

4-2016

Trauma, Oppression, and Identity: A Philosophical Approach to Justice in Catholic Communities

Dominic Sanfilippo

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/uhp_theses



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

eCommons Citation

Sanfilippo, Dominic, "Trauma, Oppression, and Identity: A Philosophical Approach to Justice in Catholic Communities" (2016).
Honors Theses. 138.

https://ecommons.udayton.edu/uhp_theses/138

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the University Honors Program at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.

Trauma, Oppression, and Identity: A Philosophical Approach to Justice in Catholic Communities



Honors Thesis

Dominic Sanfilippo

Department: Philosophy

Advisor: V. Denise James, Ph.D.

April 2016

Trauma, Oppression, and Identity: A Philosophical Approach to Justice in Catholic Communities

Honors Thesis

Dominic Sanfilippo

Department of Philosophy

Advisor: V. Denise James, Ph.D.

April 2016

Abstract

Many disciplines have contributed to the evolving understanding of trauma and oppression. The discipline of philosophy offers us the opportunity to ask the question: what should we be doing to create conditions of justice in communities where people have experienced trauma or oppression in relation to their identity? In this thesis, I will use philosophy to propose ways that we can ameliorate injustice in social and religious settings, particularly Catholicism. By examining historical and contemporary questions around identity and the self, I hope to begin to articulate both a specific problem in the Church and identify possible paths toward creating more just communities for people who identify as LGBTQ Catholics.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

Thanks very much to my advisor Dr. V. Denise James, who stuck with me and helped open my eyes to the life of the mind; the University Honors Program; my many professors and mentors who challenge me to seek out a lifelong education; my family, and my friends.

This thesis is dedicated to the courageous individuals around the world who search for love, community, and an encounter with God amidst structures and societies that challenge their humanity.



Table of Contents

Abstract	Title Page
Introduction: The Elephant in the Room	1
Chapter 1: Justice Through Difference: John Rawls and Iris Marion Young	5
Chapter 2: Trauma and Oppression	24
Chapter 3: Fragmented Identities	42
Conclusions, Limitations, and Steps Forward	54

Introduction: The Elephant in the Room

We are handed an identity before having a say in the matter, and we spend our lives running from it, pretending we have left it behind, or grappling with it as Jacob wrestled with his angel.

Fenton Johnson, *Keeping Faith*

In July 2015, Deb Word, the president of Fortunate Families, a support group for Catholic parents that advocates for the church to embrace their LGBTQ children, was asked by the *New York Times* what she would say to Pope Francis if she met him at that September's World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. She replied that she would tell the Holy Father "we don't need to put this kind of trauma on a child's soul."¹

In various ways, Roman Catholicism identifies justice as a key feature of both the communal life of the Church and of God's relationship to individual human beings. There are explicit or implicit mentions of justice in Church doctrine, teaching, and practice. We find justice mentioned in various books of the Bible, "The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love," and Catholic social teaching that seeks to affirm and defend human dignity through confronting certain systems of oppression and domination.² The Catholic world's sustained effort for peace and justice is well documented, and an exhaustive depiction of its efforts on these fronts is unnecessary here. Sustained attention to justice is a worthy project. Yet, the Catholic approach seems to fall short in certain aspects of both the Catholic Church's *theory* and *practice* of

¹ Laurie Goodstein, "Gay and Transgender Catholics Urge Pope Francis to Take a Stand," *New York Times*, July 28, 2015, accessed October 9th, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/29/us/gay-and-transgender-catholics-urge-pope-francis-to-take-a-stand.html?_r=0.

² Psalms 33:5; *Catholic Social Teaching Challenges and Directions*, "Catholic Social Teaching", United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

justice, particularly in regard to the status of women and the LGBTQ community within the Catholic Church.³ In this thesis, I will focus on the status and lives of LGBTQ members of the Catholic Church.

Catholicism differentiates and excludes certain sexual orientations and gender identities that fall outside of the Church's teaching that affirm heterosexual, consecrated marriages aimed at procreation and unity. Catholicism's continual chasm between its LGBTQ members and the full life of the Church has emerged as an increasing source of conflict, disagreement, and tension, especially in recent years. As many governments, legislatures, and other Christian denominations and religious communities around the world have made greater overtures toward LGBTQ individuals and have taken concrete steps to integrate them more fully into the social fabric, the Catholic Church seems to have become harsher in how it treats its LGBTQ members in doctrine, rhetoric, and practice.⁴ For every apparent opening, such as Pope Francis' now famous quip of "Who am I to judge?" another story emerges of a gay teacher or vice-principal being fired from a Catholic high school by the bishop for marrying his or her partner civilly in their

³ I use the term "LGBTQ" throughout to refer to the broader community; however, I do not mean to equivocate the definitions, identity, and experiences of gays, lesbians, bisexual persons, transgender persons, queer and questioning persons, etc. I use it simply as an inclusive reference point. The nuances of Catholic teaching and practice toward gay couples transgendered persons deserve separate but linked examinations; that, however, will fall outside of the purview of this particular thesis.

⁴ A few watershed moments and trends that come to mind are the June 2015 Obergefell vs. Hodges US Supreme Court Case that legalized gay marriage, state laws that ban discrimination based on sexual orientation, and renewed affirmation of LGBTQ individuals, couples, and families within other Christian denominations such as the Episcopal Church, the Anglican Church, and the United Church of Christ.

personal lives, or of cold, unrealistic rhetoric yet again finding its way into papal letters and apostolic exhortations.⁵

The disconnect between the teaching, rhetoric, and jurisprudence of the Church and the truths revealed by autobiographical accounts, relationships, and advocacy from the LGBTQ Catholic community is creating subtle cracks and psychic harms across many unique Catholic communities across the world. Seeking to employ both the methodological tool of problem articulation based in pragmatist, feminist philosophy and the relational, sacramental language of the Church, I will undertake a textual analysis to explore the delicate interplay between theories and practices of justice, identity, trauma, and oppression. By doing so, I hope to identify, articulate, and argue for the existence of a major problem in the way the Catholic Church treats its LGBTQ members.

Additionally, as a cisgender, heterosexual male who has grown up in the American Catholic Church and remained active in it, I also write from a place of humility and caution, recognizing my status as an observer to the LGBTQ Catholic community.

If the realities of the stunted life offered to LGBTQ Catholics are not acknowledged, apologized for, and ameliorated in a constructive manner, the social bonds and cohesion of the Church are likely to further regress. Despite this gloomy potential forecast, an examination of the growing body of literature and autobiographical voices from LGBTQ Catholics that affirm identity as both *gay* and *Catholic* reveals that the path forward lies in listening to the lessons about identity, harm, and healing

⁵ One such example of many firings, dismissals, and investigations is the 2013 firing of Mark Zmuda from Eastside Catholic School in Seattle, which led to continued protests from students, parents, and community members calling for his full reinstatement and a fuller dialogue over the necessity and injustice of the matter. See <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/21/seattle-catholic-schools-firing-gay-vice-principal> for coverage and links to other sources.

embedded in the stories of those people whose lives are often treated as paradoxes and foreign amidst the warmth of Catholic community. There is an uncomfortable separation splintering the Catholic Church, and it can be found in living rooms, high school classrooms, and confessionals. Its face is marked by separation, exclusion, and confusion, and it permeates the consciousness of LGBTQ Catholics, their family members and friends, and, indeed, all members of the Church in various ways. I argue that if one begins to look closely at this reality through the lenses of philosophy and narrative, both the inconsistencies and pressures that allowed it to spread throughout Catholic communities and paths forward toward healing, justice, and reconciliation emerge.

Chapter 1: Justice Through Difference: John Rawls and Iris Marion Young

Justice is a mechanism to retain order, fairness, and a sense of moral rightness in society. Each society has its idiosyncratic history, rhetoric, and context for deliberating and organizing community life that is crucial to that society's flourishing. In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Iris Marion Young proposes an "enabling concept of justice" that affirms individual difference and an understanding that the law should embrace the various embodied social identities of human beings.⁶ Young contrasts her vision of justice with John Rawls's well-known theory of justice as fairness. Rawls argues that society must place fairness above all else in an effort to promote an egalitarian liberal freedom that ensures any question of justice that emerges from an original position will purportedly ensure all parties are "rational and mutually disinterested".⁷ While acknowledging Rawls' theory of justice as an admirable effort, Young still deems it an "utopian fiction" that hides the structural, damaging treatment embedded in systems of justice.⁸ She argues that a critical examination of our acceptance of justice as fairness is necessary due to pervasive institutional conditions of oppression and subjugation that deny individual difference. These conditions often debilitate and destroy the very justice that they wish to affirm and regulate within communities and societies.

I will begin this chapter by sketching a brief outline of John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness. Subsequently, I will contrast it with Iris Marion Young's discussion of justice from her starting point that the "philosopher is always socially situated", whether

⁶ Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 39.

⁷ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 13.

⁸ Young 104.

they admit it or not.⁹ I will argue that Young's position affirms that any particular examination of justice in community must begin by recognizing and rooting out oppression and social domination. Young celebrates the differences within and amidst diverse social groups and warns that laws and policies that advocate for the "melting away of differences" put certain groups at risk for oppression. In doing so, she outlines a vision for how specific societies can embrace and cultivate a thriving social ecosystem that respects group differences to achieve a more robust justice at that particular time.¹⁰

Rawls & Justice as Fairness

Over the past several decades, Rawlsian fairness has arguably been the dominant theory of justice that has embedded itself in legal decisions, academic parlance, and political discourse. By his own account, Rawls set out to "...work out a theory of justice that is a viable alternative to these doctrines which have long dominated our philosophical tradition."¹¹ The philosophers that Rawls set his sights on were the utilitarians- such as Mill, Bentham, and Smith- who deftly advocated for the greater good of many, sometimes at the expense of individual rights. While Rawls recognized the intellectual weight behind their claims on morality and justice, he appreciated the contractual justice of thinkers like Kant and Locke and had a deep concern for protecting the inherent rights of all individuals amidst the chaos and tumult of organized societies like democracies. Therefore, his years-long development of *A Theory of Justice* centered on his desire for a way to bring all peoples to the same table when any difficult question arose surrounding right, wrong, and the just solution to a public problem. How could

⁹ Ibid 5.

¹⁰ Ibid 47.

¹¹ Rawls 3.

different people- born into vastly different homes, socioeconomic statuses, and communities- find justice? Moreover, is it possible for citizens with different agendas and deeply held beliefs, within systems of “especially deep inequalities”, to come together and arrive at a fair, acceptable conclusion for all?¹²

To answer this question, Rawls created what he called the original position: the “appropriate, initial status quo” that ostensibly serves as an impartial arbiter in all disputes.¹³ To create this original position, Rawls conjures up the metaphor of a “veil of ignorance” that obscures any self-knowledge amongst the parties involved in the situation. To explain, imagine four hypothetical people sitting around a table somewhere in America: two men and two women. One man is a thirty-two year old investment banker that lives in downtown Manhattan; he identifies as Mexican-American, heterosexual, and single. The other man is twenty-five, white, and a young medical technician in rural Ohio; he’s gay, and has been in a committed relationship for several years. One of the women is a heterosexual, black college student studying physics; the other is a Seminole woman who’s a teacher in Florida, and is married to an immigrant from Iraq. All four have been pulled into a dispute that they must resolve fairly and in the most just manner possible. Rawls was deeply concerned that each person’s individual biased history and story- comprised of racial and ethnic identities, social ties, beliefs, values, and so on- would distort any attempt to see the fairest solution. Therefore, the veil induces temporary amnesia on all four individuals. Stripped of their identities and markers by which they approach life and decision making, they are theoretically free to

¹² Ibid 7.

