

Horizons of LGBTIQ+ Hermeneutics

Summer 2021

Panelist:

Lynn Huber (Presider), Sarah Emanuel, Minenhle Nomalungelo Khumalo, Ken Stone, Max Strassfeld, and Manuel Villalobos.

Lynn Huber: Hi there. I'm excited to welcome you all to the Society of Biblical Literature's "Horizons of LGBTIQ+ Biblical Hermeneutics" webinar. This event was organized by SBL and SBL's LGBTIQ+ Task Force, which is chaired by Joseph Marchal. And it was also coordinated with SBL council member, Benny Lieu, as part of the summer webinar series. And we're also doing this at the end of pride month. We thought that that was a particularly important time and we're just getting it under the window here on the last day of June. We want to thank the people who were involved in organizing, including the members of the LGBTIQ+ Task Force. And we also are especially thankful for the work of LaToya Leary, SBL Manager of Communications and Member Relations, for making this webinar possible and just keeping us all together and on track. So I want to thank in advance our wonderful panelists, who I'm really happy to introduce.

So first up is Sarah Emanuel. She's Assistant Professor of Theological Studies at Loyola, Marymount, in LA, the director at large for Feminist Studies and Religion, Inc., and co-creator the Feminist Studies in Religion podcast. Check that out. And she's published a variety of things on queer related topics in a variety of venues and she has a forth coming monograph in the *Research Perspectives and Biblical Interpretations* Short Monograph Series on a queer intertextual and trauma informed reading of Ezekiel and the Eucharist narrative. And I just have to shout out her book on Revelation as well, her recent book.

We also have with us Minenhle Khumalo who is a South African biblical scholar whose research focuses on reading sacred texts through understandings of popular productions of narrative. And she's currently serving as adjunct professor of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament at Montclair State University. Her proposed dissertation, "The Serpent Syllabus: An Afro-Marxist Trans-Feminist Reading of Genesis 2:4-4:2 and it that reads the second creation account with social and academic practices formed through Africana queer identities, and she's working towards constructing critical pedagogies for collective psychosocial resistance. So we'll be excited to see that when that's out and, and ready for the public.

We also have with us Ken Stone, who is the Distinguished Service Chair and Professor of Bible, Culture, and Hermeneutics at Chicago Theological Seminary. He has a number of publications in LGBTIQ+ hermeneutics, including *Practicing Sacred Texts: Food, Sex, and Bible in Queer Perspective*, and he has a co-edited volume with Theresa Hornsby: *Bible Trouble*, which I think has been on sale at SBL, but I may not be correct about that. I may have just announced something that's not right. But he's also, I should note just as an aside, was instrumental in getting the LGBTQIA Queer Biblical Hermeneutics Program Unit going for SBL's Annual Meeting. And so thank you, Ken, for doing that leadership for us, we really appreciate it. We appreciate that.

We also have Max Strassfeld with us. Max is an assist... or Strassfeld. I apologize. And I just, you just corrected me earlier. Max is an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Arizona. And their book, *Trans Talmud* will be out this winter from the University of California Press and, and Max, maybe you can give us the full title because I always mispronounce... And is it, do you pronounce it? "androgynes"?

Max Strassfeld: No in, in English. I just say *Androgynes and Eunuchs*.

Lynn Huber: Okay. *Androgynes and Eunuchs in Rabbinic Literature*. Thank you, Max.

And, and then we have Manuel Villalobos who is affiliated professor of New Testament at Chicago Theological Seminary and his research and writing centers around theoretical perspectives on masculinity in the New Testament. Among his numerous, he has a number of books with Sheffield Academic Press that, he has one on *Abject Bodies in (the Gospel of) Mark*, and *Masculinity And Otherness In The Pastoral Epistles*. He also has a forthcoming book titled *Jesus, the Body without Organs: A Deleuzian Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark*.

And finally I am Lynn Huber. I'm the Maude Sharpe Powell Professor of Religious Studies at Elon University in Elon, North Carolina. And I am a member of the SBL LGBTQI+ Task Force. And I'm happy to be with you today and to be your moderator and conversation partner. And I guess as we get started, I'll note, first of all, that we've agreed to use first names. And since this is a collegial conversation, and, and again, we are recording this on the last day of pride month, 2021. So, I guess I'll get us started with a question. You know, y'all have a really, I mean, the bona fiedas and the vidas here are really amazing and interesting. So, I guess I'll ask what got you started? What led you all or led us to pursue LGBTQI+ and queer hermeneutics and readings and approaches to biblical studies? What was the real motivation?

Minenhle: I'll go first! Break the silence. You know, this question is, is, is, is difficult because it's one of those questions where one can go on forever so I'll try to be concise and to the point. I think one of the obvious things because of the nature of LGBTQI+ hermeneutics is self-interest. Right? I'm, I'm interested in myself as a queer person, a queer body. And that informs a lot of what I do, but also the interest in self is also extended to say my identity, black identity, African identity, motherhood, and all those things that get attached to who I am. But also there's a deep, deep love for narrative. And the biblical narrative too, which is sometimes hard to love, but I think I'm okay with admitting that I do like the biblical texts and love it even. And, and why that's difficult to admit is that, and this is perhaps one of the primary interests is that I really can't figure out why the Bible is so compelling and why it is that it's compelling to both oppressors and those who oppose oppression. Somehow, people on all sorts of walks of life, for lack of a better term, have decided that this text, this, this is the one and hang very, very serious ideology on their interpretations of these texts. And I, I think that informs a lot of my questioning of the text. What is it about this text? What components? And so I, I'm prone to deconstruction. I'm prone to narratology because like I'm so interested in the message that it's communicating and what needs it's responding to that make it compelling, which means that I am harsh on the text, especially the God character, because the God character in the text have been compelling to white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, et cetera, which means that those parts of the texts I'm, I'm very interested in. And sometimes, you know, I get discomfort from that interest. But I think those kinds of questions, you know, that contested space, why is it that we still fight for space in this text? What is it that it offers us that I find myself returning a lot to familiar texts to, because I want to interrogate the things that we've made familiar with the text and why we've made these things familiar. And how this text that's been around for so long and really, you know, when you., we are all biblical scholars so we know that sometimes there's just not much to it. But it's still so powerful. And I think those interests and their broad range in my scholarship like myself does not stay in one place vaguely. So hopefully that's a start.

Manuel: I will go next. I think that for me was the difficult part was to accept that I got a body, that I live in a body, to reconcile my desires with my spirituality. And once that I reconcile those, the body and my spirituality, I looked to the Bible. I need to be honest, I think that 40 years ago if somebody will tell me you will be teaching the Bible or doing something with the Bible, I will just laugh because for me, the Bible was my enemy. I didn't find any kind of comfort. So it was very difficult to reconcile them, my

spirituality with the good book. Then I came here to the US. And for the first time I was exposed to feminist readings of the Bible. For the first time I saw some women teaching Bible, which for me was a kind of cultural shock because the women that I knew, they were ones who prepare the food for us at the seminary. And then I decided to go for the PhD. And then I met Dr. Stone, which I am very glad and he's here so any questions he might be able to answer for me. So, he, he exposed me to do Judith Butler and I get in trouble, not just because my gender but also because my, my interpretation. I get that kind of the tools that I was looking for. I was exposed to many minority groups and they weren't really related with the Bible. But you still feel that I was still orphaned from my own logos. And I didn't find that I didn't fit into these minority groups. So, I start developing my own tools, my own biblical tools, and I think that it has been here in the US in this reality of the border land, negotiating many identities that I, then I still see the Bible as a source of hope, when its reading from different, different angles, especially from the part of the minority groups who have been oppressed.

