



CHAPTER 3

The Spiritual Practices and Experiences of African-American Buddhist Lesbians in the IMC

Abstract African-American Buddhist same-sex loving women (or lesbians) in the Insight Meditation tradition, who grew up in Christian churches, engaged in a mixed methods research study utilizing the Fetzer Spiritual Experience Index (with some modifications) for the quantitative portion of the study. Five women, Norene, Deborah, Marcella, Alicia, and Mary (not their real names) participated in interviews. The quantitative analysis was put in “dialogue” with the qualitative analysis from the narratives, through a Sequential Nested Transformative Strategy (SNTS) to find that Buddhism, in the Insight Meditation tradition, has a positive relational impact on these women.

Keywords Research • Mixed methods • Narrative • Relational resilience • Interviews

Chapter 1 was about Buddhism in the Insight Meditation Community (IMC). In the IMC, Buddhist practitioners are taught about Siddhartha Gautama’s life, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Brahma Viharas, the paramitas, the Five Remembrances, self and no self, and more. This is what is taught regardless of how practitioners identify themselves.

The belief is, no matter one's age, gender, sex, ethnicity, race, nationality, ability, religion, and other ways of identifying, we will all, as human beings, face the existential predicament of being human, and suffer. Afrocentric womanist theologian Delores S. Williams, and those who hold her same Transformation of Consciousness concerns, may wonder whether Insight Buddhism is good for black women, including black women who are same-sex loving. This study supports the conclusion that Insight Buddhism has been a positive transformation of consciousness for the women who participated in this study.¹

Though what Insight dharma teachers teach in sanghas is known, what was not known was if and how those teachings impacted the women in this study. In order to determine the impact of dharma teachings on these women, I asked them to complete a modified Fetzer Spiritual Experience Index which includes these statements:

1. I often feel closely related to power greater than myself.
2. I often feel that I have little control over what happens to me.
3. My practice gives my life meaning and purpose.
4. My practice is a way of life.
5. Ideas from faiths different from my own may increase my understanding of spiritual truth.
6. One should not marry someone of a different faith.
7. My practice is an important part of my individual identity.
8. My practice helps me to confront tragedy and suffering.
9. My practice is often a deeply emotional experience.
10. It is difficult for me to form a clear, concrete image of absolute reality.
11. I believe that there is only one true religion.
12. It is important that I follow the religious beliefs of my parents.
13. Learning about different religions is an important part of my spiritual development.
14. I often think about issues concerning my practice.
15. If my practice is strong enough, I will not experience doubt.
16. Obedience to religious doctrine is the most important aspect of my practice.
17. My relationship to absolute reality is experienced as unconditional love.
18. My spiritual beliefs change as I encounter new ideas and experiences.

19. I am sometimes uncertain about the best way to resolve a moral conflict.
20. I often fear punishment in absolute reality.
21. Although I sometimes fall short of my spiritual ideals, I am still basically a good and worthwhile person.
22. A primary purpose of meditation is to avoid personal tragedy.
23. I can experience spiritual doubts and still remain committed to my practice.
24. I believe that the world is basically good.
25. My practice enables me to experience forgiveness when I act against my moral conscience.
26. It is important that my spiritual beliefs conform with those of persons closest to me.
27. Persons of different religions share a common spiritual bond.
28. I gain spiritual strength by trusting in higher power.
29. There is usually only one right solution to any moral dilemma.
30. I make a conscious effort to live in accordance with my spiritual values.
31. I feel a strong spiritual bond with all of humankind.
32. My practice is a private experience which I rarely, if ever, share with others.
33. Sharing my practice with others is important for my spiritual growth.
34. I never challenge the teachings of my religion.
35. I believe that the world is basically evil.
36. Religious scriptures are best interpreted as symbolic attempts to convey ultimate truths.
37. My practice guides my whole approach to life.
38. Improving the human community is an important spiritual goal.