¹³ Ibid 18.

deliberate, discuss, and reason their way to the fairest solution, all four knowing that they could be anyone in the world once they regain their memory.

These four people are equipped only with the facts at hand and the knowledge that each of them wishes to obtain their share of the primary goods present in their specific society, which Rawls splits into two categories: the social primary goods of “rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth” and natural primary goods like “health and vigor, intelligence and imagination” which are less tied to the process of deliberative justice.¹⁴ Interestingly, he also identifies self-respect as arguably the most important primary good; I will return to this later. For Rawls, the original position is the perfect solution to the inherent biases, inequalities, and injustices that distort individual rights within pluralistic societies. This new system sought to integrate both the standard utilitarian goal of maximizing utility at any given moment and the liberal foundation that earlier contract theorists had laid down. Each person, not fully knowing themselves but harboring an internal sense of the good and that each of them lives a markedly different life in a free society, should aim for the fairest solution that will benefit the least advantaged among them once they become themselves again; furthermore, their ultimate decision should have the least advantaged of the entire society in mind. To accomplish this, he lays out two principles that make up the foundation of any and every foray into the hypothetical room where deliberations from the original position occur.

These two Rawlsian “principles of justice” that each rational decision maker utilizes in mulling over his or her course of action attempt to address the inextricable relationship between liberty and difference. After explaining them early on in *A Theory of*

¹⁴ Ibid 62.

Justice, Rawls defended, reassessed, and reflected on these two principles for the rest of his career in texts such as *Political Liberalism* and *Justice as Fairness*. The first principle articulates that all citizens hold an “extensive” set of basic liberties that are to be defended at all costs, so long as they do not infringe on others’ liberties. Building off the first, the second principle addresses inequality. It states that inequalities should be tempered as far as they are “to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged”, and that all public offices and positions be equally accessible in the interest of fairness.¹⁵ When employed together, Rawls advocates that the *liberty principle* and the *difference principle* defend each individual’s rights as far as possible whilst attempting to ameliorate, to some extent, the inequalities and disadvantages that arise among each person.¹⁶ In the hopes of illuminating why Rawls genuinely thought he was providing a paradigm through which all questions of justice could be laid to rest, I will give a short account of the second principle before moving to the first, since Rawls repeatedly states that the second flows from the first in what he deems a “lexical order.”¹⁷

To illustrate the second principle, Rawls asks us to imagine the differences between the people that make up the entrepreneurial class as opposed to poorer, unskilled laborers. There are many factors that preceded this point in time for both peoples, including the specific community, class, and circumstances that each was born into. The second principle utilizes geometry and economics to remark that any initial or entrenched inequality is acceptable only if “the difference in expectation is to the advantage of the

¹⁵ Ibid 60; further articulated on 302.

¹⁶ Ibid 60. The terms I used for the two principles- “Liberty” and “Difference”- are regularly used by scholarly sources, although some variations exist elsewhere.

¹⁷ Ibid 42. In a lengthy footnote, Rawls explains and grounds the historical meaning of the lexical or “lexicographical” in the assumption that concepts such as goods, rights, and morals have relative degrees of primacy and importance.

man who is worse off, in this case the representative unskilled worker.”¹⁸ There are different ways in which the second principle can be interpreted, carried out, and established as outcomes based on interpretations of Rawls’ terms “open to all” and “everyone’s advantage”.¹⁹ They unfold in a relative sequence: natural aristocracy, natural liberty, liberal equality, and democratic equality. Rawls ultimately settles on democratic equality as the preferred and natural outcome for free societies and says that such equality flows from a healthy synthesis of the sub-principles of fair equality of opportunity and difference.²⁰ Most of Rawls’ discussion of the second principle takes place in the realm of economics and utility, which are not the direct focus of our discussion of justice, though definitely related. Through this principle, he attempts to stem the tide of mass material inequality. He self-admittedly states that he is not entirely comfortable dealing with the different degrees of injustice that can ensure in free and materially unequal societies. He does, though, give a warning to any society that allows for inequality:

The point to note here is that while the difference principle is, strictly speaking, a maximizing principle, there is a significant distinction between the cases that fall short of the best arrangement. A society should try to avoid the region where the marginal contributions of those better off are negative, since, other things equal, this seems a greater fault than falling short of the best scheme when those contributions are positive. The even larger difference between rich and poor makes the latter even worse off, and this violates the principle of mutual advantage as well as democratic equality (17).²¹

Rawls admits the potential dangers of accepting degrees of inequality for the sake of the coherence of his system; however, this is another area where others have offered critiques. He recounts one critique, that “the final formulation of Rawls’ first principle of

¹⁸ Ibid 78.

¹⁹ Ibid 65.

²⁰ Ibid 75.

²¹ Ibid 79.

justice is stated as follows: Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.”²²

This first principle deals primarily with the actual system that governs and regulates free society. Rawls identifies certain liberties that are necessary for citizens to flourish and maximize their freedoms without infringing on the freedoms of others. These include:

political liberty (the right to vote and to be eligible for public office), together with freedom of speech and assembly; liberty of conscience and freedom of thought; freedom of the person along with the right to hold (personal) property; and freedom from arbitrary arrest and seizure as defined by the concept of the rule of law.²³

Rawls sets these out as his basic priorities for any given free society because they aim for a moderate Aristotelian path “between dogmatism and intolerance on the one side, and an a reductionism which regards religion and morality as mere preferences on the other.”²⁴

In examining the theories of justice that had come before him, Rawls recognizes a constant tension between the competing interests, beliefs, and desires in plural democracies and the primacy of rights or goods. In his view, societies grounded first by certain unalienable liberties would gradually harmonize and balance the good *because* of the urgency and relative equality of rights.

In sketching out the first principle Rawls names several contingencies by which liberties can be restricted; however, this restriction can only happen “for the sake of liberty itself.”²⁵ These contingencies- that a person’s liberties can be less extensive but equal to all other persons, or that a person’s liberty can be unequal as long as their “freedom is better secured”- aim to address the obvious reality that inequality and

²² Ibid 302.

²³ Ibid 61.

²⁴ Ibid 243.

²⁵ Ibid 244.

affronts against liberties have existed in every human society that ever purported to be free. In the hopes of addressing the complex and often disappointing realities of modern society, these contingencies provide sorts of goals by which relative inequality and limited freedoms can exist and still hit the mark of substantive justice as fairness. In the same section, Rawls identifies further addendums to the primacy of liberty. He identifies two ways in which liberties might be limited that questions of justice perhaps cannot address.

The first are the cases in which personal accident, history, or government limits liberty by necessary or reasonable measure; Rawls cites the “natural features of the human situation, as well as the lesser liberty of children” to explain these devalued freedoms.²⁶ One easy example is society’s relatively accepted rule that people cannot yell “Fire!” in a crowded movie theatre or “Bomb!” on an airplane in order to falsely incite panic. Although this limits the personal liberty of speech, Rawls acknowledges the necessity for some order. There is obviously a tense grey line at the heart of these first limitations, and those debates have raged for centuries and will continue for centuries more. The second case he identifies, interestingly, is when injustice “already exists” and is brought upon certain individuals by others, either through intolerance, contrary convictions, or some combination thereof.²⁷

In this second limitation, Rawls freely acknowledges that his theory of justice cannot account for all unjust circumstances. However, his optimism and seeming shrug toward the realities and complexities certain structural injustice leaves a lingering

²⁶ To read how Rawls has been critiqued for his treatment- or lack thereof- of justice in the family, see Susan Moller Okin’s *Justice, Gender, and the Family* and the works of Martha Nussbaum and Carole Pateman, among others.

²⁷ Ibid 244-5.

question as to whether an idyllic, rational, universal theory of justice is a desirable endpoint of the endless endeavor toward better, stronger, and fairer society. To quote:

But men's propensity to injustice is not a permanent aspect of community life; it is greater or less depending on social institutions, and in particular on whether these are just or unjust. A well-ordered society tends to eliminate or at least to control men's inclinations to injustice, and therefore warring or intolerant sects, say, are much less likely to exist, or to be a danger, once such a society is established. How justice requires us to meet injustice is a very different problem from how best to cope with the inevitable limitations and contingencies of human life.²⁸

How can individuals and groups cope with injustice? Rawls identifies societal institutions as responsible for injustice; accordingly, we are to believe that the Rawlsian pursuit of justice takes place outside of those parameters. However, these institutions are willingly co-opted elsewhere in his work. He seems to say that structural injustice and intolerance that is aimed at certain individuals and groups of individuals exist, but it is a problem for a different place and a different time. This is a vicious cycle, because Rawls wishes to present a universal theory of justice that says to any society or community that counts itself as free and asks: how well are you guarding your liberties, and how best do you aim for fairness while tempering inequality? If Rawls is making normative claims by theorizing, it is troubling to allow him off the hook for recognizing these different forms of injustice but allowing them to still be part of the cohesive system.

As a final note, Rawls' discussion of self-respect as "perhaps the most important primary good" connects to this thesis's aim to examine how the Church affirms identity and dignity within its communities- or, perhaps, fails to do so. He writes that self-respect has two primary attributes: a sense of the person's own value and his or her "conviction of the good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out." Secondly and relatedly, the person

²⁸ Ibid 245.

must be confident that he or she can fill out those intentions reasonably.²⁹ If we feel as if we cannot or should not fulfill our life's aims- indeed, if we cannot conceive of coming close to an Aristotelian flourishing- then we may find that "desire and activity become empty and vain, and we sink into apathy and cynicism."³⁰ Rawls ties self-esteem to the interplay between regret and its deeper sense of loss, shame. Whereas regret is a general feeling of absence or missed opportunity, shame "implies a especially intimate connection with our person and with those upon whom we depend to confirm the sense of our own worth."³¹ Rawlsian shame becomes moral for because it implies a failure to participate in the excellences of one's own life and the lives of others. This, too, is different from guilt (although shame and guilt can be tied to the same characteristic, event, or action), because guilt deals with something contrary to the sense of "right and justice".³² Shame moves even deeper in the soul and the psyche because they imply "blemishes in the person."³³ If the human experience of shame is undesirable and problematic within even a liberal Rawlsian system of justice, then warning bells should be ringing for any community that identifies justice as part of its bedrock.

Rawls' overall effort toward a theory of justice, although substantive, is problematic. If someone wishes to offer a universal theory and method for justice, it must proceed from the acknowledgement of the messiness and irrationality of human relationships in social settings. Although Rawls offers a beautiful vision of reason and fairness in the pursuit of justice, grounded in the idealism those that came before him like

²⁹ Ibid 440.

