

DREAM FUTURES:
STORYTELLING
PRACTICES ON PINTEREST

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ABSTRACT

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This paper details research exploring how young women tell their stories on the website Pinterest. These stories are complicated by their religious identities and the negotiation between the dream and the real in relationship to their futures and the ideologies they believe in. They are also complicated by the historical relationship between women, religion, and reduced educational opportunities and expectations. The research was conducted over an 18-month period using a mixed methods design, including recording of pins, visual and textual coding, interviews, and observations. To define some of the past and current teachings from these communities for women, “purity manuals” and other religious texts were used. This work is based in both participant and community based research, as I am a participant both on Pinterest and in the religious community. This research will provide insights into youth digital composing practices, increase understanding of the impact religious culture has on young women and will explore how this culture impacts their dreams and future plans.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
BEGINNING	1
My Story	4
METHODOLOGY	6
Intersectionality and Self-Reflexivity	6
Feminist Rhetorical Methodologies	6
Community and Relationship	8
METHODS	11
Study Timeline	11
Recruitment and Study Formation	11
Study Outline	12
PINTEREST	13
THE STORIES	15
Introduction	15
THE STORY OF BELIEF	17
Why is Belief Important to Look at?	17
Chapter Summary	18
Participant's Stories	19
Rachel	19
Andrea	19
Laura	21
Lisa	22
Julie	22
Hannah	22
Historical Connections Between Women, Religion, and Education	23
Religious Guides for Women	25
THE STORY OF DREAMING	31
Online and "The World"	31
Introduction	35
Participant's Stories	37
Lisa	37
Laura	39
Hannah	43
Rachel	46
Julie	48

Andrea	51
CONCLUSION	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY	59

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - Timeline of Study	11
Table 2- Participant Religious Denominations and Methods of Identification	17

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1- Pinterest Exercise Memes	2
Figure 2- Example Pinterest Board Page	13
Figure 3- Rachel’s “Jesus” Board	19
Figure 4 - Andrea’s “I <3 Jesus” Board	20
Figure 5 - Andrea’s Quote Board	20
Figure 6 - Laura’s “Faith” Board	21
Figure 7 - Laura’s “Being an Adult” Board	40
Figure 8 - Hannah’s Quote Board	43
Figure 9 - Julie’s Printed Book of her “Picture a Day” Board	49
Figure 10 - Andrea’s Wedding Board	52
Figure 11 - Rachel’s Wedding Board	52
Figure 12 - Laura’s Wedding Board	53

BEGINNING

“Be a good girl.” If there could be one mantra taken from my Evangelical Christian upbringing, this would be it. How does this short, four word statement shoulder the implications, ideologies, and boundaries it implies? What does it mean to be “good” or a “girl?” How is being a good girl different from being a good boy? How does one be – in their essence or actions – good? Why is goodness so important? The following study opened the trunk of my childhood, exposing all of the cross stitched homilies, underlined verses in my illustrated children’s bible, and the memories of dress shoes dangling beneath adult size chairs. Books I read in my teenage religious hope and zeal were dug from boxes in the basement and placed in haphazard piles on the floor and coffee table. Resurfaced old pictures led to renewed connections across space online. I dug through the drawer full of old receipts, broken necklaces, and buttons to find the gold purity ring my then boyfriend, now husband, guiltily took off when we broke the promise he made at fourteen. I held the ring in my palm. It was heavier than its size would indicate. How small the frame and how heavy the weight of being a good girl.

But this is not simply a story about being “good.” This is an exploration into the connections between how this weight or imperative of being a good girl leads to decreased expectations and educational opportunities for young women. It is a story of how a community can shape and form actions outside of that community into the educational sphere, and how often those outside are not aware of the controlling sweep of that community. This is a story about tensions and contradictions, about should and ought to and can’t. It is about dreaming and cleaning up those dreams to match the ideologies and reality you live in. This study is about standing in the middle of the dreams of others and watching this shifting take place, the brush strokes whitewashing this or that, the colors that refuse to be covered. This study is about compassion and understanding for those caught in these dream acts, working so hard to make everything right and good.

This is also a story of researching while caught between two worlds – academic and home.

How does one cast a critical eye on people you care about? Is it even possible to gain ‘critical distance?’ Is it necessary? Or does critical closeness actually lead to insights that distance would not allow? How does one ethically engage with data, the results of which might not please your participants or your participants’ families? These questions sound lofty, and the answers seem elusive and may not entirely be found here, but all of these questions and the search for their answers are what guide this work. To be honest, they are more than questions, they are life decisions that will form who I am as a person and as a scholar. Once the words I write here go out into the world, I cannot take them back, and I ask myself what happens when people I care about read them and possibly ideologically disagree with them.

These questions, some of them lifelong, began to coalesce around an academic project in the Fall of 2012 with one simple question presented to my university freshman writing class. I asked them who might be the audience behind a series of Pinterest memes (Figure 1).

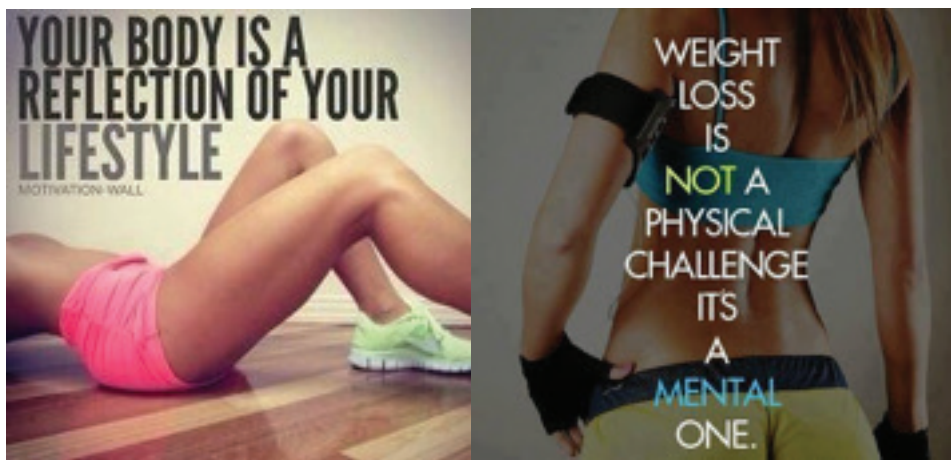


Figure 1 - Pinterest Exercise Memes

When setting up this activity, I imagined the audience for these memes consisted of housewives and elementary school teachers who pinned activity ideas during recess. Instead, my 18-19 year old students emphatically told me the audience was young women, primarily between the ages of 14 and 20. Statistics appear to confirm my students’ observations. According to the Pew Research Center, in April 2015, the majority of Pinterest users were women with the primary

age demographic being 18-29 year olds. These statistics do not account for young women under the age of 18, but they lend a glimpse towards the growing demographic of young people using Pinterest. The question began to emerge: what impact do these pins, and Pinterest on a whole, have on young women?

Though I began with wanting to know how Pinterest impacted young women, I found the young women I observed and interviewed were not neutral bodies being acted upon by a site. Instead, they used the site as a place to define their own religious beliefs, to dream about the future, and to negotiate the tensions between those dreams, reality, and religious teachings. They use Pinterest to tell a story about themselves, a story they are constantly reconfiguring both for themselves and for an audience of their peers. Through this story of their stories online and offline, I hope to bring a greater understanding to the (1) tensions and unique relationships my participants have with religion; (2) how these religious ideologies have historically had an impact on women's long term educational achievement; and (3) how young women use digital spaces to form stories about themselves and to negotiate tensions between the dreaming and the real.

This paper unfolds in layers. As a foundation to the study, in the first part of this paper, I share my story, define the methods and methodologies of the study, and give a brief background on Pinterest. The paper continues establishing background, but moves towards specifically exploring the idea of stories. At this point in the paper, I share some of the data from the study in relationship to the participants' religious beliefs. This section is specifically placed here to establish relevance for what immediately follows- the exploration into the connections between religion, women, and education. These connections move chronologically, first exploring the historical connections, and moving into present day. Coupled with the present day is a rhetorical analysis of a book entitled *Authentic Beauty* by Leslie Ludy. Two of my participants were reading this book during the study, and a close examination is important as it represents one means and method for establishing women's roles in the church.

After establishing the religious aspect of the participants' lives and the historical relevance and importance of this, the paper moves towards looking at how these elements undergird the stories they tell about themselves in relationship to dreaming and planning for their futures. Before moving into these stories, I first describe some of the tensions my participant' experience in online spaces due to their religious beliefs. This also offers another layer of complexity to their stories. After all of these layers, we reach the heart of the work- the stories of the participants. I placed their stories last because I wanted to first establish all of the complexities and tensions in which my participants live and navigate. This background illuminates some of the meaning my participants are making with their stories, their dreaming, and their planning.

My Story

Religious ideologies delayed higher education in my own life because as a woman, my primary roles were within the domestic sphere as wife and mother, so taking out loans or investing into my education were not deemed necessary. From the earliest time I can remember, the primary growth emphasis has been placed on being beautiful, selfless, and pure. Throughout my education, I excelled among my peers and school was a place of curiosity and interest, but during my latter high school years, it became apparent that education beyond high school was not feasible. My parents took no interest in me taking the ACT or SAT, and I paid for the tests out of my own money. Even though I took at least six AP classes, I never took a single test because I did not have the money and more frighteningly, I did not believe I could pass in spite of having all A's at one of the top high schools in my home state of Michigan. When it was discovered that I did not even qualify for student loans because of my parent's income (most likely this form was filled out incorrectly by myself), it became understood that I would not go to college. The same was true for my sister who had full tuition soccer scholarships to several schools, but did not have money for room and board. On the contrary, my three brothers were paid for. I quickly became married and pregnant and did not return to school until 10 years later.

This journey and having to push out of the invisible, yet powerful, cultural boundaries around my life has caused me to have a complicated relationship with my community. I still attend the same church I grew up in with my immediate and extended family, as well as my husband's family, but I also recognize that I am not a part in the same way I was before. Being a part of the community, their presence and potential readership is ever before me as I write. Know that I approach the terminology and ideas expressed here with respect and acknowledgement of the power behind them for millions of lives.

METHODOLOGY

Intersectionality and Self-Reflexivity

It is only fitting that a study looking at intersections of religion, digital spaces, and storytelling began from multiple experiences coming together. The rationale and methodology for this study are part of the weave of my life as a researcher, scholar, and person. Acknowledging the complexities and contradictions that can emerge from including intersectionality and self-reflexivity in my research derives from feminist research methodologies. Self-reflexivity is a practice that is foundational to feminist research methods (Schell 2010, Calafell 2010, Royster 2000) and is used throughout my research as a way to constantly acknowledge the insights, affordances, and limitations of writing within the community I came from and am a part of. I wrestle throughout this study with choices such as using ‘within’ instead of ‘about’ in writing. Truly, it is both. Patti Lather in her article “Postbook: Working the Ruins of Feminist Ethnography” characterizes her struggle to write the stories of women with AIDS when she talks about “‘both getting out of the way and in the way’ of the stories that belong to others” (207). In my work, I hope to allow the young women to tell their stories, but I also recognize that my history, culture, story, and purposes become mixed up in the telling. Because of this mix, I somewhat intentionally get “in the way” by including my story directly, so the color of my thread is clear throughout. Self reflexivity is also included here as a way to challenge Western notions of thinking that a researcher, especially one working closely with personal topics, can operate objectively or as a disconnected subject. I rely on Walter D. Mignolo’s concept “I am where I do and think” instead of “I think therefore I am.” (xvi). This “where” is not necessarily a physical space, though that is an element of it, but the cultures, beliefs, communities, and bodies that have formed us as researchers and act as both filters and guides throughout our conversations, observations, and analysis.

Feminist Rhetorical Methodologies

Royster and Kirsch (2012) in their book *Feminist Rhetorical Practices* talk about the importance

of “critical imagining” in the research process and allowing for a seemingly simple question or wondering to percolate inside of ourselves for a time. Royster notes in a longer but valuable quote

“I developed the habit of listening to the simple questions that came to my mind about the lives, conditions, work and contributions of African American women, rather than assuming that the goal of my scholarship, in a sense, should be to wait in taking myself and my own questions seriously until I might be able to structure well-formed, well-focused projects that fit well within the lines of scholarly expectations in rhetorical studies” (81).

