BEARING WITNESS: PREGNANT TEENS, HAGAR, AND CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHICAL RESPONSES

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ABSTRACT

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Teen pregnancy is commonly thought of as a social problem in US society. Teen pregnancy provokes our deepest convictions about sexuality, gender, family, and sin. As US culture continues to view teen pregnancy as a social problem, the stigmatization of these young persons grows, and their authentic voice remains erased. This project argues that the perpetuation of such social norms and attitudes is not ok. Moreover, it is not aligned with the sacred worth that God has given all of humanity in *Imago Dei*.

Christian bias has historically played a major role in the development of US educational, political, and medical institutions. Too often, Christian theologies that promote segregation, disembodiment, silencing, and ultimately trauma seep into our policies in a way that oppresses people based on their age, gender, race, and so on. A revised Christian social ethic is in order to resist, repair, and reshape these norms and better pursue the common good.

This project presents a childist-feminist method in light of trauma theory as an avenue for doing this work of resistance, reparations, and change for not only pregnant teens, but more specifically, homeless pregnant teens. By focusing on the particularities of homeless pregnant and parenting youth, one can gain clearer access to both the sacredness of these persons, as well as the necessary Christian communal responses to reclaiming their needs and dignity at a social level. A hermeneutic for doing this work is

developed out of key concepts from childist, feminist, womanist, and trauma theories. The hermeneutic is grounded in a theological anthropology that prizes human relationality, embodiment, creativity, and non-linear growth. While childist and feminist methods promote de-centering oneself to peoples who have been socially marginalized, trauma theory helps illuminate the ways in which not listening to the silenced, erased, and forgotten is damaging to the whole. In turn, using a trauma-focused, childist-feminist approach to Christian social ethics, one is challenged to bear witness to the silenced stories with the belief that we can heal through a greater understanding of the truth. Out of this more complete truth, individuals and communities can really engage in the struggles for change. This project bears witness to pregnant and parenting homeless teens and then provides strategies for reparative justice work.

DEDICATION

To my beloved mom and dad. Even from your graves, you continue to offer me unconditional and fierce love *and* teach me radical hospitality for all parts of myself and anyone I encounter.

To my nieces and nephews, who allow me to love them without limits.

To my clients and students, who ground me in joy and gratitude.

You all offer me affirmation when I don't deserve it and see me in ways that give me life and endurance.

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A few short months later, I got a call that my mother had passed in the night. After calling a couple of my tried and true lifelines, I called my advisor—Kate Ott. I was supposed to present a paper at a conference in a couple of days, and I just had no idea how to plan. She told me to just drive to her office. I texted my people, and they met me in Kate's office. Seong, Elyse, Leah, Steve, Brock, and Kate—thank you for being my people on that day and in the days to come. Steph, Lisa, and Sonny, thank you for being my family and place of respite while forging the storms.

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INTRODUCTION

Pregnant Teens: More than Children and Potential Mothers

Hagar, foreign slave and mother of Ishmael, found herself wondering in the wilderness, seeking guidance about her next move. Before Ishmael was born, she was being beaten and abused by her mistress. Her mistress was unable to bear children but wanted to give her husband a son. Hence, she gave Hagar to her husband as a surrogate so that he could have children. Hagar's mistress resented Hagar from the moment she became pregnant, though, and treated her so poorly that Hagar fled to the wilderness with the intent of returning to her homeland.[1]

Something mysterious happened while Hagar was in the wilderness this first time. She had stopped for some moments to rest by a well. One could imagine that she was reflecting on whether she had made the right decision by leaving her mistress and master. She wondered if she would truly be able to find her way back to her homeland. She questioned whether the journey would be detrimental to the child she was bearing. Then, all at once, she was greeted by another being who asked where she was going. Hagar came to realize that she was conversation with her master's God.[2] *Through the encounter, Hagar learned that God was listening to her and understood her plight. God displayed compassion, care, and respect for Hagar and the child she was carrying. God comprehended her struggle with living under such harsh conditions and was able to speak to Hagar about her desires for her son to not be enslaved as she has been. As a result, Hagar and God made an agreement: Hagar would return to her master and mistress, she would name her son Ishmael (which means "God hears"), and Ishmael was promised a life as a free man. Also, Hagar was promised numerous descendants. Hagar celebrated being seen and heard by God and named the well where they met Beer-lahai-roi, which means "well of the Living one who sees me."*[3]

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[1] This writer takes creative liberty in the presentation of the Biblical story found in Genesis 16 and 21 in an effort to illuminate the particular experiences of Hagar and Ishmael.

[2] The book of Genesis says that Hagar is visited by an angel of God. Fewell's interpretation merely utilizes God in reference to this particular entity. This writer chooses to use God in a similar fashion.

[3] Genesis 16:14. New Living Translation.

The exact age of Hagar is unknown, but it is likely that she was in her teenage years. As a slave, she had no rights and was completely dependent on her mistress. The only way she could exert her own autonomy was through emancipating herself from her mistress, so she fled. In the wilderness, Hagar's encounter with God teaches the reader about who God is and how God views humans, particularly women. Hagar's testimony shows a God who sees all of Hagar's particularities and listens intimately to her heart. God displays understanding that humans are both autonomous and relationally dependent as well as intertwined in structures that can be deeply and violently hurtful, from family to slavery. Hagar also encounters a God that desires for her to be liberated and flourish.[4]

This liberative interpretation of Hagar's story will be expanded upon later, but for now, I want to shift and introduce what one in the United States might call contemporary Hagars—pregnant teens. While the historical and cultural context of Hagar is drastically different from 21st century US culture, the experience of teenage pregnancy in the US resonates with the plight of Hagar. Pregnant teens and Hagar both tell stories of young women navigating tensions, felt psychologically and physically. The stories reveal a constant negotiation between autonomy and dependency through relationships with their communities, homes, aspirations, bodies, and pregnancy. Such realities impact one's entire existence. When someone is not physically welcome in a certain place, such as a

[4] This creative, liberative interpretation of Hagar's experience is by no means universal and would be disputed by differing theologies. For example, the Jehovah Witnesses view Hagar and Ishmael as sinful and destructive. Them being cast out of Abraham's family is symbolic of God's desire and efforts to cast aside the sinners from his kingdom (See https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Insight-on-the-Scriptures/Hagar/.) An interpretation such as this not only minimizes the humanness of Hagar and Ishmael, as created in God's image, but also villainizes the Muslim tradition and their claiming of Hagar and Ishmael in their origin story.

school or home, then they may question their self-worth. It is easy to imagine that when one is denied a sense of belonging and safety, that they then do not have the confidence or energy to attend to their own desires. All of these conditions serve as weights on their body and spirit, which consequently inhibits their agency.

Gloria Malone, advocate, freelance writer, and blogger, sheds light on the unique experience of being a busy teenager and becoming unexpectedly pregnant.

> When I got pregnant and became a mother at 15, I experienced an overwhelming onslaught of disrespect and shame from family members, friends, and perfect strangers.
>
> I was a teenager dealing with an unintended pregnancy, a high school course load, extracurricular activities, ob-gyn appointments, and friends and peers talking behind my back, all while trying to plan for my future and that of my unborn child.
>
> More than ever in my life, I needed emotional support. What I got was the complete opposite. . . . Society seems to think that pregnant and parenting teens must be punished and used for political prevention campaigns instead of being supported and treated as the full human beings we are.
>
> I felt alone, disrespected, and depressed. . . . I did not feel like I could reach out to anyone because the very same people I was supposed to be able to count on were causing much of the pain and depression I was experiencing.
>
> When my daughter was born, I added to that emotional burden the pressure to be the "perfect teen mom," along with the stress of needing to succeed at school and continue being the good student I had always been.
>
> In an effort to survive and limit the impact of society's rude comments and actions, I shut down emotionally. This pushed me further into depression and subsequently made me ignore my mental health altogether.
>
> I didn't realize it at the time, but the nightmares, anxiety, blinding migraines, and involuntary silent crying I was experiencing, sometimes daily, were directly due to a lack of mental and emotional support. I needed that support before becoming a pregnant teen, and I needed it as a pregnant and parenting teen. And I deserved the same support as all pregnant women and mothers.[5]

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[5] Gloria Malone, "What I Needed When I Was a Pregnant and Parenting Teen: I was desperate for the emotional support I deserved—but never got," *Selini*, March 15, 2018, https://www.seleni.org/advice-support/article/what-i-needed-when-i-was-a-pregnant-and-parenting-teen.

Gloria's narrative illuminates some particular tensions that arise for pregnant teens. Teenagers already balance school, extracurricular activities, family life, peer groups, and exploration of their sexuality. When a person finds themselves pregnant, they face judgments about their personhood, morality, capabilities, and more.

Dr. Alizabeth Acevedo is a 49-year-old anesthesiologist from Queens, New York. At the age of 17, she was a senior in high school and gave birth four months before graduation. On a website for teen moms in New York City, Dr. Acevedo describes her initial reactions to finding out she was pregnant: "Scared, disbelief, disappointment in myself, sadness for my parents, embarrassed, terrified because I had no idea how I was going to raise a baby & continue with school. Ironically, I did feel a small bit of happiness because after all I was carrying a life inside of me. I just didn't know what to do with that new life and my own."[6] Dr. Acevedo remembers being worried about herself, her parents, and pregnancy.

While these are only two experiences, what these women seem to be saying is that their status as a human being is in question—or diminished—because they had a child at a young age. These women are mirroring back to society the ways in which society views them and ultimately responds to them, holds them, and values them. These narratives of these women's lives, like Hagar's story, illuminate the ways in which human beings define each other, care for each other, judge each other, and respond to each other within

[6] Alizabeth Acevedo, "Meet Dr. Acevedo- Teen Mom to MD," http://www.teenmomnyc.com/search/label/Interviews (July 3, 2012). Dr. Acevedo shared that she was 39-years old at the time this interview was posted in 2012. At present, the website teenmomnyc.com is no longer available.

socio-historical contexts. They also shed light on the psychological trauma one encounters through processes of social shaming, judgment, and marginalization.

In the United States, teen pregnancy has been identified as encapsulating the sins and downfalls of society—as a society that prides itself on being progressive, secular, and pluralistic. Teen pregnancy pervasively is the catalyst for debates about sexuality, family, and personhood. "For many, teen parenthood symbolizes 'what's wrong' with America today. Media outlets incessantly report the details of celebrity pregnancies and create reality shows about teen mothers."[7] A 2018 poll finds that "80% of adults say teen pregnancy is an important problem compared to other social and economic problems in their community."[8] US norms and sanctions have been formed and influenced by Christian values and ideologies and teenage pregnancy challenges the US cultural norms and attitudes about human fitness—questioning the fitness of unwed persons, young persons, and persons of lower socio-economic status to bear children.[9] Thus, attitudes about teen pregnancy shed light on how Christian narratives and the historical construction of US values intersect.

The teen years are a unique time in which young people are developmentally understood as transitioning from childhood to adulthood.[10] It is a time in one's life where

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[7] Stefanie Mollborn, " 'children' having children," *Contexts* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 34.

[8] Power to Decide, "Public Opinion," (2018), https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/public-opinion. Power to Decide is an organization that grew out of the national campaign to reduce teen pregnancy rates.

[9] Kristin Luker, *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[10] For the most part, teen refers to persons between the ages of 15-19. Unless otherwise stated, this is the age group to be addressed in this project.

tensions around feminist Christian social ethical principles of autonomy and relationality, or dependency and interdependency, are at the forefront. Turning the spotlight onto the particular experiences of women in their teens who are pregnant will illuminate the inherent relationality in conceptions of personhood and how it is often at odds with notions of autonomy and independence in Christian practical theologies, health care ethics and policies, and educational measures. For example, Guttmacher Institute reports a clear paradox in state policies. "Many states require parental involvement in a minor's decision to terminate a pregnancy. In sharp contrast, states overwhelmingly consider minors who are parents to be capable of making critical decisions affecting the health and welfare of their children without their own parents' knowledge or consent."[11] Does giving birth radically alter one's knowledge, experience, and resources in a way that instantaneously makes one a legal and social adult? What autonomy does one have over their bodies and lives prior to being a certain age or bearing a child? How do social constructs and structures such as developmental stages, marital status, and so on undermine our inherent individuality and relationality? How do the ways in which society answers these questions make moral demands that shape an approach to adolescent sexuality and reproductive health options? How might a renewed look at Hagar's story create new ethical demands on Christians at the personal and structural levels?

In this project, I will utilize a childist-feminist hermeneutic in light of trauma theory to address the particularities of reproductive health for pregnant teens in the

[11] Guttmacher Institute, "Minors' Rights as Parents," *State Laws and Policies,* New York: Guttmacher Institute, April 1, 2016, https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/minors-rights-parents.

United States as well as explore ways in which we as Christians can more adequately and holistically understand and ultimately engage pregnant teens through richer biblical and theological understandings.

Methodological Tools for Re-Centering the Subject

I argue that pregnant teenagers are a population that have not had an authentic voice, or any voice at all, in US society—they not only deserve to be heard but also make demands on us as Christian citizens.[12] They are persons embedded in a series of intersecting social structures—religious, familial, educational, legal, medical, among others. In order to more fully understand the experiences and needs of pregnant teenagers, it is essential that I interrogate the multiplicities of their psychosocial lives through a Christian social ethical lens. I strive to give attention to their voices while also

[12] The rise of teen pregnancy and teen mom reality shows were created to deter young people from pregnancy. These shows had a deep impact on both the lives of those presented on TV and society as a hole. Stereotypes were created and reinforced. For example, the young women were portrayed as overly dramatic, immature, and promiscuous and the young men as absent fathers. In addition, these shows seem to leave those watching think they have lower risk for pregnancy than those on the show. For more information, see the following articles: Jennifer Aubrey, Stevens, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, and Kyungbo Kim, "Understanding the Effects of MTV's 16 and Pregnant on Adolescent Girls' Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behavioral Intentions toward Teen Pregnancy," *Journal of Health Communication* 19, no. 10 (10/2014), 1145-60, https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2013.872721; Devon Greyson, Cathy Chabot, and Jean A. Shoveller. "Young Parents' Experiences and Perceptions of 'Teen Mom' Reality Shows," *Journal of Youth Studies* 22, no. 8 (2019), 1150-65, https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1569605; Christina H. Hodel, "Negotiating Genre Boundaries and Mediating Gender Stereotypes on MTV's 16 and Pregnant and Teen Mom," *Studies in the Humanities* 43, no. 1-2 (12/01/2016), 20; Melissa S. Kearney, and Phillip B. LeVine., "Media Influences on Social Outcomes: The Impact of MTV's 16 and Pregnant on Teen Childbearing," *American Economic Review* 105, no. 12 (2015), 3597-632, https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20140012; Janni J. Kinsler, Deborah Glik, Sandra de Castro Buffington, Hannah Malan, Carsten Nadjat-Haiem, Nicole Wainwright, and Melissa Papp-Green, "A Content Analysis of How Sexual Behavior and Reproductive Health Are Being Portrayed on Primetime Television Shows Being Watched by Teens and Young Adults," *Health Communication* 34, no. 6 (05/15/ 2019), 644-51, https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2018.1431020; and Nicole Martins, Mona Malacane, Nicky Lewis, and Ashley Kraus, "A Content Analysis of Teen Parenthood In "Teen Mom" Reality Programming," *Health Communication* 31, no. 12 (2016), 1548-56, https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2015.1089465.

examining the interconnecting social structures they encounter. As a Christian social ethics project, I bring together the fields of childhood studies, feminist studies, and religious studies. I am in conversation with scholars of feminist and womanist Christian ethics, trauma theory and narrative psychology, childhood studies and sociology, and biblical studies.

I argue that a childist-feminist hermeneutic in light of trauma theory is needed for two reasons: 1) to understand the experience of being a pregnant teenager in a way that is honoring to their whole self and 2) to expound the Christian theological and social ways of being in relationship with pregnant teenagers. The hermeneutic will be used to analyze and interpret the teen experience, the US narrative of reproductive health of teens, and the biblical story of Hagar. Out of these explorations, I hope to bring to the surface new and renewed moral considerations for Christians in relation to teen reproductive health.

Trauma and Identity

As we have heard, the psychosocial experience of pregnant teenagers can have a destructive nature that comes from silencing and forgetting certain bodies and voices. In Hagar's situation, she is alone, without resources or social recourse in the wilderness. The testimonials of current teens detail the isolation, shame, and fear that come with being pregnant in unexpected circumstances. Narrative psychology ascribes to the belief that the human experience has a "storied" nature. As one sorts out questions about who they are and how they fit into the world, one creates a "self-defining *life-story*. . . . the term *narrative identity* [refers] to the stories people construct and tell about themselves to define who they are for themselves and for others. Beginning in adolescence and young

adulthood, our narrative identities are the stories we live by."[13] Developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik H. Erikson's also maintained that the construction of one's identity is a dynamic, psychosocial process.[14] Narrative theorists Dan P. McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson, and Amia Lieblich state that "stories emerge in ongoing conversations and within evolving social relationships. . . . History and culture shape the stories people tell about themselves. Narrative identity, therefore, emerges out of a doubtlessly complex but poorly understood interplay between individual agency and social context."[15] Trauma theory helps illuminate the interdependent and storied nature of humanity by focusing on the ways in which trauma is the unknown and untold stories of one's life, and these experiences change our physiology and the way our brain adapts for survival. In order for one to grow from trauma, one must look the trauma straight in the eye and make meaning of it—one must provide testimony of the trauma.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth engages numerous thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Immanuel Kant.[16] Caruth draws on Freud's work in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Moses and Monotheism*, which forward the notion that a trauma experience is an experience of fright. A violent event comes by surprise and the person misses it's timing and impact in real time. It is

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[13] Dan P. McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson, and Amie Lieblich, *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative* (American Psychological Association: 2006), "Introduction," para. 2.

[14] Erikson, Erik, *Childhood & Society, 2nd Edition*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), Chapter 7.

[15] McAdams et al., para. 9.

[16] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

only after surviving the event that one realizes one missed the anticipation of the event—the moment of trauma. Caruth contends that Lacan furthers Freud's analysis of trauma and argues that the survival of missing the violent event makes an ethical demand upon the survivor. Caruth goes further, claiming that trauma makes even more demands upon persons than what Lacan suggests—the reality of the trauma demands a witness. In claiming one's survival of trauma, one is faced with what can be known about the past and what cannot be known about the future. As a result, one can transmit one's own awakening, one's own awareness of missing a violent event, one's responsibility to return to the event as a responsibility to surviving it, and one's acceptance of the future. In holding each of these three elements in tandem, Caruth argues that one also must recognize that there are still unknown pieces and that these parts of the truth, or real, are still deserving to be known.

South African practical theologian and pastoral therapist Charles Bester Manda joins in conversation with trauma theorists Judith Herman and Barbara Rubin Wainrib, arguing that returning to the suppressed memory and telling its story are essential to healing for individuals and communities. One must reconstruct "the trauma into a narrative form."[17] Through the process of "naming, re-telling, and re-experiencing the story of trauma with [another] person, we frame it. By describing the event, it goes out of us, it goes 'out there'. Thus, the event takes on a new meaning." [18] Shoshana Felman, professor of French and comparative literature, and Dori Laub, M.D., clinical professor

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[17] Charles Manda, "Re-Authoring Life Narratives of Trauma Survivors: Spiritual Perspective." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 71, no. 2 (2015): 1-8.

[18] Manda, "Re-authoring life narratives," 3.

of psychiatry also hone in on the existential crisis that can come in providing witness to trauma.[19]

Contemporary psychological and neuropsychological research supplements these thinkers and contributes avenues for providing witness to the real, lived experience of trauma survivors. Bessel van der Kolk, founder and medical director of the Trauma Center in Brookline, Massachusetts, and Professor of Psychiatry at Boston University Medical Center, and Peter A. Levine, Ph.D., developer of the naturalistic and neurobiological approach to trauma healing—somatic experiencing, uphold that our body is physiologically changed as a result of a trauma experience.[20] In turn, they argue that healing comes through attention to the embodied experience and embodied therapeutic relationships. Manda argues that one must take into account the moral and spiritual injury one faces in the aftermath of trauma. Jana Pressley and Joseph Spinazzola rethink a component-based psychotherapy model for persons who experience complex trauma from a Christian perspective.[21] Similar to Manda, Pressley and Spinazzola highlight ways in which one's relationship with God can be impacted by trauma and explore strategies for including this God relationship in the trauma work. They point to the work of John Swinton, who talks about scriptural examples of lament and encourages persons to create

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[19] Felman and Laub, *Testimony.*

[20] Bessel Van der Kolk, M.D., *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015); Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2010).

[21] Jana Pressley and Joseph Spinazzola, "Beyond Survival: Application of a Complex Trauma Treatment Model in the Christian Context" *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 43, no. 1 (2015): 8-22.

their own lament.[22] The process of creating personal lament allows one to face their feelings of anger, ambivalence, confusion, exhaustion, and even hope. Through "journaling, poetry, music, visual art, or other expressive means," one can "engag[e] honestly with God in the process of meaning-making, with the option of reconciliation with God despite unanswered questions about the existence of evil and suffering in the world. Additionally, the practice of lament is grounded in a framework of hope, empowerment, and future orientation."

Trauma takes place when persons are unable to experience an event in the moment—the experience is halted, thus they are unable to process the experience and integrate it into their self-identity, personal life narrative, and general sense of being. But, the story does not have to end there. Trauma theory, then, will be invaluable to this project in two ways: 1) giving language to the individual and collective impact of marginalizing pregnant teenagers and 2) illuminating the ethical need to give voice to these members of society who have been silenced and oppressed in an effort towards creating a better society.

Decentering with the Child

Similar to the way in which one must revisit a silenced story of trauma in order to make the most cohesive meaning of one's life story and future, a childist hermeneutic presumes that there are silenced and ignored voices in society as well as historic

[22] Pressley and Spinazzola, "Beyond Survival," 17. They draw from John Swinton's *Raging With Compassion* (2007).

narratives.[23] A childist hermeneutic must be contextualized out of a brief introduction to the area of childhood studies. Many of the scholars who identify themselves as participating in childhood studies begin their work with a deconstruction of the terms child, children, and childhood. The history of the terms is so vital to the methodology because the terms serve as markers of history, culture, and change. Analysis of the terms themselves challenge one to visit and revisit translations of texts and cultures across sources, languages, time, and space.

Old Testament scholar Laurel W. Koepf-Taylor states, "Although other academic fields such as psychology, sociology, and education have historically studied children, childhood studies does so from a cultural studies perspective that brings attention to children's subjectivities."[24] Religious ethicist John Wall challenges us to look at the child as a full moral agent—someone who is an active player in moral situations. Wall draws on notions of the other and argues that the greatest "other" that is overlooked, ignored, and unconsidered is children. Wall claims that the best way to do ethics then, is through reclaiming the forgotten or ignored child in moral conversations. In other words, we must decenter ourselves in relation to children and open ourselves up to a creative space where all lives are equal participants.[25]

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[23] Marcia J. Bunge, "Introduction," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), xv. Bunge is a prominent figure in the study of religion, children, and childhood studies.

[24] Laurel W. Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die: Children and Communal Survival in Biblical Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 7.

[25] John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

Wall's ethics in light of childhood is enriched by feminist values and methodologies. Christian feminist ethicists Cristina L.H. Traina[26] and Kate Ott[27] utilize childist and feminist methodologies, which help in framing children and youth as persons whose voices should be heard. Traina argues that children are moral persons who are active participants in moral milieus—they make moral decisions, practice moral actions, and have a significant influence on the social space of other moral persons. "We never stop being dependent and vulnerable, never stop relying on others, and never stop being affected by [others] at the very center of our moral character. . . . this dependency places *right relations* at the very center of moral life."[28] Like children, adults never cease to be dependent, vulnerable, reliant on others, and affected by others. Moreover, children illuminate the natural and innate interdependency *all* human beings have with each other.[29]

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[26] Cristina L.H. Traina, "Children and Moral Agency," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 29, no. 2 (2009).

[27] Kate M. Ott. "Taking Children's Moral Lives Seriously: Creativity as Ethical Response Offline and Online." *Religions* 10, no. 9 (September 1, 2019).

[28] Cristina L.H. Traina, "Children and Moral Agency," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 29, no. 2 (2009): 30-1, emphasis added. Traina's argument draws on the work of Margaret Adams and Lisa Tessman, among others. These thinkers wrestle with the notion of moral agency in light of systemic sin and oppression. They seem to share the notion that humans are "dependent, interdependent, vulnerable, often inarticulate, and yet self-conscious and accountable" (Traina, 32) beings. Traina's contribution to this conversation promotes the idea that since all persons—from birth until death—can be understood as ascribed with these characteristics, children merely illuminate this nature in all of us.

[29] Traina is in conversation with Nomy Arpaly, Lisa Tessman, Margaret Adam, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Mary Coyle Roche, and A. Denise Starkey, among other legal, feminist, womanist, and childist scholars.

Christian Feminist Ideologies

Christian social ethical feminist and womanist scholarship provide language and methodologies for the interrogation of oppression as psychological trauma from a social, Christian perspective. For example, Emilie Townes, in *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil,* is "interested in getting into the interior worlds of those who endure structural evil as well as the interior worlds of structural evil itself to discover what truths may be found there."[30] Townes draws on Toni Morrison's "site of memory" to better understand ways in which social groups and societies culturally construct histories and norms. Townes utilization of theological language, such as evil, challenges the reader to assess society in light of theological values and makes demands on the reader and society to better respond to evil. It becomes essential to deconstruct certain texts and images as sources of knowledge and give attention to the silenced stories and voices.

Black feminist Christian ethicist Traci West forwards that scripture can and should be used as theory.[31] West recognizes the ways in which people use scripture for moral guidance all the time—in worship, group studies, personal devotion, and so on—and cautions against accepting overly simplified, universal, and essentialized interpretations. West argues that such engagement with scripture holds the reader back from understanding the particularities of the texts that the scripture writers were compelled to include, which in turn limits one to the dynamic role Christian scripture is

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[30] Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 12.

[31] Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), Chapter 3.

intended to have in everyday living. West also promotes the necessity of listening to the lived experiences of women and using those voices in scholarship.[32] This methodological tool is vital to upholding the teens as subjects.

Social ethicist Aana Marie Vigen is a white feminist scholar who provides critical strategies for white persons like myself. Vigen argues that white people need to "cultivate the skill to be fully present in interactions and work with people of color, while also being able to step back from the immediate dialogue and events in order to be cognizant of the larger picture and to check ourselves."[33] This requires self-reflection about how one perceives they are living their life and the actual effects of one's life. It also demands that "white people be accountable for the ways in which we fail to hear and understand the needs and claims that other communities put upon us."[34] Vigen models the feminist methodology of leaning into the unique, situated experiences of certain persons' as a way of understanding the particularities of moral life and healthcare.

The Christian feminist concepts of autonomy, relationality, and embodiment help frame a theological anthropology that challenges Western dualistic notions of personhood. For example, the principles of autonomy and relationality are invaluable to how one views each individual throughout their life and how society creates order. The promotion of individual freedom and reduction of social dependency are driving forces in policy making and become ideal outcomes for just healthcare rights. These ideals create

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[32] West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics.*

[33] Aana Marie Vigen, *Women, Ethics, and Inequality in US Healthcare* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), xxii.

[34] Vigen, *Women, Ethics,* xxii.

an overemphasis on autonomy that often plays out in generally recognizing teenagers as dependent persons. Once a teenager becomes a parent, though, they often gain rights to make medical choices on behalf of themselves and their children. Legal and policy practices surrounding teenage parents raise questions, then, about what it means to be dependent versus independent and challenges the idea of valuing autonomy over dependency. In response, feminist Christian social ethicists such as Cristina Traina recognize and argue that no one is ever solely autonomous—we are always in interdependent power relationships.

Christian ethicist Lisa Sowle Cahill and Margaret Farley frame sex and sexuality in bioethical and theological conversations about embodiment. They, as well as other feminist scholars, identify the separation between body and mind as a powerful, pervasive ideology that oppresses the experience of what it means to be fully human. Oftentimes, the human body is viewed as a part of the human being that requires ordering and control from the rational mind. This implies that a person's best self is one where they not only use their mind and capabilities of reason, but favor rationality above all other ways of being. In one sense, this diminishes the inherent good of the body. Affective knowledge, the way persons feel things, express things, know things based on emotions, feelings of pain and pleasure, then, has little value. These aspects of the human experience are viewed as inferior sources of information when compared to the use of one's mind, rational knowledge. Consequently, when one expresses emotions and

feelings, they are seen as lacking self-control, irrational, lesser than, and even unruly, rather than a fully embodied and aware person.[35]

Out of this dualistic worldview, sexuality, for example, has been promoted as an expression of the body that needs regulation from rationality.[36] Sex and expression of one's sexuality have been given a rational purpose: procreation. All other expressions of sexuality are merely indulging the body over and above reason of the mind. Farley, Cahill, and their interlocutors promote embodiment as a correction to dualism. "As far as sex is concerned, then, the corrective advanced via 'embodiment' is the counteraction of repressive attitudes toward the body with a more positive attitude toward the fullness of its capacities, an important feature of which is the potential of the sexual body for intimacy and pleasure as well as for procreation."[37] These conversations bridge a gap between Christian ethics and bioethics.