Research participants had the option of responding to the statements on a Likert Scale from 1 to 6 with 1 being strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 somewhat agree, 5 agree, and 6 strongly agree. I categorized statements as either spiritual practice or spiritual experience statements, and through Spearman Correlation, determined the impact spiritual practices had on spiritual experiences. A cursory analysis of the responses supports the conclusion that Insight Buddhist practices are viewed, by the participants themselves, as having

led to a positive transformation of consciousness. Some of the spiritual practice statements include:

- My practice gives my life meaning and purpose.
- My practice is a way of life.
- My practice is an important part of my individual identity.
- My practice helps me to confront tragedy and suffering.
- Learning about different religions is an important part of my spiritual development.
- Obedience to religious doctrine is the most important aspect of my practice.
- I make a conscious effort to live in accordance with my spiritual values.
- Religious scriptures are best interpreted as symbolic attempts to convey ultimate truths.

Nearly 85% of the research participants agreed or strongly agree that their practice gives their life meaning and purpose. Nearly 77% agreed or strongly agree that their practice is a way of life. As would be expected, given the self / no self teachings, mindfulness, and Right Concentration, only 28% agreed that their practice is an important part of their identity. On the other hand, 48% agreed or strongly agree that their practice is an important part of their individual identity. Insight Buddhism, like most other Buddhisms, promises the relief from suffering. Nearly 85% of the research participants agreed or strongly agreed that their practice helps them confront tragedy and suffering. Nearly 80% agreed or strongly agree that learning about different religions is an important part of their spiritual development. IMC dharma teachers, in my experience, tend not to be dogmatic because being so would be inconsistent with the value of nonattachment and the transformations of craving and clinging. Not surprisingly, nearly 85% disagreed or strongly disagreed that obedience to religious doctrine is the most important aspect of their practice. There is a strong element of orthopraxy in IMC, thus, nearly 89% agreed or strongly agreed that they make conscious efforts to live in accordance with their spiritual values. The Pali Canon contains thousands of suttas, and many are written about the Buddha teaching bhikkhus, or male monastics. Many of the suttas are transmitted orally from dharma teacher to students in a dharma talk given at a sangha, or in dialogue. Suttas are also often commented on by dharma teachers in their articles and books, therefore orally and in writing,

many suttas are interpreted by dharma teachers before Insight practitioners ever read a sutta and when they do, it has been translated into English. Given the many interpretive lenses between Pali and oral and written English versions of the sutta, it seems incongruent that only 26% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that religious scriptures are best interpreted as symbolic attempts to convey ultimate truths. Thirty-eight percent neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Though these women believe their practices are beneficial, what are the impacts of their practices on their lived experiences as women who are black, same-gender-loving, and Buddhists in a Eurocentric, heteronormative, heterosexist, often homophobic, and overwhelmingly Christian-identified society? Some of the spiritual experience questions include:

- I often feel that I have little control over what happens to me.
- My practice is often a deeply emotional experience.
- My relationship to absolute reality is experienced as unconditional love.
- My spiritual beliefs change as I encounter new ideas and experiences.
- I often fear punishment in absolute reality.
- I gain spiritual strength by trusting in higher power.
- I feel a strong spiritual bond with all of humankind.

Dharma teachers in IMC typically do not teach that there is a power higher than one's intention to practice, therefore it is somewhat surprising that 60% of the women in this study agreed or strongly agreed that they often feel closely related to power greater than themselves. It is somewhat surprising but for the fact that just because these women practice Buddhism does not mean they have rejected all aspects of Christianity, that some of them have integrated African spirituality, including Orishas, and that perhaps within the spiritual movements between Christianity and Buddhism, they have engaged in the movement of deity exchange.² Insight Buddhism emphasizes orthopraxis supported by the orthodoxy of the Noble Eightfold Path, therefore nearly 85% disagreed or strongly disagree that they feel they have little control over what happens to them. Meditation is a central component of Insight Buddhism. In deep meditation, often experienced in meditation retreats, one momentarily loses the experiences of physical sensations. On the other hand, retreatants often practice lovingkindness meditation which can produce profoundly intense experiences of merging. Sometimes deep silent meditation precedes guided

