*
 - *bell hooks suggests that many white women want to focus on race and difference and talk about diversity in regard to women of color but don't do their own analysis of race and the way racism functions in their own lives.*
 - *Why do you think it might be important to critically reflect on who we are as readers as we engage scripture, with one another, and womanist voices?*
 - *Why is this particularly important if our work is to focus on practices of freedom?*

Observation Exercise

- Observation questions (respond with a word or short phrase in the chat)
 - **How are you feeling?**
 - **How engaged are you? (Scale of 1-5)**
 - 1 = I feel completely checked out
 - 2 = I feel less engaged than normal
 - 3 = I feel engaged. I'm getting something out of this.
 - 4 = This is really good. I'm really engaged and feeling like something is shifting. I'm getting a lot out of this.
 - 5 = Sparks are flying, mind blown. This feels really challenging, transformative, meaningful . . .

- **What do you notice about the group’s energy or engagement? (observe only!)**
- **What ideas and questions are emerging for you?**
- Let’s practice: Engage in observation using questions above and the chat function

Liberation

- In this project, we’ll explore the concepts of liberation and freedom
- Drawing on pre-class reflection exercise, lead discussion about these questions:
 - *Think about the words, “freedom” and “liberation.” What words, images, or ideas come to mind?*
 - *What is freedom? What is liberation?*
- **Watch Maya Angelou’s “And Still I Rise”**
 - As you listen, reflect on these questions:
 - *Where do see/hear freedom?*
 - *What are some of the things that try to prevent her from being free? What is she rising from?*
 - *How does she rise? With whom?*
 - Discuss questions as a group
- **Discuss liberation using these questions and Freire and hooks readings as a starting point:**
 - *What is freedom? What is liberation?*
 - *What are we being freed from? What are being freed to?*
 - *Freire describes liberation/freedom as “the process of becoming more fully human” and argues that “liberation” (becoming more fully human) is our primary vocation as human beings. What do you think it means to become more fully human?*
 - *Do you agree that freedom is our primary vocation as humans? Why or why not?*

Liberation: Key Concepts & Pedagogical Practices

- **Share key concepts and ideas, using PowerPoint slides:**
 - **Conscientization**
 - **Conscientization (critical consciousness):** Refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions [the things that keep people from experiencing freedom] and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (Pedagogy of the Oppressed)
 - Critical awareness of world as it is
 - Realization that we can work to change reality, structures, systems
 - World as it is isn’t how it has to be

- **Praxis**
 - Action + Reflection
 - A quick note about “action”: Action isn’t simply protesting, being in the streets, or a public thing we do, etc. “Action” encompasses thinking, reflecting, conversing, and being. Anything and everything we do, think, express, believe is “action.”
 - Discuss:
 - *Why might action without reflection be flawed?*
 - *Why might reflection without action be flawed?*
- **Co-labor**
 - Hope for this Project: As we engage ourselves, scripture, and womanist voices in practices (Praxis-es) of freedom – We become more critically conscious of the world as it is and our ability to change it. We co labor for freedom

Observation Exercise

- Observation questions (respond with a word or short phrase in the chat)
 - **How are you feeling?**
 - **How engaged are you? (Scale of 1-5)**
 - 1 = I feel completely checked out
 - 2 = I feel less engaged than normal
 - 3 = I feel engaged. I’m getting something out of this.
 - 4 = This is really good. I’m really engaged and feeling like something is shifting. I’m getting a lot out of this.
 - 5 = Sparks are flying, mind blown. This feels really challenging, transformative, meaningful . . .
 - **What do you notice about the group’s energy or engagement? (observe only!)**
 - **What ideas and questions are emerging for you?**
- Let’s practice: Engage in observation using questions above and the chat function

Developing Research Questions

- As we think about our own identities and engagement with scripture, womanist biblical interpretation, and liberative practices,
 - *What are some of your questions?*
 - *What are some of the questions you think we need to address as a group?*
- Share initial research questions:
 - *What teaching methods and practices in bible studies help women in a predominantly white setting critically reflect on their social location, lived experiences, and theological commitments, including how these inform their reading of scripture?*
 - *What teaching methods and practices in bible studies help to raise critical consciousness, facilitate mutual transformation, and encourage people to co-labor for freedom in their lives, communit(ies), and world?*

- *How might dialoguing with womanist voices and one another lead to more liberative ways of reading scripture?*
- Which of these questions/topics that resonate with you, and why? Are any of these questions particularly exciting, and why?
- Where is there overlap between our questions?
- Note that questions will change – new questions will emerge as project unfolds

Participatory Action Research

- Spiral cycle of *Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect*
 - Discuss differences between observation and reflection
 - *Praxis*: action-reflection
 - Co-generating knowledge and questions together
- Discuss:
 - *A friend asks you what PAR is. What would you say?*
 - *What are some of the distinguishing features of PAR?*
 - *What are some of its commitments?*
 - *What, if anything about this process excites or resonates with you?*

Closing Activities

Personal Reflection

- Listen to “Spirits Calling” by Beautiful Chorus
<https://insighttimer.com/beautifulchorus/guided-meditations/spirits-calling>
- **Invite co-learners to reflect on these questions as they listen:**
 - *What did you observe about yourself? What questions, ideas, or wonderings are arising for you?*
 - *When did you feel most heard?*
 - *When did you hear something in a new way?*
 - *What questions or ideas are emerging for you?*

Group Debrief

- Share observations and reflections, using these guiding questions as a starting point:
 - *What have you observed about yourself, our group, and our co-learning today?*
 - *When did you feel most engaged, and why?*
 - *When did you feel least engaged, and why?*
 - *When did you feel most heard, and why?*
 - *What questions are emerging for you?*
- Share key take-aways, learnings, and lingering questions
- Plan for next session (topics, guiding questions, pedagogical practices, utilizing observations and reflections)

Mutual Blessing

- Share gratitude for one another's presence and engage in a mutual blessing

**Appendix 4:
Session 1 - Teaching Journal (January 25, 2021)**

Just finished my first lesson and wow, this project is going to push me. I had an entire lesson plan drawn up and ended up having to throw out most of it. Not throw it out – I had to adapt. I started with wanting to introduce the project and the process of observation and that was a buzz kill – starting with information was not the way to go. I knew that but still did it. Part of it was to try and set the stage for reflection throughout the lesson but what I realized is that stopping to reflect throughout it was more disruptive rather than helpful and it also took too long. After a half an hour, we hadn't even gotten into the “material” yet. As people said, they were ready to get started.

The energy shifted when I introduced the scripture passage for the day. It gave people something to dig their teeth into and begin to discuss. The scripture passage itself created space for people to reflect on who they are as readers. A lot of my approach with this project has been having people to reflect on who they are as readers first and then engage with scripture and womanist voices but now I'm wondering if it's better to start with scripture and then work backwards in terms of who we are as readers. Maybe it doesn't need to be an either/or.

For next time, there are a bunch of changes I want to make based on how today went. I am beyond grateful for this group and their feedback and willingness to work with me through this project.

- Stories – the power of sharing stories.
 - I had created a series of reflection questions to help people think about who they are as interpreters of the bible. I want to change these questions to have them be more focused on having people share stories rather than information/facts.
 - When is the first time you became aware of race? Tell about it.
 - When is the first time you became aware of gender? Tell about it.
 - When is the first time you became aware of class? Tell about it.
 - Which did you become aware of first or was it a combination?
- I think having a video/scripture/something for people to discuss at the very beginning is helpful. It helps to have something that people can engage with, especially when it comes to more abstract ideas.
- Creating space for everyone to be heard – I need to work with the group to find some ways to make sure that everyone's voices are heard. Mutual invitation is one way. I wonder if there are others as well.
- Personal experiences – creating space for people to hear one another and tell their own stories.
- At the end during the debrief, sharing the research questions for people to respond to
- Needing to pause to give people time to think – becoming more comfortable with silence
- Music at beginning when people are signing on

I also realize about myself my desire for control. I spent hours working on this lesson plan. Hours! Thinking if I put together the perfect plan everything would go smoothly. Within a half an hour, I had to throw out my entire lesson plan – well not everything but approach it a different way. It's so easy to slip into a banking model of education.

These women already know / have the knowledge within them – I really am here to learn from them / here for us to learn together.

Here's what I'm thinking for next time:

- Cat picture – where are you today?
- “Ain't I A Woman” video
 - Discussion
 - Important definition: intersectionality, social construct, race, gender (have these in handouts, not as a lecture)
- Sharing stories
 - When is the first time you became aware of race?
 - Gender?
 - Class?
 - Sexual orientation?
- Scripture
 - Exodus: Shiphrah and Puah
 - Commitment to liberation
 - Questions about gender, race, class, power in the text
- Womanist (Alice Walker) definition – discussion
 - Feminism and womanist
 - Shared commitment to liberation
 - What is freedom/liberation?
- Debrief and discussion
 - Where did you feel most engaged?
 - Where are you experiencing shifts in your thinking?
 - What new questions are emerging for you?
 - Research questions:
 - What practices helped us to experience mutual transformation, etc.
 - Sharing results from last class session
- Music
 - Where are you experiencing shifts in your thinking?
 - One take-away
 - What new questions are emerging for you?

Practicality – typing responses didn't work as well as I had hoped – different typing abilities.

Appendix 5:
Session 1 - Reflections on Emerging Themes from Class Transcript & Teaching Journal

One of the questions that came up throughout the first session was, where are we going? Beyond Kristin working on her dissertation, what are we trying to achieve? What's our vision? I could feel that the group felt a little disoriented and lost not have a clear goal be defined from the outset.

As a convener, coach, and conversation partner, my role was not to answer this question for the group but to hold space for them to keep asking it and for the problems, questions, and ideas to emerge from the group itself. Although I could hear some wondering and frustration on the group's part about where we were going and what the goal was, what I also heard and saw was that the group was actually beginning to articulate the questions and ideas they wanted to explore and problems they wanted to address together. Here are some of the questions and ideas I heard emerging:

- **How do we address the ways in which whiteness often unconsciously shapes our imaginations and engagement with scripture even when we know “better”?**

Despite “knowing” that the characters in the Bible aren't white, this is still what is ingrained in many of us. When I asked what the characters looked like in people's mind's eye, six of eight of us named that we saw white people even though everyone acknowledged that we know that the people in the Bible aren't white. Many of us have been socialized with white cultural norms, ideas, and images, that run deeper than what we “logically” know about characters in the Bible. Our imaginations and understanding of scripture, including what characters (and I would suggest God) look like is informed by art, the Bibles we were given as children, and the churches and communities in which we raised. As one person shared, “When we were brought up we never talked about race or what color were Adam and Eve. It wasn't a thing. Well, they're white, of course, because you know, I was in a white church.” Another person shared that when she was asked to imagine Adam and Eve, although she initially imagined Adam and Eve as wind and dust with a brown complexion, “something was superimposed on what was already in my mind--the thoughts—and I saw you know, at the end, even though I resist it seeing the two white people holding their hands with an apple, that's the image that just like overtook everything else that was in my mind.” This suggests that for many of us, whiteness shows up in our imaginations and influences our engagement with scripture (and perhaps God?), even when we “know better.” As one person said, “I'm really hoping to come out of from this study is a rewiring of my brain, so I don't automatically see white. Like white in charge, white in charge of the world. I'm really hoping for that rewiring of my thinking to happen.”

What this suggests to me is that one of the problems/issues that this group is seeking to address is, how do we, especially in a predominantly white setting, address the ways in which we've been socialized into whiteness? Even when

we know that whiteness isn't historically accurate or universal, it still informs our imagination and our engagement (and interpretation) with scripture (and God?) in deep and often unconscious ways. I'd posit that part of co-laboring for mutual transformation and liberation, especially in a predominantly white setting, is taking time to wrestle with the ways in which we see whiteness as a normative shows up in our own lives and imaginations.

I think asking people to share how they imagined Adam and Eve was helpful. It invited people to reflect critically on some of the assumptions and unconscious thoughts they had, including how they had been socialized. Some people saw Adam and Eve as white, one person did not, and one person did not associate Adam and Eve with a specific color. However, 75% of the group did see Adam and Eve as white. In thinking about raising critical consciousness and creating space for mutual transformation, I'm wondering if asking this question and creating space for people to name/acknowledge when we see "whiteness," especially without even thinking about it, might helps us to recognize it and then wrestle with/begin to resist it. Perhaps by naming it, we can wrestle with it and then seek a more liberative way.

Our first session suggests that another way to recognize and wrestle with the ways in which we have been socialized into whiteness, with it being dominant and normative, but also often invisible, is through dialogue and sharing stories. The ideas we share through dialogue help to spark other ideas, to help us to learn from one another, and to have our assumptions challenged and thinking changed. Through this process of shared reflection and dialogue—both listening and sharing stories—we begin to experience (mutual) transformation and become a little more free of the dominant and sometimes unconscious ideas that many of us may have.

- **What is liberation/freedom? And how do we work together (co-labor) towards freedom? What is our responsibility to one another and how do we use the power we have?** One of the questions that was posed was, what is liberation or freedom? This is a hard question that defies simple answers. It's one that I hope we'll continue to engage and reflect on as a group over the next five weeks. Having people listen to Maya Angelou's "And Still I Rise" was a helpful teaching technique as it took freedom and liberation as a new and abstract concept to something that people could hear, feel, and reflect on. Here are some of people's responses to how they understand freedom. It will be interesting to see if and how these change over time:
 - "No matter how or what another person thinks of her [Angelou], how they interpret her action, she has hope for better days, for more acceptance, and she's not lowering that expectation, for anyone."
 - "The repetition in the poem is rising. What I hear is . . . when we're born, we come to life and we each have like this opportunity to take flight, to fly freely. I think about the animals, birds, [and] how they can go wherever they want to go. There are no boundaries, no borders that they have to

cross. They can go wherever. And humans, the difference in us, is how to get to that place of humanization, of giving each person the opportunity to be who they are and not be threatened by who they are? And the real freedom is, is like can you make room for each person?"

