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Exploring Interfaith Sex Education

by

Bailey Lewis

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(Psychology)

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ABSTRACT

Sacred Sexuality explores the intersections of religion and sexuality. I worked with Dr. Birthisel, Director of the Wilson Center, and Kate Dawson, co-facilitator of the sex education class, to survey the sex education class participants on how the experience has been for them. I surveyed the sex education class participants after the class to analyze their opinions of the sex education class, interfaith dialogue, and how their spirituality or religious perspectives inform their beliefs around sexuality. Overall, the sex education class was highly recommended and gave an interesting look into how faith and sexuality interact. While the sex education class at the Wilson Center was effective in teaching the students and utilizing interfaith dialogue, the lack of religious diversity was an issue. Interfaith dialogue in consideration of sex education classes is crucial in being open-minded and allowing diversity to exist in a non-judgmental space.

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INTRODUCTION

When understanding and exploring religious and spiritual thought, sexuality is often viewed as a taboo, resulting in lacking an open dialogue (Ott & Stephens, 2017). Research has shown that people who are high in religious identity, such as those who practice Christianity in the United States of America, are more likely to have restrictive views on sexuality and more negative views towards LGBTQ* folks (Young, 2022). Actually, as a result of mainstream Christianity being unsupportive towards LGBT folks, there has been a reported loss of religious and spiritual identities in the LGBTQ* community (Wood & Conley, 2014). There have been quantitative analyses from survey data that spotlight how religion predicts negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Golriz, 2021).

However, religion can be associated with positive things when it comes to sexuality. Leonhardt et al. (2020) found that more religious people reported greater sexual satisfaction in their relationships because they understood sex as something that was both physical and spiritual. Also, data suggests that religion is associated with higher feelings of commitment to ones' partner and thus greater sexual enjoyment (Clarke et al., 2021). Sexuality can be affirmative within religious spaces as well. Religions, such as Paganism and Wicca, are supportive to LGBT* folks due to not being associated with heteronormativity (Tranby and Zulkowski, 2012).

Not all religious spaces, or even Christian ones, are the same when it comes to sexuality and sexual education. For example, Yip, Browne, and Munt (2010) describe interviews with 24 LGBTQIA+ Quakers. Many of these believers moved from more mainline Christian organizations to The Society of Friends because it provided the ability and framework to integrate their sexual and religious identities. This suggests that LGBTQIA+-affirming religious spaces can be extremely important for comprehensive, integrative sexual education.

Because of these complexities in how religion might interact with sexuality, particularly with LGBTQIA+ sexuality, I wanted to understand the experiences of people learning about human sexuality in an explicitly interreligious context. This project investigated research on sex, sex education, and religion, then interviewed participants in a sex education program at a campus-adjacent multi-faith center.

Spirituality and Sex Education Programs

Some religious organizations offer their own sexual education programs or endorse programs they see as acceptable for their members. In fact, one study of mainline Protestant churches in the Detroit area found that 44% of surveyed churches already had a sexual education program in place, and that a further 26% had plans to implement one (Freedman-Doan, Fortunato, Henshaw & Titus, 2013). Surveyed churches explained that these programs focused on the spiritual and religious aspects of sexuality, and that they focused on abstinence. Carr and Packham (2015) found that there was no effect on teen birth rates or abortion rates when considering state-mandated abstinence programs in response to teen pregnancy, although it was found that STD rates increased in low-populated locations. Smith et al. (2017) spotlights that it is difficult to make claims about the effectiveness of abstinence-only education programs when age and gender of the participants are not considered, which unfortunately is the case for much of the current research. Overall, the effectiveness of abstinence-only education programs is unknown and there is a lack of data to indicate whether abstinence-only education programs versus other types of sex education courses impact STD rates.

There are faith-based organizations that do not promote abstinence-only sex education and instead favor comprehensive sexuality education. Lopez et al. (2011) discusses the importance of faith-based organizations implementing comprehensive sexuality education into their

ministries and includes a review of a study of 5,819 religious teens, 2,049 clergy, and 442 adult youth workers by Christian Community Inc., a nonprofit research and resource development organization. Although many religious congregations are already involved in providing sexual education to their members, many are still developing - a review of clergy that participated in the survey suggests that 68% felt their congregation could do more than they already were in terms of sexual education (Clapp et al., 2003, 2010). Again, however, only 62% of those same clergy favored comprehensive sexual education that included religious/spiritual approaches to religiousness and complete information on contraception and disease prevention. The conflict between wanting to provide more comprehensive sex education and seeing the appeal of abstinence-only education is an ongoing issue in faith-based organizations that is growingly apparent.