lovingkindness meditation, therefore the responses to practice as a deeply emotional experience vary. Twenty-three percent of participants said they neither agreed nor disagreed that their practice is often a deeply emotional experience. Nearly 35% somewhat agreed with the statement. Nearly 40% agreed to strongly agreed with the statement. Unlike some Christian traditions that use fear to motivate adherents to believe the teachings, Insight dharma teachers tend not to use fear, but living in the US can be fear-producing when gender, racial, sexuality, and religious minority statuses are under attack. About 35% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their relationship to absolute reality was experienced as unconditional love; however, about 85% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they often fear punishment in absolute reality. Though they may not feel love from an external transcendental entity, they do not fear it either. Thirty percent agreed or strongly agreed that their spiritual beliefs change as they encounter new ideas and experiences. Nearly 81% agreed or strongly agree that they can experience spiritual doubts and still remain committed to their practice. It is taught in the Pali Canon that doubt is a significant hindrance to practice, insight, and enlightenment, and therefore should be eliminated. The fact that most of these women can experience spiritual doubt and continue in their practice indicates strong healthy ego functioning, resilience, and the absence of or de-intensification of an internalized persecutory object, a subject I return to in Chap. 6. Likewise, nearly 58% agreed or strongly agreed that their practice enables them to experience self forgiveness when they act against their moral conscience. Resilience can also be felt in the strengthening of one's spirituality. About 43% said they gain spiritual strength by trusting in higher power, but perhaps many do not believe in a higher power. Twenty-six percent said they disagreed or strongly disagreed that they gain spiritual strength in this way. Reflecting on the teachings against clinging, craving, and attachment, it is somewhat surprising to find that about 67% agreed or strongly agreed that they feel a strong spiritual bond with all of humankind but feeling a strong spiritual bond does not mean they are clinging to the bond, craving the bond, or attached to the bond. The spiritual practices of the women in this study support the conclusion that Buddhism in the Insight tradition is generally psychologically and spiritually beneficial because it gives meaning and purpose, contributes positively to their identity formation, helps them confront tragedy, opens their minds to learning about different religions, promotes flexibility, tends to be nondogmatic about scriptures, and promotes integrity.

In addition to the positive views these women have about their practices, they also tend to positively view their experiences arising out of those practices. For example, they still experience emotions, love, a level of fearlessness, open-mindedness, spiritual strength, and interconnectedness or interdependence. Though the suttas do not espouse that Buddhist practice leads to relational resiliency, I deem these practices and resultant experiences to be promoting a Remarkable Relational Resilience. For example, Norene said:

I am the cat that sometimes finds herself on top of the book [recording garbled] behind you and then when she falls she falls on her four paws and then just keeps walking off. I have fallen more times than I can tell you in my life and I keep landing on my four paws and I'm very very fortunate to have experienced many lives in that I don't know where the future lies. In most cases I got up there to the top of the bookcases, I was curious as to what was up there, I wanted to see, "umm," piqued my attention and I knew, of course, [recording garbled] I don't know if that necessarily for me speaks to my resilience, but what happens is when I get there, it's a bit like Rocky. Um, in Philadelphia on top of the stairs [sings the Rocky theme], I get there and then no, possibly a slip or fall, and then when I do, something happens in the fall, that's where I would say the resilience comes in—there's a knowingness that I'm not going to get hurt and it could be from here to here and somewhere in that trajectory is where it feels like (gasp) I almost have wings or I have a parachute, that's where resilience comes in.