Ken: I'll be glad to jump in next since Manuel blamed me for his path, which I would, I, I'm very happy about. I agree with a lot of what Minnie and, and Manuel said in terms of self-interest and cultural influence of the Bible. Speaking for myself, and there's a reason I'm going to put it this way, part of my entry into what we now call LGBTIQ Hermeneutics was a little bit accidental. I happened to be working on my PhD as an openly gay man at Vanderbilt just as lesbian and gay studies, as we called it at the time, and queer theory, were making a kind of splash in the academy. And some professors, not from religion, but from the English and Philosophy departments at Vanderbilt, sponsored, got money to sponsor a year-long seminar on lesbian and gay studies and then queer theory. And there were only two students, PhD students in religion who took advantage of this. The other was also a Bible PhD student, Holly Tenzing in New Testament. And it was a great experience because we got to interact with scholars like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, now passed, and David Halperin. And I had already chosen to write my dissertation on several biblical narratives in which sexual practice and gender played a role, partly because of the influence of feminist teachers I had as, as Manuel also noted about his own work. So the seminar didn't really change my dissertation focus. But it did lead me to slip in some LGBTQ scholarship, some references to Halperin and Judith Butler and actually a rather large role to Gail Rubin's famous essay, "The Traffic in Women," which was still considered at the time, primarily a feminist text. But I had discovered in the library, her writings on things like BDSM and her famous "Thinking Sex" article. And so I was quite happy to slip into a Bible dissertation, a fair amount of Gail Rubin. So I went ahead with my dissertation and was happy to be exposed to LGBTQ studies. And then once I was done with the dissertation, I, I moved further ahead in that direction. One reason I tell that story and then I'll, I'll pass it on to someone else, is I've always been struck by something that I read from the queer scholar, Donald Hall, who has argued that, and he's written a lot, not only about LGBTQ scholarship, but also academia in general, and one of the things he has said is that he believes in the academy, senior scholars ought to be a little more upfront about the role that chance and accident played in their academic careers. You pick up a book here, you happen to have a conversation with someone there and, and so forth. And we often speak as if there's a normative path, a straight path, if you will, for scholars in academia, including biblical scholars, and partly as a consequence scholars who find themselves deviating from that path, whether, because of the job market or publications or some other contingency can feel, I think, a great deal of shame about that, but queer scholars, most of all, should know that there's not one straight path. There, there are a lot of different trails, even ways of wandering off trail relative to biblical scholarship. So I'd like for us to think more about biblical scholarship in particular, but academia in general, from that point of view.

Lynn: I love that idea of deviation. And I think we should come back to that deviation at chance.

Sarah: I, I'm happy to, to jump in into this conversation. First of all, it's great to be here. Thank you so much for, for inviting me to be a part of this discussion. My answer to this question as akin to Minenhle's although, I doubt I can say it nearly as eloquently as, as she did. Just in general. I mean, she brought up subject positions, you know, our subject positionality within, within the field. And within the field and sort of in life in general, I just tend to be a late bloomer. And, and so I guess my, my not straight path, started out from a different identity. So I now identify as, as lesbian, I had it really didn't know until later in life. But I did know I was Jewish because I was born into a Jewish household and my field is New Testament so, you know, it's not exactly the most common thing to be a Jew in New Testament. But the thing that pushed me to enter New Testament studies was conversations of center and periphery and the, and the messiness therein, there was something about hearing growing up, you know, Jesus is a Jew, but Jews aren't as good as Christians that completely confused me. It didn't quite add up. And so I entered the New Testament field from that place, from that place of, of being a sort of pseudo other, a self and, and other sort of all wrapped in one in this crazy messy nonsensical way. And then in, in being this sort of outsider in New Testament, I just sort of naturally fell into deconstructive modes of inquiry and thinking. And so this gets back to the late bloomer side, queer theory was one of the later modalities that I entertained and just a shout out to fellow queer theorist, Dr. Jimmy Hoke, who recently did a recording for SBL. Jimmy. And I were and, and Minenhle, Minenhle is at Drew University now as well, we sort of come from this, a similar mold, but Jimmy and I entered at the same time. And he gave a class presentation on queer theory, our first term at Drew. And it's, it was, it felt really difficult. It felt like really difficult material for me to grasp, which is interesting because it embodies so much of how I naturally fit into the world, which is to question and deconstruct and be messy, but it's, it scared me. It was confusing to me. And it really wasn't until I finally came out, that queer theory started to feel less scary and made a little bit more sense. And so that's sort of my, my entryway into it from being an othered body, liking messiness, being confused by messiness, and finally, I guess, owning a part of who I am to be able to make sense of the messiness that is queer theory.

Lynn: And cheers the late bloomers. Me too.

Max: I guess I'm a little bit of a late bloomer, too. I wasn't going to tell this story, but, Ken, you inspired me. So I was, I was a comp lit major in college. I did secular Hebrew literature. So I stayed away from, I grew up in a religious household, a Jewish household. I stayed away from all of that in college. And then I left college and worked as a sex educator at a feminist sex store for many years. I did lots of other things. And at my queer synagogue in San Francisco, I went one weekend to, like a scholar in residence weekend where they had Rabbi Benay Lappe, who runs a queer Yeshiva now, come and teach us Talmud from a queer perspective, rabbinic literature from a queer perspective. And I had a moment after that, like, this is what I should be doing. So I went back to my little job as selling sex toys and doing sex education and studied with my Havruta, with my study partner and encountered these categories, androgynes and eunuchs. And basically went back to grad school because I really wanted the tools to unpack these stories and to teach them to my community there in the canonical literature. But there. They have been, I would say vastly understudied and under taught. And I feel really lucky to be in Rabbinics now, like in this time. I was talking recently to a senior scholar, a feminist scholar in Jewish studies. I won't name her because I don't know if she wants to be quoted, but she had done some very early groundbreaking work and continues to do amazing work. And she said to me, when she would get interviewed early on in her career, they would always ask her, who are you in conversation with? Who are you talking with? And she said it was a really, it was a struggle to answer. It was an uncomfortable question because the truth was there weren't very many people for her to be in conversation with when she was writing. Right? It, it was her and a couple of them, of other folks. So I feel really grateful to be doing queer theory, intersex theory, trans theory now when in fact there's a really rich conversation happening that I get to be a part of. And

for me, one of the questions that I keep coming back to, I use Dinshaw, Carolyn Dinshaw's metaphor of touch. Right? So what does it mean to reach through time to touch these canonical sources? Right? For me, it's rabbinic sources in particular. What does that, what does, what's the erotics of that? What's our desire as scholars, when we're reaching through time to touch these texts? And it, and that's part of the piece that I'm always trying to untangle when I write about rabbinic sources.

Lynn: Right. This is such a rich conversation. It's so fascinating to hear everyone's stories. And I guess I'll just add a little bit that, you know, back to the late bloomer thing that I didn't come out as queer until I was in graduate school in my program. I had come from a very sort of conservative evangelical Christian background and even as a felt oppression in terms of gender and never really explored kind of sexuality until later. And it's been in conversation, kind of to build on what Max was saying, in conversation with other scholars, I think that I began to think about, you know, sort of, I guess in some sense, kind of teaching myself, or not teaching myself, but teaching in conversation or learning in conversation with others, sort of, queer studies and getting into LGBTQIA studies. So also just lifting up that, that bit of chance and deviation. And then also that we're, we're not like many was saying also work. We, our identities shift right over time and, and or we learn new aspects of our identities and that part of the scholarly, at least for me, the scholarly experience has been, you know, learning myself and, and learning it in conversation with the text, which I'm sure some other biblical scholars would cringe when they hear that, that sort of, part of this project is also learning about myself through the texts. And that just, it made me wonder, especially when you were talking Ken and Manuel is, have you, have folks encountered like pushback as you've gone down, these, these roads?

Manuel: Excuse me. I couldn't hear your question. It was breaking up.

Lynn: Oh, I'm sorry. Have, have, have folks encountered pushback or resistance where people have, have other scholars or colleagues or advisors have said, don't do that, like, maybe you need to step back and do more of the historical critical kind of thing or...?

Manuel: I will, I will answer. I think that have found resistance. First of all, in my country in Mexico, in Latin America, in the places I've been invited to lecture. They don't, they don't see this as a legitimate approach. And they, yes. They'll, you know, [inaudible]. Some people are even violent in the way that they ask questions. And I hear my hermeneutical approach, I think has been more positive in one way, because probably a, with hermeneutics is growing, is maturing, is allowing us for dreaming and be creative, but in some people, I was reading one review or one of my books. He say that my hermeneutics is kind of funny, kind of, how can I say, entertaining. I think that was the word that he used. It's entertaining, it is not really a, it doesn't do anything to the scholarly world. So I think that that kind of resistance is still there. You know, them, they don't take seriously, these kinds of approaches because we are trying to destabilize, even the way we interpret it probably the resistance has more to do with them that with me, I will imagine.

Ken: You know, through another happy accident of life, I landed fairly quickly into a full-time position that allowed me to work, to do queer work, and, you know, encouraged it. So open resistance was not something that I encountered, but there are a couple of things that are more subtle that I noticed. One, I had a colleague at my school where I teach, he was very supportive of my queer work, but he said to me more than once: well, you know, you don't want to just be defined only by that. You've got to think about other things too. Right? Which, who would say that to a redaction critic? Let's say it's, it was an interesting comment to receive from someone who was very supportive of my work. The other thing outside of my institution, when I was editing a book, I approached an openly gay biblical scholar whose work, I respect a great deal. And said, you know, we're, this is the project that we're working on. Would

you be willing to participate? And this scholar was, was sort of like, I don't do that queer stuff. You know, I, I'm willing to apply the standard tools of biblical criticism to some of the texts that might be relevant, but I don't do that, you know, and it did... which was fine. I didn't question that scholars' decision, but it did sort of let me know that even folks who on the surface are supportive, can also be very uncomfortable with work that seems a little more out there as far as LGBTQ studies are concerned.