³⁰ Ibid 440.

³¹ Ibid 443; Rawls mentions that his definition of shame is indebted to William McDougall.

³² Ibid 445.

³³ Ibid 444.

Kant, it does not address how human beings historically have acted in community and continue to act today, even in spite of a growing value and care for reason. In order to combat systemic injustice such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and religious discrimination- which are directly tied to the material inequality that Rawls attempts to ameliorate in his second principle of justice- we must look at the reality of peoples' lives instead of a purportedly rational ideal.

With a simple yet profound way to defend individual rights and liberties and affirm pluralism at the same time, many writers have built on 'justice as fairness' and have applied it to many corners of society. Lawyers, policy makers, and judges championed Rawlsian justice, and the American legal ecosystem is infused with fairness from the top down. However, in order to get to the root of the interwoven injustices that face many *groups* of people in societies like contemporary America, we must turn away from Rawls toward a feminist philosopher that identified people through their complex histories, their relationships, and their bodies: Iris Marion Young.

Young's Politics of Difference

Unlike John Rawls, Iris Marion Young did not seek a unifying theory of justice. To her, such theories implied that one correct frame of justice exists for all time and all places, outside of human experience and history. This system "implicitly conflates moral knowledge with scientific knowledge" and assumes that any questions of justice can be divorced from the experiences that the given members of a community live through, whether positive or negative.³⁴ That was not the world that Young lived in or wrote about. She reveled in the positive contributions and vibrancy of diversity and difference;

³⁴ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 4.

however, she was disturbed by her increasing awareness of the overt and underlying oppression carried out against peoples on a daily basis. Given this sobering reality, Young sought to discuss and wrestle with justice without constructing her own universalizing theory. In her view, those endeavors- while taken up by many other philosophers and thinkers, and undoubtedly important- were neither entirely honest nor desirable. She dealt with an imperfect world that did not often live up to goodness, rightness, rationality, or fairness. Along with other feminist philosophers such as Susan Moller Okin and Martha Nussbaum, she critiqued Rawls because his work did not account for the very real biases and inequalities that were built into the structures, institutions, and assumptions that make up the original position. In their view, the perceived impartial sphere where deliberation takes place between fair, decent peoples is not very impartial at all.

Although important, if liberal fairness is allowed to be the culmination of the search for justice, something crucial is lost. Young makes it clear that we have told ourselves a narrative that we are on a gradual uphill track toward perfect fairness, equality, and justice; furthermore, if we reason and deliberate as hard as we can, we will arrive there quite happily and safely. At the beginning of the sixth chapter of her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, “Social Movements and the Politics of Difference”, Young makes the stakes of this mind-set quite apparent by reflecting on the stories we tell ourselves about justice and one another:

Today in our society a few vestiges of prejudice and discrimination remain, but we are working on them, and have nearly realized the dream those Enlightenment fathers dared to propound... We tell each other this story and make our children perform it for our sacred holidays- Thanksgiving Day, the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, Lincoln’s Birthday. We have constructed Martin Luther King Day to fit the narrative so well that we have already forgotten it took a fight to get it included in the canon year. There is much truth to this story. Enlightenment ideals of liberty and political equality did and do

inspire movements against oppression and domination, whose success has created social values and institutions we would not want to lose... The very worthiness of the narrative, however, and the achievement of political equality that it recounts, now inspires new heretics.³⁵

These heretics are welcome and “endorsed” by Young because they wish to make the case that they are freer than they would be otherwise by *affirming* their differences and group identity, not by decimating them at the altar of the veil of ignorance.³⁶ Black Americans, indigenous peoples, LGBTQ religious peoples, and scores of others who broadly fall into how Young describes social groups in *Justice* all experience various forms of oppression, domination, and marginalization in their communities because the differences that form their identities have been ostensibly swept away in an effort to see the world blindly and dismiss existent prejudices, hatreds, and power imbalances as relics of the past. I will outline Young’s main assessment and critique from *Justice* about the distributive paradigm and how it dismantles the “ideal of impartiality” that obscures and ignores human bodies, identities, and relationships.

The Distributive Paradigm

In order to have any conversation about justice, Young points out that one must recognize the common thread throughout the history of philosophy that skews toward equivocating questions of justice with questions of distribution. She calls this phenomenon the “distributive paradigm”, by which she means:

...a configuration of elements and practices which define an inquiry: metaphysical presuppositions, unquestioned terminology, characteristic questions, lines of reasoning, specific theories and their typical scope and mode of application. The distributive paradigm defines social justice as the morally proper distribution of social benefits and burdens among society’s members. Paramount among these are wealth, income, and other material resources. The distributive definition of justice also includes, however, nonmaterial social goods such as rights, opportunities, power, and self-respect. What

³⁵ Young 157.

³⁶ Ibid.

marks the distributive paradigm is a tendency to conceive social justice and distribution as coextensive concepts.³⁷

Rawls' theory of justice and his two principles immediately come to mind. Through direct and indirect reference, it is clear that she has Rawls and others like him in mind here and throughout the entire text by beginning her entire examination of justice as a critique of the entire vantage point from which her predecessors had started. Young points out that this way of viewing justice is so pervasive and intuitive that most critics of an increasingly dominant Rawls-influenced liberalism still use the discourse of distribution to voice their concerns, from the socialists to the Marxists to the communitarian Michael Walzer.³⁸ All of this is particularly troubling for Young because, intentionally or unintentionally, it recreates human beings as “nodes, points in a social field”, devoid of all of their human intricacy, messiness, and *social context and relationships*.³⁹ In examining the implications of the academy's collectively blind deference to the distributive paradigm, Young singled out two consequences that debilitated endeavors for more robust discussions and public implementations of justice: an ignorance of how discussions of material redistribution “presuppose and obscure” institutional context, and a distorted picture of how non-material goods- such as rights, self-respect, and opportunities- function in the lives of ordinary people in the real world.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid 16.

³⁸ Ibid 17-8. Young gives Walzer a bit more credit than her other contemporaries by noting his critique of “the structure of dominance itself”, which registers more soundly in the vein she writes in. However, she points out that Walzer, too, utilizes “the language of distribution.” See Walzer's 1983 work *Spheres of Justice* for further reading.

³⁹ Ibid 18.

⁴⁰ Ibid 24-6.

To Young, it is clear that distorted material distribution and inequality of wealth are deep injustices that need to be tackled in societies around the world. Critiquing the implicit portrayal of justice in general meaning solely those particular injustices does not mean that someone like her does not care about ameliorating grossly disproportionate economic and material wealth. It simply means that there are other pressing matters of justice in contemporary society that fall outside of this realm, such as the residents of a small town organizing and protesting against a waste treatment plant being built near their waterways and homes or another town being decimated by the major employer shutting down their factory without any consultation or warning. In situations like these, material compensation and jobs are conflated with “decision-making power and procedures”; racial and ethnic stereotypes in media, and corollary public aggressions and courtroom inequities, or questions about the “division of labor and meaningful work” all make up these injustices which are not tied directly to distribution.⁴¹ For Young, those who critique the distributive paradigm from a Marxist lens miss the crucial point that capital class relations and property are not the only contexts for domination.⁴²

By desiring a broader institutional context for examining claims of justice or injustice, Young means to include:

...Any structures or practices, the rules or norms that guide them, and the language and symbols that mediate social interactions within them, in institutions of state, family, and civil society, as well as the workplace...insofar as they condition people’s ability to participate in determining their actions and their ability to develop and exercise their capacities.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid 19-20.

⁴² Ibid 21.

⁴³ Ibid 22.

To sum up, Young identifies three clear non-distributive issues that can be addressed: decision-making, division of labor, and culture.⁴⁴

The other part of her critique of the paradigm centers on her dismay at other theorists' lack of recognition of the limits of distributive analysis. This lack of recognition "reifies aspects of social life that are better understood as a function of rules and relations rather as things."⁴⁵ For instance, she again critiques Rawls for talking about rights and duties as if they were objects that could be counted as they come off of an assembly line, or quantifiable units to be assembled, disassembled, and redistributed at will. By asking what it even means to distribute rights, Young points to her underlying charge that rights, duties, self-respect, and other phenomena are social and relational; they are "social relationships that enable or constrain action." Power, too, is distorted by the distributive paradigm; while theorists often have good intent in writing and reflecting about how to better spread it around societies, Young contends that the very commodification of power as an *object* rather than as "processes", then we will never get to the root of so many of the pervasive, intertwined injustices that exist.

Breaking Down the Ideal of Impartiality

Later in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Young uses her claims about moral reasoning and notions of justice to specifically identify the problems with idealizing impartiality within legal systems and communities. Although liberal, impartial rights might make sense if justice simply is meant to deal with the "impersonal public contexts of law, bureaucracy, and the regulation of economic competition," Young advocates that the relational nature of individuals and the social function of our identities make

⁴⁴ Ibid 22.

⁴⁵ Ibid 25.

impartiality an errant aim.⁴⁶ One key way that impartiality inhibits individual and social flourishing is its reduction of difference to a supposed unity that abstracts us from “situation, feeling, affiliation, and point of view.”⁴⁷ These things tie human beings to earthly imperfections and messiness, which contrast with the often impartial, theoretical abstracts that men have tried to cement as reasonable and ideal for centuries. This impartiality curiously appeals to the logic and tradition of the Church, which lives a dual reality between its pastoral rhetoric that appeals to people in a relational, emotional, and even loving sense versus its institutional law that ties a masculine impartiality to natural law that fixes the universe irreparably above and beyond the lived experiences of those below, including its LGBTQ members.

It is the work of a separate thesis to fully examine and attempt to locate the state of justice in the Catholic Church. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a sort of official summary of beliefs offered by Saint Pope John Paul II in 1992, a vision of justice is offered that seems somewhat emancipatory and affirmative of the individual:

1943 Society ensures social justice by providing the conditions that allow associations and individuals to obtain their due.

1944 Respect for the human person considers the other "another self." It presupposes respect for the fundamental rights that flow from the dignity intrinsic of the person.

1945 The equality of men concerns their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it.⁴⁸

By employing the language of dues, the first sentence seems to conceive of social justice as primarily material, but also relational; the subsequent two lines affirm that by speaking of inherent dignity that flows between the self and the other.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid 96.

⁴⁷ Ibid 97.

⁴⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 1943-1945.

However, in Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI)'s letter from the office of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith entitled "Considerations Regarding Proposals To Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons", a slightly different vision of justice is laid out:

Differentiating between persons or refusing social recognition or benefits is unacceptable only when it is contrary to justice. The denial of the social and legal status of marriage to forms of cohabitation that are not and cannot be marital is not opposed to justice; on the contrary, justice requires it.⁵⁰

I do not wish to exclusively focus on gay marriage or the legal parameters of it here, for the parameters of the livelihoods of LGBTQ Catholics both encompass and transcend that important discussion. However, it is worth highlighting Ratzinger's vision of justice seems to include discrimination and subjugation of LGBTQ people (and not just Catholics, for this document discusses both church and civil marriage) *by necessity* in order to keep a just, orderly social framework from collapsing.