Norene spoke about how her spiritual community promotes resiliency:

I have ... two spiritual homes in my area which is really nice. I have Spirit Rock that is long and standing and they also offer long retreats ... whether they're month-longs or what have you and then I have Shared Meditation Center.³ Their whole premise is on inclusion and spiritual growth from that point of view. And there is a way that they hold people from all different areas in this place of—you can find freedom in the liberation [recording feedback], but walk in—our doors are open for you ... [speaking of longer retreats] ... that's where I believe I have the opportunity for the rubber to meet the road. I actually have a longer time to do the work to go deeper in myself to do that investigation of the nature of my mind and what I have found is without the longer retreat, for me, it's almost as if I just sprinted [recording feedback] I have short sprints of the levels of understanding and enlightenment, the longer retreats allow me to sit longer with myself and cultivate resiliency, cultivate calm, peace, breath, letting go, presence, so for

me Spirit Rock offering a longer retreat is just what I need, and it may not be Spirit Rock. I just spent six weeks at IMS [Insight Meditation Society] last year, it's the longer retreats for me that are very, very important to add into the rest of my life.

Deborah said:

[on experiencing resiliency] I haven't allowed myself to become cynical, even though I have experienced depression, many different facets of my identity—assumptions that I'm not competent—I'm a professor of color—especially colleagues or students—I have some kind of positive, glass is half full ... probably from my family. I was pretty healthy, I mean, a sort of healthy family,⁴ so I can say nothing's perfect but, there was a lot of love and support and validation, from both my parents and my grandparents and extended family, aunts and uncles, so it was probably shaped by that but I also think—again, finding inner circles of people to help process, definitely I can point to different cities I've lived in, roommates and friends I've lived with who have been my support network especially during certain parts of the path where we were in the same city ... let's say somebody at work would say, you know, you're always getting away with something whereas no one else is being treated like that, like you're not competent like you don't really know and like “Can you believe this is what happened to me today?” We were there for each other and I think that's where a lot of resilience came from, like “You're right, you're good, the person was wrong, we know about you. Of course they did that!” and “Oh yeah you're getting away with something. Of course!” ... You can bounce back a lot easier when you realize your experiences are ... a part of a pattern and you know it's not really about you, it's about a pattern ... so I think resilience comes from having the blessing of a strong family and supportive family and all of that [and] being with others who can validate those experiences of points of pattern and the dynamics that are at play, so we can see when you're not in the pattern, so doing that for you, doing that for each other

... Yes, I would say [my Buddhist community] could be a little more direct about [promoting resiliency]. I think it is helpful to talk about ... that directly in Dharma talks like Bonnie Duran has done, and others—teachers of color have done, I think—how can you be resilient when you're getting this message on the job, or from the media that your body should be a certain way or that your skin should be a certain tone, or that your hair should be, you know. These images, even if a lot of people on the cushion got through that it's still something to just validate, and that's why I [recording feedback garbled] this way, or that's why I, um, maybe they've already worked most of that out, but it doesn't hurt to just mention it directly

because it's a common experience. I think that's why we have new dharma teachers coming up, I think they change with different generations, there's even a group in San Francisco that's organized by an Indian woman, or a Southeast Asian woman, for teachers and she also has a queer group, women of color group, I believe, but she's trying to get to those next generations, and even Spirit Rock, because it had pressure from people pushing them, they came out and said oh, let's just include everybody, but from that pressure Spirit Rock, very wealthy blah, blah, blah, very white now they have teacher training programs for mostly people of color and the LGBTQ folks and other marginalized people, for a lot of people of color intentionally so that they can be the dharma teachers ... that gives you more legitimacy to be able to spread the dharma, be able to talk at different places than you talked to before ... so that's an intentional way of bringing in the next generation that maybe is going to talk about resiliency in a way that people are thirsty for, like how do you deal with such "isms": sexism, heterosexism, racism, you know classism and all of that and their intersections.

