



Conclusions and Counseling Recommendations

Abstract African-American same-sex loving women in the Insight Meditation tradition are experiencing Remarkable Relational Resilience through mindfulness, regular meditation, meditation retreats, sangha leadership, and understanding no self as interdependence, yet some of these women may seek out pastoral or spiritual or Buddhist counseling from a Buddhist teacher, pastoral or spiritual counselor, psychotherapist or a Buddhist teacher who is also a counselor or psychotherapist. The counselor should consider 12 points in counseling these women including: not totalizing, sequence of identity formation, joining through conscientization, practicing compassion, validation, cultivating “beginner’s mind,” cultivating unconditional love, assessing self-love, finding supportive communities, adopting a womanist attitude or posture, asking about challenges, and forming multiple conjoining identities.

Keywords Counseling • Spiritual movements • Rituals
• Persecutory object

At this moment, nothing has been written about African-American lesbians who practice Buddhism (AABLs) in the Insight Meditation tradition. Though AABLs are exposed to and engage in the same practices and teachings that other Insight members engage in and learn about including the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Brahma Viharas,

to name a few concepts, previous foundational teachings in Christianity, growing up with same-sex attraction, a cultural norm toward interdependence, and for some, exposure, interest, and engagement in African spirituality, impact the psycho-spiritual experiences of these women.

In order to see how these women's lives have been impacted by Buddhism, I utilized a black lesbian Buddhist hermeneutic to better understand Alice Walker's 1979 short story "Coming Apart" and created a womanist definition that I believe should be added to Walker's 1983 four-part definition because it makes explicit Walker's initial desire for African-American heterosexual women to utilize wisdom from African-American lesbians in the interest of the whole African-American community. Afrocentric Christian womanist Delores S. Williams advocated for black lesbians and straight women to be in dialogue about whether same-sex loving women were being discriminated against by their African-American heterosexual sisters, and also stated her concern that a transformation of consciousness would be dangerous if it meant a depreciation of black people and black culture. Since Walker coined "womanist" and since Williams stated her concerns, several African-American Christian same-sex loving womanist theologians have emerged to bring visibility to black lesbian lives by engaging in womanist Christian theology. This engagement and embrace is consistent with McCrary's belief that interdependence is a norm in the African-American community.

With the experience of growing up United Methodist, and having been educated in a Catholic university, Presbyterian seminary and Insight Meditation sanghas, I wanted to know how women similarly situated have experienced what I have experienced. My scientific method included the use of the Fetzer Spiritual Experience Index (SEI), though slightly modified for a Buddhist audience, along with additional demographic questions, and questions to explore spiritual narratives, including questions about self and nonself. Through the use of these statements and questions, I learned what spiritual practices produce particular spiritual experiences. I wondered how these women experienced the teachings on nonself or no self, given that we live in a society where the black female lesbian Buddhist person is generally not celebrated. If Fairbairn believed same-sex loving men should be encamped and segregated from the rest of society, then psychoanalyzed until they become heterosexual, what would he have made of these women? There is still a movement on conversion "therapists" who believe same-sex attraction should be and can be changed through counseling.

When one reads Buddhist sacred texts from the Pali Canon, they will not find much to support the notion that nonself or no self means interdependence, yet the mixed methods SNTS produced findings suggesting that these women are relational and resilient. In the American context where there is privilege based on being male, white, Christian, and heterosexual, and violence against those who are not, I deem this relational resilience as surprising and remarkable, thus Remarkable Relational Resilience. I wonder if Remarkable Relational Resilience explains, in part, the emergence of African-American Buddhist same-sex loving women, including Ruth King, Earthlyn Manuel, Jasmine Syedullah, and angel Kyodo Williams? If meditation leads to the dissolution of mind objects, and meditation is practiced in Insight, Zen, and other traditions, then those who practice meditation and experience dissolving mind objects, including self-persecutory mind objects, and it is not surprising that AABLs are cultivating relational resilience.

