

Authors Meet Critics

Adam J. Greteman

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Kevin J. Burke

University of Georgia

AN INTRODUCTION TO *ON LIKING THE OTHER: QUEER SUBJECTS AND RELIGIOUS DISCOURSES*

Tensions often run high when LGBTQ+ lives and discourses intersect with religious lives and discourses. This can be especially true when each is manifest in an individual person who is, for instance, both gay and religious. Such tensions erupt onto the public scene under headlines about a gay teacher being fired from a Catholic school or a perceived assault on religious freedom in the name of non-discrimination. Sides are taken, creating an idea that the two sides —always two sides —shall never meet, never see eye to eye. Yet, when we move beyond the outrage made manifest often at a remove by the vicissitudes of a given news cycle, we find ourselves walking in our contexts and communities where we encounter these complications, perhaps differently. As we meet people in their flesh and blood, conversing with them face to face, the supposed two sides become more complex. These complications become particularly evident in schools where teachers and students meet one another surrounded by the swirling news amidst their own becoming. A teacher, especially in the US south at the moment, may find themselves wondering if they can talk about their same-sex partner or teach material that is inclusive of LGBTQ+ people. Or a religious student might be concerned that their religiosity will position them to be seen in a particular light, causing them to be unsure of or how to articulate their views. These may not, in fact, be literally equal concerns in terms of ramifications for career, or physical safety, but they remain concerns that exist and which must be addressed. The complexities continue dependent on the place and time.

The stuff of Teacher Education is the stuff of complex relationships. It is, in part, Teacher Education where students-becoming-teachers are introduced to a dizzying array of issues, theories, histories, and practices that are thought to

be necessary to the work of teaching. Within that work—the work of Teacher Education—the complexities of teachers, students, and the ways in which they interact add another layer. How to contemplate one’s future work as a teacher while engaged with professors tasked with your formation as a teacher? How does one’s own complex personhood come to be seen and experienced as one thinks about one’s self entering an imagined future classroom no longer the student, but having become the teacher?

It is this set of complications—ever present in classrooms but difficult to engage—that sits at the heart of our book *On Liking the Other: Queer Subjects and Religious Discourses*.¹ The book emerged out of our shared conversations about moments in our Teacher Education classes (Art Education and English Education respectively) where LGBTQ+ and religious identities and ideas would come into conflict. As we talked through such moments, we found ourselves drawing on a range of perspectives—often queer and theological—to not just make meaning but do justice to the real anxieties and fears presented by student teachers. Fortunately, we had already engaged some of this work in our first book, *The Pedagogies and Politics of Liking*, which offered an historical and philosophical engagement with “liking” as word, affect, and concept.²

We continued to wonder around the topic. “Liking” persisted in seemingly ubiquitous ways as it has infused its way into everyday conversations—from the verbal tic that is the bane of many a teacher’s existence and the action of “liking” something on social media. Liking seemed to offer a different way forward into potential educational controversy because of its quite mundane, even banal, simplicity. Liking, we argued, offers an ethically open idea that is connected to, but possibly distinct, in generative ways, from loving, hating, and caring for the other.

Like—in its various iterations and permutations—has yet to be thoroughly engaged and explored as a sensibility for teaching. Still, after two monographs and a few articles, we are not necessarily convinced ourselves that it does anything radically new or different, something Ann Chinnery touches on in her critique of the book. However, we think it might offer ways in the everydayness of Teacher Education (and we imagine more generally) to engage tensions that so often become heated.

Throughout *On Liking the Other* we were invested in exploring the tensions and potentials at intersections that are present when “religion,” “sexuality,” and “gender” discourses and identities enter the Teacher Education classroom. Here, we wanted to think with, in particular, a set of theological concepts and theorists often absent in Teacher Education generally. We focused on Teacher Education specifically and what we consider to be its somewhat unique classroom, which is simultaneously preparing students to become teachers themselves by thinking about and through instructional, curricular, and pedagogical strategies while also providing those same students with an education themselves in the histories, philosophies, theories, and practices of education, not to mention, of course, the specific insights rooted in the different subject areas (for example, social studies, art, English, science, physical education).