Throughout this study, I continually had to remind myself to give space to my questions and take them seriously as seeds towards more situated, developed thinking. This sort of commitment to critical imagining also honors our participants, especially young ones, in that we allow for space for their thoughts, questions, and ideas that may seem unformed or new to them and most certainly to us. This commitment allows that participants’ small observations or offhand comments in an interview may develop into something important. This methodology becomes essential in honoring whatever they have to say and not just what might directly benefit our research. By honoring my own ideas and questions as a researcher, I develop this practice of honoring as I move out into communities.

In allowing for critical imagination during the early part of my study, a text was brought to my attention that may have been easily overlooked as outside the scope of the study. One of the participants in her women’s bible study group was reading a book entitled, *Authentic Beauty*, by Leslie Ludy. Books, such as this one, are written expressly for young, single women in the church, and they discuss sexual purity as well as what it means to be a woman in the church community. As a young person, I had encountered several of these books, but in many ways, did not still imagine they were used as tools with young women. This book and others like it are useful in looking at ways gender roles are reinforced in the community. *Authentic Beauty* will be

explored further in this study.

As I read back through this difficult religious text, similar to ones that have had a negative impact on my own life, my body often has a visceral response. It feels a bit like stepping back into that same place of guilt and shame when looking at some of the ideas and mindsets I operated from in the past. In particular moments, I even find myself wondering how I allowed certain beliefs to usurp my own intrinsic doubts and ideas. It is hard to acknowledge the position I came from, but in that acknowledging and sitting with the discomfort, I find over time I can more easily see those moments and offer that younger version of myself some grace and comfort and remind myself that here, in this place 2016, is where I am now. Royster and Kirsch acknowledge the body in research in their discussion of strategic contemplation. They encourage slowing down and allowing for moments of contemplation and mindfulness regarding not only our thoughts, but our bodies, in research and writing. They say, “We recognize the senses as sources of information in rhetorical performance and analysis of performance” (94). The noting of how the research feels in the body has also been helpful for me in recognizing that sometimes feeling sick to your stomach or unsettled is okay and part of the research process. It is not necessarily a sign that I am headed in the wrong direction or should stop altogether, but it is my body’s way of letting me know that this mental work has an effect on my overall wellbeing. Acknowledging and accepting my own discomfort and tension allows me to more carefully look at the ideologies my young participants are engaging with. I am able to attempt to move beyond immobility at the emotion and compassion and instead look towards infrastructural changes and rational arguments formulated from my reflections. Sitting in that discomfort also allows that I can still remain a member of that community, appreciating the positive, while also critically examining that which is destructive and in need of change.

Community and Relationship

Alongside of the awareness of how exploring past community strictures that had a role in my

life impact my physical and mental self, I am ever aware of the tension of working within a community I am an active member in. Most of the participants I encounter in other social spaces and have known their families for years. I see them at church functions, sporting events, school events, and even socially in my own home. Andrea M. Riley Mukavetz (2014) comments on this tension in her piece “Towards a Cultural Rhetorics Methodology” when she asks “How do we negotiate the complexity of writing as the arms of the institution while being responsible and accountable to the cultural communities we work with and for?” (110). She answers this question by regarding story as theory and practicing “there-ness” in her work, “There-ness, as a practice, is about being attentive to how relationships and space impact the opportunity for and construction of knowledge making” (120). The relationships with my participants are the strongest guiding principle in my work. If a question or portion of the study is damaging to the relationship between myself and the participants, it will be removed. Abiding by this relational principle also helps insure that emotional harm does not come to our participants. The importance of relationality is echoed further in Mukavetz’s work when she says, “To build a cultural rhetorics methodology is to resist the notion that community-based research should be replicable. Relationships are not replicable” (121). By placing relationship, community, and story first, we acknowledge the importance of the people in the study, but it also honors our role as researchers in that the work we do is important and not replicable by another. At times, relational community based research is seen as less valuable than hard data and quantitative research, but by acknowledging and accepting that our work is not replicable, we value the work done in relationships as valid academic endeavors.

Jeff Grabill (2012) in his work “Community Based Research and the Importance of a Research Stance.” talks about “maintaining” relationships through ongoing work together (217). He highlights that it is the mutual work together that maintains and builds relationships. He notes, “Even more important is the value of maintaining that relationship through new shared work. If maintaining the relationship is a priority, then many decisions during a research process will

be informed by this principle” (217). Grabill’s work challenges me to consider the “usefulness” in what I am doing with the community. He proposes that we work alongside community members in the “practices of research, analysis, and writing” (213). In my case working with young women, the process of research may be new to them, but I address this as best I can with allowing the participants to ask questions during the interview process and asking them to help make sense of the material gathered. Often, their questions and thoughts were generative and surprising. This idea of ‘usefulness’ challenges me to consider how my research and findings benefit not just my research, but the community.

METHODS

Study Timeline

Below is a table detailing the timeline of the study (Table 1).

Fall 2014	Initial questions formed
Winter 2015	Solicit first three participants for class project. Conduct first wave of study.
Fall 2015- Spring 2016	Solicit three additional participants. Conduct second wave of study.
Summer 2016	Finalize study and compose reflections

Table 1 - Timeline of Study

Recruitment and Study Formation

When the study began, I did not intentionally seek out young women from the religious community. Instead, I solicited a convenience sampling of three young women ages 14-15, pulling from young women in my acquaintance. My daughter was fourteen in 2015, and I asked three of her friends to participate. Later, I added three more participants ages 14-17, through a snowball sampling with two of the three coming from recommendations. Prior to initiating contact with the participants, I sought permission from their parents to participate in the study. I have regular contact with most of my participants through local community events outside of the study, and with some of them, I have known their families for many years.

The study had two waves with each wave lasting for a period of four months. IRB approval was sought after the first wave, and participants from the first wave were signed retroactively. Each wave consisted of following the participants on Pinterest and recording their pins in each board, their likes, and any other significant changes, such as board deletions, board title changes, or board additions. Because each of my participants had a quote board, I selected the most recent 20 quotes from each participant's board and performed a discourse analysis on the texts looking for patterns individually and between participants based on words used in the quotes. I used screen

shots to capture the quotes as well as to capture any pins that were unique. Then, I conducted a recorded interview based on 19 questions along with follow up questions. For one of the interviews, the parent was present for its entirety, participating at times. Three of the interviews had parents intermittently present. Two of the interviews were held at the public library with no parent present.

Study Outline

1. Qualitative

- a. Online Observations - Follow participants on Pinterest for five months recording the following:
 - Charting how many pins are placed onto each board looking for patterns in board popularity and frequency
 - Recording number of “likes” given (if any)
 - Noting any significant changes to formatting and titling of boards
 - Record field notes regarding general overall observations and summary of activity
- a. Interviews
 - Conduct recorded interview with participants after observing for minimum of 3 months using IRB approved questions.
 - Photograph craft items made from Pinterest

2. Quantitative

- a. Code “quote” boards and look for patterns in words used in comparison to other participants
- b. Code titles of boards (some of the only participant created text)

3. Rhetorical Analysis

- a. Perform a literary analysis on “purity manuals,” specifically *Authentic Beauty* by Leslie Ludy, as a way to discern community beliefs and teachings regarding

women.

PINTEREST

Pinterest resembles a self constructed magazine with its prevalence of images related to fashion, food, and fitness. As of March 2016, Pinterest has 176 million registered users with 100 million active users. (“By the Number”). Pinterest is not necessarily designed to capture past events or moments in users lives as Facebook or Instagram might; instead the pins often reflect future hoped for events, activities, and purchases. Users “pin” photos or content from Pinterest or the internet onto self created, entitled, and categorized boards (see figure 2).

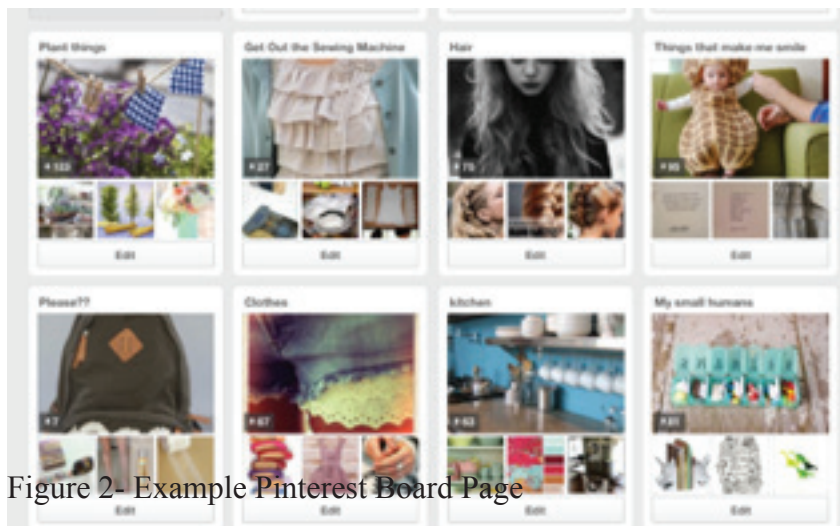


Figure 2- Example Pinterest Board Page

Many of these pins contain links to their originating websites, which can lend towards creating or purchasing whatever is displayed in the picture. According to a survey done by Steelhouse, Pinterest users are twice as likely to purchase off Pinterest than Facebook, and according to a study done by Rich Relevance in 2012, users spend more off links from Pinterest than Facebook - 168.93 versus 94.70. A study was conducted in 2012 examining the top boards or “motivations” for using Pinterest. They followed over 2 million users and 800 million pins. According to the study, females pinned primarily in boards related to food and drink, home décor, and DIY crafts. Women’s fashion was ranked third (Ottoni et al). The security and privacy policy of Pinterest is fairly open with the ability to “follow” any pinner you like without explicit permission. Several

of my participants, especially the younger ones, were allowed on the site as it was deemed “safe.” Although the youth demographics are not accounted for on Pinterest, there is no age limit as there is with other sites such as Facebook. Through my discussions with my participants, many identified Pinterest as one of, or the, first social media site they were allowed to open an individual account on.

Because of these open parameters and its commercial importance, Pinterest is often fertile ground for large-scale research. Data driven studies have been conducted examining user motivations, consumer tendencies, and pin circulation. But many scholars are interested in another unique facet of Pinterest: 85% of its users are female according to Accupol in March 2014. Pew Research Center in its 2012 study corroborates this statistic, noting that there are five times more women users than men, the largest difference of any other social media site the research center monitors.

With Pinterest having a primarily female user base, rhetoric scholars, such as Cindy Tekobe, Katherine Deluca, Mathew A. Vetter, and Lindsay Harding, to name a few, have examined the impact of the site in maintaining gender norms as well as how users are aware of this norming and work to subvert it. Operating from the notion that the work done on Pinterest is valid rhetorical engagement, which Tekobe and Deluca argue, I began with the simple question: how are these young women telling their stories on Pinterest?

THE STORIES

Introduction

With the multidimensionality of the participants' lives and personalities, each line of text and pin they select on Pinterest becomes a story of its own. Selecting which pieces or aspects of this study to include here was challenging. Know this is only a snapshot of a snapshot of the whole of their lives. My selections also are influenced by the lens of my experience, as talked about in the methodology section, so my own story plays a part in the stories I select to tell here. Three main areas came back to me repeatedly over the course of the eighteen months working with my participants. These areas or themes felt the most pressing, the most singular. They were the ones I would find myself wanting to share at conferences or in discussions on this project. The first story is the participants' relationship to religion. This seems to impact all of the other stories that follow. I then examine how the participants see themselves telling their stories, which were driven by their ideas regarding the future, dreaming, and the real.

The idea of story is used here because of its unique capabilities. Thomas King(2005) in his book *The Truth About Stories* notes "The truth about stories is that is all we are" (2). He describes the Western way of typically engaging with stories where we look for dichotomies –good and evil, light and dark. He says, "We are suspicious of complexities, distrustful of contradictions, fearful of enigmas" (25). But this story of my participants is full of complexities, contradictions, and enigmas. We are suspicious because complex stories resist the quantitative urge that brings a sense of finality and security. Stories are constantly shifting and changing. Even after telling, they may move slightly, so that when the reader engages with the material here, they are reading a past, rather than present, account. Stories resist easy conclusions and findings. But leaving space for contradictions and change honors my participants' complex and shifting lives. Digital space initially may seem to resist storytelling with its complexities and contradictions and seem more suited towards the quantitative, but perhaps the recursive, nonlinear, nature of the internet is conducive to this quality of storytelling. Roger Saul (2014) notes in his article "Adolescence

and the Narrative Complexities of Online Life” that young people are using digital spaces to recursively create their identity online. He notes identity formation in general is often viewed as a more linear process due to the narrative model stories are often told in. He says this view can “perhaps even suppress what is really a more complicated process of subject making - one that resists the fictions of linearity in favor of the recursive processes of articulation and re-articulation that are increasingly reflective of many young people’s experiences of self and meaning making.” Within digital spaces, people can go back and alter the information presented, essentially erasing any markings of a past identity for the new one. As Saul notes, linearity is a fiction. The truth is that stories are always much more complicated, recursive, blurry.