The lack of comprehensive sex education programs in religious organizations especially impacts the sexual minorities within those organizations since the relationship between religion and sexuality may be particularly fraught for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Several studies have demonstrated a link between religiosity and prejudice toward LGBTQIA+ individuals (Golriz, 2021). In a review of nearly 6,000 religious youth from 38 Protestant denominations as well as Roman Catholic, Unitarian Universalist, Jewish, and Islamic traditions, 46% of queer respondents said their parents were unaware of their orientation or struggled with it because of their religious identity. But at the same time, their religious identity was an important part of their lives. This suggests that comprehensive sexual education that allows people from all backgrounds, sexualities, and identities to integrate sexual education with their own religious and spiritual beliefs may be important especially for religious LGBTQIA+ individuals. A lack of education about LGBTQIA+ folks results in a lack of understanding, which can open the door to prejudice.

There are a few religiously-aware sexual-education programs that are growing in popularity. Turner and Stayton (2014) describe "The Seminary Curriculum Workshop" which involves an explicit multi faith approach to comprehensive sexual education. These kinds of programs have the potential to investigate sexuality and religion in a space of questioning, exploration, and understanding values while accepting differences. As a result, sex education programs may achieve being fully inclusive while religious beliefs, perhaps creating an integrated relationship of religion and sexuality.

Literature over Queer Sexuality and Spirituality

When evaluating the inclusivity of sex education programs, it should be noted that feelings of conflict between religious and sexual identities for LGBTQIA+ individuals are not limited to American Christianity. Yip, Browne, and Munt (2010) also describe interviews with 17 LGBTQIA+ Muslims in the US, UK, and Canada. Although these believers had integrated their religious beliefs with their sexuality - explaining that Allah created and accepted their sexuality - they remained concerned about the reaction of their families and religious communities. This suggests a space to examine and learn about sexuality that is welcoming of all faith traditions and the integration of religiousness and sexuality would be important across religious traditions

Some religious traditions have different approaches to sexuality and spirituality than these Abrahamic faiths. For example, Buddhist discussions of sexuality and spirituality might be rooted in the concept of the threat of desire itself, as opposed to prohibitions against any particular sexual practice (Yip, Browne, and Munt, 2010). It is important to have a religiously-diverse approach to sexual education due to the varying perspectives of the meaning of sexuality, along with considering the LGBTQIA* believers of different faiths.

Other Potential Benefits of Religious Diversity in Sexual Education

One often overlooked value of considering religiousness and spirituality in sexual education is learning how to navigate differences in religiousness and spirituality in sexual relationships. An example would be how depictions of interfaith relationships in media often ignore or downplay potential areas of conflict related to sexuality because of differences in religious beliefs, tradition, or culture (Mehta, 2012). Education programs that invite multi-faith perspectives can help people learn not just how to integrate their ideas about religiousness and sexuality, but how to navigate relationships with partners who may have very different ideas about religiousness and sexuality

Mehta's (2012) analysis of media from the 1970s to 1990s found that Christian/Jewish couples were portrayed as heterosexual and the sex lives of these couples are not seen as needing to consider their different faith systems. Mehta explains how the interfaith relationship dynamic in popular media plays into an exotic appeal rather than emphasizing the couple navigating different expectations and understandings around sexuality (2012). An inclusive sex education program for all people would help interfaith couples explore their differences to reach an understanding together, which could potentially better popular media depiction.