Feminist and womanist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Kelly Brown Douglas, as well as feminist sociologists such as Kristin Luker, help frame

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[35] Vigen, *Women, Ethics,* xxii; Carol A. Tauer, "Abortion: Embodiment and Prenatal Development," in *Embodiment, Morality, and Medicine* (*Theology and Medicine* series, volume 6), eds. Lisa Sowle Cahill and Margaret A. Farley (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), 75-92. Cahill and Farley's entire edited volume *Embodiment, Morality, and Medicine* (*Theology and Medicine* series, volume 6, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995) more fully addresses the need for understanding human beings as embodied.

[36] Lisa Sowle Cahill, " 'Embodiment' and Moral Critique: A Christian Social Perspective," in *Embodiment, Morality, and Medicine* (*Theology and Medicine* series, volume 6), eds. Lisa Sowle Cahill and Margaret A. Farley (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), 199-215; Tauer, "Abortion." Tauer provides a brief history to the regulation of sexuality from multiple worldviews; Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework For Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006); Stephen J. Pope, "Social Selection and Sexual Diversity: Implications for Christian Ethics," in *God, science, sex, gender: an interdisciplinary approach to Christian ethics,* eds. Patricia Beattie Jung, Aana Marie Vigen, John J. Anderson, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 187-200.

[37] Cahill, " 'Embodiment'," 204.

sexuality in the context of larger systems with particular Christian values and agendas. Ruether presents a historical narrative of the making of the modern family as well as numerous intersecting ideologies (sexual morality, marriage, economic structures, gender roles, race, etc.) that she argues directly influenced the Western US ideology of family. She also explores possible Christian responses to supporting families in contemporary society including attention to the Christian Right, ecofeminism, etc. Luker, who immersed herself in a four-year ethnographic project, where she joined in multiple communities that were deeply wrestling with sex education options in public schools argues that ". . . the debate over sex education is really a debate over sex and marriage, and [the] debates about sex and marriage are also debates about gender, about how men and women (and boys and girls) should relate to one another, sexually and otherwise."[38] These scholars illuminate the way certain theologies have used sin to promote oppressive, heteronormative Christian values in policy making and educational modalities.

Christian social ethicists Traci West and Kate Ott further depict ways to expose and counter the manifestation of Christian ideas and structures that have caused harm and hold the potentiality of harm in everyday encounters, including but not limited to policy making and sexuality education. West states that the "major purpose [of social ethics] is not only to analyze existing practices that inhibit and assault the social and spiritual well-being of persons, but also to specify how those practices should be transformed to provide or support socially just and spiritually nurturing relations among us."[39] In order

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[38] Kristin Luker, *When Sex Goes to School: Warring Views on Sex—and Sex Education—Since the Sixties* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 258.

[39] West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, 38.

to create space for such transformations, it is imperative to understand the ways in which we silence, forget, and cause harm to certain bodies. West and Ott challenge persons as individuals, community members, and Christian leaders to take ownership over their particular social locations and power, specifically as it relates to sexuality, sexual relations, and race.

In sum, the most wholistic approach to understanding the subjectivity of pregnant teens must include turning towards them and de-centering oneself. Because children and adolescents, as well as women, have historically had their stories hijacked and erased by the dominant persons and structures of society, the use of trauma theory is an essential tool in grappling with the greater truth of pregnant teen experiences. Moreover, trauma theory, in conjunction with child and feminist methods, provides a renewed lens for seeing the systemic forces at play and their impact on day-to-day living.

My Working Assumptions

I begin with the theological anthropological assumption that teenagers, like any other human being, are whole, embodied beings. My conception of wholeness is informed by childist and feminist scholarship that forward all humans as having inherent moral worth. Each being, in their humanness, is sacred and created in the image of God. In turn, they are interdependent, autonomous, and embodied. Teenagers, specifically, are in a unique phase of their life journey and provide what I would argue is an exceptional lens into understanding the ever-compounding, life-long tensions of vulnerability, eagerness to grow and change, dependence on others, and desire for independence.

This understanding of what it means to be human makes demands on all of us as relational, moral beings. It challenges us to own our embodiment and value the

embodiment of others. As a Christian social ethicist interested in the embodied experience of teens, I am required to understand teenagers as moral, intellectual, sexual, curious, embodied beings. Also, as a social ethicist, I want to unmask the intersection of socio-political systems teenagers are navigating and how these systems nurture and diminish their livelihood. A Christian social ethical approach, then, pushes me to think about how these systems promote the common good or systemic sin.

I am committed to examining and owning my own social location and how it informs my analysis as well as naming the particular social positioning of the voices I am presenting. Childist and feminist theories and methodologies demand that attention be given to the persons in the margins, such as women and children. They provide the language and tools for bringing these persons' experiences into the light and ask that their particular interests, needs, and voices be known and understood. They challenge us to look at the social position of a person, including their race, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality status as a way of more comprehensively understanding society.

Overview of Chapters

In chapters one and two, I develop a childist-feminist hermeneutic in light of trauma theory. It unfolds in three parts through a presentation of key concepts across the disciplines of trauma theory, childhood studies, and Christian feminist and womanist ethics. In chapter one, key concepts from childist-feminist theory are used to draw out a childist-feminist Christian hermeneutic that attends to autonomy and relationality, owning human particularities, and reclaiming the forgotten. Then, in chapter two, an introduction to trauma theory is discussed, focusing on themes around identity, narrative,

and embodiment as well as ethical demands to return to and remember the trauma. Finally, a synthesis of these disciplinary concepts is utilized to frame my childist-feminist hermeneutic in light of trauma, which I argue demands us to turn to teens as persons who have been silenced and marginalized. We must listen to and revisit their trauma narratives and the public narrative of reproductive health for teens in the US.

In chapter three, I utilize my hermeneutic to center the teen experience of being pregnant. In order to best understand the specific experiences pregnant teenagers embody, it is important to raise their voices and bring them to the forefront of the conversation. I utilize blogs, news articles, and scholarly interviews where women have had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences of being pregnant as a teen. More specifically, I am interested in the lived experience of female-identified pregnant teenagers situated within the social, historical, political, and cultural context of the US. I want to know how they feel about themselves, how they feel about their bodies, and what choices they understand to be available to them. I also want to know how they view themselves in social relationships—to their sexual partners, their parents and households, their peers, and their religious environments. I am interested in how they view being pregnant in light of educational aspirations and vocational interests. I am attentive to the political and cultural contexts that they view as mediating their healthcare decisions and services. Drawing on their articulated experience, I illustrate how they embody the tensions between autonomy and relationality in their feelings and decision-making around sexual behaviors and pregnancy. Within these tensions, though, I argue that trauma occurs in the societal processes of stigmatization and disembodiment.

The lived realities of being a young pregnant person are then placed in conversation with an analysis of societal narratives that push against the needs of pregnant and parenting homeless youth. Similar to Hagar, homeless youth provide a complex intersection of social locations that can help illuminate the types of systemic sin that are at play in the US. These young people also provide witness to the immeasurable resilience and creativity can is accessible to us all in our *Imago Dei.* In chapter three, I examine patterns of how marriage and sexuality have been constructed in US culture, including the use of religious, laws, and education. Christian ideologies have persistently been dominant in naming and reinforcing social norms and sanctions. Together, these cultural forces and social policies implicate pregnant teens as public health problems and even symbolic of our fallen world.[40] Attitudes about how the state defines family are crucial to policy making and curriculum development. My examination of US notions of sexuality and family shows how family types have been defined and valued in US society in ways that create and promote trauma. Drawing on lessons learned from Hagar and the US homeless pregnant teens engaged, I identify some central social-ethical themes that will be used to construct practical Christian ethic.

Finally, in chapter four, I continue to use some lessons learned from Hagar that help spotlight the structural sins of US culture. The life of Hagar has been read and interpreted as a trauma narrative that historically was overlooked and underrepresented. Furthermore, it is a story that individuals and communities have drawn on as a source of

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[40] B.D .Whitehead, Wilcox, B.L., Rostosky, S.S., Randall, B., & Wright, M.L.C. (2001). *Keeping the faith: The role of religion and faith communities in preventing teen pregnancy.* Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

empowerment. With insights from this text in conjunction with the stories of current pregnant and parenting teens, I reimagine Christian social ethical responses to teen pregnancy in the US. I draw on previous interpretations and utilizations of Hagar, claiming anew the essential need to provide witness to one's trauma in order to flourish. I provide tangible strategies that can be implemented by all Christians, especially Christian leaders, educators, and policymakers, to provide witness to trauma-inducing tendencies and structures of our society in order to improve the social order, make reparations, and stop sin. I promote the need, if not necessity, for us to own truths from the past in order to face the immense possibilities of the future.

CHAPTER ONE:

CHRISTIAN CHILDIST-FEMINIST THEOETHICS

Introduction

> *I have to get out of here. I understand that maybe people back home might be pleading with the gods to be with a wealthy family like mine, …but they don't know how lonely it is out here. I know we are all being forced to have sex with our masters, but these people who do this to us think it is ok. Please tell me how it is ok to buy another human being, to force someone to leave their own family to be taking care of them. Isn't' cooling and cleaning and yes m'am enough!! And, then you have to go inside me and play with my most inner parts. And put your semen inside me. Now I have part of you–and part of me–growing inside me! For what? For you and your wife to live out God's pan. Does your god really tell you that it is ok to use other people as instruments for oneself?! Put his baby in me is part of me! And I'll do anything I can to protect this baby. But, I can't stay in this place anymore. The looks she gives me—like I'm a permanent stain on her gown. She looks at me—judging me with her eyes and tone of voice—like I'm some animal. I mean, I can't imagine how she feels not being able to make a baby herself—but that's not my fault. But she threw me in the middle of it and only hates me more. It's destroying me. They sure do take control of my body—but they will never have my spirit. My energy and tears need to be for me and my baby—not for them. If I do not leave, I'll die inside. I can take care of us in the wilderness. I'll figure it out as we go. All I know is that I can't live with this physical, sexual, and emotional abuse anymore—especially with a baby on the way.*

In "Genesis 16 and 21:1-20[,] there is an effort to record, at length, a story of something that should not have happened in both a moral and chronological sense. The story implies moral wrong and a wrong turn from the neat path of narrative progression—and yet here it is, on record, and told not once but twice."[1] One could argue that in order

[1] Yvonne Sherwood, "Hagar and Ishmael: The Reception of Expulsion," *Interpretations* 68, no. 3 (July 2014), 290.

to understand and claim the Jewish and Christian Israelite lineage through Abraham and Sarah, the lives of Hagar and Ishmael need not be mentioned.[2] Christians have told the story of Sarah's miraculous birth in old age over and over. We return to the life of Abraham and Sarah to remember a God who keeps promises, has perfect timing, and preserves his people. Yet, holy scriptures, albeit briefly and arguably insufficiently, recognize Hagar and Ishmael as part of Christian history. Their mere existence in Christian scriptures tell us that they are significant to God and thus demand that they are respected for their human dignity.

As we consider what it means to be human in light of the intersection of childist-feminist ethics and trauma, the Hagar narrative models for us the importance of returning to our traumas in pursuit of greater spiritual wholeness as both individuals and communities. Hagar illuminates the childist and feminist notion that "we never stop being dependent and vulnerable, never stop relying on others, and never stop being affected by [others] at the very center of our moral character. . . . [and, moreover,] this dependency places *right relations* at the very center of moral life."[3] This claim on moral action requires a nuanced notion of human interaction, understanding, and general being that

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[2] While the book of Genesis is a vital part of both the Jewish and Christian faith traditions, I am only going to be making claims about the Christian tradition. My personal and scholarly experience predominantly lies within Christianity and that is the scope of this project.

[3] Cristina L.H. Traina, "Children and Moral Agency," 30-1, emphasis added. Traina's argument draws on the work of Margaret Adams and Lisa Tessman, among others. These thinkers wrestle with the notion of moral agency in light of systemic sin and oppression. They seem to share the notion that humans are "dependent, interdependent, vulnerable, often inarticulate, and yet self-conscious and accountable" (Traina, 32) beings. Traina's contribution to this conversation promotes the idea that since all persons—from birth until death—can be understood as ascribed with these characteristics, children merely illuminate this nature in all of us.

challenges the pervasive prizing of personal independence and autonomy—humans are naturally and innately interdependent.[4]

Trauma theory also helps illuminate the interdependent and storied nature of humanity by focusing on the ways in which trauma is the unknown and untold stories of one's life. As noted in the introduction, in order for one to grow from trauma, one must confront the trauma and provide testimony of the trauma. This requires one to meet the trauma eye-to-eye and find meaning in it. By raising the voice of Hagar at the introduction of this chapter, I model for the reader a method of childist-feminist hermeneutics in light of trauma. Hagar is both doing her own trauma work and her repressed existence in Christian history demands that we do trauma work in response to her story. In returning to the places in our lives that have intentionally, or unconsciously, been overlooked, belittled, and hidden, like Hagar's story, we are able to claim our holistic existence and make strides towards living more holistically.

In this chapter and the next, then, I develop a childist-feminist method in light of trauma theory for doing Christian social ethics. Hagar both inspires and informs this method and grounds it in Christian history and theology. I present key concepts across the disciplines of childist and feminist ethics and trauma theory. First, I identify two core Christian childist-feminist theoretical and methodological commitments that will be used to inform and shape my method. To begin, I am dedicated to giving preferential options to women and children. This, then, directs the subject of inquiry to the experiences of

[4] Traina is in conversation with Martha Ellen Stortz, Nomy Arpaly, Lisa Tessman, Margaret Adam, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Mary Coyle Roche, and A. Denise Starkey, among other legal, feminist, womanist, and childist scholars.

women and children as well as leads to an overhaul of traditional theological anthropology. My second commitment, then, stems from this renewed theological anthropology, and is to uphold a new understanding of moral agency, self-formation, and non-linear morality.

Christian Child-Feminist Theory and Methods

Central to any theological and philosophical conversation about the morality of how one conceptualizes what it means to be human is how one ought to act. The ways we think about what it means to be a human being frames our notions of individual and social capabilities, potential, and responsibility. Are we born morally good or evil? When are we considered fully human? What rights do we have as humans? What makes humans distinct from other forms of life? Do humans have particular responsibilities that other beings do not? How one answers these questions, among others, gives insight into how one imagines and understands what it means to be human, which then directly informs the development of any ethic, particularly a contemporary social ethic. In this case, I am interested in utilizing theology, psychology, and sociology to create an applied ethic that can be tangible to all interested parties, such as educators, policy makers, religious leaders, and so on.

In this section, I wrestle with this question—-what does it mean to be human? I begin by outlining why I think it is essential to give preferential option to women and children in research and the construction of Christian social ethics. Then, I outline my theological-anthropological assumptions about what it means to be human. I build on my understanding of how this theological anthropology is intertwined with and informs

notions of moral agency, self-formation, and moral development.[5] Finally, out of these assumptions, I define a formula for why such a theory makes Christian social ethical demands upon persons as individuals and societies.

These elements of what it means to be human are not mutually exclusive, nor do I want to assume that they offer a complete description of what it means to be human. I have chosen them, because I think they help us get to a more cohesive notion of what it theologically, socially, and psychologically means to be human. Each of the four points build on each other and illuminate the dynamism of what it means to be human, created and existing in God's image.

Preferential Option

In this project, I am committed to centering the voices and experiences of women and children. Feminist, womanist, and childist scholarship and activism arose out of the incessant erasure of women, women of color, and children in historical narratives, public policy, and societal consideration. For example, as introduced above, Carol Gilligan's development of care ethics was born from the realization that males and females process moral dilemmas differently. Gilligan's work challenges traditional developmental and moral theorists such as Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg who favored male development and approaches to morality. Throughout history, psychological research notoriously utilized male subjects and subsequently, the theories that were drawn from this research promoted male-centric notions of right and wrong. Women have then been understood as inferior to

[5] Wall, *Ethics*, 3 and 35.

men in moral development because they appear unable to conceptualize moral dilemmas and solutions in accordance with the male-centric benchmarks. Gilligan argues, though, that in actuality, men and women think differently about morality. They approach moral dilemmas from different entry points and draw on dissimilar principles. Men tend to ground their moral decision-making in concepts of individual rights and justice. Women, on the other hand, focus their attention on notions of responsibility and care.

The male voices directing these conversations, such as Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg, are what has been described by the acronym *weird*—western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic. These men and the subjects of their research have predominantly fit into these five demographic categories. In turn, the experiences of women and children and persons of non- Western, European descent, have been absent from the constructions of the scholarly conversation. The implications of these patterns of scholarship have vastly shaped society and created a hegemonic narrative that favors the white male experience. Women and children have historically been and are commonly identified as members of vulnerable groups.[6]

Returning to the language of Townes, which was presented in the introduction, in order to counter the hegemonic narrative and continue the work of the children and women who have come before us, I am committed to explore and illuminate

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[6] See M. Therese Lysaught, Joseph Kotva, Stephen E. Lammers, and Allen Verhey (Eds.), *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives on Medical Ethics, 3rd Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), chapter 16 for theo-medical considerations about children. Karen Peterson-Iyer also confronts these tensions in her book *Designer Children: Reconciling Genetic Technology, Feminism, and Christian Faith* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2004). Peterson-Iyer's critique is framed in light of consumerism. As a society that is addicted with consumption and faced with the possibilities that come with reproductive technological advancements. She cautions us about viewing children as object to be consumed as well as to be objects to be perfected for the sake of the parents.

unrepresented and underrepresented voices in scholarship—that of children and women. Moreover, I do not view children and women as monolithic groups, but understand that their racial, economic, and geographic differences create particularities that must be attended to as well. Through listening to their stories and participating in the creation of new public memories, I seek to expand the historical narrative we are living. Ott argues, "we see a much more dynamic form of ethics when we change the primary subject in ethics from an adult to a child; this shift provides a more fluid and adaptable view of ethics . . ."[7] Moreover, "the methodological commitment to centralizing children as moral subjects in ethics yields a revised conceptualization of moral agency, including treating the child for who they are now, acceptance of their diverse and complex moral learning, and the need for their increased social participation"[8]

Theological Anthropology

Theological anthropology is the study of what makes us human in light of theology. I find that wrestling with theological-anthropological questions helps bring focus to how I understand what it means to exist and be alive in relationship to God, scripture, and one's understanding of human spirituality and spirituality more broadly. First and foremost, I am forwarding the notion that human beings are created in the image of God—*Imago Dei*. What characteristics does this mean all humans embody? In short, human beings all have a creative nature, an inherent relationality that is always in tension

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[7] Kate Ott, *Christian ethics for a Digital Society* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 4.

[8] Kate Ott, "Taking Children's Moral Lives Seriously," 4.

with individual choice, a non-dualistic nature, a capability to learn and grow and change, and a uniqueness that is deserving of dignity and respect.

The God of the Hebrew Scriptures that engages Hagar shows us these attributes. As a Christian, I believe in a continuity of God and expanding understanding for humans of who God is as we continue to be in relation to God, from the Hebrew Scriptures through to now. For example, the Christian Holy Trinity illuminates this understanding of God. God of the Hebrew Scriptures reveals God to be a God who experiences profound satisfaction in the process of creating. God is a being that engages with the other living entities—humans, wind, water, land, insects, and so on. God responds in emotional ways—with tenderness, anger, delight. God responds with action by listening, having dialogue, creating covenants, showing wrath and love, guiding paths. In the Christian scriptures, Jesus and the Holy Spirit represent God in all things in physical forms—accessible, available, moving, present, and responsive. In physical and spirit forms, God reveals Godself as present and in relationship—responsive to thoughts, emotions, needs, wants. Christian reinterpretations of the monotheistic God of the Hebrew Scriptures include Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus represents God in the form of a human body and the Holy Spirit is the ongoing, tangible presence of God in and around us. The Christian Trinitarian God allows humanity to cling to God's relationally that is available for listening, healing, feeling in an embodied form.

The manifestation of God's complex identity in these multiple forms, *over time*, point us to the vastness of how Christians understand God. It also displays the infinite possibilities of how persons can come into being. It shows us that the process of coming into oneself is always in response to the desires of oneself and the relationships one is in.

It helps make God's mysterious relationality and creativity more accessible to for both one's own relationship with God and one's understanding of *Imago Dei*.

Wall utilizes the notion of play to draw out the mysterious, creative potentiality that humans hold in our likeness of the divine. While play is often associated with children, play is something that is not only necessary for humanity at all ages, but at the core of who we are. "Being-in-the-world is playing-in-the-world" because "play is the heartbeat from birth to death of the creation of the world into meaning."[9] Playing is a process of creative meaning making. "Play is the condition for the possibility of new possibilities itself. To be human is to inhabit a dynamic world of not only what is but also what could be."[10] It is grounded in the present moment and comes out of the ever-shifting contexts.[11] We are always in a position of being created and creating—of being constructed and constructing. Wall argues that this ability to play encapsulates the mysterious tension that we are always in a process of "stretching toward something else, some unknown possibility."[12] Like God and *with* God, we are creators. This creative nature provides a seamless segue into both our autonomous and relational nature.

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[9] Wall, *Ethics*, 53.

[10] Wall, *Ethics*, 53.

[11] Wall, *Ethics*, 39 and 119. Wall engages the work of Martha Nussbaum, whose Capabilities Approach to doing ethics is grounded in the idea that what there can be competing moral duties, or ways to be and act. Nussbaum pushes against the notion that there is one single universal moral code and that context is always relevant to moral rightness and wrongness. Nussbaum's theory supports the idea that human freedom allows one to discern how to act based on the context one finds themselves in. Wall's claim that children are moral agents and acting in moral realms expands on theories like Nussbaum's, which focuses on adult discernment, and forwards the idea that all humans have traits and capabilities to act morally, regardless of age and cognitive abilities.

[12] Wall, *Ethics*, 53.

Human autonomy and the capacity to live out of one's free will have been prized by theologians and philosophers for centuries. Traditionally, scholars have turned to Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, among others for fundamental arguments of what it means to be human based on the capability to choose and act freely. Our capability to play and respond creatively to the ever-changing contexts around us illuminates a natural sense of freedom. While autonomy has often been undergirded by the use of rational thinking, I purport that we are always acting out of autonomy in conscious and unconscious ways. Thus, age and cognitive abilities are not essential to being autonomous. Our autonomy, though, is always in tension, or in a dance with our relationality.[13] Perhaps it is even helpful to think about autonomy being embedded within our creativity that is always considering and negotiating one's relationality and infinite potentiality.

Humans, thus, are inherently and pervasively relational and communal. To say that we are relational encompasses that we are social beings, but theologically goes beyond our social nature. Yes, we exist in communities and social structures, but moreover human life is created out of relationship. Humans are dependent on their relationships. Even in our striving for autonomy, we are embedded in relationships and need them to survive both emotionally and physically. For example, human conception

[13] Cristina Traina helps push against the notion of autonomy that has become ingrained in our individualist society and is intertwined with the question of accountability. To be considered autonomous means that we can hold that person accountable for their actions. But, this is way too narrow of an understanding of what it means to be human. To be autonomous should never negate that we are also inherently relational and dependent beings. Traina draws on how society trusts children's perspective in some medical and legal settings, and then on other occasions just deems their perspective as unreliable based on their age. See this work by Traina: Traina, Cristina L. H. "Children and Moral Agency." research-article. *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 29, no. 2 (10/01/ 2009): 19-37.

occurs from the bonding of cells from two different humans. An infant is fed from the breast or bottle offered by another person. People choose to couple because of the ways emotional, sexual, intellectual, and physical contact with another fulfills certain needs and desires. Many religious rituals celebrate the intimate relationship and commitment to God and community. Returning to the Holy Trinity, the relationship between the three forms of God as well as the ways in which the Trinity seeks to illuminate God's desire to be in relationship with and through humanity sheds further light on the intrinsic relationality and communality of life.[14]

Furthermore, humans are embodied beings. We have cognitive and emotional capabilities that must all be prized. We must acknowledge and embrace cognitive and emotional experience as forms of knowledge. As noted in the introduction, Christian ethicists Lisa Sowle Cahill and Margaret A. Farley are valuable conversation partners on this point.[15] Cahill argues that Western Christian culture has maintained a dualistic

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[14] M. Shawn Copeland emphasizes not only that we are social beings but beings in community in her own theological anthropology. See Copeland, M. Shawn. "The New Anthropological Subject at the Heart of the Mystical Body of Christ," *CTSA PROCEEDINGS* 53(1998).

[15] In *Theological Bioethics: Participation, Justice, and Change* (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 2005), Lisa Sowle Cahill traces the history of bioethics, and the presence of religious voices within this history. Bioethics as a discipline, or area of discourse, arose in the 1960's and 1970's. For decades, empirical methodologies were evolving and the use of persons in sociological, psychological, and biological research was gaining momentum. The Tuskegee Experiment is commonly noted as a turning point in the historical narrative of ethics. To what end can human beings be used as a means to an end in the name of research? What are the responsibilities of the researchers? What are the inherent rights of persons that researchers must not only recognize but actively uphold? How can these rights be protected? Cahill notes that theologians were instinctively apart of these ethical conversations. Theologians were trained to engage such questions about personhood and social morality, even over and above moral philosophers. It was natural and inevitable that theologians and religious voices would participate in discourses with biomedical ethical concerns. Theologians became equipped in speaking about their theological values in secular terms. And, overtime, religious ideologies and symbols got lost. Cahill claims that in the 2000's, religious scholars need to reclaim their use of religious language and symbols in public spaces. Furthermore, theologians need to be mindful of and promote the practical implications of their ideas. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr. was able to build solidarity, community, and alliances through his use of religious language and symbolism.

understanding of the body, even as culture has changed and evolved. "The 'old' dualism of Western culture, reinforced historically by Christianity, saw the body (especially the sexual body) as the enemy of rational control and requiring subjugation. A 'new' dualism, which sees the body as raw material for choice and intervention, is exercised via the technical and instrumental rationality guiding much of modern science."[16] Cahill, as well as other feminist scholars, identify the separation between body and mind as a powerful, pervasive ideology that oppresses the experience of what it means to be human and has vast social implications. Oftentimes, the human body is viewed as a part of the human being that requires ordering and control from the rational mind. In one sense, this diminishes the inherent good of the body. This implies that a person's best self is one where they not only use their mind and capabilities of reason, but favor rationality above all other ways of being. The way persons feel things, express things, know things based on emotions, feelings of pain and pleasure, then, have little value. These aspects of the human experience are viewed as inferior sources of information when compared to the use of one's mind. Consequently, when one lives out of their body, in response to emotions and feelings, they are seen as lacking self-control, irrational, lesser than, and even unruly.[17]

In this dualistic worldview and dualistic understanding of the human body, sexuality, for example, has been promoted as an expression of the body that needs

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[16] Cahill, " 'Embodiment,' "202.

[17] Cahill, " 'Embodiment;' " Tauer, "Abortion;" Cahill and Farley's entire edited volume *Embodiment, Morality, and Medicine* (*Theology and Medicine* series, volume 6, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995) more fully addresses the need for understanding human beings as embodied.

regulation from rationality.[18] Sexual intercourse and expression of one's sexuality have a rational purpose: procreation. All other expressions of sexuality are merely indulging the body over and above the reason of the mind. As previously stated in the introduction, Cahill, Farley, and other feminist and womanist scholars promote a correction to dualism: embodiment.[19]

Embodiment challenges the dualistic worldview on three primary levels. First, it integrates the body and mind. Second, it affirms "the body as part of the person."[20] Third, it promotes freedom over control in one's "social ordering of the parts and processes of one's own body, as well as of one's own person in relation to the bodies of others."[21] This third element of valuing an embodied perspective takes the first two elements and pushes them forward into persons as social beings with social implications, such as right relationships and how we structure society through social institutions such as schools, churches, and government as well create rules and norms in laws, public policy, and the media.