THE STORY OF BELIEF

The story of religious belief my participants tell is likewise full of enigmas, subtleties, and recursive work. Their stories of belief resist the black and white, in or out binary, with many of them working along a spectrum of belief rather than a simple yes or no, labeled or unlabeled. Even though there was no direct line of inquiry into this topic during the study, their different religious affiliations were clear through their boards on Pinterest, my personal knowledge prior to the study, and verbal identification during the interview. Below is a chart (Table 2) that demonstrates the different religious affiliations of each participant and also shows how they identified their religion in the study. Several had boards related to their faith, from a board entitled “I <3 Jesus” to another simply entitled “Faith.” During the interview, I asked the question, “What might someone not know about you from looking at your Pinterest boards?” One of the participants identified in this question that their faith would not be apparent. Lisa said, “That is more just like a personal thing.”

Participant	Denomination	Method of Identification
Rachel	Non-Denominational Evangelical	“Jesus” board
Andrea	Baptist	“<3 Jesus” board
Laura	Baptist	“Faith” board and interview
Julie	Catholic	Personal Knowledge – No direct identification in study
Lisa	Non-Denominational Evangelical	Interview
Hannah	Non-Denominational Evangelical	“Faith” board and interview

Table 2- Participant Religious Denominations and Methods of Identification

Why is belief important to look at?

With my own personal story of how religious ideologies impacted my life, I wanted to understand further how my participants negotiated some of these same teachings. There is a

strong historical connection between religion and women's literacy (e.g. Collins and Blot 2003; Hull et al, 2014, Godley 2004). This connection seems important to explore in my participant's stories as well as how it may impact education and society more broadly with 73% of Americans defining themselves as Christian according to Pew Research Forum 2012. Even though this statistic does not necessarily detail the extent of church involvement or indicate a belief in the entire Christian ideological system, in the same way it doesn't for my participants, it does reflect the pervasiveness of Christian religious beliefs and influence in our culture. Connection between religion and treatment of women is not only a local issue, it is a global one (eg. Ramdas, 1984). In addition to the direct connections between religion and women's literacy, studies have been drawing correlations between social/cultural influences and literacy (eg. Heath, 1983; Kirkland, 2013; Godley, 2004; Cintron, 1998; Paris, 2011).

Chapter Summary

This chapter will explore the following: (1) how my participants use Pinterest in relationship to their religion; (2) a more detailed exploration of the historical connections between women, religion, and education; (3) a glimpse at religious "guides" for women; (4) connections with how religion might impact women today in light of history and current "guides" or parameters.

Participants' Stories

Rachel

Rachel, whose “Jesus” board is her third highest out of 35 boards total primarily pins Bible verses and inspirational notes as seen in the figure here on the slide (Figure 3).

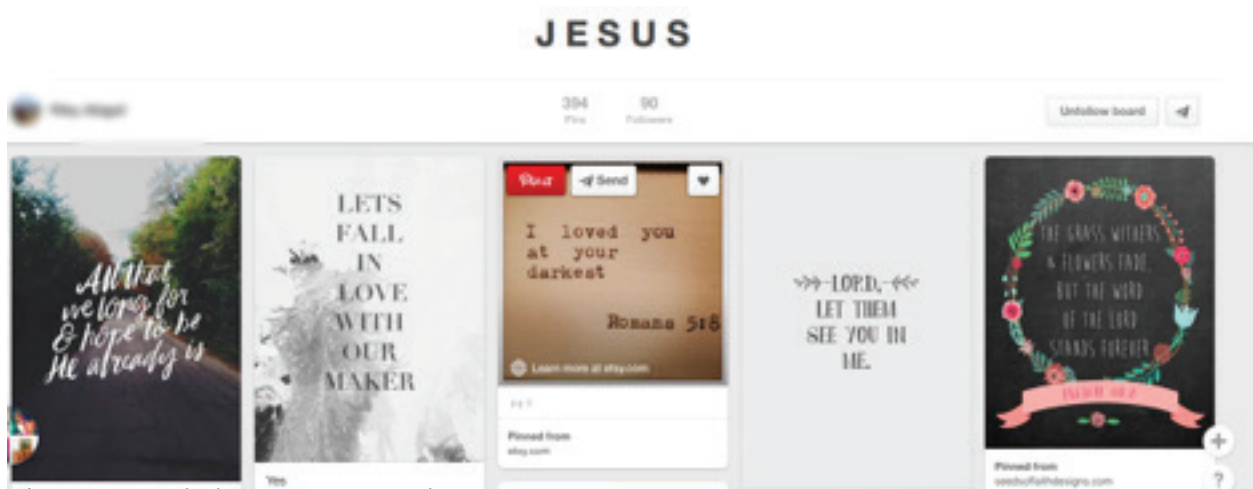


Figure 3- Rachel's "Jesus" Board

Also interestingly, she has 90 followers of this specific board, which is quite a sizable amount considering she has a total of 202 followers overall. Rachel is very vocal about her faith, and it plays a fundamental role in her and her family's life. She was homeschooled until middle school for religious reasons. If we look closely at her "Jesus" board, the word "love" is repeated. Her board title does not address a denomination or system of belief directly, but invokes a name. This may emphasize an intimacy or comfort with her faith.

Andrea

Andrea also frequently pins verses on her board entitled "I <3 Jesus", but has a distinct emphasis in her verses on missions and helping others (Figure 4). The images are interesting with a predominance of black faces and her association of religion with helping those different than herself. During the study, her family was in the process of adopting two young boys from Haiti, so some of her particular emphasis may come from this change in her family group. Her pins also demonstrate a possible relationship between this family change and their shared religious

beliefs. The pins certainly demonstrate a connection between her faith and “travel” to other places, “orphans,” and God “calling” her to work in places outside her “comfort zone.”

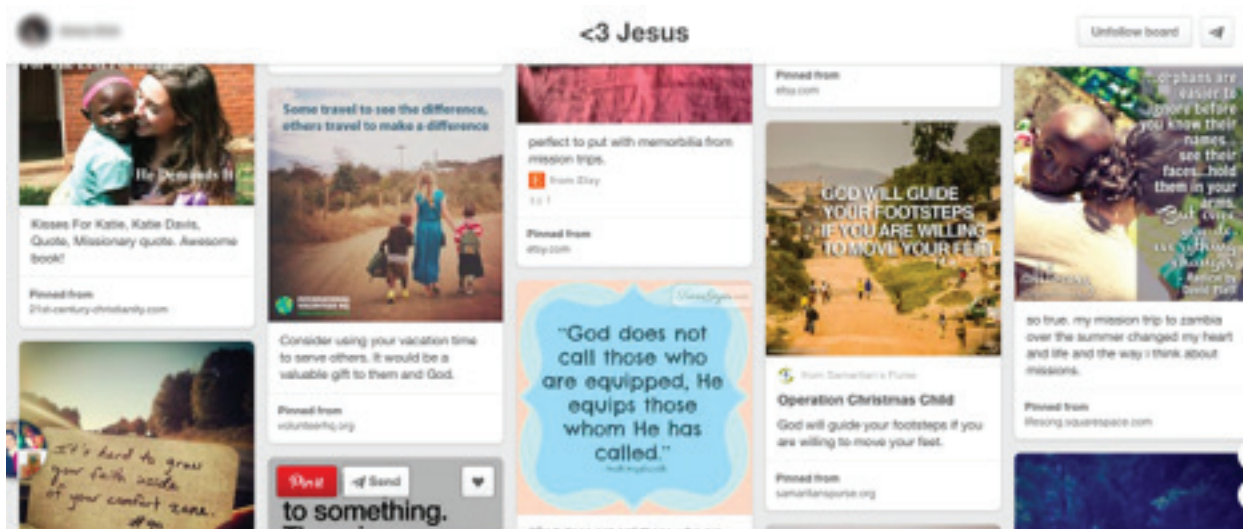


Figure 4 - Andrea's "I <3 Jesus" Board

When I coded Andrea's quote board, she also had the most quotes with a religious emphasis. Of the participants, her family is one of the most adherent to religious teachings, homeschooling their kids for religious reasons (knowledge prior to study). Andrea had the highest instances of the word “we,” such as in “may we give” as seen in Figure 5.

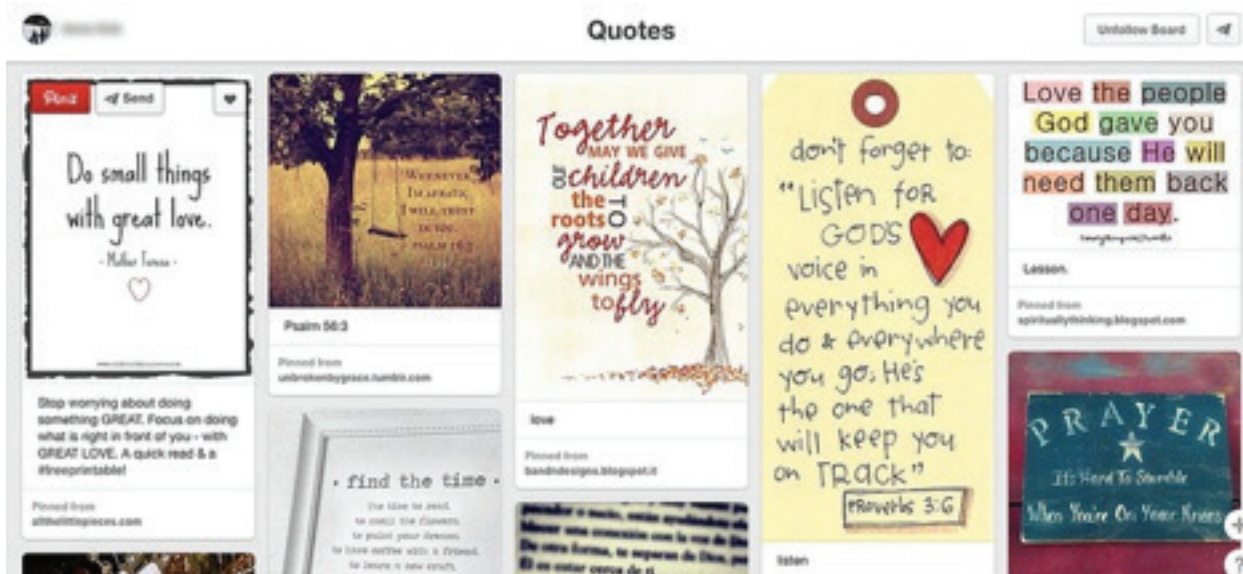


Figure 5 - Andrea's Quote Board

This “we” demonstrates a collective identity with others in a faith. From her quotes, it appears Andrea identifies more readily with the idea that she belongs in a group than Rachel’s individual emphasis, for example. This group identity can be a positive thing with community building and support, but it can also have negative consequences if the group reinforces certain ideals prioritizing group maintenance over individual growth. She also had double the other participants with the words, “Do,” and “Don’t.” These words are used as seen in Figure 5, with “Do small things..” and “Don’t forget.” Even though these terms are often couched in more gentle language, they are related to the setting and enforcing of parameters that is often associated with religion.