Sarah: Yeah, my, oh, go ahead, Minenhle. Yeah, you just said that, go ahead.

Minenhle: Thank you, Sarah. I just, I want to defend Max because touch is, it's a lovely word. And, you know, I want to reflect on that because I come from ancestral traditions. And so the notion of touch, speaks to me deeply. And I think that's all I have to say about that. So thank you for that, but also to attend the question at hand, you know, I think I can relate somewhat to what Manuel is saying because that sort of resistance, you know, I'm a, a black, queer, immigrant, single mother. So you know resistance, I just assume it. And it's been odd, you know, because I, I do what I want when it comes to biblical studies, I think anybody who looks at my publications and anybody who knows me, sometimes that's a struggle to back and forth. And sometimes I have no idea what I'm doing, but one thing I know for sure is I'm a do what I want. I think that's been a real, real struggle for colleagues, mentors, professors, because, I think there's the idea that I am not allowed to do what I want, and that I ought to be a womanist or that if I'm going to do queer theory, then, do queer theory, or do it the traditional way or you're going to be a literary scholar then, do narratology, stick to something. So, but that's the, kind of the opposite of the advice you were getting there, Ken, right? It's that like I have to be identifiable. And I think that is the primary problem with me as a body, but also me as a scholar is that I, to some extent, refuse to be identifiable. I've never come out just because it's a politics that makes no sense to me. I am me. I don't know how to be any other way. And you just go and deal with what you get. And there's no coming out. There's nothing to it, you know? And so that, that sort of scholarship gets a lot of resistance. And I think I get more resistance because I'm down to fight. And, and that's one of the things too, is like, I will fight God's self for my queer self. And you see it in my publications. And yeah. And so, I... I'm grateful for the space that those whose work that has come before me has created, but also there's an extent to which, you know, the space isn't used to bodies that look like me. And so even though so many more things are possible, there is still something of a mystery to queerness itself within our queer studies and it's been kind of disappointing how unprepared queer studies is for the mystery of queer folk. And I think again, because I have a tendency to ramble, I will stop myself there because I think that's the end of that thought.

Sarah: I, I'm struck by, well, I'll, I too want to echo Max I also love the, the thought of touching the Bible. I've, I'm, I'm struck by a few things here. I do not love the Bible and yet what if I actually do, because I keep wanting to touch it and I desire it and I'm not, I don't know what that's about. Another messiness for perhaps another conversation. But I'm struck by the terminology that you just used, Minenhle, that you assume resistance. So again, a messiness for this conversation... I'm not sure how to articulate this, because I don't, I think it's a both/and situation, which happens a lot in, in queer theory. I don't assume resistance. And I think it's a, both and of, of one, just my sheer privilege of being this white body. But also I think it's because I'm out of the evangelical knowing of, of relating to New Testament. So oftentimes I will go into New Testament conversations and just say what I want to say, because I, I don't, I don't think that I'm doing anything that could possibly upset anyone. I don't, I don't know. I don't have that kind of relationality or that background with New Testament. And so I did get into a little bit of, I don't know if I would call it trouble, but maybe at SBL a few years ago, and it was because I just didn't know. I didn't know to expect resistance. And again, I, I'm not sure where the not knowing to expect resistance comes from, privilege or otherness. I suspect both. But I was just talking about the second chapter of Revelation, when you know, John's imagined Jesus thrusts the prophetess Jezebel onto a bed

and I was merely, you know, it was relying on other folks who have already said this, that this could be unimagined rape scene. So this was not my idea. Tina Pippin has championed this, what I added into it was the idea that if the big horn revelation is imagined as male and then lampooned as female I was saying, well, we don't really know who Jezebel is, what if in John's imagination, imagination, Jezebel is a male prophet been lampooned as female. Well, then I was creating this further imagined male rape scene. And I did not think that would be a problem. And oh, wow. Yeah, I got some pushback. I got people standing. I got people looking through their Greek. And Minenhle was there after I was like, I think we were all laughing at the idea that I just was not anticipating any pushback. I was really, truly not anticipating that resistance. I didn't know that I had touched upon something hard for folks. And so it became this sort of comical thing that I had no idea, but I, I, I guess I'm, yeah. I'm curious about this. When we expect resistance and when we don't and why, and that sort of a thing.

Lynn: So, yeah. I'm totally kicking myself that I wasn't there because that answer, that's an, Sarah, it's an amazing reading that you have of that. Yeah, but it's interesting to think about the levels of kind of, sort of, sort of the normative or the, the, that we also kind of are replicating in some queer studies, too. Right? I love what you said, Minenhle, about the mystery of, of queer folk and how queer, you know, queer studies and queer biblical interpreters might not be ready for the mystery of queer, of queer folk and queer bodies. And I guess maybe this sort of leads into maybe thinking about some about where we think about our, what we think about our field and where we think the field is today. Are we doing any better with understanding the mystery of queer folk or are we, you know, replicating structures of racism, sexism, and heteronormativity, and, you know, sort of cisnormativity? Where are we going? Where are we now? I love that I spoke and yeah, the fun conversation ends.

Minenhle: You know, I'm gonna go ahead and assert myself again. You know, ironically, this is a lesson I learned listening to Mos Def who's a black rapper. He's got an album that's called *Black on Both Sides* and he's reflecting on hip hop. And I mean, the question is, you know, like that he's reflecting on is what is the future of hip hop? Where is hip hop going? And it's a way of reflecting on the past, and the present. And his answer to that is we want to know what hip hop is going, we got to take a look at where we're going, right? Ask yourself where you're going, where we're going is where hip hop is going. And, you know, as I started to think about that a little bit more. It made me think, because I had already like, started thinking about this webinar made me think about this question, you know, like what, what is queer studies right now? I modified that question for myself a little bit, because of, you know, I have a South African background that is, been very socialist and very, very... You know what? Marxist. It's Marxist. And, and geared towards this understanding of the masses. And I started to think to myself, you know, if we are interested in, in looking at what the queer hermeneutics, what the state of it is, I think to some extent, we've got to consider what the state of queer folk is, and that will give us an indication of the nature of our studies in a way. And especially, I think I want to give epistemological privilege to a black trans woman in particular. Right? And if we consider the state of black trans women in general, within biblical studies, they are a distinct absence. But also within wider social cultural context, and you, I'ma break past the pessimism, but I want to lead with that because I think we get so excited about ourselves because this is an exciting space. I mean, there is so much freedom and I've been able to do things that I did not imagine I wanted to do. Yet at the same time there is, there's something about the space that is inadequate. There is something about it that is very sorely failing us, me. And, and that's a struggle. You know, because I friend of mine, Anna Blaedel, who recently went through the absolute most with the UMC. And I mean, I named that because it was a rather public spectacle, but you know, her, they, excuse me, their reflections on that was real helpful to me because they indicated that queerness, although it was this point of struggle, for them and the church, was also a gift. It was something that saw them through that struggle. And I think that's something of where we are in queer hermeneutics. I think we're now