Object Relations Theory, in particular W.R.D. Fairbairn's view, in dialogue with Buddhist mind object theories, dynamically offers an expanded view of the mind, object and ego formation, and how the mind has the capacity to de-intensify the Internal Saboteur, or persecutory objects that undermine one's well-being. To understand Fairbairn's theory, one must first understand how he understood his own sexual development. Since Fairbairn's time, several modern-day object relations theorists have emerged and are also theorizing on what Buddhism means and how it is applied. Those theories have not been very favorable. Buddhists have been largely accused of avoiding others, even attempting to avoid their own maturation processes. If Muzika, McDargh, Engler, Epstein, Metcalf, and Aronson are correct, they would give much credence to Delores S. Williams' concerns about negative transformations of consciousness, but perhaps through lovingkindness meditation and lovingkindness meditation retreats and the de-intensification of persecutory objects, the concerns they have can be allayed.

Lovingkindness meditation, as Mary, Deborah, Alicia, Norene, and Marcella attested, does the opposite of what Muzika, McDargh, Engler, Epstein, Metcalf, and Aronson posited. Buddhist nun Ayya Khema as well as many other Buddhist teachers in the Insight Meditation tradition teach lovingkindness meditation because it promotes the same kind of intrapsychic wholeness Fairbairn hoped his particular psychoanalysis promoted, but did not. So how are counselors to apply the knowledge gleaned from this study? Is counseling even necessary if Buddhism promotes Remarkable Relational Resilience?

People bring what they bring to Buddhist practice and sangha. It is important to note that some of the women said they have been challenged by depression, and one challenged by suicidal ideation as the result of early childhood sexual abuse. The presence of a Buddhist practice does not mean a person will not have challenges. For example, nearly 8% of the research participants stated that they often feel that they have little control over what happens to them and that their practice does not give their life meaning and purpose. Nearly 7% said that their practice does not help them confront tragedy and suffering, and nearly 8% strongly disagree that they are basically a good and worthwhile person when they fall short of their spiritual ideals. Buddhism does not promote Remarkable Relational Resilience for everyone who practices Buddhism. So, what can counselors learn from this research?

The spiritual journey process is complex, rife with conflict, and requires integration along the way in order to promote Remarkable Relational Resilience. So where should counselors begin? Counselors do well for clients and do well for themselves when they can regulate anxious energy within themselves. A course or practice in mindfulness can be helpful. Pastoral theologian Joretta Marshall suggests that pastoral caregivers take full advantage of opportunities to reflect, theologically, on their own lives as it relates to their “sexuality, orientation, families, and relationships” without expecting their clients to educate the pastoral caregiver about the caregiver’s positions on sexuality, orientation, families, and relationships.¹

A first counseling meeting with an African-American same-sex loving Buddhist woman in the Insight tradition, for many pastoral counselors, may bring many levels of difference—gender, race, sexuality, an understanding of the mind, contemplation, and religion to name a few. If the counselor is aware of how differences contribute to separation yet seeks to create relationship, therapist Jean Baker Miller suggests:

to facilitate movement in relationship, the therapist should know a lot about the strategies of disconnection. They arise out of disconnecting experience. We believe that the central desire of all people is to connect with others. But when people have suffered hurt, danger, humiliation, and many other kinds of disconnection, they continue to try to find whatever connections they can.²

Black Buddhist same-sex loving women who have lived in a society where gender, race, sexuality, and religious discrimination and oppression have persisted may have adopted strategies for disconnection in Buddhist practice itself

if the renunciation ideal is what attracted women to the practice and what keeps them in fantasies about living a renunciate's life. It will take additional study of other Buddhists to know whether strategies of disconnection are predominant in Buddhist householders or lay people. Miller notes five points about authentic client-counselor relationships. Two of those points include: relationship is the bearer of cultural shame,³ and a threat to authentic relationship can be experienced as resistance to mutual impact.⁴

American society has generally shamed same-gender-loving women. Some womanist Christian theologians have largely invisibilized these women, including Audre Lorde and Luisah Teish, whose writings appeared in Alice Walker's 1979 short story, "Coming Apart." Projective identification and the resistance to mutual impact have been established in our culture. Pastoral counselors counseling black Buddhist same-sex loving women should ask themselves whether they have benefitted from the power to shame and determine whether they want to work it out in the counseling relationship, or should instead refer the woman to another counselor. If working together is the mutual decision, the counselor should also contemplate the considerations that follow.⁵ These considerations are inspired by the interviews with Deborah, Norene, Alicia, Mary, and Marcella.