Laura

Laura’s faith board, which is one her three most consistently pinned to, has a distinct emphasis on marriage and her role as a Christian woman. (Figure 6)

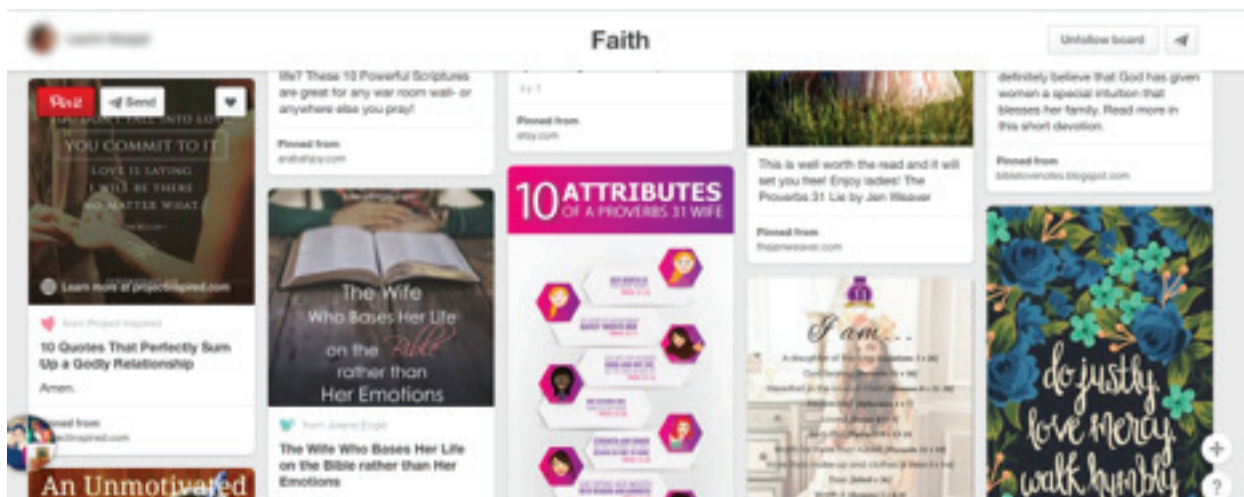


Figure 6 - Laura’s “Faith” Board

One can see on the pins displayed here, which is a sampling of some of the 94 pins on this board, “The ten attributes of a Proverbs 31 wife” and “The wife who bases her life on the Bible rather than emotions.” Her faith is intricately woven with her desires for marriage and how she wants to live once that desire is achieved. Laura also pinned in this board almost as a practice with three to four pins each week consistently. It was as if she had a commitment to pinning a

certain amount each week to balance out the more exhaustive pinning in other categories. This commitment to faith pinning may also offset some of the guilt she expressed in the interview over her frequent wedding pinning. (Discussed further in study)

Lisa

When I initially started following Lisa, I did not see any direct connections between her Pinterest activity and her faith. She did not have any boards or any particular quotes that lent towards making that connection through observation alone. As indicated earlier, religious affiliation was not a prerequisite for participation in this study. When I interviewed her though and asked what someone might not know from looking at her Pinterest, she indicated they wouldn't know about her faith because "that is more just like a personal thing," so she did not put it on Pinterest. This is interesting in light of her awareness of the audience she is constructing her story for on Pinterest. In many ways, she is more aware that people are looking at her space, and this is also shown through her comments during the interview on how she aesthetically constructs her site, and her comments on other's sites (discussed later in study).

Julie

Julie was my only participant who never directly intimated her faith either on Pinterest or in the interview. From personal knowledge prior to the study, I knew that she attended Catholic mass with her family, but her faith was not depicted on Pinterest in a faith board, in quotes, or in images.

Hannah

Hannah's board entitled "Faith" had 16 of pins on it. During the interview, I asked her what people might know from looking at her boards, and she indicated that they would know she was a Christian. Interestingly, as she was one of my first participants, I went back to her site during the latter half of the study to grab some screen shots of her boards as examples of her pins. Her

faith board had been deleted. I did not have a chance to follow up with her to find out why she had deleted this board, but it does provide a necessary complexity for the study, especially when in relationship to the shifting nature of formative years. Whether or not her faith has changed or she has decided to make it more “personal” as Lisa indicated, it is unknown. She is still active in her local church and attends weekly meetings, conferences, and summer seminars. But faith, like identity work, is shifting, growing, changing. It is an important reminder as part of this study that each participant’s beliefs can shift or change even as these words are being written.

I show these different stories and expressions of faith on and off Pinterest to offer a sampling of what I discovered regarding my participants religious identifications, but also importantly to demonstrate the variety, interpretations, and experiences within these identifications and in the same category of pinning. This is important because I seek to avoid generalizations and instead to show that even within this young group of women I might characterize in this study as “religious,” each has their own identity and relationship to religion. From one that views it as a very personal act to another viewing it as very public global social justice purpose to another looking at the role religious teachings plays in her future as a wife and mother. These screen shots also simply capture a moment in time, and just as the pins continue to change even hours after I took these shots, their religious identities also change and shift.

Historical Connections Between Women, Religion, and Education

At the same time each participant has their own individual relationship with their faith and religious identity, it is also important to look at how religion has impacted women on a broader scale. With the attention to individualization, it can be easy to forget the larger role religious faith plays on a collective level for its adherents. It is also easy to rationalize extremity as exceptional, as it is by definition, but what if the extremities are not exceptional historically? With my own educational experience impacted by religion, one particular area I wanted to explore was the correlations between religion, education, and women.

Women's education has a history of being interwoven with religious teachings regarding their roles in the domestic sphere. (Abbot, 2001; Ramdas, 1984; Collins and Blot, 2003). Religious teachings use morality (a code of right and wrong) as a means of controlling women's literacy and conduct. Collins and Blot (2003) note that they have found through their historical research, "familiar links between political, economic and religious power and the desire to regulate literacy as a means of regulating conduct more generally" (p. 67). This conduct is often related to sexuality and the type of work they are allowed to engage in both in and outside of the home. The authors go on to discuss a study performed by Burke in which the "rule of female illiteracy" as established by Florentine monks in the 16th century says that women should not learn to read or write because they "might transgress the sexual code by trafficking in love letters and love acts" (p. 69). Abbot (2001) notes that during the Renaissance, even when women were educated, they were educated with the domestic in mind, "Girls were educated to participate in the private life of the home, whereas boys were educated to participate in the public life of the Church and the state" (p. 168). Even though these examples took place hundreds of years ago, they demonstrate a pervasive history of depriving education for women in the name of religion and morality as a means to control their conduct, specifically sexual conduct, and keep them from having power and a voice in the public sphere.

Another example given by Collins and Blot (2003) brings us much closer to the current time in the mid to late 20th century. They describe what is termed as the "women's sphere," which "idealized roles in the family and community" (p.89). Women were allowed access to certain vocations as long as they had at their core care for others, such as charity and good deeds. Women were allowed to work in some educational capacities with the assumption that they would be more "nurturing" towards young children. Collins and Blot (2003) make a strong statement regarding this sphere, "The separation of spheres, as gender norms and lived realities, shaped women's work opportunities in the expanding school system as well as the knowledge female students were prepared for and allowed access to" (p. 90). The latter part

of this statement regarding preparation and access speaks to female education in the religious community. With roles of mother and wife preordained, prioritized, and assigned a moral value, female students, though they may complete high school, are not necessarily invested into as a preparation for college in the way that young men are. With young men being assigned the role of “breadwinner” and having to participate in the public sphere, their education is prioritized over women who will spend their adult years raising children and caring for a home. This expectation can limit the educational opportunities for women as they may not be given or seek out opportunities to enhance their education in ways that are needed as preparation for college. In addition to the literature discussing historical connections between religion and women’s literacy, more recent studies (Glass & Jacobs, 2005; Sherkat and Darnell, 1999) have been performed documenting the role of religion and women’s long-term educational and vocational attainment. A study performed by Glass and Jacobs (2005) found that religious conservatism in childhood affected women by “reducing their educational attainment, accelerating entry into marriage and parenthood, and increasing their conservatism on familial roles and responsibilities” (p. 571). The study also echoed Collins and Blot’s (2003) overview as it says that women then worked less in adulthood and worked in more stereotypically female occupations (caregiver positions) when they were employed. The reduced work positions and career span impact women’s overall earning and vocational potential.

These historical connections are alarming and may seem to be outliers in the Christian faith, but with the prevalence of people identifying as Christians in the United States, it is worth examining what traces these historical stories have today and how my participants may knowingly or unknowingly have a part to play in this story.

Religious Guides for Women

One of the ways that women’s roles in the Christian church are developed today is through books and literature specifically dedicated to reinforcement of women’s sexuality and roles in the

domestic. These books do not have an umbrella term, but they act as religious guides for women, and as they often emphasize purity and sexuality, I have termed them ‘purity manuals.’ These books are read in the home, but are often read in church sponsored discussion groups with other young women as well. They are primarily written for and read by younger teenage girls and seen as guides or inspiration for maintaining certain sexual boundaries. They represent a significant corpus including works associated with the True Love Waits movement as well as the Daughter’s Heart events.

Through the course of the study, I found that Andrea and Laura were reading one such book called *Authentic Beauty*, by Leslie Ludy (2003) with their high school girl’s small group. Because these books are a small, but powerful, piece of the cultural work to maintain women’s spheres and roles and my participants were reading them, they are worth exploring here. The table of contents titling the twelve chapters in *Authentic Beauty* includes titles such as “The Reviving of the Feminine Heart,” “Lily Whiteness and Romance,” and “Preparing for Intimacy.” Three chapters bear the subtitle “Future Husband Application.” The book begins with the author describing her lifelong fairy tale to be a princess. This idea undergirds the whole book as she describes her journey in trying to make this a reality with multiple men and finally she finds her true prince is Jesus. After she finds this out, then she gains access to the healthy sexual life she had longed for in her husband.

Ludy describes the purpose of the book in this statement, “This book is an invitation for you to become one of those few in this generation: a set apart young woman who allows the passionate intimacy she experiences with her Prince to completely transform every area of her life” (41). Interestingly though, she does not describe any other area of her life other than her heterosexual romantic relationship with men. She ventures into discussing appearance and modesty, but that still all circles around the idea of pleasing or attracting future husbands. Nowhere is education or life vocation or relationships with others in and outside your community discussed. In many

ways, this book is addressing how to stay pure and away from “sexual sin” before marriage, but the methods it advocates, shrinking your world and funneling it into this one means, is representative of what happens overall in this community. Women are encouraged when they feel dissatisfaction or experience struggle, to eliminate areas of their lives and pull inside instead of being encouraged to get outside of the limits placed around them and engage in other possibilities in life: athletics, education, travel, friendships, meeting new and different people. This is discouraged because anything outside of the community is considered “the world,” and the world tempts you to sin. (More discussion of “the world” and the internet in the section entitled The Story of Dreaming: Online and “the World”)

One particular disturbing moment in the book is in a passage entitled “An Unforgettable Wedding Night.” It describes a young couple, in love and newly married, showing up to their hotel room where “the night you have always dreamed about has finally arrived” (67). The idea of this dream and the use of it for control and motivation is powerful to say the least as will be shown with the rest of the story. He carries the bride into the room and sets her down as he whispers, “I have dreamed of this moment my entire life!” a second iteration of the dream in less than a paragraph, followed by, “I love you so much” (67). But then he smells something. The room is filled with a noxious odor. The groom looks “bewildered” as they both realize the room is filled with rotting garbage. Quickly, the girl (the story is told from her perspective) sees a group of her ex-boyfriends against the wall. The author describes, “You glance over at your groom. He is hanging his head mournfully and dejectedly making his way back down the hall” (68). The girl calls after him, and the groom states that he “just can’t be with you tonight-not like this” (68). The girl looks down and sees spaghetti sauce all over her dress and her dreams shattered. Nowhere in this description is it discussed that the garbage may belong to the groom as well, it is simply assumed that it belongs to her. His ex-girlfriends do not line the wall, but hers. In spite of his love for her, he leaves her when he finds her messy or impure. His purity, messiness, and shallow love are never called into question. The assumption of her fault

and the lack of challenge to that assumption demonstrate a pervasive belief system. It places sexual responsibility on young women. These sorts of standards are highly enforced within the community and maintaining a core belief in the domestic sphere.

In one section, Ludy discusses broader cultural assumptions to disprove them with her ideology. One key cultural assumption refuted is “To have a successful future, a young woman must carefully follow society’s pattern for success” (85). On the outside, disproving this assumption might be valuable if in relationship to capitalist, impersonal patterns of success, but she goes onto describe her experience in relationship to education. She relays a personal story of college pressure in high school where she admittedly became “goal oriented and ambitious,” but “the tender patient whisper of my Prince continued to tug at my heart.” (87). She goes on to detail the struggle between pursuing her educational goals and following her Prince (Jesus). She finally decides to leave high school,” The most important focus of my life now was to build my daily existence around intimacy with Him in my inner sanctuary. I realized it was nearly impossible to do this with my current schedule, so (with plenty of fear and trembling!) I made the decision to continue my education at home” (87). She goes onto detail how leaving high school and the pressure of college gave her the freedom to spend a substantial portion of her day “alone with her Prince” (in prayer) (88). The story does not relay what happened in regards to her education from that point. This is not to say that all homeschooled students are experiencing an inferior education, but to highlight the close association between sexuality, religion, and education, an association some of my participants are reading. This young girl quit school to maintain her intimacy with her Prince as means to remain pure as is insinuated by the nature of the whole conversation of the book around sexuality.