The dharma principle of if you use concentration on your breath, the meditation principle, if you use concentration on your breath, you know your breathing's focused, regain your focus, bring your attention back to your breath, without judgment, the vipassana tradition. I think that's a form of resiliency you can use on the cushion, like oh I got a little off my path, I strayed, nonjudgmental, what do I need to do, bring myself back. I think a lot of those principles really apply to, you know, let's bounce back And that can be principles of resiliency. And that's been helpful for me.

Marcella said:

There were—I guess there have been those moments of suicidal thoughts and, you know, just to bring yourself back into deeper things is really big ... and my ancestors⁵ were resilient. I wouldn't be here if it weren't for them. I wouldn't be talking to you if it weren't for them. What they had to go through for me to be here I'm very thankful for and I've, what I've been told is, I've learned that I am a human healing myself so that when I'm in my 40s and in my 50s my 60s my 70s and so forth I am able to mentor, you know, people like me who are struggling [laughing] in their teens and twenties, and 30s you know. You know, I went to [recording feedback garbled] resiliencies, so learning about people like Audre Lorde, you know, all these other, these other strong women of color Assata and Elaine Brown and Angela Davis, learning about what they went through when they were imprisoned all these things help fuel my fire too When I learned about ... the Urban Bushwomen, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar ... they have a dance arts and activism program that happens every summer and I did it in 2006 in

Brooklyn and they go to different places, when I was—I love, I love questions like this. What I learned about field hollers like the way slaves, when I hear Negro Spirituals, when I was practicing capoeira the Brazilian martial art, where, where the slave songs in Portuguese, all those songs about slavery, how to overcome whatever the master was doing to them, [she breaks into a song in Portuguese] they're talking about if I die in the transit from Africa to the New World in the ocean, don't worry about me because Yemanjá is going to carry me to wherever I go ... I'm learning about how my ancestors coped through songs, through dancing, through music ... I lived in a house this last year that was close to a creek, so I did some offerings to Osun for my birthday with some people who dressed in all white and we had some honey ... and I have some honey on my altar. I think I have an altar, that's another thing where self preservation, where I have candles and herbs, stones and gems and sea salts and you know, pictures and things, so I um, yes all of those deities, those African ones, Wiccan [recording feedback garbled] yea, I really, I really like how ... ancestor worship or deity worship can be integrated into your spiritual practice.

At the shared meditation center ... in D.C., at the Insight group there, there [were] different groups, like there's a general open group, the LGBTQ group, the POC [People of Color] group, and that's validating of who you are when you can go somewhere and you can, you know, during the dharma talk you can say, you know someone, some white person at work or something, said something very inflammatory to me today, you can discuss it in the sangha and you can do things like that in your community that's a big part of your healing, so know when someone says something queerphobic while you're shopping, you know, or along those lines that it's nice to have dialogue in your community when you really show up and people are able to support you and help you unpack, you know, whatever pain you may have endured.

Marcella concluded that her sangha promotes resiliency.

Alicia said:

In some ways yes, yes, yes [I am resilient]. I am resilient in some ways and in other ways I don't feel resilient. Resilience, for me, is the capacity to bounce back and recover from an experience of stress or demand that might make me feel like my inner resources are being, well, either my outer or inner resources are being depleted or taxed in some way, being able to recover from that and regain balance, regain a sense of balance and stability and strength and hope that I'm not always going to be in that place of struggle. Yes, yes, yeah that is my own personal experience of resiliency. [regarding Alicia's membership in various sanghas and their promoting

resiliency] Yes, yeah I would have to say all of them do Well, I think each, in their own way, they rely on the Buddhist teachings, primarily, in regards to this question, the Four Foundations of suffering [Four Noble Truths], you know, there is suffering for all of us, investigating what the causes of that suffering are, acknowledging that there's a way out, and presenting that way out in the form of the Noble Eightfold Path. It's like whatever is coming up for me in my life or someone else's life who's a member of the sangha that is causing pain and suffering, we either directly or indirectly apply our, I'm sorry, apply the Four Noble Truths, I said before foundations, apply the Four Noble Truths to whatever that experience is and what makes it bearable, supports us as being resilient is being able to do that in community knowing that even though our particular experience might be different, suffering is universal and by helping, helping us, helping me to cultivate the capacity to see suffering, that I might be perpetuating in my life, you know consciously or unconsciously and discovering the ways in which I can tap into my own internal resources, bring love and compassion understanding, patience, kindness [recording feedback garbled] awareness to those experiences, that practice, that process in and of itself creates resilience, that is what creates resilience.