Young offers a different vision of justice that embraces people in their idiosyncrasies and views them as relational beings whose lives, interests, and aims are irrevocably tied up in those of others. This speaks to the deeply communal notions of solidarity, sacrament, and a common good that threads throughout the universal Catholic Church; indeed, the church's vision of social, environmental, and material justice finds a good deal of synchronicity with Young, if not the Church's relative oppression of women and LGBTQ peoples, as explored in this thesis. Thus, it would seem that an approach to justice akin to Young would be helpful and consistent if applied to the areas where the

⁴⁹ I suspect Young would find too much to disagree with in this articulation of justice, besides the Church's lingering and embedded patriarchal language and structure, which is also a topic for an entire separate inquiry.

⁵⁰ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Considerations Regarding Proposals To Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons," Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, section 8, 2003.

Church's relational justice veers sharply away toward a colder, impartial, universal law that cleaves bodies and relationships: matters of sexuality, identity, and relationship. To get to the heart of the paradoxes, hypocrisies, and suffering faced by LGBTQ Catholics, it seems clear that the Catholic Church must assess its core definitions of justice and see where and how incongruences seep into rhetoric and practice.

Chapter 2: Trauma and Oppression

Just communities are comprised of people who are allowed to develop and live their identities free of oppression or attack. However, within communities all over the world, groups of people are routinely demoralized and disallowed from participating as full members of community life. In the Catholic world, many LGBTQ individuals walk a careful line. Some people are welcomed with open arms into parishes and educational communities; however, others experience, harassment, exclusion, and downright hostility. LGBTQ individuals across the spectrum undergo heightened harassment, from the roughly 80% of LGBTQ school children who experience bullying in a given school year to the fact that LGBTQ teens are eight times as likely to attempt suicide than their cisgender peers.⁵¹ It proves difficult to quantitatively wade through the Catholic world to pinpoint concrete numbers on harassment, bullying, and shunning; however, as shown in the last chapter, more and more autobiographical and secondary accounts are emerging of the pain, anger, and loneliness suffered by Catholics who have been told time and time again that their deepest selves are existential, sinful paradoxes. I wish to connect this pain to the growing literature and exploration of the nature and function of two distinct, yet related concepts: trauma and oppression.

Trauma

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines trauma as such:

Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer-term reactions

⁵¹ “LGBT Bullying Statistics”, nobullying.com; “Statistics You Should Know About Gay and Transgender Students,” PFLAG New York.

include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches and nausea.⁵²

While some LGBTQ Catholics experience identity-rooted physical assaults and violence, others do not. The language and narratives associated with the effects of trauma give ripe opportunity to explore how certain aspects of trauma might factor in the lives of LGBTQ Catholics.

In the introduction to the interdisciplinary collection on trauma that she edited, Cathy Caruth offers that disciplines from across the academic spectrum are beginning to turn toward trauma to try and understand and hear “the radical disruptions and gaps of traumatic experience.”⁵³ Attempting to understand traumatic experiences- the scarring events of life that sear and destroy any sense of normality, order, and justice- may seem a futile process in and of itself. However, an increasing number of researchers are exploring this tenuous space in the hopes of revealing something about how humans process trauma, damage, and healing in communities. It is particularly salient to examine trauma in community, because those who undergo it often- but not always- identify with some particular social group.

In much of the literature surrounding trauma, brushes with death are often the central catalysts that trigger debilitating consequences, ranging from what is called PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) to other, more subtle symptoms that are difficult to classify and are debated across the field. In his 1994 work *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Additional Perspectives*, Merrill I. Lipton notes that the more commonly noted causes of obvious trauma- such as “physical or sexual abuse, auto accidents, war, rape, natural

⁵² “Trauma”, *American Psychological Association*.

⁵³ Cathy Caruth, “Trauma and Experience: Introduction,” *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 4.

disasters like storms and earthquakes”- should not exclude “a wide diversity of traumas that are often overlooked.”⁵⁴ Outside of readily recognized trauma-inducing experiences, indirect possible causes traumas are also known and explored by trauma theorists: direct witnessing of traumatic events, being in relationship with community members that have experienced trauma, and inner harm from rhetorical, emotional, and spiritual abuse, which I explore through the lives of LGBTQ Catholics. In trying to paint a picture of how traumatic experience unfolds, Caruth notes that

The pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the experience is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is to be possessed by an image or an event.⁵⁵

Some trauma scholars- such as Shoshana Felman- reflect on the role of witnessing in the traumatic experience, either by the person undergoing trauma, those explicitly or implicitly causing the trauma, or secondary and tertiary participants. In his work on trauma through the lens of historiography, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Frank LaCapra references Caruth’s evocation of “the voice of trauma emerging from the wound itself...a voice testifying to the role of victim as witness” as a stark image of who and what speaks when the seemingly impossible becomes real.

There seem to be two lingering questions for anyone who tries to bring the language and literature of trauma into an exploration of the lives of LGBTQ Catholics. First, why use the framework of trauma for a kind of harm that is not necessarily material and are often inflicted subtly over time, given that by many definitions, it needs to be associated with death or disaster? Second, how do people who may not be direct victims

⁵⁴ Merrill I. Lipton, *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Additional Perspectives*, ix.

⁵⁵ Caruth, 4-5.

of trauma help bring about processes of healing? Third, if the evolving study of trauma is based on individual experience, how can it be connected to the larger social groups with which individuals identify?

Witnessing

To begin, I submit that trauma may find its way into lives and psyches of secondary and tertiary observers more often than may be realized, especially in communities. In her contribution to the edited volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Shoshana Felman recounts her experiences and memories from the first iteration of a graduate class she led at Yale in 1984 entitled ‘Literature and Testimony’. The chapter covers a great deal of ground; some of its earlier sections recount the implications that narrative, testimony, and witnessing can have on literature, poetry, and psychoanalysis through examining some of the works that the class covered, such as Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from the Underground*, the work and life of Paul Celan, and *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Sigmund Freud. I will focus, however, on what these sections build up to: Felman’s account of the class’s viewing of Holocaust narratives from the Fortunoff Video Archive⁵⁶, and the subsequent ‘crisis’ that the class and its teacher- Felman- found themselves in. Her decision to have the class ‘move on...from poetry into reality...to study in a literary class something which is *a priori* not defined as literary, but is rather of the order of raw documents- historical and autobiographical’⁵⁷ was intended to add a

⁵⁶ According to its webpage, the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies is ‘a collection of over 4,400 videotaped interviews with witnesses and survivors of the Holocaust’ and is located in Yale University’s Sterling Memorial Library. For more information, see <http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/>.

⁵⁷ Felman 1995: 46.

visceral, more real dimension to the textual landscape the class had previously navigated; however, she did not expect the outcome this would have.

The first interview Felman focuses on are of a woman's description of her relationship to her husband; they were married prior to the war and the Holocaust, and both were the only survivors from their families. In describing her choice to stay with her husband after the war despite their estrangement, she said that

The man I married and the man he was after the war were not the same person. And I'm sure I was not the same person either...but somehow we had a need for each other because, he knew who I was, *he was the only person who knew...* He knew who I was, and I knew who he was...and we're here, we're here to tell you the story.⁵⁸

The multiple levels upon which testimony work make this account shocking and emotionally powerful; indeed, the major driving force behind the woman's will to survive was so her story would exist beyond the confines of events that seemed impossible and ludicrous. This notion of the seeming non-reality of what Holocaust victims went through was voiced further by the second interviewee, a young boy who survived the Plashow camp and was eventually reunited with his parents that he missed desperately; after surviving the camp and re-joining his parents, however, he discovered that the "emaciated and disfigured"⁵⁹ people he encountered did not match up at all with the identity and imagery he had given them in his head. The symptoms of his trauma started developing in the years after, and his account- given after initially declining to share his stories and testimony, raises haunting questions:

⁵⁸ Quoted in Felman 1995: 46-47. This sounds reminiscent of related, yet different traumas that soldiers and participants in war go through; a common refrain one often upon returning home from war is that outsiders who were not there, did not witness and act in the depravities that war often entails cannot understand. Exploring this in depth is the work of a separate essay; however, one example from literature that shines a light on these themes that comes to mind is Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*.

⁵⁹ Felman 1995: 48.

It was always...something you have to forget...It just wasn't there...For the past thirty five years I've been trying to convince myself that it never happened, that...maybe it happened, but I wasn't affected. I walked under the rain without getting wet... We are what we are...we can change some, but we will never be able to eradicate...what happened...The big question is: Are we transferring our anxieties, our fears, our problems, to the generations to come? And this is why I feel we are talking here not only of the *lost generation*...this time we are dealing with *lost generations*. It's not only us.⁶⁰

Felman goes on to describe how the class, after having watched these interviews together in an apartment, went through a sort of crisis in the days and weeks following. They called Felman to discuss their feelings and talk through some of what was coursing through their minds and bodies; the friends of the students even reached out to Felman to report that the experience was the only thing they could seemingly talk about. After consulting with the Yale psychoanalyst who helped make the viewing possible, she addressed the students' feelings of crisis and vulnerability head on and structured the remainder of the class around them. After working through their own emotions and thoughts individually and as a group, the final reflections that the class turned into Felman were "amazingly articulate, reflective, and profound statement[s] of the trauma they had gone through and of the significance of their assuming the position of the witness."⁶¹ Felman had created an environment and shared in a very personal experience in which they crossed some plane of knowing, learning, understanding, and witnessing that academic work normally entails. In coming exhaustively close to the testimony, storytelling, and broken and forming narrative identities of the survivors, and after having immersed themselves in the written, fictional worlds of these same realities in the prior months, it seems that the students entered a new zone of vulnerability where the stories and identity of all the people involved, past and present, collided.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Felman 1995: 48-49. Italics are interviewee's emphasis, not my own.

⁶¹ Felman 1995: 55.

In reflecting on Felman's conclusions, there is a legitimate question as to whether current understandings of narrative identity adequately allow for the debilitating effects of trauma. I will quote Felman in full because it gives the proper scope of what she is trying to convey to the reader:

I would venture to propose...that teaching in itself, teaching as such, takes place precisely only through a crisis: if teaching does not hit upon some sort of crisis, if it does not encounter either the vulnerability or the explosiveness of an (explicit or implicit) critical and unpredictable dimension, it has perhaps not truly taught; it has perhaps passed on facts, passed on some information and some documents, with which the students or the audience- the recipients- can for instance do what people during the occurrence of the Holocaust precisely did with information that kept coming forth but that no one could *recognize*, and that no one could therefore truly *learn, read, or put to use*.⁶²

Felman is saying that the very nature of pedagogy transforms- or perhaps is revealed- when immersed in crises studies and- in her experience- of the subsequent crises of those studying and teaching them. It makes sense that these thoughts might come out of studying and working with those who have undergone trauma, in fiction and real life. However, it seems that classes and experiences like the one Felman describes could have transformative and even ultimately positive effects in other disciplines; that will have to be explored elsewhere. I will return to these questions around identity and witnessing in relation to Felman in the next chapter.

