## Ministry and Human Sexuality

**Guidelines for Presentation of a Current Event**

**Final Assignment (30%) Due Sunday, March 7**

**Word length: approximately 4000 words**

Each course assignment will require students to do a literature search in the ATLA and psychological databases. You will need to substantively use at least five references from your search and at least one needs to be from psychological studies, and/or the journal *Pastoral Psychology*. In assignments like the sermon and educational program, literature search references can be discussed in footnotes/commentaries that elaborate on how these projects utilize your critical thinking skills. Here is a guide to how to do a literature search: [HOW TO DO A LITERATURE SEARCH](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/3106240/pages/how-to-do-a-literature-search)In this course, we use APA format for citations and references.  [Iliff's writing lab](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://library.iliff.edu/writing-lab/&sa=D&source=calendar&ust=1610624779299000&usg=AOvVaw1DlyxSMrRBgWqhGkQvkaTS) has a link to suggested sites for writing resources and style guides. Use this link to find the Purdue Online Writing Lab, and their guide to APA 7 formatting.

Students will focus on an aspect of sexuality using the [OWL definition of sexuality,](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/3106240/pages/owl-definition-of-sexuality) which we are exploring in our weekly topics, and will include commentary on how this assignment helps you pursue [Learning Goals](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/3106240/pages/learning-goals) in socially just, interreligious, evidence-based spiritual care.

Caregivers are always working within a social and public context, especially in responding to aspects of sexuality.[[1]](#endnote-1) The context constructs the mental furniture of the caregiver and the care-seeker and sometimes limits or expands what kind of care is possible or not for people experiencing aspects of sexuality that generate religious/spiritual/moral struggles[[2]](#endnote-2)---experiences of tension, strain, and conflict---about sexuality. Power struggles over aspects of sexuality have positive or negative consequences for persons, couples, families, faith groups, the larger community and national milieu. This current event study assignment gives you the opportunity to reflect upon some aspects of sexuality that generated religious/spiritual/moral struggles---experiences of tension, strain, and conflict---about sexuality within public contexts.

Emerging research is demonstrating that if these kinds of struggles remain private, they tend to become a source of shame, anger, and guilt that generate life-limiting theologies/orienting systems of sexuality triggered by stress.

Throughout this course we consider life experiences you or others have had that generate religious/spiritual/moral struggles over some aspect of sexuality:

* Aspects of one’s gender and/or sexual orientation identity that do not conform to societal/religious norms and/or that make one a target for prejudice/aggression/violence.
* Work and family balance that generates moral stress over one’s gender roles and responsibilities.
* Experiencing sexual pleasure in ways that do not conform to societal/religious norms.
* Working through conflicts/power struggles in intimate and/or caregiving relationships that generate moral stress/spiritual struggles because of aspects of one’s sexuality (i.e., gender roles).
* Seeking personal and relational wholeness amidst the challenges of being single, dating, negotiating transitions in intimate relationships, and ending intimate relationships.
* Experiencing sexual trauma (abuse, harassment, assault).

These are the kinds of experiences that could be used in a current event assignment about experiences religious/spiritual/moral struggles arising from some aspect of sexuality.

This assignment is an attempt to help caregivers link the personal and the public in their practices of pastoral and spiritual care with persons, families, and communities. This is especially important at this point in the culture when so many of our political, economic, and debates about values are centered on issues of human sexuality, especially reproduction, gender, orientation, and bodily well-being.

There are many public issues that have personal and familial dimensions of struggles to do with sexuality. For example, one student in a former course became concerned about helping a pregnant teenage negotiate the legal, familial, moral, and spiritual dimensions of her crisis. She researched this topic and fashioned a pastoral response to the family and to the family’s pastor and congregation on the church’s response to unintended teen-age pregnancy. Check the newspapers, periodicals, and social media resources for current events that might have pastoral/spiritual significance for you. Check also the course page on Sharing Resources For Final Assignments

**OUTLINE**

*Note: The final assignment should be about 4000 words single-spaced, including references. Word lengths are suggested here; some sections may be shorter or longer). Please use all relevant readings and discussions from the course forums, especially the forums early on in the quarter focusing on pastoral and spiritual care. Please refer to the grading rubric to ensure you have done an adequate literature search and demonstrated course learning goals in competing this assignment.* *You will need to substantively use at least 5 references from your search and at least one needs to be from psychological studies.*

**Preface** (50 – 100 words)**:** Why did you choose this assignment; what do you hope to gain from doing this assignment?