Mary said:

Yes [I see myself as resilient]. Resilience means in the face of challenges, problems, issues that happen in life, things happen that you are able to be okay, I can get through it, things don't have to devastate me. I can bounce back from them in a way. So, yeah, I actually do think I'm resilient. I think part of it is ... how I feel no matter what is happening. You know, that I can feel, even feel happy or at peace when things are really difficult ... then there are times I've noticed when, that, times when I think—one of the things that has happened for me which has been a great change—is that for a very long time when I didn't feel good, or was sad or angry, I didn't question where it came from, I just felt bad and when I felt good it was like, "Why am I feeling good?!" You know, now it's like when I feel good is like, "Oh, I feel good." And when I'm not it's like, "Oh, what's going on?" So that has really shifted for me ... it's gradual. It wasn't an abrupt shift, it was a gradual shift. I think I noticed it one day and I said, "Wow! This is different." But I think it's been changing gradually during the last ten years or so. Yeah, so that's part of resiliency, I sort of spend more time feeling good than I spend feeling not I think resilience is, maybe, allows one to be more equanimous, so equanimity can help people become more resilient, but I think yeah, they are close cousins, not synonymous, but close cousins. And they can feed each other.

No self and resiliency are connected. Inclusive and diverse sanghas, like Shared Meditation Center and the one in Washington, D.C. that Marcella mentioned, create communities for people of color and LGBTQ people. The creation of these communities and the women's participation in these communities inspire them to be visible and authentic without espousing pro-white and antigay rhetoric.

Relational resilience, as a byproduct of Buddhist practice, has not been considered before, perhaps because it has never been tested empirically. Testing relational resilience empirically, especially in the lives of same-sex loving people, undermines the age-old homophobic stereotypes steeped in psychological pseudoscience, that same-sex loving people are not relational and not resilient. W. R. D. Fairbairn, the Object Relations Theory psychoanalyst whose work I draw on regarding the persecutory object, was also a "grandfather" of conversion "therapy"⁶—the psychological pseudoscience of radically changing a same-sex loving person's attraction toward people of the opposite sex. He wrote:

Perverse sexual tendencies [homosexuality] are not just unfortunate excrescences which in some mysterious fashion become attached to an otherwise normal personality, but integral components of the structure of the personality itself. Thus, homosexuality must be regarded, not simply as a perverse expression of natural sexuality, but as the natural sexual expression of a personality which has become perverse in its essential structure ... for what the sexual pervert does is to capitalize his perverse tendencies instead of repressing them, with the consequence that they not only become overt, but assume a dominant position in the structure of his personality. The resulting situation may, to use psychiatric terms, be summarized in the statement that the sexual pervert is not a psychoneurotic, but a psychopath.⁷

The sexual pervert refuses to lead a normal sexual life within the community and, in so far as sexual life is concerned if in naught else, he refuses to acknowledge allegiance to the standards of society. In confirmation of the fact that an attitude towards the social group is involved, attention may be drawn to the frequency with which individuals addicted to certain forms of sexual perversion form groups of their own within the community. This is, of course, particularly common in the case of homosexuals; and it is characteristic of such groups that the difference between their standards and those of the community is not necessarily confined to the sexual sphere.⁸