established enough that like we're past the apologetics hermeneutically speaking. You know, we're no longer legitimatizing or justifying it in the same way as it might've been done, say 10 years ago. But at the same time, we're still facing a distinct loss within the field, especially within the context of COVID. You know, and, I again, we're having conversations about SBL and whether or not we're going to attend the meeting in person this year. And I've, I've been struck about this question of return because as a Hebrew Bible scholar, I firmly believe that return is more difficult than exile. You can fight me on that, but I, I am, I am certain return is more difficult than exile because in some extent, you know when you're an exile and that's kind of how I think LGBTQI+ study started as a form of exile. And when you were in exile, the mission is clear. It's hard and it's painful, but it's clear. You know, like its apologetics and survival, right, but we know what we've got to do. And once you've done that, it feels like it should get easier, but it doesn't because there's more questions there's stuff to fight over now because we've built something. We're not sure what it is, but now we've got something to protect. There's interests, there's agendas, and there's also now the external and the internal, and there's all these dynamics now where suddenly return isn't this relief that we expected it to be. And I think a lot of us, scholars in my generation are in the return phase of queer hermeneutics and I think that's because the world is in a return of some kind. How successful that return is? I don't know. But, but I think that is my general reflection on the state of the field is that where we're needing to understand our relations, we're needing to understand varying degrees of vulnerability, varying degrees of power, varying degrees of understanding and different ways of being, and it's so difficult because when we're queer, right, we want to celebrate the difference of it all. But the difference of it all is so Goddamn difficult. And I don't know if that, it still makes sense as a reflection on your question, Lynn. But I, I, that's what I think about the field. And so there's, there's something about it, that's really exciting. And there's something about it that's also really terrifying because as a black queer person who is self-interested as a scholar, I pursue self at the risk of life, you know? And that's a difficult thing to confront and it's, it's difficult to think in that space when you know, Eric Thomas, who I must certainly name and will probably name at least 15 more times. Yeah, he saves me. I would have been a nurse by now, just because I think at some point I felt, it was exactly four years ago. So I know I'd be in a nurse by now, where I don't know Sarah, if you remember this either, where I was, I was done with biblical studies. It was unhelpful to me. It was unhelpful to my people because folks were dying. Folks have been dying and I am so sick of the death, you know, and you know, and this is a question that Ken may have heard before, you know, like what does healing look like in a dying world? And like every time, like, I think of that question, I just, I want to give up on biblical studies because I'm not sure the Bible has that kind of healing within it. But, you know, Eric Thomas just would not let me go. And I'm grateful for that because I, I come to a place where, you know, I'm starting to be more comfortable with myself as a biblical scholar. I don't think I've ever been happy as a biblical scholar. I never, I intended to be a biblical scholar, but I never intended to be able to be a biblical scholar if that makes any sense. I think when I wanted to be, to be a biblical scholar, I didn't know what it was. And then when I figured out what it was, I didn't like it. And Eric has been so, so instrumental in just making sure that I stay well, because he's always felt that there's a value to my scholarship. And I think also that is telling of where we are as a field, you know, we've cultivated very, very strong relations. And I think especially amongst the black queer folk that are coming out of a very small circle in the Northeast, to be honest, you know, we literally help each other survive Biblical studies. And that's been an important thing, but it's also, I think it's important for us to know that some of us have had to survive even queer hermeneutics, you know, and I'm still not sure if we're going to survive it because at the same time, like you've got other interests that pack onto who we are as queer bodies that make it so that, you know, you get stretched so thin that sometimes, I'm not sure if I can call myself a queer scholar, because I feel like, well, maybe I don't devote enough time to queer theory because I'm also going to do critical race theory, I've gotta address rape culture, I've gotta address all these other things. And sometimes I feel like, well, did I spend enough time

with queerness. And when I spend time with queerness, do I spend enough time with my blackness? Did I spend enough time with my feminine identity? I spend enough time with my motherhood and all of those things, you know, I, I'm going to stop talking soon. I think. I'm aware and I am in the field and, and I, and how I see the field from my little box.

Lynn: That's, there's so, so much there and that sort of language of, you know, is, is this field healing in a world that's sick or dying? I think it was really powerful and I'd love to hear some, you know, as kind of think about that too. I mean, are we a field that's healing or we, are we a group that is like perpetuating continued death or illness? Yeah. What do we think? Again, I like, I bring the mood down.

Minenhle: Ya'll not gon make me talk again!

Max: I don't, I don't know that I have an answer to that question precisely. Although, you know, I both have experienced transphobia in the field, in my field and Rabbinics. And, and I move through the world as white and transmasculine, so that, so there, so both of those pieces are true, right? Like I've experienced job discrimination. I was told you'll never have a job if you work on this project, right. And in the end, my job was, is I was hired through a trans studies initiative at the University of Arizona. You know, that's where my hiring came. One of the things I've been thinking about, I don't know if this is precisely the question, but one of the things I've been trying to wrestle with are the ways that history of sexuality doesn't as a framework, doesn't precisely work for my sources. And specifically when we're thinking about trans before trans like a framework of we're studying, we're using trans studies to look at categories that predate the transgender by, you know, centuries, millennia. What are the ways that history of sexuality isn't actually set up to address those questions? So part of what I've been thinking about, or the way that history of sexuality has really been, scholars have really been, always aware of the political stakes of studying same-sex sexuality in the past, that we're all aware of how our projects are pushing back against reacting to contemporary politics. And I've started to write about contemporary politics as a way of thinking about Rabbinics. So for example, I've written about the Religious Liberty Accommodations act in Mississippi, a law that passed in 2016, it's still the law in the state of Mississippi. It's a law that basically defines religious belief in three ways and it says it protects that religious belief. So, defines religious belief in ways that are anti queer and anti-trans and then it says, if you act on those religious beliefs, in other words, if you discriminate, that, that those actions are protected by freedom of religion. So why I've been stuck on this law and I won't take you through the whole argument, somebody else can ask me later, but this is part of what I'm trying to work out. The rhetoric of the law itself are used, that it's a protected religious belief that gay people should not exist and that trans people do not exist. So there's a slight shift in the rhetoric. Gay people should not exist. Trans people do not exist. Very simple distinction, really small. So here's why I'm stuck on this, because it means that the different politics that trans and queer people are embroiled in shaped the project of history differently. In other words, when we're living in a society where law and politics are arguing that trans people don't exist. And here I'm thinking of Ava Hayward's article "Don't Exist," where she quotes Laverne Cox specifically the message to trans women of color, black and brown trans woman, is don't exist. Right? So if we're living in a society that tells trans people, particularly trans women of color, don't exist, and that is now currently targeting trans youth to make that religious belief shape material reality, to try and make it so that trans people do not exist. Then it means that trans politics are caught up in questions of ontology. Right? So trans historical projects are coming out of slightly different set of concerns, A fight over ontology, a fight over, do we exist itself? And they're pushing back wrestling with those questions, those set of questions. The difference between should not and does not in some ways is small and my intention is not to rank them. As a trans and queer person, both of those are pretty freaking awful. But it's worth, I think thinking about this distinctions is why I'm using transing in my book to try and push myself to see what are the

ways that the frameworks that we have to work with, aren't quite gonna work for me to do justice to my texts.

Lynn: Max that, that so sounds so, I mean, it's so important, right? And it is a small difference, like you were saying, but it is huge. And, yeah. And it makes me wonder about the connection between sort of LGBT or L you know, gay and lesbian sorts of hermeneutics and trans hermeneutics. Right? When you're coming at things from these wildly, or not wildly, but sort of fundamental different, different questions it seems really important. And how, you know, can we have a field and craft a field that, that doesn't erase sort of question of erasure. Right?

Minenhle: You know, I promised myself, I wouldn't talk so much, but thank you for that Max, because, my, my, my, my, my dissertation is working on a queer reading of the Garden of Eden. It, it started off as reading Eve as a trans woman, which is so much fun, because, you know, to connect to the question of resistance earlier, nobody ever resists me on that because I use the hyper liberalism of evangelical interpretation. So you want to read the texts literally? Go ahead!

Lynn: Let's go!

Minenhle: Eve must be transgender. And, you know, there's a playfulness there, but there's also a seriousness, I think, that your questions there, that I, you know, I didn't think about, I think you've just shaped my dissertation. So, we need a conversation, I'm doing I can be able to cite you accordingly. But, you know, why origins? Why is it, you know, and I think also the forms of oppressions are so interested in origins, any time you want to dehumanize somebody, you want to delegitimize their place of origin. And I think, this is why I, I've been nervous about placing trans identities within the origin story, because there is a level of freedom that was there, but I'm also reading with the anthology trap door. And I'm also like, visibility. So once you place folks within origins, they're within a history that you can access, right. And so there, there's the trickiness of should not exist because as a black woman, I know a little bit, I don't experience it in the same way as trans woman do, but there, there is, I think I like to say about my own queerness is hiding out loud. You know, in the sense that like, once you know me, my nature, you understand my queerness, but I could walk down the street and I'm just another black lady, you know, or more so another African lady. And there's so much of my queerness that gets confused with my Africanness because it's all fundamentally foreign, you know. But there is a certain kind of sneakiness that I've enjoyed there because it's meant that I could be relatively bold and yet still fully hide in plain sight, you know, and there's a certain power to that when you know something that others do not. Even if it's a secret about yourself. And so, you know, and, and as I'm thinking with you, and as I'm thinking with trap door, I'm thinking with Eve, and I'm starting to think, you know, like origins are so, so deeply important to us because they mark our existence. It's an insistence that we do exist, and this is why I'm so dead set on Eve being transgender. I mean, you know, like, from creation. This was not only possible, but intentional. You know, but at the same time, you know, being subject to human history is, as queer folks we know is a difficult thing. And I just, I want to thank you for that, their bit there as we connect to wider politics.