Consideration 1—Refrain from totalizing AABL clients. Each woman who falls into this category is a unique human being.

It may be the case that an African-American woman who is a Buddhist and sexually/romantically involved with a woman does not consider herself lesbian, gay, or same-gender-loving. She may consider herself as having "slipped into something," as one my former clients described her relationship with her female partner of five years. It may be the case that she doesn't claim a Buddhist identity, even though she practices Buddhism, and even though she practices Buddhism, that does not mean she does not see herself as Christian, Yoruba, or something else or a combination of identities.

Consideration 2—Understand that there may be a sequence in the counsellee's identity formation. For example, these women are female before they identify with their religion or religions, and their sexuality and identity may be in formation after the encounter with Buddhism.

Consideration 3—Pastoral counselors should cultivate a desire to therapeutically join with their clients through conscientization.

Pastoral counselors, especially in the Christian tradition, should be mindful of the story of Jesus meeting the Canaanite woman. The moral of the story is that Jesus' prejudices and emotional posture against the polytheistic woman were abandoned in the face of her wisdom, and he rejoiced in learning from her. The polytheistic woman conscientized Jesus and he grew in love and compassion. Counselors should be willing to be conscientized by AABLs in large part because they are largely invisible in society and because many therapists are privileged by, if not participate in, the invisibilization of these women.

Consideration 4—A pastoral counselor/pastoral psychotherapist should practice being compassionate in order to suffer with those who suffer.

A pastoral counselor need not be Buddhist to practice compassion and is encouraged to find compassion practices within their own tradition that leads them to join in the suffering of their clients.⁶ If no such practice exists, a therapist might consider Buddhist meditation because belief in a supreme being or a particular supreme being is not required. When working with these women, using meditation practice (a phenomenological method) can help therapists better understand their patients' suffering and envision ways of helping them work through the suffering. Meditation practice, in particular tonglen, helps cultivate the attunement muscle and can improve one's ability to empathize with others' pain.⁷ Pastoral counselors should take the position of listener, knowing that their African-American lesbian client has been discriminated against in many ways and has perhaps taken many hits in many places in her identity formation. Like the Canaanite woman seeking healing, she also experiences some healing if listened to, and when wisdom is heard, the pastoral counselor, like Jesus, should celebrate. This consideration is consistent with my womanist definition of creating a safe space.

Consideration 5—Become good at timely validation.

Validation is a therapeutic technique often used in Dialectical Behavioral Therapy with people diagnosed as having a Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). BPD is defined, generally, as "a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects, and marked impulsivity, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts."⁸ This consideration is not meant to suggest that all black same-sex loving

Buddhist women experience BPD, but that validation is highly effective for people who are repeatedly invalidated by society in several ways. For example, in the American context, there is not one high profile African-American lesbian or gay male couple. Even when African-American gay people are prominent, attempts are made to invisibilize them. A recent example of this was played out in the public displays of aggression against singer Frank Ocean by singer Chris Brown. Society makes space for heterosexual couples and white same-sex couples to be visible, and with marriage equality, we can expect greater visibility for African-American lesbian couples.

Consideration 6—Cultivate “beginner’s mind” or the Buddhist attitude of open-mindedness, willingness to revisit old material, and renunciation of certainty about the truth.⁹

P.S. Fry, G. Kropf, and K.J. Coe found that white and black counselor trainees used fewer attending skills (asking open- and closed-ended questions, paraphrasing, and reflecting feelings) and more expressive or active counseling skills (e.g., being directive and offering interpretations) with black clients than with white clients.¹⁰ To avoid the error tendency of “summing up” and thereby “shutting up” counselees, counselors should cultivate what Buddhist call “Beginner’s Mind.” In Beginner’s Mind, we acknowledge that we really do not know what we think we know. Either there is more to know, nothing else to know that can be known about ultimate reality, or both paradoxically. Knowing that we do not know helps make space for curiosity.