Death, Trauma, and Identity

In reflecting on the 1972 Buffalo Creek disaster, Robert Jay Lifton discusses "death equivalents" that induce rifts and cracks in the ties that bind people together through geography, identity, and comfort when scarring experiences bring about a brush

⁶² Felman 1995: 55.

with death and all it represents.⁶³ These “images of separation, disintegration, and stasis...serve as psychic precursors” for death.⁶⁴ Upon reading the testimonies of people whose lives were torn asunder by the disaster, Lifton begins to note some of the hallmarks of trauma magnified on a social scale that encompass individual feelings of “psychic numbing”, an “unfocused rage” in relationships and toward others, and a perpetual dwelling on the hand of God or other divine movements in effectively destroying all that was known and familiar.⁶⁵ Death narrowly came to many in Buffalo Creek (indeed, one hundred twenty five of the 5,000 members of the community were killed) and the entire community was thrust into a constant survival mode. However, Lifton notes that focusing on survival when engaging with traumatized persons “suggests that there has been death, and the survivor has therefore had a death encounter, and the death encounter is central to his or her psychological experience.”⁶⁶ These death equivalents deserve further study in light of the experiences of LGBTQ Catholics, for it is the likely case that many people find themselves living some of the classic symptoms of trauma without going through an obvious death experience or death equivalent. What to make of this? I suggest that there may be room for definitions around traumatic impetus and symptoms to expand to the non-physical and immediate to attempt to encapsulate some of what we’re seeing.

The Buffalo Creek flood and destruction also speaks to the feeling that groups of people- and entire communities- seem to experience some sort of social trauma. For

⁶³ See Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Olson, “The Human Meaning of Total Disaster,” as well as Cathy Caruth’s interview with Lifton for the edited volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*.

⁶⁴ Vincent E. Harry, *Death Work: Police, Trauma, and the Psychology of Survival*, 52.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 212-217.

⁶⁶ Lifton (interview), in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 128-129.

many years, Lifton, Kai Erikson, and others have gotten to know the individuals and families whose lives were devastated by a flood due to human error and negligence by the Pittston Coal Company. Almost immediately, the cracks in the social fabric revealed themselves and got worse with time. As Erikson puts it in *Everything In Its Path*:

The worst damage, though, was done to the minds and spirits of the people who survived the disaster, and it is there that one must begin the search for scars...It was as if every man, woman, and child in the place- every one- was suffering from some combination of anxiety, depression, insomnia, apathy, or simple “bad nerves”, and to make matters worse, those complaints were expressed in such similar ways that they almost sounded rehearsed.⁶⁷

Erikson goes on to distinguish between *individual trauma* that acts as a “blow to the psyche” from some brush with death that induces individuals to “withdraw into themselves, feeling numbed, afraid, vulnerable, and very alone.”⁶⁸ This trauma is connected to a larger, relational phenomenon that he calls *collective trauma*:

By collective trauma...I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with “trauma.” But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective form of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared. As people begin to emerge hesitantly from the protective shells into which they have withdrawn, they learn that they are isolated and alone, wholly dependent upon their own individual resources. “I” continues to exist, though damaged and maybe even permanently changed. “You” continues to exist, although distant and hard to relate to. But “we” no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body.⁶⁹

These definitions- particularly *collective trauma*- are remarkable for their resonance with the self-narration of the lives of LGBTQ Catholics in the community of the Church, for so many of its call signs- the insidiousness and the damaged bonds without the necessity for suddenness, and the damaged and altered self that seems severed from the warmth

⁶⁷ Kai Erikson, *Everything In Its Path*, 135-136.

⁶⁸ Ibid 154.

⁶⁹ Ibid 154.

and structure of the community- speaks to the autobiographical accounts and stories of LGBTQ Catholics from the previous chapter. Additionally, it speaks to the fact that the majority, empowered population within the Church community- heterosexual, cisgender individuals- could possibly be drawn into and be affected by this version of trauma as well, even if they do not directly perpetrate it and negatively impact the lives of their LGBTQ brethren. I will return to this notion toward the end of the thesis.

Throughout Erikson's work, he references the interviews and autobiographical accounts of the people of Buffalo Creek in describing their past and current experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Here are the thoughts of one man reflecting on the role of the Pittston Coal Company in the disaster that upended his community's life:

I have a deep-seated resentment against Pittston, which probably isn't normal, but I just cannot help it. I resent the fact that no one even bothered to come to see if we were well, needed anything, offer to help clean up, or seem to care what happened to us. This is probably the wrong way to feel, but I just cannot help it.⁷⁰

As Erikson notes, this man seems almost apologetic for his anger and seems perplexed and distraught at the company's abandonment. He calls this a sort of "paternal relationship with the people of (Buffalo Creek)" that has been ruptured by a seeming lack of care or concern. Later on, in the section on collective trauma, Erikson muses on the ways in which individual desires, dreams, frustrations, and spirits are tied up in transcendental visions of community. These "bear at least a figurative resemblance to an organism...it is the *community* that cushions pain, the *community* that provides a context for intimacy, the *community* that represents morality and serves as the repository for old traditions."⁷¹ Parishes, schools, and Catholic institutional communities from around the

⁷⁰ Ibid 182.

⁷¹ Ibid 193-194.

world would instantly feel at home with this imagery and language; indeed, Catholics consider themselves to be united and wrapped up in the Body of Christ. If that community seemingly turns on a person, either aggressively attacking or implicitly abandoning him or her- not even “being bothered to see if (one) was well”- what does that do to the psyche?

These and other writers- from Caruth to Lifton to Freud- all approach trauma from different angles and disciplinary flourishes; however, almost all of them directly or obliquely mention some of the reoccurring hallmarks of traumatic experience: distorted and broken relationship, “imagery, symbolization, and meaning”, and a sense of dire helplessness to sift through what is supposed to be right and truthful in the world. All of these mirror some of the hallmarks of the psychological, emotional, and spiritual angst undergone by LGBTQ Catholics who have experienced a range of negativity in their respective communities as they came more fully into their own identity, whether it be outright hostility, suspicion, or verbal & physical abuse. I hesitate in making full claims of trauma in tenuous territory from the standpoint of an observer; however, it seems ever more apparent that the language, metaphors, and narrative vehicles LGBTQ Catholics have variously employed to describe their experiences live comfortably within the sphere of a sort of communal, identity-based trauma.

Susan Brison’s *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*, a narrative account and work of philosophy pieced together in the years after her brutal assault and near murder in the countryside of France, offers this thought about the messy intersection of identity and trauma:

If we are socially constructed, as I believe we are, in large part through our group-based narratives, the self is not a single, coherent, unified entity. Its structure is more chaotic, with harmonious and contradictory aspects, like the particles of an atom, attracting and

repelling each other, hanging together in a whirling, ever-changing dance that any attempt at observation- or narration- alters.⁷²

The act of articulating personal trauma and tying it to others is difficult, as Brison acknowledges earlier, because one runs the risk of speaking for others, among other things.⁷³ Brison has a particular vantage point as a woman, a professional philosopher, a rape survivor, and other identities, and any attempt to equivocate her clear experience of trauma with the continual degradation of identity that many LGBTQ Catholics go through would be problematic. However, comparisons of the peculiarities and rupture of traumatic experience are necessary to attempt to glean whether the LGBTQ Catholic experience might contain components of trauma itself, even outside of a singular physical event.

Oppression and the Church

In perhaps an even more acute fashion, the language of oppression captures the mental and psychological anguish amongst persons and groups that have been subjugated within larger populations and communities. In her book *Analyzing Oppression*, Ann E. Cudd presents her take on social groups and argues that

...It is individuals who suffer the injustices of oppression, though they can do so only as members of social groups. It is because humans sort themselves into social groups and find it nearly impossible as well as undesirable to extract themselves from social groups that they can oppress each other.⁷⁴

Cudd is careful to parse out the different forms of oppression; in doing so, she lends a careful hand to an attempt to determine the state of play for the broader LGBTQ Catholic community. Cudd defines *subjective* oppression as the notion or feeling that one is

⁷² Susan Brison, *Aftermath*, 95.

⁷³ Ibid 94.

⁷⁴ Ann E. Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, 23.

oppressed, whereas “*objective* oppression (is) the *fact* of oppression.”⁷⁵ Correspondingly, distinctions must be made between *psychological* oppression that deals with oppression through affecting inner states, moods, and feelings- a sort of “psychic harm”- and *material* oppression that lives within tangible physical harm to self or resources. All of these forms of oppression intertwine and play off one another, Cudd argues; in the end, they fuse into one “univocal concept” of oppression that spreads exponentially in damaging lives and groups of people in similar ways, whether they be oppressed “women...blacks...Jews...or homosexuals.”⁷⁶ In attempting to apply some or all of these forms of oppression to the lived experiences of LGBTQ Catholics, I tread carefully; however, as Cudd and others cite, LGBTQ individuals have been one of the hallmark oppressed groups of individuals in recent times. Such oppression within a broader faith community such as the Catholic Church is particularly insidious and troubling because of the mixed, often negative messaging that permeates the teaching, rhetoric, outreach, and actions of some Church leaders and ordinary lay members toward their LGBTQ community members. Some examples include use of language like “intrinsically disordered” and the oft-quoted notion appropriated from St. Augustine of loving individuals but hating their sin, with sin referencing homosexuality and/or homosexual acts.⁷⁷

Cudd explores possible origins of the psychological mechanisms and factors that fuel oppression. Two particularly salient sources for her are Franz Fanon and Cynthia Willett, who both underscore the need for recognition amidst violence in similar, yet

⁷⁵ Ibid 24.

⁷⁶ Ibid 24.

⁷⁷ CCC 2357.

distinct ways. In Fanon's view, oppression destroys and obfuscates the recognition necessary to live a life full of dignity and have a healthy sense of identity.⁷⁸ Groups develop superiority and inferiority complexes between the recognizers and the recognized in a social ecosystem, and oppression functions as various forms of violence. This violence answered with a form of counter-violence that "chases away the colonial rulers and makes the oppressed people and organized people" that can self-achieve freedom.⁷⁹ Willett cites Hegel to a greater extent than Fanon; however, although she defines freedom differently than Hegel's "masculinized" version. She too recognizes recognition as the possible crux of freedom that defies slavery and oppression; however, this lies in her definition of the self as embodied and socially connected "in the caress" that makes human relationship and awareness of the tactile other as the foundation for the ethical foundation of humanity.⁸⁰ Cudd does not fully assert that Willett or anyone else articulates a complete psychological foundation that anchors an overarching theory of oppression; indeed, such universalizing efforts might be problematic in and of themselves because they push the histories and harmful experiences of oppressed peoples to the side of the shelf.⁸¹

The other crucial part of the psychological basis for oppression is the pervasive, debilitating effects of stereotypes. She defines stereotypes as the "generalizations that we make about persons based on characteristics that we believe they share with some identifiable group."⁸² Indeed, Cudd points out that the popular way in which cognitive

⁷⁸ Ibid 62.