Sacred Sexuality Study

To investigate the complex relationship between religion and sexual education, we cooperated with the Wilson Center for Spiritual Exploration and Multifaith Dialogue to learn about participants' experiences in their semester-long sex education course. The sex education course, *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Young Adults*, is a comprehensive program that is inclusive and hosted at the multi-faith center; values of this program include self-worth, sexual health, responsibility, and justice & inclusivity (Tino et al., 2008). However, the relationships

between faith and sexuality is not a major focus of the curriculum. Understanding how participants think about their sexuality and faith as a result of this program will help further clarify the complex relationship between spirituality, sexuality, and education. In this study, we collected some quantitative measures from participants at the beginning of the course and then conducted qualitative interviews with several participants at the end of the course. This thesis will not report or analyze on the quantitative measures, only the qualitative interviews after the class.

This study will allow us to investigate the experience of participants in a community sexual education course housed in an explicitly multifaith setting. We will examine participants' experiences in the program to understand how their faith interacts with their sexual education. Additionally, the intersection of interfaith contact and human sexuality will allow for the comparison of the efficacy of this program to other interfaith programs that focus on different topics. This research will help clarify our understanding of how religious groups interact with other religious groups and inform an understanding of sacred sexuality.

Hypotheses

I expect that the participants in the Wilson Center Sex Education class will tolerate those that do not have the same spiritual or religious beliefs as themselves more than before the class, along with gaining a more comprehensive understanding of sexuality and gender. I hypothesize that people will see the intersection of their faith and sexuality as integrated.

METHODS

Participants

Participants (N ~ 20) in the Sacred Sexuality Sex Education course hosted by The Wilson Center for Spiritual Exploration and Multifaith Dialog (Orono, ME) over the age of 18 have been asked to participate in the study.

Methods

Due to data quality issues, we could not analyze the quantitative data. However, we were able to recruit four participants for the interviews. The study utilized semi-structured interviews for participants in the course which were conducted over Zoom (Appendix E for interview questions). Participants who completed the pre-survey were contacted at the end of the semester to take part in an interview using the Wilson Center's contact list of course attendees. Participants had the option to participate in the interview before or after the post-survey. Interviews took approximately 15-30 minutes. The interview consisted of questions relating to the participant's experience of the course and views about lived spirituality and interfaith values (Appendix E).

RESULTS

Four confidential interviews were conducted over Zoom that asked participants about the overall course experience, faith and sexuality, and willingness to participate in the interfaith relational dialogue.

Course Experience

1. Is there anything that happened in this course that was important to your development as a person? If so, what was the cause? What was the development?

Overall, people indicated that the class was valuable to their development and that hearing from diverse perspectives was a key part of that growth. For example, Participant One answered that “talking about the spectrum and variety in all of the different sexualities and sexual identities that people have and having a conversation with people whom all have different views and learning about the different ways to have relationships and intimate connections and communicate about that was very eye-opening” for them, along with underlining that they “felt very validated by the class... it was very cool”.

Participant Two thought they “learned a lot of factual information... through the course [they] learned a lot of different opinions people can hold and a lot of different ways of interacting, along with different ways a relationship can look and be like”. Participant Two ended their answer with saying “hearing people’s personal experiences definitely had a...”, then stated they did not know how to finish.

Participant Three answered that “Getting to talk to a bunch of different people that were all sorted interested in the same thing was interesting” and “Beside that, [they] learned a lot of information which was really cool.” Participant Four said the course “was empowering as [they] realized that it was okay to set boundaries... the course talked about setting boundaries in multiple sessions.”

2. Did anything in this course change your world view? If so, what were the changes?

What was the cause of the change?

Participants interviewed did not believe that this course changed their worldview. However, Participant Two reflected that “changing their world view would be a bit too much but more so broadened their world view”. However, in contrast with most of the people interviewed, Participant Four reflected that they “are a lot more comfortable with the LGBTQIA* community because [they are] more educated now”, along with being “more educated about the different relationships that are possible to have... how families can look like different things”.

3. Did anything in the course change your way of thinking about religious others? If so, what were the changes? What was the cause of the change?

Half of the participants did not think the course changed their way of thinking about religious others but Participant Two responded that the course did change their way of thinking about religious others because “a lot of the course went over values, its value-based around your own personal values and values related to sex, but a lot of personal values someone may have related to sex”. Participant Two continued that the “Class talked a lot about depending on what faith you’re part of or what religious/spiritual values you hold, that your values have a relationship with how you think about sex”. Overall, the course “Broadened their mind around sexuality and became more open and respectful about how others will let other religions inform their values of sexuality”. Participant Four opted to skip this question.