Jonathan Alexander (2008) in his book *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy: Theory and Practice for Composition Studies* describes the power of these sexually based narratives and stories. He considers these stories a sort of sexual literacy and defines it as “the knowledge complex that

recognizes the significance of sexuality to self- and communal definition and that critically engages the stories we tell about sex and sexuality to probe them for controlling values and for ways to resist, when necessary, constraining forms” (5). He goes on to note that sexual literacy is directly tied into being literate in our society and wrapped up in our notions of “citizenship,” and can have a direct impact on our “participation in the democratic project” (4). Most importantly, he notes regarding the stories we tell “about sexuality are part and parcel, even central at times, to the stories we tell about ourselves, individually, collectively, and politically” (4). Claire Gresle-Favier echoes the connection between sexuality and larger societal, political forces in *Raising Sexual Pure Kids*, “Proabstinence discourses ... operate as tools in reasserting the illegitimacy of the government and of secular institutions and in reinforcing the feeling of conservative Christians that they belong to an oppressed minority” (152). Whether or not it is true that Christians are an oppressed minority in society, what is important is the fact that discourses and stories around sexuality may control that “feeling” of one’s placement in society. At first glance, stories such as *Ludy’s* may seem somewhat harmless, but stories around sexuality play a direct role in the way we tell, form, and participate in stories about ourselves and our place in the world.

With two of my participants reading this book, and potentially using it as a guide for their lives, these details are important not to overlook. They seem extreme, and because of this extremity, they are easy to dismiss. But they should not be dismissed as they are just one of many similar books. This book was given to my participants in a church sponsored group, which is a common occurrence. Elite Ben-Yosef (2011) in her article entitled “Literacy and Power: The Shiyour as a Site of Subordination and Empowerment for Chabad Women” notes in women’s religious groups, “soft dominance” is carried out “by internalizing the behaviors, language, use of artifacts, and by physical presence, learners ‘realize’ their gendered positions and ensure the reproduction of the status quo of power relations” (59). She goes on to say that participants learn to “accept as ‘natural’ the existing culture structures and ideologies” (59). Within the groups Ben-

Yosef notes the women who lead these groups have been marked as “women of valor” by the learned males in the community, and in this way, by offering prestige to some of the “oppressed,” they are able to “dominate them more efficiently and ever more gently” (Betensky quoted in Ben-Yosef 71). My participants may not be directly oppressed or hidden away as women in the church, but at times, they may be subject to this “soft dominance” as perhaps with the reading of Ludy’s book. As noted by Alexander, these views of their sexuality and roles within the church are “part and parcel, even central at times, to the stories we tell about ourselves...” (4).

THE STORY OF DREAMING

What are the stories my participants tell about themselves? Religious beliefs are just one color, granted a central one, on the palette of my participants' stories. I wanted to know how they viewed the whole palette of their story, and the identity work they saw themselves doing in this digital space.

This chapter will explore the following: (1) the relationship between online activities and “the world”; (2) the participant's stories in relationship to their futures, the dream and the real.

Online and “The World”

Researchers have examined the complexities of analyzing digital and physical spaces side by side (Orgad, 2009; Leander & McKim 2003; Saul, 2014; Hine, 2009). Many ascribe to the view expressed by Leander and McKim (2003), “Participants weave these social spaces and relations into their lives in such a way that the online is experienced as real and as ‘commonplace’ and that transitions between online and offline social spaces and identities may be less marked than researchers initially assumed” (218). Though I do not think my participants view their digital selves as entirely separate entities from their physical selves, they seemed to be profoundly aware of the limitations of Pinterest, the conflicts between their beliefs and the “secular” world online, and how others might view them uniquely online. For some of my participants, even engaging in or being online provides an element of tension for them.

With the unique recursive storytelling capabilities online, Saul notes the recursive possibilities can have “consequences” in that “the pervasiveness and intensities...increasingly work to render the material and the virtual inextricable within our everyday realities – are possibilities for experiencing new ways of being in the world” (p. 67). I would argue that my participants know digital spaces can work in “inextricable” ways in their lives, and they push against this. They fight against the influence Pinterest may have on their lives and want to control the “new ways

of being in the world.” Their specific awareness and concern comes from their religious beliefs regarding “the world.”

These teachings about the world are often based around Bible verses, such as 1 John 2:15-16, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the father but from the world” (New International Version). The “world” can mean many things, but it is often considered secular culture at large, in particular the media and entertainment industry of which the internet is considered a part. If the Christian community or church is the center of a bull’s-eye, concentrations of the world move out from there with the outer rim being the most worldly or dangerous. But in between that which is the most dangerous and the center Christian church, there are gradations that often require the individual Christian to discern whether or not the space or action in that moment is for the world or for God. Romans 2:12 speaks to work of discernment in relationship to the world, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, acceptable, and perfect” (New International Version). In this verse, removal from the world is necessary to likewise discern the will of God and what is “good.” This is reminiscent of Ludy’s leaving school. It can be a vicious cycle of tension each time a person who is striving to live in this way enters into secular culture. They must be vigilant in their discernment, but their ability to discern is at the same time under assault by the sheer proximity to the world in which it is most needed. In this case, it is often simpler to simply remain removed from the world and stay towards the center where it is safest and least conflicting – the Christian community. With my participants engaging in “the world” each time they go on the internet, they are sometimes guarded and cautious about their interactions in that space. For some of the participants, this awareness is more acute, and for others, it is less important.

Don Pearson (2011), a pastor to two participants who expressed some of the strongest conflict

about being online or on Pinterest, wrote a book called *iparent*. The book addresses parents and how to deal with “technology accelerating and threatening to engulf their adolescents” (back cover). He goes on to say, “The heart, mind, and healthy gender of your child is at stake.” The book describes how technology has replaced healthy relationship development between men and women, which consequently leads to a crisis in masculinity and femininity, as idealized through Christian ideology. There is a correlation between technology and temptation or danger. Pearson notes, “There was a time when deviance required great effort...It’s not like that anymore. Deviance has become easy because technology is pervasive” (49). The book concludes, “The youth culture is trending out of control, reaching its own stagnant cesspool of extended adolescence and debauchery” (124). This debauchery typically alludes to sexuality and gender as seen in this book with the chapter titles, “Blurring Gender” and “Hooking up.” Pearson notes the important question to ask as parents to young people, “What is the value of adulthood, with its traditional markers of marriage and parenting?” (125). This question itself, through its wording, directs the reader to the ideal or intended answer with “value,” “traditional,” and “marriage” used. He says “culture,” or the world as described prior, answers this question “all day, every day- marriage and family are dead” (125). The message being conveyed then is that digital spaces, such as Pinterest, are fraught with dangers and messages that may lead to deviance, gender confusion, and debauchery (sexual sin).

This sexual sin can lead to grave, eternal consequences. As noted by Amy DeRogatis (2015) in *Saving Sex*, “sexuality and salvation are closely linked” (3). She goes on to note that the consequences extend beyond the individual and into the community, “a person’s sexual misdeed has individual, communal, and eternal consequences” (3). If sexual sin can lead to grave communal and individual loss, and technology is a superhighway towards sexual sin, then technology itself is to be feared, guarded against, and used with a caution that recognizes eternal life and death are at stake. In general, young people may or may not fully grasp the weight of “eternal,” but young Christians have been brought up to believe this centrality of eternity guides

all decisions and purpose in their lives. All of this to say, religious young people approach technology and its implications and involvements in their lives with perhaps a bit more weight than researchers who view these spaces as seamless with their physical lives may recognize. Some of my participants specifically spoke to this tension when on Pinterest. In the interview with Andrea, I asked her if she was on any other social media sites besides Pinterest. She answered quickly and emphatically that no, she was not involved on any other sites, which seemed slightly unusual for a fifteen year old. I sensed in her emphasis that somehow being on too many sites was a negative thing. She repeated that she was not hardly even on Pinterest, which my activity logs confirmed. In the two months time, she pinned the least and often went weeks without any pinning at all. I imagined she must have moved on to other sites, but instead she was not utilizing any social media at all. I immediately wanted to ask her directly about the sense I had that she viewed social media as negative, but I hesitated because her father was nearby and I did not want to appear as if I was critically questioning that belief. I was already in the slightly precarious position of asking these questions as a researcher from a public, secular, institution and as someone who has a particular interest in digital spaces. Even though they know I am a part of the Christian community, our personal relationship was new, and I was sitting in that moment as someone who represents “the world’s” interests. In this particular encounter, I placed the continued relationship as the primary imperative over satisfying my curiosity or finding out more detailed information.

Laura also expressed some tension with being on the site and her beliefs. When I asked her what she would tell someone who was just joining Pinterest, she noted, “Don’t get obsessed with it or like be covetous of it or with it because there is lots of home stuff too and like wedding things and my small group leader Amber, she would actually talk to me about that when she found out that I was on so much.” Laura’s small group leader stepped in and offered her advice when she found out that Laura was spending so much time on Pinterest, which is reminiscent of the “soft dominance” discussed by Ben-Yoself. The site offered dangers of obsession and coveting.

Pinterest does not seem to be as much of a direct sexual threat as other areas of the internet, which is often perhaps why young Christian girls such as Andrea are allowed on the site. But perhaps, it offers indirect sexual threats such as can be read underlying Laura's comments. Pinterest's primary danger is in coveting or wanting things too much. Laura specifically noted the danger was related to wanting or obsessing over "home stuff" and "wedding things." Pinterest's primary uses certainly lend to the evangelical emphasis on traditional marriage with its use for wedding planning, cooking, and the home. But what happens when you want marriage and home too much, and you are a teenager unable to marry and satisfy these desires anytime soon? This is one of the strange ironies or contradictions in the Christian evangelical faith. The idealization of marriage and home is used to motivate abstinence with the promises of a happy, and complete home in the future. And because marriage is the only sanctioned venue for sexuality, often the obsession with marriage is a response to healthy adolescent sexual need. The frequent obsessive marriage and home pinning becomes a way to simultaneously reinforce abstinence, but also serves as a constant reminder of that far off sanctioned sexuality. In the small group leader's caution is a note of care not only towards coveting, but also possibly towards where this obsession with unsatisfied wants can lead. The danger as noted above is not that she will find herself suddenly getting her hands on a credit card and purchasing these items she covets, but it lies in potential "deviance" and "debauchery" brought about by deep longing and want.

Introduction

Other participants did not necessarily feel as conflicted on the site in regards to its temptations per se, but identified conflicts on the site between the dream and the real. Perhaps conflict is too strong of a word, but they seemed in constant negotiation between what was a dream and what was reality or actually possible. This dream tension is wrapped up in what they are conveying on Pinterest about who they are versus what story their pins might tell. At times, this slight differentiation was fascinating, particularly when paired against what some of them believed they should be conveying. These dreams and stories of themselves are also wrapped up in their

plans and hopes for the future. I found the younger my participant, the more they used the site to simply dream about the future, and the older they got, the more they moved towards using the site to actually plan the future and move towards “real” life. Although, those younger dreamers were able to identify that their future selves might also move towards the “real” as well. It was a delight to see these young girls dreaming freely. It was also haunting to see their recognition of the time clock on those dreams, and that eventually they would have to give way to the real work of adulthood, a time where dreaming must move from their imaginations to being actualized on canvas. It was haunting to see them recognize their colors are limited.

It was haunting to see they also recognized restraint in attachment to morality. Pearson indicates in his book about technology,

“The giddy speed of technological advance has convinced most of us that possibilities are limited only by our dreams. If we can imagine it, we can do it. The only question that remains is ‘How long will it take?’ It wasn’t so long ago that ‘Can we?’ was held in check by ‘Should we?’ Moral restraint impacted both the speed and direction of technology’s impact” (47).”

Pearson alludes to the past with the question “should we” in relationship to dreaming and technology, but my participants seem to carry this question with them right now. Their dreams are not only impacted by time limitations, but also by “moral restraint,” or I would argue by what they imagine the right way to live.

The first time I asked the interview questions that I had formed simply on paper for the IRB board, I hesitated on a series of questions that almost seemed repetitive, but forged ahead anyway. The distinction in how my participants answered was fascinating. I asked the following questions in relationship to story:

1. If someone was to look at your site and not know you, what do you think they would learn?
2. How much do you feel this is a picture of you?

