

INTERSECTIONS OF RELIGION AND RACE IN
WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES:
POSSIBILITIES FOR TEACHING INTRODUCTORY COURSES

A DISSERTATION

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BY

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the interview participants whose theorizing and pedagogy made it possible: Aisha Ahmed, May Cale, Susie Peace, Alex Smythe, Rose Thomas, Maria Wilson, and Savannah Woolf. Thank you for trusting me with your insights!

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ABSTRACT

MARCELLA C. CLINARD

INTERSECTIONS OF RELIGION AND RACE IN WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES: POSSIBILITIES FOR TEACHING INTRODUCTORY COURSES

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This dissertation study aims to improve social-justice education by investigating an area of diversity that is often overlooked within the field of women's and gender studies (WGS): religion. Using introductory WGS courses as a case study, I examined how instructors teach about religion as it intersects with other axes of social identity and power, especially race, ethnicity, and nationality. I conducted an exploratory qualitative case study of WGS general introductory undergraduate classes in the US in recent years, using the following data sources: six textbooks assigned in introductory courses, thirty-eight syllabi for introductory courses, a survey of thirty-five WGS faculty of introductory courses, and in-depth interviews with seven faculty WGS members who demonstrated an interest in teaching and researching about religion. Qualitative analysis and triangulation of sources revealed three main themes: 1) when WGS faculty are willing and committed to teaching about religion in spite of the risks, they often choose to do so by organically integrating religion into their teaching; 2) WGS faculty who are committed to teaching about religion in a relational way often focus on religion as a complex intersectional source of socialization for empowerment and/or oppression; and 3) WGS faculty could enact student-centered feminist pedagogy featuring open and respectful dialogue as they

teach about religion and race whether or not it's their specialty. In addition to discussing the theoretical implications of these findings, my dissertation includes a discussion of pedagogical implications of each theme, including sample materials for faculty self-reflection, class activities, and resources for further learning. Through my dissertation, I hope to empower social-justice educators with concrete possibilities for responding to bigotry and oppression that involves religion as a source of social power and inequality.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

As a transdisciplinary academic field, Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) promotes holistic social justice through its interrogation of privilege, power, and oppression. Although WGS has most often used gender as a category of analysis, scholars and activists within the field have called for greater attention to other aspects of identity, such as race, class, sexuality, nationality, and disability. Following these calls from within the field, intersectionality, the theoretical framework that examines systems of oppression in relation to each other, has become one of the core methodological approaches in WGS for research and teaching. However, WGS has continued to struggle with fully implementing the analytical concept of intersectionality as it applies to race and other categories. Calls for feminists to address racial issues with a more intersectional lens preceded the development of WGS as an academic field and have continued through the present moment.¹ In order to use an intersectional lens to theorize possibilities for a

¹ Although the development of WGS began around 1970 and the term *intersectionality* was not coined until 1989, many American feminists and women's activists of color reflect an intersectional concern for race going back at least to the feminist movement in the nineteenth century. See, for example, Cooper's arguments that racial and sex discrimination are linked in the lives of Black women and that women's liberation is linked to liberation for all oppressed groups. Although not labeled as such, Cooper's arguments from 1892 reflect a kind of nascent intersectional thought. Despite the scholarship and activism of women of color within WGS and also before the inception of the field, many scholars see white supremacy as continuing to dominate WGS. See, for example, Clark Mane and also Jonsson.

more racially just future, my dissertation turns to another significant facet of human experience and social organization that is rarely analyzed within the field: religion.

Drawing on WGS literature about intersectionality, I see religion and race as mutually co-constitutive axes of identity and oppression, and I argue that we should therefore study them in relation to each other. Furthermore, current events in the Donald Trump era have increasingly drawn attention to the ways that religiously based oppression and racism intersect to create unjust systems of bigotry, such as Islamophobia and anti-Semitism (Azam 125). However, surveying the literature surrounding the intersections of religion and race demonstrates the need for further exploration of religion and race within the scholarship and pedagogy within the field of WGS. Although I have found critiques of WGS as a White² space and as a secular space as well as explorations of religion and race as intersectional axes that shape human identity and history, I have not found a thorough discussion in the existing scholarly literature of how WGS does or should teach about the intersections of religion and race in introductory courses in order to promote holistic social justice.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of my dissertation is to assess the pedagogy and content of WGS introductory courses in order to make visible and evaluate the strategies we use to deal with religion in the classroom as it intersects with other features of the social world, especially race, ethnicity, and nationality. By making these strategies visible and suggesting new strategies for teaching about religion and race intersectionally, I hope that

² I capitalize *White* to draw attention to its social construction as a racial identity.

my dissertation will assist WGS instructors and faculty members to choose more effective teaching strategies to promote holistic social justice as well as to combat relevant and current social injustices more fully.

In this dissertation I examine how our field teaches about religion intersectionally or fails to do so in our introductory courses. I am specifically interested in the ways that our failure to interrogate religion intersectionally hinders our ability to confront current pressing issues of racial injustice that have a religious component, such as Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, forms of Zionism, and religiously inflected White nationalism. By examining how we teach—or don't teach—about religion in our introductory classes and making pedagogical suggestions, I hope to empower WGS to more effectively confront forms of racism, including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, that also have a religious component. I also explore pedagogical possibilities for addressing these issues in introductory WGS courses by incorporating an intersectional analysis of religion and other factors of the social world, especially race, ethnicity, and nationality. In a world of racist xenophobia, religious fundamentalism, and nationalism,³ our students cannot afford to be afraid to discuss and confront religion in their scholarship and activism, and I hope my research will help WGS better prepare students for this work.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of this study in the context of relevant scholarly literature. Based on my desire to contribute to WGS scholarship and pedagogy, I have

³ Although the specific examples I listed here involve religion acting as a force of oppression, religion and spirituality also empower and inspire social justice activism. Understanding the complex role of religion as both oppressive and empowering helps empower scholars and activists to better approach religion when it is oppressive. See Chapter 3.

framed this research study around the following question, which I will revisit and discuss in more detail later in this chapter: how could WGS faculty in the US teach about religion intersectionally in general introductory WGS courses in order to promote social justice more fully? To answer my research question, I conducted a qualitative case study of general introductory WGS courses using document analysis of introductory textbooks and introductory course syllabi, an open-ended survey with introductory course faculty, and in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews with introductory course faculty. Following a qualitative case study methodology grounded theoretically in intersectionality, I analyzed my data for pedagogical and theoretical themes related to the intersections of religion with other factors of the social world like race and gender.

Chapter 2 discusses my methodology, sources of data, and data analysis. Three main themes arose from my data analysis, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 3. Briefly, the themes of this study suggested that instructors of WGS introductory classes who want to teach about religion intersectionally should 1) commit to the work of integrating religion in spite of the risks, 2) teach about religion in a complex and intersectional way, and 3) enact student-centered feminist pedagogy focused on open and respectful dialogue. Based on these themes, I created sample teaching materials that could be employed in an introductory WGS class in order to teach about religion intersectionally in ways that promote social justice. These sample teaching materials are found in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 further discusses the theoretical contributions of this study and provides a conclusion.

Explanation of Relevance

Religion as a social institution contributes to both individual and communal identity. It may seem odd to focus on religion when many secular academics assume that the influence of religion is declining in the United States and worldwide. However, as a recent Pew Research study points out, although religiously unaffiliated people are a growing population in the United States, “the vast majority of Americans (77% of all adults) continue to identify with some religious faith,” and furthermore, “the majority of Americans without a religious affiliation say they believe in God” (“U.S. Public”). On an individual level, then, Americans are still largely religious. Nationally and globally, religion also significantly influences interactions between groups of people. For the time being, then, religion continues to influence the social world, and scholars who study the social world cannot afford to ignore its influence.

Furthermore, current events in the Trump era demonstrates the relevance of this study’s topic in American society. From Donald Trump’s 2015 call for a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States,” to Trump’s 2020 tear-gassing of racial-justice protesters in order to snag a photo-op with a Bible in front of a church, to Trump’s 2021 incitement of a mob carrying a “Jesus 2020” banner to storm the US Capitol, the Trump era has been defined by heightened religious and racial tension (Johnson; Gelles et al.; Gjelten; Green, “A Christian Insurrection”). During the Trump years, emboldened Christian fundamentalist and anti-Semitic White supremacists and Islamophobic travel bans exposed America’s ugly underbelly of religiously motivated racism (Spencer and Stolberg; Barnes and Marimow). Crucially, Trump did not create

these enduring tensions; Americans have long been divided by race and religion, and these differences play out in our politics (Cox and Jones; Thomson-DeVeaux). Although White Christians have historically held power in American institutions, their slipping demographics have led some White Christians to adopt a dangerous and defensive victim mentality (Green, “White Evangelicals”; Jones, *The End*). We live in a nation in which the alt-right unites neo-Nazis with White-nationalist Mormon blogger moms⁴ and atheist White supremacists who call for a White ethno-state to replace the cultural boundaries once defined by Western Christendom.⁵ When atheist White nationalists have a vested interest in resurrecting the cultural insularity of Western Christendom, religion and race are at play in more complex ways than a simplistic or additive approach can capture. Working toward holistic social justice in our current context requires a sophisticated and intersectional understanding of religion as a powerful social force that inspires division, unjust social politics, and violence.

Although this dissertation focuses on American higher education, my training in intersectional and transnational feminist theory compels me to point out the relevance of religion and race transnationally as well as domestically. In 2015, the then Secretary of State John Kerry remarked in an op-ed, “I often say that if I headed back to college today, I would major in comparative religions rather than political science . . . because religious

⁴ See Jeremy Harris’s news article covering “Wife with a Purpose” blogger Ayla Stewart’s disagreement with her church’s governing body about “white culture.”

⁵ See Wood. In describing Richard Spencer, a prominent alt-right white supremacist, Wood states, “Spencer wasn’t exactly defending Christianity; he said that he . . . was an atheist. But he longed for something as robust and binding as Christianity had once been in the West . . .”

actors and institutions are playing an influential role in every region of the world and on nearly every issue central to U.S. foreign policy.” While Kerry’s focus was specific to American diplomacy, religion is a sociologically important force between, within, and across nation states, and transnational comparison can sometimes help delineate the complex way religion influences social justice. For example, the oppression of ethnic and religious minorities in the US bears many commonalities with the experiences of other marginalized racial and religious groups transnationally. We live in a world divided by religion, with religious nationalist movements gaining political power and influence around the globe. Recent years have seen the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims from Buddhist Myanmar, the mass detention of Uighur Muslims in China, and the rise of Hindu nationalism under Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India (Hunt; Xu et al.; Radhakrishnan). In Israel, Zionists succeeded in legally declaring Israel the “nation-state of the Jewish people” in 2018, in spite of the fact that one-fifth of Israeli citizens are Muslim, Christian, and Druze Palestinians, not to mention the non-Jewish residents of Israeli-occupied Palestine (Wootliff). All around me, I see evidence that religion intersects with race, ethnicity, and nationality in powerful, influential, and often dangerous ways.

As a WGS scholar committed to promoting holistic social justice, I endeavor to confront oppression through my scholarly work. In the case of my dissertation, I hope to make a very concrete contribution to WGS’s social justice work: empowering faculty in WGS introductory courses to more mindfully and effectively confront issues of social injustice like Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and other forms of religious racism and

bigotry that are relevant in today's world. If we start from the assumption that religion and spirituality are foundational to many if not most people's identities and worldviews, then it follows that ignoring religion as an intersectional factor of identity and oppression will limit our ability to educate students appropriately. By paying attention to intersections of religion and race and their social justice implications, I hope to open up new possibilities for WGS as a field. For WGS scholars committed to holistic social justice, turning an intersectional lens toward religion and race at this juncture is not simply an academic exercise; it is a necessary tool for dismantling White supremacy in our society and in our field.

Literature Review

Before discussing my methods in greater detail in the next chapter, I will briefly review some of the most relevant scholarly literature related to this topic. First, I will review the literature on intersectionality, arguing for a greater intersectional attention to religion. Second, I will review literature related to religion and secularity within WGS. I hope to demonstrate the need for greater attention to questions of religion, specifically with respect to questions of race. Third, I will review literature related to race and racism within WGS, and I hope to demonstrate the need for intersectional approaches that challenge ongoing White supremacy within our field. Fourth, I will survey approaches to multicultural and diversity education related to religion and race. I will attempt to situate possibilities for WGS introductory classes on these topics within the larger context of multicultural education.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term created by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the ways that oppressions and identity categories intersect co-constitutively in the lives of women of color (“Demarginalizing” 140). Ideas of intersectionality have been present in the works of feminists of color before the coining of this term,⁶ so it’s important to engage with the literature on intersectionality as well as the work in which intersectionality is implicit.⁷ From the framework of intersectionality, systems of social dominance reinforce and co-create each other in a matrix of linked oppression. To give an example relevant to my topic of study, scholars like Tracy Fessenden argue that “religion has been pervasively gendered female in American life, and given a spurious unity in the same discourses that give women a spurious unity” (“Gendering Religion” 168). Forces of oppression based on gender, sexuality, race, religion, class, case draw meaning from each other. Within scholarly discussions of intersectionality, there is disagreement over whether the concept of intersectionality applies only to forces of oppression or also to categories of identity (Yuval-Davis, “Intersectionality” 203). However, pragmatically whether or not intersectionality “should” or “shouldn’t” be used to describe identity categories, it is used as such today.⁸

⁶ For a full genealogy of intersectionality, see “Getting the History of Intersectionality Straight?” in Collins and Bilge. Collins and Bilge’s volume on intersectionality usefully summarizes many current debates about intersectionality, but they do not extensively discuss religion.

⁷ See, for example, Anzaldúa’s “La Prieta.” In this piece, Anzaldúa explores the limits of identity politics and asserts her holistic identity, transcending identity categories.

⁸ For a full discussion of intersectionality as it relates to identity politics, see “Intersectionality and Identity” in Collins and Bilge.

One consequence of seeing intersectionality as related to identity rather than to processes of oppression and identity formation is the necessity of linking intersectionality with an anti-oppressionist theory of power. Some scholars argue that intersectionality is not an inherently anti-oppressionist tool but a heuristic, or analytical tool, that can be used to support a variety of different political ends (Collins; Lindsay). From this viewpoint, intersectional analysis must be combined with a “critical theory of power” in order to make progressive social change (Lindsay 456). Although intersectionality is a flexible heuristic that can be applied to dominant rather than subjugated categories, the field of WGS views intersectionality and other critical theories as primarily appropriate for use within the context of promoting social justice regardless of the specific object of analysis (Levine-Rasky). I agree with Vivian May that using intersectionality as a depoliticized matrix of analysis is inappropriate for WGS and disloyal to Crenshaw and other women of color scholars who have developed intersectionality as a framework of analysis (228).

Within WGS, intersectionality must work against hierarchy and oppression while recognizing that people can have privilege in some areas while still being oppressed in other areas. Although this insight about intersectionality is standard among WGS scholars, it bears repeating in discussions about religion, especially given Jewish critiques that argue that intersectional social-justice advocates who imagine hegemonic oppressors controlling the world can animate anti-Semitic tropes about Jews as secretly controlling

and oppressing others.⁹ Rather than jettisoning intersectionality, I suggest more careful attention to the ways that people can be intersectionally privileged and oppressed at the same time. These nuances of intersectionality are necessary in order to acknowledge the ways Jewish Americans often benefit from White privilege while also experiencing religious and racial discrimination, the ways American Christians of color experience Christian privilege at the same time as racial oppression,¹⁰ and the ways that some religiously marginalized individuals in the US could also have gender, class, caste, or racial privilege, for example. Incorporating transnationalism as a dimension of intersectionality is also important in these discussions in order to resist labelling a religious group that may have contextual privilege in a specific nation-state as universally oppressive. Furthermore, these intersections of privilege and marginalization are not additive—three privileged identities minus two marginalized identities does not equal a sum total of “one privilege.” Instead, systems of privilege and marginalization synergistically affect the experience of individuals and groups, and the effect of a single axis of privilege or oppression can be hard if not impossible to isolate from the holistic experience.

In this scholarly context, intersectional analysis in this study encompasses more than simply listing multiple identities: intersectional analysis involves an interrogation of the way systems of power and privilege create vulnerabilities and privileges for certain

⁹ For an example of this critique, see Pagano.

¹⁰ For suggestions on difficult dialogues about Christian privilege with racially marginalized Christians, see Stewart and Lozano.

groups of people at the intersection of multiple identities. Also, intersectional analysis and intersectional anti-oppression politics go hand in hand in this study. My dissertation builds on WGS scholarly literature about intersectionality by combining intersectional analysis with a commitment to anti-oppression and social justice. Specifically, I investigate how WGS introductory courses teach about religion intersectionally with the goal of promoting social justice more fully.

Religion and Secularity within WGS

Exploring religion intersectionally requires an understanding of religion and related concepts, specifically as they relate to the field of WGS and the teaching of introductory courses. I will focus on reviewing literature that relates to religion, spirituality, secularity, and postsecularity within WGS, but I will begin by defining some basic terms. Taking religion seriously as an intersectional axis of identity and oppression requires working definitions of religion and spirituality. The idea of “religion” as a discrete entity comes from a history of European Christian supremacy and colonization, and, as such, is a term fraught with reductive and ethnocentric baggage (Asad 29; Clark and Stoddard 5; Fitzgerald 8). Many individuals and groups practice cultural rituals or other forms of spirituality, which I define as meaningful intangible connections to the self or other beings, including various conceptions of “spirit” and/or the divine, which they do not label as *religion*, per se. For many people, like AnaLouise Keating, spirituality suggests personal connections devoid of elements of control often associated with organized religion like “teachings, texts, standards, and leaders” (“I’m a Citizen” 57). Similar to Keating, Leela Fernandes describes spirituality as “a direct, unmediated,

ongoing and always-changing relationship with the divine” (*Transforming* 117). For both Keating and Fernandes, as well as for many social-justice scholars, spirituality can also motivate socially engaged activism. Although most people around the world practice forms of spirituality linked to their cultural or religious identities, spirituality and religion are interrelated but not synonymous terms.

Following scholars of religion who favor a more functionalist or pragmatic definition of religion that emphasizes the lived nature of religion rather than any essential belief or universal component, I define religion as a complex sociological phenomenon involving a variety of possible components—not just spirituality, but also communities, beliefs, ethics, rituals, sacred texts, places, and organizations (Clack and Clack; Schilbrack; Smart). Meaningful study of people’s spiritual beliefs, practices, and rituals often includes those who practice spirituality within the confines of a world religion as well as those who do not (Astin et al. 39). Thus, investigations of “religion” necessitate taking people’s religious, spiritual, and secular identities seriously.¹¹ My focus in this dissertation is primarily on the social-justice implications of people’s religious, spiritual, and secular identities rather than on their subjective experiences or practices. Within this dissertation, I will often use the term *religion* for lack of a better term as a shorthand for

¹¹ Following Nielsen and Small, I use “religious, secular, and spiritual identities” to indicate a broad range of possible traditions and meaning-making communities. “Religious, secular, and spiritual identities” is a phrase used by several groups in higher education, including Convergence on Campus, the national Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS).

the myriad and complex religious, spiritual, and secular¹² identities that shape people's lives, power relations within societies, and human engagements with social justice. These complex identities include spiritual but not religious people¹³ as well as people who are not spiritual but who still identify or are shaped by a religious or cultural community.¹⁴ And, of course, because world religions are internally and diverse and not monolithic, religious identities are diverse even within a specific religious tradition.

The critical theories underpinning WGS and other fields in higher education have more often than not ignored religion or relegated it to the margins. Recognizing this limitation, education scholar Jenny L. Small has recently sought to propose a new critical theory, critical religious pluralism theory (CRPT), that examines religion as a vehicle of social domination and a potential space of social transformation (*Critical Religious Pluralism*). Small describes the tenets of CRPT as follows:

1. CRPT declares that the subordination of non-Christian (including nonreligious) individuals to Christian individuals has been built into the society of the United States, as well as institutionalized on college campuses.

¹² Secular identities include atheism, agnosticism, secular humanism, and any other non-religious identities. Including non-religious people is important in discussions of religious oppression and marginalization.

¹³ In some feminist circles, spirituality is accepted more than religiosity. See, for example, Aune's finding that UK feminists were much less religious but slightly more likely to identify as spiritual than the general population. See also Levin's 2007 finding that "women and spirituality" is a common topic for graduate WGS education.

¹⁴ These complex identities include spiritual but not religious people as well as people who are not spiritual but who still identify or are shaped by a religious community. For example, see Yuval-Davis's reflections on her experiences with religion in "My Travels/Troubles with Religion."

2. CRPT critically examines the intertwined nature of religion and culture, and embraces an intersectional analysis of religious identity with race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, dis/ability, immigration status, socioeconomic class, and all other forms of social identity.
3. CRPT exposes Christian privilege and Christian hegemony in society, as well as the related concept of the false neutral of secularism.
4. At the individual level, CRPT advocates for a pluralistic inclusion of all religious, secular, and spiritual identities, recognizing the liberatory potential of these identities upon individuals' lives.
5. At the institutional level, CRPT advocates for the field of higher education to utilize a religiously pluralistic lens in all areas of research, policy, and practice, accounting for power, privilege, marginalization, and oppression.
6. At the systemic level, CRPT advocates for religious pluralism as the means for solving religious conflict in the United States.
7. CRPT prioritizes the voices of individuals with minoritized religious identities and those with pluralistic commitments in the work toward social transformation.

(Critical Religious Pluralism ch. 4)

In many ways, this study seeks to contribute to the further development of CRPT through an in-depth study of social-justice pedagogy related to religion within the context of WGS. I will further discuss resonances between this study and Small's theories in Chapter 5.

The field of WGS has engaged with religion in a variety of ways. Niamh Reilly helpfully characterizes feminist intervention in areas of religion as falling into several categories: 1) “critiques from within” religious contexts; 2) work focusing on “‘women of colour’ [sic] or women in global South contexts” in which religion is discussed with more complexity, often as an axis of identity or even a source of empowerment; and 3) “an implicit alignment with ‘secularism’” (7). Although Reilly categorizes *feminist* scholarship rather than WGS scholarship, her categories are helpful for organizing relevant scholarship that influences this study. Using Reilly’s categories, I will address relevant WGS research relating to religion, with special attention to work that relates to intersectionality and/or race.

Critiques from Within Religion

First, some feminist and WGS scholarship on religion operates as a “critique from within” religious contexts, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s feminist resistance to patriarchal religion and theology in *The Woman’s Bible*. Feminist and womanist engagements within religious studies and theology often fall into this category.¹⁵

Although these discourses generally involve feminist contributions to other parts of the academy, mainstream WGS scholarship usually overlooks these avenues of research.¹⁶

Feminists and womanists who critique patriarchal religious structures and ideas from within the context of a given religion do important social-justice work, and they trouble

¹⁵ See, for example, Adler; Cannon; Plaskow, *Standing*; Ruether, *Sexism*; Schüssler Fiorenza; Trible; Wadud; Weems; Williams.

¹⁶ See Plaskow’s assertion that “[w]omen’s studies in religion has been a bit of a stepsister within women’s studies” (“We” 199). See also Milne.

the false binary between progressive secularism and oppressive religious patriarchy. Furthermore, as Pamela J. Milne argues, the expertise of feminist biblical scholars is needed in order to combat Christian hegemonic patriarchal assumptions in our society (135). While I think that WGS scholars should pay more attention to feminist and womanist interventions within religious studies and theology, the questions asked in “critique from within” literature are often not directly relevant to my specific research on teaching in WGS. For example, a feminist critique of a specific religious practice or community that is directed toward members of the same religious community may be valuable feminist work, but the primary audience is more likely to be practitioners of the religion rather than scholars who study religion as an identity category. However, some “critiques from within” are also critiques that focus on race and that help to support the claim that religious and racial oppression are co-constitutive (Grant; Ruether, *Gender*; West).

Women of Color and Religion

Second, Niamh Reilly notes that the deepest engagement with topics of religion often comes from the areas of WGS research that focus on women of color and women from the global South.¹⁷ This connection is undertheorized, but it is evident from the published literature in WGS and feminist theory that women of color are often more likely than White women to engage with religion or spirituality in an in-depth way

¹⁷ Within the body of literature focusing on women of color and religion, there is a large body of recent feminist work engaging with the question of religious women’s agency. The link between race and religion in this body of work is largely implicit, and the discussion is geared toward defining agency rather than defining religion or race, so this literature, while interesting, is generally not directly relevant to my research. See, for example, McPhillips.

(Crowley 254). Rosi Braidotti, for example, notes, “Black and postcolonial theories have never been loudly secular” (7). Although this dissertation does not directly investigate the phenomenon of white women’s unwillingness to intersectionally engage religion,¹⁸ the published literature about this phenomenon influenced the development of this study by suggesting that intersectional attention to religion may have implications for racial justice.

One promising area of research related to women of color and religion is research that takes womanism rather than feminism as its base. In 1979, Alice Walker introduced the term “womanism” into feminist discourse in order to describe the worldview of Black women whose oppression was based simultaneously on race and gender (Coleman 2). In addition to highlighting intersections between race and gender, many definitions of womanism highlight the spiritual aspect of womanism.¹⁹ Layli Phillips Maparyan, for example, describes womanism as follows:

Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black women’s and other women of color’s everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the

¹⁸ Although this specific phenomenon is beyond the scope of this study, I reject any explanation that assumes women of color are inherently more religious and spiritual. In fact, the engagement with religion from some women of color is decidedly anti-religious, blurring the lines between Reilly’s neat categorization. See, for example, Hutchinson’s “White Picket Fences” which addresses intersections of religion and race from an anti-religious standpoint.

¹⁹ Womanism, just like feminism, is diverse. Some forms of womanism are specifically religious, such as Christian womanist theology. Others engage in a discussion of spirituality without reference to other dimensions of religion. For a helpful discussion of the diversity within womanism, see Coleman.

environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension.

(Phillips xx)

While feminism is often implicitly or explicitly aligned with secularism (Aune), womanism is usually significantly more open to ideas of spirituality. For example, in *The Womanist Idea*, Layli Maparyan articulates womanist principles and how they operate within social justice activism, focusing on spiritualized aspects of womanism, especially the notion of the spiritual interconnections between all beings. Similarly, Stephanie Mitchem's chapter in *Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion* argues that Christian womanist theology can be an important starting place for racial reconciliation. These explorations of womanism and its relation to spirituality provide a helpful counterpoint to discussions of the secularity within White feminist and White women's and gender studies, and they provide support for my interest in the intersections of religion and race.

Secularity within WGS

Third, Niamh Reilly characterizes some WGS engagement with religion as “an implicit alignment with ‘secularism’” (7). Secularity or secularism describes a presumed lack of religion that is often associated with Western Enlightenment ideals (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 5). Jakobsen and Pellegrini importantly note that the discourse of secularism is often present and influential whether or not a society or group is empirically secular (7). In other words, whether or not the United States, WGS, or higher education are actually free from the influence of religion, the presumption of a secular space rhetorically shapes the discourse.

Although several scholars have analyzed secularism in feminism or WGS, I find Karlyn Crowley's discussion most helpful. Crowley argues that our blind allegiance to secularism in WGS perpetuates some of the hierarchies we claim to oppose (256).²⁰ Crowley claims that secularism, since it is constructed in opposition to the dominant religion of a society, is bound to the assumptions and worldview of that particular religion. Crowley argues that in America, our uninterrogated secularism is not a blank space absent of religious beliefs or underpinnings but is in fact an American Christian Protestant version of secularism (247).²¹ Crowley calls for a deeper interrogation of secularity in order to combat the hierarchies we might accidentally be reinforcing by our allegiance to secularism. Ignoring the religious and spiritual aspect of WGS and its practitioners may even perpetuate "imperialist practices in the very place that no one suspects—faithful secularism" (Crowley 256). Crowley further notes that "the few who have taken up the critique of the secularity of [WGS] are feminists of color," a trend discussed earlier (254). Although Crowley is primarily critiquing secularity within WGS, her mention of race highlights the important intersections between religion and race within the field.

The implicit alignment of WGS with secularism has meant that feminist scholarship about religion has often occurred outside rather than inside of field of WGS,

²⁰ See also Joshi's argument for a paradigm shift in dealing with religion and social justice: "Christianity already permeates all facets of our society and our laws. An even-handed silence that ignores that fact only perpetuates it" (223).

²¹ This point has been argued by several scholars, such as Jakobsen and Pellegrini (3). See also Braidotti's argument that "secular humanism is implicitly religious" (8). See also Small's claim that the "false neutrality of secularity" is related to Christian hegemony (*Critical Religious Pluralism* ch. 4). See also Haque's analysis of secularity in Arab transnational art and literature.

as discussed in summarizing “critiques from within.” A poem by Emilie Maureen Townes published in a twentieth-anniversary edition of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion (JFSR)* in 2005 captures the sense of marginalization that many feminist scholars of religion feel from WGS:

i think i’m safe in saying that the place where we have yet to make a
sustained and interstructural impact is in women’s studies
the more that religion is seen only as the demon seed of meanspiritedness
and narrow-mindedness by our colleagues in women’s studies
the more they need the *jfsr* to push their boundaries
because frankly we will never get a truly international women’s movement
going in academia by ignoring and/or isolating religion and its role in women’s
lives globally
it is in the area of women’s studies that i think we have the most room to
grow in terms of making a contribution (Townes 112–13)

Townes’s assertions prefigure many of those made by participants in this study, who are critical of WGS’s implicit alignment with secularism.

Aversion to discussions of religion and spirituality is present within WGS, but it is by no means unique to the field of WGS. It’s important to note that the academy in general has an aversion to seriously considering religion or any metaphysical manifestation of “spirit.” In “‘I’m a Citizen of the Universe’: Gloria Anzaldúa’s Spiritual Activism as Catalyst for Social Change,” AnaLouise Keating explores Anzaldúa’s concept of spiritual activism as an outwardly practiced, interconnected form of

spirituality through an in-depth textual analysis of Anzaldúa's work. Before laying out her argument, Keating first discusses at length academic and women's studies scholars' aversion to discussion of "spirit." In my research I have found Keating's analysis to be true. Even among scholars who are willing to discuss religion, a deep distrust of organized religion and a kind of spirit-phobia sometimes has prevented scholars from engaging with religion in a respectful, intersectional, and nuanced way.²²

However, a discussion of alignments with secularity in WGS cannot be complete without an acknowledgement of the Christian hegemony that has prompted this alignment. Within the US, Christianity is the dominant religion, and non-Christians, including atheists and other non-religious people, experience marginalization (Adams and Joshi; Joshi; Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism*). The dominance of Christianity goes hand-in-hand with White supremacy, and some scholars have specifically focused on White Christian Protestant hegemony within the US (Jones, *The End*; Jones, *White*; Joshi). From a social justice perspective, it is important to name Christian hegemony as a force that oppresses non-Christians in the US and in many parts of the world. Alignments with secularism occur against this backdrop, and although I often find them limiting or ineffectual, I understand that many WGS scholars see secularism as a necessary tool for combatting Christian hegemony.

²² See, for example, Hutchinson's "The 'Return'" which discusses religion and race with respect to a feminist conference on secularity but sees religion purely as a force of oppression. Her interest in giving attention to religion, secularism, and postsecularism is to advocate for a more complete erasure of religion in the world and within feminism. See also Pritchard, whose article introduces a journal issue on feminism and secularism, within which most authors seem to be dismissing religious concerns and identities.

Postsecularity within WGS

Although Reilly does not list it as a category of WGS literature on religion, I would like to discuss an additional category of literature that adopts what has been called a “postsecular” perspective. Understanding the narrative of secularity helps to understand current scholarly discourse around *postsecularity*, a term which refers to the increased influence of religion and spirituality in what were previously thought of as secular spaces. Within the academy and within WGS, scholars have begun to pay relatively more attention to issues of religion and spirituality, a move sometimes labeled the postsecular turn.²³ Scholars discussing religion and spirituality sometimes point to the greater importance of religion in society to refute the idea of a secular progress narrative, which had been assumed by many scholars.²⁴ Sometimes, this scholarly attention is negative, as is the case with much White feminist critique of Islam in Europe.²⁵ Other times, scholars seem to throw up their hands and presume that all progress made through secular humanism will be lost through a conservative religious backlash. However, the importance of religion and the acknowledgement of the “postsecular turn” in society and scholarship have also prompted some scholars to engage more deeply with questions of

²³ For a recent and thorough discussion of the influence of religion in American higher education, see Schmalzbauer and Mahoney.

²⁴ For a more thorough discussion of secularity and postsecularity, see Braidotti, Braidotti et al., and Fessenden’s “The Problem.”

²⁵ See Midden for a discussion of feminist critiques of Islam in which “feminism is (mis)used for racist purposes” (213).

religion and spirituality.²⁶ Although this scholarship is still the exception rather than the rule, I see it as a welcome trend.

I have identified postsecular literature in WGS as new, at least in name, but it overlaps in many ways with the works of women of color for several decades.²⁷ For example, even though it was not labeled at the time as “postsecular,” Gloria Anzaldúa’s theorizing on spiritual activism provides a similar perspective to many postsecular feminists and womanists calling for greater attention to spirituality. Some scholars in WGS that I label as postsecular have critiqued secularity and claimed that openness to religion and spirituality would enhance our ability to make positive social change. Specifically, some scholars have suggested that the anti-religious nature of WGS limits our possibilities for activist change in the world by cutting off potential allies and useful strategies (Fernandes, *Transforming*; Maparyan, “Feminism”).²⁸ Maparyan, for example, acknowledges that WGS assumes a secular context and suggests that an “antireligious” strain in feminism sees religion only as oppressive, which can alienate religiously motivated social-justice activists (“Feminism” 26).

Leela Fernandes similarly critiques secularity but makes it clear that she does not advocate removing religious freedom from WGS or from our political state. Rather, she argues that “secularism often incorporates elements of the dominant religions in a country

²⁶ These engagements are diverse and creative. For one example, see McPhillips’s discussion of religion with relation to the Australian state. More relevant to my research, some scholars of postsecularity discuss secularity, postsecularity, and racism. See, for example, Lentin and Titley in Braidotti et al.

²⁷ See, for example, my earlier discussion of womanist interventions.

²⁸ For more on “unlikely alliances” across religious and cultural differences, see Smith.

and does not in actuality separate religion from the state” (*Transforming* 102). Since unquestioned secularism does not actually protect the religious freedom we desire, Fernandes suggests that we acknowledge the assumptions and worldviews that we all bring to the table. As Eva Midden puts it, “a critical perspective on secularism and its relation to religion is a necessary aspect of a productive and inclusive (re)definition of feminism,” or, I would add, of the field of WGS (213). As these and other postsecular scholars remind us, we may limit our strategies and our field if we refuse to relinquish secularity as a prerequisite for working together as a coalition. The diverse presence of religious pluralism may be a more helpful tool in accomplishing social justice than the negative space of secularism. This dissertation responds to these diverse and overlapping theoretical conversations about religion within WGS and related fields specifically investigating how WGS introductory classes teach about and can teach about religion intersectionally.

Race and Racism within WGS

Before addressing race, racism, and Whiteness within WGS, I will briefly discuss the concept of race itself. Researching the intersections of religion and race first requires a nuanced view of race as a socially constructed force of identity and oppression. Women of color within feminism and WGS have long called for a deeper understanding of the ways that race shapes women’s experiences, but even those who can clearly describe the effects of race may struggle to define it. In the United States, the idea of “race” is tied to specific histories of discrimination, such as slavery and Jim Crow, racially based immigration quotas, the genocide of Native Americans, and the exploitation of Chicano

farmworkers. These and other histories are the background of the ideas of “race” that present themselves today as transparently obvious, biologically determined, and ahistorical.

Researchers who analyze the definition of race show how the meaning of race has changed over time (Gossett). Critical race theorists have endeavored to uncover the processes of racialization in this country and the rules through which racial discrimination is maintained today. Most importantly, critical race scholarship has demonstrated that race is socially and legally constructed (Haney López 10). In other words, race is not an inherent biological fact. Rather, the meanings that a group attaches to different racial identities are socially constructed in specific times and places through complicated interactions with other features of the social world. For example, Michael Omi and Howard Winant indicate that other social factors such as language, culture, and religion are often embedded in understandings of race.

Social construction, however, is not simplistic, or even purely social. Some researchers have focused on race as an interplay of biological and social factors (Omi and Winant; Reardon). As Omi and Winant explain, race is not purely biological or purely social, but “a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized” (55-6). In many ways, concepts of “race” are produced by systems of racism (Coates 7; Kendi). As the varied and conflicting literature on race suggests, race is a complicated and nuanced feature of the social world.

Racism within WGS

Specifically in WGS and within feminist movements, race has long been a contentious issue. WGS as an academic enterprise in the United States has suffered from the same racism that permeates American society, and White WGS scholars have often ignored the contributions of women of color to feminist movements, despite the explicit goals of the field to dismantle systems of oppression. Black women, for example, have often felt alienated from feminist conversations in the past, and still continue to feel alienated from more recent feminist discussions because of the history of racism within the feminist movement in the United States (Marbley).²⁹ Women of color inside and outside the academy have often felt pressured to choose between their race or their gender, with White feminists expressing racism, and racial-justice advocates expressing sexism. Academically, women of color drawn to issues of race and gender have struggled to find a “home” within these movements (Hull et al.; Story). Unfortunately, the field of WGS has been and continues to be a racist space for many people. However, WGS has also been shaped by women of color throughout its history. In highlighting the racism present in the field, I want to be careful not to erase the women of color who have been present since the beginning and continue to work within WGS for a more inclusive future.³⁰

²⁹ For a greater discussion of white feminists’ racism, see Sandoval, “Feminism and Racism,” Zinn et al. and Gillman.

³⁰ See, for example, Anzaldúa, “Now” 563; Guy-Sheftall; and Kennedy 511.

Within WGS, even efforts to discuss race sometimes fail to address racism. Laura Gillman, for example, argues that White feminists discussing race and Whiteness often center themselves and further marginalize women of color (120). Gillman cautions against an additive approach to race—“simply . . . graft[ing] race and ethnicity onto existing analyses of gender and class”—and instead argues for scholars in WGS to “reconceptualize feminist thought” along the axis of race (120). While some explorations of religion and race in WGS tend to enact racism and imperialism as Gillman describes, it is my hope to build on more promising literature in my own research in order to resist racism and empire. Within this literature, some work historicizes identity creation within the discourses of religion and race (Clark and Stoddard; Cramer; Jones, *White*; Tisby). Although intersectionality is not always named directly in these theoretical conversations, scholars of religion and race implicitly explore the ways that religious and racial oppression and identity are co-constitutive. Other scholars specifically address intersections of religion and race in feminist scholarship (Boulila; Brettschneider; Bulmer and Solomos; Smiet; Beverly Weber). Feminist scholars addressing religion and race often ground their analysis in intersectional feminism as theorized by women of color, which is what this dissertation seeks to do as well.

Whiteness and WGS

Because White supremacy intersects with Christian privilege and other systems of power to rhetorically, epistemologically, and materially shape our world, it's important to survey the literature specifically on Whiteness. Since “race” is a socially constructed category, “Whiteness” is also a socially constructed category, albeit one that usually goes

unexamined as the dominant “norm” in America and elsewhere. These dynamics also operate within WGS and various feminist discourses. For example, Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that Whiteness is an unexamined paradigm and viewpoint within White feminist circles in Australia, and that even discussions of difference often reinscribe a White center. Discussing race, then, is not enough; we must understand and contest the White supremacist thinking that pervades our field.

Studying Whiteness, however, is difficult because it “requires reading absences, following traces and ghosts, and privileging syntax (*how* something is said) over content (*what* is said)” (Clark Mane 74, emphasis original). For example, in *Learning to Be White*, Thandeka explores the process of becoming White by following the traces and ghosts of White racial development. Thandeka takes a social constructionist view of race and analyzes the psychological effects of Whiteness on the American public. Thandeka argues that Whiteness is created through a pedagogy of shame and is inherently linked to “separateness and isolation” (18). Hence, although Whiteness constructs itself as a blank space, an invisible quality, it has active effects on social spaces. This effect is one of domination, and it intersects with other forms of domination and oppression, including sexism. George Yancy, for instance, argues that within feminism “whiteness involves a reinscription of *phallic* logic; it is a site of hegemonic power relations” (158, emphasis original). For anti-oppressionist feminists and WGS scholars focused on holistic social justice, contesting unacknowledged Whiteness in the field is of utmost importance. The ability of Whiteness to intersect with other axes of oppression is significant for my investigation of race with respect to religion.

In discussing Whiteness, some scholars specifically address religion in ways that inform my own research. For example, Thandeka argues that Christian theologies of sin and forgiveness insulate White Christians from addressing their own culpability in systemic racism (117). Thus, Christian hegemony is inextricably and intersectionally linked to White supremacy (Kaur 22; Whitehead and Perry 19). In a forum on “American Religion and ‘Whiteness’” with Edward Blum and other scholars, Tracy Fessenden discusses the invisibility of Whiteness and the difficulty of analyzing or even recognizing it in society (Blum et al.). Fessenden notes that Protestant Christianity operates in a similar way in American discussions of religion—it is the unquestioned, invisible norm. Not only do Whiteness and Protestantism function similarly, they also work together. Fessenden notes that when White Christians engage in colonialism and oppression, it is sometimes hard to separate out their religious and racial identities (Blum et al. 14). Fessenden’s discussion of Whiteness and religion is helpful in seeing how the two categories mutually influence and co-create each other.³¹ At the same time, other scholars remind us not to equate Whiteness and Christianity, thereby discounting the contributions of Christian feminists, Christians of color, and queer Christians in creating progressive Christian spaces (Lee). These scholars demonstrate the ways religion and race intersect, and they also demonstrate the need for research within WGS that explores this relationship.

³¹ Other scholars explore the ways that whiteness affects religious practice. Although I am more interested in how religion and spirituality reinforce whiteness, this literature contains some interesting insights. See, for example, Kurien’s section in Blum et al.

Religious Racisms and Current Social-Justice Issues

Although scholarly literature related to race and racism often fails to account for the influences on and intersections of religion and race, the literature surrounding Islamophobia and anti-Semitism is an obvious exception. Within WGS and the academy as a whole, global current events have fostered a robust discussion related to religious bigotry and religious forms of racism. Forms of religious racism and nationalism, such as Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, Christian White-nationalism, and forms of Zionism are widely recognized as related to racism as well as religion.³² Even though “anti-Semitism is located on a different historical continuum from Islamophobia,” both distinct histories are relevant for today’s social-justice issues, and, therefore, for this research project (Schiffer and Wagner 81).

The literature surrounding anti-Semitism is interesting from an intersectional perspective. Although there is a tendency in popular as well as scholarly discourse to treat Jewishness as either an essentialized race or as a religion, but not as an intersection of both religion and race, anti-Semitism is one of the most recognized examples of the social-justice consequences of the racialization of religion. Historically, Jews in Europe were a racialized “other” long before Europeans came to the New World or began the Atlantic slave trade. Thus, much anti-Black racism is built on the historical foundation of Christian anti-Semitism and Orientalism (Spangenberg). In the words of Atiya Husain in discussing the racialization of Jews and Muslims, “Religion has never been an

³² As an example within our field, the National Women’s Studies Association’s (NWSA) 2018 Annual Conference Call for Papers specifically lists Islamophobia and anti-Semitism as examples of regressive religious bigotry that represents the antithesis of WGS’s work. See “Just Imagine.”

afterthought in systemic racism, but a racial classifier, weaponized to maintain whiteness” (“Are Jews White?”). Other scholars refer to this historical nexus as “the race-religion constellation,” “refer[ring] to the practice of classifying people into races according to categories we now associate with the term ‘religion’” (Topolski 59). Because Jews have been victims of racialized and religiously motivated oppression for millennia, studying anti-Semitism reveals the way that religion and race intersect and have historically intersected. Furthermore, as Isabel Wilkerson points out, the racialized caste systems of the US and Nazi Germany bear many similarities, partially because Nazi’s looked to racist US law and eugenics research as inspiration (79). The resurgence of anti-Semitic and anti-Black White nationalists in today’s political climate speaks to the relevance for further investigating anti-Semitism as a key part of racist logics.

Islamophobia is another widely recognized form of religious racism that has received much scholarly attention within and beyond WGS. As Khaled Beydoun and other scholars have noted, today’s Islamophobia draws on the historical antecedent of Orientalism, as described by Edward Said. Said describes Orientalism as the way the “West” imagines the “East”—the set of stereotypes that Europe and European Americans use to imagine the “East” as a wholly separate, opposite entity to Western civilization, against which Europe and European Americans define themselves (Said). Islamophobia—“the presumption that Islam is inherently violent, alien, and unassimilable”—depends on an understanding of Muslims and Islam as “Other” (Beydoun 28). And as Said argues, “the Orient,” or what today we might call “the Middle East,” is “one of [Europe’s] deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (1). In other

words, Islamophobia is a form of racism³³ that racializes and degrades “Middle Easterners” and Muslims.

While the temptation in discussing Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism is to pretend that it’s a recent phenomenon created by Donald Trump or 9/11, scholars of Islamophobia remind us to put today’s new manifestations of Islamophobia in an intersectional conversation with a longer history of race, racialization, and religion (Beydoun). Scholars of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism have explored the intersectional, historical, and legal process of racialization and subsequent racial oppression of people presumed to be Muslim in America, including enslaved Africans in early American history and non-Muslims today like Sikhs who are often victims of Islamophobia (Beydoun; Gualtieri; Love; Muhammad). Critical scholarship of the intersections of religion and race with respect to Islamophobia, such as Khaled Beydoun’s *American Islamophobia*, suggests that American society often lacks the critical ability to recognize the intersecting racial, ethnic/national, and religious identities of Muslims. Beydoun, a student of Crenshaw’s, argues that America struggles to recognize African Muslims’ intersectional identities because such a recognition would “[disrupt] the narrow way in which Muslim identity was racially configured,” namely, in terms of Arab ethnicity (58). Because religion and race intersect to create privilege, oppression, and categories of meaning, American society has a hard time understanding

³³ See Khabeer et al.’s educational activist website *Islamophobia is Racism*.