Faith and Sexuality

4. How do your religious and spiritual beliefs interact with your ideas around sexuality?

Participant One answered that they were raised going to Catholic school and were taught a lot of repression and never really had any sex ed classes so this has affected them in the past...they are in the process of dismantling the trauma that was centered around that”. Participant Two said that their beliefs did not interact with their ideas around sexuality while Participant Three stated they are an atheist so it does not pertain to them. Participant Four reflected that they are a feminist and “found it difficult because they have a struggle between their values and the values of society”.

5. Do your religious and spiritual beliefs inform your perception of what defines acceptable sexual activities? If so, how?

Most of the participants did not believe that their religious and spiritual beliefs interacted with their perception of acceptable sexual activities. But, Participant Four responded they are “a Buddhist but also a pagan so the style of Buddhism they practice has five mindfulness trainings and one of them is called true love. It says to not have sexual relations with someone unless there is a long-term commitment, like being known to family and friends”. Participant Four added that they struggled with this question “because everyone’s experiences are going to be different and it's a bit limiting”. Participant Three opted to skip this question.

6. How has learning about sexuality with people who may or may not share your religious/spiritual beliefs influence your views of sexuality?

All of the participants agreed that learning about sexuality with people who may not have shared their religious or spiritual views did result in influencing their views of sexuality. Participant One answered that sexuality “is very broad and that there are a lot of different ways to express it... more than they can comprehend with their limited perspective”. Participant Two responded that they “definitely feel more open to how sexuality can look for different people and

respects it a bit more when coming from people talking about how their own religion interacts with sexuality”. Participant Three said it made them “more aware of different people’s situations”. Participant Four said that “in our society, we do not talk about sexuality often because it’s taboo because of all of these stereotypes in the media, but this class has made them exposed to different ways of thinking about sexuality and people with different viewpoints”. Participant Four continued with the sentiment that “it is good to know that everyone is different and whatever your viewpoint is, it’s acceptable”

Willingness to Participate in Interfaith Relational Dialogue

7. What is your history with interfaith contact? Can you give examples?

Most of the participants experience with interfaith contact was with the Wilson Center. Participant One answered that they “went to the Wilson Center a lot when attending UMaine and otherwise, they have had Jewish friends and Muslim friends”. Participant One “does not really exist in communities with heavy religious influence, more like spiritual yoga earth-based influenced communities”. Participant Two said the majority of their interfaith contact has been through the Wilson Center. Participant Three responded that they also are at the Wilson Center a lot and that when they were young, their “grandparents took [them] to church a couple of times... [they] didn’t like that”. Participant Four said they are “part of a Unitarian Universalist church and goes to the Wilson Center a lot for various events including meditation, embody movement, philosophy and theology discussion group, and dance classes”.

8. Reflecting on your life so far, are there any interfaith relationships that have been important to your development as a person? If so, what were they? In which ways did you develop as a result? Did any of these relationships change your perspective about religion? In what way?

All of the participants had interfaith relationships that have been important to their development as a person. Participant One responded that “the community at the Wilson Center and going to the talks and dinners and meeting people there was important to [their] development as a person in a way by connecting to different professors and people in college”. Participant One continued to say “religion aside, existing in a place that has a lot of diversity is very valuable but religion is also cool when it is diverse.”

Participant Two responded that their relationship with their mom “because mom is a more spiritual person and [they] now appreciates this a bit more, takes it more seriously, and this has broadened [their] horizons on what it means”. Participant two added “everyone [they] have come in contact with in some way” has been important to their development. Participant Three said “hanging out at the Wilson Center has made [them] more open to other people and their religious beliefs... making sure [their] past preconceived notions about those religions did not affect perception of the people at the Wilson Center”. Participant Four responded that when they were in the hospital a few years ago, the hospital had an interfaith figure and that’s how they first got exposed to Buddhism.

9. Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual or faithful person? (Or would you prefer another description?) What does it mean to you?

Half of the participants did not identify as religious or spiritual. Participant One answered that they “are spiritual and taking barefoot walks in the woods feels religious to them but does not practice any structured religion, unless yoga counts but feels that yoga is more of lifestyle than a religion”. Participant Four responded “Yes! It is partially a way of living that makes you happy and partially a way to guide for morality”.