Sarah: If I may play for a moment with some of the vocabulary and, and topics we've sort of put out there in the last few minutes. I want to wrestle with, or play with conceptions of, of healing and hurting, and exile and return with regards to my thoughts of perhaps where biblical studies might be going. And also many of you brought up rape culture. So I'm thinking about this through the lens of, of rape culture and, and, and with, you know, selfhood. I'm saying that I I'm going to say something that could be really difficult to wrestle with. And I just want to point out, I understand the wrestle of this and how painful I understand what I'm about to say can be for, for survivors, as a, as a survivor of repeated childhood sexual

abuse, I know how painful this conversation can be. But in the context of rape culture right now and the Me Too Movement, I think our brains sort of automatically go to, to again, you sort of like seemingly binary oppositions of all good/all bad. So I'm back to like exile/return, healing/hopeful. So this person did something horrific. All that, all that all bad. Let's expose all that all bad. So I'm thinking about that over here on one side of my brain. And then I'm thinking on, on another side of my brain, of this, of this concept of exile and return with regards to queer hermeneutics and biblical studies. So let's say, folks did a sort of exile in creating a space for queer hermeneutics and Bible, and a large part of that is declaring validation, declaring that this is okay and finding perhaps with evangelicalism in another corner, goodness of queer bodies in and the Bible let's find a good, let's find a good it's kind of, there's sort of like the opposite of Hollywood, like so many Hollywood queer stories of like of the trauma and the angst and the anger and in biblical studies that's like, no queerness is good, good, good, good, amazing, amazing. And so let's say we're in this return stage of, let's just say for a moment, we validated ourselves for a hot second and we can deconstruct that to, let's just say we validated ourselves epistemologically. We're in this return phase to biblical studies and this is where it sort of rape culture is coming back in. What would it look like to do queer work and to name queer bodies in the Bible and to also highlight the problematics and when it's hard and when it's scary and when it's bad and when it's rape? So sort of like the opposite of like, you know, the Me Too Movement, we want to say it's all bad. Well, this is where I understand the pain we're complicated. Right? And I don't want to say that about my perpetrator that this person is complicated and he might have some goodness to him. I get the pain of that. I really do. But I'm thinking about this return with regards to queerness and the flip side. You know, we have this sort of like evangelical at least New Testament draw to like save this text. And I think queer theory with regards to the Bible has wrapped itself around let's save it. Let's find the good. Let's find a good. Well, there's some really hard stuff in these texts. So what might it look like to do queerness and not always want to save it? You know, and is that dangerous to us as queer bodies? If we're like, oh, thanks, let's not save this queer body in the Bible. What would that look like? How would that look back on us? You know, it's, and it's a danger, it's a risk, but I don't know if that makes sense. I'm sort of grasping at all these different threads, but that's sort of where I'm where I'm at right now.

Lynn: I think that makes a lot of sense.

Manuel: I was, I was thinking I was seeing the image, I mean, he was using the title of return. I experience, that I can experience right now that kind of reality. I live like four months here in the US. Six months in Mexico. And like trying to negotiate this identity, these boundaries. And I feel more at home here in the US, because I don't have to explain about queer theory. I don't have to legitimate my thinking, my approach because for them, queer theory is why I'm Western. And queer theory is responsible for inscribing normativity in different levels, according to them. So, probably because they come in, they associate queer theory with the binary do gender exclusively. And I think that we need to move behind that. I feel that we need to be more prophetic in different ways, more creative. One lecture that I was attending in Mexico, was 'queer is cool.' I say, no! Queer is not cool. Queer is trouble. Queer destabilizes all kinds of imaginary thoughts. But sometimes I don't feel that we use properly the queer hermeneutic tools available in order to, to challenge, in order to destabilize those assumptions, you know? And I think then the future for the queer hermeneutics must be openness, creativity, to embrace different marginal groups then it's still there. For this reason, I was very touched by Max's experience of those bodies, queer bodies, that don't exist or should not exist. But what happened when we, we have so internalized that kind of a sentence in my own, in my own, with my own experience. I always thought I didn't have the right to exist. So he asked me, what is your favorite, like you were supposed to ask us about the queer favorite text in the Bible. And I say, you know, my favorite text probably is there will be two men in one bed and one will be taken and the other one will be led. He said I understood, because it's probably, you are queer.

I say no, it is not because of that it is because I will be the one who will be led. I always internalize that I understand mapping and I always wondering, what am I doing here? I don't think the right, I am not in the right place. I always in the wrong side. So, I think, when you internalize those kind of negative feelings about yourself, it will be difficult, in one way to challenge those laws that dehumanize you because you, you think that the laws are protecting you, but they are not.

Minenhle: Thank you, Manuel! That is so helpful that, to think with, and I want to return to answer Sarah's question in a way, because my, my first publication is on rape culture. And this will give you a sense of how much I do, whatever I want in biblical studies is that I've decided as a biblical scholar, especially as like a queer, black, immigrant biblical scholars that I cannot rely on the biblical text alone as a reflection of our social condition. Right. And so when I started working on this paper on rape culture, which was Judges 19, Ken. And so there, you know, I, I, I very actively avoided the queer question. Because I, I was not ready for it in a way, but also I think that I read that text as pornography. And I, I was reading rape pornography that is called non-con, which you said is short for nonconsensual, which is rape. There's no such thing. It's just rape. But, I mean, the pornography gets called non-con because obviously the creators and the audience of it are uncomfortable with just rape. And this was our risk as a biblical scholar, I put it side by side with Judges 19. And the reason why I did that there is as horrified as we are at of Judges 19 as a rape narrative, the problem is, is that the raped bodies are only made accessible to its abuses. We know nothing of the rape itself. We only know that the things that happened around it. And the thing as a textbook call it has happened. You know, but there's something about this rape moment. And as a survivor too, Sarah, there wasn't, there was an inadequacy here is that the Bible is not enough. There is a gratuitous violence that is being shown here for sure. But, this is a representation of a violence that is not an accurate representation of the experience of the violence. And so I went ahead and inspected it because we've got to do with both the shock of the spectacle, which is so much of the social media, Me Too. What we see is the Judges 19 narrative. But there's been what is experienced the adjective truth of whatever trauma that we encounter that does not get seen. And so how do we read the unseen? How do we understand? And this is true for our queerness too. And then to your point, Max, about touching an ancient text, the thing about touching it, that's about as much as we can do now. We're believing the New Testament texts, maybe there is a healing there in touching, I'm thinking of the woman and Jesus's hem. Look at me and my New Testament knowledge. But, yeah, so maybe there is a healing that isn't there, but also there is something about touching that is a misrecognition, is that there is something lost in the embrace between me and the text, because ultimately I can know the text, but can the text know me? You know? And I'm not sure the Bible has what it takes to know all this. And I don't mean that with hubris. I mean that with genuine complication. There is a lot going on in our world. There's a lot going on in ourselves. And there's also a lot going on in the texts. And then, so to your point, you know, Sarah, to your question, really, I don't, I have no idea. And I think that's a part of why we're all still biblical scholars, right? Is that, that this is what we're trying to figure out. What, what is it that is possible with, with this text. And I think some of it, especially within like queer hermeneutics is discovering so many limitations. Because I like, I know sometimes even with like queer theory, especially once we get too high theory, Manuel, I heard you say Deleuze. Already in my head, you know, I as much as I love it, my pragmatics make, Deleuzian really difficult for me at times. And that's an understanding of my own limitations and we experienced these kinds of limitations in in different places. And this is the beauty of queer theories that we have a space to explore those limitations. And we've decided that my limitations, ought not to be your limitations and we make space for each other's limitations and also make space for each other's capacities and, and growth. And I think of things that we perhaps need to be returning to a little bit more, Sarah, is the limitations of interpretation. How far can this interpretation thing go right? It's clear that we can understand that text. It's clear what we do when we interpret the text.

But what images of ourselves do we create through interpretation? And what does the Bible do to us when, when, when we touch it Max? And so again, that's probably an, an insufficient reflection on your question, Sarah, but those are the thoughts that are there.

Lynn: Yeah. This is such a rich conversation. And so, I mean, I'm hearing, and I just want to like, maybe pull together some threads about where we think the field is and, and sort of move into where it's going. Right? That we see, I guess, and please chime in with, with sort of, you know, our maybe list of points of where we're, where we are and where we're going. That we're sort of seeing the need to move towards moving past that binary of like, queer is all good and sort of recognizing that we need to maybe look at some of the, the negative aspects of kind of, sort of, or some of the harm that maybe happens within the field of, of queer hermeneutics and queer Bible and queer biblical interpretation. But then also trying to think about how we reconcile and complicate our relationship to sort of the field in general is kind of what I was hearing Sarah saying as well. Right? Like, you know, can we work on, and how do we sort of engage in conversation that is more complicated about sort of our, where we came from, especially for those who are sort of defining queer hermeneutics as opposed to evangelical Christian kind of experiences. And then I, it sounds like we're also thinking about queer biblical studies right now is in a process of trying to acknowledge and find, needs to sort of find more space for the varieties of a queer experience whether that is because of, you know, location, race, gender, and sort of the variety of experiences that, you know, we don't all have the same experiences and how can sort of, you know, people talk about SBL as a big tent, how is queer biblical hermeneutics, how are we our own kind of, you know, tent, and how can we make room kind of in this tent for, for our folks, you know, sort of the variety of our experiences. And then we also have the question that sort of, I think Minenhle, you kind of just mentioned too. It's, like, how do we balance this, this theory, practical kind of thing as well? So a lot of folks are definitely kind of more theoretically oriented in queer, biblical hermeneutics, and it's, you know, some folks are, are really are definitely more kind of practical, pragmatic in their work. And like, how do, how do those sorts of groups get together and how do we not like gate keep and say like, well, if you're not doing X. If you're not, you know, engaging, you know, sort of high theory. You know, you're, you're not part of the, you know, you don't belong under this tent. How do we not sort of get into that place? I guess. And it kind of works both ways, right? Where a lot of different ways. Are there things I'm missing or, are there, I know there are better ways of articulating this.