Muslim identity independently from race.³⁴ Similarly, Husain explores today's intersections of religion and racial classification by arguing that being Muslim complicated both Black and White American Muslims' racial self-understanding ("Moving" 10). Critical and intersectional scholarship on Islamophobia highlights the necessity of intersectional analysis in understanding American Islamophobia.

Scholars of religious racisms contribute to an intersectional understanding of religion and race, but little of this work has been done by WGS scholars. Outside of the field of WGS, scholars investigating intersections of Christian supremacy and White supremacy in the American context have demonstrated the historical and current relevance of this intersection for social justice (Jones, *The End*; Tisby). Other scholars exploring the relationship between politics, nationalism, and religion in America sometimes touch on race and racism as motivating factors in shaping current racial, religious, and political realities (Gaston; Haselby). Some scholars in the US have found that religiosity in general or Christianity specifically are correlated with racist attitudes (Hall et al.; Jones, *White*). Other scholars have investigated religious racisms outside of the US context, whether or not they are named as such, including in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia outside the US, Hindu nationalism, and racism against practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions (Alietti and Padovan; Dunn et al.; Neace; Subramanian).

³⁴ As an example, see Wilkerson's use of the designation "Muslim-American" in describing the ethnicity of a police officer who, along with other "men of color," had been "prosecuted for police brutality" (243). Even careful and well-researched work about the construction of racialized caste systems in the US can fail to see "Muslim" as anything other than a racial designation.

Scholars have also explored the “negative feedback loop” of various forms of Zionism, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism that interact in complex ways historically and today (Bobako 100; Brettschneider; Gold; Klug). Historically, some argue that since European anti-Semitism created and fueled the Zionist movement, it also bears some responsibility in the displacement of Palestinians (Halabi 400). Today, European and American Islamophobia often constructs the racialized, Muslim “other” as an anti-Semitic danger to European multiculturalism forged in response to the Holocaust—effectively externalizing White Christian responsibility for the Holocaust (Romeyn, “Anti-Semitism”; Romeyn, “Liberal Tolerance”).

The politics of Israel and Palestine also relate to US racial politics in a variety of ways. Anti-racist solidarity between Black Americans and Palestians has long been present in activist and feminist circles (Omer 187). At the same time, the need for solidarity with Jewish Americans as a religiously and racially marginalized group is evident in the prominence of anti-Semitism as “the theoretical core of White Nationalism” (Ward). These interactions are complex and disputed,³⁵ but they are relevant for WGS because they also occur internally, with many American feminists’ solidarity with Palestinians and opposition to Zionism being perceived by some as anti-Semitic (Burack; Lipstadt 198). Given the context of rising anti-Semitism, Islamophobic, and Christian White nationalism³⁶ in the US and the need for transnational solidarity with

³⁵ For a thoughtful analysis of many of these issues with attention to intersectional and feminist social-justice concerns, see Alpert; Brettschneider; and Omer.

³⁶ See Green, “A Christian Insurrection.”

oppressed religious minorities, issues of religious racism are complicated for transnational and intersectional feminists and WGS scholars. As a whole, the scholarship on religious racisms demonstrates the salience of these issues for social-justice scholarship and praxis.

Multicultural Education and WGS Introductory Courses

Although I have discussed religion and race largely from a theoretical perspective, this dissertation is primarily interested in the ways WGS as a field *teaches* about these concepts. As such, I situate my research in the larger body of scholarship on critical multicultural education. I have chosen to examine WGS through the lens of introductory college courses, which may represent the largest numerical engagement with WGS in the United States and form the foundation of WGS undergraduate curriculum. In order to contextualize my discussion of WGS introductory courses, I will review literature surrounding multicultural education as it relates to religion and race.

First, what is multicultural education, and how does it or should it relate to WGS? Multicultural education or multiculturalism within education can mean different things. In her article “‘Making New Connections’: Transformational Multiculturalism in the Classroom,” AnaLouise Keating helpfully summarizes trends within literature on multiculturalism: 1) multiculturalism sometimes refers to a vapid celebration of difference; 2) multiculturalism can relate to interactions between different cultural groups or analysis of these differences, and 3) multiculturalism can be used to resist intersecting oppressions (95-96). Although the use of multiculturalism in Keating’s first category is not helpful to this study, which does not seek to simply “celebrate” differences between

cultures, this understanding of multiculturalism significantly impacts the overall climate of higher education. Lynne Goodstein, for example, suspects that rather than moving all students toward a deeper understanding of diversity and injustice and greater commitment to social justice, cheapened diversity courses often celebrate a kind of simplistic variety of experience. Goodstein suggests that university bureaucracies often appropriate and co-opt the true goals of diversity or multicultural education as articulated by WGS and other social justice scholars. Goodstein recommends, and I agree, that WGS and other social justice scholars should stay actively involved in their universities' diversity conversations lest the opportunity for truly transformative diversity education be squandered.

In my survey of literature on multicultural education, I am focusing on the third trend that Keating identifies, sometimes called critical multiculturalism. As I use it, multicultural education refers to education that is “non-hierarchal [sic] in its race, class, and gender³⁷ construction and based on transformative visions of freedom and justice” (Swartz 494). These goals in many ways mirror the goals of a WGS education and the goals of WGS for transforming the academy, and they directly relate to my own research about WGS introductory classes. Although not always labeled as such, WGS classes are part of a larger movement toward multicultural education and should be studied in this context.³⁸ Since conversations within the field of education about transforming

³⁷ Although I adopt Swartz's language, I note that her list is not exhaustive.

³⁸ For example, in a meta-analysis of the effects of diversity initiative, Denson included WGS courses as a type of multicultural curricular intervention (813).

curriculum and educational institutions are usually conducted under the umbrella terms of multicultural or diversity education,³⁹ I will review relevant literature about multicultural education related to religion and race. By examining how WGS does or might teach about these topics within the larger framework of how other groups teach about these topics, I hope to uncover both areas in which WGS can learn from other fields and also areas in which WGS is uniquely positioned to accomplish goals of multicultural education and to contribute to the larger goal of educating and preparing our students for a multicultural and religiously pluralistic world.

Multicultural or diversity education is practiced in a variety of different ways throughout all levels of schooling. Sometimes, the goals and approaches to multicultural education transcend the boundaries of age and educational systems. At other times, the research on multicultural education related to early education is largely irrelevant for a similar discussion in higher education. Since WGS in the United States is almost exclusively part of higher education rather than K-12 education, I primarily draw on research that focuses on educating older students. Although attention to multiculturalism and diversity in teaching younger children is vital to the future of our society—and perhaps should be a part of the mission of WGS—teaching about diversity and multiculturalism on the college level fits in more closely with the current realities of WGS. One interesting question that arises in the college setting is the relationship between diversity initiatives and the liberal arts mission. As far back as 2000, a study of

³⁹ According to Denson, on the college level in the US multicultural education more often refers to educational courses, while diversity education often refers to short workshops and seminars.

500 colleges and universities found that the majority of these institutions had multicultural curricular requirements,⁴⁰ which suggests that many colleges and universities see multicultural education as an important part of their curriculum, at least in theory (Hogan and Mallott 115).

Religion in Multicultural Education

Multicultural or diversity education sometimes specifically includes religion as part of the curriculum. Since multicultural education varies so widely across nations, age levels, and disciplines, summarizing the role of religion in multicultural education is difficult. First, differences in legal, educational, and social systems produce different goals and approaches to religion in multicultural education. In summarizing the literature on religion in multicultural education, I draw primarily on research from the United States and look at international perspectives only as they inform possibilities for multicultural education about religion within WGS in higher education.

The field of religious studies houses much of the multicultural education about religion in US higher education institutions. Lucia Hulsether argues that the development of religious studies as an interdisciplinary field separate from theology is analogous to the development of WGS and ethnic studies. Hulsether sees the development of these “interdisciplines” as stemming partially from neo-liberal “containment” of feminist and “anti-racist student movements” (1). Discussions of religious literacy and religious studies education are not always framed in terms of social justice, but consider the

⁴⁰ Some of these requirements include WGS requirements. For a discussion of one university’s required gender studies course and the rationale behind adding it to the core curriculum, see Theresa Brown.

perspectives of Simran Jeet Singh: “University brass often refers to this kind of [religious and cultural] literacy as a civic good, but as a brown-skinned, turban-wearing, beard-loving man in Donald Trump’s America, I submit that people knowing who I am and having an appreciation for my religious heritage can mean the difference between life and death” (“Why Universities”).

Research on incorporating religion as a component of multicultural education often highlights the need for greater religious literacy in society and a greater attention to religious studies within education (Cush and Robinson; Diamond; Fujiwara; Gallagher; Diane Moore; and Prothero). Within the literature on religion in multicultural education classes, many researchers call for greater attention to religion within all levels of our education system, from K-12 to university education (Maley; James Moore; Passe and Willox). Scholars calling for greater attention to religion often see religious literacy and pluralism as necessary for a functioning democratic society with a diverse population (Patel and Hartman). From the perspective of this body of research, WGS’s choice to integrate or ignore religion as part of an intersectional framework has implications for social justice and the future of our society. The fields of teacher education,⁴¹ English studies,⁴² counseling and psychology,⁴³ social work,⁴⁴ and nursing and health studies⁴⁵

⁴¹ See, for example, Aronson et al.; Blumenfeld and Jaekel; and Pinar.

⁴² See, for example, Vander Lei and kyburz.

⁴³ See, for example, Crook-Lyon et al.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Hodge.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Benner Carson and Koenig.

each appear to have robust disciplinary conversations related to the need for addressing religion in multicultural education. The presence of these disciplinary conversations should serve to inspire WGS to take the topic of religion in multicultural education more seriously.

Some efforts at diversity or multiculturalism with respect to religion occur outside of the official curriculum. Eboo Patel, one of the most prominent voices in discussions of religious pluralism and interfaith cooperation in higher education, encourages interfaith service as a co-curricular means of building cooperation (*Sacred Ground*). Student life, administration, and various offices of diversity sometimes deal with campus climate separately from curricular instruction.⁴⁶ In many ways, university policies around holidays, designated worship places, and other procedures reinforce Christian privilege through a kind of secularization of Christianity that helps it operate as an unofficial state religion (Clark and Brimhall-Vargas). These issues are further complicated, however, by intersections with race for racially marginalized groups who may or may not experience Christian privilege (Clark).

Some scholars have tried to approach religion in multicultural education from the lens of critical theory and social justice. In response to the emphasis on interfaith dialogue⁴⁷ rather than on systemic change for social justice, some scholars of higher

⁴⁶ See, for example, Patel and Giess's helpful suggestions.

⁴⁷ The emphasis on interfaith dialogue is exemplified in the work of Eboo Patel, who promotes religious literacy, but has also been critiqued by other scholars as focusing only on educating individuals rather than on making systemic change within higher education. See Patel's discussion of his founding of the Interfaith Youth Core in *Acts of Faith*, and see also Gill's critique of Patel's emphasis on interfaith dialogue.

education have emphasized the need to foreground systemic dynamics, such as Christian privilege, that influence student well-being (Blumenfeld et al.; Bowman and Small; Edwards, “Critical Reflections”; Edwards, *Critical Conversations*; Edwards, “Intergroup Dialogue”; Fairchild and Blumenfeld; Nielsen and Small; Watt et al.). Small’s *Critical Religious Pluralism in Higher Education*, discussed previously, fits into this body of work. Although Small’s theories are helpful for this study theoretically, like her other work, the focus for application is primarily student affairs rather than academic affairs (Small, *Making Meaning*). This body of scholarship does not focus on pedagogy but is theoretically rich in its explorations of social-justice issues related to religion, such as Christian privilege, religious oppression, and intersections of religions with other social categories like race. Unfortunately, there appears to be little cross-pollination between this promising body of scholarship and WGS scholarship.

Some scholars explore religion in multicultural education from a feminist perspective, but, tellingly, these discussions usually come from feminist scholars in religious studies rather than scholars incorporating religion as an axis of analysis in WGS. Some of these discussions critically examine how racial and religious identities intersect, such as in the case of White Buddhists (Azaransky). Discussions of religion in WGS pedagogy are somewhat rare in scholarly literature, which highlights the contribution that this study seeks to make. One such discussion occurs in an article by Elizabeth Sharp et al. Sharp et al. discuss the role of religion in their development as feminist teachers while teaching a course on gender development that was cross-listed between WGS and human development and family studies. Sharp et al. note that the

conservative Christian attitudes of their students influenced their resistance to learning about sexism and other issues of feminism. Sharp et al. acknowledge that students' religious attitudes contribute to their own reluctance as instructors "to address issues of religion and sexism in the classroom" (538). Sharp et al. do not mention using intersectionality to address their students' religious identities, and they seem to equate their students' religious identities with the pedagogical challenges of Christian hegemony. However, one author also acknowledges and accommodates her students' religious identities: "I also inform them they are not required to leave their beliefs at the door of the classroom. Their belief systems are how they filter what they hear in the classroom" (Sharp et al. 538). A different author uses transparent self-reflexivity about her own identity as a Catholic feminist to preempt student resistance and encourage "both/and" thinking (Sharp et al. 539). Sharp et al. also acknowledge that incorporating intersectionality into their gender-focused course has been a challenge for them. I summarize these aspects of Sharp et al. because issues related Christian hegemony, class conflict, self-reflexivity, and intersectionality are important in this study as well.

Race in Multicultural Education

On the college level, multicultural education often involves anti-racist education. As I mentioned in my discussion of religion in multicultural education, these educational approaches involve curricular interventions as well as other programs, seminars, and policies on college campuses.⁴⁸ Scholars researching anti-racist education have attempted

⁴⁸ Since my interest is in multicultural education through WGS introductory courses, most research related to co-curricular interventions is tangential to my concerns. However, research shows that these interventions can make an impact on students' attitudes. See, for example, Muthuswamy et al., who

to quantify the effect of multicultural classes, and have found college diversity courses to be effective in reducing racial prejudice.⁴⁹ One large qualitative study on the effects of an anti-racist multicultural college course revealed that the majority of students at the end of the course felt that the material was important and many felt that the class should be a curricular requirement (Kathleen Martin 536). Occasionally, researchers have even specifically examined the effect of WGS courses in reducing prejudice. David E. Hogan and Michael Mallott, for example, have shown that college students who participated in race and gender diversity classes showed lower levels of racial prejudice, and Nida Denson's meta-analysis, which showed the positive effects of multicultural education on racial bias, included women's studies courses. Overall, research strongly suggests that multicultural education in general and WGS classes in particular have the potential to address race in ways that reduce students' racial bias.

The picture of anti-racist education is not always positive, however, and many researchers have significant misgivings about "diversity" and "multicultural" education. Within the context of multicultural education courses, sometimes White students demonstrate resistance to learning about race (Sanchez-Casal). Perhaps surprisingly, research has found that White college students also often benefit most from multicultural

demonstrated positive impacts of interactional anti-racist education in a learning community outside of official classes.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Denson's meta-analysis. Denson's meta-analysis helpfully summarizes and analyzes many of the studies done on this topic in more detail than I can provide here. Denson concludes that "there is an overall positive effect of curricular and cocurricular diversity activities in reducing racial bias in college students" (818). Although it is not as directly relevant to my research, studies have also found early childhood interventions to be successful at reducing racial bias (Aboud et al.).

education about race and ethnicity (Denson 824).⁵⁰ White students may have more to learn from multicultural courses, while students of other racial backgrounds come into the class with a significant amount of experiential knowledge. White students' gains also appear to be tied to identity, intergroup interactions, and democratic participation (Daniela Martin 120, 121). Regardless of the findings that multicultural education can reduce racial bias, some researchers question the effectiveness of curricular solutions to systemic problems (Anderson). Similarly, Ibram X. Kendi is particularly critical of any form of education as a mechanism of anti-racist change, arguing that the problem of racism "has always been at its core the problem of power, not the problem of immorality or ignorance," and prescribing policy change rather than persuasion through education or any other means (207). Regardless of whether courses can reduce students' racial prejudice, these critiques raise the question of whether changing individual attitudes in college courses is an effective method of anti-racist praxis.

While I agree that more needs to be done to address racism than curricular transformation, WGS faculty already working within the higher education system must think about the most effective ways to address race in the classroom. As teachers with the goal of advancing holistic social justice, it is our professional responsibility to address important issues of injustice within the classroom, even if our anti-racist commitments also demand action beyond the classroom. While focusing on anti-racist curriculum and pedagogy does not absolve WGS teachers and scholars from addressing systemic racism

⁵⁰ This finding was identified by several previous researchers and confirmed by Denson's meta-analysis.

through other means, WGS teachers should unquestionably still include an anti-racist focus in their courses. Bearing in mind these limitations, Audrey Thompson helpfully offers a framework for thinking about anti-racist education. Rather than teaching anti-racist education as a reactive strategy for limiting individual acts of racism, Thompson encourages teachers to see the anti-racist agenda as a key part of democratic education in a systemically racist country. To this end, many scholars inside and outside of WGS offer specific pedagogical suggestions for addressing race and racism in the classroom.⁵¹ These pedagogical suggestions focus on a variety of different strategies that anti-racist teachers have found to be useful on the college level in WGS and other classes, and the pedagogical suggestions offered in this study should be considered in relation to these existing conversations.

WGS Classes and Multicultural Education

Within the larger context of multicultural education research, some research specifically addresses WGS classes and their impact. Some of this work is dated, and there is much still that needs to be done, but reviewing this literature should help in identifying the role that introductory WGS courses might play in addressing intersections of religion and race. Much of the pedagogical literature on WGS in general and the WGS introductory class in particular relies on individual instructors' reflections on their classroom, which highlights the contributions of this study in bringing together the perspectives of multiple instructors as well as other sources of data. Barbara Scott

⁵¹ See, for example, Cho; Danowitz; Keating, "Investigating 'Whiteness,'" and "Making New Connections"; Leonardo and Porter; Rothschild; and Sueyoshi.

Winkler and Carolyn DiPalma's helpful volume on introductory WGS courses, *Teaching Introduction to Women's Studies*, is over twenty years old, and the field has expanded and changed significantly in the intervening years. However, Winkler and DiPalma identify a move in introductory WGS courses toward intersectionality as a critical framework in the introductory course, a trend that has continued since this publication (9). The authors in *Teaching Introduction to Women's Studies* also helpfully investigate issues of student resistance in the classroom, a perennial challenge.

Outside of Winkler and DiPalma's volume, reflections on the WGS introductory course include discussions of intersectionality, students' reflecting on their own social locations, interdisciplinary team-teaching, trends toward intersectionality and transnationality in Canadian WGS introductory courses, role-playing in discussions, using archives in teaching feminist history, the visibility of Asians and Asian Americans in the course, and letter writing as an assignment (Craven; Lindsay Davis; Hanrahan et al.; Hobbs and Rice; Karlsson; McDanel; Samanta; White et al.). As a whole, the literature about the WGS introductory course reveals a strong commitment to intersectional social-justice and feminism from WGS instructors. It also appears that the course represents many challenges and opportunities for instructors. Students can connect deeply to the material, but the personal nature of many topics also can prove challenging in many ways. Specifically, race regularly emerges as a site of frequent conflict and contestation in the WGS introductory class.

Most authors who discuss the WGS introductory course in their publications do not discuss religion, and those that do frequently speak about it in passing and in

somewhat reductive ways. For example, both Helen Bannan and Lisa Logan in Winkler and DiPalma's volume briefly discuss religion as a sociological influence, particularly on patriarchal gender roles. Bannan and Logan also appear to set up a binary between oppressive patriarchal organized religion and potentially liberating feminist spirituality. However, Bannan also acknowledges religious oppression and notes its links to xenophobia, "ethnic discrimination[,] and also to classism" (190). Heidi M. Hanrahan, Amy L. DeWitt, and Sally M. Brasher also mention religion briefly in their article about team teaching introductory WGS courses, mainly as a contributor to patriarchy. However, they also quote a student who explained that she learned that religion "has been a driving force of oppression for females and slaves, yet it has also been a saving grace and has given these oppressed populations an opportunity to have a sense of freedom in the midst of oppression" (Hanrahan et al. 107). Even though these mentions are brief, they provide helpful context for some of the assertions my participants make in this study about the field of WGS.

Even though WGS is a relatively new academic field, a number of scholars have studied the impact of WGS classes on students. While most of these studies do not specifically examine the role that WGS classes might play in students' understanding of religion and race, they are helpful for demonstrating the overall effect of WGS classes in the university setting. Some studies, for example, have examined the effects that WGS classes have on students' attitudes about gender and social justice (Harris et al.; Stake and Hoffmann). The impetus behind these studies often appears to have been an assumption that the goal of WGS classes was to change students' attitudes. While these studies have

shown that WGS classes increase egalitarian and feminist attitudes among students, they generally do not examine the impact of WGS on students' critical understanding of religion or race. However, one older study comparing women's studies and non-women's studies courses and controlling for pedagogical approaches found that although the pedagogical approach to the class accounted for some of the effect on students' attitudes, "the *knowledge* gained in [women's studies courses] appears to have had an impact that was independent of teacher characteristics, class variables, and pedagogy" (Stake and Hoffmann). In addition to affecting students' attitudes about gender and other social justice issues, WGS classes appear to often have a positive effect on students' self-confidence (Stake and Gerner; Stake and Rose). Additionally, WGS classes have been shown to spur students to action in terms of feminist activism (Stake and Hoffmann). These studies are helpful in demonstrating the social impact that WGS might have on the university.

Several other studies examined students' responses to WGS classes in ways that were framed more in terms of knowledge than attitude. For example, students in WGS classes appear to be more aware of sexism as a result of their WGS class (Stake and Rose). In general, studies have shown that WGS classes affect students' attitudes as well as their critical thinking abilities for societal analysis (Katz et al.; Malkin and Stake; Stake and Hoffmann). Several studies have explored what factors influence the impact that a WGS class has on its students. Initial student attitudes and relationships formed during WGS have been found to be significant factors that influence the effect that WGS classes have on their students (Malkin and Stake; Stake et al.; Sevelius and Stake).

Malkin and Stake identified teacher alliance and student cohesion as important factors in determining the degree to which students in WGS classes would adopt more egalitarian attitudes. Furthermore, Malkin and Stake determined that students' initial attitudes and expectations predicted their willingness to form the relationships with teachers and students that in turn affected student's attitudes. As a whole, this scholarship demonstrates that WGS classes have contributed to the learning and success of students in the university setting. Summarizing educational research on WGS outcomes, Ilona Horwath and Christian Diabl state, "Empirical research provides strong evidence of the personal and professional benefits of WGS for students, and the positive impact it has on their lives, communities and on society, more generally" (1111). Based on the previous research, WGS seems positioned to make a significant impact on students' intersectional understanding of religion if such a focus were incorporated into WGS classes, and specifically into introductory courses.

Research Question

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, this dissertation is framed around the following primary research question: how could WGS faculty in the US teach about religion intersectionally in general introductory WGS courses in order to promote social justice more fully? Based on the available scholarly literature, I am particularly interested in intersections of religious, secular, and spiritual identities with race, ethnicity, and nationality. Building on the existing scholarly literature, I hope to add depth of knowledge from this case study that will contribute to feminist pedagogy on this topic as

well as critical social-justice pedagogy related to religion more broadly. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodology and sources of data for this case study.

CHAPTER II

METHODS AND DATA

Based on existing research, I designed this study to answer my primary research question: how could WGS faculty in the US teach about religion intersectionally in general introductory WGS courses in order to promote social justice more fully? Using introductory WGS courses as a case study, this study examines how instructors teach about religion as it intersects with other axes of social identity and power, especially race, ethnicity, and nationality. I conducted an exploratory qualitative case study of WGS general introductory undergraduate classes taught in the US within recent years, using the following major sources of data: six textbooks widely assigned in introductory courses, thirty-eight syllabi for introductory courses, a survey of thirty-five WGS faculty of introductory courses, and in-depth interviews with seven faculty WGS members who demonstrated an interest in teaching and researching religion. In this chapter, I will describe my theoretical framework, methodological approach, methods, data collection, and data analysis methods.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectional Feminist Epistemology

The theoretical framework for my study is intersectional feminist epistemology as taught and practiced in the field of WGS. Throughout the research process, intersectional feminist epistemology guided my selection and implementation of research methods.

Intersectionality is in some ways both the subject and the guiding force behind this research project. In assuming that religion and race—and the privilege and oppression based on them—are co-constitutive, I have focused this study on an intersectional subject. But beyond my subject of study, my approach in asking and answering my research question is intersectional and transdisciplinary, following Vivian May’s call to “[d]raw on intersectionality’s matrix approach to meaningfully engage with heterogeneity, enmeshment, and divergence” (229). Intersectionality assumes that oppressive systems interlock in complex ways that defy simplistic categorization. Although my research focuses on one specific intersection, religion and race, using intersectionality as my theoretical approach has drawn my attention to the diverse ways that religion, race, gender, and other categories work together to create complex meaning in the social world. This study expresses the need for anti-racist, intersectional attention to religion in WGS, but in doing so, I have tried to be open to learning how religion intersects with other factors of the social world in ways that surprise and challenge my previous understandings.

In trying to flesh out a more complex understanding of the intersections of religion and race, I have also attempted to follow the imperative of intersectional methodology to “follow opacity and to read against the grain” (May 229). Since interlocking systems of oppression rarely announce themselves as such, practitioners of intersectionality must be willing to notice nuance, question normative frameworks, and explore unstated assumptions. In following opacities, I paid careful attention to the stories

and narratives that are told in introductory classes about religion.⁵² Although I framed my research questions in a positive light, looking for possibilities to improve teaching, I was also interested in noticing and probing opacities and negative spaces—why don't some instructors feel the need to engage with religion? How could unstated identities, like Whiteness, and unexplored philosophical commitments, like secularity, influence individuals and our field as a whole? To a large extent, my research design was shaped by following these “opacities,” in May’s words.

Following opacities and exploring unstated assumptions in my research also involves a transdisciplinary “refusal of disciplinary boundaries and intellectual orientations that foster social amnesia or ‘agnotology,’ structured nonknowings that exclude vast amounts of evidence and experience from accredited knowledge in order to serve hegemonic interests” (Hawkesworth 516).⁵³ Methodologically, this kind of transdisciplinary intersectionality requires me to use social science methods when helpful without accepting the epistemological and disciplinary norms of social science that are unsuitable for my research. May claims that intersectional methodology “set[s] aside norm emulation as a philosophical/political/research/policy strategy,” which, in my case, involves eschewing disciplinary norms (229). In my research, I use research and methods used in multiple different fields; however, drawing on Patricia Leavy and Basarab Nicolescu, I see transdisciplinarity as involving more than mixing knowledge from

⁵² My models for this kind of attention to WGS/feminism include Clark Mane; Fessenden, “Disappearances”; and Hemmings.

⁵³ Anzaldúa might say that the path to *conocimiento* (enlightenment) involves moving through *desconocimientos* (nonknowings) (“Now”).

different sources. I hope that my study embodies the potential of transdisciplinarity for “synergistic collaboration” between different bodies of disciplinary knowledge (Leavy 9). Specifically, I used the critical theory of intersectional feminism as developed in WGS and related transdisciplinary fields⁵⁴ to inform my choice of qualitative methods from social science research in order to make a pedagogical and educational transformation of WGS as a field. Because the knowledge I seek to produce is transdisciplinary and liberatory, I chose research methods that align with those goals.

Methodological Approach: Qualitative Case Study

Following Kate Caelli, Lynne Ray, and Judy Mill, I aim to clearly state the methodological approach, influences, and assumptions that guide my use of qualitative methods. In order to answer my research question, I used qualitative case study methodology⁵⁵ to study WGS introductory courses through several sources of data, including a survey, document analysis, and open-ended semi-structured interviews. As in any case study, I analyzed a bounded system.⁵⁶ In this case, the bounded system I chose to analyze consisted of general introductory WGS courses taught in the US in recent years, which I use as an instrumental—rather than an intrinsic—case study of social-justice education related to the intersections of religion and race. In an intrinsic case study, a bounded system is chosen because its unique characteristics as a case are worthy of study (Creswell 98). Instead, I chose an instrumental case study, in which an

⁵⁴ For more on WGS as a liberatory, transdisciplinary epistemological space, see Aaron and Walby.

⁵⁵ For more on case study research as a methodology, see Creswell 97 and Yin 16–17.

⁵⁶ See Creswell 97.

appropriate case is used “to understand a specific issue, problem, or concern” (Creswell 98). My goal, in other words, was to study teaching about religion intersectionally for the purpose of social justice, and I used WGS introductory courses as an instrumental case study in order to better understand that specific issue. As Michael Quinn Patton explains, “Any exemplar of a phenomenon of interest can be a worthy single-case study” (273). Although our field is large and diverse and could be productively analyzed through a variety of different approaches, I chose introductory WGS college courses for this case study because they are one of the most commonly offered WGS courses in the United States.

Since the inception of WGS around 1970, WGS courses and programs have proliferated in US colleges and universities and around the world. In 2021 Joan Korenman records over six hundred US WGS programs that offer a WGS minor, major, graduate certificate, master’s, or doctorate. The vast majority of these programs include an introductory WGS course, which is often the only required course for a WGS minor that may consist mainly of cross-listed courses from other programs.⁵⁷ Detailed statistics are not available concerning how many students nationwide take an introductory WGS course on an annual basis, but according to an American Academy of Arts and Sciences study of WGS programs, at least 109,360 undergraduate students enrolled in WGS

⁵⁷ In order to make these generalizations about introductory WGS courses, I randomly sampled ten percent of the programs on Korenman’s list and identified whether or not the program included an introductory course from the website. Of the sampled programs, sixty-two included a WGS introductory course and four did not. Programs that do not include an introductory course may consist entirely of cross-listed courses or may instead require a capstone course, which in practice may function similarly to introductory WGS courses in other institutions. See also Levin’s 2007 assertion that women’s studies programs commonly feature a “required introductory class” (18).

courses in the fall of 2017 (American Academy of Arts and Sciences 5).⁵⁸ In many institutions, introductory WGS courses meet general education, core curriculum, or other graduation requirements related to diversity or multiculturalism.⁵⁹ These requirements change not only the number of students enrolling in WGS courses but also the pedagogical challenges associated with teaching them. For example, Ilona Horwath and Christian Diabl studied the effect of requiring WGS in an Austrian university and found that it has the potential to increase both “resistance and change” in response to the course, with men showing significantly more resistance to the requirement (1109). In terms of their curricular contribution to undergraduate WGS instruction, Danielle M. DeMuth explains the importance of introductory WGS courses: “Introductory-level courses, through content and assignments, begin the process of critical consciousness that can lead to students’ agency as they develop visions of themselves as actors in social change movements; these courses can also introduce students to research and the theory of activism with regard to the core topics in the field.” I see introductory WGS courses as a foundation for WGS undergraduate curriculum and thus an appropriate course to examine in this research study.

Rather than further limiting my study to a geographical region within the US or by institution, the primary limit of my object of study is based on the course itself. Other

⁵⁸ Based on their methodology, the authors of the study acknowledge that this total is likely an undercount of the actual number of undergraduates enrolled in US WGS courses (American Academy of Arts and Sciences 4).

⁵⁹ See Craven 206; Levin 18; and Winkler and DiPalma 7. For a discussion of my own university’s WGS curricular requirement, see Sahlin’s “Vital.”

courses and other departments certainly have opportunity and reason to teach about religion intersectionally, but I focused specifically on introductory WGS courses. I chose a national case study of a particular course rather than limiting further by geography for two related main reasons: 1) WGS is a relatively small field, and limiting my study by geography is not as necessary as it would be in a larger field, and 2) I wanted to make sure to cast a wide enough net to obtain rich data. Since my focus is on a very specific aspect of WGS pedagogy that may not be widely practiced, I chose a national case study to be able to study and make suggestions on how to teach about the intersections of religion and race.

I had originally intended for my bounded system of recently taught introductory WGS courses in the US to have firmer boundaries for the time period involved. However, concerns about adequate recruitment for the study caused me to relax the firm time period boundary I had originally envisioned while still maintaining a focus on current and recent practice. I broadened the inclusion criteria for participants in my survey from specifying that participants needed to have taught an introductory WGS course in the last two years to requiring that participants had ever previously taught an introductory WGS course. In order to emphasize recent practice, the survey still instructed participants to “please describe your teaching practices within the last two years (or as recently as possible) in your introductory women’s and gender studies course rather than in any other course you may teach.” Interview participants were also not required to have taught an introductory WGS course within a specific time period, but all interview participants were active WGS instructors at the time of the interview, and they represented their pedagogical

approaches as current. Regardless of publication date, the textbooks included in this study were all current editions in use in WGS introductory courses, and the syllabi for this study were from 2018 to 2020. Although some participants' reflections include perspectives from outside the time period of 2018 through 2020, the data from this study as a whole reflects recent and current practice in the field of WGS.

Researcher Influences and Assumptions

Participant observation is not a source of data for this case study; however, this case study is influenced by my own experiences teaching about religion in introductory WGS classes. I assisted and taught introductory WGS courses at Texas Woman's University (TWU) during the course of my doctoral study, 2014 through 2021. I am familiar with how the course is taught at my home institution, and I have attended several panels and roundtables at the National Women's Studies Association conferences that focus on the challenges and opportunities involved in teaching introductory WGS courses. I believe that my own experience teaching this course has helped me understand the data of this study at a deeper level and also has undoubtedly colored my interpretations. Furthermore, TWU's practice of assigning graduate students to assist other graduate student instructors in their courses enabled me to experience the pedagogies of multiple other instructors as their assistant before I began to teach my own introductory courses. As an instructor, I was frequently assisted by newer graduate students, and so I saw our work in the classroom together as an important form of professional and pedagogical mentorship. This collaborative pedagogical experience influences how I view WGS introductory courses.

My experiences teaching WGS introductory courses are also influenced by institutional peculiarities and my students themselves. TWU requires students to acquire a multicultural women's and gender studies graduation requirement, which most students meet through our introductory courses. The university is primarily for women, with approximately 88% women students, 57% students of color, and 49% first-generation students in Fall 2021. The students in my introductory courses were racially, ethnically, and economically diverse, but were mostly women who were mostly taking the course for the graduation requirement rather than because of any ideological identification with feminism.⁶⁰ TWU's lack of religious studies, ethnic studies, or LGBTQ+ studies programs influenced my view of WGS as a field and the WGS introductory course as having obligations to social justice beyond the scope of gender. During my interviews I became conscious of the ways that the institutional realities of TWU had unconsciously shaped my expectations of WGS as a field. I took these moments as opportunities to reflect deeper and to try to understand where my participants were coming from.

My experiences as a lifelong Christian also influence me as a researcher and shape my interest in this research project. My research interest in the intersectionality of religion with other aspects of the social world stems first from my own experience as the daughter of White, Christian, missionary parents, and as a woman in conservative religious environments that oppress women. When I was thirteen years old, my family moved from Botswana, where my American parents had lived since before I was born,

⁶⁰ For more details of the WGS curricular requirement and the development of WGS at TWU, see Sahlin's "Vital."

“back” to the United States. I experienced profound alienation from the White American culture I found myself in, but I quickly learned to assimilate, especially through my participation in my religious community—a White, middle-class space. My family is part of the Churches of Christ, a denomination that does not ordain women and significantly restricts women’s leadership, so while my religious community in my teenage years was a source of support, it was also a place where I experienced sexism and misogyny.

After learning about intersectionality in graduate school, I had a name to describe how religion had functioned in my own life, not in isolation from other factors of my identity, but as an important vector for forming my gender, sexual, racial, ethnic, and class identities. Although I have always respected the sincerity of my parents’ religious beliefs, I also question the roles of colonialism, imperialism, and White supremacy in my family’s missionary activity. Critically reflecting on my own gender, racial, and religious identities convinced me that religion was a key component of both oppression and social justice. Since I recognize religion as a key source of identity and socialization in my own life, my research and teaching in WGS has always included religion as an intersectional aspect of identity and oppression. However, through observation of and reflection on the field, I have noticed that not all WGS teachers incorporate the topic of religion in their teaching. Curiosity that stems from my own experience is a factor that influences this project.

Although I state these influences clearly in order to be transparent about my research process, I do not view my own perspectives as inherent limitations that need to be bracketed in order to achieve objectivity. Rather, following feminist standpost

theorists and postpositivist realists, I see knowledge as necessarily partial and situational. For example, Donna Haraway cautions against the “god trick” of “unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims” (538). Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins claims that dialogue between people and groups with different standpoints is an important way of validating knowledge claims in Black feminist epistemology (279). Collins, Haraway, and other feminist standpoint theorists and postpositivist realists also argue for the epistemological value of interpersonal connection between situated knowers. By being clear about my influences and assumptions, I hope to enter into a productive dialogue with other situated knowers, including my research participants and future scholars who read my work.

As I designed this research study, I attempted to clearly articulate the assumptions that influenced my research. It should be clear that I am approaching this topic with the following assumptions: 1) religion is a valid topic for teaching and inquiry within the academy and within WGS; 2) WGS’s approach to religion appears to be lacking at times and could be improved; and 3) improving WGS’s approach to religion could have social justice implications for more effectively addressing current social justice issues related to race like Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. As the above stated assumptions demonstrate, the goal of this research project was deeply shaped by my intersectional feminist commitments to social justice. In keeping with my view of WGS as a field and my understanding of intersectional feminist epistemology, my research is ultimately geared toward the goal of promoting holistic social justice. Vivian May describes this aspect of applying intersectionality as an imperative to “[h]onor and foster intersectionality’s

antissubordination orientation” (229). Following May and other scholars of intersectionality, I see intersectionality’s resistance to all forms of social oppression and subordination as a key part of intersectional methodology, and my research uses intersectionality to promote social justice. Specifically, I hope to make a very concrete contribution to the social justice work of the field of women’s and gender studies: empowering faculty in women’s and gender studies introductory courses to more mindfully and effectively confront issues of social injustice like Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and other forms of religious racism and bigotry that are relevant in today’s world.

IRB Approval and Participant Protection

In order to conduct this case study ethically in keeping with my intersectional feminist theoretical framework, I prioritized the wellbeing of my participants. I received initial approval from Texas Woman’s University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this study on March 12, 2019, under Protocol #20476, and subsequent small modifications to the study were approved by the IRB as required. Participant recruitment, data collection, and data storage and analysis were done according to the procedures approved in advance by TWU’s IRB. For my online survey, I obtained informed consent as part of the survey,⁶¹ and for my interviews, participants emailed me signed consent forms.⁶² Both consent forms clearly informed participants about the potential risks of participating in this study. In order to mitigate the primary risk to participants, loss of

⁶¹ See Appendix B.

⁶² See Appendix D.

confidentiality, I password protected and encrypted all digital copies of participant data, and I stored all physical copies in a locked filing cabinet.

Data Collection

According to John Creswell, a “hallmark of a good qualitative case study is that it presents an *in-depth understanding* of the case” through the use of multiple sources of data (98). In my case study I conducted a qualitative content analysis of introductory textbooks and introductory syllabi, surveyed introductory course instructors, and conducted in-depth interviews with instructors who demonstrated a passion for or proficiency with teaching about issues of religion and race. All of these sources of data helped me better analyze how the case, WGS introductory courses, illustrates the possibilities for effectively teaching about the intersections of religion and race in social-justice education. In the interests of transparency and rigor, I will discuss the research design considerations and data collection procedures for each source of data below: textbooks, syllabi, survey data, and interviews.

Textbooks for Introductory WGS Courses

For this study I examined six WGS textbooks used in introductory courses. In order to guide my selection of appropriate texts, I followed these selection criteria: 1) each textbook selected was designed to be used as a textbook for a general introductory WGS course, and 2) each textbook selected is widely used nationally within WGS introductory classes. Criterion #1 was important because some instructors may assign a variety of texts, including novels and monographs. Works like *Feminism is for Everybody* by bell hooks may be assigned in introductory WGS courses, with three out of thirty-

eight syllabi in my sample including this text, but it is not a text designed to be used as a textbook for an introductory WGS course. Because I was interested in assessing how WGS introductory courses teach about religion and race, I wanted to limit my in-depth analysis to works which are specific to WGS general introductory classes. Although my study is not intended to be representative, I do intend it to be useful to WGS instructors, which is why I chose Criterion #2. Analyzing widely used textbooks provides a much richer source of data because they more accurately reflect the field of WGS.

In order to approximate national usage, I emailed publishers, looked at Amazon best-sellers' rankings, and also identified which books had been republished in multiple editions, which indicates sufficient demand in order to justify subsequent editions. In an email message dated March 26, 2019, Sherith Pankratz, an editor for Oxford University Press, answered my queries about best-selling introductory WGS textbooks:

First, it's really hard – even for publishers! – to know what the actual sales of books are, other than our own. Most publishers subscribe to various services that report bookstore sales, but of course, that's only one slice of data, and doesn't include Amazon sales or e-book sales. I know just from experience that Shaw/Lee has been the #1 book in this market for a long time. I can also tell you that the books by Kirk/Okazawa-Rey (which OUP will also be publishing in a new edition this August), Grewal/Kaplan (which hasn't been revised in quite some time) and the new reader that OUP also publishes by Sarasawti, Shaw and Rellihan are all in the top 5. Of course, as new books come onto the market and older books aren't revised, there are shifts. But I still expect Shaw/Lee to be the #1 book in its new

edition. (Pankratz)

Based on Pankratz's report, I chose to include three of the four textbooks she mentioned in my sample. Because *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World*, 2nd edition, edited by Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan was published in 2006, I chose not to include it in this sample since my focus was on recent and current practice.

Finally, in order to better triangulate my data, I included in my textbook sample the three textbooks mentioned most frequently in my survey. Although I had already selected my textbook sample before selecting the syllabi for this study, I have also included in the chart below the number of inclusions of any edition of each textbook in the syllabi sample for this study. The syllabi sample for this study included six syllabi that used Christie Launius and Holly Hassel's *Threshold Concepts in Women's and Gender Studies: Ways of Seeing, Thinking, and Knowing* and two syllabi that used Judy Root Aulette and Judith Wittner's *Gendered Worlds*, which both would have met the inclusion criteria for this study but were not included because the textbook sample had already been chosen and analyzed. I hope to include these books in future research building on this study. Table 1 below lists the full citation information for each textbook included in this study, which will hereafter be referred to by editors' last names, as indicated in the chart. Although more recent editions of textbooks may have since been published, I used the most recent edition available in July 2019 at the time of purchase.⁶³

⁶³ I was aware of the new editions of Kirk and Okazawa-Rey and Shaw and Lee and was able to pre-order them. A new edition of Rothenberg was released in Fall 2019, but I was unaware of it and did not acquire it.

Table 1

Textbooks Included in Sample

Short Reference	Full Citation	Syllabi Inclusions any edition	Survey References any edition
Gillis and Jacobs	Gillis, Melissa J., and Andrew T. Jacobs, editors. <i>Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach</i> , 1st ed. Oxford UP, 2016.	1	0
Kelly, Parameswaran, and Schniedewind	Kelly, Suzanne, Gowri Parameswaran, and Nancy Schniedewind, editors. <i>Women: Images and Realities, A Multicultural Anthology</i> , 5th ed. McGraw Hill, 2012.	0	2
Kirk and Okazawa-Rey	Kirk, Gwyn, and Margo Okazawa-Rey, editors. <i>Gendered Lives: Intersectional Perspectives</i> , 7th ed. Oxford UP, 2020.	0	0
Rothenberg	Rothenberg, Paula S., editor. <i>Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study</i> , 10th ed. Soniya Munsh, contributor. Worth, 2016.	1	1
Saraswati, Shaw, and Rellihan	Saraswati, L. Ayu, Barbara L. Shaw, and Heather Rellihan, editors. <i>Introduction to Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies: Interdisciplinary and Intersectional Approaches</i> , 1st ed. Oxford UP, 2018.	5	4
Shaw and Lee	Shaw, Susan M., and Janet Lee. <i>Gendered Voices, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings</i> , 7th ed. Oxford UP, 2020.	7	4

Assigned textbooks do not dictate what instructors teach, but textbooks certainly influence class instruction by making some topics more readily accessible to instructors and students. Individual instructors may significantly supplement their textbooks with additional materials to scaffold their teaching about religion and race, but the textbook analysis portion of this case study provided a helpful baseline for how religion is likely to be addressed across a variety of classrooms. Textbooks also act as a kind of structural system that dialectically⁶⁴ shapes the possibilities in introductory classes. The presence or absence of a given topic in a widely used textbook has an outsized influence on instructors' classrooms and may even shape the views and experiences of instructors when teaching about a given topic. In order to address this dialectical process between structures and individuals, I triangulated data from textbooks, syllabi, and individual instructors. Since my goal was to analyze WGS introductory classes as a case study rather than to critique or praise individual instructors, it was important to keep in mind the structural forces within the field and within various institutions that shape the individual teaching decisions of instructors.

Since detailed coding of the entire text of six textbooks would have been time-consuming and not necessarily relevant to my research question, I selected ahead of time which passages to analyze in detail. Before beginning my coding process, I first used relevance sampling to select passages to analyze more in-depth from the textbook sample in this study (Krippendorff 119). Using the table of contents and the index, I identified

⁶⁴ For more on the structural and dialectical intersections of religious racisms like Islamophobia, see Beydoun 40.

and digitally scanned passages that relate to religion and/or race in ways that seem relevant to my research question. Only these passages were coded and analyzed in-depth along with my interviews and survey data (Saldaña 79–80).

Syllabi for Introductory WGS Courses

The second major source of data for this study was a qualitative content analysis of different instructors' syllabi and teaching materials for introductory WGS classes. Since different departments name and classify introductory courses in a variety of ways, I allowed survey participants to self-designate whether or not they teach a general introductory WGS course. In order to determine interview participants' eligibility for participation in this study and to determine the inclusion criteria for the remaining syllabi in the sample, I also needed to develop a definition of general introductory WGS course for my own use. I defined general introductory WGS classes as any course, regardless of course title, designed to be the first and/or only women's and gender studies course taken by students and intended to provide students with a broad introduction to the field of women's and gender studies. In general, these courses are not topically focused, although some institutions do have themed introductory courses. The syllabus sample for this study included syllabi for online as well as face-to-face courses, but the sample was not divided for analysis by the mode of course instruction.