In addition to these purposes, Teacher Education also has a responsibility for engaging local communities that support, condition, and regulate how student teachers gain experience in “apprentice” or “student teaching” contexts. Teacher Education programs are never only situated in the so-called ivory tower but are intimately connected to the local (and sometimes so local) contexts in which their (or our) students, student-teach. What should we say, for instance, when K-12 students approach our student teachers and let them know they will be praying for them? What should we do when our own student teachers do the same for us, especially when they imply that they are praying for our conversion? Is it our job to “convert” them into something different, someone who does not wish to convert us?

Conversion was of interest since acts of conversion, when turned outward, are rooted in conversations with an “other” in the hope that the “other” will become like one’s self, converted to one’s side or one’s beliefs. In becoming like one’s self, the other is erased. Like-mindedness prevails. Such acts of conversion are, in the West, tied to histories of colonialism, homophobia, and nationalism that inflict shame, violence, and erasure on those queer, non-Christian, non-White “others” toward which they are oriented. Such work of conversion is done, in a simple sense, through the work of conversation. However, while etymologically tied, etymology is not destiny. As Jane Roland Martin suggested in *Reclaiming the Conversation*,

A good conversation is neither a fight nor a contest. Circular in form, cooperative in nature, and constructive in intent, it is an interchange of ideas by those who see themselves not as adversaries but as human beings come together to talk and listen and learn from one another.³

We sought, through conversation in *On Liking the Other*, to do something else, perhaps more banal—which like often is—to come to different, maybe new, understandings of shared topics and/or curiosities together. We centralized the concept of liking as it helped us move to the side of those more weighted and fraught concepts such as loving, hating, and caring that garner far more attention in educational practices and philosophies. This is not because liking is a panacea that doesn't suffer its own limitations, but as Catholic Theologian James Alison argued “like” opens up in distinction from, in important ways, love, because,

the word ‘like,’ is rather more difficult to twist into a lie than the word ‘love,’ because we know when someone likes us. We can tell because they enjoy being with us, alongside us, want to share our time and company.⁴

In liking the other—in liking our students, in them liking one another and liking us—can we find forms of enjoyment that move to the side of those more well-traveled demands—well historicized and theorized already—to love, hate, or care for the other? We are not sure, of course. Nor, in moving to the side of those well-worn concepts is ours an attempt to supersede them. Rather, liking the other we propose might provide room to re-engage the tensions with a different, less heated, sensibility.

EDUCATING FOR SHALOM

Given that our book centralizes the work of conversation, we appreciate—as Clarence Joldersma offered in his paper—a turn to his own pedagogical approach when these issues at the tension points of religion, gender, and sexuality emerge in his own classroom at a Christian Reformed college.⁵ Joldersma generously joins our conversation by thinking through “Educating for Shalom.” Educating for Shalom, as he illustrated, however is not rooted in liking, but rather returns to recuperating love and expanding it through a close engagement with the Bible in ways we Catholics—including the broad experien-

tial and theological frameworks we draw upon—often miss. Joldersma’s move, while not taking up liking, we sense is aligned with our own interest in what “theologies” might offer if taken up and taken seriously in Teacher Education. The *Bible*, in this instance, becoming a legitimate text through which evidence is found and engaged to teach. This close engagement illustrates a move toward basic justice. Joldersma pointing out, quite cleverly, to his students the extreme disparity between verses on “justice” (over 2000) and those focused on sodomy (7) in the *Bible*.⁶ This quantitative move assists in his pedagogical approach to expanding conceptions of Christian love for his students.

Love, Joldersma maintains in his approach, can be expanded and this expansion is rooted in thinking with the multiple storylines of scripture: “God as creator and sustainer . . . God as consummator, and . . . God as deliverer and redeemer.”⁷ Love, as the commandment states is no simple concept or practice. Rather for Joldersma it is a central lesson toward engaging his students’ religious identities within his particularized context: at a fairly conservative and certainly emphatically religious college. Within such a context there is time, space, and impetus for engaging religion openly on its own terms and through its particularized languages and logics. In joining our conversation, Joldersma offers important inroads in how thinking with theologies can assist educational conversations. Yet, what might “Educating for Shalom” look like in public colleges of education and, further, how does the kind of proof texting he’s gently pressing his students on perhaps challenge our own sense of what gets leveraged as ‘evidence’ in so-called secular spaces?