10. Are there any religious, spiritual or other ideas, symbols or rituals that are important to you, or have been important to you? - If so, what are they and what makes them important?

The religious, spiritual or other ideas, symbols or rituals that are important to the participants were varied. Participant One answered “Setting intentions with the new moon and releasing that did not serve them with the full moon, fire ceremonies, burning things, dancing, getting in the ocean even in the winter, tea, singing to the water and herbs while making tea, [they] have a lot of little practices [they] do often but not on a schedule”. Participant Two opted to skip and Participant Three said “no”. Participant Four” really likes flowers because they symbolize love and [they] believe love is the meaning of life, which is very central to [their] spirituality”.

11. What is your image or model of mature faith? What do you consider a mature way to handle existential questions?

Two participants did not have a model of mature faith or a mature way to handle existential questions, but the other two participants had different ideas. “Participant Two thought “Listening more and considering different people’s perspectives and being open to listening to them, along with engaging in dialogue with those things and other’s beliefs” is a model of mature faith. Participant Three suggested “writing out a list of pros and cons, perhaps list format” would be a model of mature faith.

12. How has your world view changed across your life’s chapters? How has this affected your image of God or of the Devine, or your world view? What does it mean to you now?

All of the participants felt their world view changed across their lives. Participant One said their world view “broadened a lot... used to be very closed off, protected, and scared, not really very interested in the world for a long time, but the past couple years [they have] completely branched out a lot and kinda become a completely different person”. Participant One felt

“this would take too long to elaborate”. Participant Two “thinks that [their] world view has opened up more and gotten less judgmental about things, and more inclusive about different ways of being generally.” Participant Three reflected that their world view “Probably [did not change] that significantly as [they] like to listen to folks in positions of authority in their fields”. Participant Four “went through a very rough period in which [they] realizes now that [they] thought the idea of life was being good at things and part of healing from that was realizing that it wasn’t about being a person that is good at things, but about being a good person”.

13. If people disagree about issues of world view or religion, how can such conflicts be resolved?

Most of the participants thought that if people disagree about issues of world view or religion, conflicts can be resolved by being respectful and open-minded. Participant One answered “Being curious about each other’s opinions and listening to understand but not try to convince each other that the other is right or wrong... being okay with ‘we have different opinions here but that’s that’... but that’s tricky if the other opinion is being used to harm people... how much should people get away with in the name of religion?”. Participant Two responded that they did not know, but “it might be ideal to be more respectable and listen more”. Participant Three answered “discussion with fact checking”. Participant Four said it is important to “emphasize compassion and see the other person as yourself... looking deeply at the situation and the other person”.

At the end of the interviews, I asked the participants if they had anything else to share. Participant One said “both teachers did amazing and the teaching style was fantastic... very inclusive and fun, would definitely recommend [the course] to others”. Participant Two said they

really enjoyed the sex ed course and was glad they got to help by doing the survey. Participant Three asked me more about my honors thesis while Participant Four had nothing else to add.

DISCUSSION

Overall, four participants of the Wilson Center Sex Education Class were interviewed on their course experience, faith and sexuality, and willingness to participate in interfaith relational dialogue. A positive of interviewing these four participants was the unanimous enjoyment and praise that they expressed for the sex ed class. Another positive was how all participants were open to interfaith dialogue as well. However, it should be noted that half of the participants said they were not religious or spiritual, which partially takes away from the religious diversity of the class.

While these four participants may not be entirely representative of the class or the surrounding university, it should be safe to say that their experiences and attitudes inform us of the influence and impact of the sex ed class using an interfaith dialogue. Although the class may have been lacking in religious and spiritual diversity, there was still a repeated idea of how the class opened dialogue of new ideas and opinions around sexuality. The interview questions and protocol was already set so I could not ask specific questions about Q+ identity and acceptance, but found results related to acceptance of the LGBTQ* community. Three out of the four participants stated that this course did not change their worldview, but one participant reflected that this course resulted in them feeling more understanding of the LGBTQ* community. Being more tolerant of a marginalized group that is repeatedly discriminated against due to sexuality and gender is such an important takeaway from this sex education class, which highlights how crucial it is to have these dialogues in a respectful way while accounting for faith.

