Sticks and stones: words that scar a community

Leslie Sue Hand
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STICKS AND STONES: WORDS THAT SCAR A COMMUNITY

By

Leslie Sue Hand
Bachelor of Arts, Birmingham-Southern College, 2000
Master of Divinity, Columbia Theological Seminary, 2007

A Doctoral Dissertation
submitted to the faculties of the schools of the
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at
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ABSTRACT

STICKS AND STONES: WORDS THAT SCAR A COMMUNITY
by
Leslie Sue Hand
May 2016
111 pages

The issue that this study addresses is twofold: the first part of the issue is the current prohibitive language of the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church in regards to the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender and Queer identified community within the context of the North Alabama Conference, and the second part is how this language has impacted the narrative of this particular community’s experience of the United Methodist Church. The methodology will evaluate the effect that the current language of doctrinal standards has on the LGBTQ community, examine the plight of this community as well as those who are against change in doctrine, and illustrate the need for a new way forward that offers truly inclusive ministries and welcomes full participation in the United Methodist Church. The data gathered for this ministerial project was the result of a questionnaire randomly distributed at the 2015 Annual Conference of North Alabama that measured levels of offensiveness in response to current language and amendments proposed by the Community Table to the Book of Discipline. These proposals will be presented at the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in 2016. The questionnaire was designed in light of Charles E. Osgood’s semantic differential that makes the assumption that the meaning of all things, including abstract thought, can be measured using adjectival polar opposites. The findings of this aspect of measurement showed that the North Alabama Conference would be receptive to the idea
of amending language within our doctrine to provide a more hospitable experience of church for the LGBTQ community.

Another aspect of the ministerial project was to provide an opportunity for the LGBTQ community to tell their own story in their own words through the use of narrative research. Six LGBTQ identified members of the North Alabama Conference were interviewed and shared their negative and positive experiences of the United Methodist Church. From evaluation of the data received, there were several commonalities across the narratives and the following themes emerged: 1) the need for inclusive and empowering language that encourages both members of the LGBTQ community and other church members to work toward common goals and 2) the need for more avenues that offer opportunity for spiritual growth that embraces the LGBTQ community and focuses on developing disciples for Christ.

Although it is not within the scope of the project, the information gathered through questionnaires and interviews were compiled and will be submitted to the North Alabama Conference delegation to the General Conference of 2016 in Portland, Oregon. Hopefully this will serve as a useful tool to make the delegation aware of the voices of a silenced community within the Church that needs to be heard.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my daddy. Both brilliant and quiet (the latter trait I did not inherit), you have inspired and encouraged my passion for God, for loving people on the margins of society, and the desire to continuously and fervently pursue knowledge. Through watching, knowing, and listening to you I have come to know God more intimately and spiritually. Thank you for your support, your prayers, your patience and most importantly—your love. It is an honor and privilege to call you mentor, teacher, father and friend.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks and appreciation to everyone who has walked alongside me on this journey, especially my family who has loved and supported me through several many, many, many years of school. I know I make that a hard task sometimes! Breathe mom—it is finished.

Thank you to the faculty and staff of Gammon Theological Seminary and The Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta. Your encouragement has made this journey much more enjoyable. A special thank you to my dissertation committee, Dr. Daniel Shin, Dr. Charles Thomas, and Dr. Jan Thompson—you have given generously of your time and expertise to better my work, your good-natured support is greatly appreciated.

I must also acknowledge my friends who have supported my research and writing and encouraged me to keep at it when I seemed to be drowning, especially Ed and Melissa—you have been my rocks and your friendships have kept me sane!

Tyler, you will no longer have to hear the word “dissertation,” thank you for being an amazing friend. The journey has just begun.

Also, a very special thank you to my talented editor Gabrielle Lee.—your patience with me far surpasses Job.

A word of gratitude to my Cohort, a difficult journey becomes much more achievable when you are accompanied by friends who share in bearing one another's burdens.

And of course I would like to express my gratitude to the LGBTQ community, especially those who so bravely shared their stories. It is through the glory of God, the grace of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit and the voices of the silenced that this world will be transformed.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this project is to evaluate the effect that the current language *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, specifically found in ¶ 4 Article IV, ¶ 214, ¶ 304.3, ¶ 341.6, ¶ 613, ¶ 806.9, and ¶ 2702, has on the LGBTQ community’s experience of church in the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. Historically, language has been used in both secular and religious worlds to include or exclude persons from full participation within communities. The tradition of the Church in creating doctrinal standards has encouraged a practice of exclusion by adopting a heteronormative, patriarchal framework that intentionally denies the LGBTQ community the opportunity to fully participate in life within the Church. As a result, tension between the welcoming hospitality of the United Methodist Church and the human identity of LGBTQ persons is prevalent in such communities.

Often the experience is that people who identify as LGBTQ feel shunned by the community of believers; the result is a hindering of the individual’s spiritual formation.

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1 This acronym is widely accepted and used in the field of academia to identify the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer community. For the duration of the dissertation LGBTQ will be used to reference this specific community.
4 Aleiah Jones, “Querying the Church: Christian Church Leaders’ Perspectives on Homosexuality,” (PhD diss., University of Toledo, 2013), 89.
and personal growth. In essence, Church doctrine becomes a stumbling block for people who are yearning for a deeper understanding of Christ and discipleship. This trend suggests that in the face of cultural shifts that focus on seeking justice for the human rights and dignity of oppressed communities, the Church is increasingly irrelevant. The importance of this project lies in an opportunity to provide a voice for the silenced LGBTQ community and to offer a chance to re-story their relationship with the United Methodist Church beginning with the context of the North Alabama Conference.

The Ministry Issue

The ministry issue for this project is the following: The language currently used in ¶ 4 Article IV, ¶ 214, ¶ 304.3, ¶ 341.6, ¶ 613, ¶ 806.9, and ¶ 2702 of the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church intentionally excludes LGBTQ Christians from fully participating in the life of the Church and leads to the hindrance of spiritual formation and personal growth for those church members.

The focus community of this dissertation is the LGBTQ community of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. The findings of this project will be presented to North Alabama’s delegation of the General Conference of 2016, which will be voting on resolutions to alter the language within our Book of Discipline that hinders and excludes the LGBTQ community from participating fully in the life of the Church and condemns the practice of homosexuality as being incompatible with Christian teaching.

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Intent of the Project

The United Methodist Church is standing at the precipice of a monumental decision to join in the work of the Holy Spirit by embracing all people and recognizing that human dignity and self-worth are gifts from God to all of God’s children. The intent of this study is to provide a voice for the silenced in communicating both their positive and negative experiences of Church in light of doctrinal standards that explicitly denounce their identities as “lifestyle choices.” There is a division among clergy and laity about the church’s role within and responsibility to the LGBTQ community which ranges from those who would prohibit the participation of all “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” in any facet of church life to those who would like to remove all prohibitive language and atone for the sin of excluding the community through practice, word, and deed. Currently the leadership of the United Methodist Church is able to use the language of the Book of Discipline as justification for not engaging in inclusive ministries that would allow for the ordination or marriage of LGTBQ persons.6 This project will illustrate the need to amend and adopt new language proposed by the Community Table that is intentionally inclusive. By doing so, it will eliminate the use of church law as an excuse for the exclusion of the LGBTQ community from participating in all aspects of church life. The preferred emerging story will become a stronger Christian community within the United Methodist Church that embraces all members in love, forgiveness, and understanding.

Evaluation of this project’s results presents evidence that this is not just an issue worthy of debate. What is at stake is the identity and dignity of the LGBTQ community

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6 Ibid., ¶ 304.3, ¶ 341.5, ¶ 2702.1.
within the Body of Christ and the mission of the Church. Through the use of narrative research, this particular community has been given a safe place to voice their real-life experiences of church within the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. Because the language of our Book of Discipline gives explicit permission to clergy and laity to justify acts of exclusion, the project has yielded information regarding LGBTQ persons’ feelings of alienation, estrangement from families, lack of trust in dealing with the Church, and degradation of character within the church and society as a whole. Theological terminology often differs across hermeneutical perspectives and therefore it will be necessary to provide definitions of terms that will be used throughout this dissertation.

Definition of Terms

The North Alabama Conference is a geographically defined annual conference and regional unit within the United Methodist Church. 7 Annual conferences may refer to a regional body, organizational unit or a yearly meeting. In the context of this dissertation, “North Alabama Conference” is used as a term referring to the regional body. A Bishop is an elected ordained elder who presides over an annual conference within the United Methodist Church. At the time of this project, the Bishop of the North Alabama Conference is Bishop Debbie Wallace-Padgett. The North Alabama Delegation refers to the members of the North Alabama Conference elected at the 2014 Annual Conference as voting representatives to the General Conference to be held in Portland, Oregon in May of 2016. The General Conference is the policy-making body of the United Methodist Church that meets once every four years. It is within the power

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of the General Conference to amend and revise our church law found in *The Book of Discipline.*

The **Judicial Council** is the highest judicial body in the United Methodist Church. Much like the United States Supreme Court, the body after which it was configured, the nine members elected by the General Conference serve to interpret and uphold the constitutionality of our *Book of Discipline.* The **Council of Bishops** is comprised of all retired and active bishops of the United Methodist Church and is charged with the spiritual leadership of the denomination as a whole, while each individual active bishop may be assigned to leadership over a particular geographical region. The **Connectional Table** was formulated at the 2004 General Conference of the United Methodist Church and purposed with the task of vision and stewardship of resources to enact the vision of the United Methodist Church throughout the world. They are tasked with discernment and articulation of the vision of the General Conference and in consultation with and under the leadership of the Council of Bishops. The members of the Connectional Table are elected by Jurisdictional and Central conferences. Among their responsibilities is the submission of petitions to the General Conference.

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The term *heteronormative* refers to the school of thought that heterosexuality is the only normal and acceptable form of sexuality.\textsuperscript{12} Within this dissertation, the heteronormative perspective is applied to both the biblical worldview and the perspective that influenced the origins of United Methodist doctrine and creeds. The acronym *LGBTQ* expands to Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, and Queer. The \textit{Q} is a reclaiming of the term queer and encompasses all variations of meaning that do not fall under the heteronormative scope of understanding. It is also sometimes listed with the word “questioning” rather than “queer.”\textsuperscript{13} In response to this normative influence, the researcher will apply a hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion when engaging doctrine, historical tradition and the biblical text.\textsuperscript{14} This hermeneutic is defined by Queer theologian Deryn Guest as a perspective that allows one to assume the suppression, erasure, and resistance to queer voices within the written word.

**Queer Theology**, or Queer Criticism/Theory, is a part of a wider social movement for groups that have been historically oppressed to find their own theological voice. It is a reclaiming of the word “queer” that has been used in derogatory settings to demean people outside the heteronormative spectrum. Queer Theology recognizes the differing voices amongst the LGBTQ community and makes room for each individual to bring their personal experiences to both scripture and historical tradition. The researcher recognizes her own limitations to conducting queer theology as an outsider.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\end{footnotes}
and advocate to the LGBTQ-identified community and relies upon the works of those within this community to add validity to her work.\textsuperscript{15}

Male and female \textbf{homoeroticism} for the purpose of this dissertation is a term used to define both sexual desires as well as intimate relationships between same-sex people in biblical and theological studies. These intimate relationships do not necessarily imply sexual attraction. \textbf{Gender-complementarity} refers to a technique applied by the patriarchal biblical worldview and perpetuated by church tradition that accentuates the male-female relationship of sexuality to be not only normative but ordained by God. The texts of terror, a phrase coined by feminist theologian Phyllis Trible, contain the horrific portrayal of what has always been considered normative passages in scripture but condones acts such as rape, genocide, slavery, assassinations, beheadings, cannibalism and other heinous acts. Throughout this dissertation the texts of terror will be in reference to the perpetuated stereotype of gender-complementarity.

The term \textbf{re-story} is a hopeful outcome of narrative research. The methodology of narrative research collects the stories of individuals in their own words. Within the scope of this ministerial project, the methodology of re-storying will allow the LGBTQ community to express their personal experience of church under the present regime and doctrine. To re-story is to write a new experience with both the United Methodist Church and LGBTQ communities taking part. It offers a chance at reconciliation, inclusion, and acceptance on a broader level by including the voices of both the oppressed and oppressor. It will also offer an opportunity to eliminate physical and emotional violence that has been used against the oppressed community.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
SCOTUS refers to the Supreme Court of the United States, and for the purpose of this dissertation, references will be used to discuss the landmark decision of June 26, 2015 on the docket of Obergefell v. Hodges. In a 5-4 decision, the SCOTUS justices ruled that marriage was a civil liberty guaranteed to all persons by the Constitution of the United States nationwide. In Chapter III this decision will be explored more in depth.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Methodology}

The methodology of this research begins with a literature review of the historical work that has been conducted on the use of language, scientific studies, the biblical witness, the role of doctrine, queer theology, and inclusive ministry. The goal is to assess ways that language has been used to influence attitudinal changes and also how it has been used to empower, oppress, include, or exclude groups of people. Both scripture and doctrine utilize language in each of these positive (empower/include) and negative (oppress/exclude) facets, carrying with it a weight of authority that can be used to the detriment or empowerment of members of a community of believers. Queer theology offers a way to reinterpret scripture and amend doctrine through the use of the hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion, a necessary tool for offering inclusive ministries with the LGBTQ community.

To compare and contrast current practice with historical tradition, the researcher gathered and analyzed data from a questionnaire dispersed among the people of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. A sample of members of the Annual Conference participated in this survey. The surveys were distributed and

collected in anonymity in an effort to elicit a more honest and objectively measurable response. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher to measure the attitudinal correlation, ranging from offensive to not offensive at all, between the current language of and proposed changes to the language of the *Book of Discipline* in regards to the LGBTQ community and the larger congregational opinion of the North Alabama Conference.

In an effort to give voice to a silenced people, six members of the LGBTQ community of the North Alabama Conference were interviewed anonymously through the use of this narrative research method to record their experience of church under the current language of the *Book of Discipline*. Their stories, told in their own words, have been collected and submitted anonymously for this dissertation. The assumption of narrative research theory is that “our self, our community, our world is relational and storied.”17 Each person’s story is unique to the individual and yet there are multiple moments of intersection that link our stories together. The evidence gathered for this dissertation will also be compiled into a report to present to the North Alabama Delegation to the General Conference of 2016. Although it is outside the scope of this project it is the hope of this researcher that the collected information will serve as a necessary tool that leads directly to a re-storying of the United Methodist Church and the LGBTQ community.

CHAPTER II

FRAMING THE ISSUE

The necessity to evaluate the language of the *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* is a timely issue as the delegates around the North Alabama Conference prepare for the General Conference of 2016. Among the many amendments that will be proposed at the quadrennium gathering will be the issue of inclusive language for the LGBTQ community. Prayerful research and discernment is required for all who represent their annual conferences and the findings of this research project will provide another tool to help inform the decisions the delegation of North Alabama will make in their voting on the proposals placed before them.

**Ministry Context**

The context for this study is the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. The Annual Conference consists of 771 parishes with approximately 133,695 members in a region with about 2,300,000 residents.\(^1\) The Annual Conference membership is 51.6% female, 54.9% married (heterosexual) couples with an average age of the membership being 36.\(^2\) The reported percentage of LGBTQ members of the North Alabama Conference is 2%; however, it is important to note that it is difficult to provide validity to this statistic because of the current nature of the language in our *Book of Discipline*, which denounces the practice of

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2. Ibid.
homosexuality and the overwhelmingly negative view of homosexuality in the southern region of the United States. At 54%, the majority of the membership has only a high school education—in contrast with 92% of the clergy, who have obtained a Masters of Divinity or higher.\(^3\) Across North Alabama there is a high dependency on agricultural industries, and therefore the majority of the region consists of rural areas and small towns. In consensus with other southern regions and rural areas, North Alabama has an oral culture relayed across multiple generations in the form of narrative storytelling. There is a strong sense of familial pride with genealogical roots often traced back before the Civil War.\(^4\) The racial demographic of the Conference is 80% White; by contrast, the North Alabama region is 71% White, 21% Black, and 5.4% Hispanic.\(^5\) The Conference is considered wealthy in comparison to other Methodist denominations in the region. This is the cultural demographic backdrop against which the story of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church unfolds.

In September of 2013, Bishop Debbie Wallace-Padgett, Bishop of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church, issued a press release alerting the clergy of the Annual Conference of the pending United Methodist Church ceremony to celebrate the wedding of a same-sex couple in Birmingham, Alabama. In anticipation of a negative response from the media, Bishop Wallace-Padgett contacted the clergy and laity of the Annual Conference via email, noting that retired United Methodist Bishop Melvin Talbert would be the officiant of the ceremony. In her e-mail correspondence, Bishop Wallace-Padgett appealed to the United Methodist

\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^5\) Ibid.
connectional system. She defines the connectional system as a conduit that allows for worldwide ministries but also offers opportunities to “dialogue and prayerfully discern” within an ordered process. This process, through which the amending of church law occurs, is within the legislative actions of the General Conference. Each quadrennium elected delegations from each Annual Conference discuss, listen, and discern pressing issues within the United Methodist Church. These changes that are voted on, ratified, and amended are then published as *The Book of Discipline*. Bishop Wallace-Padgett believes that deviation and disregard for this process “puts the integrity of our covenant together in jeopardy.”

In response to Bishop Wallace-Padgett’s release, there was an outpouring of concern on the part of clergy and laypersons of the North Alabama Conference. An open session was called at Camp Sumatanga, the campsite for the North Alabama Conference, that offered a forum for all United Methodists of North Alabama to dialogue and prayerfully discern the underlying issues. Bishop Wallace-Padgett contends that retired Bishop Talbert’s officiating of the same-sex wedding was a direct violation of *The Book of Discipline*. A complaint was filed against Bishop Talbert, but a joint resolution by the parties involved determined that he should not face a trial or possible loss of his clergy credentials, calling for all clergy to abide by the *Book of Discipline* and for the Council of Bishops to work more diligently toward resolving the church’s debate about human sexuality. Bishop Wallace-Padgett stated that her

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6 Bishop Debbie Wallace-Padgett, Email to Clergy of the North Alabama Conference, September 30, 2013.
7 Ibid.
greater concern is the media and public outside of the denomination associating the United Methodist Church with this one issue and "not by the rich range of ministries of North Alabama local churches such as feeding the hungry, ministry with the poor, offering hope for those in addiction, sharing the gospel with our neighbors and welcoming all people to worship together and celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion."⁹

The conversation was enlightening, marking clearly drawn lines between different factions within the North Alabama Conference. Those who opposed this union between the same-sex partners were using the 2012 Book of Discipline as a justification for their point-of-view. ¹⁰ With language that explicitly forbids the ordination of openly (self-avowed, practicing) homosexuals, does not condone the practice of homosexuality and adjudicates clergy for performing same-sex weddings, the Discipline provides a linguistic platform for their argument. The other side argued that in its current state, the Discipline is incompatible with the commands of Christ to love our neighbors, and pointed toward the incongruity in Bishop Wallace-Padgett’s letter by noting that not everyone is welcomed to worship together or celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion if their basic human dignity and identity is being denied. The argument within this Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church reflects a larger cultural divide in the secular world about the civil rights and dignity afforded the LGBTQ community. Bishop Wallace-Padgett recognizes “the pain and struggle among faithful Christians” about interpretations of biblical teaching on same-sex relationships, however, she also points to The 2012 Book of Discipline and our

⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ United Methodist Publishing House, Discipline, ¶ 4 Article IV, ¶ 214, ¶ 304.3, ¶ 341.6, ¶ 613, ¶ 806.9, ¶ 2702.
Social Principles of the United Methodist Church as a covenant that cannot be set aside, ignored, nor changed without proper due process.  

In order to understand the plight of the LGBTQ community, this researcher has used the hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion to study the wording of the United Methodist doctrine. This lens, developed and defined by theologian Deryn Guest, allows us to hear the voices of the silenced within the text and examine how it would be received by those who are excluded through the use of semantics. The heteronormative worldview is a strong influence on the current language used in The Book of Discipline. The Discipline affirms in ¶ Article 4, which addresses the inclusiveness of the church, “that all persons are of sacred worth and that God’s grace is available to all.” However, it also states in ¶ 161:

The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider[sic] this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.

In essence, the semantics used in ¶ 161 are in line with the common adage, love the sinner and hate the sin. These words are harmful to those who identify as LGBTQ because they insinuate that although God’s grace is available to all, in order to receive the fullness of God’s grace, they must reject their homosexual identity because it is “incompatible with Christian teaching.”