- "Now my interpretation of her, of Maya, is that 'they'—all those people out there in that audience—were thinking her freedom was in her mind, in herself, and her thoughts."
- "I think that's real freedom, when you don't care. You are in your body, you are in your mind, your body, or in your spirit and are who you choose and not really caring what other people think about that."

This conversation about freedom then turned to the question of, what is our responsibility to one another in terms of freedom and liberation? In response to this question, a few interesting ideas emerged through people's comments, including:

- (1) the idea that liberation is about making room for one another to be free (who we each were created to be).**
- (2) We each hold different positions and amounts of power. Those of us with more power in certain situations have a responsibility to use our power to make space for others;**
- (3) Rather than focusing solely on their own liberation, people shared stories of they and others used their power and privilege to make room for others, so they could experience greater freedom.** A few quotes from this part of the conversation:
 - "I don't remember who said it but somebody in this group started out by saying we make room for each person."
 - "If you're sort of part of the dominant, I guess you might say, or prevailing society, whether that's a just society or the beliefs or just or not, if we recognize that, that the prevailing society members maybe have a responsibility to, to open, to open the door and to recognize we're all equal and the dominant people aren't there for any valid reason"
 - "When you speak we speak of being there for others, I remember a wonderful example that I was taught a story about that I can tell now because the person it happened with is no longer living and she gave me permission one time to tell the story after she was gone. We had a choir director who was HIV-positive and gay. She is away from church on trip in Europe and she received a phone call because at that time, the news was out in the church. She received a phone call from, in Europe mind you, this is how crazy these people were, I think of them as just really meanly overreacting. Telling her that they need to have a personnel meeting right away because they had to make a decision what to do about this situation. She said, first of all I call the meetings. And second of all, we don't have a situation or a problem we have a wonderful choir director who will stay right where he is. And I mean she shut everyone—the ones who spoke up,

well not everyone on the committee but there weren't many people in that committee either. She just said, she was totally resistant. She was not going to let them or give them the space to speak against it again. And I can't tell you how proud I was of her when she told me that. Yes, she stood up for LGBTQ in Kansas City, in our church before others did.”

- “And I think that's what that's what needs to happen when you started about the dominant, oh no, that's what happened when XXX was talking about the dominant society, the dominant culture. It is up to that person to make way for those who are, in this case, let's call them less fortunate, less dominant. [Speaking of a debate on the floor of presbytery about LGBTQ ordination] I was like the voice in the wilderness. Somebody mentioned the scriptures and that they were written then by men and say what they wanted them to say. Of course, the example I gave was the passage that says women shouldn't talk in church. You know, and I said, try that one. [Group laughs.] So it's up to the one who has the power, I think and maybe later on, we'll talk about sharing power. It's up to the one who has it to share it.”

A few of the questions I hear rising from this group are, “What is liberation/freedom? And how do we work together (co-labor) towards freedom? What is our responsibility to one another and how do we use the power we have?” This suggests that the group is thinking not simply of freedom as about “me” but about freedom as about the “we.” In our next lesson, we'll talk about intersectionality, including how privilege/oppression (and our access to power), needs to be understood in terms of intersecting aspects of our identity and how it shifts based on the contexts in which we're in.

- **Teaching Methods/Engagement/Mutual Transformation.** The group noted that they felt the most engaged when engaging scripture, sharing stories, and dialoguing with one another and scripture. A few initial observations and reflections about engaging scripture, sharing stories and dialoguing with one another:
 - **Scripture and Stories, Scripture as Story**
 - One person reflected: “I felt most engaged when right after you read the passage in the Bible about the second creation and we started editing it. You know, when you said, what do you see in your mind? And you know, it was just like Claymation figures, you know it's somebody at work bench. I didn't pick out the colors of the clay, but I could feel the energy in the group [shift]. I mean people were like well, this is what I saw, and you know, just different versions of came out. To me, that that's really exciting to see the different interpretations of a very fundamental story, to see all of these different thoughts and I was pretty surprised even by myself.”
 - Another person reflected, “In our descriptions [of Eve], we were flipping script, we were no longer the oppressed, we were saying, you know, Eve was the one who was capable of this, of this

knowledge.” *It will be interesting to see how we can continue to flip the script and expand our readings from a framework of oppressed/oppressor to one of liberation—one that seeks liberation for all involved. I think womanist readings and interpretations will help us to grow to keep engaging this question of shared liberation.*

- In reviewing the transcript, I realized that I referred to the scripture passage as a story and that throughout the conversation we continued to talk about it as a story. I wonder how framing it as a story—part of our story—helped to create space for us to ask questions, to dialogue with it, and to bring our own stories and experiences. As in, if I were to have approached it as “this is the Word of God,” I don’t think the same space for conversation would have been created.
 - Multiple people named that the energy shifted in the group when we began to engage with scripture. They enjoyed interpreting the text, including reading against the grain, asking hard questions, and sharing the ideas that were raised for them. They were not afraid to read against the text, name and challenge oppressive readings, and use their own experience, reason, and commitments to engage scripture
 - Everyone seemed to understand that the bible was written in a different sociohistorical context and written and interpreted mostly by men. People mentioned that it is important to recognize the sociohistorical context, author’s biases, and interpreters’ biases when reading scripture
- **Stories As A Means of Learning & Engaging in Mutual Transformation**
- “When people share stories, whether it's interpreting the Bible passage or interpreting the poem, I think that's all very engaging.”
 - “Well, you know, I kind of like had went through a period in my life where I kind of like wanted to throw out the Bible. And then you know studying literature is made me want to understand this major piece of literature that really guides our behavior. And so, I want to be able to look at it because I feel like it's been tampered with, but I want to find those stories that are parallel to the stories today. I mean, I think the magic of it is that if you can look at it really closely and you can see how those stories are, you know, I guess, what you say they are sort of universal. And they're sort of timeless and if you can like sort of contextualize them in in the now, and like bring them, you know, breathe life into them to make applicable to the life that we are living now.”
 - Person 1: “Now stories and experiences, that is the way black people learn because at one time, while I can't speak for XXX, I'm speaking for a southern black person, but at one time, that was the way black people learned, from stories and things like that. So, I

think all of it [lectures, guided materials] is necessary to teach to reach everybody. Because if we run out of stories, then we're going to be out sitting around waiting for the clock to click, so we need to have something."

Person 2: We're not going to run out of stories. [Everyone laughs.]

- Kristin introduced Genesis 2 as a story, asking "Has anyone ever heard this story before?" (not "this is the Word of God")
- **Dialogue & Mutual Transformation**
 - One participant reflected, "I have enjoyed and have gotten new thoughts and ideas from what you guys have been talking about. This is amazing, things I have never considered before and I love that, when we can blow it such as minds with our own perspectives."
 - "Well, you know, I wanted to just sort of reiterate what XXX said about being engaged by listening . . . Just listening to each person, you know, pieces of what you [each] have to say, that just like opens up my mind. When someone says something, it triggers something in my mind, that's very engaging to me." (mutual transformation through dialogue)

Kristin's Self-Observation and Learnings

- I felt much more nervous than usual teaching. I think it was in part of trying to make sure all of the bases were covered for the research project. A lot of the literature I read talked about giving people space to understand what we're doing and how we're doing it but the explaining of things in the beginning was a little convoluted and long. It would have been better to do this at the end and trust that this group simply "got it" from the reading material.
- As the lesson went on, I began to relax more. I need to trust myself more and recognize that although this is a research project, I can trust myself and instinct and relax and have fun with it. I really have been so excited for this project and to get to work with this incredible group.
- One participant encouraged me to become more comfortable with silences, especially after asking hard questions. This was really helpful feedback. My learning goal for next lesson is to let there be a beat before I try to fill the silence that sometimes comes after a question.
- I'm learning more from this group than I'm teaching. The wisdom, ideas, and conversation has been really interesting and amazing.
- I adapted to the class. When I realized the class was dragging after the slow start, I dropped my lesson plan and decided to simply be more present and follow the questions and energy of the group. Rather than insisting we stick to what I had planned, I responded to the group and went with the questions and feedback from them and let their questions move the conversation forward. This wasn't perfect, and a little clunky at times, but it felt more authentic. I think this showed adaptability, humility, and a willingness to listen and respond to the energy, ideas, and needs of the group, rather than insisting on my own agenda. I think naming that I threw out the lesson plan I had agonized over for the past week was a way

of being vulnerable and also building trust—letting people know, hey, I’m learning here, too, and I’m learning with all of you.

- At the end of the lesson, I finally started to open up and be more vulnerable with the group, sharing this is a learning process for me, too. I haven’t done this before and am trying to figure it out and learn with everyone (versus being the “all-knowing” teacher” who has all the answers)
- I feel really grateful for this group. When I transcribed the class, I was blown away by the insightful reflections, powerful stories, laughter, and ideas that were shared. Wow.

Appendix 6: Pre-Class Assignments for Session 2 (February 1, 2021)

Hi wonderful women,

Happy Wednesday! I hope you're staying safe and warm. Thanks for meeting this past Monday. I really appreciated our conversation and the ideas you shared! This upcoming week, we'll explore how who we are as readers shapes how we read the Bible. We'll also start to learn more about womanism.

Week 2 Readings & Assignments

Attached are three readings/assignments. I would greatly appreciate it if you could please complete and email the "Lesson #2 - A Self Inventory" and "Womanist" assignments back to me Sunday.

- **Social Location & Intersectionality** - This document provides definitions for the terms "social location" and "intersectionality"
- **A Self-Inventory for Readers** - This is a tool for helping us reflect on who we are as readers and how our identities, lived experiences, and theological commitments inform how we read and interpret the Bible. This exercise (edited) is from "A Self-Inventory for Readers" in *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible*, p. xxix-xxxii.
- **Womanist** I The term "womanist" was coined by novelist and poet Alice Walker. This document shares Walker's definition of womanism.

Research Questions

A couple of folks asked about the purpose of the research project and what I need. Thanks for keeping this mind and your support of helping to make this project a success. Here are the primary research questions I'm hoping to address through this project; of course, these may evolve/change depending on the needs of our group:

- *What teaching methods and practices in bible studies help women in a predominantly white setting critically reflect on their social location, lived experiences, and theological commitments, including how these inform their reading of scripture?*
- *What teaching methods and practices in bible studies help to raise critical consciousness, facilitate mutual transformation, and encourage people to co-labor for freedom in their lives, communit(ies), and world?*
- *How might dialoguing with womanist voices and one another lead to more liberative ways of reading scripture?*

Feedback, Emerging Ideas & Validation

Over the next few days, I'll respond to the assignments you shared for our first gathering and by Sunday, I'll also share some of the learnings, ideas, and patterns I see emerging. My hope is we can talk through these on Monday, so I can see if these initial ideas are on track (recognizing they'll likely change and evolve).

Thanks again for being part of this group! I look forward to "seeing" you Monday!

Social Location

Social Location: “An individual’s social location is defined as the combination of factors including gender, race, social class, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic location. This makes social location particular to each individual; that is, social location is not always exactly the same for any two individuals.”

Source: <https://www.ncfr.org/ncfr-report/spring-2019/inclusion-and-diversity-social-location#:~:text=An%20individual's%20social%20location%20is,same%20for%20any%20two%20individuals>.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality: “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.” (Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality>)

“An intersectional analysis considers all the factors that apply to an individual in combination, rather than considering each factor in isolation . . . These intersecting and overlapping social identities may be both **empowering and oppressing**.”

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersectionality>

Intersectionality broadens the lens of the first and second waves of feminism, which largely focused on the experiences of women who were both white and middle-class, to include the different experiences of women of color, women who are poor, immigrant women, and other groups. Intersectional feminism aims to separate itself from white feminism by acknowledging women's different experiences and identities.”

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersectionality>

Intersectionality was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar.

- “Crenshaw often refers to the case *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* as an inspiration in writing, interviews, and lectures. In *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors*, Emma Degraffenreid and four other African-American women argued they were receiving compound discrimination excluding them from employment opportunities. They contended that although women were eligible for office and secretarial jobs, in practice such positions only were offered to white women, barring African-American women from seeking employment in the company. The courts weighed the allegations of race and gender discrimination separately, finding that the employment of African-American male factory workers disproved racial discrimination, and the employment of white female office workers disproved gender discrimination. The court declined to consider compound discrimination, and dismissed the case.”

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kimberl%C3%A9_Williams_Crenshaw

Womanist

The term “womanist” was coined by novelist and poet Alice Walker. Read Walker’s poetic definition a few times, circling or highlighting any words, images, or phrases that stand out to you. These could be things that resonate with you, that you don’t understand/want to know more about, or that make you say, hmmm, I’ll have to think about that more. Then, take a minute to respond to the questions on the next page and send these back to Kristin by Sunday, January 31st. Don’t worry about writing a lot – bullet points work!

Womanist

<https://studentaffairs.duke.edu/wc/resource-collection/womanist>

Reflection Questions

1. What is a womanist?
2. What are some of the characteristics of a womanist?
3. What are some of womanists’ commitments?
4. What is the relationship between womanism and feminism?
5. What characteristics and commitments do you share with womanists? What differences do you hold?

**Appendix 7:
Session 2 - Lesson Plan (February 1, 2021)**

Primary Objectives

- To learn about “social location” and “intersectionality”
- To critically reflect on our social locations and theological commitments as interpreters
- To reflect on issues of power, agency, and liberation in Exodus 1:8-21

Opening Activities

Welcome

- Welcome people as they arrive on Zoom

Centering Practice & Opening Prayer

- Lead group in gentle stretching and centering practice
- Open with prayer

Review Learning Community Covenant

- Key points to touch on:
 - Respect for one another with human beings, fellow children of God, each of us on our own journey, we’re journeying together
 - Trust (old friends)
 - Making space for one another’s voices and stories to be heard (step forward, step back)
 - Speak from our own experiences – use “I” statements
 - When the going gets tough, turn to wonder (I wonder why they thought, said, felt that, etc.)
 - Sharing is by invitation, not demand
 - Confidentiality

Review Emerging Themes

- Discuss emerging themes, questions, and reflections from last session
- Are there other things we want to add, clarify, discuss, or reflect on?
- How can these inform our learning together today?