The course also had some participants dismantling the values taught to them, whether in a religious or societally engrained way, and reconciling the messages of the sex ed class. Messages of tolerance, acceptance, and understanding boundaries is one of the many topics discussed in

this class, which participants reported as essential to helping benefit their understanding of sexuality. The participants that identified as religious or spiritual did report their understanding of their faith influencing their views and understandings. This study could be more comprehensive in the future would be having a more religiously and spiritually diverse group engaging in this sex ed class to understand better how different religions might intersect with sexuality.

A key takeaway from the interviews is that many participants elaborated that being open-minded and non-judgmental when listening to a person from another religion or faith is important to resolving religious conflicts. Interfaith dialogue highlights our differences but creates bridges of understanding that allow us to better support and be considerate of our dissimilarities in a mindful manner: interfaith dialogue would be needed to improve feelings of community, acceptance, and overall better quality of life.

Having an interfaith dialogue that is more common within discussions of sexuality would likely help many under-represented groups feel seen, heard, and valued. While it is not necessary to agree with all viewpoints, to have those with different perspectives discussing how their understandings of sexuality and religion coincide is major when better understanding and tolerating each other. Open discussions of sexuality within an interfaith dialogue might help clear misconceptions and stereotypes that are not confronted in other aspects of our lives. Interfaith dialogue might be the key to breaking down harmful ideas of marginalized groups in society, resulting in a more factual and caring society. Alongside this, interfaith dialogue being in more discussions around sexuality would better normalize sexuality and religion being recognized as having a relationship. Sex education courses being fully comprehensive while considering and respecting

religious beliefs connects back to the goal of sex education programs creating an integrated relationship of religion and sexuality, which guides away from the confusion that results from religion and sexuality being viewed as separate (Turner and Stayton, 2014).

A limitation of the study is that the University of Maine students did not range in age, resulting in a rather limited experience of sexuality and spirituality. Considering the students interviewed were all younger, the results only inform on the impact that an interfaith sex education course can have on the younger generation. How would an interfaith sex education class influence older people? Older people could potentially be more resistant to change to their worldview and practices. However, older people could benefit more from an interfaith dialogue, especially those not used to interacting with those with different religious or spiritual beliefs.

Another limitation was how the lack of religious diversity on campus resulted in the interviews not being as representative as it otherwise would be. It would be fascinating to see how a more religiously diverse class would handle interfaith dialogue, especially around sexuality. It would be interesting to find out whether a more religiously diverse class would result in more understanding and discussion around the intersections of sexuality and religious or spiritual beliefs.

A key limitation was that only four participants were interviewed, and the majority were strongly tied to the Wilson Center. Having more participants and participants that did not have interaction with the Wilson Center beforehand might produce more authenticity to the influence of the interfaith sex education class when compared to other settings. How would these conversations be with more people engaged, along with more people coming from unbiased viewpoints?

An avenue this research could take in the future would be having an interfaith sex education class on a larger scale with more participants that have diversity in age, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religious and spiritual beliefs. The Wilson Center should consider contacting all of the religious and spiritual student organizations on campus to invite them to attend their sex ed class, along with potentially attending some of their events for the Wilson Center to be more known within the religious and spiritual groups on campus. Having better advertising of the sex ed class outside of the Wilson Center sphere would better the attendance and diversity of the folks attending. Being more inclusive and having more diversity would result in more dialogue about the intersections of sexuality and religious or spiritual beliefs.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX B- INTERVIEW INVITATION

Invitation for after September 1, 2022:

Greetings,

Earlier in the semester, you participated in a research project related to your participation in the Fall Semester Sex Ed Course at The Wilson Center for Spiritual Exploration and Multifaith Dialog. We have received your contact information from the Wilson Center's attendance information on the Fall Semester Sex Ed Course at the Wilson Center. As part of the project, we would like to invite to you participate in a short online Zoom interview (15-30 mins). The interview will not be recorded – the interviewer will take non-identifying notes. The interview will ask you several questions about your beliefs and your experience in the course. The Informed Consent form is attached to this invitation.

If you agree to participate, is there a time you are available to participate in an interview via Zoom?