For this case study I collected syllabi for introductory WGS courses from survey participants and from the internet. First, some participants in the survey for this study shared their syllabi with me as part of or in response to the survey, which will be discussed in detail in the following pages. The survey prompted participants with the

following message: “In the following text boxes, please copy and paste your most recent introductory WGS course syllabus, and, if you would like, any other teaching materials from your introductory class (assignments, discussion prompts, assignments, etc.) that specifically discuss religion.”⁶⁵ In response, seven participants shared full syllabi, and one participant shared an excerpt related to religion rather than the entire syllabus. Two of the survey participants who shared syllabi also attached additional assignments related to religion. In the remainder of this study, “syllabus” will refer to the teaching materials collected from each participant, whether those teaching materials were a full syllabus, a syllabus excerpt, or a syllabus with additional assignments. Thirty-five of the thirty-eight “syllabi” for this study were full syllabi, one was a syllabus excerpt related to religion, and two were full syllabi plus additional teaching materials related to religion. In order to protect the anonymity of my participants, I removed any identifying information from participants’ syllabi before uploading them to a password protected and encrypted data storage service where I stored my data during data analysis.

In addition to the eight syllabi collected from my survey, I collected thirty additional syllabi that were publicly available on the internet. The remaining syllabi for the sample had to meet the following selection criteria: 1) each syllabus is for a general introductory WGS course, as defined above, 2) each syllabus was for a course taught in the United States during the time period from 2018 through 2020, and 3) each syllabus was publicly available on the internet during March 2020 when I collected the sample. Criteria #1 and #2 were important in order to collect relevant data about the bounded

⁶⁵ See Appendix B.

system of recent WGS courses in the United States. Criterion #3 was important because unlike the syllabi submitted to me as part of the survey by the creators themselves, the remaining syllabi were collected without the authors' knowledge or express permission. Restricting myself to published and accessible syllabi was an ethical necessity. Even though the syllabi were publicly available, I removed identifying information from any syllabus excerpts quoted in this dissertation in order to respect the privacy of the instructors who created them. I used Google Search to locate syllabi that met my selection criteria, using the search terms listed in Table 2 below. After locating documents that appeared promising using these search terms, I briefly read each syllabus to make sure it met my selection criteria before deciding to include it.

Table 2

Internet Search Procedures for Syllabi

Syllabus Search Terms	Date(s) of Google Search	Number of Syllabi Collected
introduction AND (“women’s studies” OR “gender studies”) AND (syllabus OR syllabi) AND (2018 OR 2019 OR 2020) filetype:pdf	5 Mar. 2020 23 Mar. 2020	24
(introduction OR introductory) AND (“women’s studies” OR “gender studies”) AND (syllabus or syllabi) AND (2018 OR 2019 OR 2020) filetype:pdf	25 Mar. 2020	6
(introduction OR introductory) AND (“women’s studies” OR “gender studies”) AND (syllabus or syllabi) AND (2018 OR 2019 OR 2020)		

Although like any other single data point, syllabi do not completely capture what happens in introductory WGS courses, I view the syllabus sample as an important part of

this case study. Some instructors adhere more closely to their syllabi than others do, and some instructors revise their syllabi more frequently than others do. But overall, I see syllabi as a more fluid and precise measure of our classroom content than textbooks. In general, faculty will make at least small updates to their syllabi every term to reflect changing calendars, requirements, and content. Compared to textbooks, which take years to publish, syllabi are much more likely to react quickly to current events. However, syllabi must occasionally be adapted to events that happen within a semester. As a relevant example, the syllabi from this sample from Spring 2020 reflect instructors' planned instruction before the disruption caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic. It's likely that the planned instruction differed in significant ways as most US colleges and universities moved their courses quickly online in March 2020. However, assessing the impact of these transitions is beyond the scope of this study.

Survey of Introductory WGS Course Instructors

The third major source of data for this case study was a survey conducted with instructors of WGS introductory courses. For survey recruitment I focused on the "typical case" within the bounded system of introductory courses taught nationally in recent years (Creswell 158; Patton 268). Rather than identifying the "typical case" based on participants' institutions, backgrounds, or geographical region, I targeted the philosophically and disciplinarily typical introductory course within the field of WGS. For my sampling purposes, "typical" introductory WGS courses would be taught by an instructor with links to the larger institutions that shape WGS as a field in the US. I identified key professional communication channels within the field of WGS and then

used them for survey recruitment in order to recruit instructors with strong ties to WGS as a field. There very well may be introductory WGS courses taught recently in the US by instructors with no professional relationship or institutional affiliation with these communication channels, but I assumed these courses would be less closely related to the field of WGS than the typical cases sought in this study. Specifically, my dissertation chair sent my IRB-approved survey recruitment email⁶⁶ to two professional listservs, the women's studies listserv, WMST-L, on March 21, 2019, and NWSA's Program Administrators and Directors (PAD) mailing list, on March 25, 2019. I also posted the same recruitment letter in a Facebook group called "Gender, Women's, and Feminist Studies (GWFS) PhD Interest Group" and one called "Multicultural Women's/Gender Studies at TWU" on July 8, 2019. During June 2019, I sent it to 127 specific WGS departments and programs, which I will discuss in more detail below.

In order to select departments and programs to target for additional recruitment beyond the listserv and Facebook recruitment, I chose to primarily focus on programs that offer graduate degrees and certificates. Developing graduate degree and certificate programs indicates commitment to the field of WGS, which to me indicated that the introductory courses offered in these programs are likely to be ideologically normed to the field as a whole and to meet my definition of a typical case. Additionally, these programs likely have an outsized influence on the field of women's and gender studies, since graduate students receiving formal training in the field may go on to become instructors, so WGS programs with graduate degrees and certificates may be high-impact

⁶⁶ See Appendix A.

cases in addition to typical cases (Patton 266). Using two publicly available lists,⁶⁷ I first identified programs that offer doctoral degrees, master's degrees, and graduate concentrations, certificates, or minors. Out of convenience, I also made a list of WGS programs—regardless of their degree offerings—within driving distance from my location in North Texas to maximize the potential that I would be able to conduct follow-up interviews in person. Next, I searched within each program's website for any mentions of religion or spirituality. For the purposes of inclusion in recruitment, these references could be quite brief, and, indeed, only two otherwise qualifying programs failed to include any such references on their websites. Based on this process, I sent survey recruitment emails to twenty-two programs with doctoral programs in WGS, including dual-degree programs, twenty-eight additional programs that offer master's degrees but not doctorates, eight WGS programs within driving distance, and sixty-nine additional programs nationally that offer no graduate degrees, but do offer graduate concentrations, minors, or certificates.

The survey itself⁶⁸ included closed-ended and open-ended questions about teaching about religion and other intersecting factors of the social world, demographic questions, and space for participants to share their syllabi and teaching materials, as previously discussed. In order to obtain participation from professors who may not consciously study or teach extensively about the intersections of religion and race, I

⁶⁷ Joan Korenman at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) maintains a list of all WGS programs, accessible here: userpages.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/programs.html. Smith College also maintains a list of graduate programs in WGS ("Graduate Programs"), accessible here: www.smith.edu/academics/swg.

⁶⁸ See Appendix B.

framed my survey as examining “how instructors of introductory women’s and gender studies classes teach (or don’t teach) about religion as it relates to current social justice issues related to racism.”⁶⁹ Since the demographic questions and closed-ended questions were not rich sources of qualitative data, I did not code them along with my other sources of data. The parts of the survey that I coded and analyzed qualitatively were the open-ended responses to the questions listed below:

13) What fears or inhibitions might prevent or inhibit you from teaching about religion in your introductory women's and gender studies (WGS) course?

14) What aspects of your background or education do you think most affect how you teach (or why you choose not to teach) about religion in your introductory WGS course?

15) If you wanted to improve how you taught about religion in your introductory WGS class, what would you do differently in the future?

34) Do you have any other insights you would like to share about teaching about religion and race in relation to each other in introductory WGS courses?

From March 21, 2019, to November 7, 2019, forty-three participants started my survey. Of those participants, one did not consent to participate and exited the survey. Seven additional participants marked that they consented but did not answer any additional questions in the survey. Thirty-five participants responded to at least some questions in the survey, with an average survey completion time of about 28 minutes. Thirty-two participants responded to the open-ended questions, and when reporting the proportion of

⁶⁹ See Appendix B.

participants who mentioned a specific topic in their open-ended responses, I will give the number out of the thirty-two participants who completed the open-ended portion of the survey. I separated the open-ended survey responses from the closed-ended survey responses and only used detailed qualitative coding on the open-ended responses (Saldaña 79–80). Although I will discuss the open-ended responses to the survey in more detail in Chapter 3, I will briefly summarize some key findings from the closed-ended questions of the survey here.

In the survey participants shared their racial, gender, sexual, and religious demographics. Most survey participants were White women. 90% of participants who shared their gender were women, with one participant identifying as a man and one as transgender with no additional details.⁷⁰ Of the participants who shared their race, twenty-five participants, or 80%, identified as White or Caucasian. Two participants identified as Asian or Asian-American, with one of those participants also identifying as White. Three participants identified as Black, African, or African American, with one of those participants also identifying as Latinx/Chicanx and Indigenous/Native American. One participant identified as “Mix Race” with no additional details. Survey participants were more diverse in their sexual orientation, with only seventeen participants, or about 55%, identifying as heterosexual or straight. Six participants identified as bisexual or pansexual, four participants identified as queer, four participants identified as lesbian or gay, and one participant identified as asexual. Figure 1 below reports the religious

⁷⁰ Participants were directed to “check all that apply” related to their gender identity, but the participant who marked “transgender” did not check any other boxes. See Appendix B, question 16.

affiliation or orientations reported by survey participants.

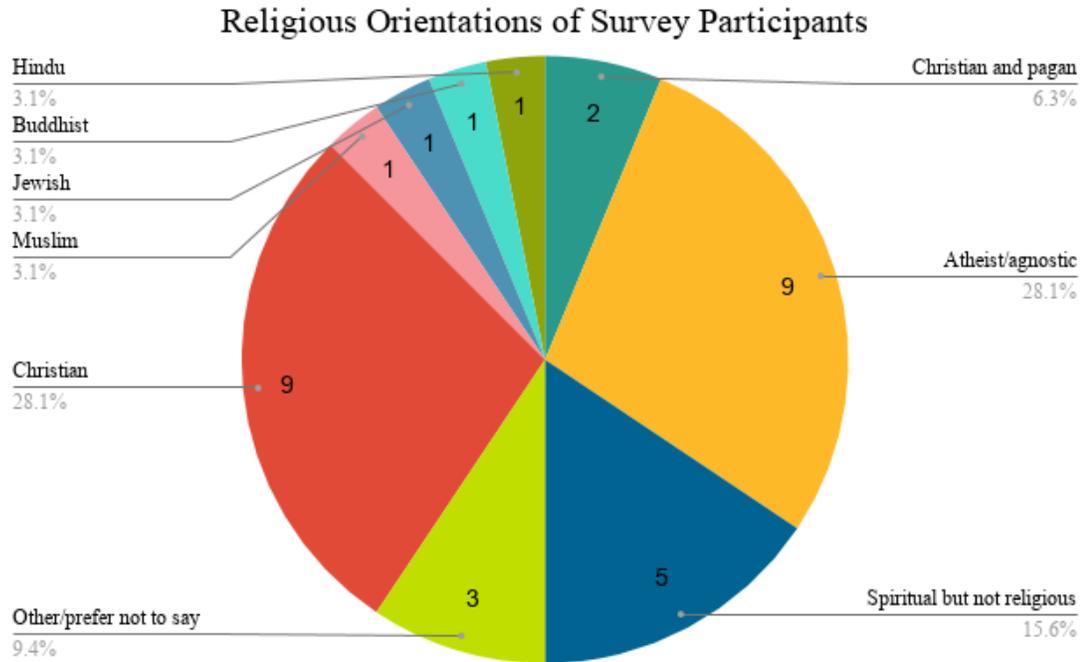


Fig. 1. Religious Orientations of Survey Participants.

Since this study was primarily designed as a qualitative case study, I did not use quantitative analysis to determine what aspects of survey participants' identities and backgrounds were correlated with certain pedagogical decisions. The sample was not representative or large enough to make such conclusions meaningful. However, I have reported trends in the survey participants' demographic data here in the interest of transparency. Compared to the US population as a whole, survey participants were much more likely to be White women and much less likely to be Christian or heterosexual.

Overall, survey participants' responses showed a sense that survey participants saw teaching about religion in introductory courses as potentially relevant or important, but not necessarily a priority. As shown in Figure 2 below, thirty-three out of thirty-five

survey participants (94.2%) answered that they feel that teaching about religion is at least somewhat important in introductory WGS courses, and 16 of these (45.7%) feel that it is “very” or “extremely” important.

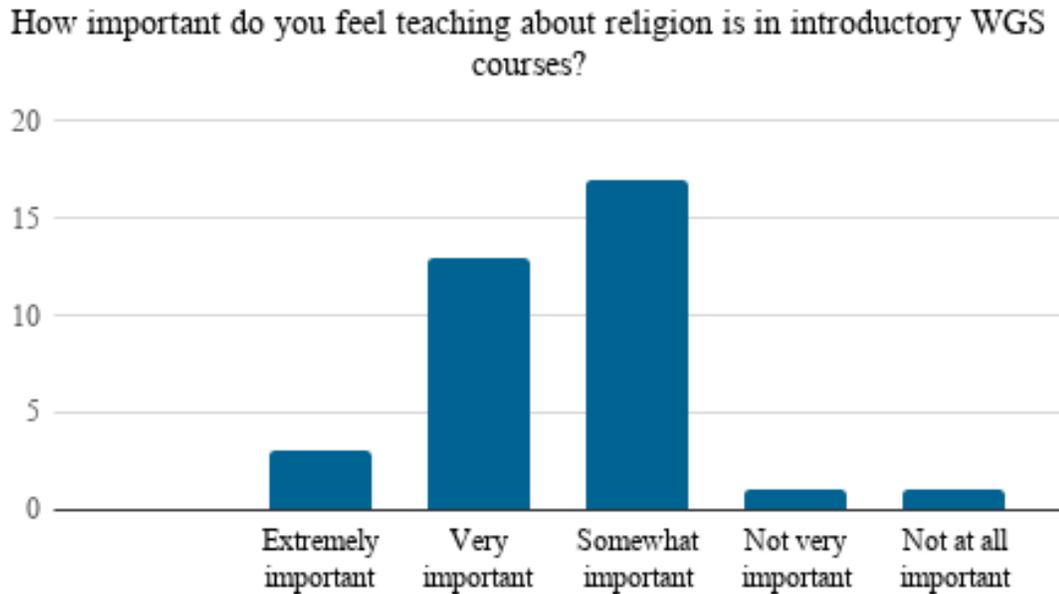


Fig. 2. Survey Responses about Importance of Religion.

Although typed open-ended responses to a survey are not the richest source of qualitative data, I consider the survey an important part of this study for several reasons. First, faculty members who do not teach about religion or consider it an important part of their introductory course seem more likely to agree to complete a short survey than to participate in an interview or focus group. These faculty members’ perspectives are an important part of this case study, and the survey was an efficient and effective way of eliciting their participation. Second, although self-reported answers from faculty are likely to overestimate how well faculty address any given topic, the survey results were able to provide more detailed and current information about how faculty actually teach

about religion in WGS introductory courses than textbooks or syllabi. I suspected and my findings confirmed that many instructors' approaches to teaching about religion and its intersections with race might occur during a classroom discussion, for example, which would be highly unlikely to appear on a syllabus or in a textbook. Finally, the overall attitude that faculty have toward this topic can best be captured by directly asking them, so the sources of data—the survey and interviews—that directly ask WGS instructors about their motivations, influences, practices, and hopes are important for this study.

Interviews with Introductory WGS Course Instructors Interested in Religion

The last and richest source of data for this study were seven in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured, interviews with instructors who prioritize religion in their research or teaching. For my interview sample, I used “theory-focused sampling”⁷¹ of instructors who demonstrated interest and proficiency in teaching about religion in order to better explore my research focus: teaching religion intersectionally (Patton 269). I had hoped to use theory-focused sampling to choose my interview sample based on my survey data, but only two of the eight survey participants I invited to be interviewed agreed to do so.

I supplemented sampling from my survey with recruitment of additional participants whose published works or publicly available research interests or teaching materials demonstrated skill in teaching about religion intersectionally. I emailed twenty-six WGS instructors with my IRB-approved interview recruitment email⁷² and conducted interviews with five of them. In addition to theory-focused sampling, I employed

⁷¹ In theory-focused sampling, researchers choose “cases for study that are exemplars of the concept of construct that is the focus of inquiry to illuminate the theoretical ideas of interest” (Patton 269).

⁷² See Appendix C.

“maximum variation sampling” for the last two interviews I conducted (Creswell 156; Patton 266). Although I had invited a racially diverse group of participants to participate in interviews with me, the first five interview participants were with White-passing people, regardless of racial or ethnic self-identification, which not all participants shared with me. I intentionally recruited non-White participants for my remaining interviews in order to include additional perspectives. All seven participants identified themselves as women and used she/her/hers pronouns, and none self-disclosed that they were transgender. Each participant chose a pseudonym for this study and shared with me their pronouns and whatever demographic information they chose, which I have reported in Table 3 below in the order in which I conducted the interviews.

Table 3

Interview Participant Information

Pseudonym	Pronouns	Volunteered Demographic Information
Alex Smythe	she/her/hers	White, queer, agnostic/atheist cis woman
Rose Thomas	she/her/hers	White, bisexual, Roman Catholic woman in her forties
Savannah Woolf	she/her/hers	White, lesbian/queer, Protestant Christian woman in her fifties
Maria Wilson	she/her/hers	Jewish woman
May Cale	she/her/hers	White, middle-aged, lesbian woman who is not a religious believer

Susie Peace	she/her/hers	Woman of African American and Native descent who integrates indigenous spirituality into Christianity
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Aisha Ahmed	she/her/hers	Muslim, South-Asian, American citizen woman of color in her thirties
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In-depth interviews were the richest source of qualitative data for this case study. In contrast to the necessarily brief survey data, in-depth interviews gave me a chance to build depth and context with participants to get a fuller sense of their classroom strategies related to teaching about religion and race. All seven interviews took approximately an hour and were conducted virtually, using the video conferencing software of my participants' choice. I used the same main questions with each participant,⁷³ asked follow-up questions, and gave participants opportunities to respond and clarify their meaning throughout the interview. Before, during, and after the interviews, I took measures to protect interview participants' confidentiality. I communicated with participants through my password-protected and encrypted TWU email account and allowed participants to choose the video conferencing software they felt most comfortable with. During the interviews, I asked participants to choose a pseudonym for themselves. I removed identifying information from the interview transcripts and identified participants only by their chosen pseudonym before uploading them to a password-protected and encrypted storage service during my data analysis. In addition, I made sure not to quote or reveal identifying details in this dissertation.

⁷³ See Appendix E.

I obtained informed consent for all interview participants through a signed consent form.⁷⁴ Before recording each interview, I also verbally summarized the key information from the consent form to make sure participants knew that they could refuse to answer questions or end the interview at any time. Although the IRB-mandated procedures for documenting consent are not always culturally appropriate for certain populations, my interview participants all had doctorates and worked within higher education. They all demonstrated comfort and familiarity with the research procedures.

Data Analysis

During my data analysis, I carefully read and organized my data, coded descriptions of content that arose in my data, and then reorganized my codes and data in order to identify patterns and key themes. As in any qualitative study, my data analysis process was somewhat recursive and nonlinear (Creswell 182). My data analysis process began during my data collection as I began to organize my data and note my preliminary reactions. I used NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software, to organize my codes during first- and second-cycle coding. The textbook excerpts, syllabi, and open-ended survey answers were already text-based, and I hired transcriptionists from Rev.com, a professional, confidential transcription service, to create verbatim transcripts of my interviews, which I then checked for accuracy. In an effort to be transparent about my data analysis process, I created analytical memos of my design choices and my decision-making during the coding and interview processes. I took field notes on each interview afterwards in order to capture any relevant details about the process and initial reactions

⁷⁴ See Appendix D.

in order to notice and acknowledge them. Throughout the process, I strived for transparency and reflexivity.

In order to identify the themes of this case study, I engaged in first-cycle and second-cycle qualitative coding (Saldaña). In other words, I noticed topics and ideas that arose in my data and then carefully and thoughtfully noticed patterns among these topics and ideas. During my first-cycle coding, I focused on looking at how introductory WGS classes teach about religion intersectionally while staying open to noticing what was most important to participants. My first-cycle coding was a mix of “in vivo” coding—using participants’ own words to name the codes, and descriptive or topic coding—using a researcher-generated “word or short phrase” to capture the main idea of part of my data (Saldaña 70). I also used attribute coding to organize my files by source type and simultaneous coding to identify the same text with several different emerging codes when necessary (Saldaña 83; 94).

I also had to adjust my coding strategies depending on the source of data I was coding. I began my first-cycle coding with the interview transcripts, and then coded the open-ended survey responses. I coded textbooks next, and then finally syllabi. I coded the interview transcripts fairly densely, close to line-by-line coding, and coded the survey responses even more densely since as written text they contained few verbal fillers. Although I had already selected relevant samples from the textbooks, I coded them less densely, using more holistic coding (Saldaña 166). In both the syllabi and textbooks, I left irrelevant information uncoded (Saldaña 80).

In order to manage the “proliferation of codes,” I followed Johnny Saldaña’s recommendation of “subsum[img] codes into broader codes or categories” during the coding process using subcoding, the process of preliminarily organizing codes into organized categories (79). During my initial coding, I constantly reorganized my codes as I added and merged codes and changed the hierarchical organization of my codes. Organizing my codes hierarchically using NVivo’s “parent” and “child” nodes allowed me to more easily navigate my codes during the initial coding process (Saldaña 91). After coding several interviews, I organized all of my subcodes into two main categories: 1. Insights about religion and social justice, and 2. Pedagogy, with many levels of subcategories under each main category. At the end of my first-cycle coding, I had created 104 codes organized into seven levels of hierarchy.⁷⁵

In order to transition from first-cycle coding to second-cycle coding, I began to “play” with my data through a variety of methods (Yin 135). Although my subcoding during first-cycle coding had begun the process of categorizing and organizing my codes, I used “code mapping” to further reorganize and condense my codes after I completed first-cycle coding (Saldaña 218). To help me condense my codes, I used Saldaña’s suggested “tabletop technique” of printing out codes or data and physically rearranging them (Saldaña 230–231). I also created “operational model diagrams” in order to visualize the relationship between different categories.⁷⁶ During my second-cycle coding, I used pattern coding to “identify . . . emergent theme[s], configuration[s], or

⁷⁵ See Appendix F.

⁷⁶ See Appendix G.

explanation[s]” in my data related to my research question (Saldaña 236). In NVivo I merged nodes into other nodes and created new organization categories. I then revisited the originally coded data within each new pattern code to evaluate the emerging pattern code.

Throughout my data analysis, I strove to be responsible, flexible, and adaptive (Leavy 127). The entire process of data analysis was recursive, and I continued to revisit and reevaluate the emerging themes throughout the process. At several points during the process, I discussed the emerging pattern codes with my dissertation chair in order to receive feedback and another perspective. After I initially arrived at the three themes reported in this case study in Chapter 3, I continued the process of analysis. Writing the first draft of Chapter 3 was a process of codeweaving, the “integration of key code words and phrases into narrative form to see how the puzzle pieces fit together” (Saldaña 276). I continually reread my data throughout the writing process in order to be attentive to my participants’ voices and the other sources of data. As an example, I created a found poem⁷⁷ from Aisha Ahmed’s interview as I wrote Chapter 3. Although I did not include the poem in Chapter 3, the process of listening to Aisha’s words in depth was a necessary part of the data analysis process for me. As I revisited my data in order to describe the themes in writing, I discovered new patterns and resonances and tweaked my organization.

⁷⁷ See Appendix H.

Validation Strategies

I used several strategies to try to increase the validity of this study. In Chapter 3 I have used direct quotes and “rich, thick description” in order to give readers enough information to evaluate my findings on their own (Creswell 252). I have also tried to honestly report negative or disconfirming evidence as well as my own influences and assumptions in order to demonstrate transparency (Creswell 251). For each theme I triangulated findings across different participants and different sources of data.

Triangulation “involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell 251). I also triangulated my findings with the perspectives of others, namely my dissertation chair as a “critical friend” and my interview participants through member checking (Patton 668).

Member checking with interview participants was an important validation strategy in this study (Creswell 252). After I concluded my data analysis, I emailed each interview participant with an executive summary of the main themes of the study along with the transcript of their interview annotated with quotes I had identified as relating to each theme. Not all interview participants responded, but those that did largely confirmed the themes of this study. Savannah Woolf responded, “I think you’ve identified the comments/themes well. I’d say how you interpret where my comments fit is spot on.” Alex Smythe responded, “I love everything you wrote and agree with it all (in short). I’m thrilled to be a part of this project!!” May Cale responded, “I’ve read over the transcript of our discussion and your categories, and I believe you’ve done a good job of mapping my responses and your themes. I can also see how you would have developed the themes

from a variety of interviews.” Some participants also responded with clarifications of their interview transcript, which I incorporated into Chapter 3 when relevant.

Limitations

Like all studies, this case study has limitations. Because the scope of this study focuses on faculty rather than students or direct observations of the WGS classroom, my findings are primarily based on faculty perceptions. It is possible that my results are skewed by my participants’ biases and wishful thinking about their teaching. I have attempted to use the triangulation of my data sources to mitigate this limitation by checking faculty responses against the syllabi sample and against my findings from my sample of textbooks. I hope that future research will continue to explore this topic through methods that assess students’ experiences in the WGS classroom. Other trade-offs in the research design of the study include the scope of the case study. By choosing a national case study, I gained more diverse perspectives, but I sacrificed some of the depth that might have come from an in-depth profile of a single institution. No research design is perfect, and although I believe this study has much to offer, it is important to acknowledge these limitations in the interest of transparency.

Like any qualitative study, my goal was to produce depth of knowledge rather than to produce generalizable results. Because I used different forms of purposeful sampling with all of my sources of data, I did not have representative samples, and therefore my results are not generalizable to the field of WGS as a whole. As an inexperienced researcher, I also made some errors that I learned from during the research process, most notably asking double-barreled questions on both my survey and interviews

about religion *and* race. Furthermore, since I analyzed and coded my data alone, I was not able to establish inter-rater reliability with my coding. However, given the lack of published information related to teaching about religion in the field of WGS, I believe that my qualitative study will make a significant contribution to the field given the rigor of my analysis and triangulation of the data. In the next chapter, I will present the findings of this study.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

The main sources of data for this case study of teaching about religion in introductory WGS courses were seven in-depth interviews, thirty-five participants' open-ended responses on a survey, thirty-eight syllabi for introductory courses, and relevant selections from six introductory textbooks. Three main themes arose across sources through repeated rounds of qualitative coding in response to the following research question: how could WGS faculty in the US teach about religion intersectionally in general introductory WGS courses in order to promote social justice more fully? After briefly listing each theme, I will discuss each theme in detail in the remainder of this chapter.

The first theme that arose in this study in response to my research question was that WGS faculty could start by being willing and committed to do the work, even when it is risky. Teaching about religion and race involves risks stemming from societal, institutional, geographic, disciplinary, and academic norms, and some faculty are not willing to navigate that risk and instead choose to avoid the topic. This study revealed that when WGS faculty are willing and committed to teaching about religion in spite of the risks, they often choose to do so by organically integrating religion into their teaching.

Secondly, WGS faculty could work to encourage students to think relationally about religion and other aspects of the social world. Based on interviews and survey data, it appears that some WGS faculty teach about religion as irrelevant, marginal, monolithic, and/or only oppressive. I found that WGS faculty who are committed to teaching about religion in a relational way often focus on religion as a complex intersectional source of socialization for empowerment and/or oppression.

Third and finally, WGS faculty could enact student-centered liberatory pedagogy as they teach about religion and race. Although some WGS faculty avoid teaching about religion because it is not their own area of expertise, this study revealed that WGS faculty who are committed to student-centered critical, liberatory, feminist pedagogy recognize religion as a relevant factor in their students' lives. Because of this realization, they respond by encouraging open and respectful dialogue about religion and race regardless of whether or not it is their personal interest or specialty.

The three themes were interrelated, with resonances across themes. For example, some participants talked about ways to encourage students to think relationally about religion through their use of feminist pedagogy. All three themes were present in some form across the primary sources of data for this study: open-ended survey responses, syllabi, textbooks, and most if not all of the in-depth interviews, which were the richest sources of data in this study. Taken as a whole, these findings suggest pedagogical opportunities for the field of WGS and other social-justice educators seeking to engage with religion intersectionally.

Theme 1: Even When It's Risky, Be Willing to Do the Work to Integrate Religion

Of all three themes, the first theme deals most closely with the affective dimension of teaching. Fear of risk and willingness or motivation to teach about something are deeply personal. Not surprisingly, then, these ideas were almost exclusively found in the sources of data that capture feelings and personal responses. For example, six out of seven in-depth interviews and fourteen out of thirty-two open-ended survey responses mentioned risk, and all seven interviews and nineteen out of thirty-two survey responses mentioned willingness or unwillingness to teach about religion.

Syllabi and textbooks, on the other hand, did not give direct evidence of a sense of risk involved in teaching about religion or any direct insight into motivation or commitment in teaching about or avoiding religion. However, my analysis of the textbooks and syllabi in my data set shows both evidence of engagement with religion and evidence of avoidance of religion, a finding that is congruent with what my participants shared about their motivations. Furthermore, all of my interview participants and three-quarters of my survey participants demonstrated their willingness to engage with religion through organically integrating religion into their teaching of relevant social-justice topics, and evidence of integration was present—at least to some extent—in most syllabi and all textbooks as well.

The first theme that arose from my data was the need for WGS faculty—and one participant specified *White* faculty—to be willing to do the work of integrating religion into their teaching in spite of the risks involved. After discussing the sense of risk that my participants shared, I will describe their willingness and commitment to engaging with

religion, and I will end my discussion of the first theme by discussing the strategy of engaging religion through organic integration.

“It’s a Huge Risk”

I asked each of my interview and survey participants: “What fears or inhibitions do you have related to teaching about religion?” In response, many interview and survey participants characterized teaching about religion as a risky endeavor. Interview and survey participants alike described the “minefield” of teaching about religion and race and the range of possible difficult responses by students and institutional actors.

Interview participant Aisha Ahmed described teaching about religion and race as a person of color by saying, “It’s a lot of emotional stress. It’s a lot of extra work. It’s a huge risk.” Aisha responded to this risk with commitment to integrate religion and spirituality in her teaching, but not all WGS instructors rose to the challenge. For example, a survey participant echoed Aisha’s words about risk, saying, “I’m not a risky person; I’m near retirement age, so I’m not a young buck who might feel brave enough to talk about religion.” While some women’s and gender studies faculty develop strategies for mitigating or navigating the risk of teaching about religion, others opt out altogether. My interview participants, who were all committed to teaching about religion in WGS, did not as a whole challenge the perception that teaching about religion in WGS might involve risk. Instead, they called for willingness to engage with risk by organically integrating religion into the WGS classroom.

Exploring participants’ sense of risk throughout my data was like following the strands of a spider web; rather than clearly identifying a singular source of risk,

participants linked risk to a variety of societal, institutional, geographic, disciplinary, and academic norms. My participants expressed a sense that systemic social factors mediated the risk, and that not all faculty shared the same level of vulnerability because of differences in identity and location. Surprisingly, sometimes interview participants with a high degree of commitment to teaching about religion expressed similar concerns about risks as did survey participants who chose not to teach about religion. Although participants did not specifically name Christian hegemony as a factor that influenced their perceptions of risk, many survey and interview participants mentioned the risk of backlash from conservative Christians. Within the US context of White Christian hegemony, it is not surprising that scholars whose racial, religious (or non-religious), sexual, and political identities put them at odds with the dominant religious practice feel apprehensive about conflict. For many participants, their perceived risk in teaching about religion was related to fears about student resistance, but other participants discussed their fears of lack of institutional support, negative career outcomes, or even risk to their personal safety. The strongest trend I saw in participants' responses about the risky nature of teaching about religion was related to students as a vector of risk.

Most participants who discussed a sense of risk about or fear of teaching about religion related their comments in some way to students. Some interview participants, like May Cale, worried about students not understanding content related to religion and possibly misinterpreting class discussions as “reinforcing students’ negative perceptions” of certain groups. For some interview participants, like Alex Smythe, the sense of fear was related to possibly “offend[ing]” or “ostraciz[ing]” a student, or as May stated, “I

worry that students will feel stigmatized by me.” Maria Wilson, another interview participant, expressed similar feelings: “I never want to pressure anybody to do anything different from what they’re doing. I never want anyone to feel the tiniest bit guilty. I never want them to think that it was ever my agenda to change them.”

Fears about student reactions seemed to bridge altruistic and self-interested concerns. Alex, May, Maria, and some survey participants expressed these concerns in terms of care for their students and a desire to treat them ethically. However, the consequences of offending students can also be felt more personally, through student evaluations and other means. One survey participant expressed a fear that students “will feel attacked for their beliefs and it will haunt me in course evaluations,” a fear shared by several other survey participants, one of whom similarly worried about “getting battered in evaluations.” Another survey participant, while explaining her worry that students would misinterpret her teaching, explained, “Although that wouldn’t necessarily bother me on a personal level, I also have to think about my future career and the weight that student evaluations hold.”

Aside from student evaluations, many survey participants and some interview participants expressed the sense that discussing religion with students could somehow blow up in the classroom, either immediately or later in the form of personal and professional consequences. In this vein, interview participant Rose described her main fear as “say[ing] something that’s badly misinterpreted, and then carried out into the world.” Many participants described the fear that class discussions would become unmanageable or rancorous. As one survey participant explained, “I am hesitant to step

into a minefield of conflict. I do raise topics about religion, but I don't enjoy it." Another survey participant shared, "I feared that due to the intense emotions surrounding these issues the class discussions would get away from me and become hostile." Rose summarized teaching about religion and teaching about race as "really hard," and something that often pulled her out of her comfort zone. She explained, "Especially if you have a class with a lot of different backgrounds. It can be really tricky. You'll have people so far from each other, it's like, how are you even going to have a conversation here?" Rose felt very comfortable with her knowledge of religion, but navigating conversations with students about deeply held and diverging beliefs was something that she saw as challenging.

In addition to viewing students as a vector of risk, participants considered their university administrations as factors that affected their perceived sense of risk or safety. Interview participant Savannah Woolf expressed a lack of fear or inhibition at her current institution because of what she perceived as a supportive administration. In contrast with two previous Christian-affiliated institutions in which "every word out of [her] mouth got [her] in trouble" with the administration, Savannah's current institution made her feel safe in teaching about religion. Many participants shared the sense that the character, culture, and climate of their current institution affected the way that they taught about religion. Although this case study focused on faculty members, this finding bolsters the view that addressing religion adequately in the classroom requires larger institutional transformation.

For some participants, the sense of risk was personal because of participants' intersecting religious, political, and racial vulnerabilities, as well as other marginalized identities. One survey participant listed a "sense of being an outsider in this very conservative cultural climate" as a fear or inhibition related to teaching about religion, and another shared that she had experienced "horrible struggles within the dominant religion both as a young person or a new professional." Both interview participants who were women of color directly expressed their views that teaching about religion and race was risky for them personally as women of color. Interview participant Susie Peace said, "If I have any fear, it would be as a marginalized scholar who already has a number of margins working against her in a secular institution. Will my tenacity to teach these things make me more vulnerable than I already am?" As another participant, Aisha, put it, "I think that women of color take a huge risk teaching in the American academy. There's just certain things that we just can't talk about." Aisha's fears were not just a vague understanding of risk; she had specific fears that informed her view of teaching about religion and race as risky: "I think that's one of my biggest fears is like, honestly to, God forbid, either lose a job or worse, end up with some, God forbid, lawsuit or incarceration or something. I don't put that past anyone." Aisha's experience as a Muslim woman of color in a fairly junior position in the academic hierarchy informed her view of teaching about religion as a risky endeavor.

Several participants connected their sense of risk to the precarity of their employment. Aisha expressed her sense of risk in the framework of her understanding of systemic racism and class struggle and hierarchy. "In the neoliberal . . . conservative

academy and context of academic capitalism,” Aisha explained, “we’re just tools, like in the sense that we’re just temporary . . . space-fillers, and we’re very easily replaced, even more so if you don’t have other safety nets.” One survey participant echoed Aisha’s perceptions of the academy, explaining that in order to improve how they taught about religion, they “would find a full-time position.” They elaborated, “As an adjunct, there is little I can do to change the courses I teach.” Aisha, returning to the theme of precarity of academic contingent employment, explained, “That’s very common, students having a lot more financial power, class power than the person teaching them. So I really do fear in terms of my professional safety and physical and emotional safety.” Although Aisha’s fears for her safety do not stem solely from the riskiness of teaching about religion but rather from the intersectional oppressions of capitalist labor exploitation, sexism, racial marginalization, and bigotry against religious minorities, her fears are a stark reminder that engaging in risk in the classroom will not be felt equally by all faculty members. The systems of oppression we critique do not end at the walls of our own institutions, and scholars who are already marginalized by these systems can have a more difficult time teaching about them in the classroom in terms of their own physical, emotional, and professional safety.

Although Aisha expressed her commitment to teaching about difficult topics like religion, race, and sexuality, she expressed skepticism that White WGS faculty shared her commitment. In Aisha’s words, “I wish more White faculty would take the risk of teaching these things, and being more proactive about teaching things around anti-racism, or anti-Islamophobia” and other topics instead of treating them as “afterthoughts.” Aisha

continued, “I wish we would center those issues and run with it as a theme rather than, like, ‘This week we’re going to talk about anti-Blackness.’” For Aisha, the complex intersections of religion, race, and sexuality need to be centered in the social-justice classroom rather than pushed to the margins, ghettoized, or left for faculty of color to deal with.

Although the five White interview participants did not name Whiteness as the motivating factor behind faculty inaction, quite a few of them acknowledged the reluctance of their colleagues to engage with topics related to religion, and several survey participants acknowledged their own reluctance to discuss religion. Most strikingly, one survey participant characterized their own avoidance of the subject of religion as cowardice: “I feel that it’s a hot button topic that I’d rather not deal with. I teach at an upper midwestern university, conservative, lots of conservative Christian groups, few Muslim students, and it’s just a battle I don’t want to fight. I’m a chicken.” Many faculty members have legitimate reasons to fear for their own personal and professional comfort or even safety when discussing difficult content, so avoiding religion could be a logical choice rather than an act of cowardice, but the survey participant’s self-characterization was striking.

Although most interview participants did not specifically name Whiteness as a variable that they saw predicting unwillingness to teach about religion, Aisha felt very strongly about naming Whiteness as a part of the dynamic. When I contacted Aisha for member checking, I included an executive summary that included the following sentence: “Teaching about religion and race involves risks stemming from societal, institutional,

geographic, disciplinary, and academic norms, and some faculty are not willing to navigate that risk and instead choose to avoid the topic.” In response, Aisha repeated her focus on White faculty as the faculty member she sees as unwilling to navigate the risk of teaching about religion:

One thing I specifically say and I’ll reiterate is that it’s white faculty that are not willing to do the heavy lifting when it comes to teaching about religio-spirituality and feminism/gender/sexuality. Typically white faculty, or POC faculty who identify as secular who have been trained by white faculty [or] have a scholarly lineage of white writers/theorists who don’t put in the work that is needed. I think it’s important for us to name this instead of just saying “some faculty.”

Aisha does not romanticize the “heavy lifting” and “work” that she describes as “needed.” Rather, Aisha sees teaching about religion as a risky endeavor for everyone but sees White faculty as unwilling to navigate that risk.

As my participants mapped out their experiences teaching about religion in women’s and gender studies, it seems clear that real or perceived risk is a key feature of the landscape. For instructors, the first crossroad seems to be whether or not to engage the risk of teaching about religion in the first place. Some women’s and gender studies faculty opt out for a variety of reasons, but others demonstrate their willingness and commitment to integrating religion into their social-justice teaching.

“Willing to Do that Work”

The first theme of this study, that instructors should be willing to integrate religion in spite of the risks involved, is a pedagogical lesson infused with hope and

humility. As an example, Susie most clearly expressed her willingness to teach about religion when I asked her about what she had done to prepare herself to teach about religion as it intersects with race and other factors of the social world. After detailing her internal and external preparation work, Susie shared the following:

I want to say with a sense of humility . . . that I still have a lot to learn. But this is the beautiful part about it: I'm willing. And I think that, in essence—my willingness to delve into it, study it, even in places that take myself out of my own comfort zone—has helped me to prepare for something like this.

A survey participant similarly explained the factors that influenced their pedagogy on the topic of religion by sharing, “I have personal experience, and I’ve made the effort to learn more and engage more.” For Susie, as for many participants, the first crossroad in the journey of teaching about religion was about willingness and commitment to doing the work.

At other times, participants invoked the theme of willingness as a criticism of the unwillingness of their colleagues in women’s and gender studies. Aisha echoed the emphasis on effort when describing White faculty’s unwillingness to do the work: “I haven’t seen White colleagues put in that effort to take those risks. Many times I think they’re a lot quicker to give up on these things because it takes a lot of work.” For Aisha, putting in the effort and taking risks to teach about religion and race was a worthwhile endeavor, but one that she did not see her White colleagues committing to. Savannah, a White interview participant, did not mention race as a factor causing faculty avoidance of religion, but she did single out religion as a category that women’s and gender studies

professors seemed singularly unwilling to learn about: “And for some reason that is the one—it’s like they will learn about everything else, even though they have no experience with it, but religion scares people in a different way.” Savannah shared other participants’ emphasis on willingness and commitment when I asked her what recommendations she had for improving how religion was taught in WGS. Savannah first recommended that people should “get themselves familiar with the content of religious studies” in order to have “resources to feel more comfortable referring to students where they don’t know what the answers are.” Savannah continued, “And then if they just engage it, they don’t let their fear to stop them from engaging!” Alex humorously described her own commitment to teaching about religion in similar terms, explaining, “I don’t worry about [my fears and inhibitions about teaching about religion] too much because it’s such a huge part of who I am and what I teach that I’m just like, ‘Well, here we are. We’re just going to do this.’”

From “willingness” to “take the risk” to “just engage” to “just do this,” many participants shared a sense that engaging the risk of teaching about religion was a worthwhile choice. In Susie’s words, “I think that if I could share anything, I think it would be, if we want to have a more just and humane world, that as teachers, as human beings, we must not back away from these teachings, because they’re integral in understanding each other.” When I asked Savannah what other insights about teaching about religion and race she would like to share, she similarly emphasized the importance of the endeavor: “So I know I’m the outlier of this, because I love teaching about religion. I hope that colleagues in intro classes will embrace that as an opportunity,

because I think we ignore it at feminism's own peril, because so many of our students don't share our views on religion, and we've got to speak to them where they are." Some survey participants shared the sense that religion is an important aspect of society and that engaging with it in class is a matter of responding appropriately to students and to the surrounding social world. As one survey participant said, "I think that identifying how religion(s) are an institution that influences all of us, practitioners or not, is important." The sense that integrating religion was "important" drove my participants' commitment to willingly navigate the risks involved in integrating religion into their teaching.

"I Want to Integrate" Religion

My participants' sense that engaging with religion in the classroom was worthwhile drove their pedagogical practices, particularly their willingness to organically integrate religion into the classroom. To varying degrees, all interview participants and textbooks and most syllabi and survey participants mentioned or demonstrated organically integrating religion when relevant. Although the tactic was widespread, it can obviously be employed more or less effectively in terms of promoting social justice. For example, some textbooks and syllabi integrated minimal references to religion that might not significantly shape students' learning. Furthermore, although the survey participant who claimed to mention "in passing" that religion is used "to justify sexism and homophobia and other intolerant behavior" could potentially claim to organically integrate religion into their teaching, this integration does not necessarily indicate multi-dimensional and complex discussions of religion. However, across my sources of data, I found evidence that participants who were willing and committed to discussing religion

often choose to engage religion by integrating material about religion into discussions of other social justice topics. Whether through adding religion into existing units, using current events, or creating an open space of dialogue in which religion as an aspect of intersectionality could be repeatedly analyzed in class discussions, participants shared a variety of strategies for integrating religion in the introductory women's and gender studies classroom.

In many ways, the pedagogical choice to integrate religion was related not just to willingness to engage with risk, but also with the other themes from this study: getting students to think relationally and enacting feminist pedagogy. Susie's descriptions of her pedagogy are an excellent example of the interrelations of these themes. In Susie's words, "I integrate the voices of women across different religions throughout my syllabi," and "in classes I'm continuing to speak about how we are a diverse group and and that we live in a diverse world," including the fact that "people come from different faith communities, or people may not come from any faith community, or people may be atheists . . . we're a diverse group." Susie's integration of religion was not just about content, but also about critical thinking and community. As Susie later explained, her choice to integrate religion organically into the classroom related to her understanding of her own pedagogy as ceremony, influenced possibly by Susie's practice of indigenous spirituality. "I want to integrate . . . as part of my pedagogy as ceremony. Ceremony is about relationships," Susie explained, "Relationship with self. Relationships with other. Relationships with the cosmos and the world. And so it's important to integrate, for me, as part of the ceremony." Susie's feminist pedagogical goals influenced her desire to

integrate religion in the classroom. Instead of segregating religion as a topic, Susie chose to integrate it in order to promote relational thinking in her students. At the same time, Susie's own spiritual and religious practice influence her pedagogy, leading her to see the act of teaching itself as sacred.

As I previously stated, all of my interview participants mentioned integrating religion into their teaching about a variety of topics. Aisha succinctly explained the approach of integrating religion in her teaching: "Throughout the semester I'll weave in things to do with . . . religion and spirituality. . . I don't put it as an afterthought but rather constantly bring it in when we're talking about intersectional analysis." Savannah similarly connected the concept of intersectionality to the tactic of integrating religion in the curriculum, remarking, "I would say anything in religion intersects with other things, so we can't divorce our teaching about gender equality [from] race or sexuality, or any other kinds of social dissonance." For Rose, this integrative intersectional approach means "there's some topics throughout the book that [she will] add religion to that aren't there already," and that she "tr[ies] to bring in religion as one of those elements" of intersectionality. Maria similarly claimed to teach about religion "organically by the setup in the class." Maria and other participants disliked the approach of segregating difficult topics like religion into units, and instead preferred an approach that allowed for continual and organic integration through open discussion. Maria explained her advice to others, "First of all, not to say, 'Okay, now we're going to talk about this and talk about that,' but actually build it into the structure of the class, and also to build into the structure of the class a place for open dialogue and for students to ask their questions."