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11 Bishop Debbie Wallace-Padgett, Email to Clergy of the North Alabama Conference, September 30, 2013.
12 Ibid.
13 United Methodist Publishing House, Discipline, ¶ 161.
However, this language condemns *who they are*, not a simple lifestyle choice. As the *Discipline* is currently worded it is reminiscent to the language of the 1896 United States Supreme Court ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson that upheld state laws which required the racial segregation of the use of public facilities as “separate but equal.”

Christians who “practice homosexuality” are loved and accepted by Christ, but not condoned by the United Methodist Church and in other sections of the *Discipline* that we will examine next; they are barred from marriage and ordination. The language is exclusive in nature, affirming the availability of God’s grace to all in one sentence and then selectively condemning the identity of certain individuals in the next. ¶161 qualifies what the United Methodist Church means by “all.” “All” excludes those who are outside the heteronormative framework of the church.

If the episcopacy, clergy, and laypersons of the United Methodist Church are using *The Book of Discipline* as a boundary to prevent the discipleship of all Christians for the transformation of the world, then it seems that the starting point must be to address how this language affects the LGBTQ-identified individuals who are currently associated with the United Methodist Church.

**Motivation for Research**

The current language of the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* has led LGBTQ members of the North Alabama Conference to feel excluded and alienated from full participation in the life of the church. By measuring the impact of semantics of our doctrine on the LGBTQ community and collecting their narratives, this researcher was able to give voice to a silenced constituency within the United Methodist denomination.

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The United Methodist context created the denomination-wide campaign of rethinking church through “Open hearts, Open minds and Open doors, [sic].”\(^{15}\) The language embraced and upheld by the United Methodist Church within their church law of the 2012 *Book of Discipline* illustrates how this campaign missed the mark. The denomination continues to exclude and alienate the LGBTQ community, treating them as demoralized congregants who live a life incompatible with Christian teaching and ineligible for the fulfillment of God’s grace in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ so long as they are “practicing homosexuals,” and therefore are treated as second-class citizens who cannot be ordained or married. As long as the language exists that refers to homosexuality as incompatible with Christian teaching, and therefore prohibits ordination, marriage, officiating marriages of same-sex couples, LGBTQ-identified persons cannot be considered full members of the United Methodist Church—nor the Body of Christ as a whole. The question remains: How can we intentionally reach out to this community, embrace its members, and use language that invites everyone to equally claim one another as Child of God? This is not simply a civil rights issue; this is an evangelistic and missional failing of the apostolic Church.

Over the past decade, several clergy members have been brought before the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church for adjudication in performing same-sex marriages.\(^{16}\) Furthermore, candidates to ministry who publically proclaim they are “self-avowed practicing homosexuality, [sic]” have been denied Elder Ordination in Full

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15 2008 Discipleship campaign sanctioned and utilized on the authority of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church.

16 In the next few pages we will present the evidence of clergy who have been brought to trial for violating the *Book of Discipline* in regards to performing Same-Sex marriages.
Connection. These rulings include clergy members who have blessed ceremonies in states where same-sex marriage was legal prior to the SCOTUS decision of June 2015 legalizing same-sex marriage across the United States. This is because clergy status is considered a covenant with the greater body of the United Methodist Church and therefore their actions are deemed as breaking Church law regardless of the laws of secular society.

Despite the denomination’s past, there are tides of change flowing in the hearts of many United Methodists. In December 2013, Reverend Frank Schaefer—former pastor of Zion United Methodist Church in Lebanon, Pennsylvania—was defrocked by the Board of Ordained Ministry for performing the 2007 wedding ceremony of his son and his son’s same-sex partner. Reverend Schaefer was initially suspended for thirty days before a two-day trial. Rev. Schaefer was informed that if he admitted his guilt and reiterated his covenant to uphold The Book of Discipline, his sentence would be lighter. But he refused to stay silent in the face of injustice, claiming boldly that the love of Christ and compassion trump doctrine. The day after he was excommunicated by the body he had served for over twenty years, he received a phone call from Bishop Minerva Carcaño of the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church, inviting

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17 There are two tracks of ordination in the United Methodist Church, Elder and Deacon. Elders are ordained in word, sacrament, order, and service and Deacons are ordained in Word and Service. Neither track is eligible for ordination if the candidate is a “self-avowed practicing homosexual” according to the Discipline. Full Connection denotes full voting rights within the Bar at Annual Conference.

18 Hahn, “Complaints.”

Reverend Schaefer to join the Conference.\textsuperscript{20} Although Bishop Carcaño lacks the power to reinstate his credentials, she said,

What I can do, however, is invite and welcome others to love and serve Christ Jesus among us, accompany those who choose to be faithful, and exhort us all to be biblically obedient. This I will do for as long as God gives me breath. Frank Schaefer chose to stand with Jesus as he extended love and care to his gay son and his partner. We should stand with him and others who show such courage and faithfulness.\textsuperscript{21}

If more clergy and members of the episcopacy continue to “stand with Jesus” as Bishop Carcaño defines it, we can transform and change of The Book of Discipline and language within it (and outside it) that excludes members of the LGBTQ community.

Other language within church law that needs to be addressed includes the 2008 amendment to § 161.F in the Book of Discipline that defines sexuality: “Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.” This statement was upheld and qualified at the 2012 General Conference of the United Methodist Church by adding to our Social Principles,

We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage. We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.\textsuperscript{22}

This qualification clearly aligns United Methodist Polity with a heteronormative worldview that defines marriage as “the union of one man and one woman.”\textsuperscript{23} With these

\textsuperscript{20} Reverend Schaefer was defrocked and his credentials were taken away by the United Methodist Church.
\textsuperscript{21} Thurston, “Defrocked.”.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
words, the United Methodist Church has aligned themselves against the civil rights and human dignity of the LGBTQ community in seeking certain basic human rights and civil liberties despite the claim in ¶ 162 of the Discipline that

Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation. We see a clear issue of simple justice in protecting the rightful claims where people have shared material resources, pensions, guardian relationships, mutual powers of attorney, and other such lawful claims typically attendant to contractual relationships that involve shared contributions, responsibilities, and liabilities, and equal protection before the law. Moreover, we support efforts to stop violence and other forms of coercion against all persons, regardless of sexual orientation.\textsuperscript{24}

It is worth noting that the United Methodist Church does not regard marriage as a civil liberty, but as an ordinance of the church.\textsuperscript{25} Therefore the authors of this amendment would not see any incongruity between ¶162 and the prohibition of same-sex marriage. This perspective could also influence the United Methodist Church’s opinion in regards to the SCOTUS decision in the case of Obergefell v. Hodges if marriage is considered a matter of the church rather than a civil liberty.

Lastly, the language pertaining to ordination will be addressed. Currently the 2012 Book of Discipline bars “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” from entering into the process of ordination. ¶304.3, which addresses qualifications for ordination, specifies:

While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed

\textsuperscript{24} The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), ¶162.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., ¶340
practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, nor appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.\textsuperscript{26}

The phrase "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" means that the person openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session that she or he is a "practicing homosexual." Essentially, "don't ask, don't tell" becomes a common theme amongst clergy and those seeking to enter into the process of ordination. Also, further clarification is needed on "the highest standards of holy living in the world," as this language could simply mean maintaining a strong relationship with Christ through the means of grace. The context of this phrase within ¶304.3, however, suggests it is used to support the heteronormative worldview of the United Methodist doctrine.

This section of the Book of Discipline has also been used to file complaints against credentialed pastors. In 2004, Rev. Karen Dammann, an openly lesbian clergy member in Seattle, was acquitted on charges of violating church law. The acquittal ignited a controversy on both sides of the issue, and in May of that year, the Judicial Council declared that bishops could not appoint ministers who had been found to be "self-avowed practicing homosexuals." They also said that they did not have the authority to reverse Dammann's acquittal.\textsuperscript{27} Later that same year, Rev. Irene Elizabeth Stroud was defrocked for "coming out" to her congregation saying that she lived in a "covenant relationship" with her same-sex partner. Prior to 2004, the last time a United Methodist minister had been defrocked because of her or his sexual orientation was in

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., ¶304.3.

1987, when a church court in New Hampshire ruled against another open lesbian clergy member, the Reverend Rose Mary Denman.

Obviously, over the past ten years, this issue has been addressed more because of increasing secular influence on the Church. The Church was once the center of community, but the latter half of the last century illustrated a migration away from religiosity.28 As this trend continues, more and more churches are seeking a way to remain relevant in a secularized world. Inevitably, the issues that are pressing in the civic and political realms will make their way beyond the stained-glass windows of the traditional Church and insist upon being addressed. A recent triumph of the LGBTQ community is in the case of Rev. Amy DeLong, an “out” lesbian clergy member of the Wisconsin Annual Conference. From June 21 - 23, 2011, the United Methodist Church held a public church trial for the seventh time in twenty years. Rev. DeLong faced two charges of violating church law and the possibility of losing her ministerial credentials. She was charged with violating the United Methodist Church’s ban on non-celibate gay clergy and the prohibition against clergy officiating at same-sex unions. She was acquitted of being a “self-avowed practicing homosexual” by a vote of 12-1 because she had never specifically confessed to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session that she was a “practicing homosexual.” However, the same court unanimously found her guilty of violating the prohibition against conducting ceremonies celebrating same-gender unions. She received a twenty-day suspension, in which time she was instructed to seek “spiritual discernment” and work with a committee of Church officials to create a new

process for the United Methodist Church to resolve disputes over ministerial violations of church covenant.\textsuperscript{29}

As the North Alabama Conference Delegates to the 2016 General Conference are preparing for and prayerfully discerning the amendments that will be proposed, now is the time to begin educating our clergy and laypersons of the United Methodist Church on the importance of language in the \textit{Book of Discipline}. The impact that the contradictory statements over the inclusive words of Christ included in the \textit{Discipline} and the exclusive practices of the United Methodist Church has had on the LGBTQ community and their experience of church needs to be measured in order to give voice to their silenced plight and work toward justice. At the beginning of 2011, in an act of retribution for their part in the compilation of abusive language used in church law, a group of 36 retired bishops signed a document called \textit{A Statement of Council to the Church}.\textsuperscript{30} This statement was released in order to persuade the denomination to lift the ban on gay clergy and to eradicate the exclusive language upheld by \textit{The Book of Discipline}. Despite their bold action, neither active nor retired bishops are allowed a vote at General Conference unless they have been elected as members of an annual conference delegation. However, there is still hope that their voices will speak to the hundreds who do hold the power to amend our current doctrine if they are made aware of the manner in which this exclusive language affects the members of the LGBTQ community.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
Summary

The delegation of the North Alabama Conference to General Conference is currently meeting diligently to discuss the amendments and proposals that will be presented on the floor of our quadrennium meeting. Now is the time for action if the silenced LGBTQ community is going to find the voice of justice within our denomination. The prohibitive language of the Book of Discipline in regards to the LGBTQ community and the impact that Church law has had across the United Methodist Church when confronting issues of same-sex marriage and LGBTQ ordination has been presented in this chapter. We have also explored the contradictory nature of the current language that comprises our Church law and presented evidence of the seeds of change that are being sewn through Judicial Council decisions. Even within the geographical boundaries of the North Alabama Conference we have illustrated that there are clergy and laity who are willing to speak out against the current language of our Book of Discipline. To gain a clearer understanding of the importance of this ministry issue, we will now turn to work that experts, knowledgeable in their fields, have already performed by addressing different aspects of the project ranging from linguistics to hermeneutical perspectives.
CHAPTER III

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter we will explore this issue from different perspectives in order to gain a clearer understanding of the plight of the LGBTQ community through both a theological mindset and cross-disciplinary fields. The researcher will present empirical, theological, biblical, sociological, linguistic, scientific and historical perspectives, and evaluate the research findings in within these fields of study. The researcher will also include a working model of inclusive ministry created by another denomination that has intentionally reached out to the LGBTQ community in order to reconcile the community to the Body of Christ where they previously felt shunned. Finally, we will speculate how the SCOTUS decision reached in June 2015 might impact the delegations of the United Methodist Church as they gather to vote on Church law at the General Conference of 2016

Empirical Perspective

There have been multiple studies to evaluate societal responses to LGBTQ community issues in terms of both civil liberties as well as Church doctrine. Among these studies, The Pew Research Center, a religiously conservative agency, conducted a survey in April 2013 sampling a national representation of 1,197 self-identified LGBTQ
adults 18 years of age or older. The findings of this report include that 92% of those who took part in the survey feel that the secular world is becoming more accepting of the LGBTQ community, and that this is due to a few key factors: education, more members of the community being open about their sexuality and gender identity, people in authority advocating on behalf of the LGBTQ community, and family units becoming more normalized through awareness of the issue revolving around identity rather than "lifestyle choice." Despite these improvements, there is still a sense of stigma that revolves around the LGBTQ community, and those who participated in the survey have had overall negative experiences, including: estrangement from a family member or close friend, being threatened or physically attacked due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, being treated unfairly by an employer, being a victim of [derogatory] slurs or jokes, and (most importantly to this dissertation) being made to feel unwelcome in a place of worship. That last response is no outlier, either: a whopping 73% of respondents to the survey distributed reported religious exclusion.

The survey shows a negative correlation between religious institutions and the LGBTQ community. This correlation is explicitly illustrated by the measurement of "welcome" perceived by the LGBTQ community members affiliated with the various religious units identified in the questionnaire. A vast majority of those who participated in the survey identified religious groups as being "unfriendly." The “Muslim religion” (84%), the Mormon Church (83%), the Catholic Church (79%), and Evangelical Churches (73%) led the statistical analysis in being the most unfriendly toward the

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2 Ibid.
LGBTQ community, thereby resulting in a negative experience of religion.\(^3\) Within mainline Protestant denominations (including the United Methodist Church) and the "Jewish religion," 1 in 10 described these institutions as friendly while most remained neutral suggesting that while their experience was not necessarily negative, it was not welcoming, either. It is not surprising, then, that 48% of the LGBTQ participants surveyed did not affiliate with any religion. This percentage is more than double in comparison to 20% of the general population who are not affiliated with any religion. In younger generations, ages 18-35, this percentage rises to 67%.\(^4\)

Of the LGBTQ community who do have a religious affiliation, they reported attaching less importance to religion and attend worship less frequently than the percentage of religious affiliated adults in the general public. Also of interest is that 33% of religiously affiliated LGBTQ adults identify a conflict between the religious beliefs of the institution they attend and their sexual orientation or gender identity. It is a clear indication of the need for culturally based education among the religious institutions and a need for reform from within. The Pew Research survey compared this to the general public to demonstrate the role of religion in regards to attitudes towards the LGBTQ community. They found that 74% of White Evangelical Protestants and 55% of all adults with a religious affiliation claim that homosexuality conflicts with their religious beliefs.\(^5\)

Overall, the Pew Research survey demonstrated that the LGBTQ community overwhelmingly feels unwelcome within religious institutions across the United States.

\(^3\) The Pew Research Center used the terminology of "Muslim religion" rather than Islam and "Jewish religion" rather than Judaism.

\(^4\) "A Survey of LGBT Americans," Pew Research: Social & Demographic Trends. The Pew Research foundation does not clarify if the term "homosexuality" when used as conflicting with religious beliefs refers to in practice or in theory.

\(^5\) Ibid., chapter six, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/06/13/chapter-6-religion/. The Pew Research Center does not clarify in what manner homosexuality conflicts with religious beliefs, i.e. concept or practice, etc.
Among the Christian faiths, the conflict between religious beliefs and sexual orientation and gender identity is found in the language of denominational creed and heteronormative interpretation of scripture. If change is to take place and the Church is to become a more welcoming and hospitable institution for the LGBTQ community, it will be necessary to amend our church law and provide a new lens for scriptural interpretation.

**Linguistic Perspective**

Language aids in the social construction of norms used to define acceptable behavior and practices within particular cultures. Sociolinguistic studies suggest that the dominant power group in a society is able to control, subdue, and impress their worldview upon subcultures through these social constructs. The language of civil and criminal law is used to restrict deviant behavior and practices but legality is only one means through which those in power enculturate society. Acceptable language that demonstrates prejudice or privilege is a learned behavior that is perpetuated through the use of this language in the home, schools, government, and every visible platform that influences and shapes members of society. An example from our recent history that illustrates these two practices of exclusive language is segregation. Across the Southern United States the Jim Crow laws were state and local laws that enacted *de jure* racial segregation and restricted civil liberties and civil rights. In the Northern United States the practice of prejudice and privilege was *de facto* segregation. Both regions used language to exclude members of society according to socially constructed norms that

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viewed one race as inferior to the dominant power. The *de jure* and *de facto* language that restricts the liberties and rights of the LGBTQ community is both a secular and religious issue worthy of discussion, especially in light of laws that have been passed in North Carolina and Mississippi. These laws allow people to discriminate and withhold services from members of the LGBTQ community on the grounds that it violates their religious beliefs. For the purpose of this dissertation, however, we will look only at the divisive language of church law that serves the same purpose of exclusion of a subculture by the dominant power.

The use of exclusive language has been studied extensively by feminist theologians for well over a century. Rosemary Radford Ruether in her works *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology and Disputed Questions: On Being Christian*, Judith Plaskow in *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women’s Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Neibhor and Paul Tillich*, Sallie McFague in *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*, Margaret Fell in *Women’s Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures*, E.O. James in *The Cult of the Mother Goddess: An Anthropological and Documentary Study*, Mary Daly in *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy in Women’s Liberation*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *His Religion and Hers*, and many others have addressed the exclusionary tactics of language. From the particular gender language of God to the exclusion of feminine language in depicting members of the Body of Christ – language and the lack thereof in liturgy, scripture, worship, and theology reifies a patriarchal worldview that constructs a masculine norm. In a study

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8 Ibid.
9 Mississippi and North Carolina have passed Religious Freedom bills that allow businesses, on the grounds of religious freedom, to deny services to the LGBTQ community. Mississippi’s law allows business owners the right to fire employees as well.
conducted by the International Committee on English in Liturgy, the researchers identified that language is a conduit of self-perception. They state that, "the way one is named within the worshiping community – and whether one is named at all – could affect the way one lives the Christian life." Liturgical readings that refer to humanity as "mankind" or to "brothers" rather than "brothers and sisters" effectively exclude women by explicitly addressing the masculine. Exclusive language has historically influenced attitudes held by both women and men that feminine leadership in religious life is inferior to their masculine counterparts. The study recognizes that in order to rectify the past grievances and alter social perception of the church in regards to women that the language used in liturgy and worship must be modified to include the feminine. Further the study suggests that as the vernacular evolves in secular society our religious or "church talk" must also evolve in order to encompass and embrace all people. The study suggests that by excluding one person the entire church suffers and cannot experience the fullness of Christian community. Language used by the dominant power, men, has shaped the way that both women and men view the role of women in the church. The exclusion of feminine language in reference to God and one another allows for discriminatory practices that subjugate women and infer that if females would like to be closer to God they must become more masculine. Although this study was conducted to examine the exclusionary language that prohibited women from full and integral practices within the church, it is applicable to all persons.

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11 Ibid., 316.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 315.
The validity given to words used in religious liturgy, worship, scripture, and law is derived from those in power. Historically, Christians have given this authority to heterosexual males. In the tradition of the United Methodist Church this category becomes even more exclusive in nature – white, heterosexual males. All other races, genders, and sexual identities fall outside the scope of dominance and therefore, utilizing the methodology of semiotician Umberto Eco, these subcultures are subjected to and controlled by the heteronormative patriarchal worldview.\textsuperscript{16} This presupposition is based on the fact that language is a sign or gesture used as a means of communication that requires the sender and the one being addressed to have a common understanding of the language (or sign) in order for the transmission to be successful.\textsuperscript{17} In other words, cultures define a sign through social construction and acceptance. If a child is taught through home, school, church, and civil society that sexuality outside the heterosexual norm is deviant, then they are socially constructed to be accepting of language that excludes the LGBTQ community from both civil and religious liberties. In essence, words or signs are not actually defined but interpreted by the individual’s culture and social context.\textsuperscript{18}

Hans-Georg Gadamer explores a similar hermeneutical understanding of language through his elaboration on the “philosophical hermeneutic.” His concern is the methodology of how understanding occurs. According to Gadamer, the primary resource for interpretation is dialogue and therefore it cannot be reduced to the simplistic notion of

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{16}] Umberto Eco, \textit{Semiotics}, 27.
\item[\textsuperscript{17}] Ibid., 16.
\item[\textsuperscript{18}] Ibid., 85.
\end{itemize}
one subjective perspective. Central to this concept is the primacy of meaning. Rather than refuting the notion that reality is derived from nature and resistance to things that are unlike us or the idea that reality begins within the human being; his approach lies in discovering how things occur in relation to one another through the concept of disclosure. This allows Gadamer to escape the previously held understanding that human beings are given meaning through isolated perspectives and allows him to say that their meaning is derived through the relational way they interact with one another and the world. Scholar Charles E. Scott describes Gadamer’s concept of the relational world as humans who are “...always together in a richly complex fabric of meanings and the world itself happens as that fabric within which there are gaps, failures, and mystery as well as indubitable presence, change, and memory.” Because of the interdependent relationships of human beings with one another and the world, as their “understanding awareness” evolves, the world changes as well. This style of interpretation differs greatly from the notion that the meaning of human beings is transcendental to our surroundings. All action, understanding, and interpretation take place in the midst of relationships with other human beings and the world.