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

Thank you,

Bailey

APPENDIX C— INFORMED CONSENTS

Interview Informed Consent for After September 1, 2022

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Jordan P. LaBouff, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology, and Sally B. Barker, M.S., a graduate student in the department of psychology at the University of Maine. The purpose of the research is to understand how people think about themselves and their attitudes about different topic and to understand your experience of the Fall Semester Sex Ed Course at The Wilson Center for Spiritual Exploration and Multifaith Dialog. You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

What Will You Be Asked to Do?

This interview is confidential and should take about 15-30 minutes. You will be invited to attend a Zoom session where you will have a 1-on-1 discussion with the researcher. The interview will not be recorded, but non-identifying notes will be made by the researcher. If you decide to participate, you will be asked several questions about your experience in the sex ed course at the Wilson Center and your perspective about a variety of beliefs. You will be asked questions like, “Did anything in this course change your world view?” and “How has your world view changed across your life’s chapters? How has this affected your image of God or of the Devine, or your world view?”

Risks

Except for your time and inconvenience, there are no additional risks to you from participating in this study.

Benefits

While there are no direct benefits to you, it is hoped the self-reflection required by the questions will be valuable and enjoyable. This research will help us better understand how people’s ideas about themselves influence their attitudes and perceptions.

Confidentiality

This interview is confidential. Your name or email will never be connected to the data. The zoom interview will not be recorded. Researchers’ notes will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked room, and the notes will be deleted at the end of the project, no later than 6/1/2024. A pseudonym will be assigned to your interview to keep your identity confidential if used in journal articles and conference presentations. The information collected from this study will be used in journal articles and conference presentations only in aggregate form to preserve privacy.

Voluntary

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time. You may choose to not respond to or ask to skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Jordan LaBouff (jordan.labouff@maine.edu; 207/581-2826). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, University of Maine, 207/581-2657 (or e-mail umric@maine.edu).

By clicking Yes below, you indicate that you have read the above information and agree to participate.

APPENDIX E— INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I will ask you 10 questions about your course experience and other beliefs. The interview should take about 15-30 minutes. You may skip questions or stop the interview at any time. Only your audio will be recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin the interview? Do you consent to be interviewed and recorded?

Course Experience

1. **Is there anything that happening in this course that was important to your development as a person?** If so, what was the cause? What was the development?
2. **Did anything in this course change your world view?** If so, what were the changes? What was the cause of the change?
3. **Did anything in the course changed your way of thinking about religious others?** If so, what were the changes? What was the cause of the change?

Faith and Sexuality

4. **How do your religious and spiritual beliefs interact with your ideas around sexuality?**
5. **Do your religious and spiritual beliefs inform your perception of what defines acceptable sexual activities?** If so, how?
6. **How has learning about sexuality with people who may or may not share your religious/spiritual beliefs influenced your views of sexuality?**

Willingness to Engage in IRD

7. **What is your history with interfaith contact?** Can you give examples?
8. **Reflecting on your life so far, are there any interfaith relationships that have been important to your development as a person?** If so, what were they? In which ways did you develop as a result? Did any of these relationships change your perspective about religion? In what way? Other
9. **Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual or faithful person?** (Or would you prefer another description?) What does it mean to you?

10. **Are there any religious, spiritual or other ideas, symbols or rituals that are important to you, or have been important to you? - If so, what are they and what makes them important?**
11. **What is your image or model of mature faith? What do you consider a mature way to handle existential questions?**
12. **How has your world view changed across your life's chapters? How has this affected your image of God or of the Devine, or your world view? What does it mean to you now?**
13. **If people disagree about issues of world view or religion, how can such conflicts be resolved?**
14. **Is there anything else you would like to share?**

Please provide answers to the following prompts so we can link your interview response to your survey responses:

- The number of the month you were born in (e.g. August - enter "8")
- The first letter of your mother's first name (e.g. M for Mary)
- The last letter of the city you were born in (e.g. N for Boston)

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Bailey Lewis was born in Skowhegan, Maine on July 9, 2001. Majoring in Psychology and Women's Gender Sexuality Studies, she is a member of All Maine Women and Vice President of Student Organizations in the University of Maine Student Government. Upon graduation, Bailey plans to go on for a Social Work MSW.