There is, too, something important to attend to in the story of Joseph Kuilema, a former faculty member and colleague of Clarence’s at Calvin University. Kuilema was effectively fired from his assistant professorship for having officiated at the same-sex marriage of some of his former students from Calvin; this came after he was, earlier, denied tenure—but retained as a faculty member with a vague promise of, perhaps, future tenure possibilities—by the board of trustees for perceived non-conformism around LGBTQ+ issues at the school.⁸ Consonant with Joldersma’s approach, Kuilema sought counsel from a minister at the Christian Reformed congregation at which he is an elder; he also sought support and received it from his department chair and program director. He

worked within established channels, in other words, and having found support from authoritative sources (much like the Bible in Joldersma's account) proceeded in a fashion consonant with an Education for Shalom. He blessed the love of his LGBTQ+ students having embraced the notion of God as redeemer and deliverer, seeking to enrich their lives in ways continuous with the faith out of which he and his students began their encounter. And he was fired. This does not, to be clear, undo the important work that Joldersma does as a teacher and a scholar, but it does suggest the potential limits of remaining in a frame that takes love, religious love, on its own terms even if those terms are made more expansive in certain corners of the faith. Because, of course, such love can just as easily, and from the same authoritative source, be made into a cudgel again. Liking doesn't solve this dilemma, *per se*, but it does in our argument allow for working beside established traditions, seeking new orientations forward, rather than proceeding from within them.

We find, more importantly, an affinity with Joldersma's approach. Despite his skepticism about our turn to liking, we are more interested and invested in the work of theologies as a component of these conversations. Theologies and theological engagement with these issues we believe might offer inroads into taking seriously the concerns presented by LGBTQ+ and religious students that may not come to any kumbaya moment but may allow a shared recognition of existence. We don't need our queer discourse partners to love theology, nor theological discourse partners to love queer theories. Yet, both might, however, become more curious at how such discourses can accompany us in their tensions, as we think problems of Teacher Education anew

EXPANDING THE CONVERSATION

Ann Chinnery offers us, in a related way, a model of engaging such issues within the context of British Columbia, Canada, which takes an avowedly secular approach. An underlying aspect of *On Liking the Other* is the explicit need to remember the ways in which schools are rooted in particular places with particular policies that contribute to a rich, albeit complex, tapestry of schools. Chinnery's critique makes clear that these tensions—so evident in the United States—are not universal. The problems that emerge when LGBTQ+ and religious subjects enter the classroom are not intractable, but rooted in

policies and politics that regulate the work of education (for better or worse). Though certainly something like Tonya Callaghan's *Homophobia in the Hallways* and Jen Gilbert's work helps us think through the limits of the juridical in the face of bigotry in Canadian schooling.⁹ Beyond this, however, Ann is importantly skeptical of our turn to liking, confirming we suspect that liking in its banality faces an uphill climb when matched with the mountains of work on concepts like love, hate, and as Ann brings into the conversation "ethical care." We are in agreement with Ann about the use and importance of ethical care within Teacher Education. We are not opposed to care as a central ethical task within schools. However, we think care has had its fair share of exploration. Indeed, in our first book on liking, we spent a great deal of time thinking with Nel Noddings and others in large part because of the potential overlaps conceptually. We wrote at the time,

We care for loved ones and loved ones care for us. This is beautiful and complicated. And we like such relations as we, ourselves inhabit them in our own lives care is something we like. And care is complicated as ethically it asks us to care for those we dislike or perhaps even hate ... love and care have, in essence, always gone hand in hand.¹⁰

It is the strong overlap between care and love that gives us pause as there is a significant affective tie there that leads, we worry, to the possibility of hatred. Such strong affective responses, we fear, lead to weaponization, though certainly not always and the intervention of liking seeks to do something, as we note, that removes the potential frisson that alights along the line of love-care-hate. Because we also like thinking with common linguistic tics that point toward deeper meanings, we think it's perhaps worth considering the ways in which, in reference to certain kinds of parents, students, and families, 'they just don't care about education' is leveraged to do certain kinds of exclusionary and supremacist work that perhaps outline the limits of a term. Does liking do something radically different? Maybe not, but it also might allow us new ways to think about the limits, opportunities, and problems of caring (Too much? Too little? For?).