One survey participant shared their strategy of integrating religion in relation to current events rather than specific topics, which is another way of organically integrating religion into the class. In the survey participant's words, "I also try to let current events take the lead. If I feel I need to address something (post-the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, post-New Zealand [mosque shooting], or any after any local discriminatory events), I will." For these participants, centering religion as an aspect of intersectionality meant organically integrating open discussions of religion throughout the course.

Other participants also described or made reference to their practice of integrating topics related to religion rather than teaching about religion in a discrete unit. May described her approach to integrating religion as opposed to teaching a specific unit about religion, saying, "I teach about religion sort of as we go along, integrated—not in a kind of direct, 'Here's our module in which we'll talk about women and religion . . . '—but suggesting to my students that an understanding of religion is necessary to understand these big data points in American history and politics."

Similar to my interview participants, many survey participants discussed their own strategies of integrating religion into their courses. One survey participant explained their approach to integrating rather than segregating religion as a theme of the course: "I do always incorporate readings/discussion/lecture of some aspects of religion. . . . Again, a unit could be devoted to religions but I tend to work it in throughout. For instance, when we discuss 'first wave' feminism we talk about religious institutions as an important site of women's early civic efforts." As this survey participant recognized, devoting a unit to

religion is a valid option, but across my sources of data, participants seemed to prefer the approach of organic integration, with or without a specified unit on religion.

Unlike the more subjective and motivational aspect of willingness to engage religion, evidence of organically integrating religion is present in introductory women's and gender studies textbooks. All textbooks in the sample included evidence of integrating religion to some extent. The textbooks in my sample all follow the typical model in WGS introductory textbooks of including a variety of anthologized readings along with typical "textbook" content written by writers or editors, but they take two main approaches as to how to represent the concept of religion. Some textbooks have a designated section or chapter dedicated to religion, spirituality, and related topics. The best-selling textbook in the market, Shaw and Lee's text, takes the approach of including a designated chapter on religion, and Kelly, Parameswaran, and Schniedewind's text also includes a section of a chapter dedicated to "Women and Religion." However, both texts integrate discussions of religion throughout the textbook, which is the other main approach that some textbooks use.

In the second approach, readings about religion are interspersed throughout chapters on other topics rather than presented in their own section. Because there's not a designated chapter or section on religion in this approach, these textbooks often have little of their explanatory "textbook" material dedicated to religion, and they also usually devote fewer numbers of readings to the topic. However, the diversity of topics discussed in relation to religion can be increased by this approach since readings are spread out across sections. The remaining four textbooks in my sample all included evidence of

organic integration of religion when relevant, although this integration ranged from readings related to religion in almost every chapter to occasional scattered references. Taken as a whole, the textbook sample reinforces the theme that WGS practitioners prefer to integrate content about religion as their primary, if not exclusive, method of teaching about religion.

The strategy of integrating religion organically is also visible in the syllabus sample for this project. Since several interview participants described how they wove the theme of religion throughout their introductory courses through in-class examples rather than specific units or readings, analysis of syllabi may not be a particularly accurate method of gauging the extent to which faculty integrate religion as a theme into introductory women's and gender studies courses, but as a whole, the syllabi sample supported the theme that WGS faculty often demonstrate their commitment to teaching about religion by organically integrating content about religion into their teaching. Syllabi often designated particular days to discuss religion, as was evident through titles and through the selected readings for the day. However, some faculty chose to integrate the discussion of religion with other topics, assigning readings related to religion on several days. Since abortion in the United States and in many Christian-majority countries is a hot-button topic related to religion, many faculty members included readings related to religion in relation to discussions of reproductive rights. Some faculty used fictional portrayals to integrate the discussion of religion, such as by using the graphic novel or film *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi or *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, in novel or TV series form or both. The reading "Do Muslim Women

Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others” by Lila Abu-Lughod was frequently assigned in the syllabus sample for this project as well, and although faculty often assigned it on days that appeared to be related to discussions of religion, they also assigned it in relation to other postcolonial or intersectional topics as a way to integrate the discussion of religion with relevant social justice topics.

Overall, twenty-four out of thirty-two of the syllabi demonstrated intentional organic integration of religion to some extent. However, it could be argued that all syllabi integrate aspects of Christianity, the dominant religion in the US, in their calendars, which include days off for Christian religious holidays like Christmas and Easter and which follow the Christian-influenced practice of accommodating Christians’ weekly day of worship, Sunday, as part of the weekend. Since this integration is the result of Christian hegemony in the US rather than the intentional choice of the instructor, I did not consider these practices evidence of intentional organic integration. Furthermore, it should be noted that some syllabi showed only minimal evidence of organic integration of religion, such as listing it as a factor of the social world. Without additional data, evidence of minimal integration on most syllabi in this sample is not enough evidence to demonstrate that introductory WGS courses integrate religion with a critical lens. However, the evidence across sources of data in this study does support the finding that WGS instructors who choose to examine religion in a more meaningful way in their introductory courses often choose to organically integrate religion into relevant topics.

Many participants mentioned religion as coming up related to specific topics in their classroom, but the specific topics they mentioned were not always the same, although sexuality was a frequent topic. Rather than seeing a connection to a specific topic, when I look across my sources of data, I see a general strategy of integrating religion when relevant. Interview participant Alex claimed, “I think it’s impossible to talk about issues of social justice and women’s and gender studies without talking about religion, especially because of . . . reproductive justice for people who have uteruses . . . because so much of that discussion has been co-opted by religion, so much of any teaching about sexuality, all the shame, the stigma, everything.” One survey participant who taught at a Catholic school similarly mentioned integrating religion with their discussion of sexuality: “When talking about sexuality, I assign texts written by theologians as well as papal encyclicals. I teach at a Catholic . . . college, so I think I would do a disservice to my students if I did not address religion when applicable.” For these participants, integrating religion was important because it is an influential part of the social world, even if it is not the main topic of the course.

Participants didn’t always explain why they chose to integrate religion in relation to specific topics, but when they did, there appeared to be practical and theoretical concerns that influenced their choices. Participants who mentioned discussing religion in relation to sexuality usually suggested the relevance of this connection to the current social and political landscape of the United States. As Alex points out, “so much of that discussion [about sexuality] has been co-opted by religion,” such as in the case of abortion or same-sex marriage. Discussion of religion in relevant circumstances,

therefore, is a practical choice informed by a theoretical understanding that religion is an important factor of the social world and that students need to develop an understanding of how it influences and intersects with other topics. In some cases, this theoretical understanding of the importance of religion includes an understanding of Christian hegemony in the US. As one survey participant explained, “There’s a lot to cover in the introductory course, but we almost always talk about how Christianity, and sometimes other religions, has greatly impacted the way many people, including non-Christians, think about gender. . . That said, religion is not a primary focus of the introductory course. We do usually watch at least one film that deals with religion in relation to transgender and sexuality issues.” Many participants shared the sense that “there’s a lot to cover in the introductory source,” and in that context, it makes sense that religion might be addressed as it intersects with other topics of discussion in the course that may be more central themes throughout the course.

Taken as a whole, the data for this case study suggested that when faculty are willing and committed to analyzing religion in their introductory courses in spite of risk, they often choose to do so by integrating the discussion of religion organically into course material. Although one survey participant felt that improving their teaching about religion would require adding a special unit on the topic instead of integrating it throughout, most interview and survey participants felt that a successful strategy for teaching about religion was to integrate it organically throughout the class. When WGS faculty choose to engage religion in the classroom, often through organically integrating relevant content, they do so out of a sense that engaging religion in the social-justice

classroom is important and related to the content of the course, either because of its inherent links to the subject matter or because of the students' backgrounds and perceptions of the subject matter. Based on this case study, it seems that willingness to navigate the sense of risk involved in teaching about religion in order to organically integrate it into the introductory WGS course could be a necessary prerequisite for improving intersectional social-justice education related to religion.

Theme 2: Instead of Deconstructing, Get Students to Think Relationally

In addition to revealing the strategy of organically integrating religion, this study revealed that faculty should endeavor to get students to “think relationally” about religion by presenting it in their classrooms as a complex intersectional source of socialization for both empowerment and oppression. In many ways, this second theme builds on the first theme of willingness to integrate. However, it is important to recognize that facts and content about religion can be organically integrated into the classroom in order to promote reductive thinking about religion and spirituality. Instead of teaching about religion as a complex and intersectional source of socialization both for empowerment and oppression, some faculty members may instead discuss religion as marginal, monolithic, or only oppressive. Presenting religion relationally is a necessary addition to the first step of willingness to engage and integrate religion throughout the course.

“Deconstructing” Religion as Oppressive

The need for complex, relational representation of religion was revealed by several interview participants who reported their concerns about negativity toward religion rather than complete avoidance of religion in WGS courses. As May put it,

“Generally I don’t see the field of women’s studies as being very open to religious belief. I see it as deconstructing religious belief in ways that I think of as not particularly productive. So I have very little to say that’s positive about the field.” May characterized the field of women’s and gender studies as having “a particular orientation toward religion, which is not one that tries to take religious believers seriously, but that finds religion as something that needs to be deconstructed and related to forms of oppression, first and foremost.” May’s complaint here is not that WGS completely ignores religion, but rather that it engages with religion in a way that flattens and removes nuance.

Although most participants who responded to my survey did not display overt anti-religious sentiment, several did, and even more survey and interview participants shared their sense of anti-religious sentiment in the field or in academia at large. In many cases, it appears that anti-religious sentiment in WGS is related to the perception that religion is an exclusively oppressive institution. As one survey participant bluntly shared, “I see religion as one of the most damaging institutions in existence.” In many cases, the reasons for opting out of teaching about religion seem intertwined, as in the case of a survey participant who shared that religion is “just not a topic I find terribly compelling, especially when there is already so much to cover in an introductory course,” but then went on to explain, “The way I teach, religion is mainly an example of social control and of a structure of oppression.” Another survey participant explained at length, “A major inhibition is that I am extremely non-religious (atheist) and don’t respect organized religion in any way shape or form. I have very little knowledge about the direct word of the Bible or other religious texts, so if I do mention things about religion it is more in

passing and in reference to how religion, at least in the United States, is often used to justify sexism and homophobia and other intolerant behavior.” For these participants, religion is relevant in the WGS classroom only as something to be critiqued and deconstructed. Unfortunately, many of these critiques of religion correctly identify oppressive aspects of White Christian Protestant hegemony in the US, but then inaccurately and unfairly attribute those oppressive qualities to *religion* as a category.

Although participants who acknowledged their anti-religious views often connected them to their lack of religious or spiritual identity, it is important to decouple personal religiosity with antagonism to religion. Since atheists are often religiously marginalized by US Christian hegemony, religious pluralism necessitates respect for and accommodation of nonreligious people. Assuming that nonreligious identity correlates to antireligious denigration of other religious groups could further marginalize atheists. In the same way that Muslims, Hindus, and Christians can be committed to religious pluralism while maintaining their own beliefs, atheists and other nonreligious people can be committed to religious pluralism without espousing religious beliefs.

I found that many participants who did not consider themselves religious or spiritual people were willing and committed to exploring these topics in the classroom. May and Alex, for example, identified as non-religious people, Alex even describing herself as an atheist, yet remained committed to analyzing religion in their research and teaching. In the same way, participants and textbooks that acknowledged religion as a force of oppression sometimes also showed a strong commitment to including a full and nuanced treatment of religion. In my data, the realization that religion can be a force of

oppression seemed to be almost universal and did not in any way account for the decision of some faculty members to reject the academic study of religion. As May said when criticizing those who characterize religion only as oppressive, “I’m not saying that religion is not related to forms of oppression, because certainly clearly it is, but that’s not the only approach that I believe ought to be taken toward religious and religious belief and believers. And . . . that seems to me to be the dominant approach with the field.”

Although writing religion off as *completely* oppressive instead of *sometimes* oppressive may not seem to make much of a difference, several participants reacted strongly against what they perceived as anti-religious bias in the field. As one survey participant shared, “I have encountered prejudice on both sides of this issue. From peers in my department I have witnessed disgust and disdain for people who subscribe to religious behaviors and activities, and from students I have witnessed suspicion and inflexibility for scientific and medical reasons for reproductive freedoms.” The participant’s characterization of “prejudice on both sides” poignantly captures the sense that anti-religious sentiment can at times foreclose productive engagement with the difficult pedagogical work of engaging with an important, and sometimes oppressive, factor of the social world. Savannah shared similar sentiments, claiming, “A lot of my colleagues are anti-religious, with good reason. I mean, there are days I’ve thought that religion’s not such a good idea, but I think creating that space in the classroom for religious students to find themselves within feminism’s really important, so that they don’t feel like they have to choose between faith and feminism, but they can actually put

those together.” Susie and May also shared the sense that unnecessary antagonism toward religion forecloses possibly productive engagement.

Getting Students to “Think Relationally”

Instead of either ignoring religion or treating it as the enemy, my interview participants discussed the kind of nuanced thinking they hoped to produce through careful engagement with religion in the classroom. When many of my interview participants talked about how they teach about religion in the classroom, I asked the follow-up question, “What do you want your students to know about religion as it relates to social justice by the end of your course?” Many of their answers related not to specific facts or content but to the kind of thinking they wanted students to be able to do about religion. As Aisha put it, “One of the key learning goals that I actually spell out in syllabi is getting them to think relationally. . . . So even if . . . X, Y, and Z students don’t identify as a Christian or Muslim, or even a religionist . . . getting them to understand that . . . religion is another category, just like race, class, gender, sexuality, et cetera. In that sense, it’s really important for them to understand it.” For Aisha, recognizing the role religion plays in influencing society is an “essential part of thinking critically about gender and sexuality.” Participants described the kind of critical thinking they wanted from students in different terms, but Aisha’s term, relational thinking, captures many aspects of the critical thinking that my interview participants wanted to teach their students when they taught about religion, and also echoes Susie’s understanding of integrating religions as a part of pedagogy as ceremony that promotes relationships, mentioned in the discussion of the first theme.

Although I discuss survey participants' open-ended responses throughout this section, a brief summary of some closed-ended survey results may be helpful here. Survey participants were asked about how different topics relating to religion are addressed in their introductory courses, either through detailed discussion, brief examples, occasional discussion by students, or assignments. Figure 3 below shows the number of times that the topics were checked by respondents. Many instructors indicate that they address topics related to both religion and race in their courses, but as the figure below demonstrates, more instructors report discussing these topics in a cursory fashion than in a detailed lesson or assignment.

Survey participants saw some intersections of religion and race as more salient to introductory WGS courses than others. Participants reported addressing Islamophobia and religious fundamentalist movements in some way in their courses significantly more often than they reported addressing oppression of religious minorities, anti-Semitism, or Zionism. Survey participants also wrote in additional topics that are brought up in their courses, most of which related specifically to intersections of religion and gender or religion and sexuality. Several participants mentioned abortion, LGBTQ+ issues, the hijab, conservative Christianity/religious right, female genital cutting, and Mormonism. Also mentioned were the Black church, Catholic sexual abuse, lack of knowledge, spirituality through womanism, indigenous and Asia-diasporic religions, the importance of Christianity, exclusion of women and LGBTQ+ people from leadership positions, religion as oppressive to women, and reproductive justice. In conjunction with the richer qualitative data about teaching relational thinking in introductory WGS courses, the

survey data suggests that many instructors see religion as related intersectionally to other aspects of the social world, although the details of which topics are prioritized may vary.

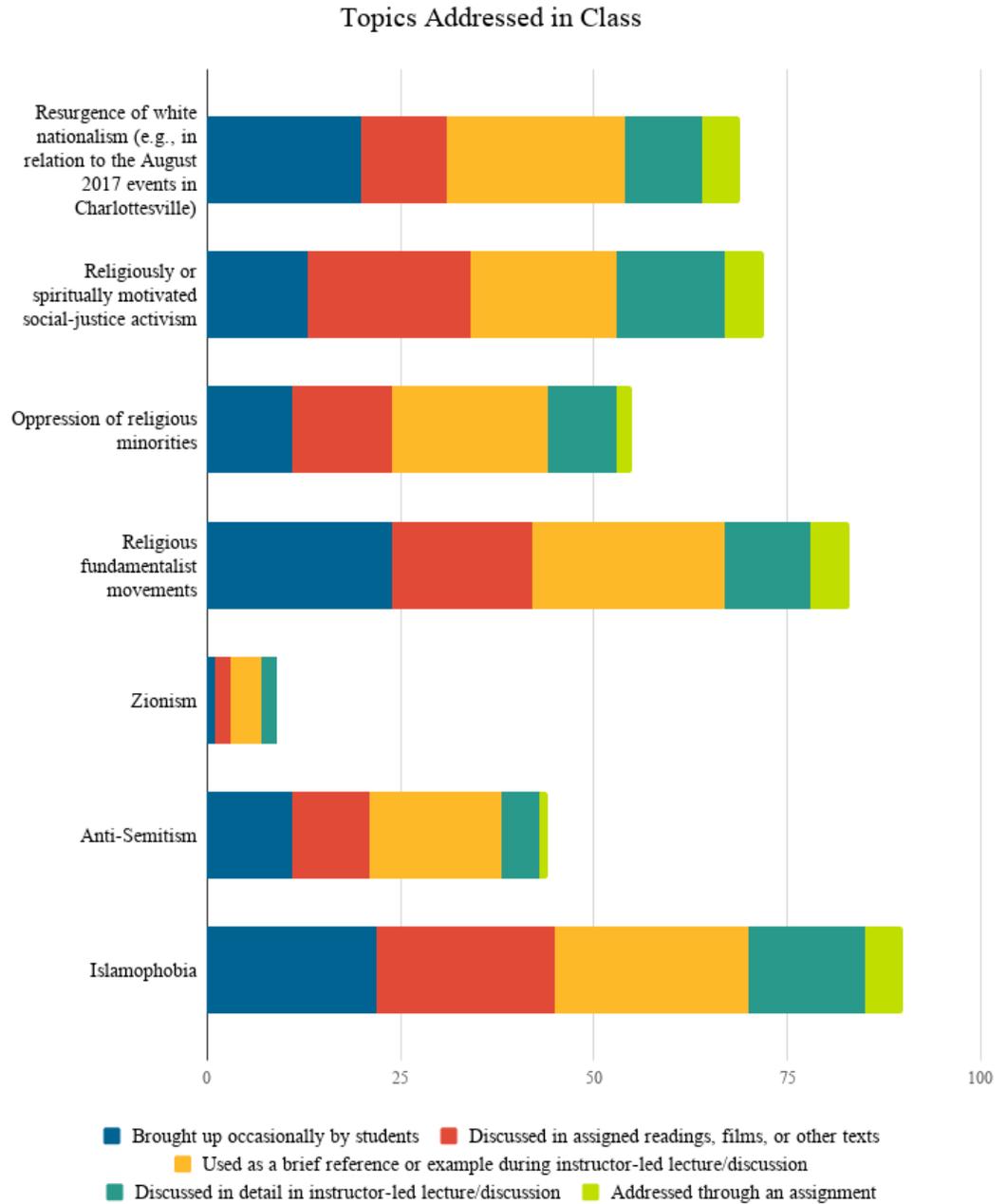


Fig. 3. Survey Responses about Topics Addressed in Class.

Relational Thinking: Intersectional Analysis

For Aisha and for most participants, intersectional analysis is an important part of careful engagement with religion in women's and gender studies and a key component of relational thinking. Aisha described the centrality of religion to her intersectional analysis in the classroom, because, in her words, "Religion itself . . . to me is as important a sociological category as race, as class, as gender, as sexuality, so I don't put it as an afterthought but rather constantly bring it in when we're talking about intersectional analysis." Aisha also described her desire for students and WGS as a field to see religion as an important aspect of intersectionality: "I want gender and sexuality as a discipline to really center religion as another social construct when we're talking about intersectionality." Although participants did not always specifically mention critiquing power relations between majority and minority religious as a component of the intersectional analysis they advocated, the understanding of intersectionality in WGS as discussed in Chapter 1 necessitates that intersectional analysis focuses on not just social construction but also power, privilege, and oppression.

Listing religion as an aspect of the social world that can intersect with other factors of the social world is not controversial in women's and gender studies. In fact, many mentions of religion in textbooks and syllabi are in such intersectional lists. For example, one syllabus explains that students in this class "will critique and analyze multiple identities: race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, nationality, physical ability, sexuality, sexual orientation, etc. and how these identities intersect within a socio-cultural context." However, when my interview participants discussed teaching about

religion intersectionally, they advocated for a more in-depth analysis than simply listing religion as a social category.

Rose, for example, explained her approach of centering intersectionality, explaining, “I give definitions and examples of what an intersectional analysis is. It’s clear from the beginning and all the way through.” Rose also gave an example of how she pushes her students to think about how intersectionality might explain the importance of “religious communities as areas of community belonging and community support” in working-class communities. Similarly, Aisha explained that she taught Islamophobia as racism intersecting with bias against a specific religion. In her words, “It’s not just about religion; it’s the two things together.” Aisha also described intersectionality as a part of the critical thinking of the course rather than the subject matter of the course. In her words, “Instead of teaching [intersectionality] as a ‘thing,’ I want us to really use it as an epistemological approach to gender and sexuality studies.” Although the data for this case study does reveal content, or “things,” that faculty might teach about religion, Aisha’s comments capture the importance of using an intersectional analysis as an epistemological approach for teaching about religion.

Teaching intersectional analysis may be important, but it is not easy. Aisha expressed this sentiment poignantly: “I still think race is an afterthought in gender and sexuality studies. I think religion is an even after-afterthought in gender and sexuality studies. So I want us to actually have an intersectional approach, rather than teaching intersectionality as some kind of object.” Rose acknowledged the difficulty of teaching intersectional analysis and shared her experience that most students have trouble breaking

out of the “additive” understanding of adding layers of identity. According to Rose, “They haven’t gotten that it’s how race affects gender, and how gender affects race, and how they come together to do very particular things.” Rose’s candid discussion of the difficulty of teaching intersectionality reveals intersectional analysis as a kind of critical thinking skill rather than a series of facts.

In spite of the difficulty of teaching intersectional analysis, my interview participants were committed to intersectional analysis as an important component of the critical, relational thinking they wanted their students to do about religion. In discussing the intersection of religion and race, Susie emphasized the necessity of acknowledging religion as a source of empowerment and resistance for racially marginalized communities. She went on to vividly describe the stakes of ignoring intersectionality: “these are intersections that I feel cannot be ignored if we’re going to understand, holistically, how particular groups or how women or how marginalized communities are practicing social justice issues. It’s like saying, ‘I’m going to drink coffee and leave out the coffee beans.’” Susie’s example reveals the importance she places on intersectionality, an importance shared by many other participants.

For many participants, using intersectionality as a foundational approach was a way to encourage nuanced, relational thinking in their students. Several participants explained that it was important to them to push back against students’ assumptions about religion and race by challenging what students see as normative. Savannah connected this practice to intersectionality, explaining, “I think it’s important to make [intersectionality] visible. I think it’s important not to default [to] White as . . . the unmarked religious

category, or ditto in Christianity, but also, again, by making Hinduism, and Buddhism, and other religions, and indigenous American religions visible as part of that.” Maria similarly explained, “I don’t want to set a paradigm of, ‘Religion is this stuff that we practice in North America, which somehow looks White.’” For Savannah and Maria, emphasizing intersectionality was a way of challenging the unmarked norm of White Christianity in the US.

Several participants discussed provocative ways they challenged students’ preconceived ideas with unusual intersections. Rose and Susie, for example, both talked about how the KKK sees itself as a Christian organization, and Rose Thomas noted that she often received student backlash from pointing this out. When I asked Aisha about teaching and religion and race intersectionally, she responded, “You can’t talk about one without talking about the other, especially in the context of [the] US.” Aisha critiqued the “US-history-centric understanding of racism” often taught in WGS, but, she explained, “even within that context, you can’t leave out religion.” Aisha explained the examples she used in class to demonstrate the intersections of religion and race to students: “I get my students to think about who are the first Muslims to arrive on the shores of the US? It wasn’t immigrants.” Aisha continued to explain that with “the long history of slavery and Black history in the US, you can’t leave out religion! The fact that we really leave out religion is itself . . . an influence of White knowledge production, White history; it’s White-washing American history and Black history.” For Aisha, pushing back on students’ preconceptions about religion is a way of epistemologically resisting White Christian supremacy. Forcing students to examine their own country’s history with more

intersectional nuance also forces them to challenge their conceptions of what is normative.

Similarly, Maria pushed back against Christian hegemony in her framing of anti-Semitism as a Christian problem. Maria explained, “I often talk about anti-Semitism when I talk about the history of Christianity,” because of “how the church defined itself against Judaism” as “the ‘other.’” Maria’s framing demonstrates the intersectional nature of many forms of religious and racial oppression and puts the focus on the oppressors rather than suggesting that oppressed peoples are somehow responsible for their own oppression. May also described the importance of teaching about anti-Semitism and Zionism in an intersectional and complex way that challenges some students’ “extremely troubling” perceptions that “Jews are the problem.” May instead sought to instill in her students a more nuanced way of thinking about how societal conditions can make specific categories of identity “the basis for some kind of oppression.” Instead of employing intersectionality to simply list social categories, many participants described the complex and structural levels of analysis they demonstrated in class and tried to teach their students. As these examples and learning goals show, participants who teach intersectional analysis to their students seek to complicate students’ preconceptions and push students to a deeper level of critical and relational thinking.

Relational Thinking: Acknowledging Complexity

In addition to intersectional analysis, another related component of the kind of relational thinking that interview participants wanted from their students was for students to recognize and acknowledge the complexity of the issues studied in class. May, an

interview participant, described the kind of complex thinking she wanted from her students succinctly: “I guess the main insight that I would have about [teaching about religion or about race] is actually the main insight that I think I have about . . . everything now, which is, these things are always going to be more complicated than we think they are.” May described encouraging her students to resist essentializing groups of people and resist the tendency to try to find the “right” opinion to have without actually looking at all of the data carefully. For May, the field of women’s studies unfortunately seemed to be rigid in its thinking about many topics and unwilling to examine data with an open mind instead of pigeon-holing the right answer ahead of time. May described her “biggest insight” about teaching about religion and everything else as, “Let’s stop teaching our students the one-correct-social-justice perspective on every issue, and let’s introduce them to nuance and the empirical data that’s out there that may even call some of our views into question.”

Although May expressed her commitment to respecting her students as people, she also added that she saw her role as to “complicate” her students’ belief system rather than to “reinforce” it: “I don’t think that I’m actually getting paid to respect the belief systems of my students—that we have actually inculcated in our students—when I know that they could do better, when I know that they could actually experience the tension and the complication of believing something, and then seeing that the empirical reality is much more complicated than they think it is.” Although May’s emphasis on empiricism was not stated by other participants, her commitment to encouraging students to explore nuance was a common theme of participants’ discussions of relational thinking.

Alex similarly summed up her most important teaching insight, saying, “In general, what I think of as really crucial for women and gender studies . . . it’s to question your assumptions. That’s like every class I teach, just question the stuff that you’ve been taught. Unlearn, relearn, look at power dynamics, which religion is a huge part of that.” For May and Alex, as well as other participants, acknowledging the complexity of the issues discussed in class was a key component of the kind of relational thinking they strived to teach their students. Rose also shared the goal of complicating her students’ understanding of religion. “People often have a really hard time understanding that their own religious experience is not normative, or that it has a particular racial history, which is normal,” Rose explained. Rose pushed her students to recognize that one expression of religion “doesn’t represent an entire tradition.” Although all of my interview participants indicated their understanding of Christian hegemony in the US, they all remained committed to examining all religions, including Christianity, with nuance rather than painting with a broad brush. This case study revealed that WGS scholars who are committed to teaching about religion teach their students to think about it as a complex intersectional source of socialization for both empowerment and oppression.

Relational Thinking: Exploring Religion Sociologically

Across the sources of data for this case study, WGS practitioners recognized religion as a source of socialization, and participants emphasized this as another key part of relational thinking about religion. In the US, the dominant religion that influences people sociologically is Christianity, but all religions teach people, overtly and covertly, about gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and nationality. Religious communities are one of

the societal institutions through which people learn society's rules and attitudes. These institutions are not passive reflections of culture but are rather active agents that both enforce and also at times resist societal norms. This finding was clear across my sources of data; all textbooks in the sample, almost all interview participants, many survey participants, and several syllabi mention religion as a source of socialization.

Although all the textbooks in this sample mentioned religion as a source of socialization, they took several main approaches. Some textbooks, such as Gillis and Jacobs's text, allude to religion as a source of socialization without directly stating it. Gillis and Jacobs quote the Bible as an example of Western cultural views and mention that some forms of homophobia are "part of a broader value system of right and wrong, such as conservative religious ideology" (107). These allusions are consistent with a view of religion as a source of cultural socialization but are not overt. In some cases, such as Saraswati, Shaw, and Rellihan's text, these allusions may be almost entirely related to presenting religion as an oppressive institution. Other textbooks, like Kirk and Okazawa-Rey's textbook, allude to religion as a source of socialization through examples and through anthologized first-person accounts that list religion as a formative influence in the author's life, such as Deborah Lee's "Faith as a Tool for Social Change" and Nadine Naber's "Decolonizing Culture: Beyond Orientalist and Anti-Orientalist feminisms" (550-554; 76-83). Paula S. Rothenberg's textbook takes a similar approach, giving examples of religion and including readings from authors who list religion as a personal influence in their own life.

Finally, some textbooks, such as Kelly, Parameswaran, and Schniedewind's book and Shaw and Lee's book, not only give examples of religion as a source of socialization and include anthologized authors who assert that "religion powerfully affects our belief systems concerning life and living," but also directly state the influence of religion in sections devoted to discussing religion (Kelly, Parameswaran, and Schniedewind 431). Kelly, Parameswaran, and Schniedewind open their section on "Women and Religion" by succinctly asserting religion's role as a source of socialization: "Institutionalized religion has a powerful impact on women's views of themselves and the values and policies that affect their life choices" (282). Shaw and Lee similarly assert that "religion remains a significant personal and political force in women's lives," and give examples of how religion can act as a force of socialization for both oppression and empowerment (637).

Survey and interview participants also alluded to, gave examples, and directly identified religion as a source of socialization in their responses. Quite a few survey participants shared their religious upbringing as an aspect of their experience that influenced their pedagogy. As an example, one participant shared, "I was raised as Roman Catholic but am no longer part of that religion, even though it is still part of my culture." Another survey participant shared, "I grew up and did my undergraduate in Utah, a very religious state, I have found much of my thinking about race/gender/class being influenced by or intersecting with narratives around religion/spirituality." Many survey and interview participants shared the sense that their students were influenced by their own religious beliefs, such as the survey participant who shared the following pedagogical struggle: "Religion is very personal, and it's tough to argue with 'because

God says so,' so while students may have begun to question other beliefs, religion often is the last to be questioned." Some survey and interview participants directly stated their understanding of religion as a source of socialization. According to one survey participant, "Religion is responsible for so many of people's beliefs and decisions."

Several participants went farther in their characterization of religion as not just an influence on individuals, but as a powerful influence on all members of society. A survey participant, quoted earlier, shared, "I think that identifying how religion(s) are an institution that influences all of us, practitioners or not, is important." As interview participant Aisha explained, students often come from backgrounds influenced by religion, whether or not they identify as practitioners. Aisha continued, "We are all taught these . . . religio-patriarchal understandings of religion and sexuality, so to take that apart throughout the semester is really important." Susie shared Aisha's understanding of religious influence, explaining in detail:

We've all been shaped and molded, if not directly, indirectly, into religion . . .

You have different regions, different countries, where a dominant religion exists, and . . . if there are some people in that country who have a dissenting opinion and don't believe it, it doesn't mean that they're not influenced by it, especially if the laws of the country have been influenced and shaped and cultivated by the religion of that country. So when we talk about religion, it's in every facet of society.

Susie also explained her view that "this country has been shaped and created by a certain facet of the Christian religion . . . And so if I . . . choose to ignore that part, then I choose

to ignore a deeper understanding of the very social order and fabric of a society that I live in.” Susie’s detailed explanation more directly states an understanding of religion that many participants in this case study seemed to share: religion is an influential force in society, often shaping the lives, beliefs, and institutions of all members of society, not just practitioners, and understanding its influence in society is a key part of understanding society. As Susie also suggested, Christian hegemony in the US is a function of religion as a sociological force, and understanding and opposing it as a form of oppression necessitates an understanding of how it undergirds our society. Getting students to understand religion as a sociological force seemed to be a key learning goal for many participants and an important part of relational thinking.

Relational Thinking: Seeing Religion as Oppressive and Empowering

Another aspect of relational thinking that occurred across data sources was the emphasis on religion as paradoxically a tool for both justice and injustice. With respect to social justice concerns, all sources of my data showed that WGS practitioners recognize religion as a multifaceted source of both oppression and empowerment. Although participants in this study shared a sense that dominant religions in a given time and place have the ability to marginalize and oppress people for religious, cultural, racial, gender, and sexual reasons, participants chose to also emphasize the liberatory potential of religion.

Throughout all sources of data for this project, teaching religion as a source of both oppression and empowerment was a strong trend. In many instances, this understanding of religion was closely tied to the understanding of religion as a

sociological influence. For example, Maria shared the following suggestion for WGS faculty: “I would say if they’re talking about what patriarchy is and the discourses of patriarchy, they need to include religion as an important source of those discourses. And also, in terms of protest and activism, I think they need to include religious discourses as major motivators for those as well.” Participants also connected the dual nature of religion as oppressive and empowering with the pedagogical goal of encouraging more complex critical thinking. For example, Maria described how she centers this theme in her own courses: “In most of the courses that I teach, one question is key, especially in terms of gender and race. And that question is, does religion promote values of equality or hierarchy? And it’s almost always both.”

Acknowledging religion as empowering and oppressive was a key component of relational thinking, but it also overlapped with the other themes of this study. Although emphasizing the dual nature of religion for social justice seemed to serve multiple pedagogical purposes in this case study, one main purpose seemed to be to encourage students to resist essentializing groups of people. In Rose’s words, “One of the things that I really, really push is that none of the traditions are monolithic” in their treatment of women. In discussing religion as both oppressive and empowering, Rose explained, “I guess mostly what I want them to know is that it’s not an either-or proposition, that it’s complex and there are a lot of factors going into this.” Multiple interview participants discussed the need to encourage students not to essentialize or dismiss certain groups of people, and they often mentioned challenging students’ preconceived ideas.

For participants, acknowledging religion as empowering as well as oppressive seemed to work toward the relational-thinking goal of resisting essentialism. For several participants, highlighting progressive strands of religious traditions was a way to push back against students' essentialized views. Savannah described her practice of highlighting the multifaceted nature of religion in the classroom:

I think one thing that you have to watch for is that people may assume [conservative Evangelical Christianity] is the only expression of Christian faith, and so sometimes what I have to address is sort of anti-religion, and to help people understand, “No, no, no, there are also all of these other very progressive people in all of these things,’ including Evangelical Christianity. Not all of them—somewhere there are 20% of them that did not vote for Trump!”

In similar terms, Alex explained her practice of pushing back on students' essentialized views:

It's important to not let a lot of the students dismiss—“Oh, well, these religious fanatics, these crazy Christian nationalists!”—blah, blah, blah, or, “Everyone who's super religious who's *not* Catholic *must* be super conservative.” I say, “Actually, that's not necessarily true.” That's when I end up talking about Mormon feminists and stuff, and of course, my students are like, “What? They exist?” I say, “Yes, they exist, and they matter.” And it matters to be doing the work that they're doing inside their religion, because they love their religion.

Savannah and Alex's examples contextualize the practice of acknowledging religion as a force of empowerment as well as oppression. For many instructors, this pedagogical practice is a way of teaching nuanced critical thinking and resisting essentialism.

Although highlighting the diverse interactions between religion and social justice was related to the theme of relational thinking, it also tied in to participants' goals of enacting feminist pedagogy, the third theme of this study. Participants explained that analyzing the paradoxical nature of religion in social justice was important not only because it provides a more accurate view of history, but also because it allows students to engage in the challenging examination of their own beliefs. May described her nuanced approach:

I have gotten questions from students, and sometimes they're challenging questions, like, "You said *this* about Christians," and I will often say under those circumstances, "Well, what I meant to say was that Christians were on both sides of this issue, right? And so there are Christian conservatives, and then people who were Christian conservative for their time, and this is what they advocated. And then there were people who are Christian progressives—again, for their time—and this is what they advocated, this is the position that they took. And so it wasn't so much non-Christian—especially in American history—non-Christians against Christians, it was more Christians of different, very different kinds of orientations toward faith who took these very different positions."

For May, helping students understand the nuance of religious influence on social justice historically not only provided practice in critical thinking but also was a way of trying to

avoid prematurely shutting down the conversation about religion with religious students, which relates to the third theme of enacting feminist pedagogy. May's discussion of Christians on both sides of the issue also serves as an acknowledgement of Christian hegemony in the US, which can be a difficult topic to talk about with Christians students who may feel defensive in discussions of Christian privilege and hegemony. May's nuanced approach reveals her goal of eliciting critical thinking about difficult topics.

Maria more directly explained her connection between teaching about the paradoxical nature of religion and helping students examine their own beliefs:

What I want students to understand is that either hierarchy or equality, either one of those ideals is cultivated and emphasized based on the cultural lens that you use. So I want them to understand that these values, a) they're both in religious discourses and b) you can choose and other people can choose. So that's . . . one of the major questions that I bring up in all of my classes. And that's what I want them to walk away with: . . . that they actually can decide what is the major message of that text and how to act on it in their lives.

For Maria, recognizing the complex nature of religion with respect to social justice was important not just as a factual proposition, but also because of how it enabled her students to engage with the subject matter. Maria wants her students to walk away from her classes empowered to engage their own religious, spiritual, and cultural surroundings as active agents of change rather than only as passive recipients of traditions. In this respect, the trend of acknowledging religion as both potentially oppressive and potentially

empowering is related to the feminist pedagogical goals of empowering students through their learning.

The complex, intersectional, and relational thinking that participants sought to instill in their students around religion related to their willingness to engage religion and their practice of feminist pedagogy—other themes in this study. For Alex, empowering students to claim religious and feminist identities was connected to intersectionality, not just theoretically, but also in praxis. In her words, “Intersectionality gives [students] space to feel like they can identify with and claim feminism for themselves in ways that I think is real and important. It really helps them see that you can be Catholic and a feminist, of course. In fact, there’s a long, really fascinating history with that.” Savannah similarly explained her commitment to “creating . . . space” so students don’t have to choose in between religious and feminist values. Across the sources of data for this case study, I found evidence that WGS professors who chose to engage religion in a complex way did so by acknowledging religion as a force for both empowerment and oppression. Far from simply a factual proposition, this complex understanding of religion and social justice seems to be connected to faculty members’ larger pedagogical goals of furthering critical thinking and social justice and empowering students.

Theme 3: Enact Student-Centered Feminist Pedagogy

The final theme of this study was that WGS faculty who want to improve their intersectional engagement with religion whether or not it’s their research specialty could do so by enacting student-centered critical, liberatory, feminist pedagogy focusing on open and respectful dialogue. Instead of focusing solely on the instructor’s research

interests and expertise, this pedagogical model recognizes that all members of the learning community bring knowledge, and that interaction among the members of the learning community is a productive form of knowledge creation. Focusing on students' needs and facilitating open and respectful dialogue about religion and race were key components of this theme, but participants also critiqued WGS practitioners who refused to engage with religion in their teaching.

I have chosen to describe the pedagogy discussed in this theme as *feminist* pedagogy in this dissertation for two reasons, one pragmatic and one theoretical. First, there are significant resonances between the pedagogical commitments espoused by study participants and scholarly discussions of feminist pedagogy. These commonalities with feminist pedagogy do not negate commonalities with other critical, liberatory pedagogies that could be explored further in future research. In other words, I feel confident that the pedagogy discussed in this dissertation is feminist, but that does not mean it is not also womanist, critical, anti-racist, and culturally responsive. Indeed, I hope it is. Using *feminist* as a shorthand is pragmatic and convenient. Second, I label these pedagogies *feminist* because I want to contribute toward the body of pedagogical scholarship most commonly identified with the field of WGS. *Feminist pedagogy* and *the pedagogy of WGS as a field* are not synonymous, but they are close linked. As Ann Braithwaite and Annalee Lepp note, “making a distinction between feminist pedagogy generally and Women’s Studies specifically is both difficult and hard to hold on to in many instances, as the lines between them constantly blur” (72). Because this dissertation argues for more intersectional attention to religion and race in WGS courses, I want to recognize the ways

in which intersectional attention to religion and race draws on aspects of widely practiced WGS pedagogy that is usually labelled *feminist*. I believe that feminist pedagogy should also be religiously pluralistic, and I want to encourage practitioners of feminist pedagogy to implement the practices of my study participants. Labeling this pedagogy as *feminist* is also a theoretical intervention in redefining the scope of feminist pedagogy.

“It’s Just Not Their Specialties”

Almost all of my interview participants expressed a sense that teaching about religion was not a widespread practice in women’s and gender studies. Some participants expressed a sense of aggrievement about this, while others seemed to accept it, but the sense that their colleagues did not teach about religion was common. Maria, for example, began her interview with me by specifically stating that her colleagues did not teach about religion. I had asked about how religion was taught in the courses she had influenced or supervised, and she responded, “Religion is only taught in the courses that I teach. I am the only one who teaches religion in gender studies. It is not taught in the others.” Near the end of our interview, after I asked Maria about her own fears or inhibitions about teaching about religion, I asked Maria if she had “any sense of why the other people in women’s and gender studies don’t teach about religion, or what fears that they might have.” Maria responded succinctly, “I think it’s just not their specialties.” Maria went on to elaborate that the “mixed” and interdisciplinary nature of her department meant that people had different specialties. Maria was very respectful of her colleagues, and unlike other participants, did not criticize them for their choice not to teach about religion. When I asked her if she saw a place for teaching about religion in

introductory women's and gender studies courses, she responded, "I think it should be there, but I'm not going to tell my colleagues what to do." As I analyzed the data from my interviews and other sources, I used Maria's words as an "in vivo" code: "it's just not their specialties" became the words I used to gather together the sense that some people don't teach about religion because it's not their area of expertise.

Although the intentions of textbook editors are often unclear, the findings from my textbook sample are congruent with the finding that some WGS practitioners see religion as an optional specialization in introductory WGS courses. The introductory WGS textbooks in my sample in general did not seek to provide a great deal of information about religion in the social world in the same way they provide information about gender, sexuality, or even race. Rather, many textbooks treat religion as one of the domains or institutions in which gender is particularly relevant. Although this is certainly true, important aspects of intersectionality are lost when certain vectors of identity, like gender, become fixed in the center and other aspects, like religion, are occasionally added as layers of meaning. With the exception of a few textbooks, like Shaw and Lee's text, the textbooks in this sample did not appear to center religion as a key aspect of intersectionality, which may be evidence of disinterest based on the view that religion is a specialized research interest that is otherwise unrelated to the goals of introductory WGS courses.

Although I could not ask the creators of the syllabi in this case study why they made the choices they did, ten of the thirty-eight syllabi contained no evidence or almost no evidence of teaching about religion. In addition to and related to the sense of risk

discussed in theme one, a lack of specialization in religion is one possible reason why some WGS faculty avoid the topic. Among interview participants and survey respondents, there was a consensus that specific academic training about religion increases comfort in teaching about religion. Participants who had such training often cited it as a reason for their comfort, and survey respondents who expressed discomfort teaching about religion often expressed their lack of basic familiarity with religion. Some survey participants expressed the sense that personal expertise in the subject of religion led to ease and willingness to teach about it. One participant shared, “I don’t want to hear [B]ible verses shot at me—I don’t have the expertise to respond with counter verses.” Another succinctly stated, “Religion is far outside my academic discipline.” Many interview participants and survey respondents mentioned that their own area of research influenced how they taught about religion. For participants who research something related to religion, the depth of insight and familiarity they gain through their research seemed to influence their pedagogy.

Most of my interview participants shared the sense that at least one reason why some of their colleagues didn’t teach about religion was because “it’s just not their specialties.” Alex, for example, pointed to her own research on religion as a reason why she engaged with it in the classroom in contrast to her colleagues. She mentioned one colleague who “will occasionally talk about her work and Catholicism and women . . . but again, because it’s part of her work.” Alex continued, “I think that’s why.” Savannah similarly characterized her colleagues as not wanting to “touch” the subject of religion because of their own lack of expertise. Savannah said, “They’re often afraid that it’ll get

into something that they don't know how to respond to, that there'll be a religious fight, and so I see them being much more concerned about their ability to navigate those conversations, because they just don't know the content of religion." Savannah connected her colleagues' avoidance of religion to ignorance, fear, and an unwillingness to learn. As the above quotes show, some participants saw lack of expertise as contributing to their colleagues' fear and sense of risk related to teaching about religion.

Lack of expertise could also be linked to disciplinary norms in WGS. Rose, another interview participant, also mentioned that her colleagues did not teach about religion. When I asked her to elaborate, she said, "I think mostly they just don't know very much. Honestly . . . if you're not on top of it, nobody's really going to criticize you." In Rose's view at least, ignorance about and apathy toward teaching about religion were related to a communal sense of disinterest in religion in women's and gender studies and in other parts of academia. Although lack of scholarly expertise about religion is not the only factor that guides instructors' choices, it obviously contrasted with the student-centered pedagogy espoused by many of my participants.

"We Have to . . . Engage in That Dialogue," Openly and Respectfully

In discussing her view that attention to the dynamics of intersectionality has the power to unite disparate groups that might otherwise be separated by religion or other categories, Savannah reflected on the nature of feminist teaching:

I think we have to be in a position where we have those conversations, but we don't have it if people are shut down and refuse to even engage with use. And so I think we have to create that space and engage in that dialogue. And that's what

teaching is anyway. It's not opening people's head up via the Freirean banking method;⁷⁸ it's really that education for critical consciousness. So I think religion's got to be part of that conversation, because religion's so important for so many people.

