We assessed psychological, sociological and demographic predictors of womanist identity development in college and community women (N=238). Stepwise linear regressions highlighted significant individual, social and demographic predictors of womanist identity, SES, sexual orientation, depression, and multiple aspects of moral injury at the Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emergence, and Internalization stages of womanist identity.

### Background

Womanism (Walker, 1983; Brown, 1989) is an intersectional approach to feminism. The Ossana, Helms & Leonard's (1992) womanist identity development model moves from an externally to internally sourced definition of womanist identity (Koenig, Cross's, 1979) racial identity development models, Ossana, Helms & Leonard's (1992) model contains four stages:

1. Preencounter: women conform to society's stereotypical gender roles and unconsciously think and behave in ways that devalue their in.
2. Encounter: women question their previously accepted values and beliefs of the preencounter stage after experiencing alternative ways of being and living.
3. Immersion-Emergence: women reject society's patriarchal definition of womanhood.
4. Internalization: women internalize a positive view of womanhood. They reject society's patriarchal definition of womanhood and develop an internal one.

Moral injury results from experiencing transgressions against "deeply held moral beliefs and expectations" (Litz et al., 2009) and betrayal by a person in legitimate authority in a high-stakes situation (Shay, 2014). This extend moral injury research to women's experiences in a sociopolitical environment which threatens women's rights and often endangers the vulnerable.

We hypothesized that psychological factors – specifically aspects of moral injury, sociological factors – especially political ideology and assault, and demographic factors including age and SES would predict woman's scores on different stages of womanist identity development.

### Results

We conducted stepwise linear regression analyses for all variables of interest on stage in the womanist identity model. Standardized (β) are reported allowing comparisons of the relative strength of the variables.

#### Preencounter

(β=0.10, F12=3.130, p=0.001) was significantly predicted by a conservative political orientation (β=0.28, p<0.001) and feelings of guilt (β=0.16, p<0.001).

#### Encounter

(β=0.20, F12=12.91, p=0.001) was significantly predicted by a liberal personal political rating (β=0.21, p<0.001), guilt (β=0.13, p<0.001), self-conditioning (β=0.25, p<0.001), younger age (β=0.18, p=0.002), and heterosocial orientation (β=0.17, p<0.001).

#### Immersion-Emergence

(β=0.38, F12=21.62, p<0.001) was predicted by a liberal personal political rating (β=0.36, p<0.001), guilt (β=0.27, p<0.001), younger age (β=0.16, p=0.003), betrayal (β=0.21, p<0.001), loss of meaning (β=0.08, p=0.003), and SES (β=0.12, p<0.02). Immersion-Emergence is associated with being politically liberal, younger, and having feelings of self-conditioning. The relationship between Immersion-Emergence and Immersion/Emergence is feelings of betrayal, lower SES, and an increased sense of meaning in life.

#### Internalization

was not well predicted (R2=0.023, F12=5.65, p<0.018) by depressive symptoms (β=0.15, p<0.018).

### Discussion

#### Womanist identity development

Ossana, Helms & Leonard (1992), Carter & Parks, (1996) is a fluid and inclusive process (Brack, Yoder & Berendsen, 2004). We believe this study is the first to identify the role of moral injury in reaction to an oppressive sociopolitical environment along with other psychological and sociological predictors in womanist identity development.

Women scoring high in Preencounter typically conform to stereotypical gender roles and may accept male dominance. Conservative personal political ideology and feelings of guilt were significant predictors of the Preencounter stage. Perhaps a conservative political ideology suggests complacency with a patriarchal system and limited value placed on women's rights as an internalization of the role of moral injury reflected in self-blaming guilt. Interestingly, Preencounter was positively correlated with Encounter and negatively correlated with Immersion-Emergence.

Women scoring high in Encounter have likely experienced situations that initiate internal crisis and bring gender discrimination directly into their awareness. We found that Encounter was significantly predicted by two aspects of moral injury - guilt and self-conditioning. This stage also sees a shift to liberal political ideology, which is more consistent with awareness of inequities in women's and less advantaged people's rights. Interestingly, heterosocial orientation was associated with being in the womanist Encounter stage; perhaps LGBTQ+ women identified more with their sexual identities than womanhood at this stage. Younger age, guilt, and political orientation are predictors of the disruption associated with Encounter, which may be explained by younger women's acute awareness of their surroundings as they navigate their identity. Encounter was strongly and positively correlated with Immersion-Emergence supporting the similarity of these disruption driven stages of identity development.

#### Womanist identity development

Women scoring high on Immersion-Emergence reject a patriarchal definition of womanhood and desire affiliation with other self-affirming women. Similar to Encounter, Immersion-Emergence is associated with being politically liberal, younger, and with continued moral aspects of self-conditioning and guilt. New predictor variables first significant in Immersion-Emergence included feelings of betrayal – likely by others and systems that devalue women, lower SES (which heightens awareness of social inequities) and increased meaning in life, which may be driven by one's sense of freedom in rejecting a patriarchal definition of womanhood and joining forces with other like-minded women. Immersion-Emergence was the only stage significantly correlated with Internalization. The relationship was inverse, which is reasonable as this stage involves inner turns to our identities and who we are.

Finally, women with high scores on Internalization have developed an internal and positive definition of womanhood. As an individualized experience, Internalization was not well predicted by our study variables. Only depression was significant, perhaps reflecting a bit of address (but no strong predictors of any of the three stages of Depression). It is possible that as their womanist identity face the realities of discrimination and work to support one another. Future studies can develop a positive gender identity free of guilt and condensation as well as examine moral injury result not just from PTSD qualifying traumas, but also from persistent discrimination, harassment, and devastation based on gender and in other marginalized groups.