Initial Roadmap for Today

- Share overview of lesson plan to receive feedback and make changes before we begin:
 - Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I A Woman” speech – video and dialogue
 - Social Location & Intersectionality – short lecture and discussion
 - Telling Our Stories—storytelling and dialogue
 - Story of Shiphrah and Puaah (Exodus 1:8-21)—interpreting scripture, reflection, and dialogue
 - “Everybody Deserves to Be Free” by the Resistance Revival Chorus—reflection

- Group debrief:
 - Observations, Reflections, Plan for Next Time
- Mutual Blessing

Observation Reminder

- Remind people to observe their levels of engagement throughout lesson, what they notice about the group’s energy and engagement, when they feel most/least heard, emerging questions, etc.

Learning Segments

Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I A Woman” Speech

- Set up video and speech by sharing briefly about Sojourner Truth:
 - Born into slavery in 1797
 - Named Isabella Baumfree; later changed her name to Sojourner Truth
 - Advocate for human rights (women’s, Black American’s, poor people’s rights)
 - Escaped slavery in 1827 after her master did not honor the New York Anti-Slavery Law of 1827 and free her
 - As she later reflected, “I did not run away, I walked away by daylight....”
 - Became an itinerant preacher
 - In 1843 changed her name to Sojourner Truth. (she named herself—agency, freedom, liberation)
 - Became involved in the antislavery movement and woman’s rights movement
 - Interconnections between struggles for freedom
 - She continued to speak out for the rights of Black Americans and women during and after the Civil War.
 - “Ain’t I A Woman” speech delivered at the 1851 Women’s Rights Convention held in Akron, Ohio
- Share reflection questions for people to ponder as they watch video:
 - *What is Truth challenging in this speech?*
 - *What does she believe about herself, women, Black people, God, freedom? What are her theological commitments?*
 - *How is Truth’s interpretation of scripture redemptive or liberative?*
 - *How does Truth engage race, gender, and class? Can these factors be singled out from one another? Why or why not?*
 - *Why does Truth ask the question, “Ain’t I A Woman?” Why is her womanhood called into question? And is she asking this as a question or is she making a statement?*
- Video: “Alice Walker Reads Sojourner Truth” (“Ain’t I A Woman” speech)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsjdLL3MrKk>

- Discussion:
 - Discuss reactions and reflections to speech using questions above as a starting point

Race, Gender, Social Location, Intersectionality PPT

- Reflection & Storytelling:
 - As a way of transitioning to talk about race, social location, gender, and intersectionality, invite people to share when they first became aware of their race, gender, class, sexual orientation, including which things they became first aware of.
 - Share story from my personal life as a way to get ball rolling. Then ask,
 - *When is the first time you became aware of race? Gender? Class? Sexual orientation?*
 - *Which of these did you become aware of first? Last? And why do you think this was?*
- Share brief lecture on “race” and “gender” as social constructs
 - Racism and sexism – real effects on people’s lives, even though based on social constructed concepts of race and gender
- Define “social location”
- Define “intersectionality”
 - Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar, in 1989
 - However, critical reflection on the intersections of race, gender, and class in Black women’s lives pre-dates this – remember, Sojourner Truth?!
 - Intersectionality important in womanist and Black feminist thought
- Discussion:
 - *Why do you think intersectionality is important to understanding ourselves and others, especially as it relates to co-laboring for mutual freedom?*
 - *What does social location and intersectionality have to do with the Bible and biblical interpretation?*

Telling Our Stories

- Invite people to spend 5-6 minutes reflecting on these questions, utilizing their pre-class assignment as a starting point for crafting their own story to share with the group. After time for personal reflection and preparation, each person spend 3-4 minutes sharing a personal narrative about who they are and how they read the Bible.
- Reflection prompts:
 - *Describe your social location. What aspects of your identity do you think are most important/influential, and why?*
 - *What is your own “working” approach to the Bible—how do you honestly think about it? How has this changed over time?*
 - *What themes or images in the Bible been important for your spiritual awareness?*
 - *What are your theological commitments? What do you believe about God, humanity, creation? The relationships between God, humanity, creation, etc.?*

- *What else do you want this group to know?*
- Telling Our Stories:
 - Kristin shares first to model vulnerability
 - Mutual invitation: Use mutual invitation to invite one another to share
 - After each person shares, group engages in ASL applause as a means of affirming them. Then, the person who shared before them offers a word of affirmation or appreciation
 - Then, they invite another group member to share
- After everyone has shared, facilitate discussion using these questions as a starting point:
 - *What did you learn about yourself?*
 - *What did you hear in one another's stories?*
 - *Where were there differences?*
 - *Where were there shared commitments?*

Story of Shiphrah and Puah (Exodus 1:8-21)

- Provide brief context/background for story, so co-learners can locate this passage within the larger narrative
- Read Exodus 1:8-21
- Facilitate discussion using these questions as a starting point:
 - *How did you imagine the characters in your mind's eye? What did they look?*
 - Remind people that this story takes place in Egypt (Africa)
 - *Who are the characters in this text? What are the power dynamics between them?*
 - *How would you characterize Shiphrah and Puah? How would you characterize their actions?*
 - *How do Shiphrah and Puah use their agency to co-labor for freedom?*
 - *Is it ever ok to break the law? Why or why not?*
 - *Who do you identify with in this story, and why?*
 - *What does this story suggest to you about justice or liberation?*

Closing Activities

“Everybody Deserves to Be Free”

- Share about the Resistance Revival Chorus:
 - “The Resistance Revival Chorus (RRC) is a collective of more than 60 women, and non-binary singers, who join together to breathe joy and song into the resistance, and to uplift and center women's voices.” (Source: <https://www.resistancerevivalchorus.com>)
- Listen: “Everybody Deserves to Be Free” by Resistance Revival Chorus
<https://insighttimer.com/beautifulchorus/guided-meditations/spirits-calling>
- Reflect: Invite co-learners to share a word or phrase from the song that stood out to them and why

Group Debrief

- Share observations and reflections, using these guiding questions as a starting point:
 - *When did you feel most engaged, and why?*
 - *What questions are coming up for you?*
 - *What patterns or themes do you see emerging?*
 - *What do we want to keep doing?*
 - *What do we want to stop or change?*
 - *Where do we go from here?*
- Share key take-aways, learnings, and lingering questions
- Plan for the next session (topics, guiding questions, pedagogical practices, utilizing observations and reflections)

Mutual Blessing

- Share gratitude for one another's presence and engage in a mutual blessing

Appendix 8:
Session 2 - Teaching Journal (Class: February 1, 2021)

Entry Date: Feb. 4, 2021

I was hoping to write this sooner but alas, life and ministry. It's been a crazy busy week with this project (including preparing for next week) and juggling other ministry responsibilities. I'm feeling a little overwhelmed and worried that I'm not going to be able to do this all. But, here I am doing it anyway—making it work. It's not about perfection. It's about the process. There is value in the process itself. So let's turn to that process.

On Monday, we had our second gathering. All last week I had been thinking about this gathering with excitement. I felt like I had learned a lot in the first session. Although the teaching last time felt rough, when I transcribed the session, I was amazed at the themes and ideas that were emerging from within the group, which was encouraging.

For Monday's class session, I put on background music before class began to help set a mood. Around 10 a.m., I turned off the music and as people logged on, the conversation turned to Covid vaccinations. A number of people in the group had scheduled or received their first vaccine. However, X, one of the black people in the group had not even though she was 80 and had registered in early January. This brought the racial disparities of life, healthcare, and access to resources into sharp focus. The group talked about these disparities. One of the members shared a phone number and name of a contact at a local hospital and encouraged her to call to schedule an appointment. At the end of the discussion, X signed off on the call. When she signed back on a few minutes later, she shared that she an appointment scheduled for mid-February. Thank goodness.

At the beginning of class, I skipped the ice breaker as the Covid conversation had given us a good chance to "warm up." I shared my observations and reflections from our last class and asked for feedback—everyone said all looked good.

One of the things I did this time was intentionally bring the excitement I was feeling to the classroom, including letting folks know how excited I was to see them. I think that made a big difference—to let folks know how much I valued their presence and our community and work together.

I forgot to ask people to observe how they were feeling during the lesson and need to remember to do that next time.

I began the lesson by sharing about Sojourner Truth and then we watched Alice Walker read Truth's "Ain't I A Woman" speech. This was a great way to delve into a discussion about race, gender, and class and freedom. The group seemed really engaged and the energy was good.

I was originally planning on giving a brief overview/definitions of race, intersectionality, and social location, then having people do a creative exercise of exploring/sharing their social location, theological commitments, etc. and then having us delve into the story of Shiphrah and Puah, but after the discussion of how Truth engaged scripture in a liberative way, it felt like the best thing to do next was for us to engage scripture as a group. I ended up having us move directly to engaging the story of Shiphrah and Puah, which led to a really rich discussion that took us to the end of our time.

A few notes about our engagement with scripture:

- I shared the scripture passage via a PPT and had diverse images of the biblical text and characters
- When I asked people what the people looked like in their mind's eye, only one person said they saw the enslaved Hebrews primarily as black people and the Egyptians/Pharaoh as white. Everyone else noted that these people were probably darker skinned or brown. I wonder if this is what people saw first in their mind's eye or if they were responding again, with what they thought they were supposed to say or what they saw after their mind had time to catch up and self-correct. For me, part of the naming of seeing whiteness, if people are seeing that, helps to name it so it can then be deconstructed. If we're not naming it, we're not addressing how deeply embedded it is.
- A question I want to ask the group in future discussions of scripture is, "who do you identify with in this story and why?"
- Another question I want to ask next time is, "What does this mean for you, your life today?" Also, "how does this passage encourage you to think or live differently in the world?" Also, "how does this passage challenge you?"

A few other notes about teaching:

- At the beginning of class, I invite people to roll their shoulders and get comfortable and show up in their bodies – it was fun to see people stretch, move and really see them be more embodied
 - I wonder if at the end of lesson, I can do something to have people check in about how they are feeling in their bodies
 - I struggle with having people respond to too many questions. I've found people can really only handle one or maybe two questions
- One of the things the group wanted to do was make sure there was space for everyone to speak. This past class there was some talking over one another, which I took as people feeling engaged and wanting to add to the conversation. However, I also want to create space for everyone to be able to both speak and be heard.
- CG made a comment about Truth's God being the same God as the white men's God whom she was speaking against and I went on a bit of a long explanation that contradicted what she shared. Next time, rather than disagreeing, I think a better teaching method would be to ask a question, rather than making a definitive statement. Questions open space for dialogue, co-learning, and mutual transformation. Monologues are often a means of domination/dominating the conversation.

- Starting with a contemporary text (“Ain’t I A Woman” speech) and pairing this with scripture worked really well. It created the opportunity for people to read these texts together and draw connects between these texts and their own lives/communities and I think created space for different questions to be asked.

Thinking about next class:

- I can’t believe that next week is our half-way point in the class. I’ve done a good job of responding to the class and trying not to hold my lesson plans too tightly but I am feeling a little worried about not getting through enough “material.”
- In thinking about next time, I want to have us share about who we are as biblical interpreters, talk about womanism and womanist biblical interpretation, but I don’t know if we’ll have enough time to do this AND engage scripture.
- I think it’s best to be honest with the group and share that the hope is that this upcoming class can be a shift to focusing on womanist biblical interpretation for the second half of the class (but noting that we’ve been engaging womanist voices already) and that this lesson will be a bit of a bridge-lesson.
- Outline for next time:
 - Welcome (5 minutes)
 - Showing up in our bodies—stretching
 - Observation reminder
 - Lesson Outline
 - Share this is a bridge lesson
 - PAR reflections (5 minutes)
 - Sharing Our Stories: Who We Are as Readers (40)
 - I need to continue to affirm and thank folks and say this is a lot and hard work and you’re doing it, and I want to name and acknowledge that.
 - We do not read scripture neutrally or objectively
 - Have specific theological commitments
 - Ways our interpretation is shaped, often without us even knowing it
 - Same scripture, different interpretations of what the text mean and who God is (freedom v. law and order)
 - Mutual invitation
 - 3 minutes per person
 - Affirmation of what person shared and ritual?
 - Debrief what we heard in one another’s stories
 - Key Concepts (10 minutes)
 - Social Location
 - Race, gender = social constructs
 - Intersectionality
 - “Womanist” definition (20 minutes) – or do I make this open to all three articles?
 - Emphasis on flourishing, not simply survival
 - Concern for the whole community

- What does it mean that womanism is to feminism as lavender is to purple?
 - Womanist biblical interpretation (10 minutes)
 - Key Concepts
 - Discussion: Invite people to share key ideas/quotes from articles
 - Reflection Exercise
 - Debrief
- Moving forward, I think I need to realize that we probably can't engage more than two main texts at a time, as in one article/video and scripture. Maybe a little more, but it would be a stretch

Other reflections:

- I felt more confident this time and was more comfortable with silence after asking a question
- I need to continue to affirm and thank folks and say this is a lot and hard work and you're doing it, and I want to name and acknowledge that.

Appendix 9: **Session 2: Emerging Themes, Ideas, Reflections from Class Transcript**

Our second gathering began with a discussion about Covid vaccinations and an awareness of the racial disparities in regard to who was getting vaccinated. When one member, who is Black, mentioned that she had been unable to get a vaccine, the group expressed concern. One member shared a phone number through which she was able to schedule an appointment and encouraged the other woman to call the number. She did and was able to schedule an appointment for mid-February. The group discussed how there is a nationwide racial disparity in terms of who is getting vaccinated with white people getting vaccinated faster than Black communities.

Embodiment Practices

One of womanism's commitments is to embodiment and showing up in body, mind, and spirit, rather than having what bell hooks calls a "mind-body split" in the classroom. This week, rather than a guided breathing meditation, I had the group stretch and show up in their bodies by rolling their shoulders, necks, etc. I then led a prayer with our hands. It was fun to see people stretch and literally "loosen up" as we began class. This exercise felt like it was a better fit than last week's breathing meditation as rather than helping people to be calm and then quickly switching to a lecture or discussion, this exercise helped people to be present, but keep the energy higher. I think that closing a song at the end (although there were technical issues with the song, which I will also address for next time) is also an important embodiment practice as it creates space to "feel" freedom, liberation, and not simply think about it cognitively. It offers people a chance to engage different ways of knowing and feeling and I believe, offers a space for reflection and hope.

Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I A Woman" Speech

I began class by sharing a short bio of Sojourner Truth and her picture. I believe that part of the work of liberation is done by hearing one another's stories and that in predominantly white settings, we are often un(der)familiar with the stories, writings, and work of women of color. In this class, I am intentionally including short bios and pictures of the women we read and engage to help offer some context about who they are. I think seeing people's pictures helps to make them more "real." I am also trying to use as many primary sources of womanists as possible, amplifying their voices and having people read/hear what they said, rather than me speaking about or on behalf of womanists or black feminists. My goal is to create space for women in the bible study to dialogue with these voices, one another, scripture, and themselves and in the process, and experience mutual transformation—whether that be of thinking a little differently, learning something new about themselves, scripture, other women, or exploring or deepening their ideas about and commitment to co-laboring for freedom.

A number of people mentioned that showing the "Ain't I A Woman" clip was an effective teaching tool as it was engaging and "chock full" of ideas. I think it also helped the group to engage and read the Exodus scripture passage differently than if we had not had the clip.

A few themes that emerged from the discussion of Truth’s speech, which although the group may not have realized it, are themes that are also central to womanism:

- **Claiming one’s personhood and seeing oneself as a beloved child of God, no matter what the world says**
 A number of people picked up on how Truth claims her personhood and sees herself as a beloved child of God, no matter how the world sees her. This is an act of agency and resistance in a racist, sexist, and classist world which constantly tries to deny the humanity and belovedness of women and especially, women of color. Liberation can be understood as becoming “more fully human;” Truth claims her humanness and belovedness and uses her voice and agency to create space for others to be liberated.
- **Challenging the contradictions and oppressive systems of the world, seeing these as interdependent (intersectionality)**
 Although we didn’t have time to talk explicitly about intersectionality (how overlapping systems such as racism, sexism, classism are interdependent and can lead to cumulative disadvantage), the group picked up on how racism, sexism, and classism were interdependent and led to cumulative disadvantage in Truth’s life. The group also noted that she challenged sexism, racism, and classism, not simply one of these.
- **The power of stories/storytelling**
 In the last session, the group named the power of storytelling. This theme of the power of telling stories as a means of community building and transformation was emphasized again. Storytelling also serves as a means of resisting dehumanization and working to change (transform) people’s hearts. The group noted how Truth’s sharing of her own life experiences, especially having her 13 children taken away from her, served to help others see her humanity and the inhumanity of slavery.
- **Racism among both white men and women; how black woman’s “womanhood” has often been called into question/denied**
 The group engaged issues of race and gender, noting that Truth’s statement of “Ain’t I A Woman” spoke to the ways in which Black women’s womanhood has often been denied. The group also noted that Truth indicts not only white patriarchy but also calls out—and calls in—white women:

 - *Person 1: What was kind of interesting to me is that she was pointing out a disparity between black and white but she never used the language of black and white.*
 - Person 2: Right.*
 - Person 1: Exactly, she just talked about, you know, what the difference was, a different treatment.*
 - Person 3: And we knew.*
 - Person 1: Right.*
 - Person 3: And we knew exactly what she was talking about.*
 - Person 2: Yeah, exactly.*

I wonder if people were thinking about these differences and forms of discrimination as only as “back then” or if people were referring to also today...

- **The Collective Power of Women**

Truth calls out the contradictions and intersectional nature of oppression in her speech, but she also calls in people and calls for women—Black and white—to come together to work for their mutual liberation and freedom. The group noted that she focuses on freedom and power, not simply as an individualistic pursuit or for one group of women, but for all women—she focuses on what they can achieve when they work together for freedom. I think her speech also helped to plant seeds in the group of what our collective power is as women. How can we work together—co-labor with one another for our shared liberation.

- **Same Scripture, Same God? Liberative Re-Readings of Scripture**

One of the big points of discussion was around how Truth read scripture and if she was worshipping the same God as white people. What the group was picking up on is that you can have the same scripture but come away from it with very different interpretations depending on what your/your community’s identity, theological commitments, and lived experience are. Truth challenges oppressive readings of scripture that try to dehumanize and diminish women. She uses her intellect, cunning, and creativity to re-read passages that were oppressive in liberative and redemptive ways (i.e. when someone says women can’t have the same rights as men, she asks where did your Christ come from?!). I think that having the group engage Truth and her liberative re-reading of the Bible helped to open the door for people to think about how we can re-read the Bible in liberative ways. Womanists have a strong commitment to reading scripture passages from the “margins,” re-reading scripture passages and rather than accepting what they’re “told” a passage says, reading it for themselves and their communities, and insisting on readings that do not lead to further oppression or dehumanization but rather, prioritize justice, freedom, and flourishing, especially for those who are most oppressed. I think this exercise and discussion helped the group to begin wanting to explore how we can do this work of re-reading the Bible in liberative ways, which they named at the end of the class. Engaging Truth’s liberative interpretation of scripture also helped people in the group to reflect on how they had been socialized (i.e. raised critical consciousness).

- **Different Epistemologies**

Womanists draw on different epistemologies (ways of knowing). Rather than focusing *only* on “book knowledge,” “logic,” or what (white heteropatriarchal) society names as legitimate sources of knowledge, womanists recognize and legitimize many different ways of knowing (i.e. intuition, emotion, songs, poetry, relational knowledge, body knowledge). The group picked up on this idea of different epistemologies (ways of knowing) as a means of resistance and liberation.

- *“I think that Sojourner Truth was coming from a place of her intuition, sort of seeing the truth in between the lines or the lies, what’s been absent. Because I think in a lot of circumstances, particularly with what we have is scripture*

now, we really have to read it and then try to feel for what the truth is.”

- **Resistance and Courage**

Resistance and courage were ideas that was mentioned in regard to Truth and women in general during the discussion of Truth’s speech and later on in regard to the Hebrew midwives.

Adjusting Lesson Plan

Originally, I was going to cover the definitions of race, social location, and intersectionality and then invite people to do a reflection exercise about their own identity, lived experiences, and theological commitments and how these inform their reading of scripture and then share these with one another. However, my gut told me to move directly into having the group engage scripture, especially after we had just been able to learn from/engage with Truth’s “text” and her liberative re-reading of scripture. I think this was a good move as it helped people to draw connections between Truth’s speech, work for freedom/women’s (all women’s rights) and liberative re-reading of scripture and helped people to start thinking about, ok, how might we do this too, in our own way.

Exodus 1:8-21: Re-Reading Scripture in Liberative Ways

Some reflections, emerging themes, and ideas from the discussion of Exodus 1:8-21 (many of these themes and ideas relate to those named above):

- **How Whiteness Shapes Our Imagination: Imagining Characters in One’s Mind’s Eye**

I shared the Exodus scripture passage via PowerPoint and included diverse images. However, I still asked people to imagine the characters in their mind’s eye. Some people saw the characters as white and some noted that they saw them as Brown or Black. Part of this exercise is for people to be aware of what they initially see in their mind, so we can name/acknowledge/reflect on that. *I’m wondering if people really saw different skin tones originally in their imaginations (first reaction) or if it was more of, this is what I know I’m supposed to see. I also wonder if people did see images of brown and darker skinned people, if that was due, in part to having a diversity of images shown. My hunch is that whiteness is still shaping our imaginations but that we’re wanting to know better and thus respond with what is the “right” answer. I need to follow up with the group about this to hear more about their reflections.*

- **Cleverness & Courage of Women**

The group interpreted the midwives’ actions as clever and them as engaging in acts of courageous resistance that sought to break unjust laws and create space for other people to survive and free. This cleverness and resistance were connected to both women’s faith and their collective strength, which I think it is an interesting idea as this group thinks about how we can co-labor for freedom. The group may not have realized it, but their reading was a liberative one. They read this scripture through the lens of their own experiences as women, they read these characters as claiming

agency and resisting oppression. In some cases, there was some hesitancy however, as to whether the women “knew what they were doing,” which I think is important for us to talk more about as we explore other passages.

- Kristin’s observation: when the group was talking about cleverness of women, there was a lot of laughter and joking around, which I think says something—it’s a way of knowing and affirming this. I wonder if this was also a recognition that although things are hard, when we can be clever, there is a joy in the struggle for freedom.

- **Willingness to Engage Difference & Power Dynamics in the Text, Engaging and Honoring Different Epistemologies**

The group was able to re-read this text in a liberative way and in a way that caused them to reflect on their own work for liberation, but they did not do so in a way that did not ignore the ethnic, gender, or class differences between characters. I think explicitly asking about the power dynamics in the text was a helpful question as was asking people to reflect on v. 19, in which the Hebrew midwives draw a distinction between the Hebrew women and Egyptian women. I think that this may have also helped people, perhaps subconsciously, think about some of the differences and power dynamics that Truth calls out in her speech.

The group also recognized that the Hebrew midwives had a special knowledge (epistemology) that the Pharaoh did not—they knew about childbirth and specifically, labor in the Hebrew community. This was a special knowledge—and way of knowing—that the Pharaoh did not have and they used this to “trick” him in order to protect their community and help them survive. This was a really important and liberative move—the group did not discount, diminish or ignore this knowledge or different way of knowing but saw it as legitimate, important, and an asset that could be used to help protect and care for their community. *I wonder how their own forms of special knowing or knowledge—what are their ways of knowing/wisdom?*

- *“I was thinking about your question earlier about the power dynamics. These Hebrew women have knowledge, and it could be an example where knowledge is power and so I think they’re using their wisdom. And now they can maybe have a little leverage over this person in power because he believes them, he doesn’t know anything about childbirth possibly.”*
- *“Back to XXX’s question about the tone of the midwives. I hear them saying, I mean the tone is like, what’s wrong with you? You’re stupid. You know these women are really strong; they don’t need midwives to get give birth, so we can’t do anything about that!”*
- *“They used their wisdom, their skill, and their knowledge on the on the Pharaoh because he doesn’t know anything about childbirth. He couldn’t compare an Egyptian and an Israelite and know anything about it.”*

**Appendix 10:
Pre-Class Assignments for Session 3 (February 8, 2021)**

Hi friends,

I hope you're enjoying the beautiful weather! Enclosed are a couple of things to work on before our gathering on February 8th. I've shared this same information via email, but as someone who prefers to have hard copies, especially of reading materials, I wanted to pass these items along to you. Here's what's enclosed:

(1) "Womanist" by Alice Walker

This is the same reading as last week but as a hard copy. No need to answer any questions, but you may find it helpful to read over it one more time before Monday.

(2) Telling Our Stories: Reflecting on Ourselves as Interpreters

At the beginning of gathering, we'll spend time sharing stories and reflecting on our identities, commitments, and working approach to the Bible. We'll use mutual invitation and each have 3-4 minutes to share with the group. Attached is a handout with few reflection questions to help get you started. **By Sunday, please email me a picture of your reflection, so I can share it on the screen with the group while you talk.** And remember, stick figures and other symbols work—there's no judgment in terms of artistic ability! Feel free to get extra creative with collage or even printed images if you want to go all out.

(3) "Introduction" from *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation* by Dr. Mitzi J. Smith (6 pages)

One of the things I heard from the group was a desire to delve deeper into exploring how we can read the Bible in liberative or redemptive ways. This is great, as this is a big part of what womanist biblical interpretation does! This piece will introduce you to some of the key commitments and theological commitments of Dr. Mitzi J. Smith, a womanist biblical scholar. **By Sunday, please pick two quotes or ideas that stand out to from this article and email them to me with a few sentences (or bullet points) about why you choose this quote/idea and how it resonates with or challenges you. Feel free to type your responses directly into the body of an email.**

(4) "Marginalized People, Liberating Perspectives: A Womanist Approach to Biblical interpretation" by Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas (7 pages)

This article is a little denser and more academic in nature but Brown Douglas does a great job of introducing womanist biblical interpretation and the notion that being on the margins does mean that one is powerless, but rather, is often where God is most often found. **By Sunday, please pick two quotes or ideas that stand out to from this article and email them to me with a few sentences (or bullet points) about why you choose this quote/idea and how it resonates with**

or challenges you. Feel free to type your responses directly into the body of an email.

Thanks for being part of this group, and I look forward to seeing you Monday!

Telling Our Stories: Reflecting on Ourselves as Interpreters

This exercise builds on the Self-Inventory you worked on last week and is a way to reflect on your social location, theological commitments, and the ways in which you approach scripture (you may want to re-read what you wrote). *This exercise is by invitation, not demand, and you are welcome to share as much or as little as you feel comfortable with about your social location, theological commitments, etc.* On Monday, we'll have a chance to share our visual reflections, stories, reflections, and journeys with one another.

Here are a few questions to get you started. Please respond to these in whatever way feels best for you:

- (1) Describe your social location. What aspects of your identity of your identity to you think are most important/influential in your life and why? In your interpretation of scripture?
- (2) What themes or images in the Bible have been important for your spiritual awareness?
- (3) What are your theological commitments? What do you believe about God, humanity, creation? The relationships between God, humanity, creation, etc.?
- (4) What else would you like the group to know about you?

On the back of this page is a sample I did (this is a little different than what I shared on Monday); however, there are lots of ways to approach these questions – do whatever works best for you!