**Your spiritual practices** (50 – 100 words)**:** Describe the intrinsically meaningful body-aware settling and/or calming practices you used in working on this assignment that

1. Increased self-awareness of one’s stress-based reactions/emotions that give rise to life-limiting, socially oppressive beliefs, values, and consumer ways of coping, especially for coping with academic stress.
2. Increased self-compassion, self-transcendence, and relational systems that support use of meaningful body-aware practices as a basis for searching for meanings about one’s stress responses and life experiences.

**Describe the Current Event**: In about 250 to 300 words, describe the event and its significance for you.

**Analyze the Event** (1000-2000 words)**:** Drawing upon course readings and your literature search, identify the core issues at stake here, especially that might be related to religious/spiritual/moral struggles arising from aspects of sexuality. What could be the challenges for the persons/families/ involved? What moral or ethical issues are central? What theological themes are most critical? How do you assess issues of race, social class, gender and sexual orientation in this circumstance? What are the main challenges to the pastor/religious leader/spiritual caregiver in this situation? How do the readings in our course help you elaborate these pastoral and theological issues (look back at the forum readings and postings)? How does your literature search in *both* (a) religious and theological studies and (b) psychological databases help you understand the underlying religious and spiritual issues and the psychological and cultural struggles going on?

You may find it helpful to describe power struggles/conflicts over aspects of sexuality in terms of the moral and/or religious orienting systems people are implicitly/explicitly using. Begin by using spiritual and social empathy to imaginatively step into the worlds of those on either side of the conflict and identify (a) their emotions; (b) the core values at stake using Jonathan Haidt’s moral foundations theory;[[3]](#endnote-3) (c) their beliefs about sexuality; and (d) the ways they cope with their moral struggles that generate power struggles.

B. Your spiritual orientation to this current event

Identify your intentional beliefs, values, and ways of coping with the moral, spiritual or religious struggles arising from this aspect of sexuality?

STRESS-RELATED EMOTIONS: Identify the emotions that arise from your stress responses to this current event (fear over life threat, guilt, anger, disgust…) and then describe how/whether your emotional stress response changes when you use your spiritual practices (i.e., anger/protest over injustice, lamentation, sorrow, compassion….and so on). Then identify the values, beliefs and ways of coping that could become an intentional theology/orienting system you could draw upon in providing care/seeking justice.

VALUES: Use Jonathan Haidt’s moral foundations theory to identify the core foundational values that shape your moral orientation to this current event and generate your power struggles with those whose moral foundations differ from your own

BELIEFS: Use your literature search and course readings to identify your core beliefs about this aspect of sexuality and the suffering that people experience, especially over power struggles related to this aspect of sexuality.

COPING/spiritual practices: What are the automatic/default/habitual ways you cope with moral stress generated by this current event or events like it? How do your coping practices change when you are using settling, calming spiritual practices in response to the stress generated by this event?

**Explore Responses**

In about 400-500 words, explore the options for responding to this topic as a chaplain, nonprofit leader, and/or community faith leader? What is the “response plan” you will follow? Specifically, how will you respond to the individuals/families/ congregation, and larger public as you help them address this situation? Why are you proceeding this way? What are the possible outcomes or consequences of your response? How will you deal with potential negative outcomes?

**Conclusion (250-300 words):** Use the following questions to describe how this assignment helped you practice socially just, interreligious, evidence-based spiritual care.

***Spiritual integration***: how did this assignment help you use intrinsically meaningful body-aware settling and/or calming practices that:

* Increased self-awareness of your stress-based reactions/emotions that give rise to life-limiting, socially oppressive beliefs, values, and consumer ways of coping.
* Increased self-compassion, self-transcendence, and relational systems that support use of meaningful body-aware practices as a basis for searching for meanings about one’s stress responses and life experiences.

**Self-differentiation and self-reflexivity:** How did this assignment deepen these interpersonal capacities by helping you understand how stress-related emotions generate values, beliefs, and ways of coping that may be life-giving or life limiting? Were you more about to self-differentiate and not become reactive to this current event in ways that could easily overwhelm you and limit your understanding and response?

**Social and spiritual empathy:** How did this assignment deepen these interpersonal capacities by helping you step into the moral orienting systems of those different from you and understand how their stress-related emotions generate values, beliefs, and ways of coping that may be life-giving or life limiting?

