

Blacketer

### Senior Seminar Write Up

A lot of the comic is focused on chapter eleven (Vail et al. 2019) of the Handbook of Terror Management Theory. They mention how religion is used to guarantee some form of immortality and I directly reference that on page three of the comic. I don't want immortality, especially not the kind that Christianity uses, so I drew myself with partially torn out wings to represent that. It is explained that in general terror management theory is a way to deal with the fact that we are mortal, and I referenced that in the comic by showing that instead of using religion to cope I have accepted just being another animal that will die. One issue though is that I have nothing to fall back on to deal with existential dread, which is described as another function of religion. The swirl imagery on page two doesn't show dread well but does reference the fact that life is confusing and overwhelming when you don't have things that help you cope. I have faced a lot of derogation which is why I present myself as a satanic being in the final page. While I do not believe in that either I have been called evil and satanic for just not being Christian and therefore decided to lean into it as a form of rebellion. The open mindedness of different people and how they interact with religion is also explained. Since I want to be respectful of others' beliefs, I often get people pushing me to just try harder to believe and I show that I have given it a chance but not really felt anything. One part of my trauma is also being forced to pretend I believe to get things like food and I just used one panel to show me being hurt by those beliefs. According to the chapter open minded people also desire to believe even if in the end they don't, and I find that true of myself. On page five of the comic, I state that I want to be able to believe there is magic in the world and that humanity has some kind of special purpose but for some reason I just can't no matter how hard I try. When facing near death experiences people also tend to see things that relate to their religious beliefs, and I don't share that experience. My near-death

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experience directly involved my religious trauma and the arrow in the comic is meant to be symbolic. I felt like I was slipping but didn't see anything but of the sides of my vision going black and the things around me getting blurry before everything truly just went black. Before that I had some moments of clear thought where I figured I was probably going to die and just accepted that. It felt like I was losing all my senses, but it was peaceful instead of stressful. I came back to being conscious later and had no choice but to pretend it never happened.

Multiple works discuss the importance of community and religion and how they result in better health. Lynn et al. looks at stress through cortisol and found that while specifically being Pentecostal may not help general religious beliefs do, likely because of the ritual and community (2010). I mention in the comic how I don't have a regular community to fall back on or beliefs that give my life purpose like people who are actively religious. Meezenbroek et al. focuses on spirituality instead of religion but explains how generally these types of beliefs are helpful to people when they need something to keep them wanting to live in the face of medical uncertainty (2012). I don't only struggle with religion but also spirituality in general so I can't use any of it as a coping mechanism. Cultural consensus is another aspect of community which I feel like I lack (Dressler, 2020). Growing up in Colorado Springs and the nearby rural areas religion, and especially Christianity, is something that the majority of people seemed to believe in. It has always been assumed that I should know Bible stories when they are referenced and that I share those beliefs, but I don't. Even though this is my culture I feel like I am an outsider and like I'm not pulling from the same cultural basis as everyone else. This is why throughout the comic I draw myself separated from others. The intensity of color also represents religious beliefs while everyone is the same animal to show that we are technically from the same group. Durkheim, as a functionalist, sees religion as something that functions to keep communities together and I find

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in this case it is correct that I feel distanced due to my lack of it (*Sociology 250 - Notes on Durkheim*, 2003).

Both religion and spirituality are seen as universal and yet I don't feel like I experience them. I opened the comic on that because it seems to be a very common belief that I wanted to challenge. Vail et al. describes religion as being "naturally intuitive" to most and, while I understand why people want to believe, I can't grasp it myself (2019). Piedmont and Leach start their article saying that spirituality can be perceived as a universal experience backed up by science but then I ask why it is such a struggle for me (2002).

It probably seems like God is something everyone believes in because the majority of the United States is Christian (Bialecki, 2017). There is an issue with Christian nationalism which wasn't part of my original religious trauma but has become important. My mother wasn't religious when I was a child but has swung hard into the beliefs Bialecki describes. She believes that the US is a Christian nation, that Christians are under attack, and that Trump has been chosen by God. For my comic this is another reason I chose to portray myself as rebellious and satanic in the end. The change in my mother's behavior has made that my current state and portraying myself that way ties the comic to my experiences now. While I don't think having religious beliefs are bad, I feel the need to fight against extremism like this.

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