Gadamer regards language as a medium for dialogue through which understanding and interpretation are derived. Language is a finite expression that is somewhat limited in relation to the capacity of human understanding; this is why

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20 Ibid., 213.
21 Ibid.
Gadamer accentuates the importance of meaning over verbal expressions. The primacy of meaning emphasizes how historical and cultural transmission occurs rather than relying upon an undefined transhistorical substance or process like many of his predecessors. Human beings and the world are in a finite dialogue which acknowledges that cultural transmission reveals the limits and possibilities for human understanding. For Gadamer, the historical development of relationships among meanings (human beings, events, etc.) is the development of awareness-or human understanding. Therefore no one human being or group of humans is the author of understanding but takes part in the development through cultural and historical transmission through mediums (such as language) of dialogue.

As human beings who reach a level of understanding that allows us to see our historically, culturally, and socially constructed norms, we can use language to reflect the evolution of our customs and values. The meaning of church law and the language we use as a medium should reflect the reality of changes in the interrelated world. What was once a socially acceptable prohibition of relationships outside of the heterosexual norm has changed drastically over the course of the past century. Some would contend it is a reflection of previous historical understandings of sexual relationships but significant to this study is that it has changed within the timeframe of the language crafted for church law in the Book of Discipline. Gadamer’s theory is concerned with how the evolution of changes in the world have culturally transmitted a change in meaning to particular human

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24 Ibid., 419.
26 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 403.
27 Ibid., 445.
28 Ibid., 472.
29 Ibid., 466.
beings. This is achieved through dialogue where we understand that our present awareness is historically conditioned and that meaning is not derived from a sole perspective but through the relationships of human beings with one another and the world. A person’s hermeneutic is developed in the midst of other people’s hermeneutics and therefore we must take one another into account. Gadamer’s approach is not limited to a certain field but other linguistic approaches attend more closely to the social science perspective. Therefore let us turn toward the work of linguistic experts seeking a method to measure the meaning of language.

Linguistics expert Charles E. Osgood and his colleagues conducted a quantitative study in the late 1950s and continued to develop their theory over the course of the latter half of last century. Their theory supports the line of thought that suggests that prohibitive language has the power to scar and alienate a community. In their book *The Measurement of Meaning* they develop a tool to be used as an objective method to measure meaning called “the semantic differential.” It does not offer a specific test, but rather a cross-disciplinary technique of measurement—and for the purpose of this dissertation we will examine the work the authors have done in the fields of linguistics and attitudinal studies.

Osgood et al attempted to expand previous understandings in the field of linguistic meaning. Before their work, the tradition was split between adopting a sociological form of meaning that relied upon the response of the hearer to the speaker’s utterances and contextually analyzing the meaning when a given sign appears. The practical difficulties of the previous understandings of “meaning” were the stimulus for

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31 Ibid.
Osgood and his colleagues to develop the semantic differential. They were concerned with a working measurement that could be used in cross-disciplinary studies beginning with the assumption that the definition—or "meaning"—of a phrase or word could be derived from its antithesis. For example, the "meaning" of the word "good" can be derived from being "not evil." But the antithesis alone was not enough to provide a means of measurement, so they expanded upon this concept with the semantic differential.

The semantic differential assumes that any concept, be it a person or an abstract thought (which would pertain to Church law), may be described through linguistic adjectival opposites, such as good-bad or happy-unhappy. Osgood and his colleagues began by proposing a "semantic space, a region of some unknown dimensionality and Euclidian in character. Each semantic scale, defined by a pair of polar (opposite-in-meaning) adjectives, is assumed to represent a straight-line function that passes through the origin of this space, and a sample of such scales then represents a multi-dimensional space." In testing his theory, Osgood performed a factor analysis on a large sample of semantic differential scales. The results indicated three recurring attitudes that people employed when evaluating words, phrases, concepts and abstract ideas. These attitudes are characterized as: evaluation, potency and activity. The polar adjectival pairs that correlate with each of these attitudes are respectively: good-bad, strong-weak, and active-passive. After discovering the cross-cultural universality of these three recurring attitudes, Osgood and his colleagues expanded their study of the semantic differential to

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 52-55.
34 Ibid., 25-27.
35 Ibid., 125.
36 Ibid.
encompass a wider berth of polar adjectival opposites that can be used to evaluate language on a larger scale.\textsuperscript{37}

When applied to the language of the \textit{Book of Discipline}, the semantic differential can therefore be used to assume that current language used can be evaluated in such scaled terms as \textit{offensive} – \textit{non-offensive} or \textit{alienating} – \textit{welcoming}. Attitudinal measurement postulates that “attitudes” are learned and implicit, and therefore people are predisposed to respond in polar adjectival manners to linguistics. Working with a neutral ground of zero, intensity and direction can be measured to lend significance to the meaning of the person’s response.\textsuperscript{38} To make the test more sensitive, Osgood and his colleagues would suggest a Semantic Scale offering at least seven degrees of differential measurements for the individual surveying the material to make judgments about the linguistics they are presented. Validity and reliability is found in the test-retest method because in their studies they have found that individuals cannot often remember the rating that they applied in meaning to each linguistic study and it is assumed that the attitude is learned and implicit therefore the response will be the same.

Another linguistic theory that is pertinent to the work of this project is the Speech Act theory pioneered by J.L. Austin. Prior to his work, the positivist perspective of the field of linguistics minimized the function of words to mere descriptive statements, assertions, or propositions.\textsuperscript{39} Austin pointed out that we actually use words to \textit{do} things, such as marriage, betting, naming, bequeathing, Christening.\textsuperscript{40} Therefore, the power of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 189-199.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 14.
\end{itemize}
words and the basis of knowledge are found in language and its actions.\textsuperscript{41} The positivist perspective attributed words to solely functioning as truth-value statements, but Austin illustrates in his work that this particular function is only a small percentage of the overall use of utterances and one he labels as constatives.\textsuperscript{42} These constatives are used only in descriptions and assertions, although Austin later concedes that this differentiation might not be as clear and concise as he first assumed.\textsuperscript{43}

In an effort to expand beyond the historical concept of language being viewed as truth-value statements, Austin introduces performance utterances and performatives. He uses marriage to illustrate this concept. In the midst of a wedding ceremony, when a partner utters "I do" it is with this performance utterance that the couple is married. However, the context of the wedding ceremony is important in order for the performance utterance to function as "happy" or "felicitous."\textsuperscript{44} There are certain conditions that must be met and they include but are not limited to: an accepted conventional procedure that includes utterances by particular people in particular circumstances (such as a wedding ceremony, the partners, the priest/ officiator and witnesses), the procedure must be executed correctly and completely by all participants, and if thoughts and feelings are necessitated by the procedure then all participants must actually have those thoughts and feelings.\textsuperscript{45} If all conditions are met then the words, the meaning of the words, and the action that the words require will function as a speech act.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 12-13.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{44} Austin uses this terminology of "happy" and "felicitous" to describe a performative that successfully carries out an action with the proper intention.
\textsuperscript{45} Austin, \textit{How to do Things with Words}, 14-15.
Performatives can take the form of *explicit* and *implicit*. An explicit performative is a sentence or phrase that explicitly states the action that is being performed. Implicit performatives do not actually contain a performative verb, and therefore the only way to be clear to their meaning is by contextual analysis to understand the interlocutor's purpose. These speech acts function not as mere descriptors or truth-value assertions, but as a particular physical action to be taken. As Austin attempted to create a list of explicit performatives verbs he realized that further distinction was needed to distinguish between constatives and performatives utterances and in this process he coined a threefold understanding through the use of locution, illocution and perlocution. Locution is the act of "saying something" through certain utterances or phrases in particular constructs. The words and the function or action they suggest are determined through illocutionary acts, or "the act performed." The perlocutionary act is the effect of the locutionary and illocutionary acts. To provide clarity, Austin offers the following example:

1) Act (A) or Locution: He said to me "Shoot her!"
2) Act (B) or Illocution: He urged (or advised, ordered) me to shoot her.
3) Act (C) or Perlocution: He persuaded me (or made me) to shoot her.

The Illocutionary act is critical to understanding the Speech Act in that it makes clear the function or intention of the locutionary act and therefore leads to the consequential effect of the perlocutionary act.

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46 Ibid., 32-34.  
48 Ibid., 94.  
49 Ibid., 99.  
50 Ibid., 101.  
51 Ibid., 101-102.
J.L. Austin’s theory can be applied to statements from the *Book of Discipline*. Paragraph 161.F reads: “The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” The performance utterances within this statement are expositional performatives with implicit functions. Expositional performatives are constructed in the form of a statement, but there is an explicit performative verb “at its head which shows how the ‘statement’ is to be fitted into the context of conversation, interlocution, dialogue, or in general of exposition.” The use of the explicit performative verb *condone* directs the reader to context. The locutionary act in uttering “does not condone the practice of homosexuality” is given clarity through the illocutionary act of forbidding “the practice of homosexuality” within a given context (ordained elders, licensed local pastors, etc.) The locutionary and illocutionary acts have a consequential effect of the perlocutionary act of persuading (ordering) those who “practice homosexuality” from participating in the particular context. Thereby the mere presence and function of these words act to exclude a particular group of people.

Austin recognizes that while these expositional performatives have “quite satisfactory explicit utterances,” they are often linked with clauses that appear to be truth-value statements. Therefore it is necessary to test this example from the *Discipline* according to the four rules that Austin has proposed for pure explicit performatives utterances:

1) Does it make sense (or the same sense) to ask ‘But did he really?’? We cannot ask ‘Did he really bid him welcome?’ in the same sense as we ask ‘Did he really

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52 United Methodist Publishing House, *Discipline*, ¶ 161.F
53 Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 85.
54 Ibid., 86.
welcome him?’ or ‘Did he really criticize him?’ in the same sense as we ask ‘Did he really blame him?’ This is not a very good test because, for example, of the possibility of infelicities. We may ask, ‘Did he really marry?’ when he said ‘I do’, because there have been infelicities which made the marriage problematical. 2) Could he be doing the action without uttering the performative? 3) Could he do it deliberately?; could he be willing to do it? 4) Could it be literally false that, for example, I criticize (as distinct from blame) when I have said that I criticize? (It could, of course, be insincere always.)

In the case considered from §161.F: 1) We can ask, ‘But did the UMC really not condone the practice of homosexuality?’; 2) The UMC can be ‘not’ condoning without saying so; 3) One can say that ‘I deliberately do not condone the practice of homosexuality’; and 4) It can be literally false to say ‘I do not condone the practice of homosexuality.’ Therefore according to Austin’s theory, this statement can be ruled as unhappy or infelicitous because it did not pass the test for a pure explicit performative utterance.

Austin’s use of infelicitous implies that something has gone wrong between the connection of the action and the performative utterance. Since performative utterances by definition cannot hold a truth-value, rather than a statement being considered false, Austin’s theory would consider it “unhappy” because of the outcome’s incongruence with the original statement. The expositional performative could be explained as an assertion or constative but it becomes even more problematic when contextually analyzed in light of seemingly contrasting statements within §161.F, such as, “We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends.” This statement, when held in contention with the one prior, is explicitly in contradiction within the exposition. The function of the previous statement implicitly forbids any action of acceptance or approval of the behavior of the practice of homosexuality. Therefore, the

55 Ibid., 83-84.
56 Ibid., 86.
57 Austin, How To Do Things With Words, 11.
58 United Methodist Publishing House, Discipline, § 161.F
whole utterance appears to be derived as a ‘true-false’ assertion even with the presence of performative characteristics.\textsuperscript{59}

From Jim Crow laws and the conservative backlash of an evolving society to the work in the field of linguistics, it is obvious that words and how they are used can either include or exclude a group of people. This illustrates the need for linguistic evaluation within the doctrinal standards of the United Methodist Church. The work of feminist theologians and others has shown that social norms are constructed through the use of negative language and through the lack of positive language to encompass the entirety of the Church. Gadamer and Eco expound upon socialized understanding of words and their meaning. Osgood’s semantic differential provides a tool for measurement of meaning on an attitudinal scale that provides insight into the future of inclusive ministries as well as explains the current condition of the North Alabama Conference in regards to the language of the \textit{Book of Discipline}. Austin’s theory of performative utterances clearly point out the incongruent stance of the United Methodist Church, and illuminates where change is necessary to make the expositive performatives felicitous as well as consider the importance of our illocutionary acts.

Next, we will turn to the work previously conducted on the issues of the LGBTQ community from a theological perspective.

\textbf{Theological Perspective}

Deryn Guest is a Queer Theologian who specializes in the use of language or the suppression of language in the biblical and religious texts used to erase the validity and very existence of the LGBTQ community. She makes a case for the necessary use of

\textsuperscript{59} Austin, \textit{How To Do Things With Words}, 89.
the hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion in reading scripture and literature in order to “resist, rupture, reclaim and re-engage the text” so that the oppressive limitations of erasure and subversion of female homoeroticism can be reversed.60 Homoeroticism, as defined by Guest, is not exclusive to sexual relationships between same-sex people; it also encompasses intimate relationships whether or not sexual expression and desire is present.61 Although the majority of Guest’s work is from the lesbian-identified hermeneutic, due to the lens of hetero-suspicion, it is still useful and relevant for the entirety of the LGBTQ community.

The largest obstacle facing queer-identified hermeneutics within the biblical text and throughout historical literature is the status of invisibility. This is a truth that is comparable to many different lenses, most notably feminist theology. Rosemary Radford Ruether, a feminist theologian, is quick to point out that biblical resources for feminism do not question patriarchy as the social context of the Old and New Testaments. The biblical silence of the feminine voice, however, speaks volumes toward the critique of the patriarchy.62 Guest’s work affirms this notion by identifying the heteronormative implications of a patriarchal society that subjects and images women predominately into the roles of Mother and Wife, places female relationships in conflict and competition, and inflicts notions of gender-complementarity in order to erase female validity, objectify relationships between women, apply masculine stereotypes that infer the warrior/savior complex, and justify heterosexism as a normative ordained by God. Feminism and Guest’s hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion are

61 Ibid.
lenses that present resistance to the fallible and caricatured images of women and men in scripture. By drawing on biblical principles of patriarchal and hetero norms, these lenses also highlight both silenced characters and those who are visibly being excluded and alienated by the Church because of the language of doctrinal creed.\(^{63}\)

In order to understand the social, ethical, and cultural significance of reading with a hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion, we must recognize the strategies that have been used to obscure and suppress evidence of homoeroticism.\(^{64}\) The valorization of motherhood, the imaging of women as competitive rivals, objectified masculinity, and injunctions to comply with notions of gender-complementarity\(^{65}\) are the most notable modes of enculturation used within the “androcentric, heteropatriarchal framework of the story world” of biblical texts used to suppress relationships both between women and non-heteronormative relationships in general.\(^{66}\)

Guest presents a litany of evidence to support her claim of the erasure of female homoeroticism throughout literature and scripture. There was difficulty in accessing a voice and image within texts that support and validate female relationships until the latter half of the previous century. Even when there was celebration between women, the sensuality was often clouded with secrecy, shame, and forbiddance.\(^{67}\) Guest points out that one of the most notable and obvious instances of erasure can be found in Emily Dickinson’s letters published by her niece postmortem.\(^{68}\) Dickinson’s niece edited her

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 23.
\(^{64}\) Guest, “Resistance,” 112-130.
\(^{65}\) Ibid., 130.
\(^{66}\) Ibid., 123-132. Guest’s perspective of the suppressed relationships between women range from the homoerotic nature to strong female companionship rather than rivalry.
\(^{67}\) Ibid.
\(^{68}\) Ibid., 124.
letters to remove any indication of same-sex passion penned by the poet. Similar editing is present in other works both contemporary with Dickinson up until the latter half of the past century, which leads Guest to surmise that the obscurity and erasure of female homoeroticism, except in the form of lesbian pulp fiction, is connected with a social constructionist understanding of the world versus the essentialist worldview of homoeroticism. The former requires thinking of homosexuality not as an abstract thought but as same-sex relationships that have been socially and culturally constructed over the course of history; therefore, same-sex love has been present in all cultures and the concept that people are predisposed to love only one sex is inaccurate and cultivated by Western society. By contrast, the essentialist worldview insinuates that homosexuality, or heterosexuality, constitutes an immutable reality that is the “essence” not constructed by culture or society. Guest contends that our twenty-first century understanding of LGBTQ self-identified relationships cannot be projected on stories and characters from differing worldviews throughout time, space and culture. Consequently, when using this line of methodology, it presents a new voice, although still silenced, within literature and the biblical text.

The relationship between Hagar and Sarah exemplifies the strategy of the valorization of motherhood and imaging women as competitive rivals. In the unconditional covenant God made with Abraham (Abram), God promised to make Abraham’s offspring like the dust of the earth, so numerous that they could not even be counted. Obviously Sarah (Sarai), even in her advanced age, was to be a part of this

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69 Ibid.
70 Ruether, “Sexism,” 78.
71 Ibid.
72 Genesis 13:14-17 (New Revised Standard Version)
covenant—but in a moment of doubt she handed over her Egyptian slave, Hagar, to lie with Abraham in an attempt to fulfill God's promise for God. Sarah's barrenness was a source of shame because it emphasized how she was unable to fulfill the identity defining role of woman—mother. When Hagar conceived, there was bitterness between the women as Sarah complains to her husband that Hagar looked upon her with contempt. The turmoil only increases when God does fulfill God's promise and Sarah gives birth to Isaac. Abraham told Sarah to do what she wished to Hagar, and the harsh punishment she exacted upon the Egyptian slave resulted in Hagar running away with her son Ishmael. Even after the blessing the Lord gave to Hagar and Ishmael and after they returned to Abraham, the two women are written as bitter enemies vying for the attention of Abraham on behalf of their sons, despite the original intention of Hagar providing help to the situation. The women are placed in rivalry positions and their identity is only given meaning through the role of mother. The hermeneutic of heterosuspicion challenges the written account to access the invisible undertones of relationships between women that are less adversarial than the biblical account generally explicates. The questions we should ask are: Who could offer Sarah solace at her barrenness? To whom could the women turn in their intimate struggles? Who could comfort the women and give advice in regards to raising children? Guest suggests a closeness that is denied through the eyes of a patriarchal society.

Rabbi Amy Eilberg, a feminist theologian, reads the passage of Sarah and Hagar through a similar lens. Both women are already without status because of their gender

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73 Different interpreters have explained the aspect of the “contempt” Hagar felt from multiple lenses. Guest and others who consider this a text of terror would suggest that the “contempt” in Hagar’s eyes was due to the rape she suffered at the hands of her masters.
74 Genesis 16:1-6
and yet the author of Genesis pens their story as one of jealousy and spite.\textsuperscript{75} Eilberg identifies oppression as the motivation for Hagar’s anger and Sarah’s barrenness, the only means by which women were given worth, as something the woman could not transcend.\textsuperscript{76} The difference in Eilberg’s feminist approach and the lens of heterosuspicion is that she asks: what if the women had helped one another to overcome the unjust rules of a patriarchal society? Guest suggests a linguistic erasure of feminine collusion and camaraderie. Ruether focuses on the mistreatment of Hagar by her mistress as being another example of why, from her feminist perspective, no one group should be elevated above another. All those who are oppressed must be liberated and vindicated by God in order to critique the dominant systems of power.\textsuperscript{77} For Ruether, the silenced voices are important only from the aspect of acknowledging oppression more so than assuming the nature of relationships between the oppressed.\textsuperscript{78}

For Guest, however, portraying women as adversaries and natural competitive rivals rather than providing a focus on the co-operative relationship between women leads to the erasure of feminine homoeroticism within the text, replaced instead with women at odds with one another. This strategy is most often associated with Deuteronomic history where its editors and authors have highlighted jealousy, competition, and plotting between females as the normative relationships between women.\textsuperscript{79} Based on the assumption that a woman’s function in life is to provide children (preferably male children) for her husband, women are portrayed as vying

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Ruether, “Sexism,” 25.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Guest, “Resistance,” 140.
against one another to gain favor. Reading with a hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion critically challenges the text and gives recognition to the closeness of co-wives. In the context of the biblical patriarchal worldview, female bonding is a necessity; these women must rely upon one another for strength and support, especially when the male-female relationship is based solely on male sexual gratification. Guest is quick to point towards the masculine narrator of the biblical texts and how they often portrayed women as “the dangerous other.”