Consideration 7—Learn to love unconditionally.¹¹

Curiosity without love for the other is information gathering, not relating. Pastoral counselors, investing themselves in clinical proficiency, should also invest in love. Buddhist practitioners are not neutral about compassion and love. Buddhist practitioners seek to become a loving presence in the lives of all others. One of the central suttas in the Insight Meditation Buddhist tradition is the *Metta* (lovingkindness) *Sutta*. A client who has engaged in this practice may want their counselor to treat them as a mother would treat their only child.

Consideration 8—Evaluate the ability of a client to love herself.

Pay attention to evidence of an active self-persecutory impulse within the client and ask her about her ways of expressing self-love. On the topic of self-love, Welwood writes:

The parent-child relationship provides our first experience of the confusing ways in which conditional and unconditional love become mixed up. Although most parents originally feel a vast, choiceless love for their newborn child, they eventually place overt or covert conditions on their love, using it as a way of controlling the child, turning it into a reward for desired behaviors. The result is that as children we rarely grow up feeling loved for ourselves, just as we are. We internalized the conditions our parents put on their love, and this internalized parent (the “superego” or “inner critic”) [Internal Saboteur or persecutory object] often rules our lives. We keep trying to placate this inner voice, which continually judges as never good enough.¹²

If she has no particular ways of self-love, help her discover ways she can express self-love and acceptance of herself, as is. To love herself, *regardless*, as a womanist might say. Loving oneself *regardless*, from a Buddhist mindfulness meditation perspective, according to Kornfield, can look like this:

Painful or threatening experience^a

Unhealthy reaction	Healthy response
Aversion:	Non-contention:
All forms of resisting experience	Freedom and clarity with experience
Anger	Mindfulness
Hatred	Connectedness
Aggression	Compassion
Fear	Concern
Judgment	Strength
Blame	Fearlessness

^aKornfield, 210

Epstein agrees:

Using meditation or therapy to try to shut down parts of our experience is ultimately counterproductive. We do not have to be afraid of entering unfamiliar territory once we have learned how to meet experience with the gentleness of our own minds. Learning to transform obstacles into objects of meditation provides a much-needed bridge between the stillness of the concentrated mind and the movement of real life ... we must learn to respond rather than react.¹³

Consideration 9—Teach counselees how to critique society, culture, the Bible, and the Buddhist suttas.

Black Buddhists women who are same-sex loving, in order to survive the multitude of societal messages telling them they are “less than” others due to racism, homophobia, and Christian supremacy, and also that they do not exist, from a strict Buddhist interpretation of nonself, need to know how to critique society, culture, and religious texts in order to externalize negativity toward herself, and allow her libidinal energy to grow unobstructed by the persecutory object, without guilt and shame.

Consideration 10—Help your client find a supportive community or communities that recognize and honor their multiple identities.

It may be no coincidence that each woman I interviewed was affiliated with Shared Meditation Center or involved in People of Color and LGBTQ sanghas. Recall Alicia stating that she is in multiple sanghas to get multiple identity needs met.

Consideration 11—Adopt a womanist (keeping in mind my definition based on Walker’s 1979 “Coming Apart”) pastoral counseling attitude that privileges the woman’s voice, encourages the externalization of desire for respect, the affirmation of their lovingkindness practices, the renunciation of intentional harm and dualism, and advocacy for wholeness within the black community.

If pastoral counselors, pastoral psychotherapists, spiritual counselors, spiritual psychotherapists, Buddhologists, and Buddhist theologians are working with black lesbian Buddhists, they may be in conversation with these women (especially where there are still traces of Christian identity and where there may be the presence of African spiritualities) about Delores S. Williams’ Vertical Encounter and Transformations of Consciousness. In the Pali Canon, the Buddha had a Vertical Encounter with Brahma, the God of Creation in the Vedic tradition. Just as the Buddha was about to retreat from society after his realization, it was Brahma who encouraged the Buddha to remain in relationship with others, out of compassion for human suffering, to teach humans how to suffer less. A Delores S. Williams’ Afrocentric womanist attitude, in a counseling context, may explore with a client whether vertical encounters that transform consciousness are actually liberating and if so, liberating from what?