Savannah's view—shared by many interview participants—was that women's and gender studies faculty have to engage with religion not because of their own expertise or lack of expertise but because it is important to their students. Crucially, Savannah connected this assertion to her understanding of liberatory feminist pedagogy. In Savannah's view, a teacher placing knowledge into students' heads is the wrong model, so in some sense, it shouldn't matter as much whether or not religion is someone's "specialty." Instead, Savannah and other participants connected their commitment and practice of teaching about religion to students' needs and to their larger goal of enacting feminist pedagogy and knowledge production.

My interview participants discussed social-justice pedagogy extensively, and although there was some overlap, they also each brought their unique pedagogical styles and emphases. Participants discussing feminist knowledge production emphasized listening, respect, using strategies to accomplish learning goals while avoiding unnecessary conflict, and adopting a posture of intellectual humility. Interview participants often described these principles as key parts of their overall pedagogical approach that also enabled them to specifically accomplish their goals related to teaching

⁷⁸ See Freire 73.

about religion. Some participants also discussed working on oneself as a key guiding pedagogical principle saw. Since teaching about religion is very personal, Susie even suggested that teachers journal about their own fears and anxieties and consider putting themselves in interfaith situations that would force them to work through their own discomfort. Participants also described a range of strategies to engage students in the material, including using pop culture, current events, and the instructor's own experience. Participants discussed a wide range of strategies, but they mostly appeared to be interested in using tactics that would successfully grab their students' attention.

Although I had not consciously thought about what pedagogical approaches my participants might discuss, I noticed during my data analysis that I was surprised that my interview participants seemed to emphasize so many aspects of what I consider basic feminist pedagogy rather than skills specific to teaching about religion. The sampled sections from the textbook set of this case study did not explicitly discuss pedagogy, but in addition to interview participants, survey participants and syllabi also discussed feminist pedagogical principles. Across the sources of data, I saw an emphasis on respectful and open dialogue in the classroom as a key part of the pedagogy of women's and gender studies in general, and specifically with respect to teaching about the topic of religion.

Student-Centered Feminist Pedagogy: Respectful

A key component of the feminist pedagogy evident in this case study is an emphasis on respect. Participants revealed this focus in examples and explicit statements, and participants represented respect as a multifaceted aspect of their pedagogy, relating to

how they treat students, how they expect students to contribute to knowledge production, and how they set the stage for a respectful learning community. On the most basic level, feminist pedagogy in this case study emphasizes respect for students as human beings.

Respecting students as human beings for my participants meant responding to their core values with care and respect. Many participants emphasized the care they took to respect students' religious beliefs and backgrounds. Although they at times wanted to challenge students to think differently, they also tried to make space for differences of opinion and to avoid stigmatizing students. May, for example, mentioned the care she took to not single out the few students in her class from "minority faiths." She mentioned that she might, when discussing religion, ask for a show of hands for students from different kinds of Christian backgrounds, but that she intentionally refused to single out students who might unwittingly become the sole representative of a large world tradition. This attention to detail demonstrates the respect my participants showed for their students in relation to religion and religious, secular, and spiritual identities. One survey participant expressed their respect for their students through a familial analogy: "Growing up in a conservative Christian household and being one of few progressive, agnostic people in the family has led to my careful approach to religion. I talk to my family like I would to students and to my students like I would my family." This participant's comparison with their own family emphasizes the importance of respect, especially when discussing across sometimes charged religious differences.

Susie emphasized the importance of respect for personal faith for both students and instructors: "I would say for scholars and for students who come from various faith

communities that one should not be made to feel ashamed of their faith.” Although avoiding shame is a very low bar in terms of respect, several participants suggested that it should not be taken for granted. For Susie, avoiding shame was not the end goal, but rather, a necessary condition. In Susie’s pedagogy, establishing an authentic, trusting learning community relied to a large extent on members of the learning community being honest and authentic about themselves, which included their religious, secular, and spiritual identities. Susie emphasized this need not just for students in the classroom, but also for instructors in institutions that may not inculcate respect for religious people. Susie told me, “Scholars, teachers shouldn’t be made to not talk about an integral part of themselves, especially when you’re dealing with a secular institution. If we’re saying we want to have open dialogue, then we need to have open dialogue, especially about religion and race because we have seen the current events that have taken place.” From Susie’s perspective, respect for others’ humanity, including their faith, is a necessary precondition for open dialogue.

Respecting a person’s religious or spiritual identity at a minimum means acknowledging their identity. Susie returned to the idea of acknowledging faith as an important part of individual and communal identity multiple times during our interview, and she explained that it was an aspect of her pedagogy that she brought with her from previous experience in a variety of diverse communities in different parts of the world:

And if you’re going to engage a community and you say, “I’m only going to engage this poverty and not your faith,” especially communities that are marginalized, you will miss a very important component. I’ve seen activists do

that because they think, “We’re not dealing with religion.” But *you* may not be dealing with it, but the community is. And the community is, in some ways, drawing from it for strength. So you may not deal with it, but you’re not going to get the result that you’re wanting to . . . nor is it a practice of, in my humble opinion, humility, in coming to a community and honoring the way that it has used its strength to continue to survive and not be wiped off the earth.

Susie’s pedagogy of meeting students where they are, using contemplative practices in the classroom, and forming a “beloved community” of learners depends on her conviction that students and teachers must honestly and openly bring their whole selves to the learning experience. For Susie, religion is part of this process. “When we talk about religion and faith,” Susie shared, “I feel like it gives us a distinct opportunity to help students, and even ourselves, to grow in ways to have a deeper understanding of it and to be more humane to each other.” As a deep and integral part of many individuals’ and communities’ lives, religion for Susie is something that must be acknowledged as part of building a respectful and open learning community.

The emphasis on respecting student’s religious and spiritual identities is congruent with the results of the survey on what instructors see as most influential to how they teach their introductory WGS course. When asked how influential students’ religious or spiritual identities are to how they teach introductory WGS courses, twenty-two respondents (63%) answered extremely or very influential, twelve (34%) answered somewhat influential, and only one respondent said that they are not at all influential. As you can see in Figure 4 below, compared to how influential respondents saw current

events or their own religious or spiritual identity, many more participants saw their students' religious or spiritual identities as relevant for their pedagogy. Although these survey results do not reveal participants' specific pedagogical response to students' religious and spiritual identities, they do reveal that most survey participants see their students' religious and spiritual identities as relevant to their teaching. Furthermore, survey participants' emphasis on students' own identities as more influential than their own is congruent with a student-centered approach and responds respectfully to students' needs.

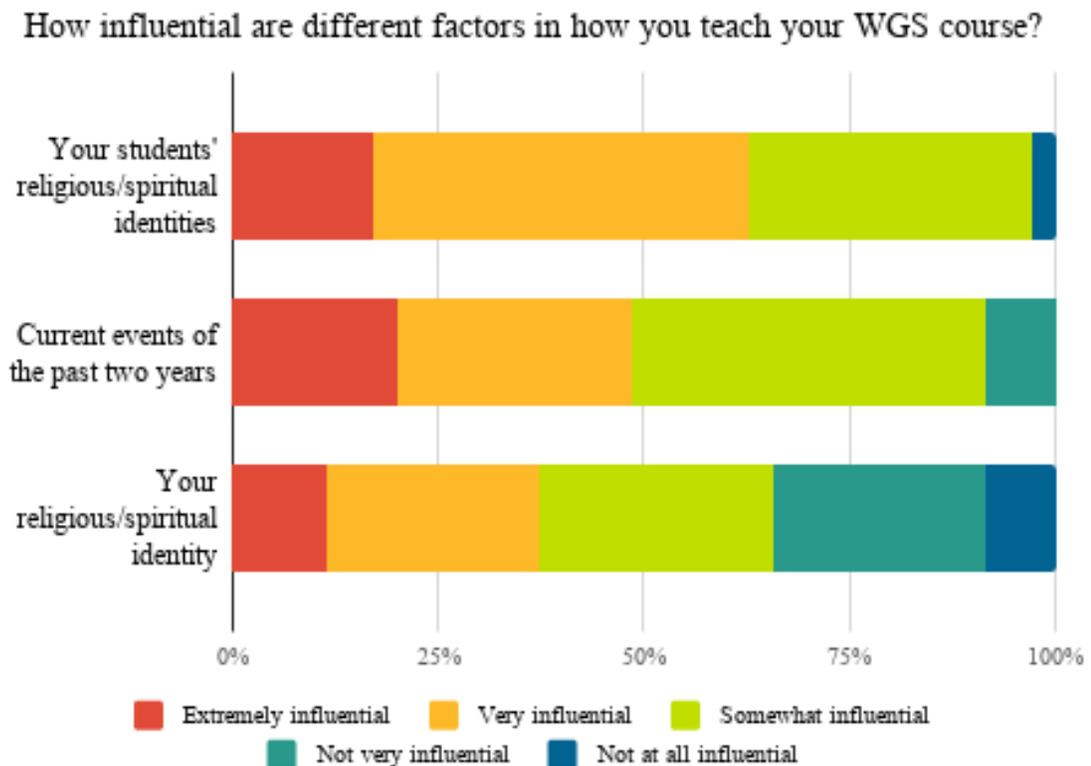


Fig. 4. Survey Responses about Influences on Pedagogy.

For several participants, another aspect of respecting students involved respecting students as knowledge-makers within the framework of feminist pedagogy. As Savannah expressed while referencing Paolo Freire, recognizing students as an active part of the learning community rather than as passive recipients of knowledge is a common aspect of liberatory pedagogies. For some participants, like Aisha, recognizing students as knowledge-makers comes out of a belief that education is a personal and a self-reflective process. Reflecting on her own scholarly development and research interest in religion, Aisha told me, “It just happened in a very organic, in a very personal-growth sort of way. My education and my personal growth have always been deeply intertwined, and it continues to play out that way in my pedagogy and through research.” For Aisha, knowledge-making is a deeply personal process for both instructor and students, and so students themselves are obviously a key part of the process.

Respecting students as knowledge-makers means epistemologically valuing lived experience in ways that may challenge traditional understandings of identity as fixed. Aisha emphasized that the knowledge-making process wasn’t about identity, saying, “I try to push them to think past identities,” Aisha told me, “I get them to think more about experiential knowledge, or aspect[s] of knowledge production—‘what does that mean?’” Aisha explained that she brought in her own life experience and encouraged students to be self-reflective not to highlight identity categories, but rather the experiential and embodied aspects of knowledge production. Aisha explained, “The reason I bring in my own personal experiences and personal stories is to get them to also then reflect on their personal experiences and personal stories and to think critically about not just their

identities but their actual lived experiences.” Aisha described “self-reflexivity” as a key theme of her courses. Allowing students to examine and reflect on their own religious and cultural backgrounds as well as their own embodied experience doesn’t have to reify categories of race, religion, or nationality; rather, Aisha’s example demonstrates the extent to which self-reflection on personal experience can challenge identity categories with the goal of engaging students in the experiential process of knowledge creation.

For some participants, listening to people tell their own stories was another way of respectfully democratizing who counts as knowledge-makers in the classroom. Susie shared this practice with me, explaining, “So in my classroom, I don’t just have students read ‘intellectual’ articles . . . because I think people speaking in their communities or from their own way is very scholarly, intellectual, and lived testimonies.” However, Susie recognized that it could be challenging for students to actually listen to the voices of marginalized people. “I think sometimes that it’s more comfortable to read about a group in a way that has been normalized in Eurocentric education than to hear it in their own voices,” Susie said, “And so I try to have communities speak about the ways oppression has taken place.” Alex echoed Susie’s words, sharing, “Giving [students] these articles *about* Muslim women written *by* Muslim women is really crucial, talking about how their voices are really important, because it gives them a sense to learn about somebody and read in someone’s own words, someone they probably haven’t ever encountered before or talked to anyone about before.” Maria similarly expressed her pedagogical practice of teaching students about others’ experience through a “sympathetic character” who could

speak about themselves. Maria explained her approach to teaching and religion and race intersectionally:

So if we're talking about gender in Islam, I will want to have a Black Muslim, and a North American Caucasian Muslim, and a Muslim from the Indian subcontinent speaking about issues that are important to them as a kickoff for class discussion. So I don't *say* it. I let somebody *else* say it and then I have the students talk about it. And I think students are very prone to empathize with people that they see in a video as opposed to a text. So I think I try to bring that stuff out organically by the setup in the class.

Although no participants specifically mentioned the practice of using guest speakers and panels to diversity perspectives, such practices could also contribute to the goal of integrating religiously pluralistic voices in WGS introductory courses as long as speakers are seen as representing their own views rather than speaking for their entire community. Alex, Susie, and Maria's choice of course content relates to their understanding of knowledge as constructed by marginalized communities rather than just by elites.

For many participants, respecting students as individuals and as experiential participants in the knowledge-making process isn't enough; effective pedagogy also depends on building communal respect, trust, and empathy in the classroom. Alex, for example, shared how she "had to learn the hard way" how important it was to center empathy in the classroom. Alex said, "I start all of my courses now with readings on empathy, and we talk about what safe space is, and trigger warnings are, in a way that makes them feel like they have some ownership of creating a safe space and that sort of

thing.’ For Alex, making students feel “ownership” of the respectful environment is key in avoiding negative classroom interactions. Alex connected her practice of teaching empathy to religion, adding, “I find that really crucial to them being respectful about religion as well. Because when I come from a place where I’m saying, ‘Everyone has to be empathetic of other people’s views and experiences even if it’s not your own,’ then they can think about Muslim women and be like, ‘Wow, that’s really different,’ instead of feeling threatened or whatever.’ In Alex’s experience, students’ willingness to listen and learn respectfully about people from a different religious background is connected to students’ overall acceptance of the classroom as an open and respectful environment. Alex shared with me her goal for her classroom: “This is the space where we need to grapple with this stuff, and we’re doing it respectfully and with empathy, but this is where we need to ask those questions and figure out what we’re doing. And I’m doing it with you.” For Alex, the ability to grapple with hard questions was dependent on establishing a respectful and empathetic learning community.

Although many participants shared the emphasis on creating an environment of trust in their classrooms, some participants connected these goals to their own specific experiences, identities, or embodiments. For example, in terms of establishing openness and respect in the classroom, Maria emphasized the value of having an “outsider perspective” as a Jew. “In a way it puts me out of the frame,” she explained, “like, Jews don’t ever try and convert people,” so in addition to her own personal scruples against proselytizing in the classroom, she felt that she had an additional level of distance from

her largely non-Jewish students. For Maria, this outsider perspective allowed her to create an open and respectful space for students without being perceived as threatening.

Some participants emphasized fairness to others as an aspect of respect in the classroom. May explained her desire “to be really, really fair, as fair as I possibly can be in my own work and also in my teaching. You know . . . to not assign to people beliefs that they don’t have or to treat them with disrespect or stigmatize them.” Several other participants echoed May’s emphasis on pushing back on students’ tendencies to paint groups of people with a broad brush. For May, this practice was not just about intellectual rigor, but also about respect. For May, this respect is not something that people we disagree with deserve because of their own qualities, but, rather, something we should extend to all because we also desire to be treated with respect. May described treating the views of Christian conservatives with respect and fairness, even when she strongly disagreed with those views. May said, “I try really, really hard to let students know, again, that we can treat people and their views with respect. And I think treating people’s views with respect means getting it right and not attributing to them views that are more of a reflection of our own identities.” Instead of casting other people as villains playing opposite ourselves as heroes, May seeks to instill fairness and respect for all in her students. Since May’s students may disagree with her and with each other, emphasizing fairness and respect also gives students the assurance that they will be treated with respect in her classroom.

Student-Centered Feminist Pedagogy: Open

Closely connected to respect in the classroom, many participants emphasized the need for openness. Participants shared that they wanted open dialogue about taboo topics, openness to growth, and openness to respectful disagreement. For example, Alex connected her desire to talk about religion in the classroom to her larger goal for the class of delving into “taboo subjects”: “Because I’m so interested in religion, I’m always interested in the taboo subjects. It’s one of the reasons why I love to teach Intro to Women and Gender Studies because we talk about a lot of stuff that people do not want to talk about.” Rose similarly expressed her commitment to talking about things that might offend students. In Rose’s words, “I think when I started teaching, I had a lot of concerns about who I was offending. I was being more careful than I should have been, whereas now, I really, really try to get students to say, like, being offended is okay, that’s an okay feeling. You should talk about that, think about why, but it’s not going to kill you. It’s not going to kill me.” For Alex, Rose, and other participants, open discussion in the classroom was more important than the social taboos and inhibitions that often keep people from discussing personal things like sex, religion, and politics.

Survey participants also shared the benefits of creating an open space for discussion in the classroom. One survey participant shared, “This year I haven’t had any problems, and in fact students have been very open and courageous about talking about religion and sexuality.” Another survey participant was similarly pleasantly surprised by the openness of their first online introductory course: “I was surprised at how willing the students were to share their deeper feelings about most things, some of them religion

(mostly around the topics of sex education, abortion, and anti-Semitism). So I am thinking a lot about what made students feel more okay with being vulnerable.” These pedagogical commitments to open and respectful dialogue were also echoed in syllabi statements about the kind of discussion to expect in the class. For example, after stating, “This is an inclusive and safe classroom” where respect is expected, one syllabus went on to state, “Certain things that we discuss in class may make you feel uncomfortable, because many of the topics are controversial. I expect and encourage you to disagree with some perspectives.” Another syllabus similarly expressed a commitment to creating a respectful learning community, and then added, “Throughout the course we will have frank and challenging conversations about social justice, and about personal and institutional responsibility.” For these instructors, respect in the classroom is not at odds with open dialogue. Instead, respectful and open dialogue is expected in the classroom around all topics, including religion.

Many participants expressed their pedagogical commitment to remaining open to students’ growth and change. Aisha most clearly explained her goal of establishing a learning community that was open to growth, saying, “I would like to always give the benefit of the doubt to my students that they are in the process of learning; nobody was born ‘woke.’ We all have work to do.” For Aisha, recognizing that “nobody was born ‘woke’” meant openness and patience toward students with different views. Susie similarly emphasized to her students, “We’re all developing our skills around diversity, because we’ve all been shaped and molded, if not directly, indirectly, into religion.” Later, Susie returned to the idea of skill development, explaining that she reminds her

students, “We are building our diversity skills and it’s like any other muscle, you got to just work it out. You keep on working out, it gets stronger and stronger.” Susie also emphasized that she tries to teach students that “we have the ability to change our mind” and that we have to be willing to “make mistakes” in the process of learning.

Openness in the classroom for several participants also involved openness to disagreement. Establishing this kind of open dialogue can be tricky, though, as one survey participant shared:

Talking about religion always makes me a little nervous in that regard because it is never my intention to offend, but rather encourage students to think critically. I also worry that my students that identify as religious have a harder time participating in larger group discussion and feel like their point of view and belief system is being attacked.

Allowing students to disagree and think critically without getting offended seemed like a tricky balance for several participants. May especially emphasized her guiding pedagogical goal of accepting disagreement. May shared, “And so for me, the most important thing about religion and race and teaching about religion and race is actually the most important thing about everything. These are difficult topics. In an ideal world, not in a bad world, but in an ideal world, we would disagree about these things.” For May, openness to disagreement was a key component of a good learning environment, not just about religion or race, but about any topic.

May envisioned an ideal learning community as one in which learners are open to disagreeing respectfully, and at least three other interview participants shared her vision.

May shared, “In an ideal world, people would be free and feel free to disagree and to dispute, and they wouldn’t feel like they’re going to be stigmatized for doing that. They wouldn’t feel as though they would be rejected as inappropriate social justice warriors or something.” Savannah, agreed, claiming that among feminists, “part of how the conversation moves forward is our disagreements.” For May, creating an ideal learning community where people can disagree involves “loosen[ing] [her] grip on a lot of things that [she] believe[s] are absolutely right or absolutely wrong,” and being “willing to say to students, ‘We’re going to disagree. So let’s see if we can disagree in a way that’s more productive, and maybe that will put us in a better place.’” Alex similarly described rejecting absolutes and accepting differences of opinions, saying to her students, “I’m not here to change your views or your opinions or whatever. I’m showing you the scope of the discussion. I’m showing you the history of the field, and I’m showing you how everything you thought was black and white is so *not* that at all.” Maria agreed, and also tied openness to disagreement with being open with students in general, claiming that “students are happier knowing what you think or knowing what you feel and also knowing that you don’t expect them to agree with you.” These participants envision productive disagreement as occurring in the context of respectful and open dialogue, and, crucially, they see disagreement as a necessary part of an open and respectful learning community.

Unfortunately, May acknowledged the difficulty of creating such an environment: “In an ideal world, we would feel free to disagree with each other and we would come to understand the reasons why people disagree about things, and to a great extent, that’s not

what I see. What I see in my classrooms is enormous amounts of agreement.” May criticized women’s and gender studies as promoting ideologically driven “right” answers rather than open dialogue and respectful disagreement. For May, openness to disagreement is a key component not only of respect, but also of the kind of intellectual rigor she desires for the field. May said, “I would actually like to see us asking difficult questions, disagreeing with each other, disputing the things that we’ve decided, and possibly coming to better understandings of what we’re studying rather than toeing a particular kind of social justice line, which by the way, . . . changes over time.” For May, respectful dialogue doesn’t necessitate agreement, but rather, it necessitates openness to disagreement.

In addition to disagreement, open and respectful dialogue necessitates listening. One syllabus explained the importance of listening to others’ experiences as an expectation for the class that was connected to building a learning community of respect and critical thinking:

Listen to what people say—If someone shares an experience or viewpoint, we can and will analyze it, think about its connection to broader social patterns, explore its ramifications, and link it to our course materials. We will not, however, openly disbelieve, discount, or discredit what others say about their own experiences. Sharing personal stories can be scary in a classroom full of strangers—so let’s give each other the benefit of the doubt and believe what people say about their own lives, even when subjecting our experiences to critical analysis.

As this syllabus statement points out, listening respectfully to others' experience is not in opposition to critical analysis, but rather, a necessary component of building a learning community where students feel empowered to engage in critical thinking. May expressed similar commitments to listening to students' religious perspectives and treating them fairly as a component of critical thinking.

Maria also especially emphasized listening as an aspect of her pedagogy that was related to her approach of organically integrating religion into her classes. She explained, "I don't necessarily shape the discourse on it. I want the students to speak about it themselves. I want them to speak to each other. I want them to kind of be present to it and interact with the material with as much of themselves as they can." Maria continued, "And in order to do that, I've got to set up an environment where they feel listened to by me not, but not just by me, but by each other. And so for me, that's the key." Maria saw the same open classroom environment as a necessity for discussing religion as well as other women's and gender studies topics: "So if you want to have a good conversation about race, about gender, about Islamophobia, about anti-Semitism, we have to start from the very beginning by creating a community of people who listen, engage, and respond. So that's my strategy, and it has to be organic." For Maria, an open and respectful learning community made up of members who "listen, engage, and respond" through dialogue is the key to successful engagement with religion and other difficult topics.

Although different participants described their pedagogy through different terms and examples, an emphasis on open and respectful dialogue in general, and specifically with respect to religion, was evident. At least fourteen out of thirty-eight syllabi included

specific statements about establishing a respectful and open learning community, several survey participants mentioned it, and all interview participants mentioned it. This case study revealed that instead of shaping the learning environment solely based on instructor preference or specialization, WGS practitioners who tried to engage religion chose to center students and their needs. Responding to students' needs means integrating content that matters in students' lives, even if it's not the instructor's specialty. Treating students with respect, acknowledging them as knowledge-creators, and creating an open, trusting environment for honest dialogue across differences were all features of the pedagogy espoused by my participants and demonstrated in the syllabi sample. Although these features of student-centered feminist pedagogy are certainly applicable to a variety of topics, my participants drew on them to describe their approach to teaching about religion. This finding should be encouraging for social-justice educators, because it suggests that instead of learning brand-new skills, improving teaching about religion is rooted in good teaching practices and basic aspects of feminist pedagogy.

Chapter 3 Conclusion

This study suggests that possible approaches to improving intersectional social-justice pedagogy about religion include willingly integrating religion even when it feels risky, encouraging students to critically and relationally analyze religion, and fostering open and respectful dialogue about religion through student-centered feminist pedagogy. These tactics may sound simple, but they are by no means easy. Engaging in respectful and open dialogue across significant differences, for example, can be challenging. May

poignantly expressed the difficulty of maintaining open dialogue with people we disagree with, especially now at a time of such heightened partisan division:

I've had people say to me, recently, you know, "It's not a good time, it's not the right time to be . . . creating gray areas." You know, "This is a make-or-break kind of moment in American history. You have to be on one side or the other." I completely reject that position. I could not reject that position more. I think that when people are polarized the way they are right now and looking at each other across the gulf and hitting each other and wanting each other to disappear from the face of the earth, I think that that's precisely the moment when you need to, to the extent possible, sort of soften our views and invite people to discuss middle grounds.

Although May acknowledged the difficulty of maintaining open and respectful dialogue across differences, she remained committed to her pedagogical goals of listening respectfully and being open to disagreement and changing one's mind. A survey participant expressed a similar commitment to making relationships across divisions, in and out of the classroom:

I've also only lived in Red States, so I have a relationship with a lot of people who are opposed to my view. These meaningful relationships help me know that we can still make connections even if we think very differently. I understand the experiences of a lot of the students, especially as they explore their own religious ideologies from outside their families for the first time.

For this survey respondent and several other participants, one of the most challenging aspects of creating open and respectful dialogues in the classroom is reaching across seemingly insurmountable polarized opinions about religion and other topics. However, the hope that “we can still make connections” across differences drives WGS practitioners to continue to integrate, analyze, and openly discuss religion in their classrooms.

Engaging in this kind of pedagogy is deeply personal work that requires respect not just from our students, but respect from us as instructors. Being open and respectful of the deeply held views of our students, which we personally might want to challenge, requires letting go of trying to change students and being willing to enter into dialogues characterized by willingness to disagree and willingness to even change our own deeply held opinions. Self-reflexivity, examining our own positions and opinions, and being open to our own views changing is challenging and difficult work. In Aisha’s words, it’s also risky. However, a willingness to engage with the risk, and organically explore religion in the classroom is an opportunity for our students to learn critical and relational thinking skills in an open and respectful learning community. Instead of avoiding topics that are not our personal specialties, the student-centered pedagogy of many feminist educators compels them to enact feminist pedagogy through open and respectful dialogue that allows students to engage and explore religion in the social world in our classrooms.

CHAPTER IV

PROPOSED PEDAGOGICAL MATERIALS

Literature and discussions of pedagogy often struggle to balance idealistic goals with practical advice. When I taught eighth-grade English in a public school, I was often frustrated by discussions that delivered only “pie-in-the-sky” teacher inspiration or, on the other hand, focused too narrowly on prescriptivist “how-to” approaches that disregarded differences in personality and pedagogical approaches. Now that I’m writing about pedagogy, I realize what a tricky balance this can be. In many ways, Chapter 3 delivers the broad strokes of an intersectional pedagogical approach to teaching intersectionally about religion and race in WGS. The themes from my case study reveal goals and general strategies that WGS faculty might find helpful. In an attempt to be more specific, this chapter will provide pedagogical materials designed in response to the themes discussed in Chapter 3. For each theme, I will present pedagogical materials for faculty self-reflection, in-class activities, and additional resources for teaching and learning. I will discuss these materials in the context of this study and pedagogical research, providing a rationale for their use. Although these pedagogical materials are intended for introductory WGS courses, they could also be adapted to other social-justice-focused courses.

The teaching materials in this chapter provide pedagogical suggestions based on the findings of this study, but I realize that each teacher is different, and that there is no pedagogical approach that works for everyone. I do not view these strategies as a silver bullet to fix all problems associated with teaching about religion and spirituality as they relate to race and other topics in WGS. Rather, this is my good-faith attempt to explore what it might look like to act on the themes revealed in this study. I present them as examples to deepen the conversation rather than as definitive answers. The pedagogical strategies and resources in this chapter are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive. Organically integrating religion into the WGS classroom, for example, could take many different forms, and these suggestions are by no means the only approach to doing so. Furthermore, since the themes themselves are interrelated, the divisions between them are somewhat arbitrary. Some strategies connect to more than one theme and could just as easily have fit in a different section of the chapter. Nevertheless, I hope that discussing the themes of this study in concrete pedagogical terms adds nuance, presents avenues for further study and exploration, and gives faculty members ideas that they could act on.

Theme 1: Proposed Pedagogical Materials

The first theme of this study revealed that faculty often share a sense that teaching about religion and its intersections with racial privilege and identity could be risky in the classroom and to themselves personally. Faculty members who choose to engage with religion in spite of the risks involved often do so by organically integrating discussions of religion into relevant topics in their introductory courses. Consistently integrating religion into a course has the potential to shape students' understanding of intersectional

analysis,⁷⁹ discussed in more detail in theme two. Many participants' comments related to the first theme emphasized willingness to engage with and integrate religion into their introduction to WGS courses in spite of discomfort, fear, and risk. In order to address the sense of risk shared by many participants, the self-reflection materials for this theme involve journaling about the fears, biases, and societal and institutional realities that make teaching about religion feel risky. The class activity for this theme presents a strategy for mitigating the risk involved in talking about religion in class by defusing potentially difficult comments from students. Finally, the resources for this theme focus on readings and other texts that faculty could assign in order to organically integrate religion into prominent topics in introductory WGS courses.

Theme 1: Self-Reflection

By self-reflecting on their own discomfort regarding religious, spirituality, and secularity, faculty members can provide a foundation from which they can invite students to do similar work. Khyati Y. Joshi argues that reflecting on discomfort is a key aspect of social-justice pedagogy: “As a social justice educator, I have made the decision to engage: to walk people through their discomfort, and to not take negative reactions personally because I understand them to be part of the learning process” (209). For Joshi, the willingness to engage with difficult feelings, both internally and in our students, is a necessary part of dismantling White Christian privilege. Table 4 below includes a self-reflection activity related to theme one.

⁷⁹ Scholars have also argued this point about integrating gender and sexuality into classes about religion. See, for example, Shkul, who argues that “focus[ing] only on religious identity would perpetuate limited understanding of humanness” (134).

Table 4

Theme 1 Self-Reflection Activity

Be Willing to Do the Work: Journaling Activity

Preparation

Gather journaling supplies and choose one of the following options.

Option 1: Intentionally put yourself in an uncomfortable situation related to your religious, secular, or spiritual identity. This could include observing or participating in a religious or spiritual activity, participating in an interfaith dialogue, or respectfully listening to someone you disagree about these topics.

Option 2: Recall any difficult moments that have occurred in your classes related to religion, secularity, or spirituality. Have students ever expressed views or beliefs that made you uncomfortable?

Journaling

1. Who was represented in the situation? Who was not represented? Whose experiences were centralized? Why?
 2. How did you act or react in the situation? What choices did you make?
 3. How did you feel during the situation? How did your emotions manifest themselves in your body during and after the situation? Who were your emotions directed towards?
 4. How do you think the other people involved felt? How did they demonstrate their feelings? If you were in their place, how would you have felt?
 5. If you felt any discomfort, what was the source of your discomfort? What beliefs, experiences, and biases influenced your feelings?
 6. What dynamics of power and privilege do you think were at play in the situation? To what extent were intersections with race, ethnicity, and nationality relevant in the situation?
 7. If you encountered the same kind of situation again, how would you want to respond? Which values, thoughts, and beliefs would you choose to guide your actions? Which feelings, beliefs, or biases would you choose not to act on?
-

Follow-Up

- What strategies could you use in future situations to manage your discomfort related to your religious, secular, and spiritual identity?
 - What could you research and learn about that might help you respond more confidently to similar situations in the future? If you choose to do further research, pay attention to your feelings and reactions as you learn new information about people whose religious, spiritual, and secular identities are different from your own.
 - How could you apply your learning from this activity in your classroom?
-

Although several interview participants discussed the importance of self-reflexivity, Susie Peace in particular expanded at length about the need to work through fears with internal, self-reflective work, and the journaling activity for theme one is primarily based on Susie's suggestions. As Susie explained, "If it is true that we teach about the things that we most need to learn, then I would say, if you're inviting students to do this work on how religion or race intersects and to look at these issues from different frameworks and perspectives and worldviews, that you must first invite yourself to do that." When I asked Susie what suggestions she might give to someone else wanting to improve how they taught about religion, Susie suggested that faculty should "put themselves in uncomfortable situations around these issues. . . It's like anything in life because our own values shape our classroom, and we've got to do the work." For Susie, this meant seeking out sources of new information and being willing to learn from uncomfortable situations such as "workshops" and "interfaith" work.

Susie suggested that faculty should reflect on representation in their teaching and personal experience, asking questions like, "Who is not here, and why?" and "What people are you centralizing?" Savannah Woolf similarly claimed that intersectionality reminded her to practice self-reflection about who was being centralized in her classroom lectures and dialogues: "Okay, when I'm talking about this theological notion, whose perspectives are informing the way I talk about it, and how am I making sure that these other perspectives are visible in the way that we do that?" Although Savannah did not mention specific methods of self-reflection, for Susie, being "in a constant state of

reflection” meant using tools like journaling and the support from other teachers committed to social justice.

In discussing the importance of self-reflection, Susie emphasized being willing to confront fears and implicit biases. Susie described the internal monologue that might happen when a faculty member was doing self-reflective work and identifying biases:

Okay. This is an implicit bias I had. I’m afraid to be in the room alone with people who look like this, or who practice this type of religion, okay. I feel it. I feel strange, but I know that this is one of my implicit biases. Why do I have this implicit bias? Okay. Now what can I do about it? I can step past those fears and feelings. I acknowledge them, and I acknowledge that I am moving from that and from that space, day by day and second by second, so that I may be open to all people in the world.

Susie’s example of working through feelings and biases demonstrates what critical self-reflection might look like for a faculty member.

Susie’s emphasis on nonjudgmental, compassionate self-reflection provides an excellent model for faculty members looking to improve their teaching about religion or any other difficult topic, and Susie’s insights were echoed by several other interview participants. Susie’s emphasis on uncovering biases mirrors Maria Wilson’s description of encouraging students to work through biases. “What I try to do is to craft questions about the materials that allow people to face some of their own biases,” Maria shared. Journaling provides a method by which faculty members can face their own biases against certain forms of religious, spiritual, or secular expression and work through them

productively. Susie's emphasis on compassionately acknowledging difficult emotions also relates to some of Rose Thomas's insight. As Rose pointed out during her interview, recognizing that "being offended is okay" is often a necessary precursor to further productive dialogue. By asking participants in the journaling activity to choose how they would like to respond in the future, I tried to channel Susie and Rose's acceptance of difficult emotions. Rather than pretending that we do not have difficult feelings and biases, we can acknowledge what we think and feel nonjudgmentally and choose how to respond.

Given the interconnected nature of White privilege with Christian hegemony and Christian-secularism, self-reflexivity about religion seems particularly important for White WGS faculty members, but reflecting on the fears and risks involved in teaching about religion may also be important for marginalized faculty members. Risk is inherent in WGS teaching, regardless of whether or not instructors integrate religion. As Rebecca Alpert reflects, "Convictions come with risks. And if you live long enough, sometimes, at least, it does get better. So, I would argue, pick your battles carefully, but make sure you pick your battles" (Alpert and White 70). Self-reflection is therefore a tool to help WGS instructors navigate the inevitable risks of teaching about and working for social justice.

Theme 1: Class Activity

The class activity in Table 5 below gives an example of how to navigate risky and difficult conversations in which students appeal to religious concepts in support of their views.

Table 5

Theme 1 Class Activity

Navigating Risk in Religiously Charged Classroom Discussions

Situation

A common pedagogical challenge related to religion occurs when students assert their religious, secular, or spiritual identities in class discussions or assignments in support of views that are in conflict with course materials. Sometimes students express controversial or even bigoted views in this manner. Because students appeal to their own deeply held beliefs and identity, it can be challenging for faculty members to respond appropriately to the content of students' remarks.

Response

1. After the student raises a potentially controversial opinion related to their religious, secular, or spiritual identity, first clarify the student's meaning by rephrasing or restating their comment before responding.
 2. Once you have listened carefully to what the student has expressed, thank the student for bringing another perspective to the discussion and reframe the student's opinion as a view that many people hold on that topic. (If the student's comment is not relevant or if it occurs in an assignment or online, steps 2–5 could be brief and instructor-led rather than discussion-based.)
 3. If the topic is relevant to the course, discuss the content of the student's comments in the larger context of what influences that view, including religious belief and practice, and how the view influences society.
 4. Include other examples of different views on the same topic in order to compare and contrast. Make sure that students don't essentialize the views and practices of entire groups by providing counter-examples as necessary.
 5. Tie the discussion to the learning goals of the course.
-

Examples

1. A student, says, "The Bible teaches that abortion is murder, so I think it's wrong and should be illegal." The instructor clarifies, "You're saying that your religious views influence your understanding of the morality of abortion, and that plays a role in your view of the law and social policies. Is that right?" The student confirms.
 2. The instructor continues, "Thanks for bringing that up. Religious opposition to abortion on moral grounds is common in the US and globally, and it's important that we talk about it."
 3. The instructor asks the class, "In your understanding, what specific religious beliefs and practices influence opposition to abortion? Also, what historical and sociological factors influence religious opposition to abortion?" During the discussion, the instructor encourages fairness, accuracy, and specificity,
-

taking care not to essentialize all religious people or all evangelical Christians or to target any member of the class. The instructor encourages students to recognize and name Christianity as the dominant religious force in the US rather than generalizing about all forms of religion. As necessary, the instructor reminds students of the expectations for respectful dialogue and clarifies and rephrases additional deeply held views expressed by other students. Later, the instructor adds, “What examples have you seen of the political influence of these views domestically and internationally?”

4. The instructor solicits other views, possible even writing them down on the board. The instructor asks, “What other views do people have about abortion? What influences those views?” The instructor makes sure that the discussion includes diverse non-Christian religious views, non-religious opposition to abortion, and religious support for abortion, including among Christians.
 5. The instructor connects the discussion to the learning goals of the class to make it clear that the goal of the discussion is to understand and consider social attitudes, practices, and policies and their effects rather than to stigmatize or attack specific views or groups of people. The instructor includes empathy, noting, “These discussions are hard, and I’m grateful that you’re all willing to share openly and discuss such a difficult topic.”
-

When students invoke their religious, secular, or spiritual identities in support of their views, instructors can mitigate the risk of conflict by listening carefully and moderating a fair and open discussion. By depersonalizing the opinions of students and discussing the influence of widely held views, the instructor minimizes the risk that students will attack each other. By adding context and encouraging nuance in the discussion, the instructor can turn a potentially rancorous discussion into a productive learning activity that furthers the goals of the class.

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, the themes are interrelated, so this activity has resonances with other themes. Although openness to disagreement in the classroom and an emphasis on listening were present in interviews, syllabi, and survey responses, as discussed in theme three of Chapter 3, interview participant May Cale talked the most about disagreement, and her suggestions inspired the previous class

activity. Although in Chapter 3 I discussed openness to disagreement as a component of student-centered feminist pedagogy in theme three, I have chosen to include this activity in theme one because of its emphasis on defusing potentially difficult or risky classroom situations. As I discussed in Chapter 3, some survey and interview participants who expressed a sense of risk in teaching about religion mentioned the possibility of rancorous or “hostile” class discussions. One survey participant mentioned that they did not want to hear student quote passages of scripture that they would not be able to counter. May’s suggestions for calmly reacting to religiously motivated statements thus appeared to be a helpful strategy for preparing faculty members for discussions that might feel risky.

During our interview, May described her method of responding to statements of faith in class and explained how she explicitly taught the strategy to graduate students who were new instructors. May characterized the typical attitude of new graduate student assistants or teachers toward undergraduates as, “We’re going to tell the students the way that they should think about this.” In May’s view, “You’re not going to change anybody’s mind by shutting them down. So let’s not shut them down. Let’s just say, ‘Thank you for sharing your point of view.’” May described how she taught graduate students to respond to difficult religiously motivated comments in the classroom, such as, “Abortion is murder.” Instead of discounting the reasons students may hold that position or responding aggressively, May taught her graduate students to thank the student for bringing up a widely held view that can now be examined as part of the class discussion.

May described this careful listening process as a way of subjecting views to critical analysis without shutting down students who might hold those views. “What I do immediately is I take that belief that they’ve articulated and I . . . move it away from them,” May explained. Instead of attacking the student, May used the opportunity to discuss the viewpoint itself. May said she taught graduate students to say, “Thank you for bringing that up. A lot of people in the United States share that belief. . . Let’s talk about that.” For May, it was also important to not use the discussion as a way to try to change students’ minds. Rather, what May considered a “pedagogical win” was getting students to “consider that that’s not the only way that people of reason and well-wishes will think about this issue.” Moving students away from personal attacks and toward critical thinking helps manage the risks involved in debates about religion, and it is also a more productive use of class time in terms of the learning goals of the course. Similarly, Richard W. McCarty recommends taking a “descriptive” approach to difficult discussions of religion and sexuality in order to build critical thinking and understanding: “When students are afforded the opportunity to explore another point of view, they can see why others would hold the positions they do, and they can more charitable talk about the premises of certain arguments and how they hold together” (45). Focusing on understanding and dialogue rather than proving students wrong appears to be a more productive pedagogical approach.

Although May’s example related to intersections of religion with gender and sexuality, the same principles could be applied to difficult conversations at the intersection of religion and race, ethnicity, and nationality. In such cases, step three of the

response, analyzing the larger context that influences the belief in question, is particularly important. In my experience, students espousing beliefs linked to White Christian supremacy in class will rarely identify the racial, ethnic, and transnational implications of their commitments to Christian hegemony. Students' comments on the surface level will instead usually deal with Christian normativity or possibly Christian nationalism. After clarifying the student's remarks and distancing them from the individual student, the instructor may need to nonjudgmentally acknowledge White Christianity as the dominant force in the US in order for students to analyze the belief or practice in a larger context. It may also be helpful in such instances to encourage students to analyze Christian identity and experience transnationally, acknowledging the places in the world where Christians do not experience the same hegemonic dominance as in the US.

Theme 1: Suggested Resources

The readings below in Table 6 represent an example of how to begin to integrate religion intersectionally into a WGS course. In keeping with the findings of Chapter 3, these sources are not intended to be used as a "unit" on religion; rather, they are designed to introduce religion as a category of analysis throughout the course. Sri Craven argues that organizing WGS courses by discrete units predisposes students away from intersectional analysis: "Such an organizing motif sets up students for additive analysis by situating key identities in turn, so that the categories are lined up in progression rather than as complicated imbrications" (216–17). Instead of adding in a unit on religion, these resources provide a starting place for integrating religion throughout the introductory WGS course.

Table 6

Theme 1 Suggested Resources

Suggested Resources for Organically Integrating Religion in WGS

Religion and histories of women's activism

- Du Mez, Kristin Kobes. "The Complex Role of Faith in the Women's Suffrage Movement." *Religion News Service*, 5 Aug. 2020, religionnews.com/2019/06/04/the-complex-role-of-faith-in-the-womens-suffrage-movement/.
- Ocampos, Tania Ildefonso. "Secular Feminism Is Silencing Islamic Feminism." *Middle East Eye*, 4 July 2016, www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/secular-feminism-silencing-islamic-feminism.
- Shields, Chelsea. "How I'm Working for Change inside My Church." *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading*, Aug. 2015, https://www.ted.com/talks/chelsea_shields_how_i_m_working_for_change_inside_my_church.

Religion and abortion

- Braithwaite, Patia. "Yes, You Can Be Both Religious and Pro-Choice." *SELF*, Condé Nast, 16 July 2019, www.self.com/story/we-talked-to-people-of-faith-about-being-both-religious-and-pro-choice?fbclid=IwAR0xDykT7j2jIA1cQH9iW2nZ2QKMpkGN6KmSJRfMHVtGnInWm98xvdQdUVk.

Religion and LGBTQ+ identity

- Beresford, Meka. "A 'B'nei Mitzvah' Was Held for This Non-Binary Teenager." *PinkNews*, 2 Mar. 2020, www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/03/02/a-bnei-mitzvah-was-held-for-this-non-binary-teenager/?fbclid=IwAR2gDqGAIaAaGugQsA8GFGpwdCCowZTXNIC2expLnmxU6BL698wK-e4jyhrG.
- Weber, Nadia Bolz. "The Denver Statement." *Sarcastic Lutheran: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner and Saint*, Patheos, 30 Aug. 2017, www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2017/08/the-denver-statement/?fbclid=IwAR35swOLOizzZUhnH_mAY1y5oNdZAFQG2EzW49Q_rbdE4Yi-Fxta3s-HpM.