In the Genesis story, Sarah is the one who illustrates lack of faith in God’s promise and in the natural wily style of women, she convinces Abraham to take Hagar. When Hagar bears a child, she is illustrated as jealous and spiteful toward the other woman. These characteristics are negative and dangerous when it comes to challenging the covenant with God: they lack the necessary faith of Abraham. Guest suggests that the Near Eastern worldview practice of sexual segregation provided a space for women where female homoeroticism has been obscured, glossed over, or utterly ignored. A close intimate relationship between women, whether sexual or not, is completely excluded from the biblical text. Guest argues that this is a purposeful linguistic tactic used by author to reify the patriarchal, heteronormative worldview. When these stories are read from the queer-identified perspective, we are offered a glimpse into this silenced and secret world through women engaging in “acts of co-operation and collusion in order to resist male authority and control.”

Furthermore, Guest challenges readers and interpreters to resist the notion that the only viable option and desire of Israelite women was to serve in the roles of Mother

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80 Ibid., 144-145.
81 Ibid., 144.
82 Ibid.
and Wife. A majority of the imagery recorded in the biblical text, such as the stories of Rebecca and Leah or Tamar and Judah, reifies this assumption: inevitably, all women desire to be married to men and to fulfill their biological destiny by bearing male children. Guest suggests that this narrative of the female character is the imaging of “masculine desires on the feminine gender.”

The relationships between Naomi and Ruth and Deborah and Jael illustrate a muted presence of a new dynamic, hinting at a closeness and dependence on a feminine emotional support rather than the economic necessity purported by a patriarchal society. They each step into traditionally masculine roles of provider and protector, judge and warrior; they defy the “androcentric, heteropatriarchal framework of the story world.”

The overtly masculine stereotypes that portray the warrior and savior image of men are clearly present in the narrative of David. However: when the lens of a hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion is used in reading the story of the man who images God’s own heart, his relationship with Jonathan takes the shape of something more than a political covenant and a close, non-sexual friendship. The covenantal language used to describe their relationship is found in other places in the Hebrew Bible to describe relationships between people who were married to those of the opposite sex: “When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” And at the death of Jonathan, David recites the poetic lines, “I am distressed for you my brother, Jonathan; greatly beloved

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83 Ibid., 133-134.
84 Ibid., 131-132.
85 Ruth 1:1-4:22
86 Judges 4
88 I Samuel 18:1
were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.”89 In his book Jonathan Loved David, Tom Horner insists that the homoerotic relationship of the two men is given validity and support because of the nature of sexuality in the Near-Eastern Religions.90 Masculine homoeroticism was not frowned upon or seen as a demoralized venture; rather, it was embraced by nearby cultures.

Feminist theologian Athalya Brenner says that the erasure evidence of women actively resisting these oppressive roles is indicative of a different reality than is portrayed by the masculine perspective in the written text. Otherwise there would not be a need for “the injunctions of Genesis and the idealization of motherhood.”91 Rules are created for a reason; if something had never occurred, then there would be no purpose for forbidding that action. For example, the signs that read “no jake brakes” are common around small towns because of the loud noise that occurs when larger diesel trucks enact these brakes. Had large diesel trucks never used these brakes, there would have been no need for the law.92 The hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion brings to the forefront the life of a woman in Israelite society: as property, forced to share a husband with other wives and concubines, the focus of the relationship between husband and wife is to sexually gratify the male’s desires and to gain his favor by giving birth to sons.

The reality of this oppressive worldview is evidenced in the burial sites at En Gedi. Women who had multiple pregnancies died much younger than their male

89 II Samuel 1:26
91 Ibid., 133.
92 Cameron Howard, lecture notes, February 9, 2012.
counterparts did during that historical time period. A queer-identified hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion disrupts and challenges this language in consideration of the harsh realities on a woman’s health and longevity as a viable motivation to resist the assumptions of the valorization of motherhood. Through adoption of gathered orders of religious life—and other choices throughout history—women have continued to resist this oppressive mold.

Resistance to the gender roles inflicted upon women from the patriarchal biblical world is also present in the New Testament and within the Jesus narrative, particularly within the Gospel of Luke. Commonly referred to as the “women’s gospel,” the author of Luke challenges the patriarchal worldview and empowers the oppressed and those who live at the margins of society. In the narrative account of Martha and Mary, the latter takes on a traditional masculine role by sitting with the male disciples and Jesus as Martha prepares and serves the meal. When Martha complains that Mary has left her to do all the work and asks Jesus to tell her sister to fulfill the womanly role, Mary’s actions are not only defended by Jesus, but lifted up as the better option. Not all of the stereotypical roles subjected upon women through the patriarchal worldview are intrinsically bad. Modern self-identified lesbian women are reclaiming motherhood as a choice and are able to challenge the language of the heteronormative patriarchy. Guest says it is through the principle of resistance in combination with the principle of reclamation that we are able to “disturb the valorization of marriage and motherhood

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93 Guest, “Resistance,” 133.
94 The Desert Mothers and other secluded and open gatherings of religious orders were a way for women to forgo the assumed roles of Wife and Mother as they became the brides of Christ and took vows of celibacy.
95 Guest, “Resistance,” 133.
96 Luke 10: 38-42
that erases female homoeroticism, thereby creating a multi-headed approach to this issue." 

The most overt act of erasure of homoeroticism is in the presentation of gender-sex complementarity as God-ordained. The Yahwist account of creation found in Genesis is included within the texts of terror, used to suppress and oppress people outside the heteronormative sexuality spectrum. These injunctions claim that God has ordained as normative the heteropatriarchal society, and also shove women back into the primary social role of birthing children. Despite the Yahwist creation story’s use as a heteronormative injunction, it does have its queer elements. The existence of the text seems to display a certain amount of insecurity about the woman’s desire for the man; otherwise it would not be necessary for the male narrator to insist upon that desire as something that God ordains. The context of the scripture is written amongst the curses and punishments as a consequence of Eve’s rebellion and her punishment is that her husband would rule over her. Guest notes that the narrator recognizes that women might wish to refuse to submit to the terms of the “heterosexual contract,” and therefore images this desire upon the woman to force her into submission.

Guest’s theological perspective is difficult to prove because erasure leaves behind no written evidence. As with feminine theology, the silent voices are heard through the hermeneutic of the reader. She is a Queer theologian who points toward linguistic suppression to support that there is more going on in the text than meets the eye. The hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion is simply a tool for scriptural interpretation that looks for a place for the LGBTQ community within the context of the Bible.

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97 Guest, “Resistance,” 142.
98 Ibid.
Applications Within The United Methodist Church Doctrine

The heteropatriarchal framework of the United Methodist Church doctrine reifies the heteronormative reading of scripture and continues to engage in erasure and obscurity of the LGBTQ voice. The contradictory statements within the Book of Discipline illustrate that there are multiple perspectives within the denomination, each vying for their views to take precedent in our church law. The point-of-view that purports the texts of terror as a means to objectify this community refuses to move beyond a literal lens of scriptural interpretation. Perhaps providing a new hermeneutic by which to study the erasure of homoeroticism within the Biblical text will allow the United Methodist Church to reach a consensus that we should embrace our non-heteronormative fellow sisters and brothers. This lens accentuates the patriarchal worldview of the authors of scripture and requires a contextual reading that will highlight the problematic nature of our church doctrine.

It is only by critically engaging the biblical text and resisting the current normative language that places men and women in certain roles that we can truly be open to the fullness of God’s intention for humanity. We must resist the imaging and projecting of desire as well as the injunctions of heteronormative gender-complementarity. Through resistance we can recognize the voices of the silenced LGBTQ members of the United Methodist Church and see one another as sisters and brothers whose human dignity is derived from God.

Deryn Guest’s work in the field of Queer Theology lends support to the argument that language can be used to isolate a community and deny people their dignity and fullness of humanity. As illustrated in her exegetical work, when erasure of
homoeroticism occurs by utterly ignoring a group of people, we rob them of their existence in history. Her hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion calls into question whether or not the Biblical narrative supports the prohibitive language in the Book of Discipline and will be explored more in depth through the lens of the biblical perspective.

The need for amending doctrinal standards is not a new concept, but often there is resistance to altering historical social tradition. George A. Lindbeck’s The Nature of Doctrine proposes a lens for rethinking theology that allows for intratextuality in interpreting doctrine and dogma that does not require negating historical faith and belief.99 First and foremost, Lindbeck’s thrusts are driven by ecumenism in light of theological theories trending in the fields of religion. This focuses on the identity and self-understanding of the Christian community and how past grievances, present scandal, and future controversy might have an effect on the way the Church relates to the modern world.

Lindbeck suggests that there have been two main methods of understanding doctrine: the cognitive-propositional approach and the experiential-expressivist approach. The former is mostly concerned with verifiable facts, truth claims, and proving that particular doctrines hold metaphysical truth.100 The latter is a symbolist approach concerned with finding the commonality of human experience and interprets doctrine at a fundamental level that can be experienced across religions through “inner feelings, attitudes or existential orientations” which are expressed in doctrines.101 Ultimately, Lindbeck lends a cultural-linguistic understanding to Christianity, where

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100 Ibid., 2.
101 Ibid.
religion is examined through the lens of language and doctrine resembles the nature of grammatical rules. Within this framework, religion shapes human experience, human understanding of self, and the perception of the world. From this perspective, the Church does not need to capitulate in order to reconcile doctrinal difference, but should adopt the social sciences to help interpret and articulate doctrine in more effective ways. When doctrines are viewed as “rules” in certain cases, if not in every circumstance, doctrines can be reconciled despite their historical oppositional status. Furthermore, the Church does not need to resign from the secular world; instead it can enter into dialogue without assimilation or accommodation because the Church's anthropological, sociological, and philosophical cross-disciplinary studies are part of the comprehensive religiosity that structures human experience and understanding of self.

This cultural-linguistic approach recognizes that practical doctrines function more like rules than truth claims or expressive symbols. Therefore they can be categorized as unconditionally or conditionally necessary, as permanent or temporary, and/or as reversible or irreversible. Lindbeck illustrates unconditional necessity of a doctrinal rule as the law of love: unconditionally, Christians are supposed to always love God and neighbor. A conditional doctrine would be Christian pacifism where abstaining from war is not always obligatory to Christian faith.

All unconditional doctrines are viewed as permanent but conditional doctrines can be either permanent or temporary. One can argue that Lindbeck suggests, in his discussion of sexual ethics, that the doctrines that limit the LGBTQ community from

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102 Ibid., 4.
103 Ibid., 18.
104 Ibid., 70.
105 Ibid., 72.
participating fully in the life of the United Methodist Church have been “abrogated by developments in science, technology, society and culture.” In the Scientific Perspective section of this chapter, we will explore more in depth the discoveries of the “gay gene” that suggest that certain people are born with a predisposed inclination to be sexually attracted to the same sex. But it is also important to note the impact of the social constructivism aspect of Queer theology that suggests same-sex relationships have been socially constructed across all time and cultures. Therefore the socially acceptable view of sexuality is what shapes theology and religion. The exclusion of the LGBTQ community then becomes a question about the condition of doctrine that finds that the “practice of homosexuality is not compatible with Christian teaching.” In light of scientific discoveries of nature versus nurture (this too will be examined in depth in the scientific perspectives portion of this chapter) and in advancements in culture and society recognizing sexuality as an identity and not a lifestyle choice, this practical doctrine is conditional and therefore should be examined closer to decide if it is reversible or irreversible.

A similar historical shift in culture and society that led to a change in doctrine is the condemnation of slavery—now understood as an irreversible practical doctrine across all Christian traditions. It was once believed that the institution of slavery was an unavoidable reality that was supported by biblical traditions and therefore accepted as compatible with Christian teaching. As culture and society evolved, it became clear that viable economies could be supported without placing the burden on the backs of a select group of people and that God’s will did not include a limited worldview of slave labor.

106 Ibid., 71.
for any of God’s people. This historical revelation did not require a new biblical mandate to reverse this prior understanding of doctrine and create a new irreversible stance against the institution of slavery.

From this perspective, Benjamin A. Simpson presents a theological “mapping” of the debate on homosexuality in the United Methodist Church that began with the addition of “the practice of homosexuality” to the *Book of Discipline* in 1972. In his presentation of the moral landscape of this debate, he notes that those who are seeking to remove any negative language about homosexuality from Church law contend that society and culture have evolved more swiftly than the Church on these pressing matters that are oppressive, exclusionary, and hateful toward the LGBTQ community. The other side of the argument is that prohibition of same-sex relationships cannot be changed due to scripture and longstanding Church tradition. Are these points-of-view reconcilable without capitulation?

In testing this cultural-linguistic theory, the starting point is to recognize that the United Methodist Church’s stance on homosexuality is similar to doctrine that has been derived from cultic sensibility rather than systematic reflection, such as the case that George Lindbeck studied on Marian dogmas of Immaculate conception and the Assumption. Proponents of the prohibition of same-sex relationships would contend that because of the supremacy of scripture and Christian tradition this doctrine is irreversible; opponents would say that in light of scientific, cultural, and societal

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109 Ibid., 3.

110 Lindbeck, *The Nature*, 82.
advancements, in addition to new understandings of scripture, that it is reversible indeed.

The irreversible stance derives from the notion that Godly-inspired scripture is either literal, infallible, or lacking human agency in interpretation: the historical context is irrelevant if the prohibition of homosexuality is expressed within the biblical text and accepted by Christians for 2000 years as being an abomination. Therefore, the grammar of Church doctrine is justified in reiterating the incompatibility of homosexuality with Christian teaching. There is not a call to ostracize or shun people who are “practicing homosexuals” from most aspects of the church. Their standard of living is seen as not holy enough to enter into Ordained ministry, and the United Methodist Church will not marry same-sex couples, but they are welcomed to worship, be baptized, and partake in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

The reversible side of the debate is concerned with the human agency involved in the writing, translation, and interpretation of scripture. Although inspired by God, the Holy Spirit continues to reveal to us what our forefathers and foremothers considered to be acceptable laws are no longer acceptable, such as slavery and the subjugation of women. Society’s construction of norms as “undeniable truth” does not merit a normative “universal truth” simply due to the longevity of societal acceptance; in this way, historical context and interpretational lenses are essential to this group’s understanding of doctrine. In viewing God as a God who is always on the side of the oppressed, excluding LGBTQ members from Ordination and marriage would place God against the current language in the Book of Discipline because of the very presence of ostracization and exclusion. The difficulty arises in the inability to capitulate this side
of the debate. Reconciliation is therefore impossible unless the doctrine is reversed because LGBTQ members cannot enter into true dialogue seeking a common ground when their very identity is at stake.

However, Lindbeck provides a path for the LGBTQ community to bring their concerns to the United Methodist Church and address the oppressive nature of their current polity. The cultural-linguistic approach to doctrine recognizes that growth in knowledge in culture and society has historically led to the necessary action of identifying conditional statements of dogma and faith and allowed for a reversal of practical doctrine. Ignorance to the identity of a person or community of persons is not an acceptable reason to exclude a community from fully participating in the life of the Church. The only way forward, then, is to amend the prohibitive language in the *Book of Discipline* in order to invite the LGBTQ community into the fullness of participation in the life of the Church. But in an effort to allow the opponents a voice, we will examine some of their arguments through the lenses of science and biblical interpretation.

**Scientific Perspective**

The groups that oppose altering Church law in order to embrace and welcome the LGBTQ community into full participation within the United Methodist Church have expressed several reasons for their position that have been previously addressed in this dissertation. A notable reason for their hesitation in moving forward is the notion that homosexuality is the "choice" of the individual as opposed to the idea that men and women are born with a predetermined sexuality. Scientific research in the
field of genetics has made strides to identify and strengthen the case of “nature” versus “nurture” in regards to human sexuality. The findings of this research help lend support to George Lindbeck’s claim that Church doctrine must be open for reevaluation with new developments in the fields of science and culture. Therefore, the Book of Discipline’s prohibitive language should be considered a reversible doctrine.

Geneticist Dean Hamer conducted a study in 1993 that launched a new field of research studies in search of the elusive “gay gene.” He examined 76 pairs of gay brothers through the lens of linkage analysis. This type of analysis utilizes genetic markers to indicate the general area on the chromosome that particular traits typically reside. In the publication of his research, Hamer identifies the twenty-two genetic markers he studied on an area of the X chromosome. There were five markers in a region of the chromosome (Xq28) that were present in 83% of the studies’ participants. These findings led to Hamer’s claim that male homosexuality is derived, at least in part, by genetics. Since this original study was conducted, Hamer’s results have been replicated by researchers at Northwestern University and NorthShore University HealthSystem Research Institute in Evanston, Illinois. Psychiatrist Alan Sanders of NorthShore University HealthSystem Research Institute recruited 409 pairs of brothers and conducted the same study through linkage analysis. When his study was published

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112 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
in 2014, Sanders indicated two strong links to homosexuality on different chromosomes that suggests there is not simply "one gene" at work.\textsuperscript{115}

In continuation with these studies, Sanders is using the same 409 brother pairings and employing a newer analysis that can examine hundreds of small genetic variations at a time called "genomewide association study."\textsuperscript{116} A genome is an organism's complete set of DNA, including all of its genes.\textsuperscript{117} In replicating Hamer’s previous study, Sanders discovered that the original genetic marker identified in 1993, Xq28, is not as reliable as a genetic marker identified through studies in 2005 on Chromosome 8, 8q12.\textsuperscript{118} In examining the DNA samples collected from the 409 participants, the only trait common to each person involved was being gay. Therefore any genetic marker consistently found in the same genetic locations would be most likely associated with sexual orientation.\textsuperscript{119} This type of analysis allows geneticists to find associations without one single genetic marker by examining a large sample of people that share one particular trait. By comparing the genetic findings of the group being studied to a control group that does not share that particular trait (in this case, homosexuality) geneticists can study how the two group's genomes differ. Sanders and other researchers still contend that even in identifying a genetic quality shared by homosexual men does not completely dispel the notion that nurture, or environment, has an influence on the development of this genetic marker.\textsuperscript{120}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{115} Ibid.
\bibitem{116} Williams, “Genetics,” 13.
\bibitem{117} Ibid.
\bibitem{119} Ibid.
\bibitem{120} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
Because of the complex nature of human sexuality, Eleanor Whiteway and Denis Alexander, Researchers at the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion at St. Edmund's College, conducted a study of same-sex attraction that explores different contributing factors to the etiology of sexuality, including biology and behavioral science.¹²¹ For their purpose of their research, Whiteway and Alexander define sexual attraction as “erotic desire experienced towards other individuals.”¹²² However, they recognize that attraction is a continuous variable that exists along a spectrum ranging from exclusive attraction to the opposite sex to exclusive attraction to the same-sex.¹²³ Along this continuum there are factors such as sexual behavior, sexual fantasy, and self-identity that contribute to the individual’s sexual orientation.