Ann concludes with a worry "that the concept of liking may bring different baggage to the pedagogical relation, especially in a teacher certification

program, that may create more problems than it solves.”¹¹ Indeed she, rightly, points out that liking might be turned to a compulsion toward likeness that hangs particularly heavily on racialized others most especially in education. We wondered alongside Sara Ahmed’s work as well in our earlier book, in particular thinking about the ways in which like travels as a concept through likability, likeness and the concurrent production of ‘unlikeness’ not because liking itself gets us to a more equitable outcome necessarily but because the word, its uses and conceptual freight needs a great deal more unpacking for its limitations and opportunities.¹² Which is to say, Chinnery is perhaps right that liking fails a test here, but we think in the hoary sentiment of all research, perhaps more work might help us better understand the limits of the frame here.

As we sat with this worry, we realized that perhaps our interest with liking is, in part, to carry different baggage and cause different problems. To quote a scene from *Rent*: “La Vie Boheme” we might remember Roger and Mimi singing to one another that “I’m looking for baggage that goes with mine.” This line comes moments before their beepers go off to remind them to take their AZT—as they thus realize they indeed carry similar baggage. Liking we know carries its own baggage and its own problems. And these may be uniquely queer bags and problems as they seek to travel to the side of concepts that have in various ways “constituted queer subjects,” but that queer subjects now seek to reimagine. Perhaps queer subjects—LGBTQ+ and religious—are tired of the heightened discourses of love and hate ... instead seeking a reprieve to catch their breathes and relate differently, more gently, as they learn to like themselves and the other. They join the conversation at different entry points. They use it to their own liking. Ann helps us to continue to realize that education is always context dependent, which is what we hoped to lift up in the book. We’re positioned differently and this has become very apparent in the last year as various states pass so-called “Don’t Say Gay” bills alongside states that have passed legislation mandating the inclusion of LGBTQ+ histories. Both approaches implicate teacher educators and their students in vastly different ways. Yet, we’d do well to remember that such a moment presents the same conundrum: regulation is not implementation leaving teachers, students, student-teachers, and teacher educators continued challenges of engaging one another.

GENEROUS REGARD

Barb Stengel moves to the side of our focus on Teacher Education, even as it is her “bread and butter” to tease out a different layer of *On Liking*. She turns to explore our “underlying deconstruction of religious and queer” through her own experiences, which have taught her “being religious has a queer character about it, and being queer requires that one tap similar energies and possibilities as being religious.”¹³ For Stengel, lived experiences with the everydayness of both religiosity and queerness create a bridge between the two since, in life, they are rarely separated. Rather, the work becomes one of developing ways of dissolving the tension between them through difficult conversations that promote not only recognition but acknowledgement. What Stengel homes in on is a sense that the concept of liking itself is both open and general, while perhaps having concrete implications in practice if attended to with some measure of seriousness. There may not be, in other words, anything too weighty about the intervention liking makes philosophically. Rather, within Teacher Education the usefulness of liking might outweigh, as Stengel proposes, its philosophical heft.

Stengel, like Joldersma and Chinnery, turns to moments in her own life as an educator where tension between religious and queer ideas and identities emerges. Most relevant to our argument is her engagement with a live-actor simulation that tasks student-teachers with coming face-to-face with students—one gay, the other evangelical, both wanting to find safety in a classroom discussing same-sex marriage. Yet, safety might not be possible for both students at the same time and recognition of this reality by student teachers often leads them to “the experience of being pulled up short.” Being pulled up short in the simulation disrupts and unsettles student-teachers’ sense of certainty which at best can assist student-teachers in the on-going work of understanding others, notably students who bring diverse views and needs into the shared space and time of a class. Being pulled up short—drawn from Gadamer—becomes in these moments an experience that does not affirm identity, but unsettles its certainty. Teacher educators, in such moments of reflection, cultivate for themselves and their student-teachers habits of generous regard for the challenging work of education where these tensions are always already present.