Sarah: I would love if, if I just real quick to say one extra thing, which I do really want to get to the pragmatics, but I'm just going to for a hot second, I guess, add some more meta complicated theoretical philosophical considerations here. And this is again, I'm just connecting threads to land. This isn't even my own really thoughts. They're coming from a blend of, of Max and Minenhle, but Max, you said at the very beginning, you know, we have this, this desire to touch. Right? And I think many of us jumped onto that language in the affirmative and, and with joy and with glee, with queerness and things like yeah we like to touch this thing. But Minenhle, you know, you're bringing up your Judges 19 essay. And I don't know if you remember this at all, but I go back to what you said and you, you gave a version of that paper at Drew, and I was sitting right next to you when you gave that paper. And I don't know if you remember saying this, but it has stuck with me for years and I think about it all the time. Which is: We're touching. Who are we touching without consent? Like, right. Is the Bible consenting to us? Are the bodies within this text, consenting to us? And we're reaching in and grabbing with our own desires. And what does that mean? You know, so I just wanted to put that in real quick.

Lynn: That's great.

Minenhle: Are you sure? I mean, I think that's a...

Sarah: I, you said this Minenhle, I swear. This was you. And it's I've, it's just really stuck with me.

Minenhle: I'll accept it! Okay!

Manuel: Maybe the Holy Spirit was working on it. Well, my, one of my, I would say observations, I don't want to say critiques to the queer hermeneutics here, I guess here's my personal observation, sometimes you're so disconnected with reality, with a community of faith. I think the queer, even the language, is so dense, so philosophical. So my concern is, how can we connect it with very prophetic approaches trying to do with a biblical text, with a community? Sometimes I use as joke in the nicer, you know, I was prepared for the church of 21st century and I land in the Middle Ages church because it's so huge. And I don't see any, any attempts from the biblical scholars here to make these kinds of transitions. It is just my, my observation okay. I may be wrong. So for that reason I decided to spend most of my work with, within a community, rather than the academic. So, that is my point.

Lynn: Right. And who are our communities of accountability? Like who are communities of accountability? Are they always sort of faith communities or religious communities? Are they other communities? I'm, I'm often asking that question, as somebody who has kind of has what's now kind of a really complicated relationship to faith communities. Like I think sometimes my community are queer people like myself who have complicated relationships to their, their community and may not be in them. And how am I a prophetic or activist voice in the, with those communities. Yeah. Minenhle I, I saw you on. Yeah.

Minenhle: I, I'm Catholic, which makes talking to my community real difficult. And I mean, I think the difficulty is, is two parts on the one hand is that I was initiated in Catholicism in Africa. And the very strange thing about Catholicism, no matter how strictly it's gotten, it's different every where you go. And so I've never been comfortable with Catholicism in the US. It just the the, the politics, funny enough, are stricter then the politics of Catholicism in South Africa. But also I think that the, the nature of the cultural setup of it. It's just like, and the religious community I've, I've only mostly ever accessed through academia, and so at that... as a, as an immigrant and coming from, you know, a country where 80% of the population is black and then suddenly being the only like dark face in a room most of the time, you know, the community became a real, real question for me and, you know, I appreciate Anzaldúa and the lesson of working class words, because I use it quite a lot of working class was you might've noticed already, and I'm already censoring myself because expletives are a very, a healthy portion of my vocabulary, even in my academia. Is this permitted?

Lynn: It is....

Minenhle: I remember that the first question when reading Judges 19 as what the fuck? And there's something about that that captures the epistemological entry point a lot better than anything I can say academically. And when I went in to put my publication and when I presented that at SBL it made no sense for me to say anything other than that. And even I use it even when I'm translating. Those who were familiar with the deportation of Hagar and I use deportation rather intentionally as a word in Genesis 22. You know, in that scene where Hagar is naming God, you are the God who sees and so many commentators would, would talk about her words. I'm thinking of [INAUDIBLE] commentary there, the word she uses "gobbled" and all respect to them there, but I firmly disagree. There's something about me as a black woman that has a very affective understanding of what Hagar is saying in there. And I think this is where maybe, Sarah you're onto something, is that I think a lot of, even just in the history of womanism and, and reclamations of Hagar, is that we want it to be all positive. We want her interaction with God, especially to be a positive. We want this to be a positive naming, and this is a paper that's coming out. An essay that's coming out this year, hopefully, and, and, and the translation that I, I use the,

I use African-American vernacular because I think it captures what Hagar is naming to God a lot better than I think any of the attempts at translation at the Hebrew. And I translate it like, “I know you see me see you, right? And there's something about that, that captures that gobbled sense, but also captures the crisis of the moment. “Aren't that you God, with your looking at”, right? And there's a reversal of the blessing of the wild ass that's going on there. There's the question of looking, but also there is that aspect of gobbledness that I think that there, when you use working class words, you get a more accurate translation because in that moment, Hagar ain't trying to be eloquent. And I think there's something about academia that wants us and we take the text so seriously that sometimes we forget that maybe in this text, what we're encountering here is a working class situation or a poor situation that sometimes requires what, in a traditional sense, maybe poor grammar. But I am communicating not only words, but a feeling here that can be captured in the sense. And it's a playfulness and you know how effective it is at making the biblical studies accessible, I don't know. But there's something about it that is also about making it authentic to the communities, because I think a lot with popular culture and the thing is about popular culture it's more interested in the Bible than I think a lot of folks want to admit. And once we stopped to tap in in language, we start to build conversation and the joy of the internet is that it can make a community of the entire world. Right? I mean, our experience with COVID over the last year and something has shown us how powerful the internet is as a tool of not only social media, but like cultural literacy. And I think the Bible was a part of that. And I think the sooner we catch on to, I think vernacular language in, in, in biblical studies and, and this is an anti-colonial thing, right, especially as a Catholic, right. The questions of who gets to translate and how do you translate and what language is translate, what is legitimate translation. And you know, this question is double fold in Africa too, because it's even more intense when it comes to Islam and its sacred texts and how we understand and translate the Hadith and the Qur'an and those sorts of things. And so, I mean, I think I'll do there, a portion of that work is lost. Because we've, we've, we've learned so much from Anzaldúa, but have sort of forgotten a commitment to a community, not I mean, especially to what you're saying, Manuel, you know, a presence, but I think also they can be a community presence in our work too.

Lynn: I think, Minenhle, you're kind of talking about the vernacular and, and sort of the use of sort of bringing in like working class language into the process of interpretation might be something that maybe biblical queer, biblical hermeneutics can sort of push the field forward on. I do know that some of us are maybe a little bit more cool with using the occasional F word. You know, I often will use it. I think, yeah, in my work. But yeah, I mean, how do you think? So I'll just sort of pose a new question is how do we think that LGBTI/Queer+ readings and hermeneutics are changing or relating to, or challenging the field. Maybe this is a little bit this probably should have been earlier in our conversation, but I guess right now, do you think we are, and how are we challenging the field or the discipline?

Sarah: Can I pose an additional question? Because I, I, I'm really curious to know what folks in this room might think of this. So when you're bringing in pragmatics and you've also brought in, you know, our, our annual meeting. And so again, just connecting dots here. So I too, say fuck all the time. And I find it an incredible tool that, that use of, you know, vocabulary. What would it look like? You know, so, so things are changing slowly with, with, with performance at SBL, like our, our name tags, for example, we now have a space to put pronouns and identify ourselves if we choose. What might it look like if we showed up to SBL not just, you know, changing our speech? Like, we're still being so elitist in the way that we're talking. I'm even doing it right now, but what might it look like to dress differently to wear backwards hats if we choose? To, to perform this queerness in, in an academic space? Is that going too far? Is it part of the queer agenda? Is that not. Yeah, just what might it look like to perform this high theory into not highness anymore. If that, if that makes sense. And to do it at our annual meeting, what, I'm just curious.

Lynn: My queer performance often involves fashion and, and dress, right? Like for me, that's part of it. Right. And, you know, I don't know. I don't know about the others.