Whiteway and Alexander have concluded that a straightforward statistical analysis of twin studies that are seeking a genetic etiology of same-sex attraction supports the biological influence, yet their results are inconclusive. They claim that the heritability values are inconsistent among studies with large confidence intervals.¹²⁴ Heritability is a statistical tool that measures the proportion of variance of a particular genetic trait within a particular population.¹²⁵ This claim leads the researchers to assume that while genetics may play a part in the causality of same-sex attraction, a larger contributing factor is environmental influence. However, they do identify that in twin studies all non-genetic factors, including other biological variables such as hormones, are considered environmental influences.¹²⁶

¹²² Ibid., 18.
¹²³ Ibid.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 29.
¹²⁵ Ibid., 28.
¹²⁶ Ibid., 30.
The primary conclusion of their study is that there is not one specific genetic variant nor particular scientific causality that is sufficient to explain the etiology of same-sex attraction.\textsuperscript{127} The complexity of sexual attraction is influenced by multiple factors, both biological and cultural. Therefore shared variations in genetics are still subject to environmental influence in developing same-sex attraction. Regardless, Whiteway and Alexander are careful not to reduce their findings to something as simple as “choice,” and implore Christian communities to recognize the complexity of human sexuality rather than assuming a simplistic notion.\textsuperscript{128}

**Biblical Perspective**

The opposition against altering church law often presents its argument from a particular Biblical interpretation perspective. Opponents’ take on whether human sexuality is a choice or a genetic trait is that biblical language explicitly forbids certain genres of sexual relationships. The LGBTQ community is either choosing to “live in sin,” or else its members are not resisting a genetic disposition that predisposes them to be inclined to sexual attraction of the same sex. The Methodist or Wesleyan Quadrilateral, coined by Wesleyan theologian Albert Outler, utilizes the lenses of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience as a means for discernment in both academia and Christian living. The interpretation of scripture, however, always holds primacy. Therefore it will be necessary to address the biblical perspective in order to provide evidence that may convince the United Methodist Church of the need to remove prohibitive and detrimental language to the LGBTQ community from church law.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
In order to understand the perspective of the opponents, we will first turn to scriptures used to condemn the practice of homosexuality. It is important to note that it is not the existence of scripture that speaks explicitly about the issue of homosexuality that is being contested between both parties involved in the discussion of same-sex relationships. It is rather the interpretation and application of scripture which can differ from denomination to denomination—as well as among individuals. The staunchest stance most commonly articulated by the opponents such as Dr. Scott Lively is that there is very little room for debate, and that the only way to negate the implications of scripture is to reject the authority of God’s word. In this school of thought, the only option is to call sin by its name and seek to counsel so-called "sinners" in living out a life of holiness and purity.¹²⁹

The other side of the coin is that God’s word is a living word, and that the Holy Spirit continues to reveal the Triune God to us through the use of scripture but also through the unveiling of the sins of the past when we have incorrectly used scripture to exclude communities of people. As the secular world demonstrates for the Church that love can be all encompassing and accepting, we must examine our laws, carefully discern scripture, and be aware of how we use language to include and exclude people from the love of the Church. The United Methodist Church recognizes the Bible as the inspired word of God, which requires prayerful interpretation and guidance from the Holy Spirit. We therefore do not hold the Bible infallible nor do we utilize a literal interpretation of scripture because we are knowledgeable of contextual relevance, human agency in editing, authorship, translation, and interpretational hermeneutics.

Two of the scriptures most often quoted are found within the Holiness Codes in the book of Leviticus.\textsuperscript{130} Leviticus 18:22 reads, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" and 20:13, "If a man lies with a male as if with a woman; both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them." Contextually, these two scriptures are found within a litany of laws that are clearly identified as admonishments against practices involved in cultic worship.\textsuperscript{131} The verses are also very difficult to translate despite the belief that they are straightforward and insist upon the abomination of all male-male sexual relationships. The Hebraic phrasing is found nowhere else within the entire Hebrew Bible and it translates awkwardly, requiring a fair amount of human agency in interpreting the meaning of the text. There are at least two veins of thought that circulate around these two scriptures. One emphasizes that throughout the entirety of the Holiness Code, Yahweh specifically states three times that the rules being set forth are to prevent the Israelites from following the behavior of the Egyptians and Canaanites.\textsuperscript{132} The other focuses on the intertextual analysis, which brings to light that every other contextual sexual prohibition is regarding incestuous relationships; therefore it is logical to assume that these verses are specifically addressing male-male

\textsuperscript{130} Life Journey Church in an inclusive church started in 1990 as an intentional community that welcomed refuge to the LGBTQ community. One of their vision projects asked the question, "Would Jesus Discriminate?" From this question they developed a series of biblical contextual interpretation to delve into the scriptures that those who oppose the LGBTQ community use to support discrimination. I have selected some of the same scriptures for the Biblical Perspectives section. To learn more about the Life Journey Church and their mission the website is: http://lifejourney.church/.

\textsuperscript{131} K Renato Ling, "The 'Lying's' of a Woman: Male-Male Incest in Leviticus 18:22," \textit{Theology and Sexuality} 15, no. 2 (May 2009), 231-250.

incest.\textsuperscript{133} We will examine these two interpretational perspectives in more depth in order to provide evidence that the prohibitive nature of the Holiness Code has been misconstrued and used to the detriment of the LGBTQ community.

Biblical historians, including Richard C. Steiner, have conducted extensive studies of the Canaanite and Near Eastern Religions that are historically contemporary with the Israelites at the time that is attributed to the penning of Leviticus. These religions often included fertility rites consisting of sexual rituals thought to bring the blessings of the Canaanite god Molech or the Egyptian god Apis upon their livestock and crops.\textsuperscript{134} These rituals included incest, prostitution, bestiality, and homosexual intercourse.\textsuperscript{135} The Egyptians and Canaanites both believed that the gods of livestock and prosperity worked alongside the goddess of love and fertility known to Egyptians as Astarte/Ishtar and Canaanites as Asherah.\textsuperscript{136} Within her temples were special male priests; among the Egyptians the priests were referred to as assinu and believed to possess special powers.\textsuperscript{137} Intimate contact with the assinu was believed to ward off evil, promote good luck, and gain the goddess’s favor. Semen, which was viewed the very essence of life, was to be deposited into the goddess through the vessel of the mortal assinu, which guaranteed fruitful crops, multiplying blessings among livestock, and immortality in the afterlife.\textsuperscript{138}

In light of the historical and contextual setting of the Holiness Code, it is not beyond assumption that the specific abomination is more in line with cultic pagan

\textsuperscript{133} Ling, “The Lyings of a Woman,” 239-241.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} Greenberg, \textit{The Construction}, 98.
\textsuperscript{137} Steiner, “Rise and Fall,” 521.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
idolatry practices of temple prostitution like the aforementioned practices of fertilization of the assi nu, than with the loving relationships between same-sex couples in the 21st century. Leviticus 18:3 reads, “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes.” Chapter 20 specifies an injunction against the pagan practices of Molech that brought blessings upon livestock and crops. In order to understand this prohibitive language as a law applicable to our modern culture, it must be stripped from its historical context. Contextually, all of the Hebrew scriptures quoted by the opposition are in reference to idolatry, pagan cultic practices (the Holiness Codes), and the abeyance of hospitality (the story of Sodom and Gomorrah).

The other approach we will use to examine these verses in Leviticus focuses on the difficulty in translation and intertextual analysis that specifically identifies the prohibitive language as forbiddance of male-male incest. The pericope of the Holiness Codes specifically addresses almost every form of incest between males and their female relatives. When read in context, continuity suggests that the act spoken of in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 is speaking of incest between males and their male relatives. Most English translations are abrupt and insinuate that there is no room for debate on the straightforwardness of the text. Theologian K. Renato Ling argues that a close examination of the different choices of the use of the phrase “have sex” or the confusion between “male” and “man” across the English versions of the Bible is

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139 Ibid., 523.
140 Ibid.
141 Judges 19:22-23; 1 Kings 14:24, 15:12, 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7
further proof of the continuing difficulty of translation when addressing these scriptures.\textsuperscript{143} In proving his point, Ling studies the Hebrew Bible and points to the fact that many of the words used in different English translations are nowhere to be found in the original text. He offers a few translations as follows:

\textit{You shall not lie with a man as with a woman. It is an abomination} (NKJV, NRSV).

\textit{You shall not lie with a male as with a female. That would be loathsome} (JM).

\textit{Do not have sex with a man as you would have sex with a woman. I hate that} (NLB).

\textit{It is disgusting for a man to have sex with another man} (CEV)

In essence, translators have added words that adhere to their interpretation of the text, which could drastically differ from the author’s unknown original intent.\textsuperscript{144} Whether in legalistic terminology or historical criticism, original intent is difficult to determine and assumes that there is one, unified intent behind a text. A biblical literalist would find difficulty in harmonizing the broken Hebraic phrasing with human agency in interpretation. But according to Ling, the Masoretic tradition holds that the original text for Leviticus 18:22 would literally translate as: with (a) male you shall not lie (the) lyings (of a) woman. (An) abomination (is) that.\textsuperscript{145} The parenthetical additions are still only implied, not present in the original Hebrew. It is clear that the meaning of this verse is not straightforward or easily translated. It could just as easily, when considered in context, be reiterating the abomination of male-male incest as it has also forbade male-female incest in surrounding verses. Therefore we must

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 236.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 231.
acknowledge the human agency that has been utilized in our modern understanding and translations of this text.

When the Hebrew is particularly difficult to translate, linguists look toward contextual clues (as noted above) to give meaning to the text. In the case of the Holiness Code, the context points toward incest. Ling points out that Leviticus 18 deals with various types of sexual relationships that have one common thread: incest. Among the condemnations: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father or mother, your father's wife, your sister, your granddaughter, your aunt or uncle, your sister-in-law (until your wife dies), a mother and daughter" (vv.7-18). The men of the Hebrew people are being warned against approaching any of their near kinsmen for sexual relationships. Ling proposes that the argument is strengthened when Leviticus 18 is read in conjunction with Leviticus 20, and that a more appropriate reading would be: "Sexual intercourse with a close male relative should be just as abominable to you as incestuous relationships with female relatives."

In conclusion, Ling reminds the readers that while for a very long time, biblical translators and commentators have assumed that Leviticus 18:22 forbids all sexual relationships between two men, it was only as recently as the 20th century that this scope has been limited to anal penetration. The opacity of the Hebrew makes it difficult to interpret the author's intent. Tradition has held that these particular scriptures are explicitly forbidding sexual relationships between males but reason has already illustrated that there are multiple understandings that can be derived from the

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146 Ibid., 243.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid., 245.
149 Ibid., 248.
text. We are also aware that when reason is applied to tradition we often see where misapplication of the biblical text has worked toward the oppression of groups of people such as in the case of slavery. Therefore to use this text as a prohibition against the romantic and erotic relationships of the LGBTQ community is not a valid argument for maintaining detrimental language and barring the community’s full participation in the life and Christian experience of the United Methodist Church.

The New Testament texts used to condemn homosexuality also require “proof-texting”, or removing the scripture from its context. For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, certain common Greek words have been translated strangely into [English]. In the Corinthians text, the Greek word malakoi literally means “soft” but is translated as “effeminate,” “male prostitute,” or “pervert.” Many scholars agree that the reference is actually a terminology for those who are “weak in faith” and those who “use and abuse power to obtain sex.”

Malakoi is only used in reference to morality within the Biblical text in 1 Corinthians 6:9. When used in this manner in other Greek writings, the word generally referred to laziness, degeneracy, decadence, or lack of courage. The patriarchal Biblical worldview allowed for misogynistic perspectives and therefore the connotation could easily be understood as meaning “soft like a woman.” Jack Rogers, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Church, dispels this myth by accentuating the difference between ancient and modern notions of effeminate

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150 The translations are the KJV, NRSV and CEV respectively for the English words chosen for the Greek word malakoi.
151 Jack Bartlett Rogers, Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009) 15.
152 Jeff Miner and John Tyler Comoley, The Children are Free: Re-examining the Biblical Evidence on Same-Sex Relationships (Sarasota: Jesus Metropolitan Community Church Press, 2002), 56.
qualities. Paul's concern was with moral weakness and condemning men who were vain, fearful and self-indulgent. This understanding stems from a historical perspective of effeminacy held by first-century Roman Culture. To be "woman-like" was to be more interested in pleasure-seeking and posturing than in working. Another key word that is used in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and also found in 1 Timothy 1:10 is the Greek word *arsenokoitai*. This obscure word, only found twice in the Bible, has been translated as "sodomites," "homosexuals" and in the KJV is rendered "abusers of themselves with mankind." Because this word is so rare and there is very little evidence of it appearing in any other Greek writings of the time, scholars have had to use modern human agency to surmise a meaning. One of the techniques employed by translators was to examine the root words *arrhen*, meaning "male," and *koite*, meaning "bed." Since women were not mentioned, these scholars surmise exclusive male illicit activity. This technique is clearly subjective to the scholar.

Another method to understand the meaning behind the term *arsenokoitai* is to examine subsequent writings after Paul's letter. Jeff Miner and John Tyler Connooley are theologians and in their book *The Children are Free: Re-examining the Biblical Evidence on Same-Sex Relationships*, their word study of *arsenokoitai* led them to the writings of Clement of Alexandria and John Chrysostom. These two early church authors address the subject of homosexuality and yet the word *arsenokoitai* only appears when they are quoting 1 Corinthians 6. Miner and Connooley surmise that this

153 Ibid.
154 Miner and Connooley, *The Children are Free*, 72.
155 Ibid., 61. "Sodomites" is the NRSV translation and "homosexuals" is from the CEV.
156 Ibid., 73.
suggests they did not believe Paul’s term referred to homosexual behavior. The same holds true for other Greek writings of the time, and therefore Rogers believes if Paul wanted to refer to homosexual sex or to one of the partners in gay-male sex he would have used other common and well-known words rather than leave ambiguous instructions. Therefore it is safe to assume that Paul was referring to a more obscure type of behavior.

In order to provide evidence for this assumption, Miner and Connoley delve into the 73 times that arsenokoitai is used in Greek literature up to six centuries after the writings of Paul. Almost every instance is similar to Paul’s usage of the word, appearing in a list of sins without any further context. Two exceptions are references to Zeus abducting and raping Ganymede, a young boy, and the legend of Naas. This legend is based in the Garden of Eden where the serpent is transfigured into a beast called Naas who uses sexual relationships with both Adam and Eve to gain power over the couple and destroy them. In the legend, Naas is said to have taken Adam like a young boy and his sin is identified as arsenokoitai. Miner and Connoley conclude that these examples lend credence to Paul’s use of the word arsenokoitai to actually mean when one male abuses his superior power in order to take sexual advantage over another. This understanding is supported by the NRSV English translation choice of arsenokoitai, “sodomite.” The men of Sodom are the ultimate example of sexual aggression, oppression, and abeyance of hospitality.

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157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid., 83. There are no known uses of the word arsenokoitai prior to Paul’s letter to the Corinthians.
160 Rogers, Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality, 95-104.
161 Ibid.
162 Miner and Connoley, The Children are Free, 26.
Etymology provides further evidence to surmise Paul’s meaning of the word *arsenokoitai*. When tracing the origins of the word, scholars have noted that the two Greek words appear next to one another in the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 20:13.\(^{163}\) Therefore it is likely that Paul was referring to the same behavior prohibited in the Holiness Codes. As mentioned in the discussion of Hebrew Bible, Leviticus 20:13 was mostly concerned with cultic practices of the Egyptians and the Canaanites. If Paul did derive the word *arsenokoitai* from this particular text then this evidence would support the idea that the behavior he was actually prohibiting was the Roman cultic practices of older men in power forcing themselves upon and taking advantage of young boys.\(^{164}\) Whether or not we can make this assumption, we can conclude that Paul’s terminology does not prohibit or label a loving relationship between two people of the same sex, and therefore these texts cannot be used to prohibit the acceptance of the LGBTQ community or condone the use of the language of the current church law of the United Methodist Church.

In presenting the biblical perspective, there is also evidence that supports the LGBTQ community and their plight. For the purpose of this project, we have selected a canon within the biblical canon as the life and words of Jesus of Nazareth, particularly as in recorded in the Gospel of Luke. There are several scriptural references that refer to how God identifies with the outcasts of society. The liberating words of Mary’s *Magnificat* lyrically illustrate God’s preferential option for the outcasts and those on the margins of society. “...he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and

\(^{163}\) Ibid., 71.
\(^{164}\) Ibid.
lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." The Christ child of Luke's gospel was not born to usher in more of the same but to bring a radical change that altered the landscape of power. When Mary and Joseph were turned away from the inn, the humble cradle of Jesus was an animal's feeding trough and the first to receive the angelic herald of the Messiah's birth were the lowly and dirty shepherds.

The Jesus of Luke intentionally included those whom society had excluded. The tax-collectors, the untouchable paralytics and lepers, the blind, the women, those inflicted with demonic forces—even the criminal dying next to him on the cross; continuously Jesus offered hope and salvation to those that the religious establishment thought would be the last to receive it. In the fifth chapter of Luke, Jesus's disciples and their lifestyles were called into question. "John's disciples, like the disciples of the Pharisees, frequently fast and pray, but your disciples eat and drink." In response, Jesus insists that there is no need to fast when the bridegroom is with you, and then goes on to share a parable:

No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise the new will be torn, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine but says, 'The old is good'.

Jesus' acts of inclusion were too radical to be contained within the old wineskins of the religious norm. Douglas Powe used this parable to illustrate the need for paying

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165 Luke 1:51b-53
166 Luke 2:1-20
167 Luke 5:33
168 Luke 5:36-39
attention to cultural shifts that indicate the need to implement new evangelical practices within the post-civil rights African-American church. In his book, *New Wine: New Wineskins*, Powe outlines the dangers of clinging to traditions and history when they are no longer life-giving but become life-taking instead.169

The theory behind Powe's work is also applicable to the plight of the LGBTQ religious community. The United Methodist Church must not ignore the nature of scripture as a living word that the Holy Spirit continuously gives us aide to prayerfully discern and interpret scripture within new contexts. The amending of prohibitive and derogatory language is a first step to adhering to placing new wine within new wineskins. The practice of holding onto historical tradition was an argument also employed to justify slavery, church segregation, and barring the way for women to be ordained within the denomination. By trying to force the cultural shifts of society into the old wineskins of tradition, the United Methodist Church risks destroying the church and spilling the blood of the body of Christ upon the ground. There is a need to explore a path that holds more than the exclusive, heteronormative worldview that the Church has historically shown.

**Operational Perspective: Models for Inclusive Ministry**

The climate of secular society is influencing the constituency of the United Methodist Church and accentuating the definitive need to re-story the interaction of the church and their relationship with the LGBTQ community. The General Conference will have to make a decision about the prohibitive language used within the *Book of Discipline* in regards to same-sex relationships. There will also be a need to ignite new inclusive ministries that will reach out to those who have been wounded by the words

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and actions of the Church. We will need guidance and models for this process—but we can take comfort in the fact that we are not the only denomination struggling with the issue and others have already made important strides in this direction.

The efforts of pastors such as Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber, a pastor who founded the House for All Sinners and Saints LGBTQ-friendly church in Denver, CO, to create intentional communities that embrace the disenfranchised offer working models of church that have successfully reached out to those that have had the doors of the Church continuously closed in their faces. In her book *Pastrōx*, Bolz-Weber’s methodology reveals through self-reflection and personal encounters of her church members’ experiences the manner in which harmful language has shaped the lives of her congregants. It was only through intentional ministries that embraced the LGBTQ community and focused on the dignity of all God’s children that many of her members were able to be reconciled to the Body of Christ.

The House for all Sinners and Saints is a mission congregation for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Currently the community has over 250 members and regular attenders across a broad spectrum of demographics. There are young married couples, baby-boomers, and even a few couples in their 70s. The largest demographic, at X percent, is made up of young single people between the ages

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170 Nadia Bolz-Weber is an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ECLA) pastor who founded the House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver, Colorado. This community is seeking for a new way to understand church in a country that is primarily made up of “over-churched” Christians. The invitation is to no longer bracket out parts of your lives to be active in a Christian community because God recognizes our humanity and chooses to love us anyway. It is a self-proclaimed LGBTQ friendly church. Accessed November 20, 2015, [http://houseforall.org/](http://houseforall.org/)

of 22 and 42.\textsuperscript{172} Although this mission congregation is associated with the ELCA, those who attend on Sundays are from different denominational backgrounds ranging from Methodist to Episcopalian to no prior denominational affiliation. The worship services are steeped in tradition with room for innovative practices such as poetry readings and a time called “Open Space.” During the time of Open Space the congregation is asked to kinetically become involved in worship by writing in the Book of Thanks, writing prayers, participating in art projects, or other creative styles of worship.\textsuperscript{173}

The intentionally inclusive community of the House for all Saints and Sinners resonates with a group of people who question the institution of religion, the exclusive nature that often accompanies doctrine, and the practice of Christian living. The missional congregation recognizes that despite the uncertainties involved with religion, there is a deep desire to connect with the mystery of God in the midst of people who love you for who you are. Whether or not the United Methodist Church moves in the direction of amending the harmful language of the \textit{Book of Discipline}, there is already a need and precedent for starting inclusive ministries that embrace all our sisters and brothers regardless of sexual orientation or identity. Bolz-Weber’s model is only one operational method that welcomes the LGBTQ community into the fullness of the life of the Church.

Another approach was taken by religious authors Scott Thumma and Edward Gray in addressing the exclusion of the LGBTQ community by identifying with the emergent church. Through the perspective of all mainline religions, the pair focuses on

\textsuperscript{172} “Who we Are,” House For All Sinners and Saints, last modified April 2015, accessed November 15, 2015, \texttt{http://houseforall.org/whoweare/}.