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[18] Cahill, " 'Embodiment' "; Tauer, "Abortion." Tauer provides a brief history to the regulation of sexuality from multiple worldviews; Farley, *Just Love*; Stephen J. Pope, "Social Selection and Sexual Diversity: Implications for Christian Ethics," in *God, science, sex, gender: an interdisciplinary approach to Christian ethics*, eds. Patricia Beattie Jung, Aana Marie Vigen, John J. Anderson, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 187-200.

[19] See Introduction, 16.

[20] Cahill, " 'Embodiment,' "205.

[21] Cahill, " 'Embodiment,' "205.

Out of our dynamic, creative, embodied nature, it is easy to understand human nature as generative.[22] We learn, we grow, we develop—and we do so out of our emotional and rational knowledge, out of our relationships, out of the constant dynamic process of creating. It is inevitable then, that we are all unique. No new moment is the same as the one before. Moreover, each moment is embodied differently from person to person. This will become clearer in the discussion of trauma theory, as the impact of experience on someone's body is unique.

In turn, we share a universal humanity and must claim our particularities—all in the name of *Imago Dei.* Christian social ethicist Anne Vigen places herself in conversation with these feminist perspectives, and also boldly recognizes the limitations of this scholarship when she insists on not only claiming the need to discuss our differences across humanity, but also to explicitly engage in reflection and scholarship surrounding race, culture, and ethnic difference. Vigen pushes white feminist scholars, including herself, to join in M. Shawn Copeland's ethical call to join in solidarity with the oppressed. For Copeland, this broke open the liberationists' "demand for a new relationship with history and society" which calls us to "take into account the humanity and realities of poor red, brown, yellow, and Black women. Moreover, they had to grapple with the deep psychic wounds of despised, marginalized poor human beings—internalized oppression, self-abuse, violence, nihilism, self-contempt."[23] A call such as

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[22] Wall, *Ethics*, 92-95. Wall's entire text returns to this notion, but it is specifically comes to life in his notion of "The other as decentering the self" and how "this kind of obligational moral creativity can be described as moal life's decentering to an ellipse: a circle with not just one center but two" (92).

[23] Copeland, 28.

this requires an anti-racist approach to doing research and includes "multicultural awareness [that] must conclude theological attention to the choices that have been made in our society which result in some people being granted status and privilege on the basis of their racial/ethnic identity."[24]

For me, this will include the following:

- I must look around my own orbit of awareness and be critical of the social structures that have created and maintained systems of oppression, including white and Christian biases.[25]

- I must look inward and bring my whole self—my experiences, knowledge, history, context, vulnerabilities—to the conversation table. This includes exploring my whiteness and privilege as well as how my frame of reference limits and perpetuates my understanding of systems of oppression. [26]

- I must resist the urge to speak for or about the people with whom I am engaging and strive for dialogue. For this project, this means that I must continually assess whether I am actually speaking with the young pregnant teens I am listening to. I must take responsibility for how I listen and then speak so to not misrepresent or take authority from the youth. [27]

- I must seek justice through resistance and reparational approaches to social living. In this project, this means reflecting on the needs and wants expressed by the young women I encounter and then strategically identifying ways to illicit real change. This justice work is a duty for myself and Christian communities.

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[24] West, *Disruptive Ethics,* 138.

[25] Frances E. Wood, " 'Take My Yoke upon You': The Role of the Church in the Oppression of African-American Women," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes, The Bishop Henry McNeal Turner Studies in North American Black Religion: V. 8., (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 37-47; Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation,* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 45.

[26] Wood, " 'Take My Yoke upon You;' " Harvey, *Dear White Christians.*

[27] Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," in *Just Methods: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader*, ed. Alison M. Jaggar (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 484-495.

These characteristics that all of humanity share in *Imago Dei* push us to expand how we understand, value, and engage with oneself and others. They also challenge us to claim our sacredness and demand that we approach fellow persons with reverence.[28, 29] We are pushed to rethink human agency, potentiality, and the process of self-formation.

Moral Agency

The elements of theological anthropology—creativity, relationality, embodiment, uniqueness, rational thinking, and a capacity to learn and grow—outlined give us moral worth and inform our moral status. Moreover, it is our humanness and sacredness that give us moral status. While I support the moral status of all living beings, and even many material entities, the focus of this project is on the moral status of humans. I forward the notion that all humans have moral status and thus are moral agents. Our moral status as

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[28] In *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives on Medical Ethics,* readers are offered to contemplate numerous, necessary theological views, specifically as they relate to medical ethics. For example, what is life and why is sacred, or worthy of intimate, moral concern? Theological ethicist Karen Lebacqz draws on the work of theologian Helmut Thielicke to argue that humans have dignity only because we are created in the image of God. In our creation, persons come to be out of relationship. Thus, humans at their core are relationally interdependent. Judge Richard Stith critiques the notion of persons having inherent value and further pushes the reader to think about the essence of being human. He claims that to value humans for being humans is insufficient for ethically, theologically-grounded social engagement. Value is something is transient and applicable to many types of objects. In some sense, valuing someone is based too much on preference or emotion. Someone or something may seem valuable today and not so tomorrow. Thus, the reader is pushed to go beyond understanding fellow persons as innately valuable towards viewing persons as inherently sacred. This demands that we approach fellow persons with not merely value, love nor respect, but with reverence. Upholding an attitude of reverence towards fellow persons calls us into an encounter where we first and foremost "let it be."

[29] Karen Lebacqz, "Alien Dignity: The Legacy of Helmut Thielicke for Bioethics," in *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives on Medical Ethics, 3rd Edition*, eds. M. Therese Lysaught, Joseph Kotva, Stephen E. Lammers, and Allen Verhey (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 727-734; Richard Stith, "Toward Freedom from Value," in *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives on Medical Ethics, 3rd Edition*, eds. M. Therese Lysaught, Joseph Kotva, Stephen E. Lammers, and Allen Verhey (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 734-748.

humans is not bolstered nor diminished by our age, cognitive abilities, liberties, gender, race, economic status, and so on. One's agency, first and foremost, exists out of one's God-like-ness that came to life in the discussion about what it means to be human. Furthermore, we all have and embody what I will call contextual agency.

As stated above, historically, humanness has been overly associated with autonomy and the ability to act freely.[30] Consequently, the notion of moral agency has been closely aligned with autonomy. Feminist, womanist, and childist scholars have worked effortlessly to shift this paradigm. We can and must "affirm autonomy while interpreting it through relationships…and embody 'relational autonomy' [which] is motivated by the conviction that persons' identities are shaped through social interactions and complex intersection social determinants, such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, and authority structures."[31]

Contextual agency is the freedom we have from instant to instant. Re-thinking agency as contextual agency demands us to understand that we are always in newly constructed social moments that have very particular contexts. Through claiming that

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[30] For example, Beauchamp and Childresss in *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* present this historical trend in ethics. Beauchamp and Childress argue that there are four fundamental moral principles that are necessary for a biomedical ethical framework: respect for autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice. Beauchamp and Childress do build on the work of enlightenment figures and forward the notion that all of these principles are of equal worth and one should not automatically be preferred over another. They recognize that emphasis on autonomy has proven dangerous, overemphasizing and favoring an "independent, rational will." Respect for one's autonomy includes wrestling with defining capacities for autonomous choice and standards of competence. The principle of justice demands consideration of fair opportunity while principles of nonmaleficence and beneficence require intentional avoidance of harm and promotion of wellbeing. (Beauchamp, Tom L. and James F. Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics, 6th Edition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.)

[31] Beauchamp and Childresss, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 106. Authors understanding of relational autonomy draws on the work of feminist scholars Catriona Mackenzie, Natalie Stoljar, John Christman, Alasdair Maclean, and others.

each occasion has a context that is defined by the intersection of the histories of all entities present, and is a new opportunity for something to manifest, we do three things: 1) honor the intersection of a person's past and present with that of whomever else is in the space, 2) acknowledge the mystery of the infinite possibilities that the future holds, and 3) invites us to return to the specificity of context to find the most complete truth. Persons have agency because they are participants in social moral realms.[32] We all have agency because we all react and engage in spontaneous and creative ways in our lived contexts.[33] Each moment provides a new opportunity for constructing meaning and history and living out our contextual agency. In other words, we are in a reciprocal relationship with context: to live is to be perpetually impacted and shifted by context, and vice versa.

What we understand as possible is influenced by our social contexts.[34] Our imagination about what can and should be is socially constructed based on the experiences we have had. Our experience includes the households we are raised in, the communities we participate in, the stories that we are told in home and school settings, among many other social spaces. How we see other people interact and process their

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[32] Traina, "Children and Moral Agency."

[33] Kate Ott, "Taking Children's Moral Lives Seriously." Ott, in conversation with Wall, argues that creativity is agency and is ethics. Ott draws on a children's program she led with her partner called Coaching Kids, where they noticed the children's response to the program's space and how space dictates opportunity. The children were primarily African American and Latinx and between the ages of 5 and 12. Ott created a project where the children would work together to reimagine community space that prized safety, health, relationships, and cooperation. Ott observed that as the children worked together to create an ethical community, they drew on their own experiences and were imaginative about how to use resources differently. This example highlights the ways in which persons of all ages are inherently creative and acting out of this creativity is being a moral agent.

[34] Particularly, womanist social ethicist Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics*. Townes draws on the work of Michel Foucault, George Lipsitz, W.E.B. Du Bois, and others to develop her

feelings directly impacts how one thinks and acts out their creative nature. Think about how children play and what they play with. The toys and resources available to children shape their creative play about what is normal and right. For example, the dolls they use are often whatever was given to them. Whether they have dolls that look like them or not is not a choice they have made during the earliest years of one's life, but rather what others have chosen for them. Almost from birth, the dolls a child is exposed to or not begin to guide their understanding and imagination surrounding race and gender expression. Toys are often gifted based on the gender assigned to a child. Whether it be color schemes or types of toys, communities are setting a tone for what is best and appropriate for children according to gender.[35] These elements of socialization construct our moral imagination, reinforcing the notion that moral agency lives in and out of our social worlds; it is an ability to be creative from moment to moment in the moral realm.

[35] Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005); Kate Ott, "Children as An/other Subject: Redefining Moral Agency in a Postcolonial Context," *Journal of Childhood and Religion* 5, no. 2 (May 2014), 7; Ott, 7-8, quoting Mercer, 18. Practical theologian Joyce Ann Mercer provides a feminist-childist sheds light on the connection between moral agency in light of relationships encapsulates the themes of play and imagination previously discussed as she reflects on United States' children in light of a capitalism and consumerism. She examines how the current socio-political climate shifts the theological understandings of children and subsequently Christian education. Christian social ethicist Kate Ott advocates for the use of ethnographic research in childhood studies because such methods are invaluable to understanding children as moral actors and open up space for ethical analysis. Particularly, drawing one's attention to children's play, provides opportunities "to observe children's moral practices during an essential component of human experience and one that reflects how children view and recreate their complex social world. . .. a focus on play connects with the language and function of imagination in a manner that most adults can understand and do not have to stretch too far to recall." Ott identifies her work as similar to Mercer's, quoting Mercer as she emphasizes the need " 'to involve 'children' as subjects in theological discourse' which means we must seek 'meaningful ways to speak about [children] in all of their sameness and particularity. Likewise, we must have linguistic terms to advocate with and for these children in the church and in the world.' "

Self-formation and Non-linear Development

> "...persons are both interdependent and in danger of oppressive socialization and oppressive social relationships that impair their autonomy by conditions that unduly form their desires, beliefs, emotions, and attitudes and improperly thwart the development of the capacities and competencies essential for autonomy."[36]

Thinking about moral agency as creativity breaks open the potentialities for each person in each moment and makes demands on us as social beings. It allows us to think about self-formation, or personal growth, as a compilation of moments—moments that are made up of an intersection of the past, the present, and the potentialities for the future. Moments are also intersections of our inner experiences and our social experiences. All of these moments are compiled together and become the unique narratives that define persons as individuals in communities.

The Christian tradition claims the uniqueness of each living being. The notion of a *self* helps put language to the living, somewhat mystic, nature of all of us—within all of us. It speaks to the space in which the spirit of God resides in us and is woven into our being from creation. This unique, core aspect of each person forms in relationship—with self, others, environments, and divine. As mentioned above, ethicist Cristina Traina forwards the notion that to be human is to be in relationship and dependent on others.[37] Traina argues that theological reflection bearing in mind children sheds light on the naturalness of human interdependency at the most basic level. For example, Traina

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[36] Beauchamp and Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 106. Authors reference on the work of feminist scholar Carolyn Ells and provide multiple sources for further reading.

[37] Traina, "Children and Moral Agency." Also, see f.n. 1. Traina directly engages Augustine's biography and legal theories in her arguments about human dependency and moral rights. She places herself in conversation with pastoral and practical theologian Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore. Miller-McLemore is a frequent conversation partner with many scholars discussed.

considers an infant crying. First and foremost, crying is a communication: perhaps the infant is hungry, sick, needs to burp, is sitting in a dirty diaper, or any other human bodily experience. Traina pushes against the Augustinian notion that we are born inherently selfish, implying that the cry of an infant is a selfish demand. Rather, Traina invites one to reorient themselves to the infant and understand that they are living out their social agency as they are able and making an impact on their social milieu, even making a request of those around them.[38] Our inherent interconnectedness and the continual shifting of our social contexts imply that each moment of our self-formation is inherently dependent upon the people around us and our environment. As a result, each moment has infinite potential that is unlike any moment of formation that has or ever will exist.

How do we engage in self-formation and actualize our potential? Traditionally, human development has been thought of as a linear process. Psychological theories have promoted a developmental model where humans go through stages of growth and maturity from birth until death. For example, and perhaps most infamous, classic Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget proposed that humans grow and develop through various stages: one must meet the markers of one stage before advancing to the next. Moral psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg built on Piaget's work and developed his own theory of moral development. Throughout one's life, they develop the skills and abilities for moral reasoning and even pursuits of justice. As previously stated, Carol Gilligan critiques Kohlberg's work for being founded on the experience of males. Gilligan argues that the

[38] Traina, "Children and Moral Agency," 31-2.

experience of females is different and that there should be different ways of thinking about the moral development of males and females.[39]

Christians tend to accept these development models, while also rallying behind what Wall calls bottom-up and top-down ways of thinking about human development, including moral and character development.[40] The bottom-up approach views humans as inherently good. Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas subscribed to this belief about human nature. In turn, the goodness within us must be preserved and protected. Thus, it is the responsibility of caregivers to preserve children's innocence and protect them from being corrupted. The top-down approach, on the other hand, views humans as innately bad, or evil. Augustine is a prominent Christian thinker who promoted this view of humanity. As a result, it is the task of older, mature humans to discipline and teach younger beings about how to correct their evil tendencies. Throughout one's life, they must strive to keep their human nature in check. Each of these approaches—developmental, bottom-up, and top-down—think about human development in a linear fashion. While each conceptual framework has a lot to offer our understanding of human nature, they also do not provide space for the more expansive notion of moral agency for which I am advocating.

I subscribe to the notion that we pursue our potential or move towards our potential in non-linear fashion. This understanding of human formation was first influenced by my training in clinical psychology, where I was most strongly influenced by the work of psychologist Carl Rogers. Rogers forwards the notion that all living

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[39] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Harvard University Press, 1982). Gilligan discusses the history of Piaget and Kohlberg.

[40] Wall, *Ethics*, Chapter 1.

beings have an actualizing tendency.[41] This is a tendency within all life forms and pulls one into their greatest potential. The actualization of one's potential is their personality development—their unique formation of who they are in the world. This process is influenced by one's context—including their internal experiences (psychological) and external experiences (social, historical, etc.).[42] In my master's thesis, I brought Rogers into conversation with Christian theologian Soren Kierkegaard to draw out the infinite potentiality and possibility that exists for humans from moment to moment. I found both scholars, although speaking from different historical contexts and placed in different academic disciplines (Kierkegaard, a nineteenth century Danish philosopher, and Rogers, a twentieth century United States' psychologist), to both speak to the fact that the infinite possibilities of each moment are grounded in one's relationships with the other. Kierkegaard helps us understand the other as God and oneself. Rogers helps us understand the other as one's internal experiences as well as the environment, our relationships, and history. Both thinkers illuminate the idea that each moment is an intersection of past, present, and future.[43]

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[41] Carl R. Rogers, "A Theory of Therapy, Personality, and Interpersonal Relationships, as Developed in the Client-Centered Framework," in *Psychology: A Study of a Science, Vol. III, Formulations of the Person and the Social Context*, ed. S. Koch (New York: McGraw Hill, 1959), 184-256.

[42] Rogers, "A Theory of Therapy."

[43] Susan Woolever, "The process of self-becoming in the thought of Søren Kierkegaard and Carl Rogers," University of Iowa, unpublished master's thesis (2013). https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.vw7w6etx. Woolever used the following texts by Kierkegaard: Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening* (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol. 19), eds. H.V. Hong & E.H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983) and Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol. 16), eds. H.V. Hong & E.H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998). Woolever used the following texts by Rogers: C.R. Rogers, "A Theory of Therapy;" C.R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961); C.R. Rogers, *Carl Rogers on Encounter Groups* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); C.R. Rogers, A *Way of Being* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980).

Wall draws on Kierkegaard, and explicitly applies this understanding of personhood to his conceptualization about moral thinking and narrative:

> Moral thinking involves forging one's pasts, presents, and possible futures into an increasingly meaningful narrative. Narration . . . is the fashioning of the meaning of time over time. It places the time of experiences in the world into a second constructed time of a story about them. Morally speaking, narration reshapes temporal experience into larger aims and hopes. It stretches the self's various times in the world into a meaningfully whole sense of direction. The story changes as experiences change. But its aim is always an increasingly diverse narrative unity. A human life is a vast complexity of times that can be created into a more or less coherent story over time. Both children and adults must constantly reimagine what their time in the world is all about. . . . As Soren Kierkegaard has argued, there are many ways in which time in the world can cause despair, but it can always also open up to renewed hope. What is possible is to transform the smallness of time, its narrative fixations and dead-ends, its many incongruities and tragedies, into a larger created story. The cycles of past, present, and future time can always be shaped into more expansive meaning. Time itself can be stretched over time. To narrative oneself is to think time more fully over time, to grow in temporal wholeness.[44]

Viewing each moment as an intersection of the past, present, and future, breaks open our integration of our past with our present because of the infinite possibilities of our future. The vast opportunities that come with the infiniteness of each moment counter the traditional linear way of thinking about human development. It suggests that we are not only looking forward, or backwards or right in front of us for that matter. But rather, we are grappling anew out of our contextual agency and formative potential.

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[44] Wall, *Ethics*, 174-75.

Take Aways

In sum, the theological assumptions that I am drawing on from Christian childist-feminist ideologies can be summarized in two parts: the first describes who or what is God and the second describes what this means for human beings.

To begin, God is relational, dynamic, creative, and holy and defines goodness and love. God created humans in God's own image. Therefore, humans, in God's image, are sacred and relational, dynamic, and creative.

There are many theo-social-ethical implications of understanding God in this way. God wants humanity to exist as freely as possible. This includes living out of one's God-likeness; experiencing relationships that lead to one feeling joy, contentment, and liberation; being able to be creative; and being able to continue to grow, learn, and develop into one's greatest potential.

In God's relationality, God pursues humankind continually, as a way of showing God's love and helping humanity reach ultimate freedom. For example, God has pursued humankind through covenants, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Additionally, grounded in Trinitarian theology, God is in, around, and working with and for humanity.

When humans, as individuals and societies, go against their God-likeness nature, they are separating themselves from God–including the goodness, holiness, creativity, and potential of oneself. This separation is sin. Then, as a consequence of sin, humans do the following: hurt themselves, hurt others, and create social systems that perpetually inhibit individual and social potential.

In order to become realigned with God and the human likeness in God, individuals and societies must be aware of their sins and then work to overcome them.

This is possible by engaging in the following: believing that God desires a common good for all people on earth; increasing multi-cultural awareness and being committed to doing anti-racist work; increasing self-awareness about one's social location and positions of power; learning about how one's position of power create and perpetuate systems of oppression; and engaging in dialogue with people of different social locations to understand the vastness of God's vision and severity of human interference in a just world. Approaches to justice through reconciliation, resistance, and reparations highlight the tensions of this psycho-social work and provide entry points for doing Christian social ethics.

After naming the need to give preferential option to women and children with an anti-racist lens and rethinking what it means to be created in God's image, a conviction arises: could the continual lack of attention, voice, and hiding of children and women be understood as trauma narratives? Does the traditional interpretation of children and women in society and biblical narrative silence the experience and presence of children? Perhaps creating, practicing, and implementing a feminist-childist attitude is in of itself doing "trauma" work on behalf of children and youth. I will now turn to trauma theory and discuss notions of identity, witnessing, and giving testimony to explore how to help create space for the stories of children and women, particularly young women, to be told.

CHAPTER TWO:

DEVELOPMENT OF A CHILDIST-FEMINIST METHOD IN LIGHT OF TRAUMA THEORY

Introduction

Something mysterious happened while Hagar was in the wilderness that first time. She had stopped for some moments to rest by a well. One could imagine that she was reflecting on whether she had made the right decision by leaving her mistress and master. She wondered if she would truly be able to find her way back to her homeland. She questioned whether the journey would be detrimental to the child she was bearing. Then, all at once, she was greeted by another being who asked where she was going. Hagar came to realize that she was conversating with her master's God.[1] *Through the encounter, Hagar learned that God was listening to her and understood her plight. God displayed compassion, care, and respect for Hagar and the child she was carrying. God comprehended her struggle of living under harsh conditions and was able to speak to Hagar about her desires for her son to not be enslaved as she has been. As a result, Hagar and God made an agreement: Hagar would return to her master and mistress, she would name her son Ishmael (which means "God hears"), and Ishmael would have life as a free man. Also, God promised Hagar numerous descendants. Hagar celebrated being seen and heard by God and named the well where they met Beer-lahai-roi, which means "well of the Living one who sees me."*[2]

Hagar indeed returned to the home of her master and mistress. While she continued to be treated badly by her mistress, she found joy in watching her son live in freedom. Ishmael's father had an incredible affection for his son and the two were very close. Then, Hagar's mistress miraculously became pregnant in old age. The mistress became fearful that the son she bore in old age would be deprived of his inheritance because Ishmael was Abraham's first-born son. In turn, she told her husband to send Hagar and Ishmael away. Ishmael's father was upset by the request. He talked with God and God told him to abide by his wife's request. God also comforted Ishmael's father by informing him that

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[1] The book of Genesis says that Hagar is visited by an angel of God. Fewell's interpretation merely utilizes God in reference to this particular entity. This writer chooses to use God in a similar fashion.

[2] Genesis 16:14. New Living Translation.

> *Ishmael would be a free man with numerous descendants. The next morning, he sent Ishmael and Hagar on their way, only sending them with a small portion of food and water.*[3]

In this chapter, I present three key elements of trauma theory—identity, witnessing, and testimony—that I find encapsulate the theoretical commitments needed for a Christian social ethics projects like I am doing here. I find that trauma theory echoes the Christian childist-feminist themes in a different language. While the framing of the core methodological assumptions I am drawing from Christian childist-feminist theories are not identical to trauma theory, trauma theory's notions of identity, witnessing, and giving testimony shed a fresh light on Christian childist-feminist theory. After presenting the theoretical and methodological commitments I am pulling from Christian childist-feminist ethics and trauma theory, I detail a synthesized set of tools, which are embedded in the Jewish tradition of creating midrash, necessary for doing Christian social ethics with pregnant teens in the USA. I apply these tools to gain insight into the life of Hagar. Looking at Hagar as I introduce these tools provides a richer trauma-informed underpinning to my method and helps set up the social ethical needs for contemporary pregnant teens.

Trauma Theory

For millennia, the presence and experience of children and youth has been overlooked in biblical narratives and societies at large. While childist-feminist theory emphasizes that experiences of young persons are significant and their stories need to be

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[3]Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 49-50.

heard, trauma theory helps us understand the physiological, psychological, and spiritual need to listen. Childist-feminist and trauma theories drawn on the language of play, creativity, embodiment, and the notion of a narrative self. Additionally, these theories push for a holistic understanding of human existence and prize humans embodied and relational nature. Trauma theory builds on the tragedy of disembodied, fragmented living and illuminates the liberative healing that comes from pursuing wholeness. Particularly, we see how bearing witness to the silenced parts of ourselves and persons in society is a social ethical need that makes practical demands on how we ought to be with one another.

In this section, I will lay out some key ways in which trauma theory helps us think about identity. Thinking about identity in light of trauma theory requires us to understand the definition of trauma and how trauma impacts a person physiologically, emotionally, and socially. Then, I will discuss the need to witness and give testimony to trauma-inducing events in order to pursue healing. Thinking about identity, testimony, and witness help illuminate the social ethical demands of this project.

Trauma and Identity

As named in the introduction, my thoughts on identity are closely aligned with the discussions above on self-formation and nonlinear development. To reiterate, one's identity is how they make sense of themselves in the world; it includes their relationship with their body and feelings as well as how they make sense of themselves in relation to their world around them—family, community, religion, and so on. For example, I identify as a female, a white Christian, and a feminist. Identity can also include our hobbies, professions, and vocational callings. In one context, I might say that I am a

counselor, an ethicist, an academic, and an educator. In another setting, I might say I am a trained psychotherapist. In the hospital where I work, I am a clinical chaplain. Our identity is always tied to our story about who we are and what we are doing. It is both constant and fluid. We are the narrator, and it is our body and our story that is continual across time and space. But also, just as our experiences are always forming us, so our identity has a fluidity that we can define and shift.

Narrative psychology helps us think about human identity formation through the lens of stories. Our contexts shape our stories—our histories, culture, relationships, bodily sensations, and so on; our narrative identity is an intersection of our "individual agency and social context." From moment to moment, one is challenged to make meaning of positive and negative experiences in a way that promotes growth.[4]

The experience of trauma can bring growth to a standstill, though, as traumatic events are not easily processed and integrated into our identity narratives. "Events are not intrinsically traumatic. They become traumatic when we are unable to process them so as to construct a coherent and meaningful narrative enabling our brains to process them using the channels ordinarily used to process experience and memory."[5] One experiences trauma when their ability to experience an event in the moment is halted, thus they are unable to process the experience and integrate it into their self-identity, personal life narrative, and general sense of being. If one was to understand human formation as nearly a linear path, then the experience of trauma would be irreparable. Rather, acknowledging

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[4] McAdams et al., *Identity and Story,* para. 9.

[5] Steven Ballaban, "The Use of Traumatic Biblical Narratives in Spiritual Recovery from Trauma: Theory and Case Study," *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 68, no. 4 (2014), 7.

and claiming that we form and develop in a more circular, ever-evolving process allows us to accept the infinite possibilities that can manifest in each new moment.

Manda's definition of trauma illuminates the way in which our body lives out this circular formation, which involves owning that each new moment is an interaction of the past, present, and future. Manda draws on Chris N van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's 2008 book *Narrating our Healing: Perspectives on Working through Trauma* in defining trauma[6] and forwards their conceptualization of trauma by stating that trauma is:

> a special form of memory, and the traumatic experience has affect only, not meaning. It produces emotions such as terror, fear, shock and, above all, a disruption of the normal feeling of comfort. The sensation-factor sector of the brain is active during trauma, but the meaning-making faculty, the rational thought and cognitive processing, namely the cerebral cortex, remains shut down because the affect is too much to be registered cognitively in the brain. Since experience has not been given meaning, the person who experienced trauma is continually haunted by it in dreams, flashbacks, and hallucinations. When the traumatic memory is not processed, it becomes a debilitating memory and it places excessive demands on people's existing coping strategies.[7]

The flashbacks, dreams, etc. is the body returning to the trauma in the present moment. The ongoing fright that comes with these moments of return, highlight that humans are never not living in the present and for the future. Freud and Caruth further develop this.

Caruth's utilization of Freud's conceptualization of a trauma experience was presented in the introduction. In review, Freud forwards the idea that an experience of fright reminds us that a violent event comes by surprise and the person misses its timing

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[6] Manda, "Re-authoring life narratives." Van der Merwe is a professor of Afrikaans and Dutch literature and Gobodo-Madikizela is a professor of psychology, specializing in trauma and forgiveness.

[7] Manda, "Re-authoring life narratives," 2.

and impact in real time.[8] Freud uses the term fright to formulate the cause of trauma.[9] To experience fright, one is taken off guard; they are not prepared or have not anticipated the violent event they are about to encounter. As a result of not being ready for the violent event, they experience fright in the actual moment of the violence. It is only after they have physically survived the violent event that they realized they were shocked by it and missed it. It is this moment of fright when the violent event is experienced unconsciously, or out of one's awareness. Since they are not present and fully conscious, because of fright, they miss the violent event in its actual moment in time.