Consideration 12—Ask client about specific challenges to forming multiple conjoining identities (keeping Audre Lorde and Fairbairn in mind) and ask whether strengthening any or all and integrating any or all of her identities is a goal for therapy if there are conflicting identities. (The women who provided narratives did not indicate conflicting identities.)

This list of considerations is long, but not exhaustive. The list includes advice on how the pastoral counselor might change the way they think about AABLs, about themselves, and how to utilize Buddhism, Object Relations Theory, and womanist pastoral theories.

BUDDHISM AND THE MIND

The women in this study tend to be interested in the workings of the mind. Those who have sat on long meditation retreats have dedicated themselves to this exploration. I believe this self-exploration qualifies them for a counselor who is analytically minded, not in the classical Freudian sense, but in an Object Relations-Buddhist psychology sense where mindfulness of thoughts and mental formations are practiced, where lovingkindness meditation practice is encouraged, and where meditation retreat experiences are balanced with relational activity in and outside the counseling room. Kornfield, a psychologist, Buddhist, and co-founder of Spirit Rock says:

The fact that aggression, anger, and aversion are built into our universal heritage is only the starting point in Buddhist psychology. After we learn how to face them directly, to see how they arise and function in our life, we must take a revolutionary step. Through profound practice of insight, through nonidentification and compassion, we reach below the very synapses and cells and free ourselves from the grasp of these instinctive forces. With dedication, we discover it is possible to do so.¹⁴

Kornfield recommends, as a psycho-spiritual practice, learning how to be aware, through mindfulness, of how these feelings and drives are operating in the body, know the difference between reaction and response, and imagine how one might honestly claim their emotions rather than blame others.¹⁵ This would be a practice also done outside the counseling room, so homework is involved for the Buddhist Object Relations-oriented pastoral counselor working with these counselees.

A PARTICULAR BLACK CHRISTIAN–BLACK BUDDHIST LESBIAN RELATIONAL HISTORY OF WHICH TO BE MINDFUL

The emphasis on knowing reactions and responses is critical in relation-oriented counseling modalities and “techniques” because, I suspect, many African-American lesbians (be they Buddhist or not) have experienced significant relational breaks that might lead to reactivity when relational challenges are presented by the counselor. Griffin writes:

African Americans have spent their years of freedom seeking to gain respectability by the mainstream as sexually moral beings and overcome the historical labeling as a sexually perverse people. In an effort to receive acceptance from a homophobic society, blacks strongly condemn and deny homosexuality within black communities and churches. While black church leaders and congregants tolerate a gay presence in choirs, congregations, and even the pulpit as long as gays cooperate and stay “in their closeted place,” gays quickly experience the limits of this tolerance if they request the same recognition as their heterosexual counterparts.¹⁶

In my experience, the lack of tolerance is not limited to visibility and the demand for respect within in church, the intolerance can be experienced within the family itself. Black Christian churches that preach a literal adherence to the Bible, and black families associated with those churches that act as church code re-enforcers, may contribute to the internalization of homophobia in counselees before they situate themselves in the Insight tradition. Being situated in the Insight tradition does not automatically erase internalized homophobia. Given the possibility that a Theravadin monastic or an Insight dharma teacher will not be prepared to help a woman re-examine the Bible, pastoral counselors, according to Marshall, should not ignore Biblical passages used to condemn same-gender-loving people. She recommends an examination and re-examination of Genesis 19/Judges 19, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:18–32, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; and 1 Timothy 1:8–11.¹⁷ If an African-American Buddhist woman, who probably grew up in church, fears punishment in absolute reality, she may have some residual inclination toward the literal biblical interpretations against same-gender-loving people. I agree with Marshall. After an 11-year-old boy hanged himself after being teased for being gay, I wrote a booklet re-examining and reinterpreting the Sodom and Gomorrah story.¹⁸ I shared this reinterpretation with clients struggling to accept their sexuality and it provided a helpful reframing away from shame.