A few notes:

- *Social location can include, but is not limited to one's race, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, age, ableness/ability, education-level, citizenship status, employment status.*
- *To think about your theological commitments, ask yourself: What do you absolutely believe is true about God and God's character, relationships, or actions in the world? What do you absolutely believe is true about humanity and humanity's character, relationships, or actions in the world/in relation to each other and God? For example, I believe that all people are made equally in the image of God and equally loved by God. That means that if I read a scripture passage that dehumanizes women, LGBTQ folks, and immigrants, I call that passage into question and read against it as the God I believe in does not dehumanize, other, or exclude humans who themselves bear God's image.*

Appendix 11:
Session 3 - Lesson Plan (February 8, 2021)

Primary Objectives

- To learn about “social location” and “intersectionality”
- To critically reflect on our social locations and theological commitments as interpreter
- To learn about the differences between feminism, Black feminism, and womanism
- To learn about womanist biblical interpretation’s key characteristics and commitments

Opening Activities

Welcome

- Welcome people as they arrive on Zoom

Centering Practice & Opening Prayer

- Lead group in gentle stretching and centering practice
- Open with prayer

Review Emerging Themes

- Discuss emerging themes, questions, and reflections from last session
- *Are there other things we want to add, clarify, discuss, or reflect on?*
- *How can these inform our learning together today?*

Initial Roadmap for Today

- Share overview of lesson plan to receive feedback and make changes before we begin:
 - Telling Our Stories—storytelling and dialogue
 - Social Location & Intersectionality – short lecture and discussion
 - “What Is: Womanism,” video by Kat Blaque – discussion about differences between feminism, womanism, and Black feminism
 - “Womanist” by Alice Walker – dialogue with Walker and one another
 - Womanist Biblical Interpretation: Smith’s and Brown Douglas’ articles – dialogue and reflection
 - Reflect on quote about liberation by Indigenous activist Lilla Watson
 - “We Labor onto Glory” by The Porter’s Gate – reflection
 - Group debrief:
 - Share key take-aways and emerging questions
 - Observations, Reflections, Plan for Next Time
 - Mutual Blessing

Observation Reminder

- Remind people to observe their levels of engagement throughout lesson, what they notice about the group’s energy and engagement, when they feel most/least heard, emerging questions, etc.

Learning Segments

Telling Our Stories

- Invite people to share the picture they created to illustrate who they are and how their social location, lived experiences, and theological commitments inform how they read the Bible
 - Kristin shares first to model vulnerability
 - After each person shares, group engages in ASL applause as a means of affirming them. Then, the person who shared before them offers a word of affirmation or appreciation
 - Then, they invite another group member to share
- After everyone has shared, facilitate discussion using these questions as a starting point:
 - *What did you learn about yourself?*
 - *What did you hear in one another’s stories? Similarities? Differences?*
 - *Are there other factors that inform how you read the Bible that haven’t been discussed here?*

Race, Gender, Social Location, Intersectionality

- Share brief lecture on “race” and “gender” as social constructs
 - Racism and sexism – real effects on people’s lives, even though based on social constructed concepts of race and gender
- Define “social location”
- Define “intersectionality”
 - Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar, in 1989
 - However, critical reflection on the intersections of race, gender, and class in Black women’s lives pre-dates this – remember, Sojourner Truth?!
 - Intersectionality important in womanist and Black feminist thought
- Discussion:
 - *Why do you think intersectionality is important to understanding ourselves and others, especially as it relates to co-laboring for mutual freedom?*
 - *What does social location and intersectionality have to do with the Bible and biblical interpretation?*

Womanism

- Feminism and womanism
 - Provide brief history of various waves of feminist movement
 - Note that feminism has become more intersectional, particularly as it has evolved and diversified as a movement.
 - Note that the intellectual tradition and cultural heritage of Black women predates the term womanist (ex.: Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman)

- Read “Womanist” by Alice Walker
 - Dialogue with Walker and one another, using these questions as a starting point:
 - *What words, images, or phrases stand out to you in Walker’s definition, and why?*
 - *Why do you think she writes that womanists are “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female”?*
 - *Walker writes that a womanist is “traditionally a universalist.” What do you think this means?*
 - *Walker writes, “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.” What is the relationship between womanism and feminism?*
 - Note: womanism is a political movement that centers and privileges Black women and their communities in the struggle for liberation from oppression; utilizes intersectional lens; concerned about interlocking systems of oppression
 - *What characteristics and commitments do you share with womanists? What differences do you hold?*

“What Is: Womanism” Video by Kat Blaque

- Watch “What Is: Womanist” video by Kat Blaque
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWgOpOkSCOI>
- Discuss:
 - *What are the similarities between womanism, Black feminism, and feminism? What are the differences?*
 - *Some Black women identify as feminists (ex. bell hooks) while others identify as Black feminists (ex. Patricia Hill Collins) or womanists (ex. Mitzi Smith). Why is it important for people to be able to name themselves?*

Womanist Biblical Interpretation

- Discuss “Introduction” from *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation*” by womanist biblical scholar Mitzi J. Smith, using these questions as a starting point:
 - *Smith writes, “Biblical interpretation is a political act and can be an act of social justice or injustice.” Do you agree or disagree that it is a political act? And that it can be an act of justice or injustice? Why or why not?*
 - *What do you think she means when she writes: “Like the Scriptures, black, brown, and yellow bodies and their communities are sacred (con)texts.”*
 - *What are some of the key characteristics of womanist biblical interpretation?*
 - *What are some of the key commitments?*
 - *What key quotes or ideas stood out to you?*
 - *What questions did this article raise for you?*

- Discuss “Marginalized People, Liberating Perspectives: A Womanist Approach to Biblical interpretation” by womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas, using these questions as a starting point:
 - *What are some of the key characteristics of womanist biblical interpretation that Brown Douglas identifies in her article? What are some of the key commitments?*
 - *Brown Douglas writes that “existing on the margins of society and church provides people with a special epistemological advantage.” What does this mean?*
 - *Brown Douglas writes, “The ‘least of these,’ those less encumbered by the corruptions and temptations of privilege and domination, are better able to see the radicality of God’s vision for God’s people.” Do you agree or disagree with her statement? Why?*
 - *How can we learn from those who are “marginalized” in the Bible and society?*
 - *How can we read the Bible in more liberative ways?*
- Womanist Biblical Interpretation: Reading the Bible in Liberative Ways
 - Lecture: Brown Douglas suggests that womanist biblical interpretation involves reading in liberative ways. She names the following practices:
 - Name our points of privilege
 - Check our interpretations and understanding of God as liberator with those who are most oppressed – if not liberating for them, we need to reevaluate our claims
 - Utilize a “hermeneutic of suspicion”
 - Discussion:
 - *How might these practices be helpful as we seek to read the Bible in liberative ways?*
 - *How might we engage in each of these practices, individually and collectively?*

Closing Activities

Lilla Watson quote

- Share Lilla Watson quote: “If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound is with mine, then let us work together.”
 - Invite co-learners to reflect silently on this quote as we listen to our closing song about freedom
- Listen: “The Porter's Gate - We Labor Unto Glory (feat. Liz Vice, Josh Garrels, & Madison Cunningham)” by The Porter’s Gate
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRuPZCXShg4>

Group Debrief

- Share key take-aways, learnings, and lingering questions
- Share observations and reflections, using these guiding questions as a starting point:
 - *When did you feel most engaged, and why? When did you feel least engaged, and why?*
 - *Which parts of the lesson did you feel a greater awareness of yourself/identity/world?*
 - *Which parts of the lesson did you feel a shift/change in your thinking, understanding of yourself, and/or ourselves as a group?*
 - *How did you feel? Did you notice any specific emotions at different points in the lesson?*
 - *What questions are coming up for you?*
 - *What patterns or themes do you see emerging?*
 - *What do we want to keep doing?*
 - *What do we want to stop or change?*
 - *Where do we go from here?*
- Plan for the next session (topics, guiding questions, pedagogical practices, utilizing observations and reflections)

Mutual Blessing

- Share gratitude for one another's presence and engage in a mutual blessing

Appendix 12:
Session 3 - Teaching Journal (Class: February 8, 2021)

Session #3 – Teaching Journal
Reflection written: Feb. 11, 2021

When planning for Monday’s session, my hope was to spend the first part of class focused on story sharing and the second half on womanism and womanist biblical interpretation. The story sharing ended up taking the whole class period and then some. As I reflect on the class so far, I wonder if it would have been better to have had people share their social location inventories on the first day of class. However, my concern/question is that if I were to have done that, would the reflections have been as deep as they were after building trust and community within the group over the past three weeks. I’m unsure.

A big personal thing for me was sharing that I personally identify as queer. I think that by sharing my story first, I was able to model vulnerability – and be vulnerable – and practice telling my own story and the stories that have shaped me.

I really appreciated people’s vulnerability in their own sharing. I could tell sharing brought up a lot of different emotions, memories, and stories for people. Although I had originally told the group that I would keep people at 3-4 minutes, I ended up not sticking to that as it felt awkward/rude/not the right thing to do to interrupt people as they were deeply sharing. At the end, with the last few folks, I got a little frustrated when people went down rabbit holes. However, again, I think people having the space to tell their own stories – have their stories heard—were incredibly important. A number of people named that the stories they were sharing were ones they had never—or rarely—told to others.

The storytelling went way long—past the 90-minute mark—so I rushed to close the lesson. We postponed all of the material I had on womanism and womanist biblical interpretation and I also left out the reflection song at the end as I wanted to respect people’s time. The debrief and planning for this upcoming class was also cut way short. I want to make sure that I am more intentional about blocking out time for group reflection and processing as well as planning for the upcoming lessons.

One of my concerns is that we’re not getting to womanism and still haven’t had a full-on discussion about womanist biblical interpretation (hopefully, we’ll get there this week! For real—we really need to!). But we have been focusing on and engaging liberative practices throughout this class. Storytelling, anti-racism, community building, mutual transformation, striving toward greater freedom—these are all liberative commitments and practices—and they are things I think we have been doing throughout the first three classes. This should make for more interesting conversation and reflection as we reflect on the womanism and womanist biblical interpretation.

For next class:

- “Loosening Up” & Opening Prayer
- Womanism video
- “Womanist” by Alice Walker Discussion
- Womanist Biblical Interpretation Lecture
 - World in front of the text, in the text, behind the text
 - 1980s: distinct from fem and black androcentric lib movements
 - Womanism emerged in theology and then moved to biblical studies
 - Intersectional lens
 - Often starts with communities in front of the text – concern about liberation and justice for the “least of these”
- Smith & Brown Douglas Article
 - Reading from the Margins
 - Re-reading for liberation
- Mark 7 & Smith Article
- Reflection Song & Quote
- Debrief

On another note, this class has been a lot. I’ve really loved it and I’m learning a lot but it’s also taken a ton of time, energy, and focus. I can definitely feel the slow burn...

Appendix 13:
Pre-Class Assignments for Session 4 (February 15, 2021)

Email to Co-Learners
Sent: February 11, 2021

Hi friends,

I'm thinking of you today and sending warmth and light. Thanks for your deep sharing and vulnerability on Monday. Reflecting on who we are as readers is not an easy task. It can often bring up many emotions and memories as we think about the people, experiences, and beliefs that have shaped us and our relationship with ourselves, others, scripture, and God. Although we each have unique experiences and come from different backgrounds, what I heard in all of our stories was resilience, faith, hope, and a deep desire to love and be loved. I am grateful for each of you.

This Monday, February 15th, we'll focus on womanist biblical interpretation and explore Mark 7:24-30. Here are a few things to work on before we meet (attached):

1. **Mark 7:24-30 Handout.** Please read through this passage, respond to the reflection questions (*bullet points work!*), and send your responses back to me by Sunday.
2. **"Race, Gender, and the Politics of Sass"** - In this article, Dr. Mitzi J. Smith interprets Mark 7:24-30 through a womanist lens. I encourage you to pay special attention to how she locates herself as a reader and names how her theological commitments and lived experiences inform her reading of this text.
3. **Optional Video: "The Urgency of Intersectionality" TedTalk with Kimberle Crenshaw**
In this powerful video, Crenshaw talks about the importance of intersectionality, especially when it comes to understanding police violence against Black women and why Black women's names, lives, and stories are often un(der)told in the media (#SayHerName). This is optional, but I encourage you to watch it if you have time.

Thanks again for being part of this group! We're halfway there!

Warmth, light, and love,
Kristin

Mark 7:24-30

In preparation for Monday, please read this passage and respond to the questions below. Typed responses, including short bullet points work. Then, please read “Race, Gender, and the Politics of Sass” and respond to the final question.

Begin by reading Mark 7:24-30.

Then read Brown Douglas’ quote and reflect on who you are as an “embodied being” (i.e. your social location, lived experiences, theological commitments, etc.). Re-read the passage thinking about how who you are as a reader shapes your interpretation of this text or the questions that are raised for you.

Just as our theologies reflect as much, if not more, about the person doing them as they do about God, so do our perspectives on the Bible. No theology emerges in a social, historical, and cultural vacuum and neither does any particular interpretation or approach to scripture. Both theological and biblical discourses are shaped by the complicated historical realities of the persons conducting them . . . The texts we go to, the way we read those texts, and the authority we give the Bible itself are inevitably formed by who we are as embodied beings, how we experience life socially and culturally, as well as what we perceive as the meaning of life.”

- Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas

Respond to these questions (short bullet points work!):

1. What questions does this passage raise for you as a reader? What is challenging or confusing? What is liberating?
2. Who do you identify with in this passage and why?
3. Re-read this scripture from the perspective of the woman. What is she up against? How does she claim her own agency? How does she advocate for herself and others? How does she resist oppression and claim her identity as a beloved child of God? (You don’t need to respond to all of these questions—just the ones that are most interesting to you)
4. Are there people in your life—or in the world today—that the woman reminds you of?
5. Read “Race, Gender, and the Politics of Sass” and pick 1-2 ideas or quotes that stand out to you and share why.