3. If not, what is missing? What are the missing pieces?
4. Five years from now, how do you think your pins would change? What would be different or the same?
5. Tell me what story do you think your boards tell?

By the time I arrived to the fifth question, I was afraid it was starting to feel repetitive, but the participants answered uniquely from the direct line of inquiry into who they were. The following details how some of the participants answered these questions as well as how they talked about dreaming and the future in relationship to these questions. The idea of story in the fifth question also seemed to capture their idea of dreaming versus what someone might learn about their real selves.

Participants' Stories

Lisa

Lisa loves Pinterest. Of all my participants, she loves the site the most. It seems to appeal to her artistic sensibilities. She carefully constructs her boards in detail, paying attention to the aesthetic experience someone might have when looking at her boards. She pays attention to how her pins look, wanting them to “go together.” She gave an example of her clothing board and how she only pins clothing pictures that have people in them rather than simply clothing laid out on a white background. She said she “prefers the ones that are on people because they are more real,” but also she seems to care that her site feels like a seamless experience for those who might be looking. Lisa also alluded profoundly to Pinterest as a place of dreaming and constructing an ideal image of her future life. When I asked her why she liked Pinterest, she noted, “It is my dream life. This is what I could be doing but I have to go to school and do homework. And I don’t have a job to afford all of this stuff I want to buy.” Although most of the participants use the site to dream, for Lisa, it seemed that Pinterest most readily captured her ideal perhaps because of her connection to the artistic elements of the site (“crafts, hair and makeup”), and

she saw much of her dream life through that lens. In her dream world, she could be creating beauty all around her and on her body without limits. The limits she imposes on this dream world are related to time and finances. She has to go to school, and she does not have the money to construct the life she has dreamt up.

Lisa out of all my participants did not seem to have her beliefs play a role in this dreamscape. She did not have a faith board. In fact, her first response when I asked her what might be missing about her from her boards, she said, “Probably my faith. That is more like a personal thing.” Her faith seemed to relate most closely to the “real” in her life that was not a part of this dream life she had constructed. Her nod towards privacy and her aesthetic awareness on the site also speak towards this dream life constructed with an audience in mind. When we think of dreaming, we think of it as something internal, but in contrast, Lisa seems to think on the outward expressed version of her dream life and how others around might experience her.

When I asked what someone might learn about her, she was the most short and vague in her answer, “I hope they would learn I like cool stuff, and that I am just like pretty chill.” In contrast, when I asked her about the story of her pins, she answered enthusiastically and elaborately, “Probably that there is this cool girl that has cool clothes and cool hair and lives in an awesome house and travels and is great with makeup and has great accessories and clear skin and works out and has a cool apartment.” Her pinning has created this whole narrative of her “dream life” which is written in what she owns and what she does. It is also written upon her body. She owns cool clothes, an awesome house, a cool apartment, has great accessories. It is not only what she owns, but what she does in travel and makeup application. Most importantly, this story is written on her body with clear skin, working out, and cool hair. When I asked her if her pins accurately represented her, her answer acknowledged this tension between her “dream life” and who she is in real life. She said, “I feel like it is a pretty good picture of me but I feel like it is a representation of what I would like to be and what I would like to have.” Then she checked

herself, perhaps the moral limitations emerging, and said, “That sounds really materialistic.” Throughout the interview, she acknowledged and was reflective on this idea of her pins on Pinterest as a dream and a representation of her dream or ideal self.

As Lisa moves into the future, she described her pinning becoming more “realistic” and full of “helpful things.” Similar to other participants, she forecasts her pins will become more based in usefulness, such as saving money, budgeting, and pins related to cosmetology, which is her professional goal. For now, she recognizes that she does not pin things that are necessarily pertinent or useful for her life right now. When I asked her what was missing, she noted that she doesn’t pin about the two things she spends the most time actually doing in her life: dance and school. She notes, “I don’t think about it.” The pins are an escape from her most present reality. She went on to say she doesn’t pin a “useful board” though she seems to realize she might make that shift in the future. In contrast with other participants who imagined that in this future reality their pinning practices would change, Andrea imagines that her life will change to match the pins more closely, “Hopefully, my pins turn into more like what I wear.” But for now, she sees her pins as an ideal depiction of who she would like to be or her dream life. If she had absolute control, limitless time and money, this is the life she would choose to live.

Laura

Laura, at the age of 17, is the oldest of the participants and a senior in high school. Her proximity to adulthood offers a unique glimpse because she is pinning not for a more distant dream like future, but for a future at hand. Her relationship with her future and dreaming carries different tensions with the bulk of her anxieties lying not as much with what her dreams might mean as with how to carry them out and also in some ways with how others might view her planning. She pins to try and gain knowledge, ideas, and “plan” for the adulthood that is nearly here less than a year away. She interestingly also had a board entitled “Being an Adult” in which she pins about budgeting as seen on the top part of the screen and also about being a wife as seen on the bottom. (Figure 7)

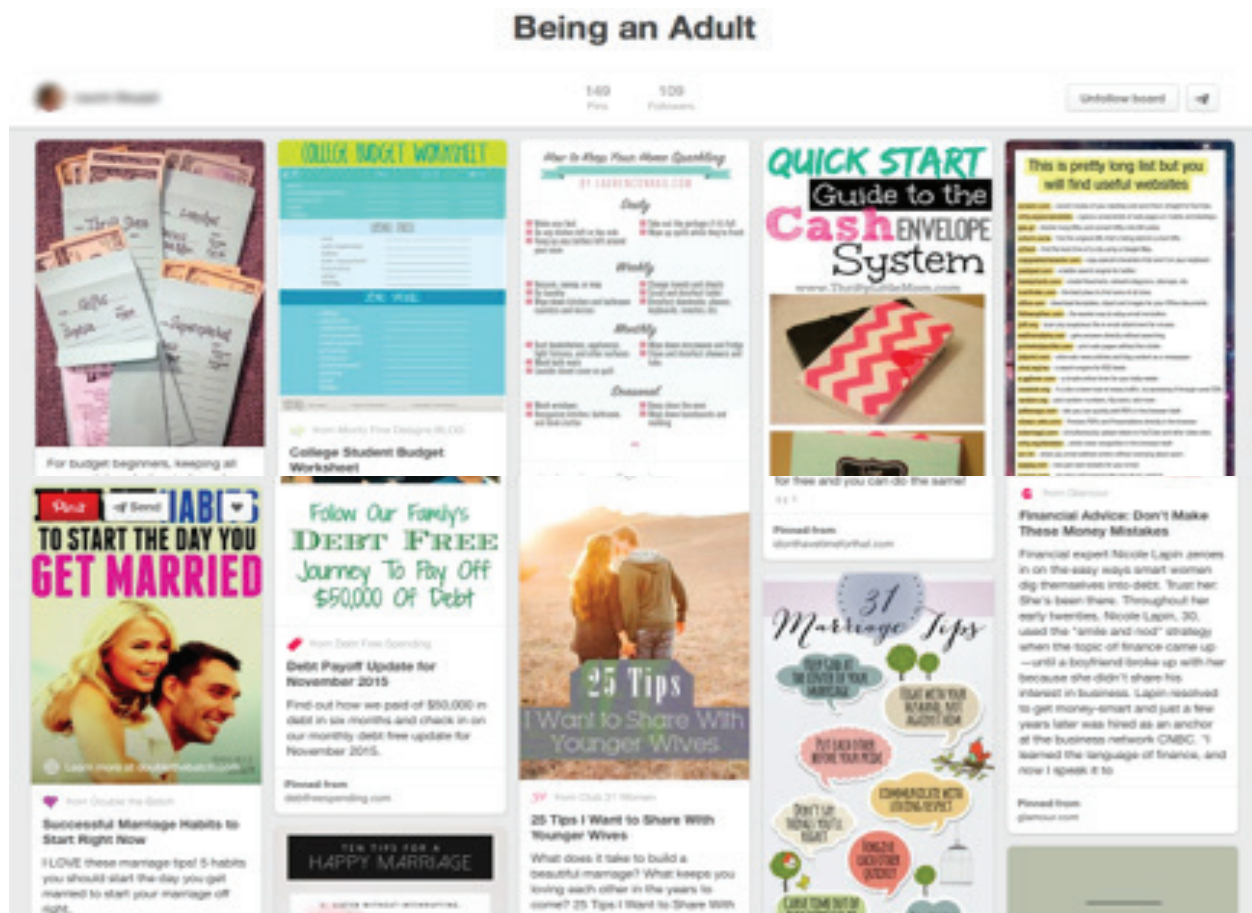


Figure 7 - Laura's "Being an Adult" Board

Laura uses her Pinterest to often work out her role as a wife and to plan her wedding. Her "Future Wedding" board had the highest pins with 569. Her next highest board, "Create," has 154 with "Being an Adult" a close second at 149. She also indicated in the interview that she had an additional hidden wedding board because she did not want people to think she was "crazy." This theme of people perceiving her as crazy came up frequently throughout the interview, especially in reference to her wedding pins. In contrast to Lisa who considered an audience in relationship to the aesthetics of the site, Laura feared her audience might consider her pins "weird" for someone her age. When I asked her what someone might learn about her from looking at her site, she indicated that "They would probably think I was like crazy with like how much I post about weddings and stuff and how young I am." With her frequent allusions to how people might view her, I asked her if she often thought about others when she was pinning. She

said,

“Not often, but with stuff like that [wedding], I don’t want them to think I am like too far ahead of myself. But I am like such a planner that planning things and thinking about things is most of the enjoyment for me, and so like I do things so far in advance. People think that is weird and so I don’t want them to think I am weird. The anticipation of things is a huge part of my experience with them”

Even though Laura is worried that people might think she is strange for planning ahead, this does not actually seem that different from how my other participants use the site. They likewise use the site for thinking and dreaming of the future. One of the main differences is that this planning seems to intensely focus on marriage and weddings. Thoughts of wedding and being a wife spill over into many of her other boards with pins talking about submission and being a good wife.

Another key difference in her site from the other participants is that she calls her activity in regards to the future “planning” rather than dreaming. I would argue that this planning is closely aligned to my other participant’s ideas of dreaming with the pleasure she derives from it, but she calls it planning because it is becoming an actuality. The actuality of this dreaming and planning her wedding is perhaps closer at hand than a simple observer of her site might realize. She told me that part of the reason for all of the wedding pins was her boyfriend gave her a promise ring, which she showed me. A promise ring is a precursor to an engagement ring, but promises that there will be an engagement ring soon. She revealed this information to me when I asked what she would be pinning in five years. At 22, she noted that hopefully she would not need a wedding board anymore (because she would be married). She thought for a minute about what she might pin, and then said, “maybe I would not be on Pinterest at all then.” This realization is fascinating in relationship to her ideas around planning and how Pinterest is used for dreaming. Perhaps, her planning and dreaming have not extended beyond the dominant ideas of wedding and marriage. In many ways, this would echo her evangelical upbringing as shown through the examination of Ludy’s book. With a woman’s future and life purposes framed around being a wife and having a

family, most dreaming and planning goes into this actualization. For Laura, this actualization is already nearby at 17 with her promise ring, and she imagines its fulfillment before 22, which is a relatively young age in itself.

Interestingly, when I asked Laura what story her pins or Pinterest boards might tell, she did not veer into the imaginative or representation as readily as the other participants. Instead, she moved to the core of things. The story for her was the undercurrent for all of her pins. She noted, “That is hard. It would probably tell about some of my anxiety that I have about just like the future. Um especially I have a board about being an adult because it like really freaks me out cause like I don’t know how to do so many things. Its like I have been catered to by my mom and dad, and they do everything for me. Then when I am eighteen, and then they are like ok, bye, I just have to know what to do.”

Anxiety acts as an undercurrent for her pinning and her concern about what others think about her. With her future so close, perhaps the reality that these things may not come together exactly as how a younger person might simply dream haunts her. One could hear this in her advice to other users, “Have it more for ideas rather than a picture of what you actually want because it is probably not going to happen.” Part of Laura’s anxiety might lie in the fact that she still has these dreams of a beautiful wedding and a happy marriage, but she is also coming to realize the actualizing of these dreams and making them happen is going to be difficult, perhaps impossible. Primarily, it is impossible because of money as she shows with her frequent budgeting pins and mention to her parents putting her on her own at eighteen. The anxiety lies in having to reside in the tension of these dreams and cut them and trim them down into attainable packages. Her anxiety with others looking might lie in the fact that part of these pins are still holding onto the dreaming. She notes that she pins to alleviate anxiety with planning, but many of the pins are still images of an idealized wedding and marriage, and those are the ones she is embarrassed by

as evidenced by her additional hidden board. Perhaps her anxiety speaks to what happens when your childhood dreams of marriage cultivated in your church community and in your belief system are near actualization and the reality of those things does not quite match up with the dream of them: one continues in the dream and “planning” of them because that is the enjoyment of them.