IN SEARCH OF REFUGE

Black sexual morality shaped in part by fear of racial oppression can result in the black straight on black LGBTQ discrimination, leading some African-American lesbians to leave their churches in search of a safer spiritual home. Whether women left church looking for a safer spiritual home on the basis of sexual oppression (which many of the research participants did not), they have found a place of relative “gay safety,” but not necessarily “black safety,” in the IMC.

Returning to the Fetzer SEI, there were indications that one woman feared punishment in absolute reality and three women were neutral. Is the fear or ambivalence based on their beliefs about being same-gender-loving? There is no way to know this from the SEI or the interview transcripts, however, given that these women grew up in church and in black families that attended church, a pastoral counselor might attune herself to her client’s spiritual journey for answers.

SPIRITUAL MOVEMENTS FROM CHRISTIANITY TO BUDDHISM

On the spiritual journey from being solely Christian identified to wholly or partially Buddhist identified, several moments in a woman’s life may have taken place and are likely to continue taking place. I call these nonlinear movements self-preservation, rejection, migration, longing, exploration, positive encounter-relocation, integration, re-evaluation, transformation and longing again, letting go, and for some, deity exchange. I coined these movements based on my spiritual journey from United Methodist to Buddhism; Lorde’s spiritual journey from Catholicism to *I Ching* to African spiritualities, to anthroposophy and secularized Buddhism and qigong; and the spiritual journey narratives of Alicia, Deborah, Marcella, Mary, and Norene. A pastoral counselor interested in their counselee’s spiritual journey may be better able to locate the cause(s) of any internalized oppression and help guard against it even if she belongs to a spiritual community that does not speak about that subject. Silence can be interpreted negatively. Returning to the SEI, there were indications that one woman feared punishment in absolute reality and three women were neutral. Taking a look again at the significant and positive correlations between this fear and other variables, we also found some agreement with these statements:

One should not marry someone of a different faith.

It is important that I follow the religious beliefs of my parents.

Obedience to religious doctrine is the most important aspect of my practice.

There is usually only one right solution to any moral dilemma.

A pastoral counselor should listen carefully for evidence of strict adherence to rules and family dynamics as a source of information and understanding about the fear of punishment in absolute reality. Fear can be exacerbated by a variety of situations.

Cadge concluded incorrectly that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are comfortable in all kinds of Buddhist organizations founded by white people across the country. Black lesbians still have to contend with racism within Buddhist communities and pastoral counselors counseling these women would do well to be curious about how their clients' experience their spiritual communities and where there is invalidation or invisibilization, encourage their client to consider joining a friendlier sangha or start one similar to the East Bay Meditation Center or Insight Meditation Community of Washington.

Sanghas, whether they were founded on inclusivity and diversity principles, can be places where black lesbians participate in life-enhancing rituals. Chiara Manodori interviewed six lesbians, one Buddhist, about commitment ceremony and children-related rituals in their spiritual communities and in the counseling room. She found that some of her interviewees were challenged in balancing the suffering caused by homophobia with the "pride and excitement" of coming out.¹⁹ From an object relations perspective, Manodori writes:

Object relationships theorists have placed a great deal of emphasis on how an individual develops the ability to tolerate ambivalence. An individual's ability to "take the bad with the good and ... tolerate both in the same person" is believed to be a sign of healthy development.²⁰

Practices in equanimity helps Buddhists tolerate ambivalence. The ability to take the bad with the good is a value Insight Meditation practitioner's share as evidenced by suttas on accepting the vicissitudes (gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, and pleasure and pain) without clinging, meditation practice, and the privileging of equanimity (along

with compassion, lovingkindness, and sympathetic joy) as a Brahma Vihara.²¹ On the other hand, Buddhists in the Insight Meditation tradition tend to possess their own ambivalences about rituals.