**Appendix 14:
Session 4 - Lesson Plan (February 15, 2021)**

Primary Objectives

- To learn about womanism and the differences between feminism, Black feminism, and womanism
- To learn about womanist biblical interpretation's key characteristics and commitments
- To discuss liberative reading strategies for interpreting the Bible
- To reflect on solidarity and our responsibility to one another in the shared struggle for mutual liberation

Opening Activities

Welcome

- Welcome people as they arrive on Zoom

Centering Practice & Opening Prayer

- Lead group in gentle stretching and centering practice
- Open with prayer

Initial Roadmap for Today

- Share overview of lesson plan to receive feedback and make changes before we begin:
 - “What Is: Womanism,” video by Kat Blaque – discussion about differences between feminism, womanism, and Black feminism
 - “Womanist” by Alice Walker – dialogue with Walker and one another
 - Womanist Biblical Interpretation: Presentation—lecture
 - Discuss Smith’s and Brown Douglas’ articles – dialogue and reflection
 - Read and interpret Mark 7:24-30 in liberative ways as we dialogue with Smith and one another
 - “We Labor onto Glory” by The Porter’s Gate
 - Group debrief:
 - Share key take-aways and emerging questions
 - Observations, Reflections, Plan for Next Time
 - Mutual Blessing

Observation Reminder

- Remind people to observe their levels of engagement throughout lesson, what they notice about the group’s energy and engagement, when they feel most/least heard, emerging questions, etc.

Learning Segments

Womanism & Feminism

- Feminism and womanism
 - Provide brief history of various waves of feminist movement
 - Note that feminism has become more intersectional, particularly as it has evolved and diversified as a movement.
 - Note that the intellectual tradition and cultural heritage of Black women predates the term womanist (ex.: Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman)

“What Is: Womanism” Video by Kat Blaque

- Watch “What Is: Womanist” video by Kat Blaque
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWgOpOkSCOI>
- Discuss:
 - *What are the similarities between womanism, Black feminism, and feminism? What are the differences?*
 - *Some Black women identify as feminists (ex. bell hooks) while others identify as Black feminists (ex. Patricia Hill Collins) or womanists (ex. Mitzi Smith). Why is it important for people to be able to name themselves?*

“Womanist” by Alice Walker

- Read “Womanist” by Alice Walker
 - Dialogue with Walker and one another, using these questions as a starting point:
 - *What words, images, or phrases stand out to you in Walker’s definition, and why?*
 - *Why do you think she writes that womanists are “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female”?*
 - *Walker writes that a womanist is “traditionally a universalist.” What do you think this means?*
 - *Walker writes, “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.” What is the relationship between womanism and feminism?*
 - Note: womanism is a political movement that centers and privileges Black women and their communities in the struggle for liberation from oppression; utilizes intersectional lens; concerned about interlocking systems of oppression
 - *What characteristics and commitments do you share with womanists? What differences do you hold?*

Womanist Biblical Interpretation

- Share brief overview of womanism and highlight key characteristics and aspects of womanist biblical interpretation
- Discuss “Introduction” from *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation*” by womanist biblical scholar Mitzi J. Smith, using these questions as a starting point:
 - *Smith writes, “Biblical interpretation is a political act and can be an act of social justice or injustice.” Do you agree or disagree that it is a political act? And that it can be an act of justice or injustice? Why or why not?*
 - *What do you think she means when she writes: “Like the Scriptures, black, brown, and yellow bodies and their communities are sacred (con)texts”*
 - *What are some of the key characteristics of womanist biblical interpretation?*
 - *What are some of the key commitments?*
 - *What key quotes or ideas stood out to you?*
 - *What questions did this article raise for you?*
- Discuss “Marginalized People, Liberating Perspectives: A Womanist Approach to Biblical interpretation” by womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas, using these questions as a starting point:
 - *What are some of the key characteristics of womanist biblical interpretation that Brown Douglas identifies in her article? What are some of the key commitments?*
 - *Brown Douglas writes that “existing on the margins of society and church provides people with a special epistemological advantage.” What does this mean?*
 - *Brown Douglas writes, “The ‘least of these,’ those less encumbered by the corruptions and temptations of privilege and domination, are better able to see the radicality of God’s vision for God’s people.” Do you agree or disagree with her statement? Why?*
 - *How can we learn from those who are “marginalized” in the Bible and society?*
 - *How can we read the Bible in more liberative ways?*
- Brown Douglas suggests that womanist biblical interpretation involves reading in liberative ways. She names the following practices:
 - Name our points of privilege
 - Check our interpretations and understanding of God as liberator with those who are most oppressed – if not liberating for them, we need to reevaluate our claims
 - Utilize a “hermeneutic of suspicion”
- Discussion:
 - *How might these practices be helpful as we seek to read the Bible in liberative ways?*
 - *How might we engage in each of these practices, individually and collectively?*

Mark 7:24-30 & Smith's Article

- Read Mark 7:24-30
- Dialogue with Smith and one another, utilizing these questions as a starting point:
 - *What are the power dynamics in this text?*
 - *How would you characterize Jesus and his actions?*
 - *How would you characterize the Syrophenician woman and her actions?*
 - *How does she use her agency?*
 - *Where do you see transformation in this text? Who changes? What changes? Why?*
- *Where do you see mutual liberation?*
- *What does this passage say to you about justice and mutual liberation?*
- *What does it say to you about co-laboring for justice and mutual liberation in your own life?*
- *What perspective does Smith read from? How is this similar or different than your own?*
- *What stood out to you in her article?*
- *How does she read this story alongside the story of Sandra Bland? What stood out to you when these two (con)texts were paired together?*

Closing Activities

Song About Liberation

- Listen: “The Porter's Gate - We Labor Unto Glory (feat. Liz Vice, Josh Garrels, & Madison Cunningham)” by The Porter’s Gate
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRuPZCXShg4>

Group Debrief

- Share key take-away, idea, or lingering question from today’s session
- Share observations and reflections, using these guiding questions as a starting point:
 - *When did you feel most engaged, and why? When did you feel least engaged, and why?*
 - *Which parts of the lesson did you feel a greater awareness of yourself/identity/world?*
 - *Which parts of the lesson did you feel a shift/change in your thinking, understanding of yourself, and/or ourselves as a group?*
 - *How did you feel? Did you notice any specific emotions at different points in the lesson?*
 - *What questions are coming up for you?*
 - *What patterns or themes do you see emerging?*
 - *What do we want to keep doing?*
 - *What do we want to stop or change?*
 - *Where do we go from here?*

- Plan for the next session (topics, guiding questions, pedagogical practices, utilizing observations and reflections)

Mutual Blessing

- Share gratitude for one another's presence and engage in a mutual blessing

Appendix 15:
Session 4 - Teaching Journal (Class: February 15, 2021)

February 15, 2021

This morning was the best class yet! The energy was good, the conversation was great, and the community—wow, I am so grateful for this group. As I mentioned to the group at the end of our session, this project has been a struggle at times. Transcribing class sessions, responding to people’s assignments, and planning lessons has been a full-time job on top of a full-time job. However, in the midst of the tiring parts, my co-learners have buoyed me. Reading their responses as they came in on Saturday and Sunday was a like water when I was parched. It gave me life.

Today, I felt the most comfortable I have yet teaching. I felt present, engaged, and ready. The material was engaging, which I think helped to set the table for the class and discussion.

Showing a video at the beginning, then reading “Womanist” worked well. As a number of people mentioned, having a video helped to bring what they had been reading about womanism to life. I’ve continued to find that showing a video or having a contemporary text and pairing this with scripture has been really effective. Most bible studies seem to start with the biblical text and then ask, what does this mean for us today. In this bible study, I’ve started with a contemporary (con)text and then had us dig into the scripture, which I think has been really helpful in terms of bringing the issues, questions, and invitations in the scripture passage to life.

Dr. Smith’s article was excellent and, in the lesson,, I moved faster through my lecture so we could get to Mark 7:24-30 and her article. The class felt really well balanced – it felt like it flowed and moved naturally, which was awesome. My co-learners are engaging questions of identity, race, intersectionality, but it doesn’t feel combative or like an us v. them. It really feels like we’re moving toward liberation together, even though we are coming from different places and with different perspectives. What I notice in the group is a lot of trust, humility, courage, vulnerability, and willingness to be transformed and speak a transforming word. I don’t know how to explain it exactly, but even as we’re talking about really hard things—about oppression and domination—and resistance, there’s a joy there. It’s not engaging in the work of liberation as a chore or something but something that is life-giving and joyful and freeing. The work itself is freeing and I feel lighter doing this work with this group of women. Doing this work together. I am being transformed. The thing is, this class feels bigger than me. It really feels like something we’re doing together because it’s bigger than me.

Other take-aways about things that are working

- Body movement at the beginning
- Music at the end
- Videos
- Connection between contemporary (con)text and biblical text

Appendix 16: **Session 3 and 4: Emerging Themes, Ideas, Reflections from Class Transcript**

Session 3

In this class, we spent time sharing stories and talking about how our identities, lived experiences, and theological commitments shape our engagement with scripture. This sharing built on the self-inventory that people had completed the week prior. A few themes and reflections:

Raising Critical Consciousness

Having people complete the self-inventory and then share their stories was a helpful exercise in raising critical consciousness. Co-learners were asked to reflect on their identity, lived experiences, and theological commitments and share how these shaped their engagement with scripture. Many people reflected on how their racial identity, gender identity, socioeconomic class, and family of origin shapes how they engage scripture and has influenced their experiences in the world. As one person shared, “Being a white woman—all of these identifies that are on there—I am sure I filter the world through those lenses whether I’m aware of them or not.”

Particularity in our Stories, Connection in Our Commitments

Although each person’s identity, lived experiences, and theological commitments were unique, there were many common themes and theological commitments that emerged, such as justice, the inclusivity of God’s love, and God’s presence with us. One person noted, “There’s similarities in the stories. Even though our backgrounds are all very different, there are quite a few similarities.” To which another person responded, “And that may be because we are all human.” This understanding of our shared humanity did not seem trite or like one that glossed over our differences or different experiences in the world. Rather, I think the differences and particularity of each person’s experience allowed for there to be deeper appreciation of each person—who they are—and appreciation of the commonalities and shared commitments that we hold in the midst of our differences.

Epistemology

Epistemology—different ways of knowing—is a theme that came up again. People shared stories and reflections in which they mentioned drawing on their intuition and using different ways of knowing to connect with God and others, including through trusting their gut about God’s love of all people, even when they were told otherwise, experiencing God’s presence in near-death experiences and the presence of loved ones who had died, and connecting with God through the natural world. This group has continued to affirm and share different ways of knowing as a legitimate means of knowledge.

The Power of Stories

A number of people mentioned that sharing these stories was vulnerable and brought up a lot of memories, feelings, and “a lot of stuff.” I’m grateful for the group’s willingness to lean into this vulnerable work. A number of people also mentioned that they shared

stories that they didn't share—or rarely shared—with others. To me this speaks to both the courage of individuals and the trust and sense of community that has been formed within the group. Stories telling continues to be an important theme and practice in our sessions. As one person reflected, “I think we have a hunger for these stories, the real stories that reveal the resilience that has been in others, but in sharing that, we shore each other up.” Others mentioned that hearing one another's stories helped me to see common threads of “strength” and resilience.

Session 4

In this session, we began with getting into our bodies, an opening prayer, and then a video on womanism. We then transition to a discussion about Alice Walker's “Womanist” definition followed by a discussion of Mark 7:24-30 and Dr. Smith's article on this same passage. A few themes and reflections:

Womanism

One of the questions that was raised was if white women and other non-BIPOC persons can be “womanists.” A number of people named that based on Walker's definition, it appeared no, but that white women could be allies, like straight people to the LGBTQ community. One person noted that in her reading of Walker's definition, womanism seemed to speak to “being in it for everybody” and not limited to people of color.” She added, “I see it being universal, but they may be too broad an interpretation. I don't know. I hope not.” I mentioned that bell hooks and others call for people to be united in their commitments to and shared struggle for justice and liberation—this is what binds people together—more so than their identity or shared oppression. In this way, individuals and communities' struggles for justice and liberation are seen as (inter)connected, even when people's identities and lived experiences vary. There are opportunities for coalition-building and allyship that recognize the differences between people's lived experiences and identities but also find places of shared commitments and struggle.

Intersections of Gender & Race

The group talked extensively about the intersections of race and gender. A number of people noted that racism that was present in first wave (i.e., the Suffragists) and second wave feminism (1970s). People also noted that in the case of Sandra Bland, the police officer's response to her was likely informed by racism and she would likely have not been arrested or have died if she were white. Group members shared about how they see racism and sexism—and both of these—show up in the world today. As one group member noted, where as white people are seen as being assertive, Black people are seen as being aggressive and that the same was often true for women.

“Sassy” & Agency

The group discussed the mother's agency as well as Smith's reading of her as a “sassy.” A number of people noted that they did not read her words to Jesus as “sassy.” One person noted that she had too much to lose by being sassy (aka disrespectful). I suggested that perhaps Smith was making the point that often when Black women use their agency to advocate to stand up against injustice or advocate for themselves or their families, they

are characterized as “sassy,” regardless of their tone and that perhaps she’s trying to reclaim this term. One member shared a story of a time when her mother had advocated for her after a white store clerk had intentionally given her the wrong change as a child. As the person noted, “My mom went back, and she didn’t sass him, she just stated the obvious. She said, she’s a child. You took advantage of her. And that was it. But he thought she was sassy just for saying how dare you tell me I did something wrong. In that sense, maybe that can be interpreted as sassy, if you sat anything that could be interpreted as sassy.” There was still some disagreement about whether the Syrophoenician woman could be characterized with sassy but multiple named the mother’s agency and commitment to advocating for her child in her interaction with Jesus.

Storytelling

The connection was made between the Syrophoenician woman and the ways in which people had seen their own mothers stand up to authority figures on behalf of their children.