Religion and sexual violence

- Downen, Robert, Lise Olsen, and John Tedesco. "Abuse of Faith: Investigation reveals 700 victims of Southern Baptist sexual abuse over 20 years" *Houston Chronicle*, Hearst Communications, 10 Feb. 2019, www.chron.com/news/investigations/article/Investigation-reveals-700-victims-of-Southern-13591612.php.
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- Pimenta, Marcio. “Photos: Yazidi Women Undergo a Rebirth Ceremony after ISIS Enslavement.” *The World*, PRX, 12 Sept. 2017, www.pri.org/stories/2017-09-12/photos-yazidi-women-undergo-rebirth-ceremony-after-isis-enslavement.
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Religion and the social construction of the body

- Ahmed, Beenish. “Bloody Hell: Does Religion Punish Women for Menstruating?” *VICE*, 19 June 2015, www.vice.com/en/article/7bdbw9/bloody-hell-menstruating-while-religious-235.
 - Demilio, Isabella, and Hafsa Quershi. “Because I Wear Hijab People Don't Expect Me to Be Queer.” *Grazia*, Bauer Media Group, 17 July 2019, graziadaily.co.uk/life/real-life/because-i-wear-hijab-people-don-t-expect-me-to-be-queer/?fbclid=IwAR1ipNTYoZPejDvgH9-RA5OOEunvaazn3PEMbrYsESPk1sfZHe2WgrgF4Ms.
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Religion and transnational feminism

- Deo, Nandina. “Introduction.” *Postsecular Feminisms: Religion and Gender in Transnational Context*, edited by Nandina Deo, Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, pp. 1–14.
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Religion and intersectional oppression

- Forward Staff. “‘I Have Stopped Wearing My Magen David’: 27 Jews On What It Feels Like To Be Afraid For Their Lives.” *The Forward*, 6 Nov. 2019, forward.com/news/434318/we-asked-jews-to-share-what-its-like-to-be-afraid-for-their-safety-here/?fbclid=IwAR3Gel8ltJLk3aVUoQkUHvSY_ey3Bs7bfHWz_JJM1588j5HbYgtT3MzZhq8.
 - Francisco, Rudy, Natasha Hooper, and Amen Ra. “Islamophobia.” “Islamophobia - Rudy Francisco, Natasha Hooper, and Amen Ra,” *YouTube*, 3 Dec. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mQpMOScJPY.
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Religion and imperialism

- Aizenman, Nurith, and Malaka Gharib. “American With No Medical Training Ran Center for Malnourished Ugandan Kids. 105 Died.” *Goats and Soda*, National Public Radio, 9 Aug. 2019, www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2019/08/09/749005287/american-with-no-medical-training-ran-center-for-malnourished-ugandan-kids-105-d?fbclid=IwAR25KSuK9nMNWsvHMi-WpjCHvtu3XPyI9Tc_O1X81VHyqTlo6SfqCJH98qA.
 - Bearak, Max. “Kenya’s Pokomo People Ask the British to Return What Was Stolen: Their Source of Power.” *The Washington Post*, 9 Aug. 2019, www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/08/09/kenyas-pokomo-people-ask-british-return-what-was-stolen-their-source-power/?arc404=true.
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Although some introductory WGS textbooks include coverage of religion, the results from my survey indicate that many WGS instructors may need additional resources for addressing religion in WGS introductory courses. Of the thirty-four survey participants who answered the survey question about textbooks in introductory courses, eight (23.5%) do not use a textbook, eight use a textbook that does not have a specific chapter on religion and spirituality (23.5%), and five (14.7%) use a textbook that has a dedicated chapter on religion and spirituality, but that chapter is never or rarely assigned to students. Overall, about 62% of instructors who responded to my survey indicated that they do not usually assign a chapter on religion from their WGS introductory textbook. Five (14.7%) answered that they use a textbook that has a chapter on religion and spirituality that they usually assign to students, and eight (23.5%) answered that they always assign their students to read their textbook's chapter on religion and spirituality. These findings suggest that—for whatever reason—many instructors of WGS introductory courses do not cover religion using their assigned textbook. These instructors may welcome additional resources such as those provided above. In the following pages, I will provide a rationale for my choice of these texts and topics. I will discuss each section of texts in the order they are presented above.

One way to integrate discussions of religion as a sociological category is to take note of where it is already present in course texts. For example, most introductory WGS classes that include discussions of the history and diversity of feminisms and womanisms include 19th- and early 20th-century American texts in which connections to Christianity are explicit. It could be productive to draw students' attention to the way dominant

religions sociologically influence oppressive attitudes and policies as well as the progressive activism that arises to challenge those attitudes and policies. Including Du Mez's short article about religious influences in the suffrage movement, listed above in the list of resources, might be an easy way of drawing out a theme that very well might be present in the existing assigned texts. The American women's suffrage movement is discussed in all of the introductory textbooks in the sample for this study, and it appears to be commonly taught in introductory courses. Discussing different strands of feminisms, such as liberal and socialist feminisms, also appears to be common in introductory curricula, so including a discussion of religious and secular feminisms, such as Ocampos's article, may be another easy way to integrate a discussion of religion.

The last suggested resource in this section discusses contemporary feminist activism in a religious context. Shields's short and accessible TED Talk provides a rationale for why feminist activism is important within religious institutions, and Shields's inclusion of her own personal story as a Mormon feminist makes the talk engaging. Shields argues compellingly that secular feminists should not dismiss or degrade the feminist activists who work within religious institutions, but should instead work respectfully to hold religious groups accountable:

[R]eligion doesn't just create the roots of morality, it creates the seeds of normality. Religions can liberate or subjugate, they can empower or exploit, they can comfort or destroy, and the people that tip the scales over to the ethical and the moral are often not those in charge. Religions can't be dismissed or ignored. We need to take them seriously.

Shields's engaging TED Talk would be an easy addition to any WGS introductory course as it deals with basic concepts of feminist activism.

Integrating discussions of religion in discussing the history and diversity of feminism was specifically suggested by Rose Thomas during our interview. Rose felt that in WGS, "sometimes there's this really heavy emphasis on the social-cultural construction of sexism, but not the social-cultural roots of feminism." In Rose's view, the socio-cultural roots of North American patriarchy and North American feminism are both "inextricable from Protestant Christianity." For Rose, not discussing religion "when talking about 'first-wave'" feminism was "something [she] would really like to see changed in textbooks." Rose indicated that it seemed like a missed opportunity not to highlight the "real shift between 'first-wave' religious motivation and 'second-wave rejection' of religion, especially by White, Jewish, and Christian women."⁸⁰ By adding context about "Quaker" beliefs, the "religious background" of Sojourner Truth, and the influence of "Hinduism and Sikhism and Islam" on "feminism in India," for example, Rose felt that students could come to appreciate the complex role that religious has played sociologically in activist movements for equality in the US and in other countries.

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the next two topics included in the list of suggested resources for organically integrating religion in WGS introductory courses were both mentioned across sources of data: abortion and LGBTQ+ identity. Since conservative political opposition to abortion rights and LGBTQ+ rights in the US is often rhetorically

⁸⁰ Even for WGS practitioners who critique the "waves" model as overly simplistic, it's helpful to draw students' attention to the way that Christian hegemony has shaped both religious feminists and feminist who have eschewed Christianity. For a critique of the "wave" model, see Laughlin et al.

linked to Evangelical Christian beliefs, discussing religion in connection with these topics feels natural. However, there is a danger of caricaturing all religious traditions as anti-abortion and anti-gay without understanding the complexity and nuance of religious beliefs and practices. For example, Saraswati, Shaw, and Rellihan claim in their discussion of abortion and birth control, “Conservative religious institutions (as Rebecca Barrett-Fox illustrates in “Constraints and Freedom in Conservative Christian Women’s Lives”) teach that sex is between a husband and wife, and while it can and should be pleasurable, birth control is unnecessary” (216). Although this claim is true of certain specific conservative religious institutions, it is by no means true of all “conservative religious institutions” across all world religions. By highlighting diverse religious arguments for abortion rights, Patia Braithwaite’s article might be a helpful addition to discussions of abortion in a WGS introductory course.

Similarly, feminists sometimes essentialize “religion” as inherently anti-LGBTQ+, erasing progressive strands of many different world religions. Rose mentioned in her interview how she emphasizes to her students that “gay people don’t just leave religion, and that many gay and trans people are very pious and very committed to their religious traditions, and to changing them or to inventing new ones.” Assigning a reading like Meka Beresford’s profile of a Jewish synagogue’s creating an appropriate coming-of-age ceremony for a non-binary teenager can provide helpful counterexamples to the reductive narrative that religious communities always reject LGBTQ+ members. Rather than essentializing all religions as homophobic, it may be helpful for student to see how members of the same tradition emphasize different aspects of their theology or practice in

order to affirm or condemn LGBTQ+ identity. Nadia Bolz Weber's progressive and affirming "Denver Statement" directly responds to the "Nashville Statement," which outlines Evangelical Christian theological reasons for rejecting LGBTQ+ identity. Exploring the differences between various Christian groups' responses to unconventional sexuality and non-conforming gender identities could provide students with opportunities for critical thinking connected to the learning goals of the course.

Since many WGS introductory courses include sexual violence as a topic, incorporating texts that demonstrate the oppressive and empowering potential of religions with respect to sexual violence might be appropriate in some courses. The investigative reporting from the *Houston Chronicle* profiles sexual abuse in decentralized Southern Baptist churches (Downen et al.). In my own teaching, I have found it helpful to push students to identify structural aspects of organizations that contribute to cultures of abuse. Sometimes, students are familiar with sexual abuse by Catholic priests, and they may react by demonizing all Catholic clergy as sexual predators. I find it more helpful to encourage students to reflect on how organizational power determines and predicts how an institution may respond when sexual abuse occurs. The decentralized Southern Baptist Convention provides an interesting contrast with the highly centralized Roman Catholic Church, and the investigative reporting by Robert Downen, Lise Olsen, and John Tedesco explores the structures and policies that sexual predators have taken advantage of in Southern Baptist Churches. However, emphasizing only the potentially oppressive aspects of religious groups may lead to reductive thinking. Sometimes, religious groups provide protection and healing from sexual abuse afflicted from within or outside the

religious community. The photo essay of Yazidi women's reentry ceremony after escaping sexual slavery with ISIS powerfully demonstrates the potential of religious, spiritual, and cultural rituals to heal and empower people (Pimenta). Incorporating texts like these that show religion as a complex, intersectional force relates to theme one and theme two of this study.

WGS introductory courses also frequently discuss the social construction of the body. Gloria Steinem's "If Men Could Menstruate" is a widely anthologized text often used in introductory courses because it humorously captures the way societies create meaning from bodily experiences based on social power. Beenish Ahmed's article about religious traditions related to menstruation might be a good text to pair with Steinem's to further explore this point. In the same way, Isabella Demilio's profile of Hafsa Quershi, a queer hijabi, might be a helpful way to explore how clothing creates expectations and stereotypes of people's identity. Since these texts closely relate to topics and ideas that may already be in the textbook or syllabus for an introductory course, they represent an easy way to organically integrate an intersectional analysis of religion throughout the course.

Intersectionality, transnational analysis, and imperialism are key themes in many introductory courses, and so I have also included texts related to religion that may help illustrate those theoretical concepts. Like intersectionality, transnationality can be a transformative pedagogical approach when integrated thoroughly into the introductory WGS course. As Dawn Rae Davis notes about intersectional and transnational methods in WGS courses, "As these two methods alter the field's primary objects of study and

reshape knowledge formation, they displace white, middle-class, and First World–centered subjectivities within the epistemological desires of the classroom, as well as more broadly across feminist-knowledge productions” (137). Often when cultures and nations interact, religious and ethnic identity also play a role, so using complex examples can help students practice intersectional and transnational analysis.

Since I was particularly interested in intersections of religion with race, ethnicity, and nationality, I wanted to make sure to include suggested resources that did not only center gender and sexuality. Nandina Deo’s introduction to *Postsecular Feminisms: Religion and Gender in Transnational Context* helpfully explains some of these interactions theoretically, and examples of intersectional forms of oppression like Islamophobia, discussed in Rudy Francisco, Natasha Hooper, and Amen Ra’s spoken word poem, or anti-Semitism, discussed by *The Forward*, could help teachers integrate religion into these topics. Similarly, Nurith Aizenman and Malaka Gharib’s description of a White Christian American woman’s misguided attempts to “help” malnourished Ugandan children might be a helpful addition to discussions of the need for transnational feminist solidarity instead of misguided attempts at development that instead perpetuate imperialism and colonialism. Max Bearak’s article and video about a sacred artifact stolen from the Pokomo people might be another helpful addition to a unit on imperialism and colonialism.

Although these suggested readings are not comprehensive, they should give WGS instructors some ideas of possible ways to organically integrate religion into existing units in a WGS course. Since many WGS courses fulfill core curriculum requirements

and struggle to cover all possible topics in detail, integrating religion as an aspect of intersectionality throughout the course is often a good approach, as discussed in Chapter 3. Integrating readings on relevant topics such as the ones above could be a straightforward way to begin to integrate religion as a category of analysis in an introductory WGS course.

Theme 1: Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the suggested pedagogical materials for theme one respond not only to the sense of risk expressed by participants in this study but also to the strategy espoused by many of them of organically integrating religion into course materials as an expression of their commitment to teaching about religion and race within the field of WGS. Critically reflecting on the difficult emotions that may be present while teaching about religion could empower faculty members to work through feelings and biases that may prevent them from addressing religion in the classroom. Strategies for defusing difficult student statements also might give faculty additional comfort because they might feel more prepared to deal with risky situations in the classrooms. Finally, organically integrating religion as a social category of analysis in the introductory WGS classroom might be accomplished by adding texts to existing units and themes.

Theme 2: Proposed Pedagogical Materials

In the data for this case study, participants' comments around theme two often involve resisting the temptation to think about religion in reductive or simplistic ways. Instead, participants encourage relational thinking about religion, emphasizing complexity, nuance, and intersectionality. A key component of relational thinking about

religion seems to be an acknowledgement of its influence sociologically toward both empowering and oppressive purposes. The pedagogical materials for this section include self-reflective relational mapping of religious, secular, and spiritual influences, a class activity focusing on relational thinking about religious oppression, and suggested resources that include a unit on religion and race.

Theme 2: Self-Reflection

Reflecting on one's own religious, spiritual, and secular influences may seem like a strange place to start in terms of discussing religion relationally as a complex factor of society, but acknowledging the complexity of influences in one's own life can be an important step in understanding the societal influence of religion. The participants in this study consistently referred to their own religious, spiritual, and secular identities as factors that influenced their teaching, and they often demonstrated a self-reflexive stance towards their own experiences. All interview participants and twenty-four out of thirty-two survey participants specifically discussed their own religious or non-religious backgrounds as a factor that influenced how they teach about religion. Participants came from a variety of different religious and non-religious backgrounds, and many that were raised in religious traditions no longer identified with them. Although participants' religious backgrounds and identities varied, many participants shared a sense that their own lived experience with religion had influenced their views about how religion and its intersections with race should be addressed in their classrooms. Table 7 below give faculty members an opportunity to similarly reflect on their own religious influences.

Table 7

Theme 2 Self-Reflection Activity

Relationally Mapping Your Journey

Preparation

- Think about how you define your current religious, secular, or spiritual identity and what effect this identity has on your life.
 - Spend time remembering the moments that most deeply shaped your own religious, secular, or spiritual identity both positively and negatively. Try to identify any turning points or influential events in your path to your current identity.
 - Gather a piece of blank paper, paper to journal on, and three different colors of pen or pencil.
-

Mapping

1. Using a colored pen or pencil, draw your journey to your current religious, spiritual, or secular identity. As much as possible, use visual representations of the key influences and events rather than textual labels.
 2. Using another color, add to your picture some visual representations or labels that represent your emotions at key parts of your journey, including the current moment you are in.
 3. Using a third color, add visual representations or labels of other social categories that have influenced your journey intersectionally.
 4. Quietly reflect on your map for a few minutes, noticing your emotional responses as you consider different parts of your journey.
 5. While looking at your map, briefly journal your answer to the following question: “How have religious, secular, and spiritual influences impacted my life, especially in relation to other aspects of my social location, like gender, sexuality, race, and class?” Pay attention to both empowering and oppressive influences and the various sources of these influences.
-

Follow-Up

- Reflect on which aspects of your own journey you are comfortable with sharing, and practice trying to capture the key parts of your background in a succinct way.
 - As you reflect on your map and your journaling, notice which groups of people you are connected to in some way and how your past or current interactions with them affect your knowledge and feelings about them.
 - Notice which groups of people are absent from your map and how your lack of interactions with them affects your knowledge and feelings about them.
 - How could you apply your learning from this activity in your classroom?
-

As discussed in Chapter 3, participants explained both their willingness and hesitancy to engage with religion in the classroom by referring to their own experiences. Although many participants who identified as atheists or agnostics were committed to exploring religion sociologically in the classroom, some cited their negative interactions with organized religion as a source of discomfort that inhibited their teaching. For example, one survey participant shared, “I used to be passionately religious. I entertained ideas of being a priest. Now I am entirely atheist. I see religion as one of the most damaging institutions in existence. I know this is a highly unpopular opinion, so I have to be careful in how I approach things.” Recognizing that connections can be emotionally charged, this self-reflection activity asks faculty to notice their own emotional reactions related to the religious, spiritual, and secular influences in their own lives. Rather than ignoring the unpleasant emotions that many people have related to various religious influences in their lives, noticing these emotions can prepare instructors to consciously respond to their emotions in the way that they choose.

Understanding the complex influences that shape a faculty member’s own religious, spiritual, or secular identity can prepare them to guide students in thoughtful discussions that acknowledge the complexity of these influences sociologically. Maurianne Adams and Khyati Y. Joshi explain the importance of this kind of self-reflection:

Because religious identity is hardly ever thought of *as a social identity* or as a source of social advantage or disadvantage, it is important for instructors and facilitators to reflect upon their own religious upbringing, experiences, beliefs,

assumptions, and values as they prepare for the course or workshop. If they are non-believers, this too is an important subject for self-reflection concerning the steps that have led to that identity and commitment. For facilitators to be effective in helping participants manage these conversations, they need to have thought in advance about their own religious position vis-à-vis specific religions as well as religion more generally, and to understand issues that might trigger them in such discussions. (287)

Crucially, the follow-up to this self-reflection activity draws instructors' attention not just to the influences they have directly experienced but also to the communities and groups of people that they are not connected to. Sometimes people translate negative interactions with one group into assumptions and prejudices towards other groups, or they assume that a depth of knowledge and experience with one religious group means that they understand all religious groups without appreciating the diversity among and between religious groups. Paying attention not just to what we know but also to what we don't know can help us be thoughtful and precise in our assertions about others.

Theme 2: Class Activity

The "Examining Religious Oppression Relationally Class Activity" in Table 8 is a lesson plan that attempts to teach an aspect of theme two of this study as a learning goal. Although the activity is based on the understanding of religion as a complex, intersectional sociological influence that was found across sources of data as reported in Chapter 3, it most closely draws on the reflections that May shared in her interview with me. I will further discuss May's comments below.

Table 8

Theme 2 Class Activity

Examining Religious Oppression Relationally Class Activity

Learning Outcomes

- Students will understand that intersecting societal conditions produce vulnerability rather than identities themselves
 - Students will understand religion as a complex feature of the social world that intersects with other aspects of identity in ways that may privilege some groups and oppress other groups
-

Foundational Learning

Make sure the class understands the following concepts before using this activity:

- social construction of attitudes and stereotypes
 - the existence of social categories like gender, sexuality, class, caste, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, dis/ability
 - intersectionality
 - systemic oppression, such as systemic racism
-

Class Preparation

Either as homework or in class, have students watch or read about societal conditions that contributed to the Holocaust or Shoah. One possibility is the following ten-minute video about societal conditions that contributed to the Holocaust:

- Bergen, Doris, contributor. “Preconditions for the Holocaust: Prejudice in 20th Century Europe.” *Facing History and Ourselves*, 22 Aug. 2018, www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/video/preconditions-holocaust-prejudice-20th-century-europe.

Also have students read some material about anti-Semitism or Islamophobia in the United States today. One possibility is the following op-ed, which describes how societal conditions can change to make particular aspects of someone’s identity salient:

- Fox, Peter. “Being Gay Used to Be Terrifying. Being Jewish Was Easy. Now It’s the Opposite.” *The Forward*, 30 Apr. 2019, forward.com/opinion/423573/growing-up-being-gay-was-terrifying-but-being-jewish-was-easy-now-its-the/?fbclid=IwAR38tw-zDs_5Xh8E-R-H8bEMUXTTYwYYiu1D9t1fo1VnIRgKWCp15bRnzMk.

Another possibility is the following article, which explores how xenophobia has historically contributed toward anti-Catholic and anti-Muslim sentiment in the US:

- Lopez, German. “100 Years Ago, Americans Talked about Catholics the Way They Talk about Muslims Today.” *Vox*, 18 Jan. 2017, www.vox.com/2017/1/18/14312104/islamophobia-catholics?fbclid=IwAR1DS7CPQmKWA3iPoxmB_9scdwG3XUn15dPlo56IG9fwaUz1Gs4NxWrt2SE.
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Class Activity

1. Ask students to form small groups and to spend three minutes trying to write down a list of all of the different social categories and experiences they can think of that have been a source of discrimination in some time and place, whether or not they are currently a problem in students' communities. Have groups share a few that they see as current problems and a few that they see as either not current, not local, or significantly lessened compared to the past.
2. Using the example of conditions that contributed to the Holocaust, tell groups to circle a few items from their list and think about the social conditions that contributed to the discrimination against that group.
3. Explain that thinking about the structures and attitudes that make some groups particularly vulnerable can be a kind of intersectional thinking. As Kimberlé Crenshaw explains, "Intersectionality is not primarily about identity. It's about how structures make certain identities the consequence of and the vehicle for vulnerability. So if you want to know how many intersections matter, you've got to look at the context. What's happening? What kind of discrimination is going on? What are the policies? What are the institutional structures that play a role in contributing to the exclusion of some people and not others?"

Crenshaw's remarks can be accessed here and could be played in class:

- Crenshaw, Kimberlé W. "Kimberlé Crenshaw Intersectionality NOT Identity." *YouTube*, uploaded by Scott Burden, 17 Aug. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPtz8TiATJY.

The full speech is available here:

- Crenshaw, Kimberlé W. "On Intersectionality." Keynote for Women of the World Festival, London, March 12, 2016, 2016. *YouTube*, uploaded by Southbank Centre, Mar. 14, 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DW4HLgYPIA.

4. Ask students to return to their lists and identify or add a group of people whose identities are intersectionally targeted to produce vulnerability, and allow groups to share. If students do not mention American Islamophobia as an intersectional combination of racism, xenophobia, and religious bigotry, briefly mention it as an example.
5. Using the example of the Holocaust, explain why it's important to focus on intersectional, systemic, and structural oppression as a source of vulnerability. If people think there is something inherent about Jewish identity that caused Jews to be targeted in the Holocaust, not only will they replicate anti-Semitic logic, but they will also miss the societal conditions which contributed to the Holocaust and also contribute to other tragedies.
6. Remind students that dormant categories that have been used to oppress groups of people can be reactivated given the right circumstances, such as when political actors intentionally use economic and social conditions to stir up long-seated prejudices in a society already primed for violence through its participation in colonialism and war. Ask groups to pick a religious group

against whom there is or has been prejudice in the United States, such as Catholics, Wiccans or other practitioners of modern paganism, atheists, Jews, Muslims, Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), and evangelical Christians. Ask each group to answer the following question, “What intersectional societal conditions would make it more likely for this group to face systemic oppression?” Allow groups time to think and time to share with the class.

7. To begin to wrap up, ask students to think about the conditions that contributed to the Holocaust and the conditions they identified as possible contributors to future oppression against religious groups. Individually, in groups, or as a whole class, ask them to think which current conditions exist in their communities that contribute to vulnerability for certain groups, religious or otherwise.
 8. At some point in the discussion, draw students’ attention to White Christian Protestant hegemony in the US, historically and currently as a system of religious oppression against non-Christians, both those from other religions and non-religious people. Make sure to frame this as a historically created system of privilege and oppression, and acknowledge that dominant religions in other countries also often create privilege and oppression.
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I asked each of my interview participants the following question: “How, if at all, do you teach about Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, Zionism, and/or Christian White supremacy?” May, like many participants, acknowledged that the introductory course covered so much ground that these specific topics were often difficult to include. May shared, “I would say even for someone like me who does work in this area, it’s very difficult to get a lot of that stuff in” in introductory courses. May went on to share that she felt that Christian White nationalism and anti-Semitism were particularly relevant problems that she integrated into “a lot of [her] teaching.” May shared that she often focused on anti-Semitism because she did not think it was “well represented” in the curriculum at her university in her colleagues’ courses, unlike Islamophobia. I asked May a follow-up question about her teaching about anti-Semitism: “when you’re teaching

about anti-Semitism because you see that gap, what are . . . your main takeaways that you want your students to get about anti-Semitism?”

May answered “on the fly” with the following learning goal for her students about anti-Semitism:

I want students to understand about any kind of prejudice, any kind of oppression, that anything that has existed as a set of categories . . . that have been constructed and that have been used over time by dominant groups to oppress and exclude and expropriate people from that category (or who are believed to be affiliated with that category), can be revived and is likely to be revived under particular conditions. And so the question is, ‘What are the conditions under which it’s likely that that category will become newly important, or the basis for some kind of oppression?’

May’s insightful and detailed learning goal for her students reveals the level of sophisticated analysis she seeks to instill in her students. Rather than relying on simplistic or moralistic frames for teaching about oppression based on religion, May chose to discuss religious oppression relationally and sociologically, emphasizing the intersectional and structural creation of vulnerability based on religious identity.

May also explained that she also chooses to “use a lot of political psychology literature” to demonstrate how “people who’ve presumably been living in peace with each other over some long period of time can in a very short period of time be activated and mobilized to reattach meaning to these classification schemes and then to begin to harm and oppress particular groups.” May added that she believed that process “in some

ways is what’s happening in the United States.” By concluding the learning activity by asking students to focus on the current conditions that may contribute to vulnerability for certain groups and reminding them of White Christian hegemony,⁸¹ this activity draws students’ attention to contemporary social-justice issues.

Theme 2: Suggested Resources

The additional resources for this section are mostly resources I have personally used in my own introductory WGS courses to teach about religion relationally. I often assign most of these texts together in one week with the title of “Religion, Race, and Resistance.” Many but not all of the texts included deal with intersections of religion and race, ethnicity, and nationality. Below Table 9 I will discuss the texts in the same order in which they are presented.

Table 9

Theme 2 Suggested Resources

Suggested Resources for Teaching Religion Relationally

Studying religion

- Nye, Malory. “I Don’t Study Religion: So What Am I Doing in the Study of Religion?” *Medium*, Apr. 21, 2012, medium.com/religion-bites/i-dont-study-religion-so-what-am-i-doing-in-the-study-of-religion-be2653682feb.
 - Sahlin, Claire L. “Helpful Presuppositions for Academic Study and Discussions of the Phenomenon of Religion.” Student handout, drive.google.com/file/d/1Z_GLDNtV9na4FHXusEV2tSHI4d2Bi6ZU/view?usp=sharing.
 - Schlosser, Lewis Z. “Christian Privilege: Breaking a Sacred Taboo.” *Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development*, vol. 31, no. 1, Jan. 2003, pp. 44–51. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1002/j.2161-1912.2003.tb00530.x.
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⁸¹ For more on white Christian hegemony in the US and the necessity of naming it in social-justice discussions of religion, see Adams and Joshi; Joshi; and Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism*.

Intersections of religion and race, ethnicity, and nationality

- Dalby, Chris. “Brazil’s Evangelical Gangs Waging War on Afro-Brazilian Religions.” *InSight Crime*, 13 Jan. 2020, www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/brazil-evangelical-christian-gangs/?fbclid=IwAR0FZB4xfHPhOZXWiGXgaqmET5WcRDFEgDc4IuJx0GJIH0zW6wQ5cewzhc.
- Husain, Atiya. “Are Jews White?” *Slate*, 14 Aug. 2018, slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/08/are-jews-white-a-judge-tries-to-answer-the-question-in-a-messy-lawsuit.html.
- Osgood, Carrie. “Geographic Distribution of Major World Religions.” “These Are All the World’s Major Religions in One Map,” by Frank Jacobs, *World Economic Forum*, 26 Mar. 2019, www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/03/this-is-the-best-and-simplest-world-map-of-religions/.
- Silverstein, Jason. “France Will Still Ban Islamic Face Coverings Even after Making Masks Mandatory.” *CBS News*, 12 May 2020, www.cbsnews.com/news/france-burqa-ban-islamic-face-coverings-masks-mandatory/?fbclid=IwAR1ZNI6-09V5IDF0lppK5Z5SQ591IHfqF1qmTgGQ-htWdUwW7nVuwSKk9ew.
- Singh, Simran Jeet. “Why Do Racists Hate Ethnic and Religious Clothing?” *Religion News Service*, 31 July 2019, religionnews.com/2019/07/31/why-do-racists-hate-ethnic-and-religious-clothing/?fbclid=IwAR3asgKomyWHfqOCQBGcf49Zuv-16qmt2eAIDMfxBPBPysrtsfk0GDHFCzY.
- Varshney, Ashutosh. “Recent Exclusionary Steps Can Only Bring India’s International Image Down.” *The Indian Express*, 16 Dec. 2019, indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/citizenship-amendment-bill-cab-protests-india-amit-shah-narendra-modi-6168756/.
- Scroll through the following sources, and look at Google Images of the characters/deities to see how they’re usually depicted:
 - Lewis, James C. “Icons of the Bible.” *FineArtAmerica.com*, 15 Dec. 2015, fineartamerica.com/profiles/2-cornelius-lewis.
 - Nil, Nilesh. “Dark is Divine,” Facebook photo series. “Dark is Divine: A Photographer Uses his Camera to Challenge India’s Obsession with Fairness,” by Zinnia Ray Chaudhuri, *Scroll.In*, 11 Jan. 2018, scroll.in/magazine/863825/dark-is-divine-a-photographer-is-using-his-camera-to-challenge-indias-obsession-with-fairness.

Religion and social-justice activism

- Densky, Andrea. “Woman Climbs Pole to Remove Confederate Flag in front of S.C. Statehouse.” Footage of Bree Newsome. *Washington Post*, 27 June 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/video/national/2015-woman-climbs-pole-to-remove-confederate-flag-in-front-of-sc-statehouse/2015/06/27/5b067ec8-1cd1-11e5-bed8-1093ee58dad0_video.html.
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- Falk, Mallory. “Religious Leaders Stand Up for Immigrants at Border.” *KERA*, 30 July 2019, www.keranews.org/news/2019-07-30/religious-leaders-stand-up-for-immigrants-at-border.
 - Mathew, Teresa. “When Disasters Hit California, Sikh Temples Provide Meals and Refuge.” *Atlas Obscura*, 2 Jan. 2020, www.atlasobscura.com/articles/california-disaster-relief?fbclid=IwAR1FXpCLDwdA31EC8JJ_M5YOenjC_vBsVsJxr6oErpCPPdbH6_Vcn9Lhy_8.
 - NowThis Politics. “Rep. Kildee and his Staff Fast for Solidarity with Muslim Staffers.” *Facebook*, 6 May 2019, www.facebook.com/NowThisPolitics/videos/2724450290919777/.
 - Reticker, Gini, director. “*Pray the Devil Back to Hell* -Trailer.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Gwhiz4, 14 Mar. 2008, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uon9CcoHgwA.
 - Kaur, Valarie. *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love*. One World, 2020.
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Theoretical background

- Small, Jenny L. *Critical Religious Pluralism in Higher Education*. Routledge, 2020.
-

The first two texts are texts above designed to introduce students to the idea of academically studying topics related to religion in the context of social justice. The short opinion piece by Malory Nye explains his approach of studying religion not by studying religion itself but by studying how the ideas and ideologies of religion interact in the world with other powerful ideologies. Nye claims to study “the idea of religion” through “studying the intersections of power and ideologies of religion, race, gender, and sexualities.” Using a short piece like Nye’s to explain the need to include religion in intersection discussions of power and social justice may be helpful for students who do not immediately see the relevance or connections between religion, spirituality, and social justice.

The “Helpful Presuppositions” handout by Claire Sahlin was written by my mentor and dissertation chair for her own WGS courses. She has generously shared versions of it with students that she mentors and at National Women’s Studies Association conference presentations. I assign it for students because it distills many important religious studies perspectives in a simple, easy-to-read format. One of my interview participants, who knows Dr. Sahlin, specifically mentioned using this piece in her introductory courses and other courses “to prepare [students] to look at religion . . . where it has been oppressive but where it also can be very liberating and helpful.” In my own classes, I usually use discussion questions that ask students to explain how other texts relate to specific items on Sahlin’s list. For the purposes of teaching religion relationally as discussed in Chapter 3, Sahlin’s emphasis on religion as “a major source of socialization” and an intersectional “axis of privilege, domination, and oppression” are particularly relevant (“Helpful Presuppositions”). Further, Sahlin’s assertion, “Religions have served both as instruments of oppression and vehicles for social justice,” mirrors the emphasis that all interview participants placed on emphasizing the dual and paradoxical nature of religion for social justice/injustice (“Helpful Presuppositions”).

In my teaching, I have found that short pieces like those discussed above by Malory Nye and Claire Sahlin that distill the wisdom of religious studies scholars can provide a helpful entry point for students into a relational study of religion in the context of social justice. When students think about the social world, they’re sometimes tempted to think about it as completely separate from whatever personal religious beliefs and practices people may or may not have. However, as Sahlin and Nye argue, what’s

important in our personal lives has a way of affecting the social world. These intimate beliefs and practices, both religious and non-religious, affect society, sometimes in ways that promote prejudice, oppression, and violence, and sometimes in ways that promote kindness, healing, and justice. Understanding these interactions is at the core of teaching about religion relationally.

The third text, by Lewis Schlosser, introduces the idea of Christian privilege. Although I usually address this concept through class discussion or a lecture rather than incorporating this reading, assigning some texts directly about Christian privilege and Christian hegemony in the US may be helpful. Instructors who are unfamiliar with Christian privilege and Christian hegemony may want to consult Maurianne Adams and Khyati Y. Joshi's "Religious Oppression" as a resource. The full citation for Adams and Joshi's chapter can be found under the recommended resources for Theme 3 later in this chapter. Regardless of what resources faculty members choose to address Christian privilege and hegemony, acknowledging the historic and contemporary power of Christianity in the US is necessary in order to have a nuanced, social-justice-focused conversation. Pretending that all students' religious, secular, and spiritual identities have been granted equal protection and recognition is inaccurate and harmful. Following Small's recommendations, I suggest that WGS introductory instructors clearly acknowledge Christian privilege and hegemony in discussions related to religion (*Critical Religious Pluralism*).

The next section of suggested resources deals with the intersections of religion and race, ethnicity, and nationality. Sometimes when teaching about this topic, I have

used Carrie Osgood's map of the world's religions, included in this section, as a visual to help students understand some of the religious and ethnic tensions that occur in other parts of the world. I ask students to think transnationally by Googling "religious minority" and clicking on the "News" tab. As students scroll through the various news items, I ask them to click on a few and notice where in the world this event is happening and what religious groups are involved. Looking at Osgood's map of the world's religions, students can locate the country or countries involved and think about how the demographics of that particular country contribute to the dynamics covered in the news item they chose. Instead of essentializing one religion as the oppressor and other as the victim, students can visually see how the same religion may act as an oppressor when in the majority while also being an oppressed minority in other countries.

Looking at Osgood's map in relation to the other texts included in this section demonstrates the kind of complex relational thinking many participants described as wanting from their students. Students can notice how the overwhelming Christian majority in Brazil, for example, might condone religiously, politically, and racially motivated violence against non-Christian practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions, as described in Chris Dalby's article. Students can see how Hindus make up the vast majority of Indians, but that a significant percentage of Indians are not Hindu, which can help them contextualize Ashutosh Varshney's description of Hindu nationalists' efforts to define Indian citizenship in ways that threaten the citizenship of the Muslim minority. Students reading Jason Silverstein's article about France's keeping its ban on so-called Islamic face coverings even while it mandates face coverings to stop the spread of the

new coronavirus can understand France's demographic context as a majority Christian country with a large secular population and a growing Muslim minority. When students learn about religious bigotry in the US, it can be helpful for them to visualize that about 2% of the population is Jewish and about 1% is Muslim, while the majority of Americans are Christians. Memorizing transnational demographic data about religious affiliation is not useful in and of itself, but it is useful for students to understand religious discrimination in a transnational context in order to resist against inaccurate and simplistic views of certain groups as inherently oppressive or inherently vulnerable to oppression.

The remaining suggested texts about intersections of religion and race, ethnicity, and nationality deal with intersections of race and religious identity. The articles by Simran Jeet Singh and Atiya Husain specifically deal with religion as a factor in racialization of certain groups. I often assign Singh's "Why Do Racists Hate Ethnic and Religious Clothing?" during the week when I discuss race and racialization. Singh connects the example of hate crimes against people in religious garb as a way to explain racialization, which "can incorporate other aspects of physical identifiers, such as what language people are speaking or what they are wearing," in addition to "skin color" ("Why Racists"). Similarly, Husain explores the legal case of an American Jewish man who recently experienced discrimination for his Jewish ethnicity even though he religiously identified as a Christian. Husain points out, "Religion has never been an afterthought in systemic racism, but a racial classifier, weaponized to maintain whiteness." I often assign these texts in connection to German Lopez's article, cited

during the class activity for this theme, explaining current Islamophobia and historical anti-Catholicism as intersectionally dependent on xenophobia. For students influenced by the Protestant Christian understanding of religion as solely a matter of personal belief or unbelief rather than a complex sociological category, these kinds of texts that connect the long history of racism to religion can be helpful in understanding religious, secular, and spiritual identities in a more relational way.

The last two paired texts in this section are examples of artists challenging racism, ethnocentrism, and color prejudice within a religious tradition. Photographers James C. Lewis and Naresh Nil each depict religious figures with darker skin than they are usually shown with. Including visual art that challenges the most common racial depictions of religious figures can challenge students to think about how religion can reify or resist color prejudice.

As the next section of texts on religion and social-justice activism demonstrates, in many instances, religion is a powerful motivational factor for efforts toward peace and justice. A key component of relational thinking across sources of data in this study was an emphasis on religion as having the potential both to oppress but also to empower, as discussed in Chapter 3. The recommended texts in this section give diverse examples of people's religious or spiritual identities serving as a motivation for social-justice activism, which all interview participants saw as important to highlight in their courses.

For example, Andrea Densky's video of racial-justice advocate Bree Newsome shows her quoting Christian scripture as she is committing civil disobedience to remove the Confederate flag from the South Carolina Statehouse after an incident of racial

terrorism committed against Black Christians in a Charleston church. Susie Peace mentioned using this video in her classes to show “coalition building across race with [Newsome’s] White male ally” and how people can use religion “to resist” oppressive structures. Later in her interview, Susie also mentioned how Alicia Garza, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, has spoken “about her archetype being Harriet Tubman, and that she prays and honors Harriet Tubman” (Andrews-Duve). Although discussing the activism of women like Bree Newsome and Alicia Garza in a WGS course may be common, Susie’s attention to the spiritual and religious inspiration of these activists demonstrates relational thinking about religion and spirituality in the social world.

The other recommended texts in this section similarly explore religiously motivated social-justice activism. Mallory Falk’s article profiles interfaith religious leaders protesting maltreatment of immigrants during the Trump administration, the article by Teresa Mathew describes how Sikh gurdwaras mobilize after disasters in California, and NowThis Politics’s video about Rep. Kildee describes a group of people who fast in solidarity with their friend even though they don’t share her religion. Gini Reticker’s *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* is a documentary about interfaith women’s peace activism in Liberia. In my own classes, I have shown both the full documentary as well as just the trailer. Finally, I have not assigned Valarie Kaur’s *See No Stranger* to my introductory course, but I may in the future. Kaur’s social-justice theories are highly relevant to WGS and also rooted in her own identity and experience as a Sikh woman in the US who experiences intersectional oppression for her gender, religious, and racial

identities. Assigning part or all of Kaur's book or some of her shorter speeches available on the internet might be helpful in an introductory WGS course. Although many other examples exist of social-justice activism motivated by spirituality and religion, these examples hopefully provide a starting point for thinking about how a WGS introductory course could explore religion as a factor in both oppression and empowerment.

The last suggested text for teaching about religion relationally is Small's *Critical Religious Pluralism in Higher Education*, especially Chapter 4, which proposes core tenets of CRPT,⁸² as outlined in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Small's commitment to articulating the theoretical guiding principles for examining religious, secular, and spiritual identities in a social-justice context should prove useful to WGS instructors. Small describes CRPT as promoting intersectional examination of religion with special attention to the primary dynamic of power and privilege in the US: Christian hegemony. Small also acknowledges the role that religion can play in empowering individuals, and she advocates for religious pluralism as the solution to religious conflict. Many of Small's principles fit in well with the suggestions proposed in this study, and her clear and concise discussion may be a helpful theoretical resource for WGS instructors who want to learn more.

Theme 2: Conclusion

As I explained in Chapter 3, relational thinking, theme two of this study, involves analyzing social-justice issues intersectionally, acknowledging the complexity and diversity of religious and spiritual groups, exploring religion as a sociological influence,

⁸² Critical religious pluralism theory.

and seeing religion as both oppressive and also empowering. The pedagogical materials for theme two responded to these pedagogical goals first by providing the opportunity for faculty to reflect on the ways their own religious, secular, and spiritual identities have been shaped in complex and relational ways throughout their lives. The class activity, based on May's suggestions, gave an example of how an instructor might incorporate religion in a lesson on intersectional oppression, a key idea in many WGS introductory courses. Finally, the suggested resources provided additional texts faculty members might incorporate into WGS courses in order to highlight the complexity of religion sociologically. The texts focusing on the intersections of religion and race, ethnicity, and nationality exemplify how an intersectional analysis of religion might be incorporated in relevant ways in an introductory WGS course, and the examples of religiously motivated social-justice activism respond to the need articulated by participants to acknowledge religion as both a force of oppression and also a force of resistance. Taken as a whole, these materials represent a few ways that WGS instructors could seek to incorporate a relational focus on religion in their own introductory courses.

Theme 3: Proposed Pedagogical Materials

Theme three focused on the pedagogical methods by which participants addressed religion in their introductory courses. Participants identified components of a student-centered feminist pedagogy focused on open and respectful dialogue as particularly relevant and helpful for teaching about religion and other charged topics. The self-reflective portion of this section invites faculty members to conduct an inventory of their personal strengths and interests related to teaching about religion in relation to students'

needs. This section includes two class activities, one focusing on providing students with the opportunity to include information about their religious, secular, and spiritual identities in their personal introductions, and another one focusing on creating conditions for open and respectful disagreement in the classroom. The suggested resources include feminist pedagogical materials.

Theme 3: Self-Reflection

Table 10 below gives a self-reflection activity related to students' religious, secular, and spiritual needs. As discussed in Chapter 3, many participants in this study shared a sense that integrating religion into WGS was important because of students' needs. All seven interview participants and nine out of thirty-two survey participants mentioned students who are negotiating their own religious, secular, and spiritual identities as a factor that influenced their teaching.

Table 10

Theme 3 Self-Reflection Activity

Religious, Secular, and Spiritual Needs Assessment and Self-Inventory

Preparation

- Gather paper to journal on and at least four colors of pen or pencil.
 - If your institution collects any data or has resources related to students' religious, secular, and spiritual identities, review it briefly.
-

Pedagogical Self-Inventory and Student-Needs Assessment

1. Take a few minutes to think in silence about your strengths and interests as a teacher. What do you love to teach about? What aspects of teaching do you feel particularly confident about? Be general, but also include any strengths, passions, and expertise that you have related to religious, secular, and spiritual identities.
 2. On the left side of a piece of paper, write down as many of these strengths and interests as you can think of.
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3. Take a few minutes to think in silence about what you think your students need in relation to your class or the university in general in order to support their religious, secular, and spiritual identities. Think about accommodations, representation, and mentorship as well as class content, and think about the various groups of students you teach and how their needs are similar and different.
 4. On the right side of your paper, write down as many of these needs as you can think of.
 5. Looking at the list on the left and the list on the right, think about how your strengths and interests can meet students' needs. Draw lines to connect the relevant strengths and interests to student needs that you are *already* meeting.
 6. Think about what needs students have that are already being met by someone else on campus. In a different color, circle those needs and label who is addressing them.
 7. Next, try to identify a few student needs that you are not currently meeting, but you feel you could easily adapt to meet using your existing strengths. Circle these needs in a different color and draw lines to your relevant strengths and interests. Label the lines with the practices you could incorporate in order to meet those needs.
 8. Finally, think about the remaining unmet needs and your strengths and passions as a teacher. Five years from now, if you could add an item to your list of strengths and interests as a teacher, what would have the biggest impact on the unmet religious, spiritual, and secular needs of your students? In another color, add it to the list on the left as a goal.
-

Follow-Up

- Make a list of any unanswered questions you have about student needs and institutional policies in order to research them further. Make a plan for how to get answers to your questions.
 - Write down the small changes you feel you could incorporate in your planner, calendar, or some other place you keep track of goals.
 - Think about what steps you would need to take, including further research and learning, in order to work towards the pedagogical goal you identified in number 8. Write down these steps in your planner, calendar, or some other place where you keep track of goals.
-

One of my interview participants, who has also edited an introductory WGS textbook, described her commitment to including material related to religion in her textbook. When other contributors suggested removing the chapter on religion from the

textbook, she said she argued, “Women in the South need this; students in the South need this.” As my participants argued in Chapter 3, acknowledging students’ religious, secular, and spiritual identities is a part of respecting students as whole people. Furthermore, as Elizabeth Vander Lei similarly argues with respect to religion in the college composition classroom, “By excising that which they believe to be at best outside the academic realm or at worst anti-intellectual, teachers risk creating not a neutral space but a sterile space where learning is safe from ideas that are potentially community-shattering, such as those regarding gender roles or environmental responsibility” (Vander Lei and Kyburz). Students are diverse, and no faculty member can or should meet all students’ needs. However, thinking through students’ needs in relation to faculty members’ skills and interests can be helpful in identifying which needs are not being met. This self-reflection activity seeks to respond to this finding by providing faculty with a structured way of thinking through their perceptions of students’ needs related to their religious, spiritual, and secular identities.

Theme 3: Class Activities

I have included below in Table 11 two short class activities rather than one. The first is an example of an open and respectful introduction activity, and the second is a list of suggestions for establishing and maintaining an environment where students feel able to disagree with each other and with the teacher. I will discuss each activity separately, immediately following each activity.

Table 11

Theme 3 Class Activity: Open and Respectful Introductions

Open and Respectful Introductions

Preparation

Allowing students to share about their own identities, including their religious, secular, and spiritual identities, helps establish an open and respectful classroom environment. One way to do that is to ask students to tie their self-introductions to course material. Near the beginning of the semester, assign or watch in class Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “The Danger of a Single Story” TED Talk or a similar text that argues for the need to resist essentializing stereotypes and assumptions:

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. “The Danger of a Single Story.” *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading*, 16 Oct. 2009, www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en.

Introductions

After students have watched the TED Talk or similar material, ask students to introduce themselves to each other in small groups, to the whole class, or on a discussion board, using a prompt similar to this:

“Tell us about yourself! What do you want the class to know about you in order to have a more complex understanding of where you are coming from? What can you share with us from your life that will help us resist a single story of a group of people that you are a part of?”