It is because such an event was missed and not consciously encountered that a person experiences the effects of trauma, or trauma response—flashbacks, nightmares, numbness, dissociation, etc. Put another way, in fright, one departs from the reality of what is the present moment. This is a result of physiological responses to the traumatic event and the ability to process information breaks down.[10]

In moments following the violent incident, moments that mark the survival of such violence, consciousness is resumed, and one learns that they were previously unconscious. It is surviving the violent event that one is even opened to the opportunity of experiencing trauma. Living through the event and the realness of survival is what separates the person from the jarring moment in time. The awareness of one's survival,

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[8] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*.

[9] For this physiological claim, Freud's argument is being understood and used as universal and gender inclusive. This element of his theory has been built upon by the other scholarship presented here and beyond.

[10] Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice.* The body actually undergoes neurological restructuring.

and one's understanding of the moment of unconsciousness, become clear to each person at different times.

When one experiences the flashbacks of the moment when they lost consciousness, only then one can begin to understand that they were unconscious. In surviving, one becomes awakened to what was previously out of one's consciousness. While the flashbacks seem to be out of one's control, they make demands on the person to return to the violent event from which they previously departed. In order to understand and learn about what was missed in the violent, frightful event, one must return to the reality that they at one moment departed from consciousness and attempt to regain consciousness.[11]

Van der Kolk helps us think about the notion of self in relationship to consciousness.[12] When we talk about consciousness, we are talking about self-awareness and being "able to feel emotions and sensations."[13] Van der Kolk describes the trauma response as a "tragic adaptation: In an effort to shut off terrifying sensations, they also deadened their capacity to feel fully alive. . . . [; they] lose their sense of purpose and direction."[14] The story does not end here, though. But, where does one go from here? How can one intercept the perpetual tragic adaptation to a trauma experience and

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[11] Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice.*

[12] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* Chapter 6. Van der Kolk draws on the work of Ruth Lanius, M.D. and Ph.D., Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) research unit at the University of Western Ontario.

[13] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 94.

[14] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 94.

facilitate the development of less-tragic adaptations? How can one find and claim agency in response to trauma?

Witness and Testimony

Let us return to Manda's take that was presented in the introduction: one must reconstruct "the trauma into a narrative form."[15] Through the process of "naming, re-telling, and re-experiencing the story of trauma with [another] person, we frame it. By describing the event, it goes out of us, it goes 'out there'. Thus, the event takes on a new meaning"[16]—as seen in the work being done with revisiting Hagar's story. Additionally, if you recall, Caruth challenges us to think about the survival of missing the violent event as the beginning of an ethical demand for the survivor. This ethical demand goes a bit deeper than merely requiring the survivor to return to the violent event in search of knowledge and understanding—it requires one to claim their survival in the midst of loss. One is required to take "urgent responsibility. . . . as an ethical relation to the real."[17] Remember, this starts with giving preferential attention to women and children, as members of society who often go unheard and are silenced. The reality of the trauma demands a witness and in the work of this project we will serve as witnesses to women and children. In order for a person to experience liberation from the repetition of the trauma wound, one must bear witness to what was experienced unconsciously. One must

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[15] Manda, "Re-authoring life narratives," 3.

[16] Manda, "Re-authoring life narratives," 3. Requote from Introduction, page 10.

[17] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 102.

encounter the violent event consciously and witness the realness of it. It cannot be forgotten, as it continues to remind oneself of the violent event through repetition, recurring in dreams and flashbacks. In returning to the event, one is faced with the realness of what can and cannot be known. Bearing witness to the unknown takes place through the original person not only returning to the place of departure and searching for what was real in that moment in time, but also giving voice to this violent event. In speaking of the event, one holds the realness of the event, realness of the departure, and realness of the unknown.[18]

If one holds themselves committed to a linear development model, how does one rationalize the biological, psychological, and social need to return to the unknown? In claiming one's survival of trauma, one is faced with what can be known about the past and what cannot be known about the future. As a result, one can transmit one's own awakening, one's own awareness of missing a violent event, one's responsibility to return to the event as a responsibility to surviving it, and one's acceptance of the future. In holding each of these three elements in tandem, Caruth argues that one also must recognize that there are still unknown pieces and that these parts of the truth, or real, are still deserving to be known. As a result, one must pass on what is both known and unknown to the next generation. One must provide witness to the elements of the real as they are capable and then must encourage others to also bear witness until the real is completely known. Like in a legal trial, multiple witnesses are called on to give a testimony. It is the hope that through the pieces of truth that each testimony offers, a

[18] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 102.

more complete truth and holistic narrative can be revealed. In this sense, trauma is living. Seeking what is unknown and taking responsibility for what is known as one moves forward into the unknown future is both accepting that one has survived and that one is still alive.

Creating and giving voice to trauma narratives, and ultimately the development of an integrated self through narrative and more complete truth, is a lifelong process. The narrative evolves with time. It is shared with others and in the sharing, it is opened up to the unknown. It requires a practice of testimony—practice in reading, listening, and speaking.[19] Shoshana Felman, professor of French and comparative literature, and Dori Laub, M.D., clinical professor of psychiatry hone in on the existential crisis that can come in providing witness to trauma.[20] Laub states, "the testimony is, therefore, the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness."[21] Narrating and giving testimony to the trauma is an act of "repossessing one's life story . . . [it] is itself a form of action, of change, which has to actually pass through, in order to continue and complete the process of survival after liberation. The event must be reclaimed because even if fully repressed, it nevertheless invariably plays a decisive formative role in who one comes to be, and how one comes to live one's life."[22] Even though it is important for someone to serve as witness to their own trauma, they are not

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[19] Felman and Laub, *Testimony.*

[20] Felman and Laub, *Testimony.*

[21] Dori Laub, M.D., "An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival," in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History,* eds. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., (New York: Routledge, 1992), Chapter 3.

[22] Laub, "An Event Without a Witness," 85-6.

the only possible witness. Laub outlines three levels of witnessing: "the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself."[23]

Attention to moral and spiritual injuries provides a more holistic understanding of the experience of trauma and thus makes different, or refined, demands on persons working through trauma and of those people joining with others in their trauma work. Manda argues that one must take into account the moral and spiritual injury one faces in the aftermath of trauma. Manda's former work introduces the term "posttraumatic spirituality," emphasizing the ways in which one's understanding of greater meaning-making and conceptions of God become shattered in the midst of experiencing trauma.

One way people can join with another in their trauma work is in counseling or therapy. Pressley and Spinazzola's component-based psychotherapy model for persons who experience complex trauma helps us think about trauma work in and through relationships from a Christian perspective.[24] Pressley and Spinazzola name the fact that the clinician and the person working through trauma will be impacted by the therapeutic relationship and the trauma work; there is a parallel process going on merely because humans are relational beings. This parallel processing can take place in relationships other than professional psychotherapy sessions, for example with caregivers and friends. Manda, Pressley and Spinazzola challenge us to consider that one's relationship with God

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[23] Laub, "An Event Without a Witness," 75.

[24] Pressley and Spinazzola, , "Beyond Survival."

is likely impacted by trauma and that this is another important relationship to be explored in facing one's trauma. This often includes creating lament.

Personality psychologist Jennifer L. Pals conceptualizes the process of acknowledging negative experiences and then actively analyzing the experiences as a process that places oneself onto a springboard. It is through returning to the experience and opening oneself to new meaning-making that ultimately prepares oneself for growth and transformation.[25]

In this project, as one is likely picking up on, I am claiming and holding the "silenced" in a multi-dimensional fashion. We cannot talk about our whole self without acknowledging and honoring all the parts that make up the whole. This is true of individuals and their bodies, as well as society and the individuals and communities that make it up. Moreover, in thinking about both individuals and societies, it is essential to also deeply hold in tension the notion of time and the way history is in our DNA. In facing the present manifestations of "being silenced" and thinking creatively and even hopefully about the future, we can deny history. But history must be understood as sacred.

In turn, this requires giving testimony to history and having witnesses of history. Trauma scholarship beginning in the 1980's, and increasingly prevalent in the 21st century, acknowledges the neurobiological impacts of trauma. Having a grasp on the neuroscience behind trauma breaks open our understanding about how attention to the

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[25] Jennifer L. Pals, "Constructing the 'Springboard Effect': Causal Connections, Self-Making, and Growth Within the Life Story," in *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative,* eds. Dan P. McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson, and Amie Lieblich (American Psychological Association, 2006), Chapter 8.

whole organism is invaluable to healing. As previously stated, people have been wrestling with these questions and seeking to understand and name what it means to be human since our creation. This is seen in my brief mention of Aristotle, Aquinas, Kierkegaard, Rogers, Freud, and so on. More recent advancements in science have allowed us to have a more detailed picture of how these intricacies of life actually manifest in our bodies.

It's always an in and out process. In some sense, this research/scholarship gives a new lens to what we already have known socially and psychologically. It further defines what's actually happening in the body. It also validates the multiple ways of being with each other in evidence-based scholarship. It provides a language for describing and theorizing about why we are the way we are and why certain things help and others don't, which people have already been doing for millennia via trial and error without a need for science. And yet, I am forwarding that these advanced understandings of science have a place—and can help reframe needs we have as inherently creative, relational, and embodied.

Providing testimony and witness is not just narrative, or a verbal action. It is about the entire organism in community with itself and others. Testimony and witness are also about the psychophysiological patterns, which we present in our on-going relationships to histories and environments. The entire body is a storyteller.[26]

So, the silenced parts of ourselves—individual's bodies and bodies of individuals—need to be heard and attended to. In the next section, we will look at the

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[26] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score;* Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice.*

way narrative therapy and somatic experiencing are utilized in therapy with children who have experienced trauma. These two clinical approaches draw out the physiological and psychological impacts of trauma. Moreover, they provide a framework for how to move forward with healing from trauma and the pursuit of human wholeness.

Narrative Therapy and Somatic Experiencing with Traumatized Children

Being silenced is a physiological, psychological, and social experience. Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman talk about the secret-keeping associated with trauma. As they discussed Herman's work with incest survivors and veterans in conversation with work with Holocaust survivors, they emphasized that the profound disempowerment of persons who experience trauma is an act of silencing. Through the experience of a dominating "other"—making an "other" powerless, the disempowered person is faced with an intersection of psychological, social, and political silencing and denial of one's agency. "Trauma exposes various modes of domination and is thus met with various modes of silencing and denial."[27] Herman describes how she helps people in her "trauma information groups" by describing that traumatic symptoms that develop in response to a traumatic event are:

> normal responses, if you will, to an abnormal situation, to a situation of helplessness and terror and shame, and that in some ways you can think of both the intrusive and numbing symptoms as memory distortions—as abnormal memories. Your task in trauma treatment is to transform them into normal

[27] Cathy Caruth, *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory & Treatment of Catastrophic Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 138.

> memories that have a narrative, that serve as a witness within one's internal story in and in relation to others.[28]

How does one do this transformative work and create more honest and complete narratives that are not only defined by trauma?

The scholarship on narrative therapy with children who have experienced trauma sheds light on what this author finds as an inherent connection between trauma theory and childhood studies. Most prominently, children who experience chronic stressors through severe, ongoing abuse and neglect may find it challenging to build safe, trusting relationships; regulate emotions; manage one's impulses; focus their attention; and be present from moment to moment.[29] The multiplicity of these physiological and pyscho-social experiences in response to trauma has come to be known as complex trauma.[30]

The children's environments have been chaotic, unpredictable, and unstructured. "Although young children may have trauma responses that challenge a caregiver's capacity to manage his or her own affect, they also have limited resources for

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[28] Caruth, *Listening to Trauma*, 141. This is a quote by Herman, as presented in the conversation between Caruth and Herman.

[29] Joshua Arvidson, Kristine Kinniburgh, Kristin Howard, Joseph Spinazzola, Helen Strothers, Mary Evans, Barry Andres, Chantal Cohen, and Margaret E. Blaustein, "Treatment of Complex Trauma in Young Children: Developmental and Cultural Considerations in Application of the ARC Intervention Model," *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma* 4, no. 1 (2011).

[30] Complex trauma is a relatively new concept in the field of psychology. It gained a place in clinical conversations and literature in the early 2000's. The concept of complex trauma emphasizes the multiple ways in which ongoing trauma through abuse and neglect has an impact on children and youth—including their development. The chronic trauma not only ignites presentations of traditional trauma responses, i.e. flack backs, avoidance, but also it significantly impacts the structuring of their brain as well as social and physiological adaptions in early stages of development. Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, founder and medical director of the Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute, has been a pioneer in the area of child trauma and has been foundational to the progression of this notion of complex trauma. Much of the research presented in the article by Arvidson et al. has been under the supervision and/or in conversation with Dr. van der Kolk. Van der Kolk, Cook, Spinazzola, Blaustein, Cloitre and others have been leading scholars publishing in this area of study.

independent, internal regulation and are heavily dependent on the caregiver for co-regulation."[31] Children lack a sense of internal and external safety and control, which manifests in a variety of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional responses. Perhaps most significantly, "the negative environmental input is internalized and a fragmented or a negative self-identity can develop."[32] The balance between the innate autonomy and dependency relationship is off. The goal, then, is to develop a sense of self that is cohesive and positive.

All children, and particularly children who experience complex trauma, depending on where they are developmentally, are likely to lack the ability or access to verbal skills that can help them process their trauma and work on creating a more cohesive self-identity. Their agency has been limited by the context of severe trauma and for their agency to be re-defined and more creative, their context must expand for tolerating stress. In turn, a caregiver, counselor, or other person interacting with the child must be aware of the work and process the child is doing experientially. It is important to be aware of opportunities for exploration and integration of one's familial, tribal, and cultural identity.[33]

Self-expression and exploration of trust and safety can be worked on in therapeutic interventions including play as well as through the implementation of predictability and rituals in the home. Thus, the development of routines and rituals

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[31] Arvidson et al., "Treatment of Complex Trauma in Young Children," 40.

[32] Arvidson et al., "Treatment of Complex Trauma in Young Children," 45.

[33] Arvidson et al., "Treatment of Complex Trauma in Young Children," 46.

create a safe external structure where children can develop a sense of safety and regulation. Transitional objects during rituals of transition, such as bedtime, can be very helpful for increasing a child's sense of control during difficult parts of the day.[34] After a sense of internal and external safety is established, a person is able to more actively begin processing their trauma history.

As discussed in a previous section, childhood trauma experiences "remain unexamined, unchanged, and intact....frozen in childhood."[35] Through revisiting and processing the trauma narrative, the narrative "begins to thaw."[36] Just like persons, stories are relational. Moreover, stories are dynamic—they are active, evolving, and unfolding.[37] Stories of others can be useful, and arguably are even essential, in developing one's own story—they are reflective, tangible, and break open space for creating new possibilities.

Since the entire organism is impacted by the trauma-induced event, the entire embodied experience must be attended to for healing. Sensorimotor approaches to therapy provide the framework and tools to do so in a relational way.[38] A healing relationship begins with developing "an environment of relative safety."[39] Then, one is

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[34] Arvidson et al., "Treatment of Complex Trauma in Young Children," 46.

[35] Dennis G. Shulman, "Pushing the psychoanalytic envelope: An introduction to Eisenstein's and Rebillot's 'Midrash and mutuality in the treatment of trauma: A joint account,' " *Psychoanalytic Review* 89, no. 3 (June 2002), 299.

[36] Shulman, "Pushing the psychoanalytic envelope," 299.

[37] This author wonders if thinking about a person as a self and a self as an evolving "story" could be considered synonymous with what thinkers across time and discipline, i.e. Søren Kierkegaard, Carl Rogers, and others, promote a "self" as a person always in the process of becoming.

[38] Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice.*

[39] Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, 74-75.

supported through a process of exploring and accepting their bodily sensations, becoming accustomed to the rhythm of their body and the diverse emotions and physical manifestations. As a result, persons increase a sense of stability through strong bodily experiences and build resilience. This offers a conditioned, corrective experience to the trauma responses of fight and flight (i.e. dissociation, numbness, irritability) and people learn how to self-regulate strong feelings. As a result, people can find and develop a renewed sense of holistic equilibrium and even find themselves able to be present in the here and now.[40]

Childist-Feminist Method in Light of Trauma Theory: Creating Midrash

If safety and trust are essential for persons to tell and restructure their life narrative in light of trauma, then attitudes that uphold safety, trust, and empathy should be strived for in listening to (and reading) one's trauma story. Levine describes a space of safety as "an atmosphere that conveys refuge, hope and possibility."[41] Manda argues that when listening to one tell and retell their trauma story, one must be a beacon of faith and hope.[42] Psychoanalyst Ann Eisenstein and Kathryn Rebillot argue that thinking of healing as a creation and unfolding of one's narrative *in relationship* to others' creation and unfolding is akin to the process of creating midrash.[43] The following underpinnings of

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[40] Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, 74-75.

[41] Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, 75.

[42] Manda, "Re-authoring life narratives," 3.

[43] In Shulman "Pushing the psychoanalytic envelope," page 298, Shulman states that the function of therapy/psychoanalysis is to "do midrash, a creative response to the analysand's (and sometimes the analyst's) suffering that plays in and elaborates the spaces between the words and the history."

Jewish midrash are instrumental in doing trauma work, with those who believe in a monotheistic religious tradition:

1. God, including God's word (scripture), is a living entity that humanity must never stop engaging.
2. It is virtuous to converse and even argue, because it is representative of one staying engaged with others and God.
3. Ongoing conversation is the only way humanity can get closer to the truth.
4. Humanity must never stop seeking to understand God and desiring truth. If anyone thinks they know, they must check themselves for pride and ignorance.
5. Midrash gives attention to holes in scripture.

In turn, I argue that bearing witness to trauma testimonies is creating midrash and ultimately can contribute to a renewed method for doing Christian social ethics, as Christians learn from the scriptural traditions of their Jewish siblings. Specifically, because claiming that trauma work is creating midrash, the method is anchored in a rich Jewish tradition that Christianity has roots in and that relies on the relational and dynamic attributes of God and humanity. Moreover, it is the following: a Godly and holy process; essential to better understanding God; honoring God and God's desire for conversation; and promoting truth seeking, which promotes deeper understanding, wider eyes, and less pride and ignorance.[44] Unfortunately, many Christians do not share this approach to scriptural interpretation or use of scripture for ethical discernment. Christians that prize daily engagement with scripture and cling to scripture as God's ultimate truth would benefit from the Jewish tradition of midrash as a way to more acutely know and engage

[44] Amy Kalmanofsky, "How Feminist Biblical Scholarship Can Heal Victims of Sexual Violation," in *Sexual Violence and Sacred Texts*, edited by Amy Kalmanofsky, Chapter 3, (Cambridge, MA: Feminist Studies in Religion Books, 2017); Sarra Lev, " 'Dipping a Finger in Honey': Sense Making in the Face of Violent Texts," in *Sexual Violence and Sacred Texts*, ed. Amy Kalmanofsky (Cambridge, MA: Feminist Studies in Religion Books, 2017), Chapter 3.

with God. In future sections, I will show that many dominant Christian ethical responses to pregnant teens are founded and reinforced by conservative and stagnant readings of scripture. The Midrashic tradition provides tools for a re-invigorated approach to scripture that can lead to more compassionate and liberative ethics surrounding gender and sexuality.

Einstein and Rebillot draw on the story of Ishmael and provide an example to elaborate:

> The rabbis set out to "fix" this traumatic event—Ishmael's banishment—not by changing the facts, but by taking the liberty of adding on to the story in order to reassure the reader that Ishmael's emotional injury was ultimately healed. In addition, Abraham's image of fatherhood is restored to one worthy of continued idealization, and he can remain the great Father of his People.[45]

As this example shows, creating midrash is transformative and restorative, for both individuals and communities.[46]

As this project shifts between the lived experiences of pregnant teens and an examination of biblical and Midrashic interpretations of Genesis 16 and 21, one can see how Hebrew scriptures seem to show one how God acts as a witness to the trauma narratives in a way that we can draw on in the here and now—especially the trauma encountered by the marginalized women and children. It is in the moment when the

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[45] Ann Eisenstein and Kathryn Rebillot, "Midrash and mutuality in the treatment of trauma: A joint account," *Psychoanalytic Review* 89, no. 3 (June 2022), 304.

[46] Fewell does just this in her text *The Children of Israel.* Specifically, in chapter six, she creates a play coordinated by a local Rabbi and Christian youth leader. They work through a script with adolescent girls from their communities. Fewell's play brings together the story of Esther with contemporary adolescence in a way that is allows youth to connect with the ancient text and bring it to life today.

character provides witness to themselves and God provides witness that new truths are revealed, meaning-making occurs, and hope is revived.

As I prepare to turn my attention to the experiences of pregnant teenagers in the US and the cultural narratives surrounding sexuality and pregnancy in the US as seen through psycho-social research and US history, I will implement a child-centered, trauma-informed, feminist ethics method. This method is a hermeneutical lens that seeks to draw on the complex intersections between Christian childist and feminist methods and trauma theory that I have presented. Specifically, it is a reflective hermeneutic, where I must continually claim my own subjectivity in the research process. I understand that my own experiences inform the skills I use—the questions I ask, my ability to listen, what I view as objective, and so on. I will be straddling 1) the desire to be an empathic and congruent listener with one foot in the experience of the subjects I am engaging and one foot in my own experience and 2) the reality that I am an educated, white, heterosexual, Christian woman in the United States, which is always in the here and now of the work.

I will draw on the Jewish tradition of creating midrash as inspiration for being a witness to the testimonies of young women in the US who find themselves homeless and pregnant. Participating in this tradition decenters dominant Christian approaches that have been harmful to women and girls and requires I attend to my positionality as a white Christian US woman engaging this ancient and, yet everyday scriptural tradition of Judaism. I will be doing trauma-work as I seek to not only be a part of bringing the voices of the young, misunderstood, and stigmatized women to the forefront but also challenge the ways in which they have been misrepresented, silenced, and oppressed. This includes clinging to my belief in the sacredness innate in all voices. I will strive to

see and uplift this sacredness as I hear and share the experiences of young women I have never physically met. Additionally, I will honor their agency that exists in every moment—and recognize that agency is contextual.

This requires me to listen deeply to the stories they are telling and pay attention to the situatedness of the storytellers and the stories themselves. Since I am not doing ethnographic work and personal interviews directly, I will be using my empathic listening skills and claim the various texts as manifestations of the lives they represent and were authored by. A Christian theology about the Bible as the living word and Jesus as God incarnate are helpful theological foundations and particular to my childist-feminist approach detailed in chapter one. Just as Christians are encouraged to engage scripture as a living document where we can encounter God, so too I will enter into a relationship with the texts before me and lean into a journey with the creators.

Specifically, deep listening in this context includes attending to the words the authors use and the emotions expressed. It also includes naming the places where words are not at the forefront. I will think about the nonverbal elements of the stories as elements of trauma. There will be times when words and meaning-making are not accessible because the speaker is in trauma response. Silence and holes in narratives will be understood as violent acts themselves—acts that induced a silencing trauma response.

I will seek to uphold a sense of curiosity and hope. With a desire to offer healing reflection on our society's traumatic wounds, I will view my efforts as part of the necessary trauma work needed for a more whole society. This requires ongoing reflection and critique of the process. I will be reflecting and critiquing my own process as a scholar

as well as interrogating the methods that the US society has utilized in response to young pregnant women.

In sum, taking the stance of bearing witness means that I will actively position myself so to give witness to the women's testimony while embodying the notion that testimonies are essential parts of the entire truth. I promote the idea that trust must be named, processed, and integrated by all parts of a body in order for the body to be free to pursue its potential. I forward the notion that body/body parts can refer to one human and their body parts or one community where persons are understood to be part o the larger body. And, I understanding that testimonies must be witnessed as a means towards processing and integrating the entire truth.

Additionally, I view the process of giving testimony and bearing witness is an example of humanity's inherent relationality and dependency—because it is a dynamic process between two or more parts with the hope that the body's potential will become less inhibited. In relation to this, I approach inhibited potential of a body as coming from trauma; trauma is the bodily impact of something that happened and can't be processed. I believe that we, as humankind, need to re-visit our traumas so events can be processed and the impingement of potential can be healed and released. This is possible through bearing witness to testimonies of trauma. On the other hand, not giving testimony to trauma and not bearing witness to the testimony of trauma leads to greater impingement of one's potential. Ultimately, impingement is not living out our *Imago Dei* as designed and promotes anything contrary to this. Moreover, impingement can be understood as separation from God, or sin, and sin exists and must be named at the individual and systemic level out of *Imago Dei.*

Just as Hagar shows us that God listens, the implementation of this hermeneutic includes embodying the belief that God is listening and desires for us to return to our trauma wounds and find healing.

CHAPTER THREE:

CENTERING THE TEEN EXPERIENCE: US NARRATIVES, DATA, AND DISEMBODIMENT

Introduction

I did not have a choice. I was her servant—hers to use and exert power over. I followed her to this land, far from my homeland. Of course, I always wanted to be a mother, but ideally it would be with someone I chose. Or, within my culture. Having a child because she could not become pregnant was not my choice. She gave me to her husband to lay with. Is there no limit to what it means to be someone's servant—their slave? And now she despises me. I am now her husband's second wife—a matrimony that seems to only have come into being because of her desire—and Your promise to her husband that he would be the father of all nations.

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Hagar and her young son Ishmael found themselves in the wilderness exhausted, belabored, dehydrated, and out of food and water. Just a few days before, Ishmael was playing with his younger brother and receiving affection from his father. A few days ago, they were not travelers on foot not knowing where their next meal and drink of water would come from or where they would find rest for their tired bodies. On this particular day, Ishmael was so weak. Hagar guided him to rest under a tree and then scanned the area for water—his body had reached a limit and he could travel no further. Hagar was determined to provide for her son but also was in great turmoil. What if there was no water? Was this the end of her son's life? Was this how it would all end?

And on this day years later, Hagar found herself once again sitting in the wilderness concerned about the wellbeing of her son. Ishmael was crying out in desperation about a hundred feet away and Hagar's heart sank as the fear and concern consumed her being. Then, all at once, God appeared to Hagar. God spoke to Hagar. God heard Ishmael's cries and reminded her of God's promise for Ishmael's freedom and many descendants. Hagar looked up and laid her eyes on a well of water. Hagar rose, gave water to Ishmael to drink, and Hagar and Ishmael began their life of liberation. Ishmael became a great bow-man and indeed was blessed with descendants beyond one's counting.

Hagar and her relationship with Sarah open the reader up to the interpersonal dynamics Hagar is navigating in her daily life both prior to and during her pregnancy as well as in childrearing. Their relationship magnifies the ways in which one's autonomy is intimately tied to one's relationships and social context. Moreover, Hagar and Sarah help the reader see the ways in which the social relations we find ourselves in are always being processed and integrated into our internal being.

Hagar and Sarah are both women in a patriarchal society. Literary scholar of the Hebrew Bible, Elaine James, identifies the multiple ways in which solidarity between Hagar and Sarah is imagined across academic disciplines, including theology, creative writing, fine arts, and others in the *Women's Bible Commentary*. James states, "Contemporary feminist and womanist theologians have been keen to rehabilitate Hagar. Phyllis Trible (*Texts of Terror,* 1984), and Delores Williams (*Sisters in the Wilderness*, 1993), and many subsequent others, have explored the story's potential to illustrate women caught in malignant distortions of power, especially with respect to patriarchy and race."[1] James later continues,

> the rift that lingers between Sarah and Hagar continues to speak powerfully to unhealed wounds of all kinds. Poet Alicia Suskin Ostriker imagines each woman articulating a yearning for solidarity that remains unfulfilled, perhaps impossible: Sarah grieves, 'We should be allies / we are both exiles, all women are exiles,' and Hagar wonders, 'She threw me away / Like garbage. . . . But I still wonder / Why could she not love me / We were women together' (*The Nakedness of the Fathers,* 1995).[2]

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[1] Elaine James, "Sarah, Hagar, and Their Interpreters," in-*Women's Bible Commentary,* edited by Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jaqueline E. Lapsley, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 55.

[2] James, "Sarah, Hagar, and Their Interpreters," 55.