Max: I feel somewhat inspired by this, but I, I mean, part of it was when I came out, I had to, I was working at this sex shop. And I was, I had to go to two conferences: a book conference for publishers actually. And the advice I got from a trans person who I asked, like, how do I dress in this professional context? And he gave me good advice, which was, you know, dress better than them. Always dress better than them 'cause that's, cause your dress is the problem. Your dress is the piece that they're uncomfortable with. So make sure that it looks, but it's, it's a kind of, it's constraining, right? It's, it's a way of functioning in those things. And I have, you know, my, my ways that I found to still feel like me. But, I don't know what that would look like for me. I feel inspired by that provocation, but also I carry that within me. You know, maybe I'm of the generation of scholars backs still that, is still functioning like that. Like you still have to dress better than them.

Lynn: Well, and there are different amounts of freedom for people to, to, to do that right. Since we are again, I mean, depending where we are and who we're engaging with.

Max: However you all want to dress. I'm so there for it, like I will celebrate the heck out of that. That sounds exciting to me to unpack some of that culture. So it's not at all a reflection. I just had a reaction that I was trying to unpack.

Minenhle: You know, Max. I, I, I, I I'm split between the two, because I think it's obvious that fashion and dress informs me. Those who know me know that I have very elaborate costumes at time. And this has been one of the biggest losses of COVID for me, is that like, the outfits are just not the same on the screen. Right? And so there's something about the full appreciation of my queer performance in my dress that is, has been lost. Yet at the same time, you know, I think the performance is also like a form of hiding. I hide hearing aids that then hide in my head wraps. And there are spaces where I need to be more African and there are spaces where I do not. You know, those are the things that there are spaces where you want to draw attention to your blackness and there are spaces where you do not, you know. I've got bright red hair under this head wrap too. And so, that becomes convenient. You know, and then it becomes an extension of my African-ness and nobody ever questioned that, but there's so much going on under this head wrap, you know. It's, and some of it is practical. Like I, like, hearing aids work better when there's a little muffling, just because like they worked too well. And then you, you can't adjust your own volume. And so, especially in the classroom head reps have become a staple. And so there's something about the performance that is not just queerness. I think there's also questions of ableism, when it comes to the performance of dress, how we understand the function of clothing and what clothing does. I mean, certainly clothing covers, but it also is a form of representation. I think this is what Max is picking up on here. Is that like, especially when, in the spaces where your identity is questioned. There's something about walking in, in a distinctive manner. That means you cannot question me. And that's one of the things that I know about my fashion choices, that when I walk into the room, there is no doubt I have walked into the room. And that is by design because it is so easy for my voice to get lost in a room. And I simply refuse for that to happen. But there are times where, I would frankly prefer to disappear. And folk, I'm almost unrecognizable to some folks. They've walked straight past me on the street, my students and I live across the street from, I also still teach it at Seton Hall and I live right across the street from them. And I walked past them on a daily and they do not know. That is there's something about that too, with the dress also, but you know, I, I, I, I'm also questioning how much does that do, because to be honest with you, there is something of me that is a little, and this is difficult because we're on the SBL platform, but I'm gonna go ahead and say, that is dissatisfied with SBL. You know, I'm a Hebrew Bible scholar and the honest truth about Hebrew Bible and the history of its interpretation within the Euro

Americas is that. It has been responsible for great deal of white supremacies and hetero-patriarchy's ideology. And so I question how much that performance does in a space with a history like that, where there it matters because we know that that within the cultural spaces, those performances exist and they, they make no difference to white supremacy and hetero-patriarchy, you know, at the, ultimately nobody cares. And so I wonder if that is true, because I mean, there is something about SBL that is still married to those histories, quite intimately. And there's. I mean while I'm at it, not enough to talk about reparations within the SBL leadership. But, I mean, so I feel like I'm, I'm, I'm wondering if perhaps those efforts might be misplaced not to say that. I mean, this is coming from present, who takes the fashion and dress very, very seriously. I mean, I make my own clothing, right for conferences and that sort of stuff. But at the same time, I'm starting to think, you know, the question of the suit, the question of dress is such a colonial question, you know, because I mean, I am like, I experienced this. I mean, I'm, I'm Zulu and the Zulu people are, I mean, for better or for worse, we are the naked Africans. You know, I mean that, that there are many, many other African cultures with elaborate dress and textile traditions. But, the Zulu folks, it's hot on the east coast of Africa, you know, I went about elaborate beads and all that sort of stuff, but actual physical covering is quite minimal, you know? And so, I mean, questions of covering us, are such colonial questions. What is it that we are covering or exposing with our dress? And, you know, and we're educated folks since I think perhaps, we can bypass the performance because I think the performance might get lost. And we can go straight to the question is that we want to decolonize these spaces. We want to deconstruct heteropatriarchy in these questions, which means that like we're doing with our bodies is a reflection of a larger desire to disrupt the spaces in which our bodies occupy. Yeah.

Sarah: Yeah, I just, I, just real quick. I mean, now you're inspiring me to just show up naked to SBL and see what happens. But I think, you know, something that that is coming up here is also this question of safety. So Max, I'm just, I'm reminded. I have, I took students to Israel a few years ago when I was at Colby College and I have a trans male student and he was in the process of converting to Judaism and he really wanted to go to, I mean, it's, the Western Wall is remarkably gendered. I usually do not have, I full on protest when I'm there as, as a Jew. And, but he really wanted to go to the male side and he was like, what do I do? And I, I said, you dress, I said the same thing. I was like, you dress better than them. You get, and we're going to go and buy you a yarmulke. We're going to make you look like the best Jewish boy there could possibly be. And you're going to go to that side of the wall, and you're going to march there, and you're going to have a great time. You know, so yeah, I'm just. All these questions of how, when do we do this performance? Why what's the safety? When are we being, when and where, and when are we colonizing the conversation even more by asking that particular question? Yeah.

Ken: I don't, I don't, I am not in a position to give much commentary on fashion because I'm the anti-stereotypical gay man, in that sense, I have no fashion sense. But one thing this conversation does make me think about that I think is relevant not only to fashion, but how we write and what we choose to focus on and so forth is a normalization, you know, a word that was very important early in, in queer studies. And I think for those of us in academia is something we still wrestle with. You know, we want to resist normalization. That's part of what it means to do queer scholarship. And yet we also recognize someone used the word gatekeeping earlier in a negative sense, which it would be for me too, but there are gatekeepers out there and how to be a scholar and academic and simultaneously resist the normalization, I think is a struggle at multiple levels. And I don't have an answer to it. It's it's something. I think we continue to wrestle with.

Lynn: So any other, like, sort of thinking about ways that we are besides our mad fashion skills? Are we challenging the field? I mean, if we could get rid of the elbow patch, that would be something, but, you know, to the point. You know, Minenhle's a point, Max's point, Max's like a lot of our points, right. That,

you know, there's also, there are other, I 'mean, there there's like intersecting concerns. Right? Are there other ways that we are challenging or bettering the field? I think maybe as a time to, you know, do a little shout out on how, how we are making this field better.

Ken: No, in terms of the shout out, I did want to say something that comes back Lynn, to your question about the state of the field. I think in academia these days, it's, it's very easy to be quite negative about the state of anything going on in academia, but one of the things because of COVID that I was able to read that I don't know that I would have gotten around to as quickly as I did was the, I actually have it out for another project. This *Bodies on the Verge* that, that Joe edited, Joe Marchal edited. And then you're one of the respondents. And one of the things that really struck me reading through that book was how diverse the contributions are, there's a real heterogeneity. To, to the essays in there and experimentation. And I mean, I'm saying this as someone who can't stand to read about Paul, so I was really impressed with the way in which Queer scholars do, or scholars doing queer work do seem to be finding lots of ways to do something new in the field. And, and I would like to see more of that, of that type of a project. I'm sorry. As a Hebrew Bible scholar, I wish I was able to use the Hebrew Bible example of a collection of essays like that. But it was, I was really quite impressed with that. And it makes me think that queer biblical scholarship is in a very productive mode at the moment. There are a lot of challenges. But there's a lot of, there are a lot of signs of, I don't want to say progress because then it puts me back on that linear, straight trail, but, flourishing, flourishing maybe is a better word.

Lynn: I think there's a lot of creativity to maybe now one of the essays in that piece, in that volume, engages a piece of science fiction. I think like queer reception history is something I'm really interested in. And I think, I don't know, there's sort of more interest in those things. Sort of, I think somebody mentioned, I think, you know, like our conversation partners, you know, we need to have, you know, I mean one way, one thing I think that is one thing that I think is happening is querying the canon. Eric Thomas, Jackie Hildago, and, you know, really kind of talked a lot about querying the canon and, and I think, yeah, I mean, I think that that's a great thing bringing in sort of conversation partners and one thing that we're kind of, I'd like to think pushing for, what are other kinds of things or what are some great things that you're reading and that you want to shout out?