Hannah

Hannah uses Pinterest almost daily. She consults it each morning for clothing and hair inspiration. At fifteen, she has been on the site for a couple of years and has used it in a variety of ways. When I asked Hannah what people would know about her or be able to tell about her when they look at the site, she said, “Um, I don’t really know. Just that I am like a normal teenage type person.” She mentioned they would know she likes sports and that she is a Christian from her faith board. When I asked her what they might not know, she said they might not know her personality because many of the images were not self generated. She selected them, but did not create them. In the midst of conversation, she mentions that she at one time had a “Me” board that was full of selfies. When I asked her why she deleted it, she said, “I am not on the selfie bandwagon anymore...I felt like it was kind of immature. Like self absorbing, not good. I thought it was kind of egotistical to have a board of yourself.”

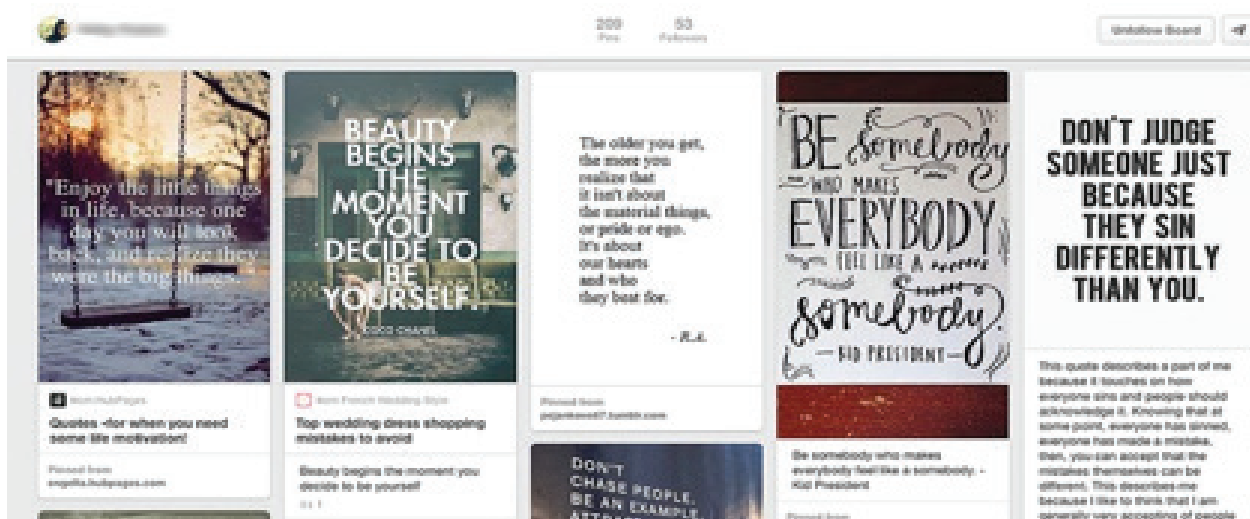


Figure 8 - Hannah's Quote Board

Even though she does not have a selfie board anymore, when coding Hannah's quote board and truly throughout her site, she focused on this idea of identity and self formation. The direct focus on identity formation was seen clearly in the textual analysis of her quote pin board (Figure 8). Most of her quotes had something to do with a reflection of who a person is or how he or she is viewed. She had more than double of the use of the word "be" or "becoming" in her quotes, such as in the use seen in Figure 8: "...you decide to be yourself," and "Be somebody." In many ways, this self reflection is a way of figuring out her own story.

This longing to understand her own story was also expressed at the end of the interview when I asked Hannah if she had any questions for me and she asked, "What have you mostly found out?" She wanted to know what I saw in her boards about her. I told her about some of the items I had coded from her quotes as well as some of the different ways I had observed she used Pinterest. I directly told her that I noticed she thought about identity a lot. She agreed that yes, she does think about identity quite a bit.

When talking about Hannah's future, her answers are worth noting with how she saw her role alongside her shifting from the dream to the real. When I asked Hannah about what she saw herself pinning in five years, she responded with the following:

"I will be twenty, so I probably would have stuff about maybe kids, like kid room ideas, wedding. I already have my dream wedding board, but like for real wedding. I will probably use it more for life instead of pleasure if that makes sense because my mom doesn't like have a humor board or a quotes board. It is all like cooking, cleaning, crockpot, and stuff like that."

Instead of "dreaming" she would be in college or developing a vocation, which was not mentioned in this conversation, she imagines she will be at twenty years old looking at recipes, cooking, and wedding boards. She conflates her life to her mother, imagining herself to be in a similar state at twenty as a mid forties stay at home woman. Even though there was a lot of

laughter in this conversation around her comments, they beg for further thought and reflection. When she is 20, instead of using Pinterest as a place for “dreaming” as in her “dream” wedding, she will use it for a “real” wedding. In the same way, her dreaming pins of hair and clothing will move to “real” domestic pins of cooking, cleaning, and crockpot. At twenty, she imagines she will be engaged in the serious, real work of life, but that work revolves around the home and the domestic.

Hannah uses the word dream three times – “Dream wardrobe,” “Dream house,” and “My dream wedding” on her boards. The idea of dreaming also emerged in other areas of the interview. When I asked Hannah what she might tell someone who is just joining Pinterest, she mentioned that her mother thought it was a “cult.” Her mother was nearby and overheard and said, “You look at it and you see all these things that you could have and wish you had. You see all these other people pinning these dream kitchens and then look at your kitchen. I got tired of seeing all of that.” Her mother equated the power of dreaming with the power of a cult. The dream performs a sort of indoctrination. This is reminiscent of the warning from Laura’s small group leader that dreaming of the future presents a sort of danger. For the mother, this danger was in comparison to her reality and the subsequent pain of disappointment in not measuring up to this “dream kitchen” or dream life. I asked Hannah if she saw it like that. She responded, “No I don’t. I use it more for enjoyment. I don’t use it for comparing myself with others. It is more like what I wish. With my dream wedding, it is not like I am comparing my wedding to other people’s.” For Hannah’s mother, this dream life brings pain – strong enough to be compared to a cult. But for Hannah, this dreaming is still enjoyable.

My personal relationship with Hannah is perhaps stronger than with other participants, so I felt a freedom to ask her more questions and probe more deeply. I asked Hannah directly: What do you mean by ‘dream’? She replied, “It is kind of a far off thing, but I guess it is not really like dream but more like planning. Like future. It is stuff that I would like to have at my wedding.

It is not stuff that is like a dream that I wont have. But I guess it is like far off... in the future.” Hannah’s comments are reminiscent of Laura’s with a correlation between dreaming and planning. A key difference though is that Laura is starting to come to an adult realization, similar to Hannah’s mothers, that this dream might not come true. Hannah’s mother experienced this as a forty something woman so profoundly, she said she removed herself from Pinterest for a year and compared it to a cult. Laura experiences this pain as well, but possibly terms it anxiety. She still holds out some hope that these things may happen, but is coming to grips with the fact that they may not. In contrast, Hannah still has hope that she will have access to these dreams. It is “stuff that she would like to have....It is not stuff that is like a dream that I wont have.” Hannah differentiates between the two different kinds of dreaming. There is the kind that is impossible or possible. At the same time, Hannah also indicated that at twenty, she would switch from a “dream wedding” board to a “real wedding board.” At that time, she will be moving towards adult reality of sifting through her dreams and deciding which ones can be real and which ones will go by the wayside. Similar to other participants, she imagines this work of the real to be “serious” or “useful.” There seems to be an implied correlation between the real, adulthood, seriousness, and lack of enjoyment. For now, Hannah is free to dream and enjoy her dreams because those dreams are still in the distant future and still imbued with possibility.

Rachel

In her thirty five boards, Rachel never uses the word “dream” in any of her stylized one word titles. Her boards were artistic and pragmatic. She describes herself in one sentence on the title of her page: “I am a big fan of southern prep [clothing style], good food, quality books, and a whole lotta Jesus.” This description is apt as her pinning practices show her highest consistently pinned board was “Clothing” as well as her “Jesus” and “Words” board.

When I asked Rachel what someone might know about her, she indicated, “They would know about my morals and stuff...[from] different quotes and words.” It was fascinating that she first

noted they would see her morals in contrast to her mentioning what she notices when she looks at other boards. Early in the interview, she mentioned that she sometimes looks through people's Pinterest to get a sense of who they are. She noted she looked at their clothes to get a sense of their style and food to get a sense of their lifestyle. She noted, "There is a difference between someone who pins salads or cakes and cookies. I don't know. That tells a lot about a person...If you are actually pinning lots of salads, you must be a health nut." The boards she looks at when she tries to gain a sense of who someone is more closely resemble the boards she frequently pins on rather than the "morals" or ones she indicated in the interview as most important to her or displaying of who she is.

Overall, Rachel does feel like her boards do display her life and offer an accurate picture of her, and this is partially because of her pinning practices. She noted that she "actually tries to live her life by them" [pins and quotes]. In contrast to pinning an ideal, dream life, Rachel strives to pin things that she can actually live by now. This was also reflected when I asked her the story of her pins, and she said, "It think it would tell the story of like, it seems like a big word, but like my passions in life." This is a fascinating contrast and usage of the site. Instead of viewing what she pinned as future, distant dreams, she pinned in accordance with her current passions and life. She did not look to represent a version of herself, figure herself out, or dream of a future self, but instead engaged in the current state of herself and what she is interested in.

Similar to other participants, the idea of usefulness surfaced, but uniquely not in contrast to the future, but regarding right now. She joked, "My mom teases me a lot about how I pin random things and that doesn't like do anything for you cause like more people use it for DIY ideas, more recipes and stuff (*italics mine*)."

This idea behind her pins not "doing anything for you" is reminiscent of other participants' conversations around future usefulness of pins. Her mom in a way attempted to call her to the real or more adult useful usages of the site by teasing her about her "random" pinning. When I asked her why she doesn't pin things that "do anything" or are

“useful,” she responded, “Just cause it is kind of fun and a time consumer I guess.” Her response pushes against that impulse for the real by fully acknowledging the site is for enjoyment.

From the casualness of her comments, one would imagine that she possibly does not invest a significant amount of care or time on Pinterest, but she was one of the most consistent pinners and had taken care to style her site in a way similar to Lisa, who was admittedly “obsessed.” Perhaps, Rachel’s youth manifests itself as a lack of concern about the future or about her life. She had a “Wedding” and “XO” board, the latter of which was consistently pinned pictures of couples in various poses, but she does not seem to recognize these things as dreams, but instead as passions. Her seeming connection between Pinterest and her current, rather than future, self imbued her experience with “fun” and a sort of freedom to resist the urge or imperative for usefulness.

Julie

Julie is tiny and shy with a soft voice, which can sometimes make her feel more childlike. She is a committed student, dancer, and athlete. Her mom and sister are equally diminutive in size, and the three of them are frequently together, crafting and cooking. They came up often during my interview with Julie, and at times, Pinterest felt like a collaborative activity between the three of them with sending pins back and forth and working on cooking meals and creating wall art and picture books from Pinterest.

Julie was perhaps one of my most unique participants in that she did not have a hair, makeup, clothing or wedding board. She also seems aware that her Pinterest usage might be different than others. In the interview she indicated that most people her age use Pinterest for “different outfits, hairstyles, and stuff.” When I pointed out that she had none of those things and asked how she uses it instead, she said, “I like to use it for things in the future instead of now I guess.” Intriguingly, Julie actually uses Pinterest “now” in her day-to-day offline life more than my other participants for cooking and crafting. She also uploads her own content with her highest board

being a “Picture a Day” board, where she uploaded one picture each day for a year. She then printed the 365 pins into a book, which she showed me (figure 9).



Figure 9 - Julie’s Printed Book of her “Picture a Day” Board

Also uniquely, Julie does not appear to consider herself or her identity directly on the site as others, such as Hannah, do. In her 365 pictures, there is not a single one of her face. There are two that capture a dancing costume she is wearing from the neck down. When asking what someone might know or not know about her, she never mentioned her personality as others did and instead focused specifically on activities, “I like to cook and do crafts and take pictures.” When I asked what they might not know, she they “probably wouldn’t know what sports I do” in contrast to others noting their sense of humor or their personality directly.