Koepf-Taylor further illuminates the tension between Hagar and Sarah—a tension only possible between two women. Because Hagar and Sarah share the same gender, there was potential for them to find solidarity in their womanhood.[3] The realities of this shared gender were not points of connection, though, but rather a source of threat, vulnerability, and self-reflection. It is when Hagar becomes pregnant that Hagar begins to see Sarah differently. Suddenly, Hagar is of some value in a way that Sarah is unable to be. "The economic value of children in the ancient world renders them a necessity rather than an emotional luxury. Hence, childlessness is a form of economic hardship and a threat to communal survival in addition to a personal tragedy."[4] Even though surrogacy was a common practice in the ancient world and Sarah's social status is not altered by using a surrogate to carry on her lineage, Sarah experiences the shift in Hagar and internalizes the notion that Hagar now has a diminished view of her. In some sense, Hagar becomes a mirror to Sarah in this moment; Hagar abruptly sees Sarah differently and Sarah witnesses Hagar's face. Hagar's perception of Sarah can be understood as providing a testimony to Sarah's barrenness and infertility.[5]

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[3] Elisheva Baumgarten is one of many sources that addresses the duties of procreation in ancient Judaism (in "Judaism," *Children and Childhood in World Religions,* Chapter 1, edited by Don S. Browning, and Marcia J. Bunge, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011). Notions of fertility and lineage defined women and their role in society.

[4] Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die,* 43-44.

[5] Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die,* 43-44. Koepf-Taylor draws from biblical scholar Amy Kalmanofsky's discussion of the experience of horror in witnessing destruction. Koepf-Taylor quotes and utilizes Kalmanofsky's (in *Terror All Around: Horror, Monsters and Theology in the Book of Jeremiah,* New York: T&T Clark, 2008) argument that the act of witnessing the aftermath of destruction can elicit a response of horror. The witness's emotional reaction to encountering a space that has been destroyed provides "terrifying and shame-inducing warnings to [other] witnesses that remind them of their own weaknesses and potential for a similar shameful fate" (Kalmanofsky, 31 in Koepf-Taylor, 43). Furthermore, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's interpretation of Genesis 21 presents Jehovah as providing witness to Sarah and demanding Abraham to act upon his role of witness to Sarah (in *The Woman's Bible,* United States: Pacific Publishing Studio, 2010, 11). Abraham is obligated to see Sarah as his wife, understand her

In this chapter, I am going to draw on what I have learned from listening to Hagar and Sarah to engage pregnant teens in my current US society. I will begin by framing the societal narratives I find most relevant to these young people's lives. Their relationship with each other and society illuminates the importance of understanding psychosocial and historical context when thinking about real life. This will be done in an interwoven process that also wrestles with the materiality of contextual agency. Hagar and Sarah's contextual agency helps train one providing witness about the importance of understanding societal narratives in order to glean a more complete truth of the lived, personal particularities. As a result, analysis of the lived realities of pregnant teens in the US, particularly homeless teens, must be done in conjunction with an analysis of their context–the societal backdrop, which includes many sites of trauma and incomplete testimony.

I will draw on research produced by the social sciences (psychology, sociology, social work, etc.) to provide a descriptive survey of the teen experience that arises out of these narratives. Turning one's attention to the particular experiences of pregnant teens who are homeless provides a uniquely intimate perspective on attitudes held by teens and their knowledge about sex and sexuality, human reproduction, freedom and rights, self-worth, and relationships.

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plight as at one time barren and now the mother of Isaac, and provide testimony to Sarah through sending Hagar and Ishmael away. Stanton forwards the notion that Jehovah provides and displays intimate positive regard for Sarah in this section of the narrative, but does not act kindly on behalf of Hagar. Looking at Stanton in conversation with Koepf-Taylor and Kalmanofsky illuminates the complexity, and even challenge, of bearing witness to multiple trauma stories in tandem, particularly stories of more than one person in a joint space.

First, I will address social factors associated with being a young unmarried pregnant person, including statistics and demographics. The stories and statistics will be looked at in light of historical conversations about sexuality and pregnancy through an examination of the US history of marriage and family politics. These historical narratives naturally include and segue into the politics of sexual education and medical ethics. The social institutions of family, education, and medicine each display the way in which society shapes how we define what it means to be human and ultimately provide different entry points into the marginalization of homeless, pregnant teens. There are numerous ways in which the women and children are treated as second-class citizens, thus diminishing their sacred theological anthropology.

Then, I will examine personal beliefs and attitudes expressed by homeless youth surrounding sex, contraception, and pregnancy. I will illuminate the actual experience of pregnancy for these teens through exploring the impacts being homeless and pregnant has on their day-to-day living. Through listening to teen voices and learning about their experiences, one should feel an urgency to dig deeper and explore how the US has constructed a society that nurtures such experiences of disembodiment, isolation, and social abandonment. In this next chapter, we will do just that. In order to better understand these tensions, we must continually return to the experiences of pregnant teenagers.

Finally, all of these pieces will be synthesized under the lens of trauma as a way guiding one's understanding of how the intersectionality of these young people's lives is a lesson about society, a call to duty to witness their testimony, and a societal demand to explore how US culture creates and created these traumas.

Teen Pregnancy: The Social Problem

"For many, teen parenthood symbolizes 'what's wrong' with America today. . . . In a 2004 opinion poll, teen pregnancy was rated by 42 percent as a 'very serious problem' in our society, and another 37 percent considered it to be an 'important problem.' "[6] Why is teenage pregnancy so problematic? Why have pregnant teenagers become sites of trauma that society wants to erase? What testimonies must be provided and heard in order to bear witness to these sites of trauma? Sociologist Kristin Luker testifies that teenage pregnancy challenges the United States cultural norms and attitudes about human fitness—questioning the fitness of unwed persons, young persons, and persons of lower socio-economic status to bear children.[7]

The statistics of teen pregnancy in the United States are promising for the general population. The rates of teen pregnancy, persons aged 15-19, have been on the decline since 1991. In the last five years, we have continued to see a gradual reduction in teen pregnancy rates. This is a result of an increase in both abstinence and use of contraceptives.[8]

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[6] Mollborn, " 'children' having children."34.

[7] Luker, *Dubious Conceptions*.

[8] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), November 15, 2021,"About Teen Pregnancy," https://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/about/index.htm; Joyce A. Martin et al., "Births: Final Data for 2019," *National Center for Health Statistics* 70, no. 2 (March 2021), 1–51; Lisa Romero et al., "Reduced Disparities in Birth Rates Among Teens Aged 15–19 Years — United States, 2006–2007 and 2013–2014," *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 65, no. 16 (2016): 409–14; John S. Santelli et al., "Explaining Recent Declines in Adolescent Pregnancy in the United States: The Contribution of Abstinence and Improved Contraceptive Use," *American Journal of Public Health* 97, no. 1 (2007), 150–56. Some argue that the decline in teen pregnancies is primarily due to increased abstinence, but this is less supported by research. National trends surrounding sex education in school and federal governmental funding for different curriculums inevitably has an impact on these stats. Additionally, increased knowledge about HIV and the impact these insights had on social and educational approaches to sexual

While teenage pregnancy is not a new phenomenon, it has definitely grown into a topic warranting public and academic attention. Teenagers aged 18-19 represent three times as many pregnancy rates as those between the ages of 15 and 17.[9] It is important to note that "the US has a long history of teen childbearing. Looking at the teen birth rate since the start of the Second World War, the high point for teen births was in the mid-1950s. Yet teen parenthood did not emerge as an important 'social problem' until the 1970s."[10] In the 1950s, it was not uncommon for persons to marry and immediately get pregnant in their late teens and early 20s. Since then, the age of marriage has increased significantly.[11] "In the 1950s, the cultural ethos placed great emphasis on female domesticity. A young woman who dropped out of high school to get married (perhaps because she was pregnant) was simply conforming to expected social roles."[12]

Kristin Luker further testifies that teenage pregnancy began to be understood as a problem in the 1970's. As a result of abortion becoming legal in 1973, researchers "began to refer to a new demographic measure, the 'pregnancy rate,' which combined the rate of abortion and the rate of live births."[13] In 1975, Senator Edward Kennedy proposed the

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activity cannot be ignored. (See G for more information.) These societal factors that influenced policy-making and societal norms will be addressed in the next chapter.

[9] Mollborn, " 'children' having children," 35. These statistics come from the National Vital Statistics Report Vol. 57, No. 7 (2009).

[10] Mollborn, " 'children' having children," 35. This statement is supported by data published by Stephanie Ventura, "Births to Teenagers in the United States" (2001).

[11] Mollborn, " 'children' having children," 35; Luker, *Dubious Conceptions*, Chapter 4.

[12] Luker, *Dubious Conceptions*, 63.

[13] Luker, *Dubious Conceptions*, 82.

National School-Age Mother and Child Health Act. The purpose of the act was based on the notion that teenage pregnancy rates were becoming an increasing problem and ultimately lead to other problems, including school dropout, disruption to family systems, and dependency on public resources such as welfare.[14] While the bill did not pass, it stirred public conversation and pregnant teenagers became a population worthy of special attention. The political climate of the 1970's, though, is deeply rooted in a more pervasive narrative about marriage, family, and citizenship status.

The United States' Narratives on Marriage and Family

"Because of the important individual and social goods connected with marriage and marriage-like arrangements, society in the form of general community, extended family, or formal state always has guided, legitimated, and monitored marriage."[15] What is "family," though, has changed in significant ways over the last 150 years. These changes require honest testimony accompanied by deep listening and reflective witness bearing.

Industrialization, capitalism, world wars, post industrialization, globalization, changes in the world force, and many other significant and wonderful evolutions in the world, particularly in the US shifted the definition of family, and left one clinging the ideal of marriage outlined above. Marriage and family politics have historically

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[14] Luker, *Dubious Conceptions*, 71.

[15] Don S. Browning, *Equality and the Family: A Fundamental, Practical Theology of Children, Mothers, and Fathers, in Modern Societies,* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 210.

symbolized a "grand cooperation" between religious and state institutions.[16] Since the 19th century, marriage has been an object of political, scholarly, and personal conversations both within and outside of discourse about family. Marriage has been described as a foundation of family, symbolic of the US constitution, and a constitutional right that is only available to certain citizens—and also serves as a factor in determining one's citizenship status.[17] The politics of marriage are intertwined with religious, racial, gendered, sexualized, and reproduction politics.[18]

"Why Marriage?" asks George Chauncey in his 2005 publication.[19] Chauncey provides testimony to this through a historical analysis of how and why the politics surrounding equality for the LGBTQ community has been shaped around the rights of marriage. He quotes gay and lesbian marriage activist Jack Baker's statement from 1971, "the institution of marriage has been used by the legal system as a distribution mechanism for many rights and privileges, [which] can be obtained only through a legal

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[16] Browning, *Equality and the Family*, 258. Browning credits this "grand cooperation" to political shifts of the Protestant Reformation.

[17] Kevin J. Christiano, "Religion and the Family in Modern American Culture." In *Family, Religion, and Social Change in Diverse Societies* (Eds. Sharon K. Houseknecht and Jerry G. Pankhurst), Chapter 2, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation, (*Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[18] Patricia Hill Collins, "Like one of the family: race, ethnicity, and the paradox of US national identity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, 1 (2010), 3-28. Feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins argues that the United States' family norm is gendered and racialized.

[19] George Chauncey, *Why Marriage? The history of Shaping Today's Marriage Debate over Gay Equality,* (New York: Basic Books, 2005). Other scholarship engaged in this discussion include, but are not limited to the following: Timothy J. Biblarz, and Evren Savci, "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Families," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, no. 3 (June 2010): 480-97; Judith Stacey, *Unhitched: Love, Marriage, and Family Values from West Hollywood to Western China*., (New York: NYU Press, 2011); Judith Stacey, *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996); Stein, *The Stranger Next Door: A Story of a Small Community's Battle Over Sex, Faith, and Civil Rights,* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001).

marriage."[20] Chauncey argues, "But the history of marriage has given this debate special significance for all sides because the freedom to marry, including the right to choose one's partner is marriage, has come to be regarded as a fundamental civil right and a powerful symbol of full equality and citizenship."[21]

The freedom to marry and the right to choose one's partner have been civil rights that numerous persons have fought for in US history. The narratives about religious groups, racial and ethnic groups, and others seeking the freedom to participate in legal marriage are numerous. *But*, how did marriage become so closely associated with citizenship status in the US in the first place? Historical, sociological, and theological scholarship that looks at marriage, when brought together in conversation, shed light on how public discourse and public policy shape and are shaped by social ideals and practices and provide a richer and more complex understanding of the context necessary for a more honest witnessing.

Historian Stephanie Coontz testifies that the growing market economy of 17th century Europe nurtured individualism and the value of personal choice.[22] Wage labor reduced the dependency men and women had on their parents, so they were freer to marry whenever they wanted. At the same time, the use of reason and rational decision-making challenged the mating traditions of organized marriage and men and women were

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[20] Chauncey, *Why Marriage?*, 90. Baker's quote was published in *Look* magazine in January 1971.

[21] Chauncey, *Why Marriage?*, 165.

[22] Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*, (New York: Penguin, 2006), chapter 9.

able to enter marriages based on preference rather than force.[23] The ideals of marriage now included consent, mutuality, and volunteerism. It was these ideals that became paramount at the time that the US colonies were formulating their norms and developing the US Constitution.

Historian David Sehat adds to this conversation and testifies that these ideals about marriage are grounded in Protestantism.[24] He credits the Protest Reformation and efforts of Martin Luther as essential to understanding the power of individualism. Theologian Rosemary Radford Reuther provides testimony to the fact that the values of the Victorian Era reinforced the notion of marriage as representative of civil and political individualistic ideologies.[25]

United States culture has consistently privileged persons who are married. In the US, marriage is a right that many persons have fought for. The right to marriage has served as source of regulating peoples' bodies based on gender, race, and sexual orientation.[26] The right to marry and participation in the act of marriage has served as a boundary between who is in and who is out within the US society.[27]

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[23] Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 146.

[24] David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[25] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family, (*Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2000).

[26] Cott, *Public Vows;* Gaines Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920,* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

[27] Fay Bothom, *Almighty O God Created Races: Christianity, Interracial Marriage, and American Law*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Chauncey, *Why Marriage?;* Hill Collins, "Like one of the family;" Coontz, *Marriage, a History;* Ruether, *Christianity and the Making.*

This narrative about the US ideology of marriage citizenship can be used as a lens for being a more honest witness to the socialization and identity formation of persons and communities. For example, the political struggles around marriage that African Americans have faced within slavery and upon emancipation sheds further light on the such realities. While marriage was practiced by slaves in enslavement, it was not legally recognized. Upon emancipation, many fled to become legally married. They faced ongoing racism and limits on their right to marriage because judges and legal professionals continued to believe that Black bodies were inferior to white bodies. It was not until the mid-20th century that interracial marriages were legal in all states.

Understanding the lived experience of African Americans before and immediately after the US Civil War reveals how these ideologies about marriage have influenced the construction of cultural ideas, values, and rituals. The lived realities of African Americans during slavery highlight the very real, legal and social, boundaries that were constructed in the name of marriage.[28] Womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas provides an imperative take in *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*. Douglas presents the historical narratives that falsified Black identity, sexuality, and morality–all in the name of Christianity.

Specifically, Douglas provides testimony to how African Americans, in slavery and being the social other, were exploited with consequences that linger today. Douglas

[28] Ruether, *Christianity and the Making;* Kelly Brown Douglas, in *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), as well as Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought.* Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* are invaluable sources on this topic.

claims and reclaims how African Americans were innovative and resistant in creating an empowering, self-reliant culture within the larger oppressive structures of slavery.

> One can see how ideologies and lived experience are intertwined and dynamic by looking at the slaves' marriage practices. "African sexual customs and mores provided the flexibility needed for Black women and men to adjust from a situation of freedom to a situation where someone else had control over their bodies. Such flexibility, however, did not signal a laxity in moral principles. Instead, it revealed standards that allowed for community and family life within the living quarters of the enslaved."[29]

For example, sexual activity was not sanctioned to marriage. Sex and pregnancy out of wedlock were normal. Marriage was also a valued ritual. While the marriages between slaves had no legal standing in the US, they still participated in marriage rituals honoring the commitment between two persons., such as jumping over a broom. In many ways, the marriage ideas of slaves are closely aligned with ideals of marriage for which dominant culture was founded on—choice, commitment, consent, and union. It also had a significant affectional component, which is prominent in the companionate marriage trends that the dominant US society later adopts. African-American slaves also understood the value of legal marriage, as "evidenced by the scores of former slaves who sought legal marriage after emancipation."[30]

While enslaved, the needs of each person were attended to by the entire Black community. There was no room for notions of patriarchy or matriarchy in marriage, family, and community structures to set in.[31] Upon emancipation, Black men and women

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[29] Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 64.

[30] Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 66.

[31] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, Revised 10th anniversary edition (Routledge, 2000), 58.

already understood that their labor was a commodity in the growing market society. They quickly strove to be participants in the society that favored individualism, competition, and self-promotion. At the same time, they continued to value community and extended family as family and upheld a more collective society that went against the dominant white structure.[32]

Unfortunately, Black families have continued to suffer the consequences of slavery and had to straddle tensions between being second-class citizens in the dominant culture and maintaining their particular passion and liberation within Black culture. They have been "kept in a state of poverty and indebtedness by a system of sharecropping that subjected their labor to the tyranny of the same plantation owners in the Cotton Belt for whom they had toiled as slaves."[33] The stereotypes and labels of African Americans that were created during slavery have remained embedded in US culture. Interracial marriage was not legal in all states until the middle of the 20th century.[34] In bearing witness to this testimony, I understand that in the name of marriage, society regulated bodies and created social others based on gender, race, sexuality, and economic status.

The ideals about family have been promoted as essential to maintaining and developing a national identity. Also, ideas about family influence how one engages in

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[32] Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 58-61.

[33] Cahill, *Family*, 113.

[34] Bothom, *Almighty O God*.

politics and set expectations of the government.[35] The power of discourse is real and can be explored further through looking at different social mediums.[36] How are the categories and social constructions explored in this essay on marriage reinforced and combatted across time in multitudes of social mediums?[37] Social programming, such as religious or community event planning including dances, socials for singles, and so on, nurture messages about appropriate types of relationships and socialization patterns.[38] Television shows and films have are classic mediums for advertising the heteronormative marriage ideology.[39] Radio programs have also been a dominant source of promoting family and marriage ideals.[40] The academy has also been scrutinized from within, challenging scholarship to rethink its methodologies.[41] For example, it is important for historians to tell the counter narratives of US and social scientists to be cognizant about how their

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[35] Dan P. McAdams, Michelle Albaugh, Emily Farber, Jennifer Daniels, Regina L. Logan, and Brad Olson, "Family Metaphors and Moral Intuitions: How Conservatives and Liberals Narrate Their Lives," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95, no. 4 (2008), 978-90.

[36] Pierre Bourdieu, "On the Family as a Realized Category," *Theory, Culture & Society* 13, no. 3 (1996), 19-26

[37] Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s,* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013).

[38] Tim B. Heaton and K.L. Goodman, "Religion and Family Formation," *Review of Religious Research* 26, no. 4, (1985), 343-59.

[39] Isabel Heinemann, ed., *Inventing the Modern American Family* (Frankfurt, Germany: Campus Verlag, 2012), Introduction and Section 3.

[40] Self, *All in the Family;* Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity.*

[41] Celello, *Making Marriage Work;* Andrew J. Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today,* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2010)*;* Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought;* Curwood, *Stormy Weather;* Rebecca Davis, *More Perfect Unions: The American Search for Marital Bliss,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2010)*;* Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church.*

lines of questioning and inquiry have underlying moral assumptions about what is good, or ideal social behaviors, constructions, etc.

Stephanie Coontz comments on the social significance of marriage, which reinforces the ways in which marriage has been understood as a medium for monitoring and assessing the wellbeing of society. She states the following:[42]

> Marriage itself adds something extra, over and above its selection effects. It remains the highest expression of commitment in our culture and comes packaged with exacting expectations about responsibility, fidelity, and intimacy. Married couples may no longer have a clear set of rules about which partner should do what in their marriage. But they do have a clear set of rules for how everyone else should and should not relate to each partner. These commonly held expectations and codes of conduct foster the predictability and security that make daily living easier.[43]

In sum, the ideology and reality of marriage are understood to promote a sense of social order. Marriage is embedded in US culture and society as a signifier of social status, predictability, and security. The US ideology of marriage in its existence embodies the value of both individuality and rationality. The US is infamous for creating and upholding the right for all citizens to participate in the marriage-go-round as they chose.[44]

Teen Pregnancy by the Numbers

The United States' politics around marriage directly guide the complexity of reproductive justice and ultimately the lived realities of young, pregnant, homeless

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[42] Coontz, *Marriage, a History,* 278.

[43] Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 309. For Coontz, this code of conduct includes, but is not limited to, knowing that a person cannot get away with being violent towards their spouse and children cannot be exploited for their labor.

[44] Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round.*

persons. In order to wrestle with the lived complexities of our pregnant youth, looking at these socio-political histories in conversation with each other will illuminate the diversity of forces that are a play in the day-to-day living of all our citizens, particularly teenagers. As I work through an overview of statistics regarding teen pregnancy, it is important to note what is being stated in this data. In general, marital status is assumed to be single. Additionally, the statistics continually show disparities across racial, ethnic, and economic status. It is essential to hold on to the narratives about marriage, race, and social status when providing witness to these numbers.

I will highlight the direct impacts the political narratives around marriage and social status have on shaping attitudes and policies for reproductive rights. The direct impact on how a young person is socialized to think about their body, their worth, their rights, and their significance in our society is pervasive and stark.

Teen Pregnancy Rates

In review, research shows that teen pregnancy rates have steadily declined since 1988.[45] Particularly, there was a "dramatic decline from 2008 to 2011 in national rates of pregnancies, births, and abortions [that] reflects a decline in each of the 50 states."[46]

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[45] Kathryn Kost and Isaac Maddow-Zimet, "US Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2011: State Trends by Age, Race and Ethnicity," New York: Guttmacher Institute, April 2016; Kathryn Kost and Stanley Henshaw, "US Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2010: National and State Trends by Age, Race and Ethnicity," New York: Guttmacher Institute, May 2014; Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), *Sexual Health of Adolescents and Young Adults in the United States,* Menlo Park, CA and Washington, D.C.: KFF.org (August 20, 2014). http://kff.org/womens-health-policy/fact-sheet/sexual-health-of-adolescents-and-young-adults-in-the-united-states/.

[46] Kost and Maddow-Zimet, "US Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2011," 5. Other specific trends showed a decline of rates between 1988 and 2000, 2000 and 2005, 2008-2010, and 2010-2011.

Statistics regarding 2010, 2011, and 2015 show that the highest rates of pregnancy were found in the same states: New Mexico, Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.[47, 48] The lowest rates were found in New Hampshire, Vermont, Minnesota, and Massachusetts.[49] Geography and state politics are clearly fundamental elements of this story that cannot be forgotten.

In addition, racial and ethnic disparities are interconnected with these geographical statistics. Between 1990 and 2010, pregnancy rates of non-Hispanic white teenagers and Black teenagers dropped 56% (from 86.6 per 1,000 women to 37.8 for white teenagers and from 223.8 per 1,000 to 99.5 for Black teenagers).[50] For Hispanic teens, the pregnancy rate was at its peak in 1992. From 1992 to 2010, though, the Hispanic teen pregnancy rate dropped 51% (from 169.7 per 1,000 to 83.5). The rate among Black and Hispanic teens is about twice that of non-Hispanic white teens.[51]

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[47] Kost and Maddow-Zimet, "US Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2011;" Kost and Henshaw., "US Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2010." In 2010 and 2011, New Mexico had the highest rates and Mississippi the second for both years. The order of the other states shifted, but they all remained the states with the highest pregnancy rates.

[48] Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), *Teen Birth Rate per 1,000 Population Ages 15-19,* (Timeframe 2015), Menlo Park, CA and Washington, D.C.: KFF.org. http://kff.org/other/state-indicator/teen-birth-rate-per-1000/.

[49] Kost and Maddow-Zimet, "US Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2011;" Kost and Henshaw., "US Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2010." In 2010, Maine also was on the list, but replaced by Utah in 2011. Changes in percentage rate for 2012-2015 can be found in the following data: Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), *Percentage Change in Teen Birth Rate,* (Timeframe 2012-2015), Menlo Park, CA and Washington, D.C.: KFF.org. http://kff.org/other/state-indicator/change-in-teen-birth-rate/

[50] Kost and Henshaw, "US Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2010," 3.

[51] Kost and Henshaw, "US Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2010," 3.

Birth and Abortion Rates

There are also noteworthy statistics regarding birth and abortion rates. In 2010, the teenage birthrate was 34.4 births per 1,000 women, which was "44% lower than the peak rate of 61.8, reached in 1991. The 2010 abortion rate was 14.7 abortions per 1,000 women. This figure is the lowest since abortion was legalized and 66% lower than its peak in 1988 (43.5)."[52] In 2006, there was an increase in these rates, but they declined again at a faster rate between 2008 and 2010. One might ask why the US continues to have such a narrow grasp on these facts.

Based on these statistics, the most pressing (or interesting) information about pregnant teenagers to take note of and make publicly known is with regards to age, race/ethnicity, and geography. When looking at rates according to race/ethnicity and geography, the age range was 15-19.[53] It is noteworthy that separate research finds it necessary to clarify that most teen pregnancies occur when people are 18-19.[54] In most contexts, when a person turns 18, they are no longer considered a minor. Overnight, one's legal autonomy breaks wide open. At the age of 18, the moral agency society places on someone shifts dramatically. Does one's actual decision-making abilities change at the flip of a switch? We know the answer is no.

While an overall reduction of teen pregnancy numbers has and is continuing to decrease, which has resulted in a decline of teen birth rates, the disparity of birth rates

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[52] Kost and Henshaw, "US Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2010," 3.

[53] These are the statistics presented by Guttmacher Institute and KFF.

[54] Mollborn, " 'children' having children."

based on race and socio-economic-status (SES) persists. Birth rates for Hispanic females aged 15 to 19 decreased 5.2% between 2018 and 2019. The rates for non-Hispanic white females by a slightly higher rate of 5.8%. And for non-Hispanic Black females the decrease is only 1.9%. The rates were unchanged for several demographics: American Indians/Alaskan natives, and Hispanic Asian, non-Hispanic native Hawaiian, and other pacific islander teenagers. If we just look at this data alone, things seem encouraging: who would complain about an overall reduction of teen birth rate? But, in order to offer the most robust witness, it necessary to interrogate the apparent differences between racial and ethnic groups.

In the United States, teen birth rates show a wide disparity between the birth rates of non-Hispanic Black teens when compared to non-Hispanic white teens. The CDC's National Vital Stats for 2019 states, "In 2019, the birth rates for Hispanic teens (25.3) and non-Hispanic Black teens (25.8) were more than two times higher than the rate for non-Hispanic White teens (11.4). The birth rate of American Indian/Alaska native teens (29.2) was highest among all race/ethnicities."[55, 56]

Other Factors

The intersection of race, ethnicity, and economic status are undeniable. Guttmacher Institute reports a clear paradox in state policies. "Many states require

[55] CDC, "About Teen Pregnancy."

[56] The statistics being provided in the body of this text display general trends for the US. For more specific data about how these trends manifest across states and even counties, refer to the following source: Romero et al., "Reduced Disparities."

parental involvement in a minor's decision to terminate a pregnancy. In sharp contrast, states overwhelmingly consider minors who are parents to be capable of making critical decisions affecting the health and welfare of their children without their own parents' knowledge or consent."[57] This raises several questions regarding the human and reproductive health ethics for teenagers.

In addition to disproportionate racial and ethnic rates of US teen pregnancy and birth rates, there are many other prevalent forms of disparities at play. Teens in foster care are twice as likely to become pregnant than those not in foster care. Higher rates of pregnancy are seen in families with lower household incomes, lower educational achievement, and those living in rural settings.[58] Moreover, it is dramatically more common for pregnant teens to drop out of high school and struggle with unemployment than non-pregnant teens.[59] In future sections of this chapter, it will become clear that a young person's understanding of one's reproductive rights and access to medical treatment are intimately intertwined with witnessed disparities these stats present.

US Versus Other Industrialized Nations

Additionally, the teen pregnancy and birth rate in the US continues to be significantly greater than other industrialized countries, particularly in Western Europe;

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[57] Guttmacher Institute, "Minors' Rights as Parents."

[58] America's Health Rankings (AHR), "Public Health Impacts: Teen Births," 2020, https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/health-of-women-and-children/measure/TeenBirth_MCH; CDC, "About Teen Pregnancy;" Ana Penman-Aguilar et al., "Socioeconomic Disadvantage as a Social Determinant of Teen Childbearing in the U.S," *Public Health Reports* 128 Suppl 1, no. Suppl 1 (2013), 5–22; Romero et al., "Reduced Disparities."