**Interreligious competencies:** How did your use of course readings and your literature searches in religious/ theological and psychological databases help you develop interreligious competency that integrates:

-*Knowledge* of the socially constructed nature of religious beliefs, values, and rituals

-*Attitudes of cultural humility* toward cultural, religious, moral, and spiritual differences, and the ineffable mystery of the other; antiracist attitudes for understanding systemic racism and white privilege.

*-Interpersonal capacities* in spiritual empathy enabling understanding the religious, spiritual, and moral orientation of others.

-*Skills* in spiritual and emotional self-care for coping with the anxieties/losses of letting go of absolute meaning/value systems that avoid, polarize, or minimize religious and spiritual differences.

**Evidence-based spiritual care:** How did your use of course readings and your literature search help you practice evidence-based spiritual care by drawing upon research on aspects of religion and/or spirituality may be helpful or harmful people, especially when there are power struggles over aspects of sexuality that generate religious, spiritual, and moral psychological struggles?

**Socially just spiritual care:** How did your course readings and literature searches help you articulate spiritual care that pays attention to interacting social advantages and disadvantages that may harm others, contributing to systemic social injustice? How did your spiritual practices help you manage the moral distress of practicing socially just spiritual care that is always unfinished?

**References**

Abu-Raiya, H., Pargament, K. I., Weissberger, A., & Exline, J. (2016). An empirical examination of religious/spiritual struggle among Israeli Jews. International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 26(1), 61-79. doi: 10.1080/10508619.2014.1003519

Bradley, D. F., Uzdavines, A., Pargament, K. I., & Exline, J. (2016). Counseling atheists who experience religious and spiritual struggles. In A. Schmidt, M. Chow, P. Berendsen & T. O’Connor (Eds.), Thriving on the edge:  Integrating spiritual practice, theory, and research.

Exline, J. J., Pargament, K., Grubbs, J. B., & Yali, A. M. (2014). The Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale: Development and initial validation. Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 6(3), 208-222. doi: 10.1037/a0036465.supp

Pargament, K. I., Wong, S., & Exline, J. (2016). Wholeness and holiness: The spiritual dimension of eudaimonics. In J. Vittersø (Ed.), The handbook of eudaimonic wellbeing. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Co.

1. We are using the *Our Whole Lives* curriculum to define these five aspects of sexuality: *sensuality* (bodiliness and touch), *intimacy* (relationality), *sexual identity* (orientations and roles), *sexual health/reproduction* (physiology, procreation, etc.), and *sexualization* (power dynamics). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. There are three types of spiritual or religious struggles ([Exline, Pargament, Grubbs, & Yali, 2014](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/1914534/discussion_topics/12762589#_ENREF_15)):

   * *Struggles with God* (e.g., questioning God’s love, feeling angry at God, feeling like God has abandoned or is punishing us because of some aspect of our sexual lives)
   * *Intrapsychic struggles within us*: moral stress over conflicting values, ultimate meanings, and doubts about aspects of our sexuality
   * I*nterpersonal struggles between us and our significant others* over aspects of our sexuality.

   These three kinds of religious and spiritual struggles are interconnected. For example, spiritual doubt can lead to interpersonal struggles. Interpersonal struggles lead to guilt and shame. Guilt and shame lead to fear of being punished by God and/or religious authorities/others. Fear of punishment and hell can lead to anger at God and organized religion.

   Religious and spiritual struggles are widespread across a range of faith orientations; for example, among atheists ([Bradley, Uzdavines, Pargament, & Exline, 2016](#_ENREF_2)), Muslims, Jews ([Abu-Raiya, Pargament, Weissberger, & Exline, 2016](#_ENREF_1)), as well as the general population. Pargament et al. ([Pargament, Wong, & Exline, 2016](#_ENREF_4)) note that spiritual struggles are common and can have either life-giving or life-limiting outcomes:

   Spiritual struggles have to do with the most fundamental issues of life – questions of ultimate meaning, good and evil, religious doubts, intimacy, the divine and one’s relationship with a higher power (Exline et al., 2014). These struggles are fundamentally dis-orienting; they shake people to their very core.  A number of studies have linked struggles in the spiritual domain to psychological, social and physical signs of distress (Exline, 2013).  But distress and dis-orientation are not the end of the story.

   As people struggle, they try to re-orient themselves to the challenges posed by internal transitions and external events.  Although popular culture has sentimentalized the value of difficult life experiences, as we hear in statements such as “no pain, no gain” and “suffering builds character,” it must be stressed that efforts to re-orient following difficult life experiences are not necessarily successful. Some people experience only pain, suffering, and brokenness through their struggles.  In this regard, higher levels of spiritual struggles have been associated with decline in immune functioning (Trevino, Pargament, Cotton, Leonard, Hahn, Caprini-Faigin, & Tsevat, 2010), increases in depression (e.g., Pirutinsky, Rosmarin, Pargament, & Midlarsky, 2011), and even greater risk of dying (Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2001).