Even though she might perceive that she uses Pinterest differently than others, the other participants also do use Pinterest to think and dream about the future. Perhaps, with Julie using Pinterest in a practical way now, her speaking to “using it for future” also relates to her perception of using it for pleasure vs. purpose. She is using “now” as a window into different types of gratification or enjoyment. She may not use it for a hairstyle “now” but she does use it for cooking now. Cooking might be more “useful” or less of an instant gratification than

hairstyles or clothes, which may be perceived as more shallow purposes. Cooking is practical and meets a need, which could be perceived as adult-like and more future oriented.

Even though she uses the site for the future, Julie noted that observers might not be able to tell “what I want to do when I grow up.” I asked her if she knows what she wants to do, and she laughed and replied, “not really.” I followed up and asked if looking at Pinterest helped her to think about what she wants to do, and she said, “Sometimes it does. Like if I am looking at pictures of animals, I might want to be a vet, and so, yeah.” To an outside observer such as myself, I might imagine that she wants to do something related to building or designing homes. Julie has a “Dream house” category, which over the course of observing her activity for two months was the board she most consistently pinned to. It is her only use of the word “dream” out of her 33 boards. It is also the board she indicated she would love to have come true, and when I asked her what she liked about Pinterest, she noted “It gives you ideas for houses and different things.” Her “dream house” board is filled with blue prints and floor plans rather than decorating elements. When I asked her about her interest in floor plans and if she wanted to draw or create them when she grew up, she said no, that she just wanted to have a house that was for her, implying the desire for a home constructed around her desires and interests rather than living in a place constructed for someone else.

In many ways, with Julie’s frequent use of the site to construct food and art in her offline life, she appears to perceive that she has already tapped into the more adult-like usefulness of the site. She does not use it for pleasure and daydreaming and wondering about a story or perception of herself, but instead uses it more practically. This also reflects Julie in her offline life. In my day to day interactions with her, I have observed that she is not as concerned about hair, clothing, makeup, or her future marriage. In fact, she never once mentioned marriage throughout the interview even when I asked her about her use in five or ten years. Instead, she noted she would use it for organizing in college and “for a house or saving money” in ten years. Julie uses Pinterest to fit her desires for organization, planning, and creating rather than a dreamscape that

brings her pleasure. Coincidentally or not, she was also the one participant who did not directly indicate a belief or faith during the study.

Andrea

Andrea comes from a large family and is homeschooled by her mother. She has a good sense of humor and though her jokes and observations are never mean spirited, she is the person whose eye contact you would seek across the room for a raised eyebrow and silent chuckle. Even though she is not incredibly talkative, she is comfortable around people and has a busy social life. When recording Andrea's interview, an error in the program made it unplayable, so direct quotes are not used here. Instead, her ideas are summarized and paraphrased from the notes taken during and shortly after the interview.

Andrea uses "dream" once in her 28 boards in "my dream closet," and this is the board she also indicated she would love to have come true if she could wave a magic wand. Andrea like other of my participants seems to recognize the distinction between the dream and real with her current and future use of Pinterest. When I asked her what she imagines pinning in five years at 19, she said she would probably pin recipe boards because she would not have her mother cooking for her anymore. She would also pin wedding boards and hair boards because her older sister would not be around for doing her hair. She did not mention college, but instead her comments show thoughts of cooking and wedding. She does imagine that there will be some sort of transition from others caring for her to her caring for herself. Andrea indicates she will pin boards for use even though she currently has hair, wedding, and cooking boards, but they will transition from using them for enjoyment to pinning on them for practical, real usage.

As indicated prior, Andrea pinned the least frequently out of my participants and seemed to be the most conflicted about being online. Her father, whom I had just met during this interview, was also present for some of the interview, which perhaps caused a more stifled and less

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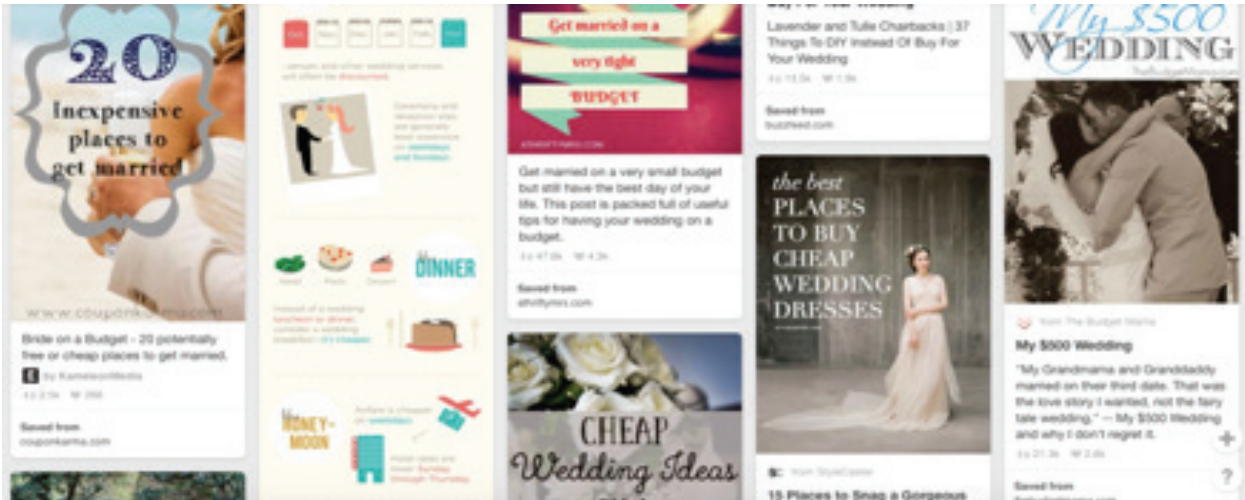


Figure 12- Laura's Wedding Board

Even though Andrea was reading Ludy's book *Authentic Beauty*, her wedding board does not seem to indicate a romantic emphasis on a "prince" or a "dream" wedding. She seems to have been able to differentiate between her faith and the ideals behind marriage, even though she still imagines she might be engaged rather young, at 19, in wedding planning.

CONCLUSION

Ironically, Pinterest is a site designed for creating neat categories and sorting images and ideas into these tidy boards, but how my participants use the site pushes against easy categorization. In this paper, I have attempted to demonstrate the complexities of how my users approach their religious beliefs on the site as well as look at how they use the site in relationship to dreaming, reality, and future planning. These elements of future and dreaming are important to look at with the historical associations between women, religion, sexuality, and reduced educational imperatives. There are not easy conclusions to arrive at or predictions to make. This paper is full of ‘perhaps.’ Instead, I simply offer a picture of what these young people are doing right now with the site. Some find the visual aesthetics of Pinterest somehow depicts who they are with their style and creative longings. Others find the quotes and categories they have chosen demonstrate a picture of them. None felt the story of who they are as depicted on Pinterest was entirely complete.

It is fascinating to see what they dream of when they think the options are somewhat limitless in terms of time and money. They dreamed of weddings, travel, cool clothes, and beautiful homes. Some openly felt the tensions between what they dreamed and the financial feasibility of these dreams. Some felt the tensions between their dreams and the real, with the real carrying a closer correlation to the possible. Others were young enough to simply enjoy the dreaming and delay the anxieties of actualizing these dreams.

The idea of the dream is important in relationship to religion for several reasons. First, this relationship highlights where the participants believe limitations may lie and what is possible in their futures. In particular, this is important for young religious women with the history of reduced educational and vocational expectations and the emphasis on roles of wife and mother. These limitations and possibilities were seen in how the participants viewed whether or not their dreams could come true and the particular parameters they placed around these dreams in

relationship to coveting, materialism, or the perceptions of their audience.

The examination of how the young women view their potential roles in relationship to religion is important as women's roles in religious circles are often intertwined with ideas around sexual purity as idealized in the Christian faith. As seen in Ludy's book, the ideal prince or marriage is made a dream – "a dream come true." This dream of the ideal husband, wedding, and honeymoon is cultivated as a way to control sexuality, but as we saw with Laura, there is danger in wanting or "coveting" too much. The danger of dreams being too powerful is also seen in Hannah's mothers response to the dream as having a "cult" like power. It then becomes a balancing act of dreaming of the future to maintain sexuality, but not dreaming too much as to cause one to act outside of sexual limits.

Looking at dream and religion together is important in understanding what religious young women are navigating in terms of their education and futures. The sexual purity conversation is important as Jonathan Alexander notes, the stories we tell "about sexuality are part and parcel, even central at times, to the stories we tell about ourselves, individually, collectively, and politically" (4). These stories and dreams they tell and move in play a role in how these young women may find their place in academia, society, and the world.

For myself, my future constructed as wife and mother interfered initially with my education, but I eventually was able to see that my future did not fit into that prescribed notion as cleanly as I imagined or had been taught to believe. Even with the delay in my education, I now find myself beginning a PhD program, something my young self could never have "dreamed" alongside those other dreams of being an ideal wife and mother. At times, when those dreams I had been brought up to believe were "good" or the highest ideal did not come true as I pictured, I grieved. On the other side of letting go of those dreams constructed for me, I found a reality that had the power, fulfillment, and purpose that I had hoped for from those original, in many ways

ideologically constructed, dreams that had so shaped my early years.

As educators, it is important to consider the challenges of these students in our classrooms. When presenting on this material, a question came to the forefront in conversation: how do instructors help students coming from religious backgrounds in our classrooms? This question is too large to explore here in depth and lends itself to further work in relationship to religion and education, but for now, I will offer an abridged and emerging answer. Allowing students to share their opinions on topics, especially if controversial, might give religious students the space to work out their own individual belief systems in our classrooms. As noted earlier, Christians are taught to be on guard from the world, and this includes our classrooms. If they sense the professor and students are adversarial to their belief systems, in many ways, they may withdraw and take on a defensive approach inside themselves. Allowing them to speak and accepting their belief systems as something considered, reflective, intelligent, and thoughtful will allow religious students to venture that same consideration, understanding, and engagement with other differing viewpoints. Creating a culture of listening in the classroom helps every student, especially those with unique backgrounds.

In my classroom, I also allow students to write about their religion if they chose to do so for class projects. I simply ask that they work to demonstrate concrete, specific details as evidence rather than abstract ideas or beliefs. I tell them I will not take points off if I disagree with their argument or topic, in the same way I would not for a student arguing against gun control or other controversial topics, but they need to work with thoughtful reasoning and with nuanced arguments, considering both sides. I also ask, as I do all students, that they enter into their writing with real, honest questions to explore. Without well-formed questions and a movement into what makes them curious, their papers could potentially veer into empty, canned rhetoric and not bear the mark of their own unique thinking and wording.

In the same way educators are aware that classrooms are not neutral spaces and students bring their own unique cultures and backgrounds to the educational experience, Pinterest and digital spaces are not neutral. This work demonstrates the need for contextualizing what users bring to the digital spaces in terms of culture and ideologies. Why might they find the space troubling or contentious – not in terms of usability per se – but in terms of morality, ethics, and ideologies? These tensions were seen in the teachings around the world, how some of the participants monitoring their usage, and in the book iparent. The examination of how culture and religious ideologies impact digital spaces warrants further research and consideration.

Another aspect of this study that warrants further consideration is the role of purity teachings in development of sexuality and gender. Looking closely at them and noting “how” they control, and how these methods of control – fear, unrealistic idealization – also relate to broader societal issues and the movement of women into the public sphere and places of leadership is important. Also, many of these teachings ignore discussions around gender identity in relationship to LGBTQ identities or the role different ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds might play in negotiating sexual or life ideals.

I also see parallels between the methods of control used by purity teachings and the fear based rhetoric being used today in our current political climate, specifically in relationship to immigration and the injustices in the legal system against minority peoples. The same fear mindset used to control sexuality is used to stereotype or discriminate against people based on fear. Historically, with our society and political system built in close relationship to Christian religious ideals, further exploration is needed into how the rhetoric of religion is directly and indirectly used today in our political system.

My participants’ dreams and realities will most likely shift and change throughout their life. Some of their early dreams might be achieved and found lacking. Others might be let go of only

to find a more colorful, poignant reality in their place. Some may find their dreams become so strong they are worth pushing against religious parameters they grew up with in order to achieve them. None of us can know. Certainly, through this study, we have the honor of catching a glimpse of their stories and dreams as they are forming, shifting, and changing.

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