In your instructions, make it clear that students are welcome but not required to share about any of their identities, including any religious or spiritual identity they may have.

This class activity is one I often start introductory courses with, especially in online courses. Although I don’t always specifically mention students’ religious, secular, and spiritual identities in the instructions to this activity as I have recommended doing above, my students often reveal information about their religious, spiritual, and secular identities during this activity. Muslims, Catholics, Baptists, Latter-Day Saints, and atheists have all shared about their identities and the incorrect assumptions people make about them based on their group affiliation in response to this activity. My students, who are largely from North Texas, are probably more religious and more religiously diverse

than students at some other institutions, so they may need less prompting to be willing to share about their religious identities. However, I feel that allowing students to share aspects of themselves that are deeply important to their sense of identity is important in any student population. Not all students attach importance to their religious, secular, or spiritual identity, but for those who do, it may be one of their most important identity markers, an “integral part of themselves,” in Susie’s words.

This activity responds to theme three by recognizing that students’ religious, secular, and spiritual identities may shape their needs and participation in our classrooms. Whether or not a faculty member sees their own religious, secular, or spiritual identity as important or relevant, students themselves may be negotiating their own identities in important and age-appropriate ways. As one survey participant pointed out, “The research also tells us that traditional age college students are moving through understandings of this identity, so this matters.”

Allowing students to choose which aspects of themselves to self-disclose also reflects the emphasis in theme three on engaging respectfully with students. May’s attention to never singling out students from non-majority religious traditions is an important consideration to remember when designing introductory activities that may include aspects of students’ religious, secular, and spiritual identities. Some students of minority religious traditions may not want to share about a part of their identity that is often misunderstood, while others may be eager to explain an important part of themselves to willing listeners. Allowing students themselves to decide what to share respects the needs of all students and allows them to be the experts on their own lives.

Table 12

Theme 3 Class Activity: Open and Respectful Disagreement

Open and Respectful Disagreement

Setting a Foundation

Since your class members will probably not all agree on topics related to religion, secularity, and spirituality, you must establish procedures for how to respectfully disagree if you want them to be able to talk about these topics. Establishing the expectation that members of the community are welcome to respectfully disagree and challenge each other often requires explicit faculty guidance at the beginning of the class. Possible methods of establishing this expectation could include the following:

- In your syllabus, include your expectations for respectful dialogue. Explicitly include the understanding that class members are encouraged to respectfully disagree.
- When you go over your syllabus for students, either in-person or online, draw students' attention to your expectations for respectfully disagreeing and include examples of what that looks like to you.
- If your class communally creates expectations for the learning community, make sure to ask the class what norms they would like to establish for disagreeing with each other in class.
- In your syllabus or in class discussions, make it clear that students are not expected to agree with all assigned texts.
- Normalize respect for religious, secular, and spiritual identities in the academic environment by including a statement of accommodation for students' rituals, festivals, and practices in your syllabus whether or not it is required by your institution.

Modeling and Maintaining Respectful Disagreement

Even after you have established the precedent that students are not expected to agree with you, the class materials, or each other, you will need to model and maintain that expectation throughout the course, possibly through the following methods:

- Assign authors who disagree with each other in order to model to students how to listen to and learn from multiple perspectives.
 - Assign perspectives that you personally disagree with but see merit in, and let students know at some point during the course of the discussion how you feel. Model respectful disagreement and engagement.
 - When students express opinions in class, solicit the class for other viewpoints. If no one immediately volunteers, ask the class to list contrasting viewpoints, whether or not they personally hold them.
 - Assign viewpoints on a controversial topic to students and have students debate each other respectfully.
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- Normalize respect for religious, secular, and spiritual identities that you might disagree with by respectfully mentioning people of principle who hold controversial stances. For example, if you are discussing contraception, you might mention the Roman Catholic Church's opposition to contraception and note that their view is based on their understanding of human sexuality and the value of human life. Give students a sense that viewpoints they don't agree with may be based on deep principles and may be internally consistent rather than capricious or inexplicable.
-

Table 12 above includes suggestions for allowing and even encouraging respectful disagreement in an introductory WGS course. These suggestions respond to various components of theme three, but most specifically they respond to the emphasis that several participants placed on openness to disagreement. As discussed in Chapter 3, many participants and some syllabi explicitly encouraged respectful disagreement in their classes as an integral part of learning. One syllabus included descriptions of class participation norms that included this statement: "I expect and encourage you to disagree with some perspectives." As discussed in Chapter 3, May shared her views on disagreement in the classroom at length, including her view that "in an ideal world, we would disagree about these things," referring to religion and race. For May, seeing disagreement as a "feature, not a bug" of productive classroom engagement was a cornerstone of her feminist pedagogy. May also emphasized the importance of fairness in disagreement. Respectfully and accurately representing the views of people we disagree with can be challenging because our own personal disdain for views that we see as harmful impedes our ability to represent these views fairly before beginning to critique them. However, accurately and respectfully representing the views of people we disagree

with signals to students that we will also be respectful towards them when we disagree and can make students more willing to be open about their own views.

In my experience, many of the suggested practices above are common but not universal in WGS pedagogy. Rebecca Alpert, for example, explains what she learned from teaching in women's studies in terms very similar to those used by participants in this study:

I'm also convinced that the classroom needs to be a neutral space where real conversations (and real disagreements) can take place in a respectful way.

Ultimately, that's my goal when I teach. I don't expect students to change their minds or their politics. But I do hope they can make a good argument for their position and respectfully listen to those who disagree with them. That's what student-centered teaching is ultimately all about. (Alpert and White 63)

Explicitly teaching these practices to new instructors may be helpful component of mentorship in feminist pedagogy, especially for instructors who may explicitly or implicitly feel that it is their responsibility to teach students the "correct" feminist views on the topics covered in WGS courses. For the purposes of resisting Christian hegemony and Christian-secularism, it may also help to explicitly identify our classrooms as religiously pluralistic spaces where participants will have different religious, secular, and spiritual commitments that may lead to disagreement. Nurturing religiously pluralistic disagreements in respectful ways rather than pathologizing differences of religious, spiritual, or secular identity connects to the social-justice goals of WGS and should be a part of WGS pedagogy. Encouraging productive disagreement, including on topics

related to religion, may feel scary to some instructors, but it can enhance the learning community significantly. These suggestions hopefully serve as a helpful reminder for WGS faculty about the importance of disagreement in our courses.

Theme 3: Suggested Resources

Table 13

Theme 3 Suggested Resources

Suggested Resources for Student-Centered Teaching of Religion

Sources that relate to college students' experiences

- Diamant, Jeff, and Elizabeth Podrebarac Sciupac. "10 Key Findings about the Religious Lives of U.S. Teens and their Parents." *Pew Research Center*, 10 Sept. 2020, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/10/10-key-findings-about-the-religious-lives-of-u-s-teens-and-their-parents/.
 - Marouan, Maha, and Rachel Ralmist. *Voices of Muslim Women from the US South*. Women Make Movies, 2015. *Kanopy*, www.kanopy.com/product/voices-muslim-women-us-south-0.
 - Shamas, Diala. "Living in Houses Without Walls: Muslim Youth in New York City in the Aftermath of 9/11." *Gendered Lives: Intersectional Perspectives*, 7th ed., edited by Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey, Oxford UP, 2020, pp. 419–29. Originally published in *New York after 9/11*, edited by Susan Opatow and Zachary Baron Shemtob, Fordham UP, 2018, pp. 206–29.
 - Zucker, Adam. *The Return: Young and Jewish in Poland*. Seventh Art Releasing, 2014. *Kanopy*, www.kanopy.com/product/return-1.
-

Sources related to feminist pedagogy in WGS

- Gotell, Lise, and Barbara Crow. "Antifeminism and the Classroom." *Women's Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*, edited by Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Agatha Beins, Rutgers UP, 2005, pp. 287–303.
 - Luhmann, Susanne. "Pedagogy." *Rethinking Women's and Gender Studies*, edited by Catherine M. Orr, Ann Braithwaite, and Diane Lichtenstein, Routledge, 2012, pp. 65–84.
 - Rhoades, Katherine Ann. "Border Zones: Identification, Resistance, and Transgressive Teaching in Introductory Women's Studies Courses." *Teaching Introduction to Women's Studies: Expectations and Strategies*, edited by Barbara Scott Winkler and Carolyn DiPalma, Bergin and Garvey, 1999, pp 61–71.
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Sources related to social-justice pedagogy of religion

- Adams, Maurianne and Khyati Y. Joshi. “Religious Oppression.” *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, 3rd ed., edited by Maurianne Adams and Lee Anne Bell, with Diane J. Goodman and Khyati Y. Joshi, Routledge, 2016, pp. 255–297.
 - Ennis, Ariel. *Teaching Religious Literacy: A Guide to Religious and Spiritual Diversity in Higher Education*, Routledge, 2017.
 - Goodman, Kathleen M., Mary Ellen Giess, and Eboo Patel, editors. *Educating About Religious Diversity and Interfaith Engagement: A Handbook for Student Affairs*. Stylus Publishing, 2019.
 - Vander Lei, Elizabeth, and bonnie lenore kyburz, editors. *Negotiating Religious Faith in the Composition Classroom*. Boynton/Cook Publishers, 2005.
-

The resources in Table 13 above give a few starting points for further exploring aspects of theme three of this study. Theme three found that instructors who were committed to incorporating religion into their introductory WGS courses responded to students’ needs with a feminist pedagogy that emphasized open and respectful dialogue. Furthermore, participants emphasized that responding to students’ needs pedagogically did not require the instructors to be subject-matter experts on all topics related to religion. I will discuss each section briefly in the order presented above.

First, I have included a few sources as examples of materials related to religion that instructors could include in a WGS course that might relate to students’ experience. The sources I have included and others that deal with the religious, secular, and spiritual concerns of young people may respond to students’ needs to negotiate and explore their own beliefs and identities. Although it would be impossible to include material in a WGS course that relates to each student’s needs with respect to their religious, secular, or spiritual identities, choosing relatable material may help students explore their own identities in relation to those of others. This approach draws on what AnaLouise Keating

calls “relational teaching,” which uses “situation-specific” points of connection as learning opportunities (*Teaching* 53). In Keating’s words, “These commonalities neither overlook nor deny the differences among us. Rather, they offer pathways into relational investigations of difference—difference defined not as deviation *from* an unmarked norm but as interrelated *with* this norm” (53). Including material in a WGS introductory course that involves people deeply exploring their religious, secular, or spiritual identities served not only the needs of students whose specific identities are represented in these materials, but also the needs of students whose experience might have some commonalities with the people represented. Rather than attempting to represent all students’ identities, faculty can look for opportunities such as the suggested resources to create relational points of connection that draw students into deeper analysis of how religious, secular, and spiritual identities relate to other aspects of social transformation.

All of the sources I have suggested in this section deal with young people’s religious, secular, and spiritual identities. Although Jeff Diamant and Elizabeth Podrebarac Sciupac’s report on a Pew Research Center study on the religious experiences of teenagers and their parents does not deal directly with college students, it may be a way for instructors and possibly their students to begin to think about the religious orientations of young people. I also have suggested Diala Shamas’s chapter on the effects of post-9/11 surveillance on Muslim youth in New York. A shortened version of the work is anthologized in one of the textbooks from this study, Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey’s *Gendered Lives*. Kirk and Okazawa-Rey include it in their chapter on “Gender,

Crime and Criminalization,” but it also could be used in units on state-sponsored oppression and violence or xenophobia.

Although most college students today do not share the exact experiences of the college students in Shamas’s study, the shared age and educational context may make the content more relatable. Shamas’s vivid descriptions of the effects of state surveillance on Muslim college students include details about police informants infiltrating groups of friends; one even became a bridesmaid at the wedding of a Muslim student she was spying on. The quotes from college students in Shamas’s study reveal the depth of betrayal students felt and the chilling effect of the surveillance on their personal, religious, academic, and activist lives. Because the study deals with college students and their lived experiences, it may be more relatable to students in WGS courses than more theoretical discussions of Islamophobia.

I have also suggested two documentaries about religious women that may be relatable to college students in introductory WGS courses. Maha Marouan and Rachel Ralmist’s *Voices of Muslim Women from the US South* profiles several Muslim college students on the same campus. The participants are diverse in their race, ethnicity, and religious practice, and Maha Marouan, as a WGS professor, brings an intersectional feminist lens to the film. Since the film is only thirty minutes long, students learning about intersectionality could watch the film in class and practice intersectional analysis of the diverse experiences represented in the film. Similarly, Adam Zucker’s film *The Return* about young Jewish women in Poland might be a relatable way for students to practice intersectional and transnational analysis. Zucker’s film is longer—almost an

hour and a half—and explores the lives of four Jewish women over a period of several years. Although the film is about the women’s experience of Judaism in Poland, each woman has transnational experience, which leads the film to deal with religious, ethnic, and cultural identity across borders. One woman, Tusia, splits her time between New York and Poland, but she is only interested in exploring her Jewish identity and heritage in a Polish context. The film explores women’s agency in patriarchal religious traditions, conversion, and dealing with historical trauma, and using the film as an example for practicing transnational feminist analysis could prove very fruitful. Students in an introductory WGS class might find the characters in both films relatable, and the films could be avenues for more fruitful discussions of religion as a factor that comprises intersectional experiences.

In addition to the first section of suggested resources, I have included sources for further study for WGS instructors. As I explained in Chapter 3, this study contributes to critical, liberatory feminist pedagogy, and many aspects of theme three reflect long-standing conversations in feminist pedagogy scholarship. For example, the findings of theme three resonate strongly with Erica Lawson’s summary of student-centered feminist pedagogy:

Critical feminist pedagogies are most effective when they tap into students’ interests and learning styles. Some examples of these are connecting with an instructor and classroom peers around shared perspectives, implicating the whole self in the learning process, raising questions that challenge deeply held views

about the world and social problems, and fostering dialogues that continue beyond the classroom. (109)

Reading widely in feminist pedagogy would probably be beneficial for WGS instructors, but I have specifically chosen suggested resources that further extend theme three's focus on open and respectful dialogue⁸³ as a component of student-centered feminist pedagogy.

The section on feminist pedagogy contains suggested resources related specifically to openness to disagreement in feminist pedagogy, which was an important component of theme three and an important topic of discussion in scholarly discussions of feminist pedagogy. Some participants in this study critiqued other feminists and WGS faculty as seeking to instill in students the "correct" views rather than teaching students to think critically. Similar discussions are common in feminist pedagogy scholarship and may represent common pitfalls in WGS teaching. As Keating explains, "We can feel so righteous in our concerns about social injustice that we trample over those who have different views. Yet this self-righteous, reactionary attitude is quite different from the type of inclusionary classroom I want to create" (*Teaching* 26). Similarly, the participants in this study favored what Lise Gotell and Barbara Crow call a pedagogy of "difference" rather than what they call an "emancipatory feminist pedagogy" (290). Gotell and Crow critique emancipatory feminist pedagogies that presume to teach students "good, true, innocent knowledge" as silencing dissent in the classroom (290). In contrast, Gotell and Crow promote a pedagogy of difference that accepts conflict between different opinions.

⁸³ Many critical and liberatory pedagogies outside of feminist pedagogy also prioritize dialogue, drawing on Freire's emphasis on dialogue (93).

“Conflict resides in the feminist classroom,” Gotell and Crow explain, “just as it does within feminist movements” (291). For Gotell and Crow, accepting conflict and disagreement as a part of the learning process can be a productive part of the learning process because “by introducing students to contending feminist perspectives and providing them with the analytical tools to dissect assumptions, compare interpretations, identify strengths, weaknesses, and inevitable ambiguities, we are providing a space where students think on their own behalf” (291). Theme three of this study reflects a similar view of feminist pedagogy that prioritizes critical thinking rather than parroted ideologies.

The other recommended sources on feminist pedagogy similarly explore openness in feminist pedagogy. Katherine Ann Rhoades qualitatively explored her students’ process of identification and resistance to ideas presented in an introductory WGS course. Rhoades describes her students’ learning process as involving “numerous border skirmishes as they actively engage in identifying both with and against new knowledge” (69). Given her students’ non-linear learning process, Rhoades recommends openness to differences of opinions and new ideas, pedagogical practices also suggested by this study (70). Susanne Luhmann similarly explores the concept of pedagogy in WGS and suggests that WGS teachers “accept that feminism and WGS offer no final answers, only more questions, and that students need to chart their own way through their attachments to feminism” (80). These scholars’ openness to disruptive pedagogies echoes some anti-racist scholars’ critiques of safe spaces that do little to counter the embedded violence of racism (Leonardo and Porter 140). Although many other excellent discussions of feminist

pedagogy exist, these three chapters contain sustained discussions of many of the salient pedagogical points raised in theme three of this study. Since the study participants are all WGS scholars and teachers, it is not surprising that their views resonate with published scholarly discussions in the field. The suggested sources related to feminist pedagogy in WGS provide one way to further explore this study's application of feminist pedagogical principles to the topic of religion.

The last four suggested resources specifically deal with religion. These resources may help instructors who do not see religion as their specialty, as discussed in Chapter 3, but desire to respond to students' needs by incorporating analysis of religion into the classroom. To that end, the last section of Kathleen Goodman, Mary Ellen Giess, and Eboo Patel's *Educating About Religions Diversity and Interfaith Engagement* may be a helpful resource. Although the book is designed for professionals in Student Affairs rather than for faculty members, Part Five of the book provides "Foundational Knowledge" about understanding Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Secular, Buddhist, Sikh, and Hindu students on campus. For faculty looking to learn more about supporting their students diverse religious, secular, and spiritual identities, this is an excellent resource. Similarly, Ariel Ennis's *Teaching Religious Literacy* gives suggestions for designing co-curricular interventions about religious diversity. Ennis's workshop suggestions may be helpful to some teachers, and Ennis's "Measuring Religious Literacy" chapter provides rubrics for measuring the outcomes of his Faith Zone workshops that may be helpful for faculty members to use in developing their own learning outcomes.

The single most helpful resource I would suggest for developing critical pedagogical strategies surrounding religion and social justice is Maurianne Adams and Khyati Y. Joshi's "Religious Oppression" chapter in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. Adams and Joshi's chapter is comprehensive, covering relevant historical, theoretical, and demographic perspectives on religion as well as lesson plans, learning goals, and pedagogical tips. Many of the suggestions shared by participants in this study relate to the strategies suggested by Adams and Joshi, and I highly recommend their chapter for WGS faculty looking to improve how they incorporate the topic of religion into their classroom discussions.

Finally, although it discusses the integration of religion into the composition classroom rather than into WGS, I recommend Elizabeth Vander Lei and Bonnie Lenore Kyburz's volume. Some topics in Vander Lei and Kyburz's book are specific to composition and not directly relevant to the field of WGS, but there are many overlaps with the findings of this study. The selections in Vander Lei and Kyburz deal with instructor reluctance to address religion, difficult religious conversations with students, the importance of instructor self-reflexivity, and the need to respond to the aspects of students' identities that are important and salient to them.

Theme 3: Conclusion

Theme three dealt with participants' overall pedagogical approach to teaching about religion. Rather than emphasizing faculty members as experts, participants used open and respectful dialogue in order to discuss the topics that were important to their students, whether or not they were personally important to the faculty members

themselves. The pedagogical materials for theme three further explore these findings. The self-reflection activity asks faculty to reflect on students' needs related to their religious, secular, and spiritual identities and the faculty member's own desire and capacity to meet those needs in the WGS classroom. The class activities include tips for establishing an open and respectful classroom environment through an introduction activity that allows students to self-disclose, if they choose to do so, their own religious, secular, and spiritual identities as well as tips for promoting respectful and productive disagreement in the classroom. The suggested resources include materials that could be assigned in a WGS course that might relate to students' own negotiation of their religious identities and might provide opportunities for intersectional and transnational analysis. Resources about feminist pedagogy and teaching about religion further build on theme three for faculty interested in further learning.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

Although the pedagogical materials in this chapter are by no means comprehensive or exhaustive, they represent an attempt to provide a practical application of the themes of this study. Pedagogy is personal and each WGS instructor's classroom is different, but these materials provide a menu of possible pedagogical interventions based on this study. By presenting materials for self-reflection, classroom activities, and further resources related to each theme of this study, this chapter seeks to build on the knowledge gained from this study in order to offer practical suggestions to WGS practitioners who are committed to this work.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was designed to answer the following research question: how could WGS faculty in the US teach about religion intersectionally in general introductory WGS courses in order to promote social justice more fully? I was particularly interested in the intersections of religion with race, ethnicity, and nationality, as well as the social-justice implications of critical pedagogies for addressing forms of racism that have a religious component. I used a qualitative case study with multiple sources of data, and three themes arose in answer to this question. In this final chapter, I will discuss the theoretical contributions and significance of this study as well as propose directions for future research.

Since this study explored how introductory WGS courses teach about religion using participant data from faculty members, follow-up studies could fruitfully examine student perspectives through interviews, focus groups, quantitative assessments, or other means. The themes of this study could be further tested by assessing new sources of data related to introductory WGS courses, such as analyzing course descriptions for introductory courses from a representative sample of National Women's Studies Association member institutions. Exploring WGS pedagogy on this topic outside of introductory courses might also be productive. The perspectives of graduate students on

intersections of religion and race within the field and pedagogical implications might be another interesting angle to explore. Furthermore, since some of the themes of this study related to feminist approaches to pedagogy more broadly, follow-up studies could examine other difficult intersections in WGS, such as race or class, and then compare the themes in order to contribute to feminist pedagogical approaches.

From my vantage point, I hope to expand WGS's understanding of religion as a necessary component of intersectional social justice analysis and praxis. Religion and spirituality are key factors in identity formation and oppressive social structures that intersect with race, gender, sexuality, and other categories. As scholars dedicated to critiquing oppressive structures, we need to take religion and spirituality seriously for their contributions to injustice as well as for their possible contributions to holistic approaches to social justice. I hope that my research helps push the field of WGS toward more critical and pedagogical engagement with religious, spiritual, and secular identities, particularly as they intersect with racial, ethnic, and national identities. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the scholarly significance of this dissertation and suggest areas for future research related to each theme of this study.

Theme 1: Significance and Areas of Future Research

The first theme of this study was an emphasis on commitment to teaching about religion intersectionally, including organic integration of religion throughout the introductory WGS course, in spite of perceived risks. This finding is particularly significant in light of the ongoing and urgent need to oppose White Christian supremacy in the US. Although religion is not inherently oppressive, under-theorizing the potential

of religion to contribute to oppression and liberation is dangerous. As events in the Trump era make abundantly clear, White Christian supremacy is a source of chronic oppression as well as an acute threat to a functioning pluralistic democracy (Small and Edwards, “White Christian Supremacy”). These threats clearly underscore the need for WGS professors, and particularly White WGS professors, as Aisha Ahmed specified, to commit to engaging religion at its intersections with race, ethnicity, and nationality. However, these threats also clearly demonstrate the real risks involved, particularly for faculty of color⁸⁴ and non-Christian faculty, in opposing White Christian hegemony. This study contributes to this conversation by clearly articulating the need for faculty to commit to pedagogical practices that expose and help dismantle White Christian supremacy. Rather than framing lack of engagement with religion as wholly a matter of a lack of knowledge, participants in this study emphasized the need to commit to doing the work.

Articulating the role of commitment for teachers who oppose White Christian supremacy is related to another theoretical contribution of my dissertation: the development of critical theory related to religion. Much work remains to be done in integrating religion into critical theory. Small’s proposal CRPT⁸⁵ is a particularly helpful attempt to blend critical social-justice theory with religious identity in higher education. The findings of this dissertation align well with Small’s proposed theory, which I

⁸⁴ See Lawson and see also Das Gupta for discussions of racially marginalized WGS instructors and issues of authority and risk in feminist pedagogy. See also Kim for a discussion of issues or risk and authority associated with teaching religion as a woman of color.

⁸⁵ Critical religious pluralism theory.

summarized in Chapter 1. The risk related to teaching about religion articulated by participants in this study may be related to institutionalized Christian hegemony and “the related concept of the false neutral of secularism,” named in tenets one and two (Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism* ch. 4). By taking seriously the intersectional risks faced by variously situated WGS professors, this study implicitly and explicitly acknowledges that Christian hegemony and the false neutrality of secularism create privilege, oppression, and risk. Taken as a whole, this study’s themes resonated in many ways with Small’s proposed CRPT, which provides further support for CRPT and suggests that the field of WGS may have much to contribute to the further development of CRPT and the integration of religion into other critical theories. WGS’s significant commitment to intersectional social justice provides a strong framework for the further development of critical theory about religion, and examining religion intersectionally is a relevant undertaking for the field of WGS.

Outside of CRPT, this dissertation indicates potential for WGS to contribute to other critical theories, such as critical race theory (CRT), critical race feminism,⁸⁶ and critical intersectionality theory. Aisha’s assertions that White faculty lack commitment to teaching about religion and race was an important part of the discussion in theme one. Although only one participant shared this view, Aisha felt strongly enough about it to reiterate it during member checking. Furthermore, in line with Small’s recommendation to prioritize religiously marginalized voices, I chose to highlight Aisha’s concerns in this

⁸⁶ See, for example, Razack et al., written by Canadian feminists of color, which includes a significant focus on how the post-9/11 War on Terror has reshaped racial politics.

dissertation out of respect for her experience as the only interview participant in this study who was a Muslim woman of color (*Critical Religious Pluralism* ch. 4). Given the intersecting realities of racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia in the US, Aisha's experience and words of caution are important for WGS as a field to listen to.

Since many critical theories, including CRT and critical intersectional theory, have tended not to integrate a lens of religious pluralism, there is significant opportunity to build on the work of this dissertation by articulating critical WGS perspectives related to religious pluralism and social justice (Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism* ch. 4). What would it look like, as Small asks, to apply Derrick Bell's "interest convergence" theory to discussions of White Christian hegemony, acknowledging that progress for non-Christians may only happen when it aligns with the interests of the majority (Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism* ch. 5; Bell 35)? How could the need to find common interests with White Christians change practical strategies for religiously marginalized groups seeking a more equitable and pluralistic society? Given the capacity for racial caste systems to adjust to new realities, as Isabel Wilkerson describes, how might Christian privilege play an increasingly important role in the US caste system as changing demographics make the country less White? These questions are areas for future research and opportunities for WGS to contribute to critical intersectional theorizing.

In thinking through ways that this study and the field of WGS could contribute to critical intersectional theorizing about religion, the relationship between religion, race, class and sexuality stands out as one possible avenue for self-reflection. Although WGS's

grounding in intersectional feminism is a critical strength that could empower us to respond effectively to intersectional social-justice issues related to religion, this study suggested the need for additional critical and intersectional self-reflection on the part of WGS faculty members. Although the survey respondents in this study did not comprise a representative sample of WGS faculty in the US, the participants as a whole were more White, less Christian, and less heterosexual than Americans as a whole, as well as more educated than Americans as a whole in order to meet the inclusion criteria for the study. The relationship between race, class, and sexuality in mediating willingness to engage intersectionally with religion is an area for future research and self-reflection. One interview participant in particular, Rose Thomas, pointed out how she challenged her students' assumptions that LGBTQ+ people were not religious, particularly in her upper-level courses rather than introductory courses:

I make a point that religion isn't just for heterosexuals, that gay people don't just leave religion, and that many gay and trans people are very pious and very committed to their religious traditions, and to changing them or to inventing new ones. Because I think there's . . . this assumption . . . that if you're gay, you leave, and that's it, and you're just not religious, that basically being gay is absolving yourself of any sort of religiosity. I'm like, no. Sure, sometimes it is, that's true sometimes . . . We often talk about the intersection there of race because the gays most likely to just leave religion are upper-middle-class Whites. The gays least likely to leave religion are from poor and working-class communities and communities of color . . . Sometimes they'll just stay and put up with very

homophobic religious communities, but sometimes a lot of them are inventing new communities.

Rose's insightful comments may also suggest some of the reasons WGS practitioners may be reluctant to commit to intersectionally teaching and analyzing religion. As workers in solidly middle-class institutions who may have more class and sometimes racial privilege than the American public as a whole, WGS professors who want to jettison religion from their personal and professional lives may be able to do so with fewer consequences than more marginalized people. WGS faculty members' feminist commitments and LGBTQ+ identities and politics put them at odds with the Protestant Christian religious majority in the US, which may contribute to a general reluctance to engage with any form of religion theoretically or pedagogically. Although the nexus of religion, race, class, and sexuality may be a challenge for WGS as it seeks to engage with religion more intersectionally, it may also be an opportunity for self-reflexive theorizing. Several survey participants in this study expressed that their reluctance to teach about religion was related to their own sense of alienation or even hostility toward religion, which suggests that self-reflection individually and communally may be warranted. Further exploring these intersecting identities and commitments may be a fruitful way for WGS faculty to demonstrate their willingness and commitment to integrating religion into social-justice theory and practice.

A final implication of theme one is that the extent to which this study revealed an integration of religion with topics of gender and sexuality reveals the focus of the field itself. I framed this study as exploring religion intersectionally in introductory WGS

pedagogy with a special attention to intersections with race, ethnicity, and nationality. My survey and interview recruitment materials and questions reflected this focus as well, but the findings of the study demonstrated the centrality of gender and sexuality in WGS. Across sources of data for this study, when religion was incorporated intersectionally, it seemed more likely to intersect with gender or sexuality than with race, ethnicity, or nationality. Integration of religion primarily as it relates to gender and sexuality may reveal the extent to which the field is still centered on these topics.⁸⁷ I will further discuss the focus of the field in the next section.

Theme 2: Significance and Areas of Future Research

The second theme of this study emphasizes the need to engage with religion relationally, acknowledging religion as a complex intersectional source of socialization for empowerment as well as oppression. This finding contributes to CRPT, which “critically examines the intertwined nature of religion and culture, and embraces an intersectional analysis of religious identity with race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, dis/ability, immigration status, socioeconomic class, and all other forms of social identity” (Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism* ch. 4). One implication of this theme is the need to continue to expand WGS’s intersectional focus beyond gender to include, at a minimum, “feminist, queer, and antiracist goals of social transformation” (Hawkesworth 511).

⁸⁷ As a relevant analogy, composition studies instructors seeking to incorporate religion saw possibilities for integration in discussions of authorship, textual analysis, and plotlines—namely, concepts of central concern to their discipline (Vander Lei and kyburz 61).

The centrality of women, gender, and feminism in WGS is a topic of significant historical and contemporary debate in the field of WGS (Wendy Brown; Friedman; Klein; Maparyan, “Feminism”; Romack; Zmroczek and Duchen). Although I acknowledge that the field of WGS is rooted in feminism, I agree with scholars who call for the field to embrace an expanded and intersectional view of social justice, including by embracing womanism as well as feminism (Maparyan, “Feminism”). As Ranjoo Seodu Herr argues, the insistence on focusing only on gender has often been a feature of White liberal feminism that transnational, “Third-World,” post-colonial, and other feminists from the Global South have critiqued. In expanding WGS beyond a narrow focus on gender, scholars should follow the lead of womanists and feminist of color from the US and from the Global South who have long called for these critical, intersectional, and transnational engagements.

This study’s emphasis on examining religion relationally and intersectionally fits in well within an expanded vision of the field, following scholars like Linda Woodhead. Woodhead examines whether supporting religious rights and gender/sexual rights are mutually exclusive goals for today’s feminists. After reviewing feminist literature on the intersections between religion and feminism, Woodhead calls for a more nuanced discussion of religion. She argues for careful, thoughtful interactions between religion and feminism in future research. Woodhead is calling for the type of work that I am engaged in, and I also believe that it has much to offer the field.

Calling for more intersectional attention to religion in WGS is also significant because sometimes pseudo-feminist concern-trolling is used to propagate Islamophobia

and Protestant Christian secularism in favor of any other religious, spiritual, or secular orientation. As transnational feminists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty have long argued, Western feminists construct ideas about oppressed women that serve racist, imperial, and colonial needs (*Feminism*). As scholars like Lila Abu-Lughod, Zillah Eisenstein, and Saba Mahmood have pointed out, these imperial feminist logics have often supported violent Islamophobia. Furthermore, hegemonic power systems have a vested interest in being able to blame persistent problems on a single aspect of identity in order to deflect intersectional social-justice concerns (Jiwani 106). In this context it is vital for WGS to make our commitments to intersectional anti-racism and religious pluralism clear. My dissertation clearly articulates the commitments of my participants to teaching about religion as it relates to race, ethnicity, and nationality, which is a significant contribution given the necessity of furthering this dialogue in feminist and WGS spaces.

My study's critique of scholars who approach religion as irrelevant, monolithic, marginal, or one-sidedly "good" or "bad" also builds on transnational feminist insights. Given the attention paid to religion in transnational feminist scholarship, White WGS faculty in the US who see religion as irrelevant might benefit from self-reflection on the extent to which their social location influences their assessment of religion in the social world. An inability to acknowledge religious, secular, and spiritual identities as relevant to social justice may be a result of an investment in White Christian supremacy or "the related concept of the false neutral of secularism" (Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism* ch. 4). My dissertation participants' critique of fellow WGS practitioners who refuse to

engage with religion and race should thus be read as a contribution to the larger self-reflexive conversations within WGS about anti-racism and transnational feminism.

Another key component of theme two was participants' emphasis on religion as potentially empowering as well as potentially oppressive. This finding resonates with Small's assertion that "[a]t the individual level, CRPT advocates for a pluralistic inclusion of all religious, secular, and spiritual identities, recognizing the liberatory potential of these identities upon individuals' lives" (*Critical Religious Pluralism* ch. 4). However, this study's findings saw the liberatory potential of religion and spirituality as extending beyond individuals to marginalized communities. This study's focus on addressing religion as both potentially oppressive and empowering should be further explored in future research, especially in relation to systemic, intersectional, and transnational factors that complicate understandings of religion and culture.

Specifically, more work remains to be done in the field of WGS with applying critical, intersectional, and transnational feminist perspectives to issues of Christian privilege and religious oppression. My participants' pushback against labeling any one religion as inherently oppressive may seem to go against some scholars' insistence on naming and opposing Christian hegemony in the US (Adams and Joshi; Joshi; Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism*). However, my participants' strategies suggest that some WGS faculty find discussions of Christian privilege pedagogically easier in the larger transnational context in which all world religions have been used in certain times and places to justify violence and oppression. On the one hand, using a transnational approach to religious oppression could be seen as coddling or pandering to Christian

privilege. On the other hand, if a transnational approach to religious oppression is more effective at prodding students to question and resist Christian hegemony, it certainly seems worthwhile. Further research should explore the extent to which transnational perspectives aid or impede discussions of Christian hegemony in the US.

Theme 3: Significance and Areas of Future Research

The final theme of this study suggested that student-centered feminist pedagogy with open and respectful dialogue might be an effective way to teach about religion intersectionally. Although the study participants did not name it as such, the emphasis on open and respectful dialogue incorporating many voices in theme three relates to CRPT's emphasis on "using religious pluralism as the means for resolving religious conflict in the United States" (Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism* ch. 4). Furthermore, theme three's emphasis on respectfully listening to religiously marginalized people tell their own stories echoes Small's suggestion to give special respect toward those with minoritized religious identities and commitments to religious pluralism (*Critical Religious Pluralism* ch. 4). Future research should build on these findings to explore the role of religious pluralism in feminist pedagogy.

This study makes a sustained argument that WGS instructors can and should incorporate discussions of religion into their feminist pedagogy. Rather than viewing WGS and feminism itself as inherently centered on women or gender, I take the position that WGS as a field and feminist pedagogies should incorporate a flexible and intersectional approach to social justice that recognizes that most salient aspects of social identity in any given situation of oppression are diverse. Although gender,

sexuality, and race are common intersections that WGS explores, a flexible intersectional approach recognizes that sometimes religion, class, or disability needs to be recognized and prioritized. Rather than nailing down the core intersectional areas that WGS “owns,” I suggest strategically recognizing what is relevant in each situation. In the words of Kimberlé Crenshaw, “if you want to know how many intersections matter, you’ve got to look at the context. What’s happening? What kind of discrimination is going on? What are the policies? What are the institutional structures that play a role in contributing to the exclusion of some people and not others?” (“On Intersectionality”). Religious, secular, and spiritual identities are not always the most relevant in a given situation and should not always be prioritized in a WGS introductory course; however, all WGS faculty could benefit from the ability to notice and explore religion when it *is* relevant. Since introductory WGS courses fulfill many college students’ diversity requirements, WGS faculty who recognize their students’ needs in a country and world increasingly defined by intersectional religious conflicts would do well to allow for open and respectful dialogue related to religion in their courses.

Incorporating intersectional analysis of religion as a part of feminist pedagogy in WGS introductory courses should ideally deepen intersectional analysis. In calling for more intersection attention to religious, secular, and spiritual identities in WGS, I want to be careful to avoid the trap of additive analysis that involves “the tendency to approach a given issue through the lens of an exhaustive ‘list’ of (ever expanding) political identity categories, which are then deployed ultimately to dismiss feminist and queer interventions as ‘failures’ because items on that list are unaccounted for” (Craven

202). The findings of this study reveal the strength of intersectional feminist pedagogy and the possibilities for deepening intersectional analysis. One of the implications of the third theme of this study is that common feminist pedagogical strategies can form the basis for addressing religion effectively. Rather than excoriating the field, this study explores the possibility that the field of WGS could draw on its founding epistemological and pedagogical commitments in order to respond to the growing social-justice challenges related to intersections of religion and race.

The third theme of this study also suggests some epistemological implications of incorporating an intersectional focus on religion into WGS. Theme three of this dissertation emphasized the epistemological grounding of many feminist pedagogical practices.⁸⁸ Viewing students as co-creators of knowledge shaped my participants' pedagogical practices, and their commitment to open and disruptive liberatory pedagogies was grounded in an understanding of knowledge-making as a political project. As a field, WGS works to create the institutional and "intellectual space" necessary first to imagine and then to promote holistic social justice (Aaron and Walby 1). In other words, WGS must first create new practices of knowledge creation in order to accomplish its goals. As Audre Lorde reminds us, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (112). Epistemologically, since WGS cannot rely on colonial, White supremacist, heteropatriarchal tools of knowledge production to build a

⁸⁸ See, for example, Das Gupta, who argues that much feminist pedagogical scholarship comes out of instructor's own experience in "introduc[ing] alternative pedagogical practices based on epistemologies that call into question entrenched assumptions about what knowledge is, who has it, different types of knowledge, how they develop, how they are expressed, and about the politics of teaching and learning" (118).

new and equitable society, creating new tools for creating knowledge is core to WGS's mission. Since I view WGS primarily as an epistemological intervention in the academy, challenging the Christian-hegemonic and Christian-secular foundations of our public universities and disciplinary knowledge systems fits in well with WGS's epistemological mission from my vantage point.

Crucially, opposing White Christian supremacy as a force of oppression in the US involves rethinking WGS and feminism's relationship to secularism, which is often an invisible norm that enforces and responds to aspects of the dominant religion, as discussed in Chapter 1. As Eva Midden argues, "the ignorance of the secular legacy is closely connected to whiteness, or the invisibility of the white norm. Therefore, we need more knowledge and understanding of the relationship between Christianity, secularism, and so-called enlightened Western societies" (213). Instead of prescribing secularism as the remedy to religious conflict, scholars like Small prescribe religious pluralism as the method for solving religious conflict (*Critical Religious Pluralism* ch. 4). In many ways, my participants' emphasis on open and respectful dialogue as a fundamental pedagogical practice related to religion echoes Small's recommendation. Rather than attempting to remove or ignore possible sources of religious conflict through the false neutrality of secularism, my participants recommended welcoming diverse and pluralistic voices to the conversation. In addition to the practical pedagogical purpose of avoiding argumentative interactions in the classroom, this practice suggests that WGS's epistemological grounding has the potential to inspire effective social-justice praxis related to religious pluralism.

Rethinking religious pluralism as the pedagogical and theoretical response to religious conflict may also necessitate further epistemological theorizing about spirituality in knowledge production. Since resisting hierarchical views of knowledge production is a founding goal in WGS, our field should be open to knowledges influenced by spirituality.⁸⁹ Along this vein, I suggest a postsecular epistemic openness to spirituality as a critical intervention for WGS's transformation of the academy. Embracing open and respectful dialogue about religion, as theme three of this study calls for, might pave the way for WGS to epistemologically revolt against the "faithful secularism" of the academy as a kind of transdisciplinary transformation of the neoliberal university (Crowley 256). A postsecular WGS would embrace a "softer" form of secularism, to borrow Line Nyhagen's term. Instead of insisting that religion and spirituality have no place in public or private life (a "hard" secularism), or allowing religion and spirituality to function purely in the private sphere (a "mixed hard and soft" secularism), Nyhagen's "soft" secularism would allow feminists to bring their experiences of spirituality and their lived religion into both private and public feminist spaces (499). For me, an epistemologically postsecular WGS would be a place where we are honest with each other about the deep religious, secular, and spiritual commitments and experiences that shape our knowledge without forcing anyone to follow someone else's epistemological commitments.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Fernandes, *Transforming*; Keating, "I'm a Citizen"; Maparyan, "Feminism."

In thinking about the epistemological implications of this study, I draw on the insights of Aisha, who theorized in our interview about the liberatory potential of spirituality. Aisha defined spirituality as “something that has the potential of being extremely subversive, that has been historically used as ways of bringing about change, whether it’s inner transformation or social-justice change. . . The spiritual is . . . the feminine or the queer aspects of religion.” To the extent to which intersectional feminist liberation is a spiritual project, enforcing secularity in our classrooms could have negative consequences. For Aisha and other feminists of color, there are also often racist effects of the secular bludgeoning the spiritual. For example, Leela Fernandes has criticized secular US feminists’ refusal to acknowledge the spiritual themes of Gloria Anzaldúa’s work (*Transnational* 184). Aisha similarly explained the importance of incorporating alternative epistemological frameworks outside of White-Christian-secularism in her teaching:

I constantly center women of color writers and theorists in my classrooms. So what that means is automatically they tend to be readings that are not secular necessarily, they’re not White secular feminism, but rather they’re always already high to the spiritual. So for example, Gloria Anzaldúa’s work, you can’t read *Borderlands* and not talk about religion/spirituality because her entire work comes from a space where she is struggling with the sexual and the spiritual together, and she critiques her own religion and she brings in a very critical lens around religion while also not letting it go.

Embracing epistemological frameworks outside of White-Christian-secularism could thus be an important part of creating a more racially just WGS.

My dissertation adds to the work of feminists of color already making these arguments. Jasmin Zine, for example describes the potential for anti-racist feminism to bridge the secular and religious divide:

Accepting critical faith-centered voices as valid constituents of academic thought is not meant to imply an uncritical moral relativism but merely asserts that these voices be allowed to occupy spaces within the arena of legitimate academic engagement. The validity of faith-centered knowledges, like all other forms of knowledge, is therefore open to contestation. However, these knowledges should not be invalidated simply by virtue of not being secular in orientation. (183)

Similarly, Lata Mani troubles the arbitrary epistemological divide between the sacred and the secular from a Hindu perspective, and responding to the intersectional oppression of Christian hegemony and racism, Irene Lara reclaims the maligned “Bruja” as an inspiration for spiritual activist epistemologies for Chicanas. Applying these epistemological critiques of secularity to WGS pedagogy is a fruitful area for future research.

An epistemologically postsecular and pluralistic WGS would be founded on commitments to open and respectful dialogue across religious, spiritual, and secular differences, as discussed in theme three, and would also be an outgrowth of our field’s founding and core values. Because WGS is an epistemologically revolutionary project, we should be willing to show openness to knowledge production that challenges

institutional norms, such as norms of patriarchy, hegemony, or, in this case, secularity. In order to transform the social world, we have to redefine what counts as knowledge and who counts as knowledge-makers. And to do this, we must be transdisciplinary, resisting arbitrary disciplinary boundaries that territorialize knowledge. I think transdisciplinarity is a key defining feature of the field of women's and gender studies and to me, transdisciplinarity means rejecting the myth that knowledge needs to come in discipline-specific shapes.⁹⁰ Rather, any knowledge worth seeking has the potential to challenge boundaries of academic disciplines.

Since, in the words of Gloria Bowles, WGS “does not conceive of knowledge in a compartmentalized way,” we should resist arbitrary divisions of knowledge that separate “academic” knowledge from activism but also from other forms of knowledge, including embodied forms of knowledge like intuition and spiritual forms of knowledge that deal with interconnections with other beings (Bowles 8). One way we can accomplish this epistemological goal is by tapping into transdisciplinary knowledge that exists, in the words of Basarab Nicolescu, in the “sacred” space “beyond all disciplines” (8; 2).⁹¹ Transdisciplinary knowledge is not exclusively secular and may sometimes be accessed through spiritual and religious practices. More theorizing remains to be done on the

⁹⁰ Other scholars have used the term *interdisciplinarity* rather than *transdisciplinarity* in articulating this aspect of WGS's knowledge production. See, for example, Kitch.

⁹¹ For Nicolescu, there exists a “sacred zone of nonresistance” across all levels of disciplinary “Reality” and that connects us in some way to the “Real” that exists beyond “Realities” (8–9). Although Nicolescu does not appear to use “sacred” in a religious sense, the implication that reality exists beyond arbitrary divisions of knowledge has implications for dividing knowledge into categories of secularity and spirituality.

connections between transdisciplinarity, spirituality, and the epistemological commitments of WGS.

Conclusion

By exploring how introductory WGS courses teach about religious intersectionally, this study adds to the scholarly literature by building depth in a specific case study. This study's findings confirm many of the suggested best practices given by scholars applying a critical social-justice lens to pedagogy about religion, spirituality, and secularity. Furthermore, this study examines some of the many reasons practitioners within WGS may shy away from teaching about religion. Since critical pedagogy cannot be mass produced but is instead lived out by individual teachers in their own unique circumstances, building depth of understanding around the factors that influence a specific group of teachers in a specific course is helpful for understanding the challenges and opportunities in WGS and related fields for implementing a critical and intersectional pedagogy of religion. In this study I wanted to examine the discursive processes within introductory WGS courses in the US that give meaning to religion and race because I consider WGS's teaching mission to be vital for promoting holistic social justice. If our students have the tools to critically analyze religion, secularity, and spirituality in complex, intersectional ways, I believe they will be even more equipped to resist subtle and dangerous forms of oppression like xenophobia, Islamophobia, and Christian hegemony.