[59] AHR, "Public Health Impacts: Teen Births;" CDC, "About Teen Pregnancy."

our rates are most similar to Eastern European countries like Russia.[60, 61] In the same way that we see the differences of rates within the diversity of the US, the global trends reinforce the power of social norms around adolescent sexuality. Whether or not a culture, in this case a nation, accepts the sexuality of youth as something that is to be respected directly, or not, impacts the access young persons have to comprehensive sexual education and contraceptives.[62] For example, in the Netherlands, there is a general understanding that adolescents are sexual beings and will engage in sexual behavior. Consequently, the Dutch "are strongly accepting of teenage contraceptive use and are insuring adolescent access to contraception and sex education. Such examples challenge the notion that teenage sexual activity always has serious short-term and long-term health-compromising consequences."[63]

So why is it that the United States stands out as having higher teen pregnancy and birth rates than other countries? The statistics show an undeniable correlation between economic status and teen pregnancy rates. Moreover, the United States continues to

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[60] CDC, "About Teen Pregnancy;" Gilda Sedgh et al., "Adolescent Pregnancy, Birth, and Abortion Rates across Countries: Levels and Recent Trends," *The Journal of Adolescent Health: Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine* 56, no. 2 (February 2015), 223–30; Santelli et al., "Explaining Recent Declines."

[61] Note: Statistics about birth rate do not explicitly tell us about pregnancy rates nor the age in which persons start engaging in sexual intercourse. See: John S. Santelli et al., "Explaining Recent Declines in Adolescent Pregnancy in the United States: The Contribution of Abstinence and Improved Contraceptive Use," *American Journal of Public Health* 97, no. 1 (2007), 150–56.

[62] Sedgh et al., "Adolescent Pregnancy;" John S. Santelli et al., "Global Trends in Adolescent Fertility, 1990–2012, in Relation to National Wealth, Income Inequalities, and Educational Expenditures," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 60, no. 2 (2017), 161–68; John S. Santelli et al., "Transnational Comparisons of Adolescent Contraceptive Use: What Can We Learn from These Comparisons?" *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine* 162, no. 1 (2008), 92-94.

[63] Santelli et al., "Transnational Comparisons," 93.

perpetuate significant socio-economic and racial/ethnic disparities. What does the intersection of these social dynamics look like for actual teens? By turning our attention to the statistics of homeless pregnant teens, one can gain an even deeper comprehension of the story.

Homeless Youth and Pregnancy Rates

In 2013, the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) created a national initiative to end youth homelessness by 2020. It included two strategies: the first one was focused on the data surrounding youth homelessness and the second strategy looked at the national systems associated with youth homelessness and their capacities.[64] Initial research was needed to obtain an estimate of homeless youth and their unique needs as well as assess the resources available and utilized by homeless youth. In turn, USICH was joined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the US Department of Education (ED) to conduct an in-depth survey called *Youth Count!*[65]

Youth Count! data shows similar patterns of racial and economic disproportionality for homeless youth as seen in other areas of society. Not only is there a

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[64] For more information on this initiative by the USICH, see the following: https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/youth-count, https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_Youth_Framework__FINAL_02_13_131.pdf.

[65] Matthew Morton, Amy Dworsky, Gina Miranda Samuels, Sonali Patel, *Voices of Youth Count Comprehensive Report: Youth Homelessness in America, Report to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development,* US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research: September 2018. https://www.huduser.gov/PORTAL/publications/Voices-of-Youth-Report.html#:~:text=Voices%20of%20Youth%20Count%20(VoYC,and%20interventions%20of%20selected%20communities, 24.

greater amount of homeless Black, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaska native youth, but also LGTBQI youth and pregnant and parenting youth. Moreover, services that are available to homeless youth are often more universal in kind; services lack attention to the intersectional and thus specialized needs of persons who find themselves homeless.[66] Specifically, about two-thirds of homeless youth reported that they couch-surfed for nearly 12 months prior to being on the streets or "sheltered homeless."[67] Of the youth who are homeless and living on the streets or a shelter, 39% of the females and 16% of the males reported being pregnant or having a pregnant partner.[68] The rates of teen pregnancy are prevalent in both rural and urban areas, but " the percentage of homeless females who were pregnant or a parent was higher in small counties than in either medium-sized or large counties."[69]

Additional dimensions to consider are the rates of contraceptive use and involvement in survival sex among homeless young people. Let's look at two studies that examined youth in Los Angeles County. In a study that sampled nearly 900 homeless Los Angeles youth between the ages of 14 and 25, nearly 67% of them reported not using a

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[66] Morton et al., *Voices of Youth*, 107.

[67] Morton et al., *Voices of Youth*, 23. This source describes persons who are couch surfing, or have a residence to sleep at, as different from being explicitly homeless. Their use of "explicit homelessness" is similar to the Homelessness Policy Research Institute's definition of being "literally homeless." This includes living on the streets, in a car, in shelters or rooms in a hotel/motel paid for by an agency.

[68] Morton et al., *Voices of Youth*, 28-44. A limitation of this statistic is that the males were not explicitly asked if they had a pregnant partner–just if they were pregnant. It is possible that the reports would be higher if the wording of the question were different.

[69] Morton et al., *Voices of Youth*, 40.

condom during their last sexual encounter.[70] Additionally, approximately 37% of these youth reported having multiple sexual partnerships, 17.5% are involved in sex trading, and 43% have sexual intercourse while under the influence of substances.[71] Another study surveyed 60 homeless young people in Hollywood who were between the ages of 18 and 24 and specifically focused on whether or not they were involved in survival sex.[72] "Survival sex was defined as the exchange of sex for food, drugs, money or a place to stay."[73] Thirty-six of the 60 women reported survival sex involvement.

> What is most striking about the findings from this study is the similarity between homeless young women involved in survival sex and those not involved. There was no evidence of differences in age, educational level, ethnicity, or sexual orientation that would distinguish homeless young females who had been involved in survival sex from those that had not been involved. The homeless young women, whether involved or uninvolved in survival sex, had similarly high rates of childhood sexual abuse, dependency system involvement, juvenile and adult incarceration, and psychiatric hospitalization, consistent with other studies of homeless young people (Robertson & Toro, 1999; Toro et al., 2007). Both groups of young women were similar in the length of time they had been homeless, pregnancy history, childbearing, and prevalence of injection drug use. The findings from this study confirm that homeless young women represent a particularly traumatized, high-risk population, but most of the socio-demographic characteristics and background experiences we investigated do not help explain why some young women became involved in survival sex while others do not.[74]

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[70] Anamika Barman-Adhikari, Hsun-Ta Hsu, Stephanie Begun, Andrea Perez Portillo, and Eric Rice. "Condomless Sex among Homeless Youth: The Role of Multidimensional Social Norms and Gender." Original Paper. *AIDS and Behavior* 21, no. 3 (03/01/ 2017), 688-702.

[71] Barman-Adhikari et al., "Condomless Sex among Homeless Youth," 694.

[72] Curren W. Warf, Leslie F. Clark, Mona Desai, Susan J. Rabinovitz, Golnaz Agahi, Richard Calvo, and Jenny Hoffmann. "Coming of Age on the Streets: Survival Sex among Homeless Young Women in Hollywood." *Journal of Adolescence* 36, no. 6 (12/01/December 2013 2013), 1205-13.

[73] Warf et al., "Coming of Age,"1207.

[74] Warf et al., "Coming of Age," 1211. Previous studies referenced: (1) Robertson, M., & Toro, P. (1999). Homeless youth: research, intervention and policy. In Fosburg, & Dennis (Eds.), Practical lessons: The 1998 national symposium on homelessness research. Washington DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development and US Department of Health and Human Services, and (2) Toro, P., Dworsky, A., &

In sum, homeless youth have their own very particular contexts that they are navigating. The uniqueness of their conditions demand that we tune in and reconsider what living in and with these conditions really mean for them and for society.

Limitations of Statistics

Statistics are numbers that represent the lived realities of our society, but leave a lot of room for interpretation. They are descriptive and help us understand a portion of the truth; but, in order for us to truly comprehend what value the numbers serve, we must listen to the voices of who they represent. Hagar, for example, is known as the concubine of the great Abraham. Additionally, she is the servant, or slave, to Abraham's wife Sarah. If one was to think about Hagar in a purely statistical and descriptive way, Hagar would be understood as the following: a slave displaced from her homeland, a servant to the royal family, a concubine to the patriarch, a runaway pregnant young person, a young mother. When one stops here, then, Hagar is just another concubine from ancient times and just another slave who disrespected her mistress. But as I have argued, we cannot stop there. In revisiting the experiences of Hagar with Sarah, one's understanding of the humanity of the bodies being named grows deeper and wider. For Hagar, and Sarah, the struggles with being a woman in a patriarchal society are real. For Hagar, the struggles of being someone's maidservant and also having something that her mistress is envious of

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Fowler, P. (2007). Homeless youth in the United States: recent research findings and intervention approaches. In 2007 national symposium on homelessness research.

challenge her internal sense of dignity and social sense of worth. The implications of these struggles are heavy.

Listening to Hagar and being curious about her experience begins to give her the respect that we only see God give her in the wilderness. By turning towards Hagar's voice, one can have a deeper understanding of all that impacted Hagar's choosing to reside in the wilderness and how God understood Hagar's contextual agency and blessed her. No one is just a number, and in order to more accurately expand the truth about what it is like to be a homeless, pregnant teen, one must actively turn their attention to the voices of homeless pregnant teens regarding their attitudes and beliefs about sex, sexuality, and relationships.

Returning to Homeless, Pregnant and Parenting Teens

The narratives about marriage and identity penetrate the lived experience of young, homeless, pregnant and parenting US citizens. These narratives testify to values that promote white, heteronormative ideals about family, marriage, and sexuality. In turn, these political agendas continue to shape homeless pregnant and parenting young person's access to housing, sexual education, general education, medical care, and more. Thus, there are many more details to bear witness to.

Most vividly, the housing options for homeless persons are often structured around this value of marriage. Samantha from Berkeley can help one remember: "Berkeley had no subsidized housing facilities for homeless expectant couples. 'And what is up with the city not having housing for pregnant women with a father? Am I supposed to leave the father, have a dysfunctional family because you don't want to give

me a house?' "[75] Similarly, Hagar's status as concubine provided the space for her mistress Sarah to displace her.

In the state of Oklahoma, utilization and allocation of funds for families in need has been controversial.[76] Efforts towards promoting marriage have been prioritized over other welfare system developments.[77] Sociologist Melanie Heath details how state funds have been put towards pro-marriage initiatives rather than Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programming. As a result, some of the pro-marriage programming attracted middle-class, white, heterosexual couples and were advertised as couple retreats. These initiatives proved to widen, rather than narrow, the marriage gap between economic classes and racial boundaries.

Let's return to Luker's quote about communities grappling with sex education options in public schools. ". . . the debate over sex education is really a debate over sex and marriage, and [the] debates about sex and marriage are also debates about gender, about how men and women (and boys and girls) should relate to one another, sexually and otherwise."[78] Luker also states, "the fight about sex is both a moral and a political one."[79] As described above, the politics around sex cannot be separated from the politics around family.

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[75] Smid et al., "The Challenge of Pregnancy," 8.

[76] Melanie Heath, *One Marriage Under God: The Campaign to Promote Marriage in America*, (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 2.

[77] Heath, *One Marriage Under God*, Chapter 3.

[78] Luker, *When Sex Goes to School*, 258. This was also quoted in the Introduction, page 19.

[79]Luker, *When Sex Goes to School*, 259.

Educational opportunities, including implementation of sexual education and reproductive health curriculum, embody these societal ideas. How does a school or community identify itself and what values does it seek to uphold?[80] Who is being represented as we think about the development and implementation of sex ed curriculum—the taxpayers, the parents, the school board, the state as a whole, a portion of interested parties in the state, etc.?

The lack of sex ed and/or a limited sex ed curriculum is dangerous. Much of the data presented points to the need for better sex education. The beliefs and fallacies the youth articulated around contraception shed light on the fact that the US is not adequately teaching students about anatomy and reproductive health. Recall, several youth stated that they did not trust condoms, feared side effects of contraceptives, and believed they do not need sex education.[81] Their attitudes and beliefs represent misinformation that then leads to unrealistic expectation and unsafe actions. This misinformation compounded by feelings of stigma and judgment for homeless youth further impairs their utilization of medical resources during pregnancy.

Changing social norms and societal values does not happen easily. Inspired by the hope articulated by the homeless parenting youth of the US and by the endurance of Hagar, it is time to reflect on the testimonies presented and explore how society can do better.

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[80] Heath, *One Marriage Under God*, Chapter 3.

[81] Hubel and Moreland, "What Do Adolescent Parents Need."

Rights vs. Realities: Beliefs and Attitudes of Teens Experiencing Homelessness

Research shows that pregnant teens who are homeless share similar views about sexuality, including how to negotiate sexual activity with partners, why and how one can access reproductive services, and whether or not contraceptives are useful.[82] In this section, the beliefs and attitudes of pregnant homeless teens will be addressed. One can see that how they perceive their rights and responsibilities directly informs how they think about their options and then their actions; particularly, how they navigate relationships with sexual partners, resources, and management of their own bodies. I hope to illuminate how these young people's sense of agency is reflected in their beliefs and attitudes, which is also founded in their experiences. Additionally, the ways in which society has shaped the beliefs and perceptions of teens will continue to be considered.

As introduced in the previous sections, a key component in discussions about teenage pregnancy is the precise age of the person and whether or not they are legally considered a minor. Being 17 years of age or younger, the status of being a minor, has significant implications with regards to medical and legal rights. Rights to education and health care are two primary areas of interest.[83]

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[82] Barman-Adhikari et al., "Condomless Sex among Homeless Youth;" Stephanie Begun, "The Paradox of Homeless Youth Pregnancy: A Review of Challenges and Opportunities," *Social Work in Health Care* 54, no. 5 (2015), 444-60; Stephanie Begun, Katie Massey Combs, Michaela Torrie, and Kimberly Bender, ""It Seems Kinda Like a Different Language to Us": Homeless Youths' Attitudes and Experiences Pertaining to Condoms and Contraceptives," *Social Work in Health Care* 58, no. 3 (03/16/2019), 237-57; Stephanie Begun, Cressida Frey, Katie Massey Combs, and Michaela Torrie, ""I Guess It Would Be a Good Shock": A Qualitative Examination of Homeless Youths' Diverse Pregnancy Attitudes," *Children and Youth Services Review* 99 (April 2019), 87-96; Grace S. Hubel and Angela D. Moreland, "What Do Adolescent Parents Need to Prevent Repeat Pregnancy? A Qualitative Investigation," *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies* 15, no. 1 (2020), 21-31; Warf et al., "Coming of Age."

[83] Other concerns and needs, including housing, food, childcare, and others are also important. For the purposes of this essay, education and health care will be focused on.

While nearly half of all high school students have reported engaging in sexual intercourse over the last few decades,[84] many teenagers report that they do not seek reproductive health services out of fear of their parents knowing.[85] Some states have policies that support the confidentiality of minors.[86] Confidentiality of dependents, though, has become very complicated as it has become common practice that insurance companies send explanations of benefits forms to policyholders.[87] Unfortunately, there are very limited options around this, which only enhance the lack of safety teenagers feel in pursuing medical needs. This can result in many negative consequences pertaining to one's sexuality, including not obtaining contraception, STI testing, and prenatal treatment.[88]

Qualitative interviews with homeless youth provide us with the young person's voice. A study of youth aged 18-21 and residing in a shelter in Colorado share that not

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[84] KFF, *Sexual Health.* This has remained fairly consistent throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Luker also points to the War on Poverty as a moment in history that raised the spotlight on teen pregnancy. Advocates were adamant that all women should have access to low-cost contraception. For a more in depth historical analysis, including sexual revolution of the 1880', 1960's and 1970's as a pivotal moments in history, see Luker, *Dubious Conceptions,* chapter 4.

[85] Heather Boonstra and Elizabeth Nash, "Minors and the right to consent to health care," *The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy* 3, no. 4 (August 2000), 4–8.

[86] Boonstra and Nash, "Minors and the right to consent," 4-8; Abigail English, Rachel Benson Gold, Elizabeth Nash and Jane Levine, *Confidentiality for Individuals Insured as Dependents: A Review of State Laws and Policies*, New York: Guttmacher Institute and Public Health Solutions, July 2012; Guttmacher Institute, "Protecting Confidentiality for Individuals Insured as Dependents," *State Laws and Policies* (New York: Guttmacher Institute, April 1, 2016), https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/protecting-confidentiality-individuals-insured-dependents.

[87] English et al., *Confidentiality for Individuals Insured as Dependent*s.

[88] Boonstra and Nash, "Minors and the right to consent;" English et al., *Confidentiality for Individuals Insured as Dependent*s.

using condoms is the general practice, even though they are accessible.[89] This group consisted of the following racial breakup: 43% White, 20% Black, 20% Multi-racial, 10% Latino/a, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. When asked for explanations about why this is the case, "[r]espondents provided several hypotheses regarding why their condom use tends to be erratic, where were represented through the following quotes: (1) 'There aren't a lot of really decent places to have sex when you're homeless'; (2) 'Condoms are literally the worst'; and (3) 'I could make more money by not using condoms.' "[90] Condoms are known for interfering with the satisfaction for males, are not trusted to actually work, and are not always within an arm's reach at the moment of sexual encounter. Here are two personal statements:

> A heterosexual, cisgender young woman said, "I don't' really believe they work anyway. People here can't be spending money on that, since they might break anyway. It's a waste of the little money people have." … Another heterosexual, cisgender young woman offered, "They sort of ruin the vibe and then it's something that makes it no feel as good. And they're just sort of weird, in general. Like a weird material and smell funky and then you have this creepy thing left over at the end that you gotta throw away. Just sort of unnatural, you know? And they can break so they're not that perfect anyway."[91]

For the majority of this particular group of young persons–older teens and predominantly White—protection against pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV was not a priority.[92]

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[89] Begun et al., ""It Seems Kinda Like a Different Language to Us."

[90] Begun et al., ""It Seems Kinda Like a Different Language to Us," 245.

[91] Begun et al., ""It Seems Kinda Like a Different Language to Us," 246.

[92] Begun et al., ""It Seems Kinda Like a Different Language to Us," 246. For a more detailed study on the attitudes about pregnancy, see: Begun et al., ""I Guess It Would Be a Good Shock."

Another study illuminates misconceptions about contraceptives and general attitudes towards sexual and reproductive health education. Now, we are listening to the voices of adolescents between the ages of 14-17 who lived in a residential facility and were seeking permanent housing, 90% Black and 10% White. They are located in a southern US state and expressed the following about not utilizing different types of contraception:

> Many adolescents reported being distrustful of birth control. For some of the adolescents, conversations with peers led to distrust. For example, one participant said:
>
> > I was gonna get the rod at one point, but then I heard how your body's just irritated with it. I don't want it. At one point, I was thinking about getting an IUD put up there. Then we had a group of girls that were here before us come back, and they were saying how it made them lose hair and stuff. I was like, 'Oh, nope, I don't want that.' I'm not trying to go bald just to keep from getting pregnant. (P04)
>
> Another adolescent described similar conversations with peers, explaining:
>
> > . . . they was sayin' things about it having a risk of causing infertility, and I do want kids someday, so that was a huge concern. With the Depo, they say it makes you fat, so I can sort of blame that on this tummy. That's why a lot of people have been against the Depo cuz they don't wanna get fatter than they feel like they are. (P01)
>
> Participants described negative past experiences with birth control that led them to not want to use it in the future. Some described negative experiences with side effects. Also described were difficulty remembering to use or using some methods. Further, participants discussed not wanting to use birth control because of experiencing or learning of birth control failures. For example, a participant said:
>
> > . . . before I came here, I was going to my clinic in [my home town], and a lady, she had the rod in her arm. Her child was no older than a year. The rod is supposed to last for three years . . . I've heard about the rod you can [have] in your arm, the shot, and the pills, the Mirena and all that and I don't want none of that. I've tried the shot, I've tried the pills. That doesn't work. (P04)
>
> Specifically related to LARCs, participants described not wanting to have a foreign object in one's body and the length of time for effectiveness being too long. For instance, a participant said:
>
> > . . . you have to get the rod cut out of your arm before you can have babies again. I don't want to go through that. I'm not sure. I really don't like anything that's alone, like can be used for more than so many years inside

> your body without having to be removed and reput back in. I just don't trust it. (P04)[93]

Among the same group of youth, similar beliefs and attitudes influenced their thought process about considering the use of birth control:

> Three of the young women described things that made them want to use or consider birth control. One participant discussed hearing from peers that taking birth control after childbirth would cause weight gain. She said,
>
> > '[I will use birth control] because I know I'm gonna lose all my baby weight. It'll help me gain more weight, too. 'Cause I don't wanna be as skinny as I was before' (P09). Another participant described receiving education that alleviated concerns about birth control. She said, 'Well, I was told that it's not always the infertility thing, and it doesn't always make you gain weight, so that helped a lot' (P01). Finally, one of the young women shared that she had decided to use a LARC after childbirth. When describing why, she referred to its advantage in terms of length of effectiveness. She stated, 'It's three years. It lasts for three years. I'm gonna keep getting it back to back' (P06).[94]

As one can see, the information homeless young women trust and most directly impacts their contextual agency is from their peers.

A group of African American, single, young, homeless mothers in a Midwest city are clear about how they understand their social networks and who they can trust.[95] While they were aged 18-21 during the interviews, most had been pregnant or given birth while a teenager. Most of these women articulated a deep pride in being a parent. A great amount of distrust also penetrated their spirits and decision-making. One woman reflected on the lack of friendships with other mothers in the shelter: " 'You would think

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[93] Hubel and Moreland, "What Do Adolescent Parents Need," 6.

[94] Hubel and Moreland, "What Do Adolescent Parents Need," 7.

[95] Allison Schrag and Ada Schmidt-Tieszen, "Social Support Networks of Single Young Mothers," *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 31, no. 4 (08/01/2014), 315-27. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-013-0324-2.

since all of us need help from one another, we would help one another, but that's not how it works.' "[96] The interviewees noted, "[p]articipants mentioned that trust issues interfered with relationship building with neighbors and roommates. Due to a lack of trust, the young mothers kept to themselves, although they wanted friends."[97]

This lack of trust was felt for others beyond peers in the shelter. Many women shared that their relationships with their extended family is tumultuous. The strongest social support came from the woman who raised them, whether it be their biological mother or someone else. They shared that they experienced their extended family as judgmental and greedy. The stress that came with being continually ridiculed at home or used for their state benefits deemed living with family less appealing than a shelter. Additionally, there appeared to be a lack of continuity with the father of their children. In the shelter, these young women explained that they could just focus on themselves and their children.[98] The final group of people that the young mothers reported having not trust–or faith–in were caseworkers. They stated that the caseworkers would give them tasks to complete, which they could and would do on their own anyway. The caseworkers seemed uninterested, not knowing the children's names, and likely to openly discuss client business with colleagues.[99]

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[96] Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen, "Social Support Networks," 320.

[97] Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen, "Social Support Networks," 320.

[98] Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen, "Social Support Networks," 320-22.

[99] Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen, "Social Support Networks," 323.

Additionally, while pregnant teens and teenage mothers have the right to stay in school and obtain an education, "approximately 70% of teenage girls who give birth leave school."[100] Teenagers report that they would have liked to have remained in school, but did not feel supported and even discriminated against by "school administrators, teachers, counselors and fellow students."[101] Some states have made incredible efforts to publicly support pregnant teens and help them know their rights.[102] For example, New York provides a very thorough, friendly, and affirming guide to the New York law.[103]

Furthermore, there are serious socio-political implications for pregnant teens and teen mothers, which complicate the navigation of one's medical and legal rights. As expressed in the narratives of young women presented earlier, pregnant teenagers encounter incredible amounts of judgment and stereotyping. In her ethnographic work, sociologist Ruth Horowitz finds that government funded educators working with pregnant teens and teen mothers can generally be broken into two categories: arbiters and

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[100] Linda Mangel, "Teen Pregnancy, Discrimination, and the Dropout Rate," para. 4, blog from ACLU of Washington State, October 25, 2010, https://aclu-wa.org/blog/teen-pregnancy-discrimination-and-dropout-rate.

[101] Mangel, "Teen Pregnancy," para. 5.

[102] American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Minnesota & Teen Wise Minnesota, *The Rights of Pregnant and Parenting Teens in School,* (Handout) Minnesota: ACLU and Teen Wise, 2011; ACLU, "Pregnant and Parenting Teens," ACLU, 2015. https://www.aclu.org/pregnant-and-parenting-teens#comment-0; Reproductive Rights Project, *Your Rights as a Pregnant or Parenting Teen*, (Handout) New York: New York Civil Liberties Union.

[103] Elisabeth Ryden Benjamin, Esq., Annie Keating Donna Lieberman, Esq., Jana Lipman Anna Schissel, Esq., Miriam Spiro, Esq., and Cassandra Stubbs, Esq., *The Rights of Pregnant & Parenting Teens: A Guide to the Law in New York State,* New York: New York Civil Liberties Union Reproductive Rights Project, 2006. http://www.nyclu.org/files/publications/nyclu_pub_rights_parenting_teens.pdf.

mediators.[104] The arbiters seem to view the teenagers through a top-down, authoritative lens as dependents on the welfare system. The mediators seem to engage the teenagers as persons working on goals to enhance their life and the life of their children. These different attitudes influence how the educators engage the students around learning, completing tasks, romantic relationships, public/social lives, sexuality, and more. For example, the arbiters believe that the teen mothers need to keep relationships with boyfriends in private spaces. The mediators, on the other hand, understood that sexuality and embodiment were natural to who these women were. The mediators engaged with the teen mothers as first-class citizens, which was empowering to the young women.

A person's experience in educational, medical, and social service settings set the tone for how they view the world and the decisions they make. Moreover, the stories that homeless youth share with each other are formative tools for meaning making. The fear of having one's child taken from their custody while seeking basic services is real[105]—and serves as a context that informs one's decision-making for oneself and one's children.

What impact does such judgment, distrust, dislocation, misunderstanding, and social isolation have on someone? Remember Hagar–why did she leave her "home" and become homeless the first time? Her dependency on her mistress forced her into sexual relations with a man. Then, she was sought out for her youthfulness and ability to

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[104] Ruth Horowitz, *Teen Mothers: Citizens or Dependents?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[105] Marcela Smid, Philippe Bourgois, and Colette L. Auerswald, "The Challenge of Pregnancy among Homeless Youth: Reclaiming a Lost Opportunity," *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 21, no. 2 (05/09/2010), 140-56, online version pages 7-8.

reproduce. Then, her way of being and feeling was not tolerated. She felt judged and was not able to freely express herself. Being alone in the wilderness seemed more optimal.[106] After returning, she participated in her society to the best of her ability. She loved her child, but she and her son no longer fit in the household. Once displaced from her homeland at the word of her mistress and master, now again displaced from the home she adapted to at the word of her mistress and master—Hagar's being was tolerated no more! Just as Hagar wrestled with navigating the terrain of her patriarch and matriarch, so too the homeless youth of the US have their own landscape. Let us now turn our attention towards the impact of such contexts on one's health and wellbeing and see what the homeless pregnant youth of the US must share with us.

Impact of Pregnancy on Homeless Teens and Children of Teen Parents

Now that we have a greater understanding of the beliefs and attitudes shared by homeless pregnant teens, it is important to dig deeper into what the direct impacts are. Primarily, the stress that one experiences leading up to and then being homeless is severe. Out of this stress comes more traumatic events and the overall negotiations of daily living become more challenging. After explaining the power that stress has on homeless

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[106] Traci C. West, "A Space for Faith, Sexual Desire, and Ethical Black Ministerial Practices. Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice," in *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, 31-50, edited by Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2004). In this piece, West confronts the deep Christian roots of shaming women and condoning their sexuality. Hagar represents one of the first women to be socially ostracized for her sexuality and then deemed in need to be controlled by others. Moreover, Hagar can be understood to be a victim-survivor of gender violence, which leads to even more complicated layers of social isolation and shame.

pregnant teens, I will highlight the very tangible consequences that stem from this stress and further exacerbate this stress.

A qualitative study out of Houston conducted focus groups with 64 homeless youth between the ages of 14 and 24.[107] The youth were asked to discuss the circumstances that led to their being homeless. The results of this study illuminated the incredible amount of stress that preceded the youth being homeless and then the strategies they implemented to keep going. To begin, one can see how this level of stress impacts decision making. For example, "[a] pregnant sheltered minor who frequently ran away before going to the shelter described running away to her boyfriend's house to cope with the stress and turmoil at home, and expressed her regret for having had unprotected sex, which resulted in pregnancy: '[w]e have sex a lot. . . . But [a condom] is something that I should have used.' "[108] This glimpse into this young woman's experience spotlights the power of stress and the trauma that can so easily accompany it. Based on the synopsis provided, one cannot know what specifically was going on in her home, but it is clear that her homelife seemed unsustainable and so she would flee. In turn, she reports making decisions she regrets, including having unprotected sex. While it would be an assumption based on limited content, one could presume that this young woman had at least one trauma experience in her home and then with her boyfriend.