⁷⁹ Ibid 62-63.

⁸⁰ Ibid 66.

⁸¹ Ibid 77-78.

⁸² Ibid 69.

psychologists define stereotypical thinking as a form of categorizing may be morally wrong, even if it is common practice for human beings. In groups and out-groups are formed within larger communities, and individuals are driven to cultivate and protect a positive presence within the in-group for healthy self-identification. Cudd argues early on that oppressed groups almost necessarily need oppressor groups, even if all the individuals within that group do not intend to oppress or even are aware that they are doing so. For that to happen, out-groups that are denigrated and excluded must exist.⁸³ When all of these factors combine, a thriving oppression emerges that promotes some and distorts others; the community may survive and seem viable on the surface, but acute pain and a lack of recognition flourish underneath. Those oppressed may feel angry, alienated, harmed, and abandoned; yet, many are psychologically co-opted into believing in what others have deemed them to be. Cudd summarizes this entire process neatly:

Oppressed persons often acquiesce to and accept their own oppression because they come to believe in the stereotypes that represent their own inferiority, are weakened by those stereotypes and even motivated to fulfill them.⁸⁴

When these various characteristics of oppression are lent to an examination of LGBTQ Catholics within the church communities, warning signs arise immediately. They are second hand citizens to begin with, caught in a divide of identity and practice; their embodied selves through sexual, loving relationships are demarcated as grave error, sinful, and morally bereft of goodness. However, the language of inherent dignity embedded in the Catechism, the words of bishops, and other parishioners keeps many within the community. Indeed, the stereotypes of how gay and lesbian people function and how they are *meant* to exist in this world seem to have permeated the psyche of many

⁸³ Ibid 25 and 78.

⁸⁴ Ibid 80.

Catholics, both straight or LGBTQ, oppressor and oppressed. The Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons defines homosexual acts as “essentially self-indulgent” and “contrary to the creative wisdom of God.”⁸⁵ In response, researchers and authors have begun to look elsewhere for understanding on these topics, most notably to LGBTQ Catholics themselves. As a bridge to Chapter 3 and how trauma and oppression might debilitate identity, I turn to the work of Andrew Yip. He surveyed over one hundred gay and lesbian Catholics in the United Kingdom about Church teaching on homosexuality, relationships, and love, and a variety of responses and attitudes toward their own places within the community were given.

A few that capture the different reactions- from incredulousness and anger to acceptance and a curious adaptation- are seen below:

The expression of love cannot be wrong. Why would God give the desire without allowing fulfillment? I know that I was born gay, so how can the expression of what my nature is be sinful?
Respondent 119

This individual addresses arguments from natural law at their root by affirming his identity as part of his created self, and expression of that identity as logically consistent with the theological notions of God’s perfection in creation.

God created us in his own image- homosexual. He doesn’t make mistakes. Our essential Christian vocation is the same as everyone else’s: to receive love and to give love. Most human beings are clearly called to a loving, sexual, one-to-one relationship with another. We are, too. It is our *duty* to fulfill our vocation to give love and receive love in stable relationships. The Church is quite wrong in what it says about this, and doing severe damage to the Body of Christ.

Respondent 121, his emphasis

⁸⁵ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexuals, Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, paragraph 7, 1984.

This person goes even further in stating the logical incoherency of the Church's teachings on love and homosexuality, respectively; his emphasis of the word "duty" stands in contrast to Cardinal Ratzinger's assertion that "justice requires" the opposition and outlaw of same-sex unions earlier in Chapter 1. Respondent 121's diction at the end of his testimony about damage done to the "Body of Christ" adds another layer of inextricability between the relationships between members of the Church and the theological and metaphysical implications of love for Catholics. Unlike the first two, Respondent 57 had a different take on his status in the Church and in the eyes of God:

Sodomy is condemned, not only by the Church, but by God in the Bible- the ultimate guide to living! However, I am quite sure that two men really loving one another, even to masturbation (mutual) but *without sodomy*, is quite acceptable to God. Sodomy is an abomination in God's sight. The term 'making love' so often means anything but that, but simply giving way to lust and sinful, selfish gratification of one's sexual lust.

Respondent 57, his emphasis⁸⁶

This man has seemingly fully embraced his own second-class status because of Church teaching and biblical tradition, yet fully embraces love within God's eyes so long as it is divorced from the act of physical love. As I have recurrently said throughout, it would be presumptuous and ill considered to speculate on the inner motivations of LGBTQ Catholics from a removed, secondary observer; however, this person's words echo some of the acceptance of subjugation through stereotypes and moral certainty of the majority discussed in Cudd's work, even though he still sees and seeks a path to a form of love alongside those in his Church who see him as distinct and damaged.

To return to Cudd- what are some of the harms of this oppression, particularly in cases when notions of God, divine order, and moral fates are brought into the picture? In

⁸⁶ Andrew K.T. Yip, "Dare to Differ: Gay and Lesbian Catholics' Assessment of Official Catholic Positions on Sexuality", 1997, 172-175.

her sixth chapter, she notes that oppression is linked and rooted in a language of trauma that has three consequences: terror and psychological violence, humiliation and degradation, and objectification.⁸⁷ There are also three indirect psychological forces at play: shame and low-self esteem, false consciousness, and deformed desires.⁸⁸ Although all do not apply in all cases and in all times for examining the varied experiences of LGBTQ Catholics in the Church, I argue that there is a great deal of evidence that the language of oppression and trauma whirl around in vicious cycle that has broken and altered the spirits, psyches, and relational senses of many within the Church, whether in direct or secondary fashions. In a spiritual sense, she says “trauma severely disrupts human relationships and the trust that victims have in other people and the divine.”⁸⁹ These accounts and surveys speak to a shattered trust in both God and other people, which I will explore further in the next chapter.

⁸⁷ Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, 160-163.

⁸⁸ Ibid 176.

⁸⁹ Ibid 160.

Chapter 3: Fragmented Identities

Having established both that communities must cultivate a concept of justice that affirms identity and that trauma and oppression can debilitate the lives and psyches of individuals, social groups, and the social ties that bind people together in community, we must now turn to the question identity itself. Philosophers have long explored the nature and function of personal identity, and most debate centers on whether identity is fixed, malleable, or something in between, and what factors- memory, experience, social circumstance, and so on- shape it.⁹⁰ In recent years, scholars from multiple disciplines (including philosophy, psychology, cognitive science, and literary theory) have increasingly explored identity through the lens of narrative. Narrative identity treats humans as beings driven stories, and involves the process “by which people convey to themselves and others who they are, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future.”⁹¹ For many narrative advocates, such as Paul Ricœur, a French philosopher well known as a hermeneutic phenomenologist who studied narrative, identity is inextricably tied up with ethical action and a search for rightness and meaning within communities of layered, complex relationships. In *Narrative and Time*, Ricœur attempts to solve the paradox of the fixed self and the changing self by arguing, as Patrick Crowley summarizes, that “narrative...mediates the aporia of change and

⁹⁰ For a broader overview of the philosophy of identity, see Harold Noonan and Ben Curtis’ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry, last updated in 2014.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity/#5>

⁹¹ McAdams and McLean 2013: 233.

permanence through a process of ‘emplotment’ that organizes the contingencies of existence into a coherent whole.’⁹²

Assuming that human beings attempt to mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually organize their lives into a “coherent whole”, I will explore narrative identity as it relates to ethical decision-making and community life. Afterward, I will explore autobiographical accounts of how LGBTQ Catholics variously describe their experience of narrative identity in the Church as a sort of identity-based bifurcation and “forced schizophrenia” as related to their sexual identities, their relationships, their membership in Catholic communities, and their deep senses of selves and connections to God.⁹³ Given this reality, I will suggest that the Church recognize and admit the powerful damage that its rhetoric and rulings inflicts on its LGBTQ members and claim that it cannot purport to be an universal community centered around justice whilst simultaneously debilitating and splintering the identities and lives of some of its members. There seems to be sufficient evidence to classify this damage as deep-seated trauma on a similar level as other trauma discussed in psychological and medical literature, which would have grave implications on the legitimacy of the Catholic Church to claims of justice and would seem to require reconfigured theology and rhetoric around homosexuality and love in order to take steps toward reconciliation.

Narrative Identity and Ethical Choice

Narrative identity is committed to the notion that our experiences shape our perceptions of ourselves and the broader meanings of life. We experience life’s moments

⁹² Patrick Crowley, “Paul Ricœur: the Concept of Narrative Identity, the Trace of Autobiography”, 2.

⁹³ Dugan McGinley, *Acts of Faith, Acts of Love: Gay Catholic Autobiographies as Sacred Texts*, 12-13.

in the present; in every following second, minute, hour, and year, we re-visit them and shape them through the lens of narrative. Ricœur separates our identities into two parts, *idem* and *ipse*; whereas *idem* represents the fixed part of “I” that remains, *ipse*- or “Selfhood”- “...is analogous to narrative identity and involves the telling and retelling of a life-story, whether factual or fictional, such that the figure of identity that emerges offers a new insight into the self.”⁹⁴ There is some part of us that constantly scours and re-interprets the past even as we move through the present. Indeed, the study of memory is intimately linked to how we self-conceive narratively. W. David Booth points to cultural markers like family photo albums as sorts of memory- and, thus, identity-shapers. A near-universal object like the photo album has a powerful hold on people. Beyond the laughter, tears, and sentimentality it can cause in its observers as they fondly (or hesitantly) recall past events and people, photo albums have immediate impact on our present and future self-conception. For Booth, the photo album

shows memory in its fragile, vulnerable attempt to gather in and guard the past, lest it be lost to the passage of time and to forgetting. And it casts some light on ways in which what is remembered and forgotten are shaped by power, interest and selection.⁹⁵

When memory is tied in, Booth finds kinship with Iris Marion Young and, to some extent, Kwame Anthony Appiah by saying that “identity and difference/differentiation are two sides of the same coin.”⁹⁶ As discussed in Chapter 1, Young argues that it is impossible to separate people from the differences and social markers that make them up; this seems congruent with the notion that we cannot distance ourselves from the narratives that encircle our lives, whether told to us or told by us.

⁹⁴ Crowley 2-3.

⁹⁵ W. David Booth, “The Work of Memory: Time, Identity, and Justice”, 243.

⁹⁶ Ibid 255.

The vehicle for sharing identities is the story. Stories cannot exist in vacuums, because their meaning comes out in their sharing. Sharing is often verbal and, more broadly, linguistic in nature; therefore, much of the discourse around narrative identity has come through analyzing the positive effects that things like the ‘power of conversation’ have on human beings through adolescence, their formative young adult years, and beyond, as found in the work of Jack McAdams and others. I affirm that the broad study of narrative identity can be extraordinarily powerful in theory and practice; however, it is clear that it is limited by what it leaves out of its own definition. Emotional and non-linguistic bodily experiences seem to contribute just as much to lifelong, evolving notions of the self and identity, especially when considering communities of people- such as LGBTQ Catholics- who have undergone repeated attempts by outside forces to strip physicality away from them. Much of the discourse has not made those experiences crucial to narrative identity.