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
reconciling congregations and building bridges between the LGBTQ and heterosexual communities. In their book, *Gay Religion*, the theological concept of pastoral care is utilized in praxis by forming a new religious identity that embraces the healing and empowering attributes of the Holy Spirit. Their collection of works does not assume that the issues of the LGBTQ community and the negative experience of religion is a problem to debate, but embraces that there are a multitude of experiences throughout the historical context of American religion that need to be remapped.

The assumption that is purported by the Pew Research Survey discussed within the Empirical Perspectives and is often experienced in the mainstream media coverage of debates across the American landscape is that the LGBTQ community refrains from religiosity. *Gay Religion* offers a voice that contradicts the assumption that the LGBTQ community is not religious and is even present in the more conservative and fundamentalist communities that have vilified LGBTQ persons. In response to the media’s negative portrayal of the correlation between religion and LGBTQ individuals as well as academic apologetics such as the work of this dissertation, Thumma and Gray have compiled a collection of narrative experiences in order to re-story members of the LGBTQ community who identify with and have positive feelings towards different religions. They have provided a theological framework that identifies "gay religion" as part of a larger American economy that “defines religious tradition within denominational organizations and subaltern communities” through explicit and implicit expression of “the religious” in popular culture.\(^{174}\) Through narrative research, Thumma and Gray have given a unique voice to the LGBTQ community that

highlights the positive experience of religiosity and demonstrates that there are some churches and religions that are "getting it right."

These two examples of intentionally inclusive ministries offer a possibility to envision a re-storying of the United Methodist Church and the LGBTQ community. In the narrative research evaluation we will address other ideas that were brought to light during the interview process.

The Impact of the SCOTUS Decision

The Supreme Court of the United States's landmark decision of June 26, 2015 on the docket of Obergefell v. Hodges has ignited further debate within the United Methodist Church. The Court's 5-4 decision held that the Due Process Clause and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment guarantee the fundamental right of marriage to same-sex couples.175 At the center of the case was James Obergefell, who married John Arthur in Maryland, where same-sex marriage was legally recognized in July 2011. After returning home to Ohio, their state would not recognize the legality of their marriage, and therefore they filed suit in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio on July 19, 2013 against then-Governor of Ohio, John Kasich. The couple alleged that the State of Ohio discriminates against same-sex couples who were lawfully married in another state. Arthur was terminally ill and the couple wanted the state of Ohio to legally identify Obergefell as his spouse on the death certificate. By the time the case reached the Supreme Court, the case was a consolidation of six lower-court decisions that represented sixteen same-sex couples; all six lower courts ruled in

favor of the claimants. The case essentially dealt with two issues: the Constitutionality of states prohibiting same-sex marriage, and the right of refusal to recognize same-sex marriages conducted in a state where the wedding was legal. Justice Anthony Kennedy stated in the majority opinion that “[t]he limitation of marriage to opposite-sex couples may long have seemed natural and just, but its inconsistency with the central meaning of the fundamental right to marry is now manifest.”

Petitions that called for the amendment of prohibitive language within the Book of Discipline in regards to the LGBTQ community were submitted prior to this SCOTUS decision. Now that same-sex marriage is legal across all states, some are hoping that this will persuade the delegates at General Conference to vote in favor of the proposed amendments. But not everyone is pleased with this decision. Reverend Thomas Lambrecht is a General Conference delegate who does not feel that the SCOTUS opinion will hold any weight with the outcome at General Conference. In an interview for United Methodist News, he tells journalist Heather Hahn,

Most of the delegates who would favor retaining the church’s current position on marriage do so out of deep conviction and understand that the church is at different times and various points at odds with the culture in which it lives. Our commitment to biblical truth does not depend upon judicial affirmation by the Supreme Court of this or any other nation.

Where Lambrecht is probably right about those who are thoroughly convinced that biblical truth is reflected in the current language of the Book of Discipline, there is

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176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
hope for the LGBTQ community in the moderate General Conference voters who are not as strongly opinionated about the certainty of historical, heteronormative, exclusive interpretation of scripture.

One of the most pertinent and uplifting quotes that Hahn presents is from San Francisco Bay Area Bishop Warner H. Brown, Jr. who is also the President of the United Methodist Council of Bishops. He says, “The law does not require anyone to violate their conscience of what God has called them to do, or their theological understanding. But if we seek to be an inclusive church that serves all our parishioners, and all our neighbors, we will have to consider how we treat all people equally.”

\[180\] Ibid.
CHAPTER IV
THE MINISTRY PROJECT

Language is a powerful tool that can either be used to embrace and include a community or alienate and exclude it. When ratified and purposed within the doctrinal standards of the Church, language takes on a more authoritative role that can dictate the actions and attitudes of both clergy and laity within a denomination. The purpose of this project is to evaluate the effects that the current language of the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church has on the LGBTQ-identified community's experience of church. It is my assumption that there will be a negative correlation between this particular community's experience due to the exclusive language of the United Methodist Church doctrine that prohibits full participation in the life of the Church for LGBTQ persons and identifies their sexual orientation and gender identity as being incompatible with Christian teaching. For the purposes of this study, our primary focus is the LGBTQ-identified persons of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. The goal is to provide a voice for this silenced community—and, although it is outside the scope of this project, it is the hope of the researcher that by hearing the LGBTQ community's narrative, the delegation of the North Alabama Conference to the General Conference of 2016 will be better informed of the lives that are at stake in their voting decisions. In order to re-story the LGBTQ community's narrative within the relationship of the United Methodist Church, we must first identify their silenced voice within their particular context.
Objectives

I am utilizing a mixed-method approach in research design. The quantitative measures are an attempt to glean an overall picture of how the North Alabama Conference views both our current language and the proposed amendments to the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church. For the purposes of this project the questionnaire was limited exclusively to the Book of Discipline paragraphs pertaining to sexual orientation and gender identity.\textsuperscript{1} The objective was to provide a baseline for understanding how sensitive the clergy and laity are in regards to this particular issue facing the United Methodist Church at this time in our history. With the General Conference of 2016 swiftly approaching, the topic of inclusive ministries, more particularly those of same-sex marriage and ordination, has been on the tip of everyone’s tongue. If our doctrinal standards are amended to be more inclusive, this baseline can help in predicting the reaction of the North Alabama Conference and whether or not they will be open for moving forward with truly inclusive ministries and embracing their silenced LGBTQ-identified sisters and brothers.

The qualitative aspect is in the form of narrative research. Studies—including the survey conducted by the Pew Research Foundation found in the literary review portion of this dissertation—have shown that when people know LGBTQ-identified persons, they are more likely to be intentional with hospitality and more sensitive to the issue at hand. It becomes no longer an abstract idea for debating but involves real people whose lives are drastically altered by the use of language. The objective of narrative research is for the interviewees to tell their story of the experience of church in the North Alabama Conference in their own words. The researcher’s role will be to

\textsuperscript{1} ¶ 4 Article IV, ¶ 214, ¶ 304.3, ¶ 341.6, ¶ 613, ¶ 806.9, and ¶ 2702
collect this data and to attempt to re-story the relationship between the LGBTQ community and the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. This will include suggestions for intentional ministries to correct our failings to this community in past experiences, and to present the final qualitative report to the North Alabama Conference delegation to the General Conference of 2016.

The People

The survey was randomly distributed by being made available at the Annual Conference in June of 2015. Anonymity was crucial for the validity of more open and honest responses. It did not distinguish between LGBTQ-identified and heterosexual-identified persons. Therefore, the study will be framed by the statistical make-up of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church as a whole. The Annual Conference is 51.6% female, 54.9% heterosexual married couples, and has an average age of 36. 2 Its largest age group is 55-64 years old. 3 The reported statistical make-up for openly LGBTQ persons is 2%, this statistic is comparable to the 2.8% of LGBTQ indentified Alabamians and slightly lower than the national 3.5% of Americans who identify as LGBTQ. The majority of the laity membership has at least a high school education where 92% of clergy have obtained a Masters of Divinity or higher. 4 The racial demographic of the Annual Conference is 80% White, as opposed to the North Alabama region, which is 71% White, 21% Black, and 5.4% Hispanic. 5

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
The interviewees for the narrative research are six LGBTQ-identified persons whose primary experience of Church is within the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. 50% are openly LGBTQ-identified with both family and Church members knowledgeable of their sexuality and/or gender identity. Five of the six interviewed are White in order to represent the 80% of the laity membership of the Annual Conference. 50% of participants also identify with the female gender in order to reflect the overall gender identification of the Annual Conference. Each individual is considered “active” in the local church—defined as attending worship at least twice a month in addition to affiliation with a small group.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire (See Appendix A) was designed to create a reactionary baseline to represent the current attitude of the general population of clergy and laity among the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. The attitudinal measurements are concerning the current and proposed changes to the Book of Discipline in regards to the language pertaining to sexual orientation and gender identity. Closed-ended questions were presented, asking for a 7-degree response on a Scale ranging between Very Offensive and Very Not Offensive. Assumptions were based on Charles E. Osgood’s semantic differential that the meaning of all things can be measured using polar adjectival descriptors, be it an object or an abstract thought such as opinion on church law. The questionnaire was made available at Annual Conference in June of 2015. The concept behind the decision to make it publicly available to both the clergy and laity that attend the Annual Conference was that the response would be representative of people actively involved in the life of the North

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Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. Lay delegates and clergy are the most likely candidates to exact change and influence attitude over the geographical location of the entire Annual Conference.

Included in the questionnaire are statements that are currently found within the Book of Discipline which address the issue of exclusion of LGBTQ-identified persons from particular practices of ministry as well as specifically condemn the “practice of homosexuality.”\(^7\) Also included within the questionnaire are the proposed changes presented to General Conference by the Connectional Table. In May of 2015, the Connectional Table approved proposed legislation regarding several topics, but for the purposes of this project we focused solely on the proposals regarding the use of prohibitive language in the Book of Discipline in regards to sexual orientation and gender identity. The group charged with the vision of the United Methodist Church and given stewardship over the denomination’s resources to enact this vision throughout the world has made a proposal to remove the prohibitive language about homosexuality from the Book of Discipline while only making minor changes to our Social Principles. The proposed legislation is being presented in four petitions and would allow for clergy to officiate same-sex marriages, would remove being a “practicing homosexual” and performing same-sex ceremonies from the list of chargeable offenses for clergy, and would remove language that states that

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\(^7\) Condemn is an antonym of condone and in keeping with Osgood’s theorem that polar adjectives provide a measurement of meaning; if the United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality they must condemn it.
homosexuality is found “incompatible with Christian teaching” while recording that historically this was the United Methodist Church’s stance.⁸

The Connectional Table’s goal was to present proposals that would be more likely to pass at General Conference in light of delegations from more conservative annual conferences such as the Central Conferences. Outside of the United States, there are 7 organized central conferences from Africa, Europe and the Philippines. In November of 2013, the secretary of the General Conference, Rev. L Fitzgerald Reist, released a numerical list of delegates that would be representing each annual conference in voice and vote in 2016. There is a requirement that each annual conference be represented by one clergy and one laity delegate with additional delegates being determined by the total clergy and membership of each conference. At General Conference in May of 2016 the delegates are: 58.3% from the United States, 30% from Africa, 4.6% from Europe, and 5.8% from the Philippines.⁹ Therefore the Connectional Table’s strides may be viewed by some as not going far enough in the strides of amending the United Methodist Church’s use of exclusive language but their efforts are effective in eliminating hurtful language and a stepping stone towards the use of inclusive language if passed.¹⁰ To view the Connectional Table’s proposal in its entirety, see Appendix B.

The limitations of the questionnaire are evident in the low number of responses (77) gathered and whether or not this sample size is large enough to be truly

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⁸ Connectional Table, “A Third Way,” (a petition for legislation to be presented at the United Methodist Church General Conference, Portland, Oregon, May 10-20, 2016).
¹⁰ Connectional Table, “A Third Way.”
representative of the 133,695 members of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. Making the survey available at the Annual Conference was by design to gauge the attitudes of the more-active laity and clergy members that are typically more influential in change. However, this prevents accurate measurement of the average layperson that does not attend Annual Conference-wide events. This offers a limited view of how adaptable North Alabama might be to truly inclusive ministries if legislation is approved at the General Conference to amend the current prohibitive language in the Book of Discipline.

The strength of a questionnaire is also dependent upon the honesty of its participants.\textsuperscript{11} This project addresses a sensitive topic in the Christian community where members of both sides of the argument are passionate and headstrong. Furthermore, clergy members are often reluctant to speak against church doctrine because of the spoken covenant to uphold the Book of Discipline in their ordination. In an attempt to persuade all participants to speak freely and explicate their answers openly, all aspects of the project were conducted in anonymity.

\textbf{The Narrative Research}

A sample of six LGBTQ-identified persons who are primarily affiliated with the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church participated in intentional interviews to gather their stories of the experience of church under the current language in the Book of Discipline. Narrative theory requires that the researcher be able to claim and understand her own story and the intersections with the stories of the interviewees. This is an essential step because our own stories are often projected onto others and

\textsuperscript{11} Cameron and Duce, \textit{Researching Practice}, 50-52.
influence the reflection, evaluation, and interpretation of the project. In an effort to maintain full disclosure, the researcher recognizes that she is an outsider to the LGBTQ community and was raised with the teachings of a heteronormative and patriarchal biblical worldview. Further, she acknowledges that her relationships with family members and friends within the LGBTQ community—as well as witnessing the exclusive nature of both society and church—were motivating factors for engaging in this particular research project.

The intentional interview process involved disclosing the researcher’s story while evoking and encouraging the interviewees to share their experiences. Narrative research is not simply a report of events that have occurred in the life of a person. It also illustrates the way a person’s story has been shaped by those experiences and lends light to the meanings “[by] which they have been formed as people and the relationships” they have with one another and the Church. The first step in the process was to identify the issue or concern that prompted the project and guided the narrative intentional interviews. The centralized issue shared with the interviewees was the language of the Book of Discipline.

Currently, the doctrinal standards of the United Methodist Church refer to homosexuality as being “incompatible with Christian teaching” and identify officiating same-sex marriages as well as being a “self-avowed practicing homosexual” as chargeable offenses for clergy members. It is the conclusion of the researcher that the

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12 Savage and Presnell, Narrative Research, 74-75.
13 Ibid., 83.
14 Ibid., 86.
15 United Methodist Church, Discipline, ¶ 304.3, ¶ 341.6, ¶ 2702.1
prohibitive language in the Book of Discipline has negatively affected the interviewees and their experience of Church.

The correlation between doctrine and experience is not always linear. By indoctrinating such prohibitive language and derogatorily referring to a person’s identity within church law, the United Methodist Church is offering a legal means (for clergy and laity alike) for the justification of exclusive ministries that oppresses a community of people based on sexuality and gender identity. The concern to the ministerial setting of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church is the treatment of the LGBTQ community and their exclusion from full participation in the Body of Christ.  

The interviewees were prompted to tell their stories in relationship to God, family, and the United Methodist Church. The intersection of relational stories reveals what Carl Savage and William Presnell refer to as “hidden scripts” in their book, Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities. The process of uncovering the narrative requires the researcher to make connections between the reported story and the faith community by discerning the interpretation of the story. As the narratives unfolded, the researcher encouraged participants to visualize the future of the church and what an eschatological hope for an emerging story would entail. If the language of the Book of Discipline is amended, would that provide a more welcoming experience—and what other efforts should be made in the re-storying of the United Methodist Church and the LGBTQ community as a whole?

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16 Savage and Presnell, Narrative Research, 87.
17 Ibid., 12-27.
Summary

In the Fifth and final Chapter of this dissertation the data collected from the questionnaire and interviews will be evaluated and analyzed. The accomplishments of the project will be highlighted alongside the unexpected results of the project. In the conclusion, the narrative research will be allowed to speak for itself. The voices of the LGBTQ community and their experience of the United Methodist Church in the North Alabama Conference are not meant to be measured but to be heard.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, ANALYSIS, THEORY, AND CONCLUSION

Summary of the Problem

Despite the United Methodist Church’s intention to be an inclusive church that welcomes all persons to experience the fullness of God’s grace on the path to Discipleship, the invitation rings insincere due to the explicitly exclusive language of the Book of Discipline found in ¶ 4 Article IV, ¶ 214, ¶ 304.3, ¶ 341.6, ¶ 613, ¶ 806.9, and ¶ 2702. The purpose of this study was two-fold. One aspect’s goal was to gauge the attitude of the North Alabama Conference in regards to the both the current language of our Church law and the proposed changes that will be presented at the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in May 2016. The questionnaire was designed to measure the level of offensiveness of these specific paragraphs in the Book of Discipline and the proposed changes that removed the language explicitly condemning the relationships, marriage, and ordination of same-sex couples. The second aspect offered a chance to re-story the narrative of the United Methodist Church and the LGBTQ community by extending the invitation for this community to tell its experience of Church in the North Alabama Conference under the current language of the Discipline. An unintended outcome of the research project is the creative proposals of models of inclusive ministry that will work toward healing between the LGBTQ community and the greater United Methodist Church.
Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the current language in the *Book of Discipline* perpetuates a heteronormative worldview that prevents open LGBTQ members from entering into Ordained ministry and explicitly forbids clergy from performing same-sex marriages under penalty of trial that could lead to the loss of clergy credentials. It is only fair to acknowledge that the “practice of homosexuality” is indeed against the *historical* teachings of the Christian faith. The concern of this researcher is that scientific discoveries, sociological advancements in culture and society, and the work of the Holy Spirit that continues to reveal to us the importance of making disciples of all people have all worked together to bring us to a critical moment within the United Methodist Church. As we stand at the precipice of a monumental decision, this project is designed to give a voice to the silenced and a face to anonymous LGBTQ community members so that their lives will be considered in the decision-making process.

The General Conference of 2016 is swiftly approaching, and the delegates chosen by their respective annual conferences will be asked to evaluate and determine the future language of the *Book of Discipline*. A lot is at stake in this decision. The LGBTQ community is comprised of individuals who have contributed to the life and work of the Body of Christ in significant ways. These individuals are members of families, men, women, and children who are each valuable and loved by God in the same manner as heterosexual members of the Body of Christ. Their stories are important to commit to memory because pain and rejection have a scarring and lasting effect on the future of the Church.
Analysis: The Questionnaire

The questionnaire that was available at the North Alabama Annual Conference in 2015 can be found in Appendix A. With a sample size of 77 returned surveys, the reliability of the estimate is within .06 of the actual proportion with a probability distribution equal to .75. Of the participants who responded: 52 (67.5%) identified as female; 25 (32.5%) identified as male; 57.1% were between the ages of 25 to 44; 24.7% were above the age of 45; and only 10.4% indicated that they identify as LGBTQ. The limitations for analysis are evident in the reliability of the statistical information. The sample size might still be sufficient for analyzing but it is the researcher’s concern that the majority of those who returned the surveys were in agreement on every question to varying degrees. The lack of diversity could imply that the survey was not promoted in a manner that more factions were aware of or interested in completing the questionnaire.\(^1\) If conducted again there would need to be announcements at Annual Conference and it should be mentioned in the conference materials so that more people are aware that the questionnaire is available. The nature of the questions could have suggested the bias of the researcher prevented possible participants from wanting to take part in the survey.\(^2\) Another possibility is that the most likely participants are those who are seeking change in the language of the Discipline and therefore their answers are reflective of that particular constituency.\(^3\) The data, however, does not support the researcher’s assumptions. The researcher assumed that the North Alabama Conference as a whole would not be ready to accept change in language and therefore inclusive

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\(^2\) Ibid., 177.

\(^3\) Ibid.
ministries and reconciliation between the LGBTQ community and the United Methodist Church would be difficult to achieve. The results suggest that people are ready to move forward in ministry together and are aware of the way language can be detrimental and harmful to a group of people.

The following table represents all 77 participants and their responses to the corresponding questions. A table illustrating the responses in correlation with each question according to gender can be found in Appendix C.

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The first two questions of the survey dealt with §2702.1 (a) and chargeable offenses of clergypersons in regards to morality. The first is the proposed new language that defines immorality as not observing celibacy in singleness nor fidelity in marriage. The current language adds the word "heterosexual" before marriage. The proposed changes in language are not radical, but are intentional in protecting open LGBTQ-
indentified clergy members in committed marriages. 91% of the participants found the changed language to be between a range of “mildly not offensive” to “very not offensive,” while 93.5% of the participants found the current language to range between “very offensive” and “mildly offensive.” This trend is continued throughout the questionnaire. The majority of the participants found the current language to be “offensive” and the proposed language of the Community Table (found in its entirety in Appendix B) to be “not offensive.”