RITUALS

Certain rituals and the meaning placed on those rituals can be considered fetters, or obstacles to enlightenment and *nibbana*. The ten fetters in the *Abhidhamma* include “(1) sensual lust, (2) attachment to existence, (3) aversion, (4) conceit, (5) wrong views, (6) adherence to rites and ceremonies, (7) doubt, (8) envy, (9) avarice, and (10) ignorance.”²² This ambivalence stems from Theravadin teachings on self as *jiva* and *atman*, or soul and spirit, and the Buddha proclaiming no self or no soul at the core of being human. In this context, rituals are considered hindrances:

Among the fetters (*samyojana*) that bind to existence, theism is particularly subject to those of personality-belief, attachment to rites and rituals, and desire for fine-material existence or for a “heaven of the sense sphere,” as the case may be.²³

As long as it is understood in the community that the rituals affirming lesbian identity and child naming are not meant to be construed as believing in the *jiva-atman* self, or in the perpetuation of everlasting life, the ritual should not be terribly problematic and can be supported as an effort to bring compassion and healing to women who suffer oppression. A dharma teacher and/or pastoral counselor may ask women what rituals are meaningful to them. Rituals can be created or co-created to help cultivate equanimity.

FAIRBAIRN’S RELEVANCE?

Given Fairbairn’s negative pseudoscience as it relates to the depravity of same-sex loving people, does he have anything to offer today’s conversations on object relations, counseling, and psychotherapy? According to Fairbairn:

It is an accepted article of the psychoanalytical technique that the analyst should be usually self-effacing. As we know, there are very good reasons for the adoption of such an attitude on his part; but it inevitably has the effect of rendering the object-relationship between patient and analyst somewhat

one-sided from the patient's point of view and thus contributing to resistance. A certain one-sidedness in the relationship between patient and analyst is, of course, inherent in the analytical situation; but it would appear that, when the self-effacing attitude of the analyst is combined with a mode of interpretation based upon a psychology of impulse, a considerable strain is imposed upon the patient's capacity for establishing satisfactory object-relationships (a capacity which must be regarded as already compromised in virtue of the fact that the patient is a patient at all).²⁴

I agree. It is reasonable to adopt the view that a psychoanalytic self-effacing attitude will not be conducive to a working relationship between a counselor and a black Buddhist lesbian when the psychoanalysis is based on impulse interpretation. Fairbairn's recommendation is to

1) enable the patient [counselee or client] to release from his [or hers or their] unconscious "buried" bad objects which have been internalized; 2) promote a dissolution of the libidinal bonds whereby the patient is attached to indispensable bad objects; 3) situations should be interpreted not in terms of gratification but in terms of object-relationships; 4) libidinal strivings should be represented as ultimately dictated by object-love and therefore is good; 5) libidinal badness should be related to the cathexis of bad objects; 6) guilt situations should be related by interpretation to bad object situations; 7) caution should be exercised over interpretations in terms of aggression except perhaps in the case of depressives.²⁵

Again, I agree. In terms of psychological health, I am making the determination from a "reformed" Fairbairnian Object Relations Theory and Buddhist psychology. From a reformed Fairbairnian Object Relations Theory, I am suggesting that Fairbairn was correct in theorizing that people tend to be healthier when they are more relational. African-American Buddhist lesbians have demonstrated their concern for others, an openness for difference, and the ability to individuate themselves from others without becoming separatists. His belief that same-gender-loving people are not innately relational has been proved incorrect, not only by me and the women in this study, but by countless same-sex loving people throughout generations and across the world, and by researchers in many disciplines over time. It is reasonable to conclude that most of these women have experienced psycho-spiritual well-being despite living in a society that has elements and different levels of devaluation, discrimination, oppression, and invisibilization. In order to understand how Buddhist practice has helped them experience psycho-spiritual well-being, I attempted, through quantitative analysis, to correlate

questions from the Fetzer SEI related to spiritual practice, with the SEI questions related to spiritual experience. Given my experiences in meditating and leading meditation groups, as well as the narratives of those who, through lovingkindness meditation, have worked through various levels of hatred, including self-hatred, I support lovingkindness meditation as a contemporary (though ancient) intervention for detoxifying the persecutory object. Lovingkindness meditation does not require much up-front money for instruction, may not require dependency on another individual (though the presence of a loving guiding teacher that the meditator can be beneficial), and presents other benefits, like managing stress and de-intensifying ego energies that can lead to an overactive persecutory object.