Ken: I think Max needs to write something on a reading the Bible while selling sex toys.

Lynn: Yeah, me too. I want to know like what the shop was.

Max: It was Good Vibrations. It was...

Lynn: Classic.

Max: Yeah, and I was actually the vice president of the board of directors for two years. I'm not going to lie. When it was a co-op before it was no longer club, extraneous information nobody really needed about me, but there you go.

Minenhle: You know, I, I think I want to connect to what Ken is saying, because I, I know the Afro-pessimism is so strong within me that sometimes, you know, I've got to be very, very intentional about remembering the, the more optimistic end of it. And I, I mean, and I on a personal level, I, I, I think, queer theory, not I think, I'm certain Eric Thomas and queer theory saved my career. I think that's a good thing because, not to sound prideful. Well, oh, maybe, prideful. I think the field needs more bodies like me. And so I'm, I'm grateful to Eric and I'm, I'm grateful to be here and I'm, I'm grateful for queer theory because it's, it's, it's, it's, it's been helpful to understand myself and my insistence on being a biblical scholar. You know, I don't enjoy being a biblical scholar. I enjoy reading biblical texts and I enjoy

interpretation, but I don't enjoy the scholarship itself. I think that's just, the honest truth of it. It's just so hard for me in particular, just because of all the various politics of it all that I, I, I have been so grateful to queer theory because, and, and, and queer hermeneutics because that has been one of the few more hospitable spaces. You know, and I think, as, as queer folk we know how inhospitable spaces can be. And so the fact that queer hermeneutics has successfully made hospitable spaces, even when the hospital- the hospitality is difficult sometimes, it's there and exists. And I, I think the, the realness of the hospitality of queer hermeneutics is a thing that is felt by a lot of scholars. Right? Even those who struggle, like, like myself, and I, I'm grateful for that because I have been a reluctant scholar without queerness. I, I think my, my voice, my scholarship might've been erased all together because, you know, it's become a loose definition. That's allowed me to do the, the, the weird stuff that I do. And to be honest, you, when Lynn, when you sent that email asking us, you know, to speak about our interest in what we're working on and highlighting this sort of stuff, I thought, gee, man, do I share that with them? You know, I- have, I've done enough with queering and I mean, to borrow from Eric, I mean, I think that's a part of queering, the queer canon, too, right, is that queer interests are so complicated that I'm grateful that there's been this space that offers me legitimization as a scholar, without any limitation as a scholar or with minimal limitation in the sense that I am able to pursue a diverse range of interests. And although I questioned myself as a queer scholar, I don't ever recall being questioned in my queerness. I mean, I get a lot of resistance. I get all sorts of things, but I think my queerness has always been known, in a way, and there's a weird sort of comfort in that. And I mean, and as biblical scholars, we know that the violence of knowing, but also we know the power of knowing. And, and I think that is what queer hermeneutics is, it's a space where we are known and we get to know each other and that it, that it's so important and irreplaceable.

Lynn: And we're glad you're here. So maybe as we, I warned you that this question was coming, but if you were, you know, going to sit down with like, your favorite queer biblical, para biblical, biblical-ish figure, if you had the chance to sit down with anybody and, you know, have a little convo, spill a little tea, you know, whatever we're going to use, who would that person be? You know, or interpreter? Well, I'll go first and say, I think mine's Thecla because like she's feisty and fun, which is kind of my thing so... as I look over to where my spouse is, I don't want her to get jealous.

Max: I have a favorite story, which I won't retell here, but I, I've been writing about it now since my grad school application. And it's about an androgyne "androgynous" in Hebrew. And so it's a really problematic text, it's a really problematic story, but I'm in love with it. So I, I sort of wish that I could talk to that androgynous and hear, what their, what their version of the story is. And I kind of imagine it in my book, I rewrite the story. But I really wish I could just like sit down and have coffee.

Lynn: So now if you, yeah, so now we all have to, you know, rush out for the book when it comes out, do you have a 2000 and... It's this year, do you know? I think this winter.

Max: I'm sorry, I wasn't meaning to play to play up...

Lynn: No, no, no. I'm, I'm like bringing it up. I want to know. 'Cause I want to make sure that everybody reads it.

Max: It's coming out from University of California press and exactly when is a little bit up in the air because of COVID, but either like, I would think winterish yeah. Yeah.

Lynn: Yeah, no. And I will say I am somebody who does try to, you know, shout out people's work when I think that they're doing interesting things. And so I, And that's one of the ways that I think, you know, I try to as becoming sort of a more senior scholar, try to support younger, younger folks in the field.

Sarah: I, I'm changing my answer on the spot. I, I, I typically don't like, think about biblical characters as like people that I like. My, my initial answer was like the version of Jesus in Revelation 1 where he's got like, the sash and the gown, and he's like a drag queen, just cause I, you know, was interested in the fabulousness of that, but hearing, I mean, And in talking about what, what queer theory has done for us, it reminds me that, while coming out helped me understand queer theory more, queer theory and being amongst queer persons provided a visual of queerness that I didn't even know was part of me. And so it's in a way being amongst queer theorists and biblical queer studies. I don't know if it saved my life; it changed my life. I'm still in the pain of coming out in a way, but perhaps there is one biblical character who might be able to help me navigate what it's like to have lived two different lives. One as a person who thought she was straight and very much was in love with a beautiful man. And now a person who identifies as lesbian and as with a beautiful woman and perhaps, that person would be Naomi, just maybe there is one person who I could sit down with in the Bible and help me get through this.

Minenhle: I have two. I'm a start with the, the, the first one, the first one is Zipporah. Yeah, every time I, I was thinking about this question, I had a hard time picking characters that I could imagine myself as, and you know, I'm, I'm currently working on a reading of Zipporah in that epic Exodus 4 scene, right at the end where God is attacking Moses, and Zipporah on their way back to Exodus and Zipporah circumcises and touches somebody with ... there was blood everywhere. I love that so much. But something of that is a little bit of my personality that willingness to face what I feel is inadequate images of the divine and demand more. And I love that about that scene because that scene is so crucial to the Exodus. It's so forgotten in the Exodus. It does so much to connect what happens before and after. And it's also this queer mother because she's performing the job of a patriarch, prophet, and priestess at the same time. You know, and it's just like, it's epic. I think it's like just biblical woman at their most bad-ass. And then, my other favorite character is the complete opposite, but I think it's the pettiness that I read there. It's the unnamed woman in Judges 19 is a favorite of mine. And, you know, she's tough to love because I think the story doesn't want you to love her. And I think, I think that's why I do. It's just like, and, and, and one of the reasons why I identify with her is that like, I always insist on, on reading agency. And when she's touching the threshold because it's the one discernible action that, I mean falling rather, I'm sorry, Max, I'm holding onto your terminology there. But when she falls onto that threshold, I read that as an active movement because I, every time I read that text, I imagined myself and what I would do in that situation, because unfortunately I find myself in the situation of imagining death far too often out of necessity, you know? And I realized that I would be a petty victim. If you go like, abuse me and kill me, I will get in your way. We'll go have to deal with my body before you can get up and go upon your own way. And there's something about that, what that that woman is doing in that moment after a longed for deal to still fall where she must be seen and addressed is this is kind of who I am, even in my victimization that, I mean, I'm so aware of is that I just, I wouldn't, I would never make it easy. And I think there there's something about that, that I hold on to. So I think Zipporah and the unnamed woman in Judges 19 so yeah.

Ken: This is potentially a controversial one, but I, I would like to talk with Lot's daughters. And hear a little more about their sexual agency there and you know, what, what that must have been. I mean, obviously I think it's a story, not a historical artifact, but, what, what, what would that experience be like and how does it not fit? You know, even, I think the story is told in a way to stigmatize their descendants, but for precisely that reason, I, I think that's who I would like to talk with if I could.

Manuel: Well, I already shared one. I've been then the other favorite one is these young men who run naked in the middle of the night in the Gospel of Mark.

Lynn: I like that.

Manuel: I will sit with him. I will touch him and to be healed.

Lynn: I love it. Yeah. And what in the world? I love that scene. It's great. Yeah, Mark is the best. Yeah, I kind of want to hang out with Mark and Jesus too, just because, I yeah, just because the, I don't know. He's my favorite. I want to thank you all for your honesty and your sort of insight and taking time today to, to chat about the field. And it's been delightful and I enjoy like I'm looking forward to all of your forthcoming works and getting to know your work even more. So thank you all. And thank you for all the people who have watched our webinar. Thank you again to SBL and to everyone who has made this possible.