An interesting response was found in answers to questions 11 and 12. The proposed language reads: The United Methodist Church historically has not condoned the practice of homosexuality and has considered this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. In contrast to the current language that reads: The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. Of the participants, 94.8% find the current language to be on the offensive end of the scale, but 48.1% of participants find the proposed language to also be offensive. The Community Table, in preparation for General Conference 2016, prepared the proposals contained within this questionnaire. It is the researcher’s opinion that the desire was to remove the harmful language that explicitly excludes the LGBTQ community but to retain the language that acknowledges the historical or traditional stances of the United Methodist Church.

The reasoning is two-fold:

The first purpose would be to honor the dissenting party’s objection to change and recognize that it is not a unanimous decision to seek change in language to the Discipline. It is not a covenant that is entered into lightly and deserves the respect of
Due Process. The second purpose is to acknowledge our historical failures. To simply remove the traditional and historical statements might appear if we were participating in what Deryn Guest terms "erasure." Healing requires naming your mistakes and working toward reconciliation.⁵

All in all, the research seems promising as a way forward with ministry. It suggests that the North Alabama Conference is not only open for change but is ready for its language to be reflective of this need. In the conclusion we will address possible paths of ministry that can serve as healing and reconciliation between the LGBTQ community and the United Methodist Church. All of these suggestions have been put forth by the six LGBTQ-identified interviewees that participated in the Narrative Research.

**Narrative Research Theory and Family Systems Theory**

The stories of the participants in this research project speak for themselves. Each experience is unique to the individual, and yet there are intersections where the participants' lives overlap with one another and with the overarching storyworld of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. Carl Presnell and William Savage identify these intersections as the definition of pastoral theology in postmodern narrative theory. They say that it is a "['c]ritical conversation that takes place at the intersection of the multiple narratives surrounding a particular contemporary situation nestled in a particular ministry context."⁶ In regards to this research project the contemporary situation is the status of the LGBTQ community that

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⁵ Ibid., 110.

is defined by the *Book of Discipline* and our particular ministry context is the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The methodology utilized to analyze the gathered narratives is known as the *proactive research method*. This particular method does not require the researcher to make any pretense of objectivity but encourages transparency of the researcher’s intentions while allowing the emerging story to be constructed without imposing the researcher’s agenda. As a clergyperson of the North Alabama Conference, this researcher is already ingrained in the culture of the particular context and is not solely working toward an understanding of the narrative that is the current reality, but is also helping to discern the “preferred story” in order to be a catalyst for transformation. The preferred story is the desired outcome of all narrative research where all participants involved are given voice and path to reconciliation that writes a new story that doesn’t involve conflict and discord.

The only way that the evolution of the narrative can move from the current reality to the preferred story is through openness and dialogue that identifies the intersections of the narratives. Savage and Presnell employ the use of Murray Bowen’s Family System Theory. Systems theory at its core recognizes that interrelated components and the manner in which they work together form a cohesive and identifiable ecosystem. When Bowen’s understanding of systems theory is applied to this research project, the human components of individuals, couples,
families, local churches, and the Annual Conference are the aforementioned interrelated parts and function within the system of the United Methodist Church.

Virginia Satir, communications theorist, adds to the equation by looking at the structure or “variable and invariable behavioral sequences and patterns, rules for order and change.” The narratives gathered through interviews illustrate a sequenced pattern for the LGBTQ community in North Alabama. The theme of “fear” to be the authentic self as well as a pattern of “rejection” when someone does disclose their sexuality resonates within the rules of both Southern culture and the rules of the United Methodist Church. The narratives intersect where human sexuality meets perception. The negative correlation is found in the difference of human sexuality perceived by church doctrine and the reality of the LGBTQ community. When something falls outside the “norm,” its perceived difference takes on a negative quality. Systems theory and narrative research methodology looks to these differences as a place for the emerging preferred story to lead to transformation of the whole ecosystem.

The other components of Satir’s development include purpose, communication patterns, and links with society. The purpose of an ecosystem is the mission and the relationship contract/covenant. Within the context of this project, this aspect can be identified as the mission of the North Alabama Conference which is to “Discover, Develop, and Deploy Spiritual Leaders to Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World” and the baptismal covenant where the church vows to

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
surround each candidate for baptism with a community of love and forgiveness.¹⁵ This project allows for a new form of communication between the North Alabama Conference and the LGBTQ community, and is urging a greater connection between the church and society for the transformation of all parts of the system because each part of a family/institutional system "acts upon and is acted upon by all other parts."¹⁶

Analysis: Narrative Research Model

This postmodern approach to Qualitative Research emphasizes that all experiences, even scientific theory, are at their core narratives.¹⁷ Stories cannot hold an intrinsic "truth" or objective reality; therefore we do not seek to measure the outcome of the narrative but to discern the meaning of a story as it has been socially constructed into the overarching narrative.¹⁸ In the context of this research project we were seeking to discern the narrative of the LGBTQ community within the overarching storyworld of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. The researcher interviewed six members of the annual conference who identify as LGBTQ. Each interview was guided by, but not limited to, the questions found in Appendix C. To protect the anonymity of the interviewees, each has been assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of clarity in sharing her or his story. The researcher took detailed notes during the interview process, constructed the answers into narrative form, and submitted the narrative to the interviewee for transparency and approval. The following stories are the personal experiences of LGBTQ-identified members of the North Alabama Conference in the United Methodist Church. In an effort for full transparency, the researcher will

¹⁶ Savage and Presnell, Narrative Research, 114.
¹⁷ Ibid., 23.
¹⁸ Ibid., 45.
add her own narrative, because every research project is driven by its researcher's agenda, and hence an attempt at true discernment is reliant on full disclosure.

Tyler, 29-Year-Old, White Male, Identifies As Gay

I was born into an itinerant family, the son of a United Methodist Pastor in the North Alabama conference. People seem shocked to find that from my earliest years I have nothing but fond memories of the church. I was the adorable, quiet, and angelic child that was embraced and coddled by all of my father's congregations and I was taught that nothing in the world could separate me from God's love. I moved several times throughout my youth, but I never had a problem considering each congregation as "home." There was a feeling of safety and security within the walls of the church and the only threat I ever faced was when one of my sisters would get me in trouble during a service because you could bet that I would be the one getting the spanking when we got home. It wasn't until I was a teenager that I started feeling like more and more of an outsider. Because my dad moved a lot I was pretty adept at making fast friends, but there was always a sense of not wanting to get "too close." I knew I'd have to start over in a few years anyway, so what was the use of letting down my guard? When I was seventeen I told my best friend that I thought I was gay. He was amazing, I can still remember his initial response, "Dude, you think I didn't already know?" With his encouragement, I decided to be open about my sexuality. My friends and family never had an issue; they supported me, and my dad said he was proud of my courage. Unfortunately, his current church didn't feel the same way. When we went on the mission trip my senior year, my dad received three anonymous letters saying that it was inappropriate for me to sleep in the same room with the other boys. I could tell it hurt my father much deeper than it hurt me. I was afraid I would end up hurting his ministry so I made the decision not to go on the mission trip even though all of the guys in the youth group were my friends and none of them were afraid of sharing a room with me. That was the first time I realized I was considered a different species.

When I went to college I began distancing myself from the church. A lot of my friends would hang out at the Wesley Foundation; I refused to go with them. God and I were fine. God's people and I were not. I spent those years only attending church when I'd go home for Christmas and Easter and even then I was only doing it for my father. At the age of twenty-four I met a wonderful man who somehow wooed me back behind the stained-glass windows. At his church there was a group intentionally designed to draw us into a covenantal relationship with one another. It was loosely based on the idea of Wesley's classes: accountability, and emotionally supportive group that was completely embraced by that particular congregation. I realized then that I wasn’t finished with church, but I was finished with being shunned because God had created me to love differently.

I think the United Methodist Church is missing out on a great opportunity to do God’s work by ignoring my people. I don’t think it’s the people in the
church necessarily, but take the “phrases” you just read to me. The institution is going to kill the church if we don’t step up and voice the wrongness that's going on. Some issues are debatable and people can simply agree to disagree; this isn’t one of them. You either love people or you don’t. I don’t buy into the claim that some so-called Christians make of “I love you, I just don’t love what you do” because being gay isn’t something I do, it’s who I am. If we want to reconcile—that’s the word you used—the only way to do that is to stop creating rules, being judgmental, and pretending like our opinions are God’s will. We have to be willing to reach out to the lost—those who the church has turned away and have lost all hope because they think God doesn’t love them anymore. It’s just not true—and the church, of all places, should be where people feel safe and protected from the ridicule of the world.

Karen, 43-Year-Old, Black Female, Identifies As Lesbian

My church still doesn’t have a clue what goes on behind closed doors. My “roommate” and I have been living together for 10 years and they think it is so wonderful that the two of us are such great friends. They think it’s important for two single women to be safe and so it is only logical for us to live together. The church where I grew up would not know what to do with a “lesbian,” much less with one who is married to a white woman. There are so many levels of judgment in that statement that I wouldn’t know where to begin. My authentic self tells me I should proudly wear my lavender and hold my wife’s hand during worship. But I cringe every time I think of the look Mrs. Davis would give me if I even spoke the words. First she would have me wash my mouth out with soap and next she’d try to cleanse me of my demons.

But don’t get me wrong, I have always loved church. I grew up singing before I could talk and dancing before I could walk. I have no doubt that my God loves and blesses me and what’s more, I love my church folks. They are the first to pray over me when my life gets stressful and the first to bring me a meal when I’ve been sick. They have hearts of gold, but they lack the leadership to see beyond labels. Maybe I’m just not giving them a chance to allow the Spirit to work in their lives and bring them to change, but to be honest I’m terrified. When Sarah and I decided to have children I made the most difficult decision of my entire adult life, I left my childhood church and we started attending a multi-cultural church downtown. My church family thought I was protecting my roommate from the ridicule of being an unwed mother; they were partially correct. It only bothered me that they revered that decision and called me a saint for taking care of Sarah. I almost came clean right then and there.

My mother, now she’s a wise woman, she just wants grandchildren. When Sarah had our twin girls last year she didn’t ask a question about the how, she just calls them her grandbabies. She stood next to us as the girls were baptized and took the vows with us as we proclaimed we would nurture and raise them in the church. I know she would love me even if I spoke the words, but again I’m choosing silence. She knows; there is no need to say them.
Sarah and I got married in August [2015] but we had to be married by one of our Presbyterian friends. That was a bittersweet day for me. I was finally able to proclaim my love for the woman who has held my heart in the palm of her hands for 10 years, but I couldn’t invite the men and women who had raised me up in church nor could we be married by a United Methodist preacher. There is a deep sadness in our church because I think that there are a lot of people who are like me that are afraid to be who they are. I’m afraid to be who I am. Sarah reminds me every day how the church is like a person and that it takes time to learn, grow, and change even with the Spirit working on your heart. I suppose it requires patience, which is something I have in droves. One day, Sarah, the girls, and I will walk proudly down the aisles of the church without any judgmental eyes turning on us and we will be embraced like every other family. But until that day, all we can do is pray.

Sam, 23-Year-Old, White Male, Identifies As Gay

I’ve known since I was 10 years old that I preferred boys. I have a little sister who is amazingly supportive and she was the first one to tell me. I didn’t even understand what it meant to be gay or straight but I knew that as all the other guys in my class started teasing the girls, I was teasing the boys. I never “came out” because I think that is a silly notion. My sister never announced she was straight, why should I have a big rainbow party to announce that I’m gay? If people ask, I tell them. But this is the South; people are usually too prim and proper to have the nerve to simply come out and ask someone their sexual orientation. I did tell my parents when I was in high school. My dad is a real macho man so I kind of expected his response—silence. He never talks about it and definitely doesn’t advertise it to all of his friends. We have a decent relationship but my “gayness” is always the white elephant in the room that is never discussed. My mom, on the other hand—I was terrified to tell her. I don’t know why exactly but when I got the nerve to try I hemmed and hawed around the words until finally she said, “I know you’re gay, Sam! Just say it!” She would probably wrap me in a rainbow flag and hold a parade with large flashing neon signs that read “This is my gay son and I love him!!” I appreciate the sentiment, but it’s not necessary. I’m not courageous or doing something bold; I am Sam, and Sam is a gay man.

The church is a little different. All my friends in church have known since we were little and none of them have any issue whatsoever with my sexual preferences. Now that we’re older, they are all quite protective of me. But again, we never discuss my sexuality. They are afraid that if the “grown-ups” in the church find out that I’m gay that a campaign will be lodged against me and they’ll prevent me from working with the youth. We don’t live in a small town, but the church is keenly unaware of this fact. People are always up in one another’s business and whispering secrets behind one another’s backs. My friends are probably right, but if someone asks, I will tell them.
I love my church. I love the people in my church. But trust is an entirely different issue. Can you love someone without trusting them? Being gay is just another attribute of my life. I'm 6'4, 210 lbs, have twinkling green eyes, I'm Christian, and I'm gay. What I do, on the other hand, is teach youth about how God loves them for who they are. No matter the mistakes they may make or how many times they try to push God away, [He] is always there for them and loving them. Teenagers have a tough go of it. They're bullied, they are tormented by their own lack of self-worth, many do not have the support system at home to deal with the emotional world of teenage life, and many are simply seeking an adult who can listen to, validate, and love them. That's what I do.

I've just finished undergraduate school with a BA in Religious Studies. I am considering seminary, but I know that the United Methodist Church will not allow me to be a preacher. I have all the gifts and graces and I have experienced God's call to ministry, but I'm gay. That isn't something that I can change and it isn't something I will hide. God made me who I am, but my church sees me as an issue that needs debating. I could leave and go to another denomination that accepts people like me, but I'm Methodist. I'm not going anywhere. If God doesn't give up on me when I'm wrong, I'm not going to give up on my church when they're wrong.

Susan, 35-Year-Old, White Female, Identifies as Lesbian

I came out in college after attending a Gay-Straight Alliance meeting and hearing the stories of other gay and lesbian Christians who have been shunned by their churches. I realized that the reason I had been hiding from myself was because I had been raised to believe that homosexuality was wrong. The Bible expressly forbids it and therefore I had to fight it like a disease. A man in my church where I grew up talked about how he had been "healed" from homosexuality. He compared it to alcoholism. He believed that God had created him to be gay but it was also like how an alcoholic has a gene that predisposes that person to being addicted to alcohol. He described being gay as his "cross to bear" and that he was tasked with avoiding homosexual behavior. I knew I was attracted to one of the girls on my softball team so I took his advice and quit the team, avoiding her altogether.

The façade worked for three years. I dated boys, talked to my sorority sisters about our future weddings and how many kids we wanted to have when we got married. I planned out an entire heterosexual future. I could avoid being gay and fight it every step of the way because God wouldn't have given me this cross if he didn't think I was strong enough to bear it. I talked to people in campus ministries that supported my decision and thought I was brave for seeking healing. They told me that Jesus loved me just like I was, but he loved me too much to leave me that way. I believed it.

My junior year in college there was a movement on campus to start a Gay-Straight Alliance. I thought this was the perfect place for me to share my
story about how I had been “healed” from my homosexual tendencies. The first night I came in ready to share and I saw a very familiar face. It was Samantha, the girl from my high school softball team. All those emotions came flooding back and I was sure it was the devil on my back. When Samantha moved to hug me, I jerked away as the tears spilled over my cheeks. I told her that I had been healed and that she was just there to tempt me! If the roles had been reversed, I would have stormed out and never spoken to her again. She started to cry with me instead. That night we had a long talk about the way her church had turned her out when she refused to accept prayer for healing. We were from a pretty small town so it really didn’t matter which denomination you claimed to be a part of—everybody believed the same things.

Fast-forward a few months and I had been “healed” from my “healing.” For the first time in my life I stood with a group of gay and straight people that had walked the same path as me. I wasn’t bitter toward my church, but I did want them to know the truth. Samantha went with me when to the First United Methodist Church one Sunday morning. We sat together and heard the whispers because everyone in town knew Samantha was a lesbian. No one spoke to us, not even the people who had sat there when I was baptized and promised to welcome me as a sister in Christ. It hurt, but for the first time in my life I felt free. The pastor apologized for the congregation’s behavior, but at that point it didn’t matter. I had my answer. I would never be accepted so long as I was insistent upon being a lesbian.

Edward, 36-Year-Old, White Male, Identifies As Gay

I wouldn’t say that I’ve struggled with my sexuality all my life. I have just evolved. In high school I pretended to be straight; in college I pretended to be straight but I have been in a loving, committed relationship with a man for five years. We’re roommates, according to most of my family. My sister is way too observant and nosy not to have forced my confession. I love her and I love that she didn’t wince in the slightest when I yelled in her face, “OKAY YOU WIN I AM GAY!” Everyone in my family works for the church so I’ve always been guarded about how their lives and careers would be affected if I came out. The place where I work also has a morality clause in our contracts; if I came out, I would be fired. My boyfriend’s family is the same way, so we pretend to be roommates so that everyone else is happy.

I sometimes feel as if I’m leading a double life. Camp Sumatanga was and is a huge part of my life. My camp friends are my closest friends, but they don’t even know that I’m gay. I listen to some of my friends go on about “the gays” and how God sees them as “an abomination.” My sister will get up in the middle of debates defending the GLBT folks. But everyone expects that from her because she’s never shied away from fighting for the people on the margins. I sit silently by her side, proud and jealous. I wish I could be free enough to tell the people who claim to love me that I’m one of those “gays” they think are going to perish in the fiery flames of hell. But I can’t, not now.
When the Supreme Court decision came out this summer, my sister drove to my house in tears. I knew that she was overjoyed that finally someone was getting something right. I didn’t have the heart to tell her that it had changed nothing in my life. My boyfriend and I couldn’t get secretly married because what was the point if we couldn’t share that with everyone we love? She even offered to be the surrogate if we decided to have children. How would I explain that to my mother?

I watch all the “normal” families that come into my work and wonder why God made me this way. I want a house, a dog, three kids, and a white picket fence. But I also want a husband. The church has always been a part of my life, but again I’m pretending to be straight. I go every Sunday with my parents, have lunch, and go home to my boyfriend. It’s actually quite painful not being able to be who I am. I don’t know if changing the Book of Discipline would do any good whatsoever. People are still going to believe how people are going to believe. Language is a step in the right direction, but it won’t do anything if leadership isn’t working hard to change hearts. But that’s what church is all about, isn’t it? People come together and worship a God that’s in the heart changing business. I guess we’ll see what the future brings; I just don’t think we’re there yet.

Megan, 47-Year-Old, White Female, Identifies as Transgender

I was born and named John Wesley. That’s just a glimpse at the Methodist blood in my family. I was the youngest of four siblings and had three sisters who paraded around the house in their frilly dresses and playing Barbies while my mom fitted me out in camouflage and my dad was shoving a shotgun in my hand by the time I was eight. Come to think of it, mom’s choice of clothing was really appropriate. My “male” skin was the camouflage for my “female” self. I was jealous of my sisters and would often hide in their rooms to watch them brush and braid their long hair and talk about boys. I would imagine myself out in the open, trying on their clothes, swirling around in the dresses as they knocked against my knobby knees. In fact, that’s how my mother figured it out. One day she walked in on me wearing one of my sister’s A-line skirts, a smart white button up and applying her mascara to my lashes. She clutched her chest and yelled for my father, who abruptly “beat the girl” out of me.

I just got better at hiding it and it stayed hidden until I was in seminary. The campus where I did my theological studies was a very liberal setting and we often talked about sexuality and gender issues. There was a group on campus called Imago Dei that I readily joined and attended all their meetings and chapel services. Everyone assumed I was gay. I saw no reason to go into depth about anything until my homiletics professor asked me to lead chapel one Thursday. Of all the days, Thursdays were the worst if you were looking for low-profile. It was a communion service that included an actual sermon, not just a homily or liturgy so pretty much the entire faculty and student body would be present. No big deal, I wrote a sermon, it was theologically sound and even humorous in a knee-slapping kind of way (I’ve always used humor to deflect my pain). But
when the scripture was read, I opened my mouth and what came out was, “My parents call me John Wesley because I was born with male anatomy. God calls me Megan because I am female.”

The cat was out of the bag and I felt simultaneously excited and terrified. I had never doubted the response of my campus. They embraced me and a couple of the girls and I started shopping once a week, we called it our girly day. It was everything I had ever desired; I was woman, hear me roar. The problem was that I had just admitted in front of Ordained Elders that I was transgender. I know that the Discipline says “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” but that’s because not even the church knows what to do with folks like me. I’m not gay. I’m a woman who loves men who just happens to have been born with my reproductive organs on the outside of my body. You see how this could turn into a very stressful debate. I finished my MDiv and quietly slipped into the oblivion where candidates that never make it to provisional elder linger. I still feel called, but living in the secular world is the only place I can be truly accepted for who I am.