Mutual Transformation and Liberation

One group member noted that both Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman were transformed in their interaction. Another also noted that there was mutual transformation in the text and that it offers a model of liberation for us. As she noted, “whenever you can open your eyes to—when Jesus was transformed. Whenever we are allowed to open our eyes to understand someone better, I think that’s liberation for both people, but especially for the person who needed to have their eyes opened.” Another person noted that the transformation in this text was not limited to this interaction but had far-reaching effects. Jesus’ understanding of who God’s children were was transformed in this interaction and it had far-reaching consequences for the rest of his ministry, with him being more inclusive. Some of people’s take aways from this discussion included that:

- “If you speak out, you create the opportunity for someone to see something from your perspective . . . She spoke up, then that began the ball rolling in the direction of potential justice.”
- “We have to be thinking about justice for everyone all the time.”
- “I need to be an agent for liberation, for justice. And it also gives me hope, with some people I felt do often that I’m talking to a wall, but it gives me hope because Jesus changes.”
- “Boldness as a precursor to liberation”

Teaching Methods

The group mentioned that digging into scripture and having this be paired with an article, a contemporary experience, and one’s own experience has been engaging and beneficial. Another person noted that digging into the scripture, learning about what others are saying, and then relating it to “our everyday or contemporary experiences” has been particularly engaging. Another person mentioned how much she appreciated the in-depth articles. This is consistent with what the group has shared in past sessions and suggests that in terms of teaching methods that help to raise critical consciousness, facilitate mutual transformation, and encourage people to co-labor for freedom it is helpful to:

- **Engage in an intersectional analysis of ourselves as readers, noting how our race, gender, class, etc. as well as our lived experiences and theological commitments inform who we are as readers and how we interpret the Bible**
 - Finding: whiteness often shapes our imaginations and engagement with scripture, even when we “know better”
- **Start with a contemporary text or context and pair this with a scripture passage**
 - The use of videos, poetry, etc. at the beginning of the lesson has been particularly effective for starting conversation and framing the topic/our engagement with scripture
- **Include the voices of womanist scholars as dialogue partners (I think this could be expanded in other settings to be “include a diversity of voices” in other bible studies)**
 - Engaging different voices helps us to expand our understanding of the biblical text, to learn about other people’s experiences, and to find places of difference and commonality in terms of our experiences, interpretations, etc.
 - It also opens us up to hearing others’ stories and reflecting on our own
- **Create spaces for people to share stories and connect scripture to their lived experiences or contemporary contexts**
 - The sharing of stories and being able to talk about our own lived experiences, especially as they connect to the scripture, has been an important practice
 - Storytelling creates space for people to be heard—and hear others. It also builds community and trust, facilitates a deepening of relationships, helps people to understand both the differences and commonalities in one another’s experiences and find places of shared strength and commitment.
 - One of my hopes for this course, although it was not an explicit goal in the beginning, is that women have been able to hear the stories of women in the Bible in new ways and re-read in liberative ways that see these women as role models who used their agency, wisdom, and lives to advocate for justice, not only for themselves, but for others (the larger community) and who co-labored for mutual liberation.
- **Acknowledge, affirm, and celebrate different ways of knowing**
 - Throughout the sessions, people have lifted up stories about their intuition, what they knew in their gut, and experiences that defy traditional forms of “knowledge.” They have also noted the ways in which women in the Bible (i.e. the Hebrew midwives, the Syrophoenician woman) have had different ways of knowing than men and authority figures. I think an important practice has been to create space for women’s different ways of knowing to be acknowledged, honored, and affirmed.

- **Reflecting on Mutual Transformation and Co-Laboring for Liberation**
 - At the end of each session, usually as we wrap up the discussion around the biblical text, I've asked the women what this passage says to them and their own lives about liberation. Engaging this question of what liberation is and what our responsibility to one another is in the work of justice and liberation has been a reoccurring theme. I will be interested to see how our understandings of liberation have—or have not changed—over the course of this class, not only theoretically but in terms of our own commitments and actions.

Appendix 17:
Pre-Class Assignments for Session 5 (February 22, 2021)

February 16, 2021

Hi friends,

I hope this letter finds you well! This Monday, we'll (re)turn our attention to Genesis 3 and explore how we can re-read this familiar text in liberative ways. Here's what to work on before we meet:

- **“Wisdom in the Garden Reflection Questions”** - You do *not* need to complete or submit this handout, but you may personally find it helpful to jot down a few notes in preparation for our discussion on Monday. I'd encourage you to read through these questions before reading the article.
- **“Wisdom in the Garden: The Woman of Genesis 3 and Alice Walker's Sophia”** (5 pages) – This article invites us to re-read the familiar story of the woman in Genesis 3 with fresh eyes. It raises some really interesting ideas and challenges. I look forward to hearing what you think!
- **Genesis 3:1-7 (CEB)** – After reading “Wisdom in the Garden,” (re)read Genesis 3:1-7. Do you agree with Kimberly Dawn Russaw that the woman in Genesis 3 should be characterized as wise? Why or why not?

Have a great week, and I look forward to seeing you Monday!

Hope, Courage, & Joy,

Kristin

“Wisdom in the Garden: The Woman of Genesis 3 and Alice Walker’s *Sophia*”

Below are a few reflection questions. You do not need to complete or submit this handout, but you may personally find it helpful to jot down a few notes in preparation for our discussion on Monday.

1. How would you define wisdom? What do you think makes someone wise?
2. What are the three markers of wise individuals in the literature of the ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible?
3. How does the woman in Genesis 3 embody these characteristics?
4. After reading the article, read Genesis 3:1-7 (on the backside of this sheet). Do you agree with Kimberly Dawn Russaw that the woman in Genesis 3 should be characterized as wise and included in the list of wise characters in the Bible? Why or why not?
5. How might the church, world, and society be different if biblical interpretation and the church paid attention to the wisdom of women and other people who have traditionally been ignored, marginalized, or excluded?
6. What is our responsibility in terms of re-reading biblical texts that have traditionally ignored, excluded, or diminished women or other groups? How might we re-read these texts in redemptive or liberative ways? Why is this important?
7. What are one or two ideas or quotes that stand out to you from this article?

Appendix 18:
Session 5 - Lesson Plan (February 22, 2021)

Primary Objectives

- To dialogue with the work of womanist biblical scholar Kimberly Dawn Russaw and one another about Genesis 3
- To interpret Genesis 3 in liberative ways
- To critically reflect on intersectionality in womanism and feminism

Opening Activities

Welcome

- Welcome people as they arrive on Zoom

Centering Practice & Opening Prayer

- Lead group in gentle stretching and centering practice
- Open with prayer

Review Emerging Themes

- Discuss emerging themes, questions, and reflections from last session
- *Are there other things we want to add, clarify, discuss, or reflect on?*
- *How can these inform our learning together today?*

Initial Roadmap for Today

- Share overview of lesson plan to receive feedback and make changes before we begin:
 - Critically reflection on images of Adam and Eve in art and pop culture
 - Watch “Confessions of a bad feminist” Ted Talk by Roxane Gay and dialogue with gay and one another about intersectionality in feminism and womanism
 - Womanist Biblical Interpretation: Presentation—lecture
 - Read and interpret Genesis 3 in liberative ways as we dialogue with Dawn Russaw and one another
 - Quote about liberation by Grace Lee Boggs, Asian American activist activist
 - Listen to “I’m Gonna Walk It With You” by Brian Claflin and Ellie Grace
 - Group debrief:
 - Share key take-aways and emerging questions
 - Observations, Reflections, Plan for Next Time
 - Mutual Blessing

Observation Reminder

- Remind people to observe their levels of engagement throughout lesson, what they notice about the group’s energy and engagement, when they feel most/least heard, emerging questions, etc.

Learning Segments

Adam and Eve in Art & Popular Culture

- Share images of Adam and Eve from artwork, Google search
 - Note that artwork is a form of interpretation
- Discuss:
 - *What do you notice about these pictures?*
 - *How are Adam and Eve portrayed?*
 - *Where do you think these ideas (interpretations) came from?*
 - *What impact have these interpretations had on women? Men? Others?*

“Confessions of a bad feminist” TedTalkVideo by Roxane Gay

- Introduce Roxane Gay
- Watch “Bad Feminist” Ted Talk (excerpt) by Roxane Gay
https://www.ted.com/talks/roxane_gay_confessions_of_a_bad_feminist?language=en
- Discuss:
 - *What stood out to you in Gay’s talk?*
 - *What are some of her critiques of feminism?*
 - *How does Gay use an intersectional approach to feminism?*
- Share quote from Gay’s talk about not paying by the rules
 - *Have you ever been labeled as “a woman who doesn’t play by the rules” or “who expects too much”? If so, when? Why?*
- Share excerpt from Walker’s “Womanist” definition:
 - Womanist:
 “Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up . . .Responsible. In charge. Serious.”
- What similarities do you see between Gay’s quote and Walker’s definition?
- What are some of the other similarities between feminism and womanism? Differences?

Reading for Liberation

- Share powerpoint with key points from Brown Douglas’ article, “Marginalized Realities, Liberating Perspectives”
 - Liberative practices utilized in womanist biblical interpretation
 - Discuss additional liberative practices

Genesis 3

- Read Genesis 3
- Engage in dialogue and interpret passage using these initial questions:
 - *What happens in this passage?*
 - *How would you characterize the woman and her actions? The man? The snake?*

- Dawn Russaw article
 - Share PPT slide with three characteristics of wise individuals in Ancient Near Eastern literature and Hebrew Bible
 - Characteristics:
 - Their skillfulness, craftiness, or cleverness
 - Their ability to see
 - Their focus on going after what seems good
- Re-read passage with these characteristics in mind.
- Dialogue with Dawn Russaw’s work and one another using these questions as a starting point:
 - *Do you agree with Russaw that the woman in Genesis 3 embodies the characteristics of a wise individual? Why or why not?*
 - *Would you characterize the woman in Genesis 3 as “a woman who doesn’t play by the rules”? Why or why not?*
 - *How might the church, world, and society be different if biblical interpretation and the church paid attention to the wisdom of women and other people who have been traditionally ignored, marginalized, or excluded?*
 - *How might we re-read these texts in redemptive or liberative ways? Why is this important?*
 - *What does this text and re-reading it suggest to you about liberation and freedom?*
 - *Dr. Kimberly characterizes Sofia from The Color Purple as a wise woman. Who would you characterize as a wise woman?*

Closing Activities

Quote about Liberation

- Share quote about liberation and transformation by Grace Lee Boggs, Asian American community activist in Detroit

Song About Liberation

- Listen: “I’m Gonna Walk It With You” by Brian Claflin and Ellie Grace
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8boCrXOp9M>

Group Debrief

- Share key take-away, learning, or lingering question from today’s session
- Share observations and reflections, using these guiding questions as a starting point:
 - *When did you feel most engaged, and why? When did you feel least engaged, and why?*
 - *Which parts of the lesson did you feel a greater awareness of yourself/identity/world?*
 - *Which parts of the lesson did you feel a shift/change in your thinking, understanding of yourself, and/or ourselves as a group?*

- *How did you feel? Did you notice any specific emotions at different points in the lesson?*
- *What questions are coming up for you?*
- *What patterns or themes do you see emerging?*
- *What do we want to keep doing?*
- *What do we want to stop or change?*
- *Where do we go from here?*
- Plan for the next session (topics, guiding questions, pedagogical practices, utilizing observations and reflections)

Mutual Blessing

- Share gratitude for one another's presence and engage in a mutual blessing

Appendix 19:
Session 5 - Teaching Journal (Class: February 22, 2021)

February 22, 2021

Today was Session #5. I worked on the lesson plan yesterday and felt a little iffy about it—less sure than other lessons. When I got on the call, I felt glad to see everyone (it's such a good group) but tired as well. This process has been incredible, but it's also been a lot of work—timewise, emotionally, mentally. But it has also been joyful, joy-filled work.

Here's what I noticed about myself and the group today:

I really wanted the group to agree with Russaw and have this lightbulb moment of wow, Eve is a wise woman! We've been taught to read this passage all wrong! We need to reclaim Eve as a heroine of our faith! That is not how the conversation went. People were more reluctant to initially see Eve as a wise character. There was some confusion or resistance to using the three markers of wise individuals that Russaw outlines in her article. As one person noted, that's now how she would have defined a wise person. I think it would have been better to ask people to share stories of people in their lives, especially women, who they consider wise and then discuss what wisdom is. Drawing a closer connection between the Roxanne Gay clip, especially her description of feminists as "rule-breakers" and Alice Walker's definition of womanist may have also worked better. Next time I would ask people/focus on if they thought Eve was a proto-womanist character rather than if she was a wise one based on Russaw's definition.

I felt myself getting frustrated with the group when they didn't immediately adopt Russaw's interpretation as their own, even though that's ridiculous. Ellen had some really profound things that she shared in her interpretation of the text. Asking the group what this passage says about liberation was really helpful. It was like a light was switched on and suddenly people suddenly started talking about the woman in Genesis 3 as reaching for freedom, being liberated, creating space for others to become freer. Suddenly, the group got it.

When we reflected on the class, I asked people when they felt most engaged (or least engaged) and people mentioned that they felt engaged the entire lesson. This was a gut check for me as I felt off/like the energy in the entire group was a little off today. It also helped me to get that there's value in the journey/conversations/dialogue. It reminded me that part of co-learning is taking things at the pace of the group and taking cues from the group about what directions we should go rather making people march to the beat of my own drum.

One of the things that came up at the end of the session, which I wasn't expecting was people commenting on their sadness about this group ending and feeling like there would be a hole in their lives. One person noted that they felt like their eyes had been opened and they didn't want them to be closed again but they also weren't sure where to turn to

in terms of finding womanist and feminist biblical interpretation. Part of this class that I hadn't thought as much about was the exit strategy and how to end this chapter well. I asked the group to think about how we want to end and ways in which we might want to continue meeting moving forward and to share these next week. Ending well will be huge. Well, ending this part of the group that is.

A number of people also mentioned that the size of this group was key. That wasn't something I had thought about before but I think they're right. Seven people plus me really has been a good size for making space for everyone's voices to be heard and for everyone to have a chance to share.

For the last session, here's what I'm thinking:

- Welcome
- Opening Video
- Matthew & Smith article discussion
 - Transformation
 - Being for others
- Group Sharing about reflection questions
- Individual affirmations
- Group affirmations
- “We are the Ones” song
- One word – a commitment you're making
- Next steps: writing process, etc.

Friday, February 26th

I finished transcribing the lesson today and learned a lot through this process. I realized that a lot of the frustration that I was feeling was my own stuff. In relistening to the lesson, I realized that the group was not only engaging in liberative readings but also adding a lot more texture to the discussion and interpretation of this passage by asking questions, holding multiple interpretations at once, and thinking independently and interdependently.