Although the theoretical discourse around narrative identity is strong, it has troubling gaps and voids when it comes to integrating emotional and non-linguistic experiences into its conception of how identity is shaped and formed over time.⁹⁷ This observation comes into sharper focus when analyzed in light of trauma. Traumatic experiences- or, as Caruth and others might describe them, ‘non-experience[s]’- often shape the very foundations of the identities and personal narratives of the affected. Trauma has and continues to be defined in many ways, which I take as a good sign; the fluidity, uncertainty, and fragility embedded in the effort to study trauma academically calls for such an interdisciplinary, evolving definition. However, Cathy Caruth’s

⁹⁷ I explored this in greater detail in my previous essay on narrative identity.

observation in her introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* that ‘to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event’⁹⁸ proves both effective for this essay and haunting in its implications.

In defining narrative identity and relating it to redemption, Dan McAdams and Kate McLean observe that ‘narrators who find redemptive meanings in suffering and adversity...tend to enjoy higher levels of mental health, well-being, and maturity.’⁹⁹ This is entirely plausible and a desirable outcome for both those who have gone through suffering and adversity and humanity in general. However, the scale¹⁰⁰ on which adversity and suffering can be measured is extremely broad, and there seems to be a marked, if difficult to identify difference between someone recounting a lost job and hearing a Holocaust survivor attempting to narrate the vicious brutalities and dehumanizing events of concentration camps. I am not suggesting that the experiences of those who have faced a sort of ‘smaller’ adversity are lesser or invalid; on the contrary, I simply mean that the very process of storytelling, narration, and lived experience might be different in ways for trauma victims, and we must recognize that.

Debilitating influences such as trauma, oppression, and violence can emotionally and psychologically debilitate separate members of the community, not just those directly victimized; I will cover this more extensively in the next chapter. In light of Cathy Caruth and others’ discussions of the devastating impact trauma can have on individuals and communities, it is clear that those who are working with narratives in interdisciplinary ways must confront the reality that victims of trauma do not- and, perhaps, cannot-

⁹⁸ Caruth 1995: 5.

⁹⁹ McAdams and McLean 2013: 233.

¹⁰⁰ I mean ‘scale’ metaphorically; although it’s likely that such a scale/scales exists, I am not referencing them.

approach or tell their own stories in the same ways others can. The formation of a positive, healthy narrative identity is possible despite- and, as McAdams, McLean, and others might suggest, because of- adversity and negative life experiences; however, the very definition of narrative identity must evolve and expand to acknowledge the fact that the telling and listening that lie at its heart may often seem ‘impossible’ for survivors of trauma. To this end, we would do well to dive into the lives and words of LGBTQ Catholics themselves, and reflect on narration and trauma through the work of Dugan McGinley.

Narrating Gay Catholicism

In his 2006 work *Acts of Faith, Acts of Love*, Dugan McGinley explores the tensions inherent in the identities and lives of LGBTQ Catholics in America and the possibilities offered by autobiographical self-narrative. McGinley situates his work amidst the small but growing body of critical literature examining the Church’s official teaching around homosexuality, the broader LGBTQ community, marriage, and full participation in the Church.¹⁰¹ McGinley admits his own limitations in his book: he addresses only the stories and autobiographical work of gay Catholic men in recent decades and does not attempt to speak to the complex problems of lesbian Catholic women or fuller LGBTQ community. Nonetheless, he hopes that the “liberatory principles of his analysis” can be used more broadly in the Church, especially given “the conflation of gay men and lesbians in official documents.”¹⁰² By utilizing autobiography, McGinley shows a “self in context” that stands in rich contrast the isolated way in which

¹⁰¹ Dugan McGinley, *Acts of Faith*, 2,

¹⁰² I would add that the B, T, and Q of LGBTQ are also often conflated in Church documents and rhetoric- and, often, not well articulated or understood.

the church talks about sexuality.¹⁰³ He briefly discusses the work of James Olney and other autobiographical theorists in identifying the “complex interplay between the *autos* (self) and the *bios* (life), constantly articulating and re-articulating a “textual self” over the course of a lifetime. In the contexts of sexuality and Catholicism, the autobiographical account stands on its own as a truthful, authentic counterpoint to official teaching that has not taken the first-person vantage point into consideration for centuries.¹⁰⁴

By embracing storytelling and autobiographical telling, the broader LGBTQ population both co-creating and revealing an integrated community that is part of many other previously established communities. Autobiography brings this reality into focus by transforming it into testimony and rendering “in a particularly direct and faithful way the experience and vision of a people.”¹⁰⁵ LGBTQ Catholics who actively live their identity have been denied a voice in articulating their lives within official Church circles and reflecting on and disseminating Church teaching; thus, it seems that this sort of storytelling is a method for taking matters into their own hands to reveal truth. As McGinley puts it,

Although the majority of the autobiographers I examine in this study are not aware of the many theoretical concerns relating to this genre, they do have a sense that telling one’s life story is vital to becoming a self and finding one’s voice. In doing so, they challenge those who would marginalize them, and they do justice work for the entire community...they perform a service by bringing flesh and blood to church teaching that effectively disembodies them, and by giving life to otherwise theoretical moral arguments.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ McGinley 37.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid 41-42.

¹⁰⁵ James Olney, “Autobiography and the Cultural Moment”, 13, qtd. In McGinley 45.

¹⁰⁶ McGinley 46.

These narrative searches for identity and self-knowledge differ in style and content, but many point to a similar desire for “places we visit...(and) places we can’t go...and a longing so real it becomes a place, an identity, a home” within the complex, interlocking experiences that make up this community that centers around sexual identities that have been rejected and cast aside by powerful social structures, including the Catholic Church.¹⁰⁷

Within these autobiographical accounts, common themes emerge: emotional, psychological, and spiritual angst, depression, isolation, anger, and numbness. I will provide a small sample of some of these accounts to allow the words of gay Catholic individuals to speak for themselves, and to provide a connection to claims of inflicted trauma and oppression in the following chapter. I begin with the words of an Italian American gay Catholic who remembered his childhood isolation in his “Memoirs of a South Philly Sissy”:

If there was one word to describe my childhood, it is “lonely.” An overwhelming, unbearable loneliness. Loneliness walked through my days, became my nightmares. I remember Christmas days when I sat alone near the tree in the living room, looking into a room full of relatives and family friends, feeling left out and thinking how unwelcome I’d be if they knew I was queer.¹⁰⁸

Note how he frames his loneliness as absolute, constant, and “overwhelming”; even amidst family circumstances and a religious holiday that is supposed to be joyful in the Christian and Catholic tradition, Christmas, he feels afraid and separate from the rest of his loved ones by his very nature. This echoes Caruth’s definition of trauma as rupturing daily experience and turning it into “non-experience”.¹⁰⁹ Although Mecca and the other witnesses cited in McGinley said that they knew their identity was innate from childhood,

¹⁰⁷ Rob Nixon, “Avondale: A Memoir of Identity,” 42, qtd. in McGinley 51.

¹⁰⁸ Tommi Avicelli Mecca, “Memoirs of a South Philly Sissy,” 18, qtd. in Ibid 52.

¹⁰⁹ Caruth 4-5.

they came into fuller awareness of that truth at different times in their young lives; as Frank DeCaro put it, “I was born gay. It just took me sixteen years to figure it out.”¹¹⁰

Despite this shared sense of some innate knowledge of their rightful identity, many of the autobiographical accounts spoke about how almost everything in their immediate surroundings and community structures forced them to bifurcate their lives into different spheres. The words of Richard Rodriguez are telling:

For I knew nothing in the world was so dangerous as love, my kind of love...from an early age I needed to learn caution, to avert my eyes, to guard my speech, to separate myself from myself...Or to reconstruct myself in some eccentric way...My eyes looking one way, my soul another. My motive could not be integrated with my body, with act or response, or, indeed, approval.¹¹¹

The implications of some of the phrases Rodriguez uses, such as separation and reconstruction of the self and the impossibility of integrating “motive...and body,” are profound. This sort of internal splintering intuitively seems psychologically and emotionally damaging. It is difficult to measure how that damage compounds and shifts when tied to spiritual health. This splintering carried on into adolescence and young adulthood for many of the men cited by McGinley. They began to hear more and more derogatory and inflammatory language and rhetoric from their peers, families, and community members about LGBTQ people, such as “queer” and “faggot”, which created a “climate of fear” that sowed a deep resistance in the men to articulate and take ownership of their sexual identity.¹¹²

This climate can create a deep sense of self-loathing and shame, and as Fenton Johnson shares, can destroy one’s sense of being able to experience love in a healthy manner:

¹¹⁰ Frank DeCaro, “A Boy Named Phyllis: A Suburban Memoir”, qtd. in McGinley 53.

¹¹¹ Richard Rodriguez, “Brown”, 206, qtd. in McGinley 54.

¹¹² McGinley 57.

I had so deeply and profoundly accepted this given that I had no awareness of my own self-contempt...I had never heard words to describe the desires that of their own accord visited me. A man loving a man- I had never read of this or seen images of it; I had never experienced it in any way other than the recesses of my own desire, a place so ugly (I assumed) it was beyond the pale of words. To defend myself against my desire I constructed an elaborate wall around my heart, so high no one could see in and I could not see out.¹¹³

These perceptions of self ebb and flow over time with each individual, and some Catholic stories are brighter than others, as McGinley notes, depending on the particular responses and experiences of affirmation from family, community members, and Church figures. However, the lingering negativity still taints much of the experience of Catholic life for LGBTQ individuals. The language embedded throughout these accounts that conjures imagery of blocking others out, feeling helpless and angry, and not being able to escape perceptions of despair for barely a moment all resonate with traumatic language and, in a different sense, narratives of the oppressed. These recent autobiographical efforts documented by McGinley and others show how the Church must recognize this reality for these voices all tell of “how being gay is deeply embedded in sense of self...the church would like to separate *being* gay from *doing* gay, but it is not that simple”¹¹⁴ If the Catholic community truly wishes to treat all its members with dignity and justice in the image and likeness of God, it might look in reconciliation to the words of LGBTQ Catholics like Andrew Holleran, who identifies sexual identity as “the thing around which our deepest wishes coalesce: the desire for love, trust, fidelity, stability, a home, a companion, a future, all of that.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Fenton Johnson, *Geography*, 73, qtd in McGinley 58.

¹¹⁴ McGinley 82.

¹¹⁵ Andrew Holleran, *American Contradictions: Interviews with Nine American Writers*, qtd. in McGinley 82.

What light can be shed on the process of identity from these explorations of trauma, oppression, and autobiographical telling? It is clear that trauma, as defined by processes of storytelling and accounts, affects multiple levels of a community from direct participant to secondary and tertiary observers. That narrative process of discovering and articulating identity seems to have been negatively warped for all involved. In Felman's work, the pain, confusion, and denial of the Holocaust survivors of their own lived realities comes through in the tension between their urges to repress their experiences- turn them into 'non experiences'- and their need to bear witness to themselves and others, to, as the second survivor phrases it, "deal with our feelings, understand our experience[s]."¹¹⁶ This does not mean that the ability to form positive narrative identity is totally broken. In both the deeper way that the witnesses' accounts were 'freeing'¹¹⁷ and in the relief, growth, and discovery that came from the students' initial trauma as witnesses to raw testimony, it seems that both parties' narrative selves survived to the other side, as it were.