The presence of such tensions is the stuff of education as the tensions allow for an unpacking not only of the intellectual landscape but the affective and material experiences of students' embodied realities. The usefulness of liking—and its move towards generous regard in Stengel's hands—is focused less on the political arena and more on the everydayness of classrooms where students interact with one another and their teachers to make meaning of the world, the self, and others. Heated political discourses may very well serve purposes in the public realm and certainly hold consequences for people's everyday lives, including our everyday lives in classrooms. Yet, within those classrooms there is space and time to cultivate habits that both recognize the complexities of being while acknowledging that such being exists alongside others for whom the world looks, sounds, and feels different. There might then be a new language emerging, which shifts experience, for describing theory and practice in education. Such language reframes the queer and the religion in their simultaneity so that both, together, are regarded generously.

CONCLUSION

The tensions that exist between religious and queer experiences and discourses after publication of our book, as well as our Author-Meets-Critics session in March 2022, have become more politically salient. Issues that we could see on the horizon as possible within the legal landscape have come further to light. We can look at the *Kennedy v. Bremerton* case as it has redefined legal precedent as regards school prayer. And we can look at the continued new and heartbreaking stories of LGBTQ+ teachers being fired often for the public sin of acknowledging their queerness. Teachers more broadly conceived in this moment—be they religious or LGBTQ+ or both/and—are being made queer for the ways in which their lives as public figures are put under the microscope as they interact with, instruct, and inevitably change their students. There's a great deal of love and hate being seeded in the discourse, and we might suggest as well, an appropriation of care along the way—won't someone please think of the students, they yell incessantly into the void of social media stardom and local political narcissism.

In his deeply ambivalent book about the Catholic Church's various responses to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and early 1990s, Michael O'Loughlin

touches on the well-known viciousness of prelates like Cardinal O'Connor in New York as is both right and required. As well, however, he chronicles the interventions rooted in mercy, care, and we would suggest, liking, of a great many gay and straight laypersons and avowed religious men and women along the way. The idea was, ultimately, to comfort the sick and provide succor for the outcast most often while holding formal religion both close and at arm's length. The work might be best summed up by a straight woman, part of a thriving parish in the Castro that served a large population of gay men struggling with, dying from, and living with HIV and AIDS: "What straight people have to do, and I'm straight, is to learn to have a little compassion and understanding."¹⁴ Maybe this isn't asking enough of straight people, just as we might not be asking enough of, for instance, devout Christians teaching LGBTQ+ students. But perhaps seeking compassion and understanding, looking to produce liking, is a first step towards something different, something outside of the weighted answers of the past rooted in love, care, and hate. And perhaps it is within Teacher Education where such a step can be taken first.

1 Kevin J. Burke and Adam J. Greteman, *On Liking the Other: Queer Subjects and Religious Discourses* (Gorham, ME: Myers Education Press, 2021).

2 Adam Greteman and Kevin Burke, *The Pedagogies and Politics of Liking* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

3 Jane Roland Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation: The Ideal of the Educated Woman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 10

4 James Alison, *On Being Liked* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003), 107.

5 Clarence W. Joldersma, "Reducing the Tension Between Queer Identity and Religious Discourses by Expanding the Idea of Religious Love: An Example," *Philosophy of Education* 78, no. 4 (same issue).

6 Joldersma shared this pedagogical practice during the conversation held during the 2022 meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society, but it does not appear in his final critique.

7 Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Seeking Justice in Hope," in *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition Amid Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and William Henry Katerberg (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 83.

8 Jack Stripling, “This Professor Officiated at a Gay Wedding. Then He Lost His Job.,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 27, 2022, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/this-professor-officiated-at-a-gay-wedding-then-he-lost-his-job>.

9 Tonya D. Callaghan, *Homophobia in the Hallways: Heterosexism and Transphobia in Canadian Catholic Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); Jen Gilbert, “‘Let us Say Yes to Who or What Turns Up’: Education as Hospitality,” *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* 4, no. 1 (2006): 25-34.

10 Greteman and Burke, *The Pedagogies and Politics of Liking*, 13.

11 Ann Chinnery, “The Challenges of Liking in Pedagogical Relations,” *Philosophy of Education* 78, no. 4 (same issue).

12 Greteman and Burke, *The Pedagogies and Politics of Liking*, 79.

13 Barbara S. Stengel, “Exploring the Nexus of Queer and Religious,” *Philosophy of Education* 78, no. 4 (same issue).

14 Michael J. O’Loughlin, *Hidden Mercy: AIDS, Catholics, and the Untold Stories of Compassion in the Face of Fear* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2021), 191.