Isn’t that sad, though? The Church should be that safe refuge from the secular world, but the roles are completely reversed for people like me. I do still attend church every Sunday and most people in the congregation that I’ve come to call home know my history. I dress as a woman, I’m legally named Megan, and I date men. But it took a while for me to find a church that didn’t want to chase me out after just three weeks. One experience was rather scarring. It was a large church in a fairly large-sized community and they were skeptic from the moment I walked in the door. I have a beautiful tenor voice, if I do say so myself, and so I asked to sing in the choir. The Children’s Director was the first to stalk up to me and ask me if I was a man. Soon after there was a torrent whirlwind of accusations that swirled around me and there was no safe haven in sight. I didn’t stay long: I am not looking for drama; I’m searching for the Body of Christ. Sometimes we actually catch a glimpse of God’s Kingdom, and those are the moments that make the search worth it.

Leslie, 33-Year-Old, White Female, Identifies As Heterosexual

The intersection of every self-defined group is often clouted in privilege and shame. We meet in the crossroads, identifying those who are “like me” and those “who are not.” It is our reaction to these realities of difference and similarity that construct our worldview and hermeneutic. Growing up in an itinerant United Methodist preacher’s family that nomadically left imprints across North Alabama, there were several occasions for self-examination at multiple intersections. The differences between each parish, no matter how minute, painted contrasting colors of regional attitudes within a relatively small geographical area. Each town informed my self-reflection of identity as a white, lower-middle class, educated, mostly able-bodied, Southern, liberal, millennial, female middle-child.
The most palpable presence of privilege and shame accompanies my experience of racial perception and reality. Within the sanctity of our home, my parents often stressed the importance of viewing people of all ethnicities as not only having equal human dignity but also to recognize that race is an inherent part of everyone's story. They admonished the societal boundaries refusing to allow their children to grow up believing that the color of someone's skin or their country of origin predetermined that individual's worth or value in the world. It was never a lesson or issue I questioned until circumstances no longer allowed me to ignore the reactions and attitudes of those who were supposedly "like me."

I recognized that I was a privileged young woman: I was born with an analytical mind that could easily process numbers and words, retain and regurgitate information upon command, and master any standardized test laid before me. Because of this, I was valedictorian of my graduating class and received a full scholarship to Birmingham-Southern College. I vowed that my education would assist me in changing the world. Over the course of time I have accumulated several degrees—numerous letters that follow my name, giving me authority in the eyes of society. It bolsters my acceptance despite the size of my paycheck. But I have never lost sight of my purpose, justifying the growing debt to student loans as my penance for being a privileged child and a platform to raise a concerned voice about the intolerance of a skewed worldview.

Throughout all of this development, I am a person with Spina Bifida. My condition was kept "secret" and "hush-hush" as a child, my mother fearing that the other children's knowledge would lead to ridicule and harassment. I could never spend the night with the other girls or go on any camping trips with the girl scouts unless my mother was present. This was both a logistical and emotional protection provided by a loving parent because I had been intermittently catheterized since the age of four. There is something quite humbling about having to submit to the generosity of another in such a vulnerable position. The relief and independence I felt at finally being given the reins at the age of twelve is indescribable. But for years, I lived under the impression that telling anyone would automatically categorize me as handicapped until I met another young woman with Spina Bifida who had been confined to a wheelchair her entire life. She embraced the world, spoke openly about her condition, and made me feel ashamed about hiding it for so many years. Shame is a powerful motivating factor.

My call to ministry is found in the eye of a storm with swelling winds of privilege and shame. I recognize a distorted worldview that emphasizes differences without seeking similarities at the intersections of life and I feel God has thrust me in the midst of whirlwind to be God's prophetic voice that speaks order out of chaos. As a United Methodist, I have the connection of the North Alabama conference. We are not only called to preach the social gospel; our feet, heritage, and tradition are firmly planted within it. So I acknowledge that I am a liberal, that I am a woman, that I am firmly against any form of racism, sexism, sexualism, individualism, and every other -ism that seeks to divide God's
children against themselves. But I strive to step through the rushing waters, recognizing that Jesus did say to love our neighbor. As easy as it may be to stress “Your Muslim neighbor, Your Mexican neighbor, Your Gay neighbor,” it is sometimes more difficult for me to say, “Your Christian neighbor wrapped up in bigotry and pride.”

When I left my previous parish, a man who fought me every step of the way told our District Superintendent that I had the heart of David and the prophetic voice of Nathan. Although this glowing praise left me stuttering in disbelief, I do believe that if I am to continue to do God’s call on my life justice, then I must strive to be this person. I will not compromise the Gospel, but I can seek out those who have been hurt by the ones who have been charged to bring the Good News into the world and help work towards reconciliation and healing.

This project is designed to analyze the “anxiety” of the overarching storyworld of the North Alabama Conference. The anxiety that has encroached upon this storied ecosystem affects the “organism even at its cellular level.” With threats of a schism in the United Methodist Church and hyperawareness to the plight of the LGBTQ community in American culture, human sexuality and the church’s response to it has pervaded every aspect of the North Alabama Conference. The narrative interviews are evidence that each individual is experiencing the tension of this ecosystem. Savage and Presnell refer to this as the “fight or flight reaction to destabilizing threats, large and small.”19 In systems theory, by and large, anxiety is subconscious with different parts of the ecosystem displaying patterns such as “blame and denial” or “outbursts of buried fear and misery.” The sexuality debate has been brought to the front and center of the United Methodist Church, and reactions can be categorized into high tension subgroups atypical of systems theory. Negative reactions and intolerance have caused this anxiety to grow and led to either too much capitulation in seeking reconciliation or alienation through language that bars true dialogue. For examples, refer to Chapter II

19 Ibid., 115.
in the conversations about proposals for General Conference in 2016 in regards to the change of language in the *Book of Discipline*.

Savage and Presnell contend that postmodern evaluation of the data we have collected does not seek to measure but to understand. The current language in the *Book of Discipline* is only a starting point as Edward iterates in his narrative. But it is, at the very least, a starting point. The intersection of the LGBTQ community and the North Alabama Conference gives hope for the future of the church. There is recognition that we are a family system that affects one another with our language and actions (or lack thereof). The acknowledgement that our common mission is discipleship in the name of Christ for the transformation of the world, and that our vehicle for transformation is a community of love and forgiveness, is what brings us to the table.\(^{20}\) If all voices can be heard and recognized as sisters and brothers working toward and from our commonalities, then our differences will be known as diversity rather than anxious threats. The emerging preferred story is one where this schism does not exist, and that all parts of the greater ecosystem are working toward transformation of the world.

**Conclusion**

The success of this research project is only measurable in an unrealized future context. The purpose was to address the current prohibitive language of the *Book of Discipline* in regards to the LGBTQ community within the context of the North Alabama Conference and how this language has impacted the narrative of this particular community’s experience of the United Methodist Church. Savage and Presnell contend that central to understanding a faith community’s narrative reality is

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\(^{20}\) Ibid., 122.
"respect for the powerful role of language in the construction of human experience."\textsuperscript{21}

Both the questionnaire and the narrative research demonstrated the offensive nature of the current language that bars the LGBTQ community from ordination and marriage as well as differentiates between sexual "norms." It is in our differences that the narrative can either emerge into the preferred story of communion or lead to schism and indifference.\textsuperscript{22}

The pivotal moment of discerning between opportunity for healing and parting ways is situated within the greater narrative of the United Methodist Church. The method of discernment is found within the Theological Task of this body of faith which they describe as both "critical and constructive."\textsuperscript{23} Albert Outler's Wesleyan Quadrilateral is used to critically engage expressions of faith and issues that intersect with this faith. Outler refers to this Quadrilateral as the "Source and Criteria" of our Theological Task as the United Methodist Church:

- Scripture—the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine
- Tradition—the story of the church and of God's continuing activity through the history of the church
- Experience—examination of individual and corporate experience to confirm the realities of God's grace attested in scripture
- Reason—all truth is from God, reason is one way we seek to understand and appropriate that truth\textsuperscript{24}

This tool is a guide, but it is necessary to remember that within a narrative any interpretations are being influenced by the "self-defining narratives of the parties involved and the larger narratives with which they intersect."\textsuperscript{25} Although the United

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{23} United Methodist Church, \textit{Discipline}, ¶105.SECTION 4.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{25} Savage and Presnell, \textit{Narrative Research}, 82.
Methodist Church purports the primacy of scripture, the constructive nature of their theological task is a further reminder that scripture is interpreted through the lens of Christian and human experience. Every generation brings their self-defining narratives to the biblical text as they “appropriate creatively the wisdom of the past and seek God in their midst.” 26 This lens allows the people of the United Methodist Church to construct and “think afresh” the way that this doctrine and God’s revelation unfolds anew in the current “troubled and uncertain times.”27

The ultimate goal of the United Methodist Church and the LGBTQ community should be an emergent, preferred story. The new story that emerged from this research is a need for inclusive and empowering language that offers opportunities for expansion and growth. These perceived differences can move beyond the generated “problem-saturated part of the story that is causing pain, disharmony, negative projections and lovelessness in various forms.”28

The re-storying of the narrative of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church and the LGBTQ community can be a welcoming and inclusive church whose members embrace one another and work toward our common mission in a community of love and forgiveness. The participants in this narrative research study have suggested that intentionally inclusive ministries, if incorporated, can lead us towards harmony, positive projections, and love in various forms. We will have to re-imagine the possibilities of the Body of Christ as we reach out to a neglected, ostracized, yet immensely pertinent community within the Church. LGBTQ programs should include Bible Studies, fellowship, and open dialogue and discussion that is

26 United Methodist Church, Discipline, ¶105.SECTION 4.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
welcoming not just to those who identify as LGBTQ but to other church members that are offering true repentance for the United Methodist Church's historical traditions, although it is important to note that "repentance," in this sense, is not intended to be interpreted as moral uprightness, expressions of regret, nor a "180-degree turnaround." Walter Brueggemann talks about repentance as reorientation—a change of heart and mind that allows someone to see things differently from a new perspective. In order to move forward, it will be necessary for the United Methodist Church as a whole to remove itself from a place of judgment and reorient itself toward the humility that allows us to evaluate the brokenness that is an unconditional status of every human being.
APPENDIX A
Questionnaire

Statistical Analysis on Current and Proposed Language to the
Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church

Age: (17 or Younger) (18-24) (25-34) (35-44) (45-54) (55-64) (65-74) (75 or Older)
Gender:
LGBTQ-Identified (Y/N):

All information gathered is anonymous and for the sole purpose of collecting data and research analysis.

¶2702.1 A bishop, clergy member of an annual conference (¶ 370), local pastor, clergy on honorable or administrative location, or diaconal minister may be tried when charged (subject to the statute of limitations in ¶ 2702.4) with one or more of the following offenses:

1. (a) immorality included but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in marriage.

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2. (a) immorality included but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in heterosexual marriage.

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3. (b) practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings

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4. (b) practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to: being a self-avowed, practicing homosexual; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies

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§ 161. B) Marriage—

5. We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between two people who are married to each other.

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6. We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman.

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7. We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, which is traditionally between one man and one woman, whether or not there are children of the union.

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8. We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union.

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¶ 161. We affirm that sexuality is God’s gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift.

9. Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous marriage.

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10. Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

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11. The United Methodist Church historically has not condoned the practice of homosexuality and has considered this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.

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115
12. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.

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§304.3 While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world.

13. The practice of homosexuality is considered by many to be incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, authority for discerning suitability for ordination continues to rest with the annual conference as provided in ¶ 33 of the Constitution, following candidacy procedures as provided in the Book of Discipline, and authority for making appointments continues to rest with the bishop after a consultative process to determine the suitability of such an appointment.

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14. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.

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§ 310.2.d) footnote 3:

15. The General Conference, in response to expressions throughout the Church in regarding homosexuality and ordination, reaffirms the present language of the Discipline regarding the character and commitment of persons seeking ordination and affirms its high standards.

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16. In the Social Principles, the General Conference has said that, “we affirm the sanctity of marriage that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between two people who are married to each other. We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, which is traditionally between one man and one woman, whether or not there are children of the union.

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17. In the Social Principles, the General Conference has said that, “we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” Furthermore, the Principles state that ““we affirm the sanctity of marriage that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a
man and a woman. We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union.

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¶ 341.6

18. Ceremonies that celebrate marriages between two persons committed to one another as provided in ¶ 161.B may be conducted by United Methodist pastors and other persons authorized in the Book of Discipline only upon following the process provided in ¶ 340.2.a)(3)(a).

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19. Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches

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APPENDIX B
Community Table Proposal for General Conference

A Third Way

PROPOSAL III—A THIRD WAY—(Draft legislation has been prepared for this approach).
Remove all prohibitive language from The United Methodist Book of Discipline, but with only minor changes to the existing Social Principles in anticipation of the finalizing of a global Social Principles which may come in 2020, while affirming the existing Disciplinary warrant about who clergy perform weddings for and while affirming the existing constitutional warrant for annual conferences to make decisions about ordination.


Impact: Would make minor changes to the Social Principles in anticipation of a global Social Principles. These changes would note, for instance, that historically The United Methodist Church has not condoned the practice of homosexuality.

In terms of same-sex marriage, this approach would allow the exercise of conscience amongst clergy. Given the current disciplinary warrant (cf. BOD §340.2a, 3a) for clergy to determine whom they perform weddings for, clergy who choose to could perform same-sex weddings. Clergy who do not choose to would not be required to perform same-sex weddings.

Annual conferences, as is already their constitutional warrant (cf. §33 of the Constitution), would continue to determine matters of ordination, including whether or not to ordain LGBTQ persons. Bishops would determine where to appoint based on the existing consultative process outlined in the BOD. This option also would remove the practice of homosexuality or the performance of same-sex ceremonies from the categories of chargeable offenses. It would leave the funding restrictions intact.

A Third Way
Discipline Paragraphs: 2702 and related paragraphs 161, 304, 310, and 341
Financial Implications: None
Global Implications: Yes

Amend paragraph 2702.1 as indicated following:

¶ 2702. 1. A bishop, clergy member of an annual conference (¶ 370), local pastor, clergy on honorable or administrative location, or diaconal minister may be tried when charged (subject to the statute of limitations in ¶ 2702.4) with one or more of the following offenses: (a) immorality including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage; (b) practices declared by The United Methodist

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Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or performing same sex wedding ceremonies; (c) crime; (d) disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church; (e) dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church; (f) relationships and/or behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor; (g) child abuse; (h) sexual abuse; (i) sexual misconduct or (j) harassment, including, but not limited to racial and/or sexual harassment; or (k) racial or gender discrimination.

Amend paragraphs 161.B), 161.F), and 304.3 as indicated following:

¶161.B) Marriage—We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between two people who are married to each other, a man and a woman. We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, which is traditionally between one man and one woman, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage. We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

...  

¶161.F) Human Sexuality—We affirm that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift.

Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

We deplore all forms of the commercialization, abuse, and exploitation of sex. We call for strict global enforcement of laws prohibiting the sexual exploitation of children and for adequate protection, guidance, and counseling for abused children. All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence. The Church should support the family in providing age appropriate education regarding sexuality to children, youth, and adults.

We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. The United Methodist Church historically has not condoned does not condone the practice of homosexuality and has considered considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.
§304.3. While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is considered by many to be incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church. Therefore, authority for discerning suitability for ordination continues to rest with the annual conference as provided in §33 of the Constitution, following candidacy procedures as provided in the Book of Discipline, and authority for making appointments continues to rest with the bishop after a consultative process to determine the suitability of such an appointment.

....

Amend §310.2.d), the footnote referenced therein, Footnote 3, beginning on page 225 as follows:

§310.2.d), Footnote 3. ... The General Conference, in response to expressions throughout the Church regarding homosexuality and ordination, reaffirms the present language of the Discipline regarding the character and commitment of person seeking ordination and affirms its high standards. For more than 200 years candidates for ordination have been asked Wesley’s Questions...

...

In the Social Principles, the General Conference has said that “we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” Furthermore, the Principles state that “we affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between two people who are married to each other a man and a woman. We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, which is traditionally between one man and one woman, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage.” Also, “we affirm the integrity of single persons, and we reject all social practices that discriminate or social attitudes that are prejudicial against persons because they are single.”

...

Amend paragraph 341.6 as indicated following:
§341.6. Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches marriages between two persons committed to one another as provided in §161.B may be conducted by United Methodist pastors and other persons authorized in the Book of Discipline only upon following the process provided in §340.2.a)(3)(a).
RATIONALE:
This change ends Church trials over homosexuality, and it retains the authority of the annual conference to discern suitability for ordination. Bishops retain authority for appointments. Clergy and local churches will continue to have the right of consultation in appointment making processes. Clergy will determine whom to marry to whom.
APPENDIX C
Questionnaire Responses According to Gender

¶2702.1 A bishop, clergy member of an annual conference (¶ 370), local pastor, clergy on honorable or administrative location, or diaconal minister may be tried when charged (subject to the statute of limitations in ¶ 2702.4) with one or more of the following offenses:

1. (a) immorality included but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in marriage.

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2. (a) immorality included but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in heterosexual marriage.

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3. (b) practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings

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4. (b) practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to: being a self-avowed, practicing homosexual; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies

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5. We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between two people who are married.

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6. We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman.

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7. We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, which is traditionally between one man and one woman, whether or not there are children of the union.

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8. We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union.

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¶ 161.F) Human Sexuality—We affirm that sexuality is God’s gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift.

9. Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous marriage.

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11. The United Methodist Church historically has not condoned the practice of homosexuality and has considered this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.

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While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world.

13. The practice of homosexuality is considered by many to be incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, authority for discerning suitability for ordination continues to rest with the annual conference as provided in ¶ 33 of the Constitution, following candidacy procedures as provided in the Book of Discipline, and authority for making appointments continues to rest with the bishop after a consultative process to determine the suitability of such an appointment.

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14. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.

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¶ 310.2.d) footnote 3:

15. The General Conference, in response to expressions throughout the Church in regard to homosexuality and ordination, reaffirms the present language of the Discipline regarding the character and commitment of persons seeking ordination and affirms its high standards.
16. In the Social Principles, the General Conference has said that, "we affirm the sanctity of marriage that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between two people who are married to each other. We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, which is traditionally between one man and one woman, whether or not there are children of the union.

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17. In the Social Principles, the General Conference has said that, "we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." Furthermore, the Principles state that "we affirm the sanctity of marriage that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union.

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§ 341.6

18. Ceremonies that celebrate marriages between two persons committed to one another as provided in § 161.B may be conducted by United Methodist pastors and other persons authorized in the Book of Discipline only upon following the process provided in § 340.2.a)(3)(a).

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19. Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches

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APPENDIX D
NARRATIVE RESEARCH PROMPTS
The story of a people

1. I am collecting life histories for a Doctor of Ministry research project. If you are willing to share your life history in the context of the church, take your time. I will not interrupt you, but I will take notes for us to reflect upon as you and I construct your narrative.

2. Is your local church/family/friends aware of your identity? If so, how did the local church/family/friends respond to your disclosure and if not, discuss why you have chosen not to disclose your identity?

3. I’m going to read to you from the Book of Discipline between each statement discuss how the words of our church law make you feel. There is not a right or wrong response we are just going to see if the local church experience is similar to or different from the legalistic notion of doctrine. READ: ¶ 4 Article IV, ¶ 214, ¶ 304.3, ¶ 341.6, ¶613, ¶806.9, ¶ 2702.

4. You may know that our General Conference meets in May of 2016. There are a number of proposals that will be voted on by delegates from each annual conference. One of the issues that will be discussed in great depth will be the language of the articles and paragraphs we’ve just read. With your permission, I am going to share your narrative with our delegation from North Alabama. Is there anything you would like to be certain that the clergy and laity representing our conference know about you, your life history of church experience or anything else that you think they should be considered in the decision-making process?

5. Do you have any thoughts or ideas about how we can re-story the narrative of the LGBTQ community and the United Methodist Church? Is there a path to reconciliation and healing and what would that path look like?

The purpose of the narrative interview is to be open and free-flowing. The interviewee dictated where the conversation led but the researcher had prompts available to steer each participant in the direction of the project. As can be read in their narrative accounts, not every suggested prompt was utilized in each interview.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Williams, Katie Bo. "Genetics of Sexuality Broadens." *Discover* 36, no. 10 (December 2015), 13.