**Ministry and Human Sexuality**

**Research Paper Outline**

**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.

This assignment gives you the opportunity to reflect upon some aspects of sexuality that generated religious/spiritual/moral struggles[[1]](#endnote-1)---experiences of tension, strain, and conflict---about sexuality.[[2]](#endnote-2) 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.

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 developing an education program that enhances spiritual care to those experiencing religious/spiritual/moral struggles arising from some aspect of their sexuality.

**OUTLINE:** *Note: The final assignment should be 4000 words, and single-spaced, including references. 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:**

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

**Part B. Your spiritual practices (50-75 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.

**Thesis (300-500 words):** Introduce your topic, define key terms in your own words, and conclude your opening paragraph with your thesis/argument **(see:** [**https://iliff.bloomfire.com/series/3207572/posts/2869686-make-a-thesis-statement-work-for-you-fact-sheet**](https://iliff.bloomfire.com/series/3207572/posts/2869686-make-a-thesis-statement-work-for-you-fact-sheet)**).** A thesis statements should be one sentence in length, about 25–30 words, indicating the claim or point to be made in the paper.

**Body of the Research Paper (3000- 3500 words words):** Under subheadings review and evaluate core scholarship that supports your argument, elaborating key terms in your own words.

If it fits your method (e.g., practical theology) describe a case study or a way you would like to implement your thesis in practical arenas of religious leadership.

A bibliography that includes at least 12 scholarly books, articles, and other appropriate resources directly related to the thesis. Do not include encyclopedias or dictionaries on this reference list.

You are expected to

a. use the resources of the writing center <https://iliff.bloomfire.com/posts/2858956-online-writing-resources-suggested-sites>

b. and submit your near final draft to the writing center to get feedback on your research paper. <https://www.iliff.edu/writinglab/>

Review the grading rubric to make sure that you meet all requirements of the final assignment.

1. 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. Pargament et al. ([Pargament, Wong, & Exline, 2016](#_ENREF_3)) 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)

   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.   [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. 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-2)