DETOXIFYING THE PERSECUTORY OBJECT

The women I interviewed agree that their practice helps them be resilient in the presence of numerous and life-long narcissistic wounding that would cause others to seek “schizoid shelter” in isolated, long-term meditation practices. These long-term meditation practices are usually led by monastics and white dharma teachers who have not yet espoused a theology or Buddhology of black liberation.

I anticipate that a continuing dialogue between Buddhists and Christians on the wilderness and deep wilderness experiences of transformation of consciousness, as Delores S. Williams envisioned the wilderness and positive transformations of consciousness, would be rich. If group identity leads to liberation, why would Buddhists not support the creation and participation in People of Color and LGBTQ sanghas that help cohere group identity? Conversely, if giving up black consciousness and identifying with “alien” and “destructive” forms of consciousness is what is happening to African-American lesbians in Buddhist communities, why are they not destroyed but instead strengthened by their Buddhist practice? The wilderness and deep wilderness experiences, and the wildernesses of these unanswered questions, provides a motivation for journeying, discovering, and awakening for those interested in Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

NOTES

1. Marshall, 155.
2. Jean Baker Miller, et al., *Therapists' Authenticity, the Complexity of Connection: Writings from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2004), 65.

3. Ibid., 79.
4. Miller, et al., 80.
5. Pamela Ayo Yetunde, "Identity Development in African-American Christian Lesbians and Culturally—Appropriate Treatment Considerations," final paper for Developing Intercultural Competency in Pastoral Counseling, Columbia Theological Seminary, 2013. This list of considerations is adapted from that paper.
6. As a Buddhist practitioner, I dedicate my practice and work to understanding suffering and the way through suffering. This understanding comes from meditation practice, reading Buddhist scriptures (The Pali Canon), and from sangha (Buddhist church). It is said that there are three jewels in Buddhism: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Through the Buddha we learn about privilege, delusion, anxiety, renunciation, wisdom and teaching/learning. Through the dharma we learn how to observe phenomena, determine truths, and experiment with healing. The dharma jewel is like strengthening one's phenomenological muscles of ascertaining reality. Through the sangha we learn how to be in spiritual community.
7. Tonglen meditation is a Tibetan Buddhist practice of visualizing one who is suffering, breathing in as you image how they suffer, and breathing out as you envision how you might help that person suffer less. Tonglen is a practice in leaning toward others rather than away from others.
8. American Psychiatric Association, *DSM V*, 325.
9. "Shosin, Access to Insight" (accessed January, 13, 2016), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shoshin>.
10. Robert T. Carter, *The Influence of Race and Racial Identity in Psychotherapy* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1995), 51.
11. Pamela Cooper-White, *Many Voices: Pastoral Psychotherapy in Relational and Theological Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 244. I agree with pastoral psychotherapist Cooper-White. By learning to love unconditionally that love should not be sentimental or the attachment to a pattern of nice behavior but nonpossessive and compassionate.
12. Ibid., 254.
13. Epstein, *Going to Pieces Without Falling Apart*, 130.
14. Kornfield, 209.
15. Ibid., 220.
16. Griffin, 21.
17. Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural passages are from the Thompson Chain-Reference Study Bible, New King James Version, compiled and edited by Frank Charles Thompson, published by B.B. Kirkbridge Bible Co., Inc., Indianapolis, IN.
18. Pamela Yetunde, *The Healing of Sodom and Gomorrah: A Path to Compassion and Liberation for All* (Atlanta, GA: Marabella Press, 2010).

19. Chiara Manodori, "This Powerful Opening of the Heart," *Journal of Homosexuality* 36, no. 2 (1998): 54.
20. Ibid.
21. Thera and Bodhi, 198.
22. Bodhi, *Abhidhammattha Sangaha*, 269.
23. "Buddhism and the God-Idea, Access to Insight," <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/godidea.html> (accessed January, 13, 2016).
24. Fairbairn, "Endopsychic Structure Considered in Terms of Object-Relationships," 87.
25. Ibid.