This was the first lesson where I really began with having people start by talking about the traditional, oppressive interpretations of a scripture passage first. In terms of the planning process, I think I was looking for a way to fill time. I learned that this is something that I will not do again. Although people mentioned they felt engaged the whole time, what it did was lend validity, space, and energy to that interpretation and get people thinking about oppression, rather than liberation. As one person noted, her engagement built throughout the lesson and got stronger and stronger the more we talked about liberation.

If I were to teach this lesson again, I would cut the pictures/traditional interpretations in the beginning and start with asking people to share about someone who they consider wise and why. From there I would have us talk about and develop our own definition of

wisdom. Then, I would have us watch the Roxanne Gay and ask people to reflect on what resonates with them. From there, I would have us read Genesis 3:1-8 and ask people to reflect on if they think that Gay's quote could also apply to Eve. I'd also ask if they thought Eve could be characterized as a womanist. I'd then invite us to reflect on our definition of wisdom and see if we thought Eve could be characterized as a wise woman based on this. From there, I would bring in Russaw's article and have us talk about if Eve fits her definition/the definition of wise characters from the ANE and Hebrew Bible. I would then have us watch the interview with Oprah Winfrey about playing Sofia and then invite people to reflect on if they thought Sofia, like Eve, was a wise character. From there I would invite people to reflect on what this passage says about liberation, especially in our own lives.

Another big miss in this lesson was not creating space for people to talk about Sofia—and her as a wise woman—from *The Color Purple*. I think I struggled to find the right media for this lesson or basically got off on the wrong foot. That said, my initially reaction and judgment of this lesson and people's engagement was way off. This reminds me that sometimes, my perceptions can be off and that even when I'm off my game, it's not only me that carries the lesson—it's my co-learners. Co-learning is a collective endeavor.

Texture. Questions. Holding multiple viewpoints and interpretations. Not accepting easy answers. New liberative interpretations. Sharing wisdom with one another. Sharing resources. Wanting to keep meeting. Finding community. Being community. Being better together.

**Appendix 20:
Pre-Class Assignments for Session 6 (March 1, 2021)**

February 25, 2021

Hi friends,

Happy Thursday! I hope your week is going well.

Attached are a few things to work on for our final gathering on Monday. These items will also be mailed to you:

- **Reflection Questions** - These questions are meant to be "soul work," in addition to helping me to learn about your experience. My hope is that they will offer you a chance to reflect on the past five weeks, your own journey, and our group's journey together. *Please send me your responses by Sunday evening and have them on-hand for our gathering Monday.*
- **"Give Them What You Have" article** - In this article, Dr. Smith interprets Matthew 14:13-21 through a womanist lens. It's beautifully written and a powerful essay. (It gets a little dense in the middle but is worth sticking with)
- **Matthew 14:13-21, Reflection Questions, & CliffsNotes** - This handout has the scripture passage and a few reflection questions. You do not need to turn in your responses, but you might want to jot down a few notes in preparation for Monday. The handout also has my attempt at a CliffsNotes version of the article (key quotes). That said, the article is so much better and more impactful if you're able to read the whole thing, even if it's only skimming it!

I look forward to seeing you Monday!

Joy & Hope,
Kristin

Final Reflection Assignment

Please set aside some time to work on these questions and email them to Kristin by Sunday evening. There are no right or wrong answers. For some answers, you might feel called to write more and some less.

1. How has this series helped you to reflect on how your own social location, lived experiences, and theological commitments inform your engagement with the Bible? How has your approach to the Bible or you read scripture changed (or not changed) over the last five weeks?
2. What have you learned about yourself through this series? What parts of who you are have been (re)affirmed? What parts of yourself—or how you see yourself—have shifted?
3. What is liberation? What are we being liberated from? What are we liberated to?
4. What is *your* responsibility to others in the work of liberation? What is *our* responsibility to one another as we co-labor for freedom?
5. How has this series helped you to think about co-laboring for freedom (the work of liberation) in your own life?
6. What are one or two of your key take-aways or learnings from womanism?
7. How has this Bible study been different than other ones you have participated in? What aspects of it have you enjoyed most?
8. What value or impact might Bible studies like this, which focus on engaging ourselves, scripture, and womanist voices, have for Christian Education/the Church, especially in predominantly white settings? (*Note: Engaging ourselves has two meanings. It refers to engaging who we are individually as readers and engaging ourselves collectively as a community of readers through practices of dialogue, storytelling, etc.*)
9. Anything else you'd like to add or share?
10. At our final gathering, we'll offer affirmations of one another and the group. Please write a short affirmation or word that comes to mind when you think of each group member.
11. Would you be interested in this group continuing to meet in some capacity? If so, what might this look like?

12. Lastly, please select a pseudonym for this project. In the paper, I'll use the initial/s from your pseudonym. For example, if you picked, Mickey Mouse, it would be M. or M.M. in the paper.

**“Give Them What You Have’:
A Womanist Reading of the Matthean Feeding Miracle (Matt. 14:13-21)”
by Dr. Mitzi J. Smith**

Below are a few reflection questions and key quotes (my attempt at a CliffsNotes version of this article). You do not need to write responses, but you might find it helpful to jot down a few notes before Monday.

Read:

- Matthew 14:13-21
- *FYI: this passage comes right after Jesus learns that his cousin, John, has been killed*

Reflection Questions

1. Dr. Smith notes that many African Americans that achieved any socio-economic success did not make it alone. *Who are the people who have helped you in your life, either socioeconomically or otherwise?* (p. 142)
2. Dr. Smith writes “My mother always insisted that people need one another to survive.” *Do you agree or disagree with this statement? If you agree, what implications does this idea have for how we live our lives and live in relationship with one another?*
3. *“What difference would it make in people’s lives if we all lived in a sharing more grounded in compassionate consciousness of the existence and impact of unjust systems and situations, of human error, of hardships that can befall any of us, and an understanding of our human connectedness?”* (p. 142)
4. React to this statement: “A womanist ethic asserts that we cannot free ourselves without freeing other folk too. We cannot liberate ourselves and our children and leave other folks and their children to themselves without the proverbial boots or bootstraps, if we can help it. Human beings need other human beings to survive.” (p. 142)
5. “Harriet used her meager resources to free others. And the threat of losing her own hard-won freedom, did not keep her from risking the depletion of her own social, economic, and physical capital to help free other slaves. Womanist biblical scholar Renita Weems argues that women should pool their resources, gifts, and energies, “so that each of us has the opportunity to grow.” As Harriet jeopardized her own freedom and spent her resources to free other slaves, other abolitionists pooled their resources to cover any deficits and to meet Harriet’s needs.” (p. 143) *What resources do you have and how might you use these to help free others?*
6. What are 1-2 quotes or ideas that stood out to you from this article, and why?

**Appendix 21:
Session 6 - Lesson Plan (March 1, 2021)**

Primary Objectives

- To reflect on what we had learned about ourselves, biblical interpretation, womanism, womanist biblical interpretation, and liberative pedagogical practices in this study
- To reflect on what transformation, if any, we experienced
- To reflect on solidarity and our responsibility to one another in shared struggle for mutual liberation
- To give thanks for one another and our work together
- To discuss next steps with this project

Opening Activities

Welcome

- Welcome people as they arrive on Zoom

Centering Practice & Opening Prayer

- Lead group in gentle stretching and centering practice
- Open with prayer

Initial Roadmap for Today

- Share overview of lesson plan to receive feedback and make changes before we begin:
 - Watch “Harriet Tubman” video and discuss liberation and our responsibility to one another
 - Read and interpret Genesis Matthew 14:13-21 in liberative ways as we dialogue with Smith’s work and one another
 - Reflect on this series and our learnings, key take-aways, remaining questions, etc.
 - Share affirmations and celebrate our work together
 - Discuss next steps
 - Listen to “We Are The Ones” by Sweet Honey in the Rock

Learning Segments

Harriet Tubman & Freedom

- Introduce Harriet Tubman
- Watch “Harriet Tubman: Fearless Freedom Fighter who Liberated Hundreds of Slaves | Biography”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmsNGrkbHm4>

- Discuss:
 - *How did Harriet Tubman use her freedom?*
 - *Why do you think she risked her own freedom for others?*
 - *What do you think of her visions and seeing those as a vision from God?*
 - *How did she live as “I-am-for-others”?*

Matthew 14:13-21 & Smith Article

- Read Matthew 14:13-21
- Discuss and interpret passage together, using these questions as a starting point:
 - *Who do you identify with this in this passage, and why?*
 - *What was the miracle?*
- Smith article
- Discuss:
 - *What is the lens that Dr. Smith uses to read this story?*
 - *What are her theo-ethical commitments?*
- Share quote from Smith’s article about the lens she uses to read this story (PPT)
- Share key points about holistic transformation from Smith’s article (PPT slides)
- Discuss:
 - *Who or what was transformed in this passage?*
 - *How do you see the disciples move through these stages of holistic transformation?*
 - *What does this passage suggest to you about liberation?*
- Discuss Smith’s article, using these questions as a starting point:
 - *What key ideas or quotes stood out to you from this article, and why?*
 - *Dr. Smith writes “My mother always insisted that people need one another to survive.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? If you agree, what implications does this idea have for how we live our lives and live in relationship with one another?*
 - *Dr. Smith notes that many African Americans that achieved any socio-economic success did not make it alone. Who are the people who have helped you in your life, either socioeconomically or otherwise? (p. 142)*
 - *“Harriet used her meager resources to free others. And the threat of losing her own hard-won freedom, did not keep her from risking the depletion of her own social, economic, and physical capital to help free other slaves. Womanist biblical scholar Renita Weems argues that women should pool their resources, gifts, and energies, “so that each of us has the opportunity to grow.” As Harriet jeopardized her own freedom and spent her resources to free other slaves, other abolitionists pooled their resources to cover any deficits and to meet Harriet’s needs.” (p. 143) What resources do you have and how might you use these to help free others?*
 - *“What difference would it make in people’s lives if we all lived in a sharing more grounded in compassionate consciousness of the existence and impact of unjust systems and situations, of human error, of hardships*

that can befall any of us, and an understanding of our human connectedness?” (p. 142)

- Share quote from Smith’s article about a womanist ethic (PPT)
 - *What are the key commitments of a womanist ethic?*
 - *What does it suggest about people’s responsibility to one another in the shared struggle for mutual liberation?*

Reflecting on Series, Co-Learning, & Transformation

- Facilitate reflection about this series, using these questions as a starting point. Encourage people to draw on their responses from the final reflection assignment and to pose additional questions or share other key take-aways:
- *What is liberation? What are we being liberated from? What are we liberated to?*
- *What is your responsibility to others in the work of liberation? What is our responsibility to one another as we co-labor for freedom?*
- *How has this series helped you to think about co-laboring for freedom (the work of liberation) in your own life?*
- *What value or impact might bible studies like this, which focus on engaging ourselves, scripture, and womanist voices, have for Christian Education/the Church, especially in predominantly white settings?*
- *Anything else you’d like to add or share?*

Affirmations

- Facilitate the sharing of affirmations for each group member

Closing Activities

Next Steps with Project

- Share about next steps with project
- Plan reunion gathering

Song About Liberation

- Listen: “We Are the Ones” by Sweet Honey in the Rock
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHsJHZpOJCc>

Mutual Blessing

- Engage in a mutual blessing

Appendix 22: Public Presentation Summary

- **What was the setting of the public presentation of your project (when, where, to whom)?**

My public presentation was held on February 7, 2022, 9:00-10:30 a.m. on Zoom. The participants included six members from Second Presbyterian Church, the congregation where I currently serve as a pastor; two members of my D.Ed.Min. cohort, one student in the D.Min. program at Columbia Theological Seminary, and a local pastoral colleague.

- **What is the format for the focus group (public presentation) discussion (medium, length, expectations, means of feedback)?**

The format was as follows:

- 9:00-9:10 – Welcome and Introductions
- 9:10-10:15 – Presentation of Study and Findings, interspersed with time for reflection, discussion, and questions
- 10:15 – Questions and Discussion about Implications of Project

- **How many attended?**

Ten women attended the presentation.

- **How long did the presentation take, including question and response time?**

The presentation was scheduled for 90-minutes but ran long. The total meeting time was 105 minutes.

- **List up to five (5) responses from the group that helped you to revise and improve your project.**

Five responses that helped me to revise my project were:

- To share more about how I was transformed through this study.
- To recognize the importance of the group moving from an understanding of “me” to “we” when it came to liberation.
- To recognize the importance of relationships and community in liberative education. Trust and relationships are important for creating a learning community in which people are willing to take risks and learn from one another.
- To provide ideas of how other Christian religious educators can incorporate insights from this project in their teaching.
- To consider how the findings from this study might be used to advocate for changes in the PC(USA) ordination standards.

- **If the public presentation produced ideas for further study, please list one or two of them.**

One idea for further study is to examine how this study would work with teenagers or young adults.

- **How would you approach the project differently if you could start anew given the feedback you received from the public presentation?**

Although the feedback I received did not cause me to want to approach my study differently, it did encourage me to think more about what comes next now that this study is done. Specifically, the participants encouraged me to think more about how this study and the insights it generated can be used to transform Christian education and the PC(USA) ordination standards. The participants invited me to more deeply consider how this study's findings can have a "ripple effect" and help to facilitate transformation in the larger church.

- **Did any aspect of the public presentation surprise you or catch you off-guard? If so, what have you learned from those moments?**

The questions and feedback I received was very helpful and affirming. None of it caught me off-guard.

- **On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being least, 5 being most), what do you think was the level of interest and engagement of the group with the content of your project?**

I would the level of interest and engagement of the group at a 5. The presentation went long because of the robust discussion. Additionally, after the presentation, multiple participants reached out to share how much they enjoyed the presentation, learning about the study, and being part of the conversation about the project's implications.

- **On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being least, 5 being most), what do you think was the level of interest and engagement of the group to the way you presented your project?**

The format of combining a segmented presentation with time for questions, reflections, and discussions worked well. This format provided information about the study and its findings while also creating space for ongoing feedback. I would put the level of interest and engagement of the group to the way I presented the project at a 5.

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