   It is true, however, that spiritual struggles can be a source of growth and greater wholeness… Empirical studies have shown some ties between spiritual struggles and reports of growth following trauma and major life events (e.g., Gall et al., 2011; Magyar-Russell et al., 2013; Trevino et al., 2012).  We suspect this growth is manifested by shifts in orienting systems that become more whole; that is, more deeply purposive, broader and deeper, more flexible, more coherent and discerning, and more benevolent and life-affirming.  In support of this notion, Desai and Pargament (2015) compared college students following a period of spiritual struggle who experienced growth or decline.  Those who reported greater growth were able to find greater meaning from their struggle, were able to draw on more positive religious coping resources, had a more secure relationship with God, and had integrated religion more fully into their lives. (Pargament et al., 2016, pp. 387-388) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Use Moral Foundations Theory, described on their website <https://moralfoundations.org/>:

   **Moral Foundations Theory** was created by a group of social and cultural psychologists to understand why morality varies so much across cultures yet still shows so many similarities and recurrent themes. In brief, the theory proposes that several innate and universally available psychological systems are the foundations of “intuitive ethics.” Each culture then constructs virtues, narratives, and institutions on top of these foundations, thereby creating the unique moralities we see around the world and conflicting within nations too. The five foundations for which we think the evidence is best are:

   **1) Care/harm**: This foundation is related to our long evolution as mammals with attachment systems and an ability to feel (and dislike) the pain of others. It underlies virtues of kindness, gentleness, and nurturance. *[Emotions: compassion; fear of causing harm]*  
   **2) Fairness/cheating**: This foundation is related to the evolutionary process of reciprocal altruism. It generates ideas of justice, rights, and autonomy. [Note: In our original conception, Fairness included concerns about equality, which are more strongly endorsed by political liberals. However, as we reformulated the theory in 2011 based on new data, we emphasize proportionality, which is endorsed by everyone, but is more strongly endorsed by conservatives] *[Emotions: anger, gratitude, guilt]*  
   **3) Loyalty/betrayal:** This foundation is related to our long history as tribal creatures able to form shifting coalitions. It underlies virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice for the group. It is active anytime people feel that it's "one for all, and all for one."  
   **4) Authority/subversion:** This foundation was shaped by our long primate history of hierarchical social interactions. It underlies virtues of leadership and followership, including deference to legitimate authority and respect for traditions. *[Emotions: respect, fear]*  
   **5) Sanctity/degradation:** This foundation was shaped by the psychology of disgust and contamination. It underlies religious notions of striving to live in an elevated, less carnal, more noble way. It underlies the widespread idea that the body is a temple which can be desecrated by immoral activities and contaminants (an idea not unique to religious traditions).  *[Emotions: disgust, reverence/awe]*

   We think there are several other very good candidates for "foundationhood," especially:

   **6) Liberty/oppression**: This foundation is about the feelings of reactance and resentment people feel toward those who dominate them and restrict their liberty. Its intuitions are often in tension with those of the authority foundation. The hatred of bullies and dominators motivates people to come together, in solidarity, to oppose or take down the oppressor….

   Much of our present research involves applying the theory to political "cultures" such as those of liberals and conservatives. The current American culture war, we have found, can be seen as arising from the fact that liberals try to create a morality relying primarily on the Care/harm foundation, with additional support from the Fairness/cheating and Liberty/oppression foundations. Conservatives, especially religious conservatives, use all six foundations, including Loyalty/betrayal, Authority/subversion, and Sanctity/degradation. The culture war in the 1990s and early 2000s centered on the legitimacy of these latter three foundations. In 2009, with the rise of the Tea Party, the culture war shifted away from social issues such as abortion and homosexuality and became more about differing conceptions of fairness (equality vs. proportionality) and liberty (is government the oppressor or defender?). The Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street are both populist movements that talk a great deal about fairness and liberty, but in very different ways, as you can see [here, for the Tea Party](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703673604575550243700895762.html), and [here, for OWS](http://reason.com/archives/2011/10/20/the-moral-foundations-of-occup).   You can find out your own moral foundations profile at [www.YourMorals.org](http://www.yourmorals.org/).   [↑](#endnote-ref-3)