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[107] Diane Santa Maria, Sarah C. Narendorf, Yoonsook Ha, and Noel Bezette-Flores, "Exploring Contextual Factors of Youth Homelessness and Sexual Risk Behaviors : A Qualitative Study," *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 47, no. 4 (12/01/2015), 195-201.

[108] Santa Maria et al., "Exploring Contextual Factors," 198.

The following story further exposes the layers of trauma and how trauma events continue to inundate the lived reality of homeless youth:

> A sheltered young adult, who had been a teenage mother and subsequently had had multiple partners, related the following: "[My mother] straight sold me and my little brother–mainly me–for crack whenever I was younger. . .. her rule was 'No penetration; you're good. You can do whatever you want; just don't penetrate.' Basically, as long as they didn't put their dick inside of me, they were good to do whatever else they wanted to. Playing with me–all kinds of weird shit that I have to have dreams about now and I gotta think about."[109]

As a young, homeless mother, this woman is continually reliving her trauma experiences without the stability of housing.

After a young person finds themselves homeless, the potential of trauma events increases dramatically, which takes a toll on mental and physical health. Several male and females interviewed in the Houston study shared stories of violence and exploitation while homeless. "One young adult noted that when girls 'don't want to give it up [have sex], ... that's when you have your rapes. . .. And it happens to dudes, too.' "[110] Numerous youth reported the likelihood of first being drugged and then raped. "A pregnant sheltered young adult who had been drugged and raped described the stress of waking up in the hospital to find out what had happened: 'I woke up in the hospital, and they told me, 'You have chlamydia and you're pregnant. you have all these drugs in your system.' . . .I didn't know how to take all that in at one time, plus I have no place to go.' "[111] This young woman could be understood to have experienced multiple, simultaneous

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[109] Santa Maria et al., "Exploring Contextual Factors," 199.

[110] Santa Maria et al., "Exploring Contextual Factors," 199.

[111] Santa Maria et al., "Exploring Contextual Factors," 199.

trauma events. Remembering that we are all embodied beings, it is essential to think about all that this woman's body went through, even without consciousness. Her body digested harmful substances, was penetrated, became pregnant, was transported to a hospital, and finally was tested and treated by medical professionals.

The ongoing impact of being drugged and violated pervades these youth's lives in so many ways, including the suffering of their mental and physical health.

> Another pregnant sheltered young adult expressed the stress she felt regarding being drugged and pregnant: "I went from 135 to 111 [pounds]. So I didn't have time to be depressed, because I was so worried about my health and what was going on because the drugs that they laced me with. It did something to my body on the inside, because I was pregnant, too. So the pregnancy, the drugs and then plus everything that's going on. Then I started having anxiety problems. My heart rate is too fast. My blood pressure's too high."[112]

The lack of control that is associated with not having a consistent home is exasperated by the lack of control over one's body.

On top of these losses, homeless, pregnant youth also juggle transient support systems and limited access to resources. As stated in the previous section, the relationships with family are often strained for these young women. Their peer relationships in shelters are usually laden with distrust and the general need to just look out for oneself and one's children. The relationships with the children's' fathers are unpredictable.[113]

Those who had previous involvement in foster care systems, an institution that is designated as one protects children and acts in the best interest of children, have even

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[112] Santa Maria et al., "Exploring Contextual Factors," 199.

[113] Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen, "Social Support Networks."

greater challenges with supportive services.[114] The rates of pregnancy for youth whose family cases were closed and those who were emancipated at age 18 were identical; this suggests that extended involvement in child welfare systems, regardless of whether a child was returned home, adopted, or aged out of the system, have a greater chance of becoming pregnant and a parent as a youth. If we bring these facts into conversation with the reality that "youth in foster care are known to have less access to health care in general" and "youth with experience in foster care experience greater barriers to reproductive health-care option, such as abortion,"[115] then homeless youth who have been in foster care have several social forces acting against the likelihood that they will get the health care they need while pregnant.

A study that draws on the interviews of homeless youth in Berkeley, California, provides testimony to the complexity of loss that impacts how they proceed in getting services.[116] The experiences of these young people help expound on the innumerable consequences that stem from a general sense of distrust with case workers and medical professionals.[117] Young homeless persons who chose to seek resources for parenting reported being fearful of losing their children to child protective services due to their

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[114] Katie Massey Combs,, Stephanie Begun, Deborah J. Rinehart, and Heather Taussig, "Pregnancy and Childbearing among Young Adults Who Experienced Foster Care," *Child Maltreatment* 23, no. 2 (2018), 166-74.

[115] Combs et al., "Pregnancy and Childbearing among Young Adults Who Experienced Foster Care," 171. Combs et al.'s statement about the general health are of foster children was taken from the research conducted by of one of their contributors, Taussig, and published in the following article: Taussig, H. N., Harpin, S., Betts, W., Melnicoe, L., & Russo, G. J., "Youth in Foster Care," in *Neinstein's Adolescent and Young Adult Health Care*, eds. L. S. Neinstein, D. K Katzman, T. Callahan, C. M. Gordon, A. Joffe, & V. Rickert (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2016).

[116] Smid et al., "The Challenge of Pregnancy."

[117] Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen, "Social Support Networks."

homeless status.[118] The "youth recognize the benefits of health care and, in most cases, they realize that accessing public resources is their only viable means for extricating themselves from homelessness. They are also acutely conscious that accessing care increases the chances that their child will be removed from their care."[119] This dynamic is intensified if the young person has past experience in the foster care system. "For many of them, especially those who grew up in foster care themselves, the risks of access these services may not outweigh the benefits. Service providers must directly and honestly reveal to their clients/patients the mandatory reporting regulations to which they are subject as well as the detailed consequences of a report to CPS, because the primary obstacle to accessing prenatal services is fear of losing custody of one's newborn."[120]

Of the 13 homeless women and 8 homeless men interviewed, "[f]our women and two men had experienced multiple pregnancies and multiple involuntarily removals of their children. The impact of repeatedly losing custody was profound, and they expressed prolonged sadness and grief."[121] Participants shared that this loss was unbearable and they were only able to find relief in substance use. Hope was not completely lost, though. One young couple put it this way, "Maddie and Rob, who had lost three children between them, conceived of themselves as victims of repressive services, yet they continue to think that their next pregnancy represented a new opportunity."[122]

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[118] Smid et al., "The Challenge of Pregnancy," 7.

[119] Smid et al., "The Challenge of Pregnancy," 10-11.

[120] Smid et al., "The Challenge of Pregnancy," 11.

[121] Smid et al., "The Challenge of Pregnancy," 9.

[122] Smid et al., "The Challenge of Pregnancy," 9.

Unfortunately, this hope can is likely countered with the difficulty of finding stable housing. Data out of a study that surveyed and interviewed homeless youth in Texas, found that "the financial responsibility of parenting may be contributing to homelessness in young adults."[123] Moreover, "[homeless] pregnant and parenting young adults were more likely than other homeless young adults to report being homeless due to the inability to pay rent."[124] The struggle for money brings us back to high levels of stress and the increased likelihood of engaging in unsafe activities for money, such as survival sex.[125]

The final challenging aspect for homeless, pregnant youth that it going to be named here is the potential for finding stable housing. Research conducted with young adults in California and Hawaii name that a major factor impeding upon a young woman's obtainment of stable housing is her commitment to her partner.[126] Supportive housing services require that persons who live together must be related. Committed couples who have children together do not qualify. In order for the child to receive housing with a parent, the other parent cannot reside with them. Imagine the stress such condition put on a person—to have to choose family unity and support or housing. The

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[123] Sarah C. Narendorf, Sheara Williams Jennings, and Diane Santa Maria, "Parenting and Homeless: Profiles of Young Adult Mothers and Fathers in Unstable Housing Situations," *Families in Society* 97, no. 3 (2016), 207..

[124] Narendorf et al., "Parenting and Homeless," 207.

[125] Begun, "The Paradox of Homeless Youth Pregnancy."

[126] Smid et al., "The Challenge of Pregnancy;" Elizabeth M. Aparicio, Andrea Birmingham, Eri N. Rodrigues, and Carla Houser, "Dual Experiences of Teenage Parenting and Homelessness among Native Hawaiian Youth: A Critical Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," *Child & Family Social Work* 24, no. 2 (2019): 330-39.

stress on one's body and spirit who finds themselves young, homeless, and pregnant and/or parenting is increasingly palpable.

Conclusion

Let's review what can be gleaned from listening to the voices of homeless pregnant teens. First and foremost, there was pride, hope, and fortitude. These young people felt pride in being a mother. This pride was clear from their statements: "[d]espite living in a shelter, Kezzia was proud to be a mother and a provider for her children, 'Just when I be doing stuff for them. That makes me feel good. . . We sit down and watch movies, I read them books and stuff, like we really just you know, at home . .I'm just glad they happy.' "[127]Another youth named Melanie shares that her "daughter makes her feel good about herself, because she can tell her daughter identifies her as her mother, and likes It when 'mommy' does things for her: 'There's little stuff I do, like she smiles only when I do it, or she knows my smell like not matter what I try to change. With her it's like a bonded mother and child but with other people is just family, family, nothing new, you see them everyday . . .but with her it's new everyday.' "[128]

In the pride Kezzia and Melanie express, one can also hear a deep sense of hope and fortitude in how they talk about purpose and connection. These young mothers know what makes their children happy—and the children know their mother's smell. This reciprocity of knowing one another and being able to share in the mundane of the day to

[127] Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen, "Social Support Networks," 320.

[128] Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen, "Social Support Networks," 320.

day with joy Kezzia and Melanie describe is pungent. We see the way in which the innate embodiment of experience and relational dependency gives them not only pride, but a reason to live.

In this hope and purpose for living, a palpable sense of strength and resilience emerge. Kezzie illuminates the notion that home does not need to be any certain location. Rather, home does need to be a place where the dance of autonomy and relationality can be expressed—a place where the "other" in the space expands oneself and bring newness to every moment. This interpretation of home and declaration for spaces where one can be free in relationship—with themselves and others—casts light on the imaginative courage required to make home accessible across time and space. Moreover, one can observe the need for a sense of home and the resilience and creativity required to cultivate and claim it.

This pride, hope, and fortitude for living irradiates the power of contextual agency. While in the same moment that Melanie is making her daughter smile only as she, her mommy, can, Melanie and her daughter are also homeless. From the stories presented in the previous pages, one can assume that being homeless includes financial struggles, challenges navigating services, and tumultuous relationships. All of these conditions are real and the impact that Melanie and her daughter have on each other is not depleted by these other aspects of their context. They are both consciously and instantaneously choosing to love each other, affirm each other, and motivate each other.

Through these testimonies, it is clear that trauma experiences do not define a person or a person's path. As embodied beings, these youth, like all of humankind, are constantly being impacted and formed by their experiences. How tragic would it be for

the witnesses of these testimonies to just stop here and carry on. As an outsider, being a witness to Melanie, Kezzia, and all the other homeless, pregnant and parenting youth, one can see the need to return again and again to the ways in which society is creating trauma for these young people. To not do so would be perpetuating sinful disembodiment of our common good and the sacredness of these specific humans.

Hagar shares similar experiences. The pride in being Ishmael's mother and the wellbeing of Ishmael giving her a will to endure is easily relatable to the pregnant and parenting homeless youth in the US. Hagar cried out to God in her fear and anguish—the reader of Genesis only has access to two occasions of such anxiety, but one knows a mother's heart never stops longing and fighting for the needs for her child. Hagar desired to care for Ishmael wherever they resided. In her second journey into the wilderness, Hagar demonstrates real distress surrounding Ishmaels need for water. In her crying out to God, she opens herself up again to the resources in her reach. She turns to the vastness of her despair and seeks provisions and healing. God continues to return to Hagar and Ishmael. God also revisits Abraham and Sarah in their brokenness. God does not allow anything to be unknown, unspeakable, and irreparable. Out of these encounters with the truth, God helps create realistic solutions and paths forward.

Through listening to the stories of pregnant and parenting homeless youth and reflecting on how God not only listened to Hagar, but saw her and blessed her, the duty to join in healing our trauma wounds is upon all. If, "having a child was associated with lower educational attainment, less employment (for females only), not having a checking

or savings account, and a history of homelessness,"[129] then, rather than defining homeless pregnant and parenting teens as the social problem of our culture, shall we not help them with their basic needs? God did so with Hagar. Hagar declared, "You are the God who sees me. . . . I have now seen the One who sees me."[130] Are Kezzia, Melanie, and all the homeless youth who are pregnant and parenting able to make such a declaration of the God in us? Can they say: I have now seen those who see me? In the next chapter, I will outline Christian ethical action steps to help move the church and society into doing the trauma work necessary to work towards the tangible needs of our homeless pregnant youth. In the interim, let us sit with the testimonies before us and reflect on the parts of their stories we heard for the first time.

[129] Combs et al., "Pregnancy and Childbearing among Young Adults Who Experienced Foster Care," 172.

[130] Genesis 16:13, New International Version.

CHAPTER FOUR:

GOD HEARS: CENTERING HAGAR AND THE TEEN EXPERIENCE

Introduction

> *Why God? Why did it have to be this way? Why did I have to rip my baby boy from his father's arms? Why could Sarah not love Ishmael? Why could they not work harder at helping Ishmael and Isaac when they were fighting? Why must Ishmael and I be sent away for their destiny to be fulfilled? Why do they get to determine our physical stability? Do they not know the impact it has on our hearts? Dear God, will we have enough food and water? Will we find shelter? I trusted you and returned. Will you again hear the cry of my heart? I once again return to the wilderness.*

In returning to Hagar's story, one can see that many elements of what it means to be humans in society not changed. The US narratives reviewed in the last chapter show the way in which the values and norms of those in power in the US dictate the resources available to the general public. The same dynamic is seen in the life of Hagar, Sarah, and Abraham. But, just as God showed Godself to Hagar, so too God is showing Godself to the pregnant homeless teens today.

In this chapter, the trauma work continues. We will return to the experiences of our homeless, pregnant teens for deeper reflection. In doing this trauma work—the work of returning, giving testimony, and witnessing—it is important to remember three key figures in Hagar's story: Hagar, Ishmael, and God. Settings change, but what the few verses in Genesis depict is the presence of God with each person across space, time, and conditions.

God met Hagar in the wilderness the first time.[1] Scripture states in Genesis 16:

> **5** Then Sarai said to Abram, "This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she's pregnant she treats me with contempt. The LORD will show who's wrong—you or me!"
> **6** Abram replied, "Look, she is your servant, so deal with her as you see fit." Then Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away.
> **7** The angel of the LORD found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur. **8** The angel said to her, "Hagar, Sarai's servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?"
> "I'm running away from my mistress, Sarai," she replied.
> **9** The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority." **10** Then he added, "I will give you more descendants than you can count."[2]

At first glance, it is clear that God encouraged Hagar to return to a place of trauma—the home of her mistress and master. The despair and uncertainty that Hagar felt in that initial wilderness journey could also be interpreted as a trauma narrative. In deeper listening to this text, it is striking that the reader is not presented with a direct crying out to God, but rather, Hagar fled and God met Hagar by the water. God knew that Sarah felt contempt from Hagar and then treated her badly. God knew Hagar by name and the specifics of her troubles. Here, one sees a God that is overseeing the daily living of humanity—in very intimate and particular ways. Additionally, God swoops in and engages with humankind.

What other details does the text provide to further illuminate the conditions Hagar found herself in? God names the following facts:

Hagar, you are with child.

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[1] Again, it is understood that the Judeo-Christian texts speak of an angel of God coming to Hagar rather than God Godself, but the same creative liberty that has been taken throughout is maintained here. What is paramount is that God chose to communicate directly to and with Hagar.

[2] Genesis 16:5-10. New Living Translation.

Hagar, you will bear a son.
Hagar, you will call your son Ishmael.
Hagar, I will greatly multiply your descendants.
Hagar, you will have such a lineage that it will be too numerous to count.

If these things are set in motion and Hagar's destiny, then, at this stage in her pregnancy, she must be able to have her basic needs met. As a single young woman, the most obvious chance for this is to return to the community from which she fled.

While it is extremely uncomfortable to think about a God who would send their beloved child back into a system of oppression and exploitation, it is worth noting that God helped Hagar identify the only way for survival—and in this moment, it is survival of Hagar's self with her unborn child that is most pressing. But, God does not simply say, "Hagar, it is better to live as a slave than die alone in the wilderness." Rather, God very clearly seems to be saying, "Hagar, I am with you. I hear you. I have great plans for you and your son. I will help provide the resources you need to flourish in these ways. But, you must first bear and raise a healthy child."

In the return, Hagar and Ishmael lived under Abraham and Hagar for at least 14 years until Isaac was born to Sarah.[3] In this amount of time, Ishmael grew into a boy who would one day be the leader of many descendants. Whatever norms that Hagar and Ishmael had established with Sarah and Abraham were disrupted with the birth of Isaac. While holding the tensions that are apparent in the unjust social system and the unending

[3] Genesis 16:16 and 21:5. Abraham was 86 years old at the time of Ishmael's birth and 100 years old at the time of Isaac's birth.

human battle with insecurities, jealousy, and so on, if one hones in on the intimate encounters with God, it is apparent that the spite of all parties is taken into consideration.

It is necessary to approach Genesis 21 with the same expectation:

> **8** When Isaac grew up and was about to be weaned, Abraham prepared a
> huge feast to celebrate the occasion. **9** But Sarah saw Ishmael—the son of
> Abraham and her Egyptian servant Hagar—making fun of her son, Isaac.[a] **10** So
> she turned to Abraham and demanded, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son.
> He is not going to share the inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won't have it!"
> **11** This upset Abraham very much because Ishmael was his son. **12** But God
> told Abraham, "Do not be upset over the boy and your servant. Do whatever
> Sarah tells you, for Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be
> counted. **13** But I will also make a nation of the descendants of Hagar's son
> because he is your son, too."
> **14** So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food and a
> container of water, and strapped them on Hagar's shoulders. Then he sent her
> away with their son, and she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba.
> **15** When the water was gone, she put the boy in the shade of a
> bush. **16** Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards[b] away. "I
> don't want to watch the boy die," she said, as she burst into tears.
> **17** But God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar
> from heaven, "Hagar, what's wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy
> crying as he lies there. **18** Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great
> nation from his descendants."
> **19** Then God opened Hagar's eyes, and she saw a well full of water. She
> quickly filled her water container and gave the boy a drink.
> **20** And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness. He became
> a skillful archer, **21** and he settled in the wilderness of Paran. His mother arranged
> for him to marry a woman from the land of Egypt.

As Abraham sends Hagar into the wilderness, Hagar likely might have had flashbacks to the fears she had years prior. Perhaps the stakes seemed even bigger now that Ishmael was a youth himself. The stress could be even greater, as the first time she fled on her own accord. This second time, the powers of her society dismissed her, sent her away, banished her—sent her to the streets, one could say—but God did not dismiss or banish her and Ishmael. Quite the contrary: God journeyed with them, prepared a place for them, and created a way for their lineage to flourish.

So, where is God already present with the pregnant and mothering homeless youth? How can we see God and Hagar in action? What are we missing out on by not seeing them? How does God want us to see and hear better? This requires returning to the traumas society has created, that society has experienced, and that God wants society to heal from. To do this work, the voices of our youth must be revisited and I must strive to be as truthful of as witness to their testimonies as I am able. I intertwine the narratives from chapter three in order to shed light on the gaps in our society's narratives—the traumas that need revisiting. I share some examples of organizations from the last several decades that are already doing this trauma work. These organizations will become tools for the larger society, specifically the Christian church in pursuit of the common good.

Transformative Trauma Work

Genesis Revisited

The more time spent with Hagar and the youth of the US, the more the voids appear in my perspective of US culture. This journey began by turning my heart, eyes, and ears to Hagar. The more time I spent with Hagar, the angrier I got at Abraham and Sarah. I started off by inviting us to find Hagar, listen to Hagar, be a witness to Hagar. It was immediately obvious that she has been used and abused for millennium by different sects of Christianity. For example, the life of Abraham and Sarah has been held as a sacred example of marriage and Hagar is often just left out.[4] If Hagar is acknowledged,

[4] Elizabeth A. Clark, "Interpretive Fate amid the Church Fathers," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives,* eds. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), Chapter 5.

she remains to be seen as "a foreigner, a slave, and a threat to Sarah."[5] In the Christian New Testament book of Galatians, Paul poses Hagar and Sarah in conflict, each representing a different covenant with God—Sarah represents the new covenant in Christianity and Hagar represents the Jewish Christian opponent.[6] Indeed, many within Jewish and Christian traditions have redeemed Hagar; Islam did so even more fully.[7]

What took me by surprise, though, was how in the process of liberating Hagar, I found the deeper need to liberate Sarah. In claiming Hagar's worth, Sarah and Abraham's human mess becomes more unforgiveable. In the same way that honing in the very particular experiences of homeless youth who are pregnant and/or parents demands one to work towards creating a more just society, in providing witness to Hagar illuminates the injustices of Abraham and Sarah's society.

So, yes, the Hagar that God sees, the Hagar that wrestled with the oppressions of her society and fought for survival, has multiple trauma experiences. And, her trauma experiences can be understood as a result of the violence of the powerful.

For millennium, Christians have been returning to the story of Abraham and Sarah. Time and time again, Hagar is scapegoated as a way of avoiding the other

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[5] Letty M. Russell, "Twists and Turns in Paul's Allegory," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives,* eds. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 72.

[6] Russell, "Twists and Turns," 72; Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russell, "Unto the Thousandth Generation," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives,* eds. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), Chapter 1.

[7] For a more complex reading of Hagar across the Abrahamic traditions, see Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russell, eds., *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives,* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

trauma—Abraham and Sarah could not trust God. Their fear and pride were embodied and their judgment was destructive. Their trauma experiences manifested in ways that sexually and socially exploited their servant. The fact that Christians continue to hold the story of Abraham and Sarah on a pedestal at the expense of shaming and disposing of Hagar is merely the Christian society unable to heal from the trauma of its ancestors. Return and return again, but the delusion that Hagar is the scandal denies the Christian world of true healing—a healing that God so intentionally invites the world to do merely based on the prominence of this story in scriptures.

In turn, it is with immense, transformed gratitude and respect for Hagar and all the youth engaged in this project that an ever more urgent need to provide witness to their embodied experiences is required. But, bearing witness from a childist-feminist, trauma-informed perspective includes a call to duty that demands returning to one's trauma, both interpersonal and intrapersonal traumas, and expecting healing in the trauma work. Moreover, we are called to do this work because it is in our nature—*Imago Dei*—and it is the only way to honor God and human sanctity. To act otherwise is to act out of sin and perpetuate disembodiment and trauma. Constructive social ethics are imperative to both heal from past traumas and resist future ones. I will now turn my attention towards naming constructive ethics to guide this work.

Guiding Approaches for Justice Work

A childist-feminist, trauma-informed methodology provided a lens for understanding the practical socio-ethical needs of homeless pregnant youth. The themes outlined at the end of chapter three point us as a society directly towards social structures

that have and can continue to attend to the *Imago Dei* of the young people. Each of the themes, though, require the development and sustainability of social systems. A successful organization is founded on shared values and purpose; religious and spiritual resources can and should be deeply instrumental to the creation of such bodies.

The needs defined in the last chapter were garnered from the stories of young pregnant persons. The stories continually reflected broad disparities between white persons and people of other races and ethnicities. A need for culturally grounded services as well as holistic and supportive educational and health programs illuminates the way in which racial and ethnic disparities permeate our preventative and responsive systems. The pervasiveness of systemic racism is the US is a trauma narrative that must be addressed honestly and assertively. In review, in order to do trauma work, one must return to the silenced and forgotten parts of the story and give them space. One must integrate the formerly erased and detached segments of ourselves into the whole. One must endure in this work, trusting and believing that a more cohesive whole is possible, liberating, and glorifying to God. Moreover, to refuse to do this work would facilitate the opposite effect—perpetual and more severe fragmentation.

As a result, it seems obvious that the trauma work with homeless pregnant youth begins with a commitment to antiracist work. Out of an antiracist commitment, one can draw from the reparations paradigm and resistance work, which are deeply aligned with the Christian theology I outline in chapter one. The use of the reparations paradigm and resistance as justice work are invaluable in grounding organizational formation in Christian values and shaping concrete systematic strategies for reshaping how we

theologically and socially attend to the diverse, particular needs of each person's *Imago Dei*.

Foregrounding Antiracist Commitments ideas

Antiracist ideologies provide a clear language and rationale for doing childist-feminist Christian social ethics in light of trauma. As claimed in the theological anthropology beginning this work, all persons are unique and sacred to God. Human diversity and lived particularities shed light on the vastness of God and illumine what it means to be *Imago Dei*. As the Jewish Midrashic tradition teaches, God invites us into intimate conversation and the nitty gritty. God craves for us to see the limitlessness of creation and honor the complex and intersectional beauty of life. Denying our diversity and the ways we have exploited rather than honored each other in our diversity not only stunts the common good, but separates us from the freedom God desires for us. In order to do transformative trauma work at the systemic level, individuals must reflect honestly on their own particularities. Antiracist approaches to ethics provide tools for doing just this.

For example, Jennifer Harvey vehemently argues that white Christians must engage in white antiracist work.[8] For Harvey, this begins with understanding race as a social construct.

[8] Harvey, *Dear White Christians;* Jennifer Harvey, "A World on Fire and Whiteness at the Core," *CrossCurrents* 68 (March 2018), 93–111; Jennifer Harvey, "Which Way to Justice? Reconciliation, Reparations, and the Problem of Whiteness in US Protestantism," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics 31*, no. 1 (2011), 57–77.

> … there are profound ethical implications to insisting we understand race primarily as a social construction and not as an intrinsic identity of difference. This is not to say racial identities do not represent real differences about which we should care, some of which we need to learn to value and embrace. It is to say that it is possible and - for the sake of the integrity and efficacy of our justice work - necessary to identify how race has been constructed in any historical period (including the present), in any geographic locale, and in relation to any racial identity or interracial relationship.
>
> In turning our attention away from racial difference as the ethically meaningful nodule, race as a social construction turns our attention toward the specific, concrete material and structural realities contained in race; toward what race means in the day-to-day living of those of us who are racialized (which is all of us in this nation).[9]

Adamantly claiming the construction of race across time and space opens up space to see the ways in which society has and does create our values and norms. It is out of these values and norms that systems of law, education, employment, health, religion, and so on, are designed. In order to most fully pursue the common good—a society where all persons are valued and free participants, we must stop causing trauma. And, in order to stop causing trauma, we must wrestle with our previous sites of trauma. As individuals and a society, we need to more fully return to our sites of trauma—the times and places where society has strategically, and even unconsciously, silenced or erased parts of the whole truth. This begins with accepting that race and gender are socially constructed and so have histories that we can learn from to modify our present and future. Interrogating one's own racial and gender identity and their historical narratives challenges one to acknowledge, hold, and consider the multitude of other particularities at play, including economic status, sexual orientation, age, and so on.

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[9] Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 161.

Then, out of this renewed perspective of race, gender, and other particularities, persons and groups need to expect and even lean into the potential for conflict. Traci C. West argues that "A feminist and womanist gender justice approach to antiracism in religious studies intentionally promotes rupturing conflict with traditions of repression and our communal investments in them."[10] Furthermore, this work "should be understood as a deliberate commitment to immerse ourselves in tense, high-stakes struggle with one another."[11] As discussed in the introduction (pages 15-16), West also promotes the use of scripture as theory. In other words, Christians can and should use their holy scriptures as guides for ethical thinking and practices.

Hagar shows us how to struggle. She shows us how to wrestle with oneself, society, and God. Additionally, one sees God engaging in these conflicts with Hagar. God openly approaches the conflicts expressed by Hagar, as well as Abraham and Sarah. God models the need to give attention to the very specifics of each conflict in order to find a way forward. God does not ignore the fact that Hagar is from a different culture than Abraham and Sarah. God understands how these differences have resulted in diverse personal experiences for each person. God acknowledges that in order for each person to flourish, attention and consideration must be given to their multiplicities. When God instructed Hagar to return to Sarah, God said I hear you and understand your plight. God guided Hagar to return to Sarah until her child was old enough and capable to help her

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[10] Traci C. West, "Embracing Conflict," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (Indiana University Press) 38 no. 1 (2022), 23.