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APPENDIX A

Survey Recruitment Email

Subject: Participants needed: Teaching about religion in WGS intro classes

[The following introduction will be omitted if the recruitment email is sent out by Marcella instead of Dr. Sahlin]

Dear Colleagues,

My doctoral student, Marcella Clinard, is recruiting participants for her dissertation study. Please consider participating, and please also consider sharing this message with others who meet the criteria below.

Sincerely yours,

Claire Sahlin

Dear Women's and Gender Studies Faculty,

My name is Marcella Clinard, and I am a doctoral candidate in Multicultural Women's and Gender Studies at Texas Woman's University. Under the supervision of Dr. Claire L. Sahlin, I am conducting a dissertation study of how instructors teach (or don't teach) about religion in general introductory women's and gender studies courses. The NWSA 2018 Call For Proposals listed "religious bigotry (including both Islamophobia and anti-Semitism)" as examples of "desperate and retrograde responses to current social, political, economic and environmental challenges," and I want to examine how these topics are taught in introductory women's and gender studies courses.

The purpose of this study is to examine how instructors of introductory women's and gender studies classes teach about religion as it relates to current social justice issues concerning racism. My goal is to gather information about teaching in the field of women's and gender studies and not to judge how individual instructors choose to teach

their courses. Whether or not you teach about religion in your class, you are eligible to participate in this survey if you are an adult (18 years and older) who has previously taught a college-level general introductory course in the field of women's and gender studies (e.g., Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies).

This online survey will take approximately thirty to forty minutes to complete, and you will be asked to answer brief questions about yourself, your current institution, and how you teach about religion in your introductory course.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. There is a potential loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, electronic meetings, and internet transactions. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. If you would like to receive a summary of the results of this study, or if you have any questions, please email the principal investigator at mclinard@twu.edu.

If you are aware of other individuals who meet the criteria for this study, please feel free to send this announcement to them.

This study has been approved by the TWU IRB. Please click on the link below to view the informed consent and participate in the study:

(Psychdata link was here.)

Sincerely,

Marcella C. Clinard

Ph.D. Candidate in Multicultural Women's & Gender Studies

Phone: (940)898-2119

Email: mclinard@twu.edu

Texas Woman's University

APPENDIX B
Survey Instrument

Question Logic

If [Yes (continue with survey)...] is selected, then skip to question [No logic applied]
 If [No (close out of window)] is selected, then skip to question [GO TO END OF SURVEY]

Page Break

Thank you for agreeing to take this survey on how WGS faculty teach (or don't teach) about religion in introductory women's and gender studies courses. For the purposes of this study, please describe your teaching practices within the last two years (or as recently as possible) in your introductory women's and gender studies course rather than in any other course you may teach. Our goal is to gather information about teaching in the field of women's and gender studies and not to judge how individual instructors choose to teach their courses.

- 2) How important do you feel teaching about religion is in introductory WGS courses?
- Extremely important [Value=1]
 Very important [Value=2]
 Somewhat important [Value=3]
 Not very important [Value=4]
 Not at all important [Value=5]
- | | Extremely influential | Very influential | Somewhat influential | Not very influential | Not at all influential |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 3) How influential have current events in the last two years been to how you teach about issues related to religion in your introductory WGS course? | <input type="radio"/> [Value=1] | <input type="radio"/> [Value=2] | <input type="radio"/> [Value=3] | <input type="radio"/> [Value=4] | <input type="radio"/> [Value=5] |
| 4) In general, how influential do you think your students' religious/spiritual identities are to how you teach your introductory WGS course? | <input type="radio"/> [Value=1] | <input type="radio"/> [Value=2] | <input type="radio"/> [Value=3] | <input type="radio"/> [Value=4] | <input type="radio"/> [Value=5] |
| 5) In general, how influential do you think your own religious/spiritual identity is to how you teach your introductory WGS course? | <input type="radio"/> [Value=1] | <input type="radio"/> [Value=2] | <input type="radio"/> [Value=3] | <input type="radio"/> [Value=4] | <input type="radio"/> [Value=5] |
- 6) If you assign a textbook for your introductory course, which best describes your use of the textbook?
- I do not use a textbook. [Value=1]
 There is no chapter on religion/spirituality in the textbook I use. [Value=2]
 There is a chapter on religion/spirituality in the textbook I use, but I never or rarely assign it to students. [Value=3]
 There is a chapter on religion/spirituality in the textbook I use, and I usually assign it to students. [Value=4]
 There is a chapter on religion/spirituality in the textbook I use, and I always assign it to students. [Value=5]
- 7) Please type the title of the textbook you assign. If you don't assign a textbook or prefer not to say, leave this question blank.
-
- 8) Which of the following topics are brought up occasionally by students in your introductory WGS course? Check all that apply.
- Islamophobia [Checked=1]
 Anti-Semitism [Checked=1]
 Zionism [Checked=1]
 Religious fundamentalist movements [Checked=1]
 Oppression of religious minorities [Checked=1]
 Religiously or spiritually motivated social-justice activism [Checked=1]
 Resurgence of white nationalism (e.g., in relation to the August 2017 events in Charlottesville) [Checked=1]
 None of the above [Checked=1]
 Other contemporary current events or issues related to religion that you address in your class [Checked=1]
-
- 9) Which of the following topics are discussed in assigned readings, films, or other texts in your introductory WGS course? Check all that apply.
- Islamophobia [Checked=1]
 Anti-Semitism [Checked=1]
 Zionism [Checked=1]
 Religious fundamentalist movements [Checked=1]
 Oppression of religious minorities [Checked=1]
 Religiously or spiritually motivated social-justice activism [Checked=1]
 Resurgence of white nationalism (e.g., in relation to the August 2017 events in Charlottesville) [Checked=1]
 None of the above [Checked=1]
 Other contemporary current events or issues related to religion that you address in your class [Checked=1]

10) Which of the following topics are used as a brief reference or example during instructor-led lecture/discussion in your introductory WGS course? Check all that apply.

- Islamophobia [Checked=1]
 Anti-Semitism [Checked=1]
 Zionism [Checked=1]
 Religious fundamentalist movements [Checked=1]
 Oppression of religious minorities [Checked=1]
 Religiously or spiritually motivated social-justice activism [Checked=1]
 Resurgence of white nationalism (e.g., in relation to the August 2017 events in Charlottesville) [Checked=1]
 None of the above [Checked=1]
 Other contemporary current events or issues related to religion that you address in your class [Checked=1]

11) Which of the following topics are discussed in detail in instructor-led lecture/discussion in your introductory WGS course? Check all that apply.

- Islamophobia [Checked=1]
 Anti-Semitism [Checked=1]
 Zionism [Checked=1]
 Religious fundamentalist movements [Checked=1]
 Oppression of religious minorities [Checked=1]
 Religiously or spiritually motivated social-justice activism [Checked=1]
 Resurgence of white nationalism (e.g., in relation to the August 2017 events in Charlottesville) [Checked=1]
 None of the above [Checked=1]
 Other contemporary current events or issues related to religion that you address in your class [Checked=1]

12) Which of the following topics are addressed through an assignment in your introductory class? Check all that apply.

- Islamophobia [Checked=1]
 Anti-Semitism [Checked=1]
 Zionism [Checked=1]
 Religious fundamentalist movements [Checked=1]
 Oppression of religious minorities [Checked=1]
 Religiously or spiritually motivated social-justice activism [Checked=1]
 Resurgence of white nationalism (e.g., in relation to the August 2017 events in Charlottesville) [Checked=1]
 None of the above [Checked=1]
 Other contemporary current events or issues related to religion that you address in your class [Checked=1]

Page Break

Answer the following questions in your own words in as much detail as you would like.

13) What fears or inhibitions might prevent or inhibit you from teaching about religion in your introductory women's and gender studies (WGS) course?

10) Which of the following topics are used as a brief reference or example during instructor-led lecture/discussion in your introductory WGS course? Check all that apply.

- Islamophobia [Checked=1]
 Anti-Semitism [Checked=1]
 Zionism [Checked=1]
 Religious fundamentalist movements [Checked=1]
 Oppression of religious minorities [Checked=1]
 Religiously or spiritually motivated social-justice activism [Checked=1]
 Resurgence of white nationalism (e.g., in relation to the August 2017 events in Charlottesville) [Checked=1]
 None of the above [Checked=1]
 Other contemporary current events or issues related to religion that you address in your class [Checked=1]

11) Which of the following topics are discussed in detail in instructor-led lecture/discussion in your introductory WGS course? Check all that apply.

- Islamophobia [Checked=1]
 Anti-Semitism [Checked=1]
 Zionism [Checked=1]
 Religious fundamentalist movements [Checked=1]
 Oppression of religious minorities [Checked=1]
 Religiously or spiritually motivated social-justice activism [Checked=1]
 Resurgence of white nationalism (e.g., in relation to the August 2017 events in Charlottesville) [Checked=1]
 None of the above [Checked=1]
 Other contemporary current events or issues related to religion that you address in your class [Checked=1]

12) Which of the following topics are addressed through an assignment in your introductory class? Check all that apply.

- Islamophobia [Checked=1]
 Anti-Semitism [Checked=1]
 Zionism [Checked=1]
 Religious fundamentalist movements [Checked=1]
 Oppression of religious minorities [Checked=1]
 Religiously or spiritually motivated social-justice activism [Checked=1]
 Resurgence of white nationalism (e.g., in relation to the August 2017 events in Charlottesville) [Checked=1]
 None of the above [Checked=1]
 Other contemporary current events or issues related to religion that you address in your class [Checked=1]

Page Break

Answer the following questions in your own words in as much detail as you would like.

13) What fears or inhibitions might prevent or inhibit you from teaching about religion in your introductory women's and gender studies (WGS) course?

(28000 characters remaining)

- 14) What aspects of your background or education do you think most affect how you teach (or why you choose not to teach) about religion in your introductory WGS course?

(28000 characters remaining)

- 15) If you wanted to improve how you taught about religion in your introductory WGS class, what would you do differently in the future?

(28000 characters remaining)

Page Break

Please answer some background questions about yourself as an instructor and about your current institutional location.

16) What is your gender? Check all that apply.

- woman [Checked=1]
 man [Checked=1]
 nonbinary/genderqueer [Checked=1]
 agender [Checked=1]
 transgender [Checked=1]
 other/prefer not to say [Checked=1]

17) What is your race? Check all that apply.

- Asian/Asian-American [Checked=1]
 Middle Eastern/North African [Checked=1]
 Black/African/African-American [Checked=1]
 White [Checked=1]
 Latinx/Chicanx/Hispanic [Checked=1]
 Indigenous/Native American [Checked=1]
 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander [Checked=1]
 Other/prefer not to say [Checked=1]

18) Which description best fits your sexual orientation?

- asexual [Value=1]
 lesbian/gay [Value=2]
 bisexual/pansexual [Value=3]
 queer [Value=4]
 heterosexual/straight [Value=5]
 other/prefer not to say [Value=6]

19) Which best describes your religious affiliation or orientation?

- atheist/agnostic [Value=1]
 spiritual but not religious [Value=2]
 Muslim [Value=3]
 Christian [Value=4]
 Jewish [Value=5]
 Buddhist [Value=6]
 Hindu [Value=7]
 Other/prefer not to say [Value=8]

20) If you identify as Christian, which of the following best describes your current Christian denomination?

- I do not identify as Christian [Value=6]
 Catholic [Value=1]
 Evangelical Protestant [Value=2]
 Mainline Protestant [Value=3]
 Latter-Day Saint/Mormon [Value=4]
 Other (please specify) [Value=5]

21) In which fields do you have a graduate degree? Check all that apply.

- the field of women's and gender studies [Checked=1]
 Humanities discipline [Checked=1]
 Social science [Checked=1]

- Other field or degree in progress (please explain) [Checked=1]

- 22) What best describes the highest level of your women's and gender studies (WGS) coursework?

- no coursework [Value=1]
 undergraduate courses [Value=2]
 graduate courses [Value=3]
 graduate certificate [Value=4]
 master's degree [Value=5]
 doctoral degree [Value=6]

- 23) How many years have you taught WGS on the college level?

- 0-5 [Value=1]
 6-10 [Value=2]
 11-20 [Value=3]
 20-30 [Value=4]
 31+ [Value=5]

- 24) Which best describes your current faculty status?

- tenured [Value=1]
 tenure-track [Value=2]
 full-time lecturer [Value=3]
 adjunct/confingent [Value=4]
 graduate assistant or teaching fellow [Value=5]
 Other [Value=6]

Page Break

- 25) Which best describes the institution where you teach? Check all that apply.

- public [Checked=1]
 private [Checked=1]
 community college [Checked=1]
 four-year college or university [Checked=1]
 two-year college [Checked=1]
 religiously-affiliated [Checked=1]
 HBCU (historically black college or university) [Checked=1]
 historically women's college [Checked=1]

- 26) Which best describes the status of women's and gender studies at your institution?

- independent department [Value=1]
 interdisciplinary program [Value=2]
 Other (please specify) [Value=3]

- 27) What is the name of the institution where you teach? (This answer will be used in order to look up the student demographics of your institution. You may leave this question blank.)

- 28) What is the course title of your introductory women's and gender studies class?

- 29) When was the last time you taught an introductory women's and gender studies (WGS) course?

- Fall 2016 or more recently [Value=1]
 within the last five years [Value=2]

more than five years ago [Value=3]

30) What is the course level of your introductory WGS course?

- freshman [Value=1]
 sophomore [Value=2]
 junior [Value=3]
 senior [Value=4]

31) Why do most of your students take your introductory WGS course?

- interest in material [Value=1]
 fulfills requirement [Value=2]
 Other (please specify) [Value=3]

32) What is the average class size of your introductory WGS course?

- less than 30 [Value=1]
 30-50 [Value=2]
 51-75 [Value=3]
 75+ [Value=4]

33) What is your overall impression of the typical demographics of your introductory WGS class compared to the overall demographics of your university? Check all that apply.

- About the same as university demographics [Checked=1]
 Fewer men than university demographics [Checked=1]
 More racially diverse than university demographics [Checked=1]
 Less racially diverse than university demographics [Checked=1]
 More sexual minorities than university demographics [Checked=1]
 Other (please specify) [Checked=1]

Page Break

34) Do you have any other insights you would like to share about teaching about religion and race in relation to each other in introductory WGS courses?

(1000 characters remaining)

*35) Would you be willing to share your most recent introductory WGS course syllabus?

- No [Value=1]
 Yes [Value=2]

Question Logic

If [No] is selected, then skip to question [#41]
 If [Yes] is selected, then skip to question [#36]

Page Break

*36) There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality with any email, downloading, and internet transactions. In addition, there is a risk of loss of anonymity since it is possible that your files contain identifying data. In order to maintain your privacy and confidentiality, I will password protect and encrypt all digital copies of this data, and store all physical copies in a locked filing cabinet. All identifying data will be destroyed within 5 years from the end of the study. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. By sharing your syllabus and/or teaching materials with me, you give me non-exclusive rights to anonymously quote and excerpt from your data in my dissertation. Non-exclusive rights will not limit any future publications by you or other authorized by you.

- I give permission to quote and excerpt from my syllabus and/or teaching materials [Value=1]
 I do not give permission (please leave questions 37-39 blank) [Value=2]

If you are willing to share your most recent introductory WGS course syllabus and any other teaching materials from your introductory class (assignments, discussion prompts, assignments, etc.) that specifically discuss religion, you may either email them as attachments to

mcolinard@twu.edu, or copy and paste them in the textboxes below.

- 37) In the following text boxes, please copy and paste your most recent introductory WGS course syllabus, and, if you would like, any other teaching materials from your introductory class (assignments, discussion prompts, assignments, etc.) that specifically discuss religion. If your syllabus is longer than 28000 characters, please copy and paste the remaining portion on the next question. You may leave this question blank.

(28000 characters remaining)

Page Break

- 38) Please copy and paste the remaining portion of your most recent introductory course syllabus, or any other teaching materials from your introductory class (assignments, discussion prompts, assignments, etc.) that specifically discuss religion. You may leave this question blank.

(28000 characters remaining)

Page Break

- 39) Please copy and paste any other teaching materials from your introductory class (assignments, discussion prompts, assignments, etc.) that specifically discuss religion. You may leave this question blank.

(28000 characters remaining)

40) Which of the following best describes the syllabus shared above? Check all that apply.

- I created this syllabus [Checked=1]
- Someone else created this syllabus [Checked=1]
- I am required to use this syllabus [Checked=1]
- I adapted this syllabus from other sources [Checked=1]
- Other (please explain) [Checked=1]

Page Break

*41) If you would be willing to receive follow-up emails about this study, please enter your email address below. I may email you about your syllabus or to request to schedule an in-depth interview on this topic if your survey answers indicate interest and proficiency in teaching about religion.

- I do not consent to receiving follow-up emails. [Value=1]
- I consent to receiving follow-up emails at this email address: [Value=3]

Automatic Page Break

Intersections of Religion and Race in Women's and Gender Studies: Possibilities for Teaching Introductory Courses

Thank you for participating in this survey!

For maximum confidentiality, please close this window.

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APPENDIX C

Interview Recruitment Email

Dear _____,

OPTION 1 (recruitment from survey):

My name is Marcella Clinard, and you recently responded to my survey about teaching about religion in introductory women's and gender studies classes. Your answers on the survey indicated your interest and proficiency in teaching about religion. Based on your answers to the survey, I am emailing you to ask if you would be interested in participating in an in-depth interview on the same topic.

OPTION 2 (recruitment outside survey):

My name is Marcella Clinard, and I'm conducting research for my dissertation about teaching about religion in introductory women's and gender studies classes. [**Your teaching/publicly listed research interests/publications/etc.**] indicate your interest and proficiency in teaching about religion, and I think your perspectives would be a valuable addition to my study. Based on [**your teaching/research interest/publications/etc.,**] I am emailing you to ask if you would be interested in participating in an in-depth interview on teaching about religion in introductory women's and gender studies courses.

The purpose of this study is to examine how instructors of introductory women's and gender studies classes teach about religion as it relates to current social justice issues concerning racism. In order to participate, you must be over the age of 18, and you must have previously taught, supervised, or directly influenced the curriculum of a general introductory women's and gender studies class in the United States at any time. Before the interview takes place, you will print, sign, scan and return the attached consent form. The interview should last approximately sixty minutes, and can take place

[if participant is in North Texas] at a quiet, semi-private location of your choosing, such as your faculty office.

[if participant is not in North Texas] using a video conferencing tool of your choice (i.e., Google Hangouts, Skype, Facebook Messenger video chat, etc.).

During the interview, I will ask you questions about teaching about religion and race, and I will record your answers for further examination. If you choose to participate, you will create a pseudonym for me to use in order to protect your confidentiality and privacy. There is a risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, electronic meetings, and internet transactions. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

If you are interested in participating, please email me at mclinard@twu.edu with a few suggestions of convenient times for you over the next few weeks. Please also email me if you have any questions about this study. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Marcella Clinard

Ph.D. Candidate in Multicultural Women's & Gender Studies

Phone: (940)898-2119

Email: mclinard@twu.edu

Texas Woman's University

APPENDIX D

Interview Consent Form

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title:

Intersections of Religion and Race in Women's and Gender Studies:
Possibilities for Teaching Introductory Courses

Investigators:

Marcella Clinard, M.A., principal investigator, (940)898-2119, mclinard@twu.edu
Claire L. Sahlin, Ph.D., faculty advisor, (940)898-3329, csahlin@twu.edu

Key Information:

You are being asked to participate in a study for Marcella Clinard's Multicultural Women's and Gender Studies dissertation at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of the current study is to examine how instructors of introductory women's and gender studies classes teach (or don't teach) about religion as it relates to current social justice issues concerning racism. You were selected to participate in this interview because your answers on the initial survey indicate your interest and proficiency in teaching about religion. You will be asked to participate in an hour-long, audio-recorded interview and potential follow-up emails with a total time commitment of no more than three hours. If you are located in North Texas, the interview can take place at a quiet, semi-private location of your choosing, such as your faculty office, and if you are located elsewhere, the interview can take place using a video conferencing tool of your choice (i.e., Google Hangouts, Skype, Facebook Messenger video chat, etc.). The risks of this study include loss of time, fatigue, potential loss of anonymity and confidentiality, and emotional discomfort. You are eligible to participate in this interview if you

- (a) are at least 18 years old
- (b) and have previously taught, supervised, or directly influenced the curriculum of a college-level general introductory course in the field of women's and gender studies (e.g., Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies) in the United States. This includes serving as the teacher of record for an introductory women's and gender studies course, creating materials specifically for an introductory women's and gender studies course (e.g., lesson plans, syllabi, textbooks), and/or supervising an introductory women's and gender studies course taught by another instructor.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you are interested in learning more about this study, please review this consent form carefully and take your time deciding whether or not you want to participate. Please feel free to ask the researcher any questions you have about the study at any time.

Description of Procedures

If you are willing to participate, you will first print, sign, scan, and return this consent form to Marcella Clinard at mclinard@twu.edu along with suggestions of several times that would be convenient for you over the next few weeks to schedule the interview. You will work with the researcher to schedule a time for an hour-long interview, and the researcher will email you the interview questions ahead of time.

On the day of the interview, you will work with the researcher to create a pseudonym which will be used instead of your name in the the dissertation. The researcher will ask you questions about teaching about religion and race and record your answers for further analysis. You are welcome to take breaks, decline to answer a specific question or end the interview at any time.

Approved by the
Texas Woman's University
Institutional Review Board
Approved: March 12, 2019
Modifications Approved:
July 15, 2019

Initial: _____
Page 1 of 3

Your interview will be audio recorded. The researcher, her faculty advisor, and, temporarily, a professional transcriptionist will have access to these recordings, and they will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

After the interview, you are welcome to contact the researcher through email if you want to add or change anything you said in the interview. After several months, the researcher will email you a copy of your interview transcript with notes about possible themes in your interview. At this point, you are welcome, but not required, to respond in as much detail as you would like to confirm, deny, or expand on the researcher's preliminary findings.

I anticipate that email communication in order to schedule the interview and obtain informed consent will take no more than 30 minutes in total, the interview will take 90 minutes maximum, and optional member checking will take 60 minutes maximum, for a maximum time commitment of three hours.

Potential Risks

The following section will explain the potential risks of participating in this study and the steps the researcher will take to minimize these risks.

- (a) There are potential risks of loss of time and fatigue. In order to minimize these risks, you can take breaks or discontinue your participation at any time.
- (b) There is a potential risk of loss of anonymity. I will not ask you to divulge your name, but communication through email and during the interview may give the researcher your name. Due to the nature of the interview, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
- (c) There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality with any email, downloading, and internet transactions. In order to maintain your privacy and confidentiality, I will password protect and encrypt all digital copies of your data, and store all physical copies in a locked filing cabinet. Digital files that contain identifying data will be password-protected and encrypted, and stored on a flash drive kept in a locked filing cabinet. I will use your chosen pseudonym instead of your name. All identifying data will be destroyed within 5 years from the end of the study. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law.
- (d) There is a potential risk of emotional discomfort when discussing issues related to religion and race. You can decline to answer specific questions or stop the interview at any time. If you do feel distressed or experience emotional discomfort, you can seek support by using the Psychology Today Find a Therapist Tool to look for counseling services in your area: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>

Any personally identifying information will be removed from your interview transcript, and, after this removal, your answers could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you or your legally authorized representative.

If you would like to participate in the current study but not allow your de-identified data to be used for future research, please initial here: _____

The researcher will try to prevent any problems that could possibly happen. You should let the researcher know at once if there is a problem and they will assist you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen if you decide to take part in this research.

Approved by the
Texas Woman's University
Institutional Review Board
Approved: March 12, 2019
Modifications Approved:
July 15, 2019

Initial: _____
Page 2 of 3

Participation and Benefits

Your involvement in this research study is completely voluntary, and you may stop participating in this study at any time without penalty. There are no direct benefits to the participants. The researcher will benefit from this study by learning more about the topic of study. If you wish to receive information about the results of this study, please request that information by email from the researcher listed at the top of this form.

Questions Regarding the Study

If you have any questions about the study, please contact the researcher; her phone number and email address are at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at (940)898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.

Consent

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to participate as a participant in this study and understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

Please print your name above

Participant Signature

Date

Please print, sign and initial, scan, and return this consent form to Marcella Clinard at mclinard@twu.edu. Thank you for your participation!

Approved by the
Texas Woman's University
Institutional Review Board
Approved: March 12, 2019
Modifications Approved:
July 15, 2019

APPENDIX E

Interview Guide

[I provided the numbered questions to the interview participants ahead of time, and asked all participants the same ten questions. However, I asked different prompting questions, such as the ones listed below, depending on the answers that my participants give. The prompting questions were not given to participants ahead of time and not all prompting questions were asked of all participants.]

1. **Option 1 (if participants have previously taught an introductory WGS class):**

How do you teach about religion in your introductory WGS course?

Option 2 (if participants have previously influenced or supervised but NOT taught an introductory WGS class):

How is religion taught in the introductory WGS courses you have influenced or supervised?

[Possible prompting questions:]

- a. What readings do you assign that relate to religion?
- b. What kinds of questions do you ask that relate to religion?
- c. What kinds of assignments do you use that relate to religion?
- d. Are there any other ways you teach about religion in your introductory WGS class or in other classes?

2. How do you think teaching about religion relates to social justice, if at all?

[Possible prompting question:]

- a. What do you want your students to know about religion as it relates to social justice by the end of your course?

3. How, if at all, do you see religion and race as connecting or intersecting?

4. How, if at all, do you teach about Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, Zionism, and/or Christian white-nationalism?
5. What insights would you like to share about teaching about religion and race in relation to each other?

[Possible prompting question:]

- a. How, if at all, does the framework of intersectionality help you teach about religion in relation to other aspects of the social world?

6. What aspects of your background or education do you think most affect how you teach about religion?

[Possible prompting questions:]

- a. What have you done to prepare yourself for teaching about religion?
- b. How, if at all, has your own religious identity affected how you teach about religion?

7. What other factors affect how you teach about religion?

[Possible prompting questions:]

- a. How, if at all, have current events in the last two years affected how you teach about issues related to religion?
- b. How, if at all, do your students' religious identities affect how you teach about religion?
- c. How, if at all, does your institutional location affect how you teach about religion?

8. What fears or inhibitions do you have related to teaching about religion?

9. **Option 1 (if participants have previously taught an introductory WGS class):**

If you wanted to improve how you taught about religion in your introductory WGS class, what would you do differently in the future?

Option 2 (if participants have previously influenced or supervised but NOT taught an introductory WGS class): If you wanted to improve how religion was taught in introductory WGS classes, what would you recommend doing differently in the future?

10. What other insights would you like to share about teaching about religion or race?

APPENDIX F
First-Cycle Codes

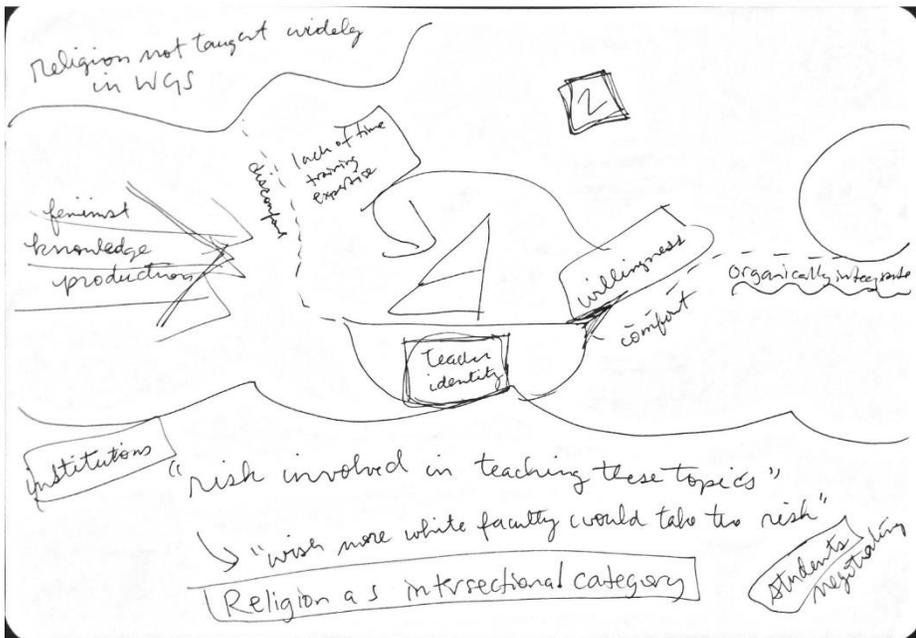
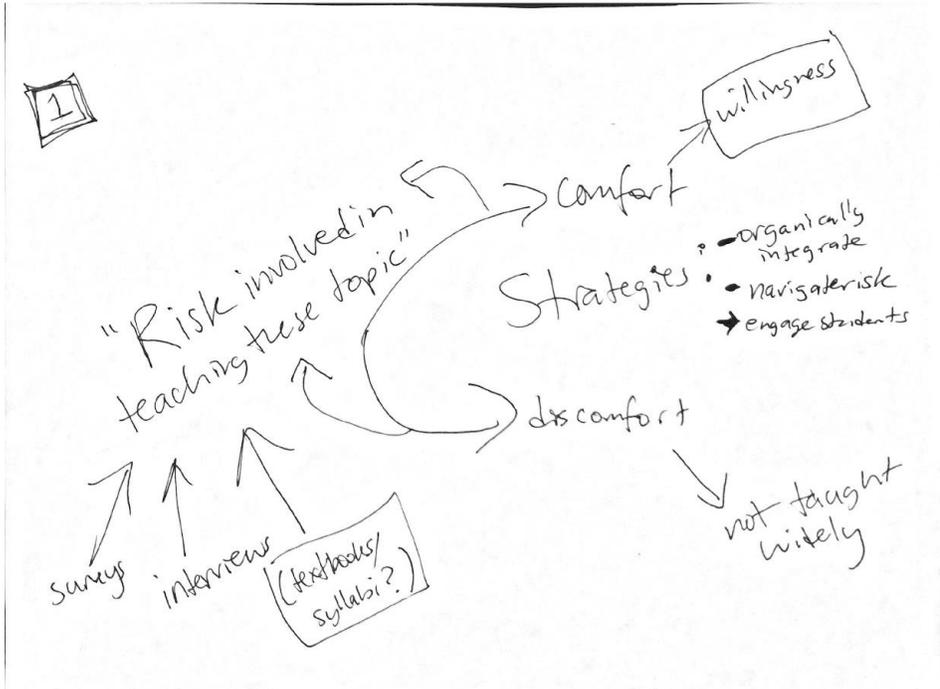
Name	Files	References
Insights about religion and social justice	1	1
<i>does religion promote values of equality or hierarchy. And it's almost always both.</i>	18	109
Religion motivates activists	14	84
spirituality I think of it as something that has the potential of being extremely subversive, the	10	32
Religion motivating oppression	16	68
Feminist work in religion	2	24
<i>Religion as a source of socialization, gender, sex, etc.</i>	15	103
History and facts about a religious group	4	28
Normativity of Christianity	3	28
Religion as a shallow form of difference	2	4
religious discourse is very important in communicating with people	5	11
Secularity as a framework	7	19
<i>Religion as an intersectional sociological category</i>	24	110
Defining religion and spirituality	7	10
Oppression because of religious identity	5	23
Race and Religion	13	82
anti-Semitism	11	35
Islamophobia	12	64
Religion and racism	8	19
Transnational and intersectional connections	11	56
Women of color engaging the spiritual	3	7
you can't talk about one without talking about the other	4	8
Zionism	8	15
Religion and masculinity	2	2
Religion related to women	15	73
Pedagogy	0	0
<i>Guiding pedagogical principles</i>	0	0
Enact feminist knowledge production	12	24
Empowering social justice activism	2	5
I don't have all the answers	6	12
Listening	8	38
Empathy	2	5
Post-oppositionality	6	17
nobody was born "woke."	6	15
this is not some secular course, but rather one that is deeply fueled by the spiritual	2	3
Respect	15	39
Building trust in the classroom	4	6
Talk openly about taboo subjects	5	6
Get students to think relationally	30	52
Resisting essentialism	6	28
The importance of intersectionality	6	21
Think critically about power	5	13
Centering race	2	6
to think past binaries	5	18
Work on your self	4	19

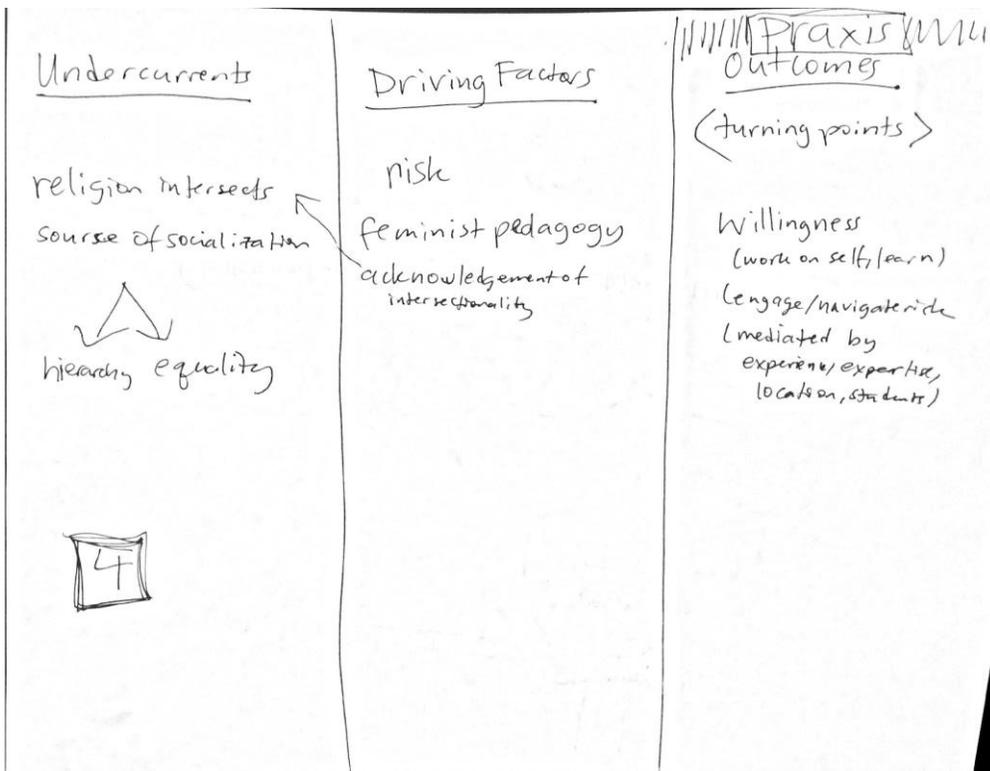
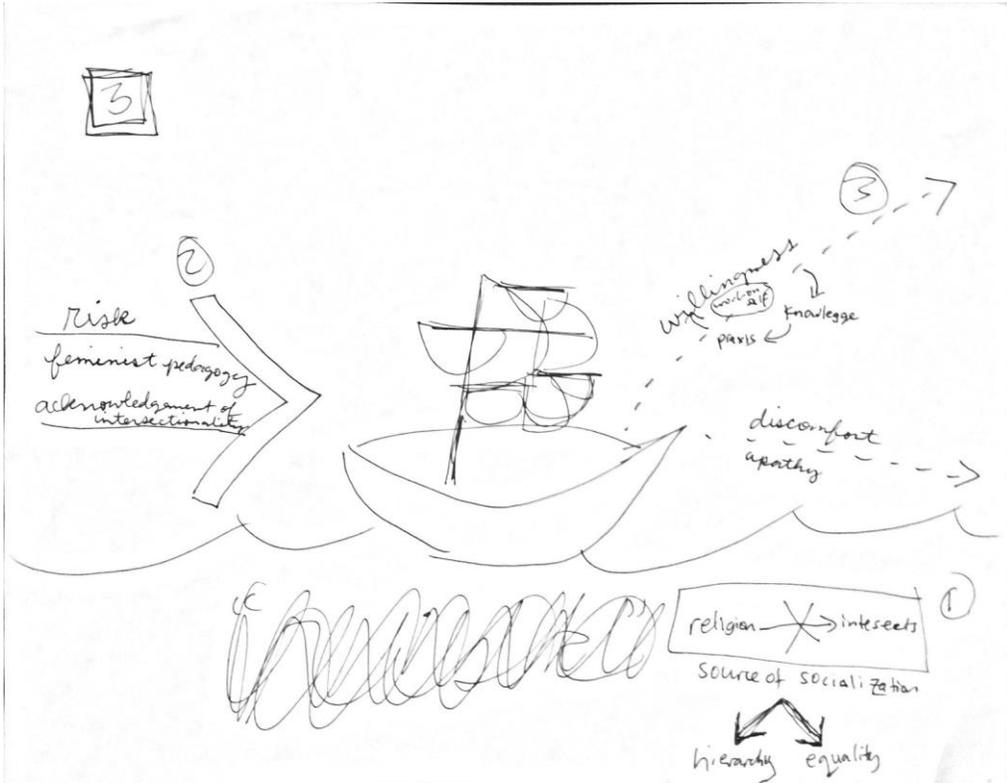
make connections between theory and practice and what's happening around	3	6
Situating own identities	2	5
<i>Pedagogical influences</i>	0	0
Affective factors	0	0
Anti-religious sentiment	5	17
Comfort with teaching about religion	1	19
Discomfort teaching about religion	1	12
Lack of interest	1	5
Risk involved in teaching these topics	6	32
Individual factors	1	1
Academic training influencing pedagogy	5	25
I think it's just not their specialities	5	13
Lived-experience influencing pedagogy	8	45
Learning as you teach about religion	4	4
Mentors influence pedagogy	1	1
outsider perspective	2	4
Religious identity influencing pedagogy	8	44
Research influencing pedagogy	6	21
Systemic factors	0	0
Institutional location influencing pedagogy	8	25
Geographic location	4	7
Non-discrimination statements	1	1
Students	2	5
Student resistance or sensitivity	6	53
Student ignorance or obliviousness	5	11
Students enjoy classes or subject	6	32
Students negotiating religious identity	9	63
WGS	1	9
Intro classes	5	10
Lack of time in intro classes	3	12
Textbooks	4	9
Lack of training	2	3
Racism in WGS	1	1
Religion not taught widely in WGS	16	106
Hope for WGS to center religion more	4	6
I wish more white faculty would take the risk of teaching these things	1	3
those structures are just not in place yet	2	5
<i>Pedagogical strategies</i>	0	0
Organically integrate religion into teaching	36	106
Assignments related to religion	10	32
Historical-critical approach	2	2
Diverse representation in teaching about religion	5	19
I constantly center women of color writers and theorists in my classrooms.	3	6
NOT integrate	2	2
Teach about religions	1	6
Student engagement strategies	2	4
Building trust in the classroom	3	5

Accommodate religious observance	7	8
Engage students in discussing religion	7	21
Engage students through news and current events	7	26
I use a lot of pop culture	3	5
Students make connections to texts from their own experiences	6	17
I see you're struggling with this, I want you to work through this. Here's your opportunity t	1	1
Uses own experience in teaching	5	10
Using poetry and examples	1	3
Willingness to do the work	6	31
Keep up with scholarship	3	5
Update course readings	5	9
Know enough to point people to resources	1	1
Source type	0	0
Interviews	7	7
Survey	2	97
Syllabus	37	284
Textbook	6	338

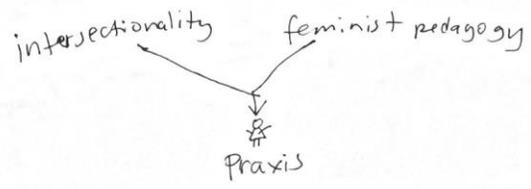
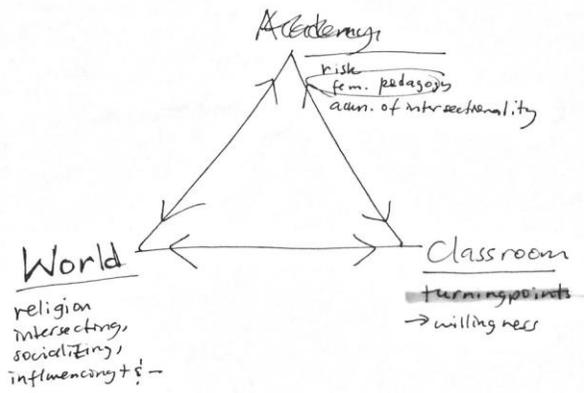
APPENDIX G

Operational Model Diagrams

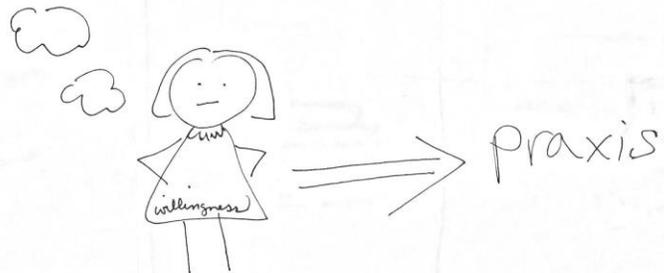
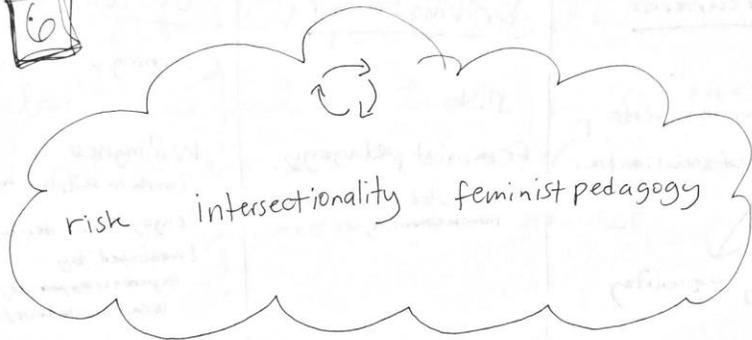




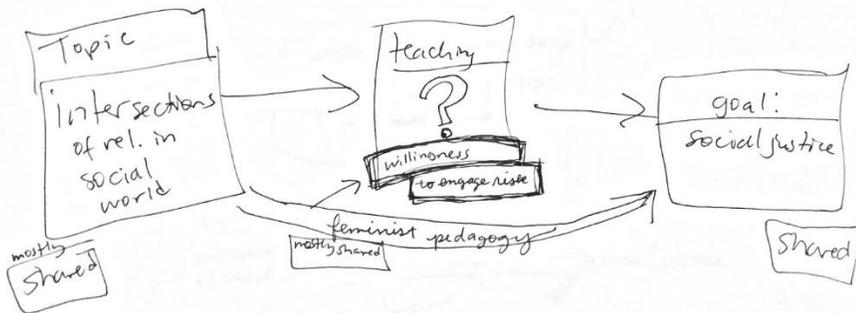
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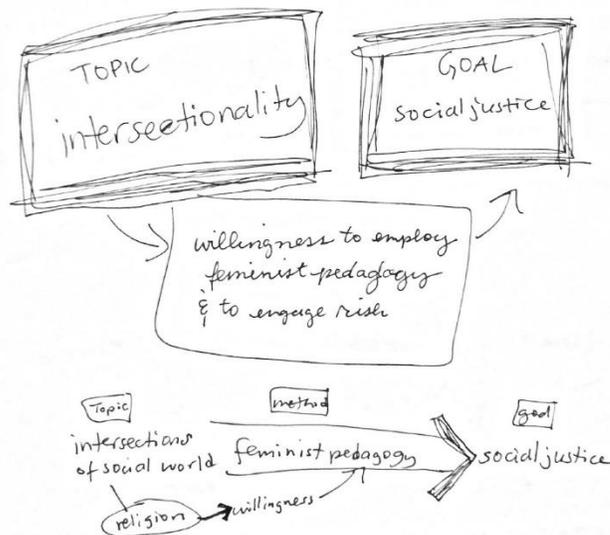
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7
 How might WGS faculty teach about the intersections of religion and race in intro courses in order to better promote social justice?

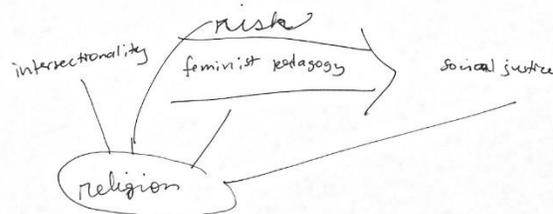


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9

	Topic	Method	Goal
general	intersectionality	feminist pedagogy	social justice
religion	intersect, socialize, influence +	willingness to engage risk	



	Influences	To teach		Or not to teach
Micro	Risk	"Willing" to do the work	Pedagogical influences	Religion not taught widely
			Organically integrate religion into teaching	
Meso	Institutional, geographic, disciplinary, and academic norms	Enact feminist knowledge production	Student-centered pedagogy	"I think it's just not their specialties"
Macro	Societal norms (secularity, normativity of Christianity, religion as a shallow form of difference)	"Get students to think relationally"	Religion as an intersectional source of socialization for equality and/or hierarchy	Anti-religious sentiment

	Topic	Method	Goal
General Topics	Intersectional aspects of social world that relate to social justice	Feminist pedagogy	Navigate risk; promote social justice
Religion	Religion as an intersectional aspect of the social world that at times promotes social justice and injustice	Willingness to engage feminist pedagogy (and why?) (and how?)	Navigate risk; promote social justice

APPENDIX H

Interview 7 Found Poem

Aisha's Found Poem

Teaching these things in the classroom
is very difficult work
Women of color especially
take a huge risk

I fear
for my safety (physically, professional[ly])
to—God forbid—either lose a job
or worse
end up with some—God forbid—lawsuit
or incarceration
or something

I wish more White faculty
would take the risk
of teaching these things
being more proactive
 anti-racism, anti-Islamophobia (afterthoughts)
It takes a lot of hard work
I haven't seen White colleagues
put in that effort
to take those risks
They're a lot quicker to give up on these things
because it takes a lot of work

Women of color
take a huge risk teaching
in the American academy
There's certain things that
we just can't talk about
And it's a lot of emotional stress
It's a lot of extra work
It's a huge risk