Fairbairn, a man with a complicated childhood sexual developmental past that included being repeatedly fondled by his mother,⁹ repeatedly degraded by his father,¹⁰ and fondled by a strange man,¹¹ who suffered as an

adult with paruresis just as his father had,¹² who wrote in his journals that he had vagina envy,¹³ also posited that only heterosexual people could be relationally resilient and suggested that gay men be encamped and segregated from the rest of society to be converted into heterosexuals before being released back into society. Fairbairn, perhaps because of his own sexual shame, was wrong to categorize all same-sex-loving people as mentally ill and was wrong to exclude some heterosexual people as sexually perverse. Fairbairn's pseudoscience did not include empiricism, nor did it include an exploration of how Buddhist practices supports relationality. The exploration of the psycho-spiritual experiences of African-American Buddhist lesbians, using a mixed methods approach using the Fetzer SEI with a separation of spiritual practice statements from spiritual experience statements; Spearman Correlation to determine the impact of spiritual practice on spiritual experience; and a Sequential Nested Transformative Strategy,¹⁴ supports the conclusion that same-sex loving women of African descent practicing Buddhism in the Insight tradition are relational and resilient. What is remarkable is that the relationality and resiliency occur in a gendered, raced, and heteronormative society.

Buddhism, in Theravada and Insight, promise, on one side, nonrelationality as in Siddhartha Gautama leaving his wife and son and returning to them as their dharma teacher, and holding the celibate monastic life in the highest regard, with the householder life (which may include being married and raising children) as secondary and hindrances to a more evolved consciousness. Relationality, perhaps, is an inconvenient truth of Buddhist practice in the Insight tradition because the relationship-oriented experiences of the women in this study do not support the belief that Buddhism creates introversion, distance, aloofness, abandonment anxiety, and detachment. Buddhist practices, at least for some Buddhist practitioners, may actually support the opposite of what people have come to believe about Buddhism—that it can actually lead to experiences that support relational resilience.

NOTES

1. Pamela Ayo Yetunde, "A New Spelling of Our Names: An Exploration of the Psycho-Spiritual Experiences of African-American Buddhist Lesbians," PhD diss., Columbia Theological Seminary, (2016).
2. I call these nonlinear movements self-preservation, rejection, migration, longing, exploration, positive encounter-relocation, integration, re-evaluation, transformation, longing again, letting go, and deity exchange.

3. Shared Meditation Center is a pseudonym of an Insight community in northern California. I used a pseudonym to protect the identity of research participants who practice there.
4. Ja’Nina Walker and Buffie Longmire-Avital, in their article “The Impact of Religious Faith and Internalized Homonegativity on Resiliency for Black Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Emerging Adults,” *Developmental Psychology* 49, no. 9 (2013), 1723–1731, found that black lesbians utilized their families and racial communities as sources of strength when faced with sexism, racism, and homophobia.
5. Walker and Longmire-Avital found that some black lesbians struggling with their sexuality may seek out religious support to work through their oppression and cultivate resilience because of the black community’s belief that religion may give meaning to systematic oppression.
6. W.R.D. Fairbairn, “The Treatment and Rehabilitation of Sexual Offenders,” in *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (London: Routledge, 1999), 289–296.
7. *Ibid.*, 291.
8. *Ibid.*, 292.
9. John D. Sutherland, *Fairbairn’s Journey into the Interior* (London: Free Association Books, 1989), 66.
10. Marie T. Hoffman and Lowell W. Hoffman, “Religion in the Life and Work of W. R. D. Fairbairn,” in *Fairbairn and the Object Relations Tradition*, eds. Graham S. Clarke and David E. Scharff (London: Karnac Books, 2014), 78.
11. Sutherland, *Fairbairn’s Journey into the Interior*, 73.
12. Hoffman and Hoffman, “Religion in the Life and Work of W. R. D. Fairbairn,” 71.
13. Sutherland, *Fairbairn’s Journey into the Interior*, 72.
14. SNTS is a combination of Sequential Explanatory Strategy, Sequential Transformative Strategy, and Concurrent Nested Strategy. These research strategies can be found in John W. Cresswell’s *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln, NE: Sage Publications, 2003).