[11] West, "Embracing Conflict," 23.

and their future family survive. Only then were Hagar and Ishmael able to live out their unique paths.

Confronting the conflicts between Hagar and Sarah was essential to identifying a new way forward. Hagar and God wrestled with the facts and did not deny their significance in Hagar's plight. God was steadfast in attending to both Hagar's basic needs and wholistic needs. God's engagement with and provisions for Hagar illuminate the notion that God desires that we not merely survive and live with a fragmented sense of self. Rather, God longs for us to live out our *Imago Dei* and maximizing our potential. The reparations paradigm and resistance are two tools that can help shape how we can wrestle with the specific needs of our homeless pregnant youth from an antiracist, and ultimately Christian childist-feminist, perspective.

Reconciliation vs Reparations

Many Christian communities have drawn on the reconciliation paradigm as a means for wresting with and responding to racial and social injustices.[12] The reconciliation paradigm is based on the notion that the problem at hand is separation. The solution, then, is the opposite—unification. For example, racial segregation, whether legal (like US slavery or South African apartheid) or social (such as people attending churches that are primarily their race), is a wrong. It goes against our shared humanity and God's vision of us living in harmony. In turn, in order to move towards shared community, the racial divides must be fused and people must mingle. Once people

[12] Harvey, "Which Way to Justice?"; Harvey, *Dear White Christians.*

actually join together across their differences and lean into their like-ness, then the problem has been reconciled.[13] This sentiment is often connected to Martin Luther King, Jr., specifically ignited in his 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech.

> I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.
>
> I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.
>
> I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.
>
> I have a dream that one day down in Alabama with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, one day right down in Alabama little Black boys and Black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.
>
> I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.[14]

This vision is inspiring and fairly easy to buy into. At its best, this sort of coming together allows for people to own and celebrate their differences.[15] But, the vision itself and joining together is not enough. Harvey elaborates and provides witness to additional work that is needed:

> The reconciliation paradigm claims that difference is a good that should be embraced. Historical realities complicate this claim. Quite simply, not all racial differences are different in the same way. White racial identity is not a parallel to Black racial identity, at least not in moral terms. The problem, therefore, is not separateness itself; the problem is what our differences represent, how they came to be historically, what they mean materially. Racial separateness is evidence that

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[13] Harvey, "Which Way to Justice?"; Harvey, *Dear White Christians.*

[14] Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream," August 28, 1963, accessed via https://www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety.

[15] Harvey, "Which Way to Justice?" 61.

> our differences embody legacies of unjust material structures, and painful and violent histories that remain unredressed. The reconciliation paradigm articulated by white Protestants tends to miss this reality.[16]

First, it is imperative that one not ignore the historical and material manifestation of human differences. Second, systemic change and shifts in power are necessary for actual change to take place in society.

This entire project is striving to provide testimonies to the realities of US history and how society has shaped the opportunities of its people. The voices of homeless pregnant teens shed light on the inequalities of the medical and educational institutions. The absence of religious resources was also apparent and Christian communities' use of reconciliation approaches have fallen short. One must shift the conceptualization of the problem from separation to brokenness—our systems are broken, and they need to be repaired.[17] The reparations approach to justice was created with this in mind.

Harvey continues to push white Christians to do antiracist work and highlights several benefits and priorities that arise from a reparation's paradigm:

1. it "embodies a particularistic ethic acknowledging real differences rooted in a shared history with a view toward repair as the solution to the problem of exploitation,"
2. it "recognize that broken- ness comes from specific harms done,"
3. it promotes the notion that "Addressing brokenness requires addressing that harm and naming a perpetrator,"
4. it claims that in order "For racial justice to be pursued authentically as a community, the perpetrator or perpetrators must come forward and participate in concrete redress,"
5. "reparations acknowledge white agency historically and demand ongoing white agency for the repair of racial brokenness," and

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[16] Harvey, "Which Way to Justice?" 61.

[17] Harvey, "Which Way to Justice?" 62. Harvey draws on the history of the Black Power Movement as well as the work of scholars such as James Cone in her presentation of the reparations paradigm.

6. "in a reparations paradigm, try as it may, whiteness is simply unable to remain invisible."[18]

Factors one through three mirror the childist-feminist in light of trauma theory approach presented in this project. In order for society to make strides in its trauma work, Christian communities, particularly white Christian communities, must give witness to the brokenness and pursue restoration. Ignoring particular sins related to race inhibits the healing needed for oneself and one's communities as well as perpetuates denial of one's truth. Only through exploring one's own particularities and imbedded sins can one understand the liberation that is possible from trauma healing. In addition to doing restorative and reparative work at our trauma sites, it is also important to identify ways to prevent, or resist, deepening the wounds and even fighting against new ones being invoked. A brief introduction to resistance work will further clarify how to move forward.

Resistance

Traci C. West outlines a Christian social ethic of resistance in response to gender violence against Black women.[19] West's ethic highlights the importance of both method and practice in doing ethics. The ethic is developed based on the experiences of violence shared by several women, asking the reader to learn from the women and their resilience.

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[18] Harvey, "Which Way to Justice?" 64.

[19] Traci C. West, *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence, and Resistance Ethics,* (New York: NYU Press, 1999).

As a result, the reader is called to action through resistance. West defines resistance in the following ways:

1. "...[R]esistance involves any sign of dissent with the consuming effects of intimate and social violence."[20]
2. Resistance "occurs when a community leader publicly contests through words and actions the male-centered notions of power, authority, and status that can appear to authorize violence against women."[21]
3. Resistance requires a "persistent and comprehensive approach."[22]
4. Resistance includes "survival and liberation goals."[23]
5. Resistance "must employ our feelings."[24]

Ultimately, then, resistance behavior creates the space for persons to begin to heal—begin to do trauma work. Resistance behavior demands that one face a potential trauma in the face, as it is happening. It actively pushes against the experience of silencing, erasing, and fragmenting. In addition, as one resists future traumas, one will gain confidence and strength to revisit past traumas.

As West proclaims, resistance work requires an exertion of power. From a social ethics perspective, this means that persons in power must use their influence to counter the perpetuation of systemic violence. In addition, from a Christian white antiracist approach, all white persons must claim their own social privilege and be intentional about

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[20] West, 151.

[21] West, 151.

[22] West, 152.

[23] West, 162.

[24] West, 162.

the authority they have in the world. An outline of practical strategies will help shape these ideas into a more constructive Christian social ethic.

Christian Social Ethical Strategies

In this section, two broad types of strategies for doing Christian Social Ethics in light of what we have learned from the testimonies of Hagar and the homeless pregnant youth of the US. These strategies are not exhaustive, but there is a hope that they can be used by all persons, specifically Christians, to begin doing transformative trauma work.

Honest Storytelling. Remembering of History, and Reflection

Storytelling and remembering have been integral to this project at every step. The childist-feminist methodology in light of trauma theory makes demands on persons and groups to return to the parts of our stories that have been overlooked, erased, or forgotten. In order to do this, one must continue to revisit the multiple histories at play. This act of returning to our histories includes a posture of expectancy and curiosity. It is imperative that we never assume we know the whole story; rather, we must always be looking for pieces that were left behind or ignored. This mentality should be modeled by religious leaders on the pulpit, in weekly newsletters, in pastoral care, and in the provision of group studies. Individuals should be encouraged to engage in storytelling and historical reflection in personal and social ways.

One must assume there is more to know and crave the liberation that comes with getting closer to the truth. This kind of work with our histories includes revisiting

scriptures, creating midrash, learning about the specifics of our socio-political climate, giving one's own testimony, and bearing witness to as many others as possible. More specifically, this can include reading memoires, novels, and poetry; listening to music; dancing to music as freely as possible; watching films; and dialoguing with the people you encounter. If one claims that we are embodied beings and feelings are a source of knowledge, then each of these mediums of engagement provide a different avenue for learning about the God-likeness and the human-made impingements in each person.

In order to be an honest witness, one must reflect and ask questions. Let's return to the needs expressed by our homeless, pregnant youth. What questions still need to be asked? What is making it hard for me to truly understand what they are saying? What has been my educational journey? When and how was I taught about sexuality and reproductive health? What do I wish I had been told? Who do I wish had been more open with me about sexual health?

There is a strong need for culturally grounded services. But, what does this mean and include? Why does this not already exist? In order to answer these questions, it is important to understand the power of culture and day to day living. Harvey gives testimony to the fact that white people struggle with describing their racial identity, which in turn results in an ambivalent sense of self.[25] An ambivalent sense of self can be understood as another symptom of trauma, because we know that God desires for us to feel secure in who we are. When we are unwilling to do the trauma work to heal this tangled sense of self, we find ourselves more and more estranged from our core.

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[25] Harvey, "Which Way to Justice?," 60.

Ultimately, this sort of specific trauma leads to an inability to understand the power of culture and identity that our homeless youth describe.

Questions like the following could serve as a starting point for returning to this kind of trauma. How do I think about my culture? What circumstances shaped these ideas? Do I agree with how others think about my culture? When do I feel like I have the most agency? Under what conditions do I have the most contextual agency? Does this differ from the homeless youth's contextual agency?

Do I know that when I go to the doctor that I will be able to communicate my needs and questions? How do I feel when it seems that people just do not understand my experiences? Do I have resources to support me when I feel alone? Can I trust that my household will keep me safe? Can I trust that my doctors will be available to me when I need them? Can I trust that my pastor sees me as a sacred child of God? Why can I trust them? Why cannot I trust them? How do I imagine this to be similar to or different from Hagar or the homeless pregnant youth?

Wrestling with these questions may feel uncomfortable. It likely will require one to confront conflicts—bad memories, negative emotions, disturbing bodily sensations. One might have to listen to a young person who has been hushed or kicked out of the story. It will be important to remember that confronting conflicts within oneself will help one develop skills for confronting conflicts with others, which is really important for antiracist justice work. So, just as God bore witness to Hagar, bear witness to the children and youth in an effort to magnify and honor what has been ignored, shamed, and exploited.

Claiming All Vocations as God's Work, Leadership Formation, and Accountability

This area of strategy focuses humans as creators of society. Ultimately, the manifestations of these strategies are formulated out of the work done in honest storytelling, remembering of history, and reflection. As we turn our attention to think concretely about how we are members of society, and in light of the knowledge gleaned from bearing witness to the stories foretold, we must once again claim our theological anthropology—as a human, we are capable of learning and growing, we are embodied, and we are generative because we are created in God's image. It is our duty to embrace these attributes to pursue the common good.

This duty can be fulfilled simply by accepting that each of our roles in society are meaningful. We must take responsibility for the various social locations we find ourselves in and explore the ways in which we have power to make change. Additionally, we need to be creative in how we use religious spaces and resources as well as train each other as leaders for change. Finally, we need to hold each other accountable. There are concrete social policy and services needs that must be supported by religious bodies *if* everyone is willing to do the trauma work outlined in the first set of strategies. There is a need for innovative programing of the following institutions: education, reproductive health, mental health, residential, and medical.

What does this deep listening and renewed knowledge of Hagar's, Kezzia's, and Melanie's realities demand of us now? Through listening to teen voices and learning about their experiences, one should feel an urgency to dig deeper and explore how the US

has constructed a society that nurtures such experiences of disembodiment, isolation, and social abandonment.

Support and Advocacy at the Systemic Level

In review of the research and voices presented, several themes emerge. Each of the themes provide entry points for practical ethical work that can be supported by churches. Religious voices of support are critically important since much of the social policy that affects pregnant and parenting teens is infused with a conservative Christian bias against women and girls. Christian faith communities working out of commitments to anti-racist, childist, and feminist priorities should support/advocate for:

1. A need for culturally grounded services.[26]
2. A need for holistic sex health programs.[27]
3. A need for educators, caseworkers, and medical professionals to be trained in trauma-centered approaches to their work.[28]
4. A need for programs to allow young pregnant and parenting persons to have actual choices about where and how they live.[29]
5. A need for supportive educational settings where young mothers can continue their education and get vocational training.[30]

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[26] Aparicio et al., "Dual experiences," 337; Elizabeth M. Aparicio, Olivia N. Kachingwe, Jamie Fleishman, and Julia Novick, "Birth Control Access and Selection among Youths Experiencing Homelessness in the United States: A Review," *Health & Social Work* 46, no. 3 (08/01/2021), 171-86; Elizabeth M. Aparicio, Danielle R. Phillips, Trisha Okimoto, Megan Kaleipumehana Cabral, Carla Houser, and Kent Anderson, "Youth and Provider Perspectives of Wahine Talk: A Holistic Sexual Health and Pregnancy Prevention Program Developed with and for Homeless Youth," *Children and Youth Services Review* 93 (October 2018), 467-73.

[27] Aparicio et al., "Wahine Talk," 472.

[28] Narendorf et al., "Parenting and Homeless," 207.

[29] Aparicio et al., "Dual experiences," 337; Smid et al., "The Challenge of Pregnancy," 8.

[30] Smid et al., "The Challenge of Pregnancy," 8.

6. A need for churches and religious organizations to have open doors to homeless people, pregnant and parenting teens, and pregnant and parenting homeless teens.[31]

For each concreate social program, policy or approach, I name a current program in the U.S. that lives it out. Christian social ethics at the community level is about partnership and shared social responsibility and accountability.

A need for culturally grounded services

Culturally grounded services focus on the specific needs of homeless youth in their communities. It requires organizations to learn about the cultural needs of the youth and create spaces that are adaptive. This is important for both the parent and the children.[32] A great example of a program created out of cultural awareness and needs assessment is Wahine Talk.[33] Wahine Talk seeks to draw in homeless youth through incentives, such as a smartphone, data usage, and gift cards. Once a person signs up to be a part of the program, and is encouraged to engage in the agencies various types of service. The incentive program increased engagement and accountability. The rewards and upgrades were given for participation in specific services, such as support groups, sex health, and birth control. Wahine Talk identifies as culturally grounded service and serves an incredible example of meeting the clientele where they are at, including knowing what their needs are to be healthy and safe as well as providing a tool for communication and accountability through the smart phones.

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[31] Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen, "Social Support Networks," 324.

[32] Aparicio et al., "Dual experiences," 337.

[33] Aparicio et al., "Wahine Talk."

A need for holistic sex health programs.

Wahine Talk serves as the example for this theme as well. “An overarching theme among both participants in and providers of Wahine Talk is a sense that the program is truly holistic, integrating providers of different disciplines, serving youth at multiple intervention levels, and fundamentally viewing sexual health as embedded within a larger context of well-being.”[34] The providers of Wahine Talk are committed to building trust with the participants and ensuring they are safe. The fact that participants and providers both experience Wahine Talk in this way speaks highly of the program. Programs such as Wahine Talk must be used as a model for creating sex health programs for youth of all ages.

A need for educators, caseworkers, and medical professionals to be trained in trauma-centered approaches to their work.

One of the youth from the Midwest shared why she does not trust her caseworker: “I don’t trust any of these case managers. I just don’t. These people, I can’t see them. . . . being genuinely trying to help someone. I just don’t see it…I’ve heard them discussing people and things going on. I would never try to discuss my business with them because I don’t’ want them discussing it. I hope 9a therapist would be more confidential.)”[35] In order for youth to actually engage in services, they must be able to build a trusting relationship with the professionals. The service providers must not only be trained in

[34] Aparicio et al., “Wahine Talk,” 472.

[35] Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen, "Social Support Networks,” 323.

trauma-focused approaches but also must be held accountable to use them.[36] It is essential to understand that trauma experiences impact everyone differently and be aware that each person has their own triggers and vulnerabilities.

A need for programs to allow young pregnant and parenting persons to have actual choices about where and how they live

In response to research conducted with homeless Native Hawaiian teen parents, the following argument was made:

> Of note, there are some members of the Native Hawaiian community who firmly believe it is their right to be able to "live like a Hawaiian," as Natalie noted, meaning to live outside of a formal building structure (*house*less, not *home*less) and to live off the land for subsistence. Culturally grounded housing support might include innovative design thinking to develop a range of home options, including, when possible, the choice to live outside in a traditional or nontraditional housing structure. The key is the ability to choose, not to be made homeless/houseless by poverty, lack of resources such as affordable housing, and limited economic opportunities.[37]

Ultimately, as expressed here, youth should not be forced into being homeless. There should be options for them, and their choices should be honored. What would it look like to honor someone's choice to be homeless? If someone's conditions were so bad that it was in their best interest to be homeless, should their decision not be respected? This can and should include housing programs that push against heteronormative notions of family.[38]

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[36] Aparicio et al., "Dual experiences," 337.

[37] Aparicio et al., "Dual experiences," 337.

[38] Smid et al., "The Challenge of Pregnancy," 8.

One program that stands out here is Safe Families.[39] This program is designed to provide crisis respite services to families, so to help them get through the crisis and ultimately not have to reach a point where state services get involved. When a young mother is on the verge of homelessness, she could reach out to this program and either be provided shelter and food in the same residence as her child or separately.

A need for supportive educational settings where young mothers can continue their education and get vocational training.

Lyfe NYC sets a high bar for this need. Lyfe's mission is the following: "The Lyfe program is a NYC Department of Education program that provides free early childhood education and support to children of student parents enrolled in NYC Department of Education schools."[40] This program is focused on the entire family, understanding that education is invaluable at all stages of life. By providing early childhood education, the parents are able to complete their educational goals. Participants describe the program as like a family and a great source of support through life transitions.

A need for churches and religious organizations to have open doors to homeless people, pregnant and parenting teens, and pregnant and parenting homeless teens.

Due to the busyness of life of pregnant and parenting youth, they have little time for religious and extracurricular activities.[41] Religious organizations would be great

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[39] Safe Families, https://safe-families.org/about/history/.

[40] Lyfe NYC, https://lyfenyc.org/about-us/.

[41] Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen, "Social Support Networks," 324.

places to offer assistance with childcare and support services for young parents and children. For example, churches can participate in locally organized programs like Family Promise.[42] Family Promise works with families to help prevent homelessness and reduce the stress of being homeless. They provide temporary housing and help with transportation and rent.

If each person, in their place of work, began to intentionally bear witness to the people around them, the pervasiveness of the needs so clearly depicted by the homeless youth would become apparent on a larger scale. It is important to get comfortable with asking the right questions. For example, do all my colleagues feel as if their voice matters? How do I help support people who are different from me in their particular work struggles? Do the policies and practices of my workplace reflect systemic racism? Or, are there policies and procedures that actively promote antiracism and gender equity? Do I take these policies seriously? Would I hold someone accountable if they verbally, physically, or sexually hurt someone? Does my workplace reflect on its role in the community? How could we as an organization get more involved in the community? What resources do we have to share—space, funds, etc.?

After wrestling with these questions, one can often feel unequip in how to being to act. Religious communities are excellent spaces for people to participate in group studies and leadership formation in how to do this work. Recall that Traci C. West argues that in order to stop systemic violence, there needs to be organization and social

[42] Family Promise, https://familypromise.org/.

movements.[43] This could include antiracist study groups, small groups that focus on learning about social issues, and educational seminars. Once people are in the same room and wrestling with the truth, convictions will become solidified and human creativity will begin to shed light. In these spaces, the members of the group must push each other to go beyond reflection and feeling. The group needs to assess their core values and inventory their resources. Additionally, clear goals must be set and action steps defined.

For example, the United Methodist Church in Summit, NJ has taken on the daunting task of ending homelessness in a couple of very doable ways.[44] The church community determined that it was committed to helping the homeless in their community and began partnerships with already established local organizations. One of the partnerships is with an organization that began in Summit, NJ and is now active in 43 states—Family Promise.[45] Family Promise has a variety of wrap-around services for homeless people, one of them being providing temporary housing to families in need. Summit UMC became a site where homeless families are hosted for four weeks each year. The opportunity for families to be able to stay in a warm and safe place, such as a church building, keeps them out of shelters where there are the greater safety and health risks described by the youth in chapter three. Summit UMC also works with three other organizations that provide meals, foodbanks, showers, shelter, and medical treatment for homeless populations. Through the variety of the organizational relationships, members

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[43] Traci C. West, *Wounds of the Spirit,* chapter 7.

[44] https://umcsummit.org/ministry/.

[45] https://familypromise.org/.

of the church community are able to actively fight against homelessness in a variety of ways. They can help prepare the church space to host families, cook meals, buy food and clothing, and more. As a result, families are allowed to remain as a family unit without their selfhood being questioned and their safety at risk.

Conclusion

In sum, transformative trauma work is a personal and communal task. God revealed the power of trauma work to humanity each time God pursued Hagar in the wilderness. God and Hagar modeled that while facing our traumas and wrestling with the discomforts within our souls and societies can be daunting, there is hope. Hope in liberation. Hope in wholeness. Hope in authenticity.

CONCLUSION

Oh, my son! Look at us. You are strong and your bowmanship allows us to always have the food we need. Now, we will find you a wife and you will have beautiful children.

Dear God, you really heard my cry. You understand the desires of my heart. Hallelujah. You are with me always.

Teen pregnancy has been defined as a social problem for decades. The preventative solution to this problem has been and continues to be public initiatives that promote shame, stigma, and more deeply rooted stereotypes. In addition to the testimonies provided by Luker in previous chapters, within the last decade, The New York Human Resources Administration (HRA) published ads that "feature images of young children alongside messages to their would-be teen parents."[1] For example, one poster has a small child, seemingly around three years old. She is looking up with her finger in her mouth, as if she is thinking. The following words are around the child, "Honestly Mom…chances are he won't' stay with you. What happens to me?"[2] Then, in a yellow banner at the bottom, it states, "ARE YOU READY TO RAISE A CHILD BY YOURSELF? 90% OF TEEN PARENTS DON'T MARRY EACH OTHER."[3] Note, these words are in all caps, bold, and "teen parents" is in red font.

This kind of prevention feels misplaced, trauma-inducing, and stigmatizing in the same way that current television shows such as "16 and pregnant" and "Teen Mom" were

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[1] Miriam Zoila Perez, "NYC Teen Pregnancy Campaign Brings Shaming to Bus Shelters and Cell Phones," *Rewire News Group: Parenthood*, March 5, 2013, https://rewirenewsgroup.com/2013/03/05/nyc-teen-pregnancy-campaign-brings-shaming-to-bus-shelters-and-cell-phones/.

[2] Perez, NYHR bus stop add.

[3] Perez, NYHR bus stop add.

designed as initiatives to dissuade teen pregnancy.[4] The social problem as it is being told and defined is first and foremost a "female problem."[5] In other words, "the financial obligations and responsibilities are placed solely on the woman."[6] The shame and stigma that the public puts on these young women infuses their self-identity.

Moreover, the perpetuation of the stereotypes about these teenagers facilitates such a narrow narrative that the complexities of their personhood are lost and ignored. Society is both traumatizing members of its body and denying the trauma of its corporeal and spiritual whole. Revisiting the life of Hagar and her encounters with God, one can see that God is not satisfied with the continuation of trauma. God desires for humanity to be as integrated and liberated as possible. This is observed in God's pursuit of Hagar's first journey into the wilderness and understanding of her plight. God shows Godself as impacted and moved by Hagar's particular experiences and desires, such that God helps Hagar see the risks of being pregnant and alone in the wilderness. God provides an alternative that is not necessarily easy, but sustainable—return to Abraham and Sarah, raise Ishmael, and then Ishmael will train as a hunter and able to provide for their future lineage.

In revisiting this story, one learns about God and from God about how to be in relationship. God meets Hagar where Hagar is at. God listens, validates, and empathizes

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[4] See Introduction, f.n. 12 for scholarship on these shows.

[5] Gloria Malone, "Where's the '16, Parenting, and OK' Reality Show?" *Rewire News Group: Power*, October 20, 2014, https://rewirenewsgroup.com/2014/10/20/wheres-16-parenting-ok-reality-show/.

[6] Malone, para. 8.

with Hagar. God is impacted by Hagar and inspired out of God's own unconditional love for her. God is not tolerant of eternal entrapment and unfulfilled desires. God is not content with someone living out of hopelessness. God shows how authentic and uninhibited relationship can be empowering.

Trauma theory helps conceptualize the damage that comes from silencing and forgetting parts of the whole. Feminist, womanist, and childist methodologies have been created to reclaim the voices and social capital of people in the margins. Trauma theory illuminates the necessity of these feminist and childist tools in order to overcome the fragmentation from trauma. Hagar helps one see that doing trauma work is aligned with God's will and possible. Hagar also provides witness to the fact that God is doing the trauma work with all of humanity.

Hagar was a young adult whose societal status was dictated by the norms of a patriarchal and ethnically and religiously divisive culture. Focusing on Hagar's testimony and recognizing the significance of Hagar's story in scripture, challenges one to be curious about who in contemporary society is displaced because of economic, racial, religious, and marital status. Additionally, God models an imperative to be sure to see and give voice to these silenced and marginalized persons. God shows us that all persons have moral agency and that society can and should be decentered in response to all people's needs. God aides Hagar and Ishmael in creating a new path.

Using Hagar and God's relationship as a guide in pursuing the transformative possibilities from doing trauma work, this project seeks to do trauma work with regards to what has been deemed a social problem in the US—teen pregnancy. As one hones in on the statistics surrounding teen pregnancy, it becomes apparent that economic and

racial disparities are deeply at play. In turn, the precariousness of homeless pregnant teens becomes even more essential to understanding the essentialness to wrestle with and give testimony to the particularities of young, homeless, pregnant and parenting members of society.

Many scholars, journalists, and weblogers bear witness to the experience of homeless pregnant and parenting youth. These particular testimonies help create the space for thinking about the systemic conditions that silence these young people. Additionally, they provided the personal testimonies of young homeless pregnant and parenting persons so that their untold stories could begin to be heard and integrated into the fragmented social narrative.

In chapter three, the young people who are homeless as well as pregnant and/or parenting helped highlight several holes in the US society. Specifically, there is an ongoing need for wholistic sexual education as well as access to general education. Also, the provision of resources (medical, educational, psychological, etc.) need to be culturally based. This includes knowing the particular, intersectional needs of the population being served and then being creative in responding to those needs. Trauma-informed services are also needed *and* would only reinforce the goals of culturally based services. Finally, the presence of religious and spiritual spaces and resources was nearly absent from the stories shared.

Christian social ethical work that focuses on anti-racist practices provide an entry point into responding to these needs. Namely, reparations and resistance ethics illuminate the need to claim and give testimony to these needs as coming from systemic injustice, or

trauma. These ethical frameworks also oppose complacency with our oppressive social systems and demand the development of social change.

Social change can take many forms, but a couple of concrete strategies can be implemented within Christian communities. First, people as individuals and communities must engage in honest storytelling and wholistic remembering of Christian and societies histories. The interwoven narratives of Christianity, race, and economics have shaped US society and so must be accurately represented, upheld, and revisited. This also requires the intentional work of reflection. Taking the stance of creating midrash can be invaluable for implementing these strategies, because midrash is grounded in the Judeo-Christian history of being in conversation with God and holy scriptures. Midrash embodies the dynamisms and relationality in our *Imago De*, including expecting to learn and knowing that there are always new mysteries to be revealed.

Additionally, social change can be invigorated by Christian persons claiming and re-claiming all vocations as God's work and being intentional about leadership formation and social accountability. God has empowered humankind to be co-creators of society and such a gift requires continually de-centering oneself to the other—such as homeless, pregnant and parenting youth.

If sermons, missionary visions, and educational curriculum focused on serving homeless, pregnant teens, then word choices and tones of voice would be reshaped. Moreover, perhaps this reshaping would more thoroughly attend to the needs of all community members. For example, if society wants to argue that education should be accessible to everyone, what does it mean that our homeless, pregnant youth tell us that it is not accessible to them? It means that the system is broken. If we created educational

structures that actually were within reach of homeless, pregnant and parenting young people, then one can only imagine how this would shift stigmas and increase radical acceptance.

This can include being family-centered by offering child care for the parenting students. It can also include validating all human persons as embodied in their *Imago De*. Emotions and sexuality as are important as cognitive abilities. Finally, it pushes against the individualistic mentality and embraces our inherent relationality and dependency. These values should be reinforced at all Christian social levels and convicting to people in their roles as parents, teachers, school board members, legislators, voters, counselors, and preachers.

Ultimately, doing this Christian childist-feminist social ethics work in light of trauma theory invites us all to be more authentically in relationship with God. Out of one's ever-evolving relationship with God, one finds themselves cozier with the comfortability of being de-centered. Taking ownership of one's own sacredness in God's image expands one's openness to bearing witness to the sacredness of others—moral agents, embodied, dynamic, and relational. If we truly desire to uphold the *Imago De* in those around us, then how can we not be more like God was with Hagar? How can one not want to do the liberative trauma work and be open to the wholeness God is waiting for us to experience?

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