The earlier definition of narrative identity as overcoming adversity and "finding redemption" seems inadequate and out of place compared to the traumatic realities explored here. What is needed is a renewed definition of narrative identity that deals with the uncomfortable reality that peoples' capacities to process experience and live it out in a healthy fashion are profoundly different due to individual and social trauma. These traumas are not pleasant for all involved, and it may seem tempting to ignore the damage brought forth into others' lives. However, if we accept narrative identity as one of the major ways people encounter the world and themselves- and if we wish to study and

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Felman 1995: 48.

¹¹⁷ Felman 1995: 48.

employ that identity in a positive manner on personal lives and on communities- then we must address the fact that storytelling is not a objective process and tool that people can activate equally and automatically. The daily experience of encountering life can be distorted into a fragmented process where lingering questions about one's self and place in the world reoccur and haunt a person like ghosts.

Conclusions, Limitations, and Steps Forward

As I stated at the beginning of this thesis, I wade into this topic with caution, for it is easy to generalize and obfuscate the matter at hand when personal lives, relationships, and divine implications are at stake. However, I argue that this thesis makes a strong case that the Catholic Church must take a deep look at the ways its teaching, rhetoric, and representatives positively or negatively affect the psyches and functioning of its LGBTQ individuals, families, and communities across the United States and the world. If the Church desires to live out justice rooted in emancipatory dignity and the notion that all people are to flourish as created in the image and likeness of God, then communities where identities are affirmed and oppressive and trauma-inducing actions and words are cast out are necessary. Catholicism's doctrine, teaching, and rhetoric around LGBTQ individuals is not static or unchangeable, although the evolution of its application might seem to move at a glacial pace. Church leaders must recognize that, by excluding the LGBTQ community from the full participation of its teaching on love, relationship, marriage, identity, and all else, it performs serious harm to not only LGBTQ individuals and families, it damages their own families, friends, school and parish communities, and broader social circles. Furthermore, the Church's moral weight and respect in the global dialogue around justice, compassion, and love may continue to be seen as hypocritical if injustice and damage continues to be perpetuated by its own hand. I was limited in my effort by time, resources, and my external vantage point as an Catholic ally into the trauma and oppression experienced by many within and outside the Church. Thus, my proposals for steps forward include projects and suggestions that I hope a diverse chorus of scholars, practitioners, parishioners, and decision-makers take up and make their own.

Firstly, there is a need for more qualitative and quantitative surveying about the lives and experiences of LGBTQ Catholics around the world. More and more autobiographical voices must rise to the public square, whether they be in the form of interviews, essays, books, academic chapters, social media or blog posts, and all else found in our rapidly evolving shared social medium. Creative and honest self-telling clearly brings truths and moves people in deep ways, and those voices are desperately needed in order to paint a clear, sober picture of the realities facing LGBTQ people in the Church. This is tied to a greater interdisciplinary need to explore the nature of trauma as it relates to identity and community. I made an effort to present some aspects of trauma theory on its own merits in this thesis in order to let readers wrestle with whether it can apply to the lives of LGBTQ individuals in the Church, even those who have not directly experienced assault, physical violence, or other characteristic trauma inducing events. The disciplines of philosophy, theology, psychology, sociology, literature, cognitive science, and more must come together to explore how identities and bodies seem to be fractured over time by a distortion of self-worth and cohesion, especially in the light of a divine sense of 'rightness'.

Secondly, the Church must take ownership of its vision of justice; although that may seem an unwieldy and impractical demand for a sprawling institution that defines itself as having both physical, earthly dimensions and a universal, transcendental community, practical efforts must be undertaken if any notion of justice is to be extended to the LGBTQ community. This may eventually take the form of admittance of fault, wrongdoing, and inflicted trauma and oppression; however, the Church moves slowly, and it would be foolish to anticipate the ways this process might fully unfold. It seems

apparent, though, that some of the logical inconsistencies of the theological basis for differential treatment of LGBTQ Catholics must be addressed and changed in order to articulate any renewed sense of justice and dignity for the entire Church community. Other work can and must be done to fully explore the exact changes to theology; however, if the Catechism of the Church continues to view homosexual inclination as “objectively disordered” and acts as “intrinsically disordered” and roots that position in Scripture and natural law, then it is near-certain that cyclical trauma and oppression will continue to debilitate the lives of LGBTQ Catholics.¹¹⁸ I do not presume to speculate on how exactly this can or must unfold, although in acknowledgment of the complexity of the issue, I look to McGinley’s reference of Mark Jordan’s prediction:

Correcting Catholic teachings on homosexuality is not only or mainly a matter of proposing amendments to specific documents. The official doctrine is more deeply embedded than that. It is more deeply connected to old arrangements of institutional power. Changing the language without reforming the teaching would be useless, even if it were possible. The most important relations between Catholicism and homosexuality are not embedded in official propositions about homosexuality, nor even in official regulations for homosexual behavior. The forces at work here are not only the forces of words.¹¹⁹

Thirdly, allies and witnesses around the world must continue to voice that the LGBTQ community is not alone on its journey toward acceptance, flourishing, and a just and full life within and outside the Church. Like all movements toward justice, key watershed moments seemingly open the floodgates toward greater understanding, processing, and change. One area where I see this happening is bringing the lessons and truths of trauma, identity, justice, and community further into the storytelling realm, in whatever form that might take.. Stories like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *The Things They*

¹¹⁸ CCC 2357-2359.

¹¹⁹ Mark Jordan, *Silence*, 4, qtd. in McGinley 157.

Carried may not have been factual accounts, but they spoke deeper truths that moved people into action. We may very well be on the verge of such a moment for the Catholic Church. It will take all of this and notes I undoubtedly miss here in this effort.

On that note, Pope Francis recently released his long anticipated post-Synodal apostolic exhortation on the family, *Amoris Laetitia*. It would be naïve to attempt to fully unpack the document given its length and complexity; however, a few excerpts from the exhortation offer a strange paradox. The language of the exhortation contains both signs of hope about recognizing the complexities of the family and love lives of Catholics and a continued narrative that the sexual identities and lives of LGBTQ Catholics are problems to be solved, rather than realities to be celebrated. Francis highlights the need for conscience in engaging in moral and spiritual decision making and advocates for a global admittance of complexities of family life throughout the document, ranging from situations of the divorced and remarried to the plight of families torn apart by unfortunate circumstances. However, when discussing homosexuality in sections 250 and 251, the line in the sand remained clear:

The Church makes her own the attitude of the Lord Jesus, who offers his boundless love to each person without exception. During the Synod, we discussed the situation of families whose members include persons who experience same-sex attraction, a situation not easy either for parents or for children. We would like before all else to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while ‘every sign of unjust discrimination’ is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence. Such families should be given respectful pastoral guidance, so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God’s will in their lives.¹²⁰

And, immediately afterward:

In discussing the dignity and the mission of the family, the Synod Fathers observed that, “as for proposals to place unions between homosexual persons on the same level as marriage, there are

¹²⁰ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 250.

absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family."¹²¹

These two lines show how the contradiction of Church rhetoric lives on. Although we should respect dignity, attempt to assess the realities of lived situations of Catholic families, and avoid all "unjust discrimination", unions and relationships are not even "remotely analogous" to heterosexual ones, and the spirit and letter of "intrinsic disorder" live on.¹²² This flies in the face of the lived testimony and philosophical analysis in this limited work and the countless voices from elsewhere, and underscores the urgency for an accelerated effort to bring all parties involved to the table so joy and justice can replace numbing, anger, and despair.

Despite the foreboding tone of the ending of this thesis, all is not lost. The very act of identifying different sorts of traumas and oppression publicly acts as a small crack in structure of injustice and damage, and starts processes that unfold in real time in communities around the world every day. The testimonies referenced in this work show how both academic work and narratives serve as purveyors of "reconciliatory emancipation," as Toinette Eugene phrases it, and help bring about both pragmatic, direct change and sacramental healing.¹²³ Blame, fault, and justice are necessary, but they unavoidably go hand in hand with healing and reconciliation in the end. In this sense, philosophy helps us cast light onto darkness. Indeed, to quote Matthew 10:27:

What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Ibid 251.

¹²² CCC 1357 and *Amoris Laetitia* 251.

¹²³ Toinette M. Eugene, "Reconciliation", 13-14, qtd. in McGinley 161.

¹²⁴ Matthew 10:27 NRSV.

Works Cited

Brison, Susan. *Aftermath*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Catechism of the Catholic Church.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a6.htm

Crowley, Patrick. "Paul Ricoeur: the Concept of Narrative Identity, the Trace of Autobiography." *Paragraph* 26 (2003): 1-12.

Cudd, Ann E. *Analyzing Oppression*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Erikson, Kai T. *Everything in its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*. New York City, New York: Touchstone, 1976.

Harry, Vincent. *Death Work: Police, Trauma, and the Psychology of Survival*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014 edition.

"LGBT Bullying Experiences." Nobullying.com.

Lifton, Robert Jay and Eric Olson. "The Human Meaning of Total Disaster: The Buffalo Creek Experience." *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 39 (1976): 1-18.

Lipton, Merrill. *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Additional Perspectives*. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publishing, 1994.

Liuzzi, Peter J. *With Listening Hearts: Understanding the Voices of Lesbian and Gay Catholics*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2001.

McAdams, Dan P. and McLean, Kate C. "Narrative Identity." *Current Directions*

- in *Psychological Science* 22 (2013): 233-238. Available via SAGE,
<http://cdp.sagepub.com/content/22/3/233> (Accessed 1 November 2014).
- McGinley, Dugan. *Acts of Faith, Acts of Love: Gay Catholic Autobiographies as Sacred Texts*. New York City, New York: Continuum, 2004.
- McNay, Lois. "Communitarians and Feminists: The Case of Narrative Identity."
Literature and Theology 16 (2002): 81-95.
- Poole, Lee. "The Catholic Homosexual." *New Blackfriars* 56 (1975): 500-505.
- Pope Francis. *Amoris Laetitia*. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. 19 March 2016.
- Ratzinger, Joseph (from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons." Rome, Italy: 1 October 1986.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Russell, Glenda M. and Janis S. Bohan, Marya C. McCarroll, and Nathan G. Smith. "Trauma, Recovery, and Community: Perspectives on the Long-Term Impact of Anti-LGBT Politics." *Traumatology* 20 (2010): 1-10.
- "Statistics You Should Know About Gay and Transgender Students," PFLAG New York.
- "Trauma", *American Psychological Association*.
- Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Edited by Cathy Caruth. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Yip, Andrew K.T. "Dare to Differ: Gay and Lesbian Catholics' Assessment of Official Catholic Positions on Sexuality," *Sociology of Religion* 58 (1997): 165-180. Accessed 17 February 2016.

Young, Iris Marion. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990