

# history theatre



## **God Girl**

**Written by Kristine Holmgren**

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## **Table Of Contents**

A Conversation with Playwright Kristine Holmgren

Introduction to Presbyterian Church

Women Ministers in the Presbyterian Church

Women and Ministry in the United States

Feminism in the United States

### **Discussion and Class Activities**

The Struggle for Women's Equality

Organizing for Women's Rights

Examining how gender stereotyping affects relationships

Women in Religion

God Girl and Religious Hypocrisy

Bibliography

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## A Conversation with Playwright Kristine Holmgren

### What was the motivation in writing *God Girl*?

Last year BeliefNet (the largest faith-based blog in the world with a readership of over 3 million) invited me to join their team of professional writers and columnists. When I suggested my column be called “The Faithful Feminist” the editor insisting I drop the “F” word from the title.

She wasn’t referring to “faithful.”

“We don’t want to offend anyone,” she said. “Market research reports ‘feminist’ turns off too many people.”

I told BeliefNet to take a hike.

The editor’s words stayed with me, however – because she wasn’t the first young woman to tell me her fear of the “F” word. Women today say this; they believe in equal pay for equal work, equality in hiring and promotion, equal access to credit, reproductive freedom.

They don’t, however, call themselves “feminist.”

*God Girl* is my gentle reminder that “feminism” is a proud, important ethic – and that Minnesota feminists have important stories to share.

I wrote my play to reinforce this simple truth; there is nothing evil about Minnesota feminism. Feminism is only this - the radical concept that women and men are equal.

When I began my seminary career I convinced that God wanted me in His service to His people. (Capital letters intentional!)

I expected to be educated like a man in ministry. The sexism and harassment I experienced at seminary changed me forever. I wasn’t alone, however – and *God Girl* is the story of the women I met at seminary.

Together, we “outed” faculty who withheld grades when we wouldn’t date them. We stormed “male only” dining clubs; broke into elite “sherry hour” salons denied access by women.

In those days, no one dared to call us “chicks,” “babes,” “gals” or “ladies.” Words were important to us – and we insisted the seminary treat women, African Americans, gays and lesbians with fairness and dignity. We were feminists then, and we’re feminists today.

*God Girl* is one of the stories I tell when asked what this country was like before our laws were changed, our values transformed and our culture revolutionized by the hard work of feminists.

**Was it difficult to write about your own experiences in the scheme of a play?**

Writing about myself was painful. My years at seminary changed my orientation to my world. The woman who enrolled is not the woman who graduated.

Writing this play required me to revisit one of the most painful times of my life. I was so young. *God Girl* reminds me of how hard it was to grow up, and how much I've learned since then.

**How do you see the topics of this play being pertinent to today's society, especially in terms of modern feminism?**

I understand it is difficult for some folks to speak up for themselves—for others. Prejudice, sexism, racism or homophobia are ever-present today, and when we meet them, many of us retreat.

When we all turn away, however, nothing changes.

The fight for equality is not yet won. The battle is not yet over. The freedoms we claim are frail freedoms.

I hope that young, bright, thoughtful women and men step up and defend what is their birthright; peace, freedom and equality for everyone. The liberties we enjoy were won. The freedoms we enjoy are connected to struggle. .

There are many paths to an honorable life. I hope that more men and women choose the path carved by feminism.

**If you could say anything to a young woman pursuing religious study, what would you tell her?**

When I was a young woman, Protestants worked for social change. I can't say that about today's church.

My role models were determined to preach, serve and work for a better world. Today's Christian leaders are dedicated to "success," and the gospel of "abundance."

My hope for any woman in ministry today is that she speak against, stand against and fight against the vanity of contemporary "evangelical" Christianity.



Kristine during her time in seminary

Ministry to the poor, the weak, the hungry and the hurting is not as sexy as soothing the conscience of wealthy people.

The work is not easy. I know. So – when she needs support, comfort, and the courage to continue – my hope is she come to me for a big hug, a big bowl of soup and a soft place to fall.

**What scene in your writing made you laugh or cry the most?**

I remember Debi, Cathy, and the other women who loved me through those awful days.

I miss the intimacy we shared; the unfinished sentences, the frank and painful honesty that bound us.

And - although *God Girl* does not make room for them - I remember the few good men who stood by us, helpless to what we had to endure.

***God Girl* deals with some intense issues. What do you hope people take away from the play?**

Each of us must find a place where we can be true to the wild freedom within.

Liberty is a grand intention.

Once we declare it, we are unstoppable.

Listen to the still, small voice that presses you to be what God intended.

Set yourself free. And then - let go.

Change the world.



Summer Hagen as Kristine Holmgren in *God Girl*.

# Introduction to Presbyterian Church

## What is Presbytery?

It is derived from the Greek word presbyteros, meaning elder, as in church leader. A presbytery is a group of churches connected to one another by geographical region.

Presbyterianism first officially arrived in Colonial America in 1703 with the establishment of the first Presbytery in Philadelphia. In time, the presbytery would be joined by two more to form a synod (1717) and would eventually evolve into the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1789.

In 1857, as the United States edged closer to civil war, the New School Presbyterians split over slavery, with the southern New School Presbyterians forming the United Synod of the South. In December 1861, following the outbreak of the Civil War, the Old School Southern Presbyterians formed the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America. Following the end of the war, the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America renamed itself the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Presbyterian denominations grew, merged and split. Currently, there are two dominate Presbyterian denominations in the United States. The largest is the Presbyterian Church in the USA (**PCUSA, 1983**) and the second largest is the Presbyterian Church in America (**PCA, 1973**). The PCUSA ordains women for ministry and elder positions, the PCA does not. This is one of several distinctions between the two. Each of these denominations is associated with its own theological seminaries. Princeton Theological Seminary is one of the largest institutions providing education in leadership for congregations within PCUSA. Presbyterians founded the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) in 1746 to train ministers dedicated to their faith. Princeton Theological Seminary was established in 1812 when it became evident that a dedicated theological program was needed. It is not affiliated with Princeton University. Princeton Theological Seminary educated men and later women for ministerial and non ministerial careers.

In 1956 Margaret Towner became the first ordained female minister in the Presbyterian Church in the USA. Although thousands of women have been ordained since then, progress was slow in the beginning. During this time, a woman was expected to marry, start a family and become a homemaker. She had few legal rights to her husband's earnings or property. The struggles women faced would persist in the larger landscape of women in America's politics and society throughout the 50's, 60's and 70's.

## Women Ministers in the Presbyterian Church

In 1789 the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America met in Philadelphia. At the time, all church officers: deacons, elders and ministers were by both custom and church law, male. The very notion of women holding office was considered absurd.

Things began to change in the early 20th Century. In August 1920, Presbyterian President Woodrow Wilson signed into existence the XIX Amendment to the Constitution of the United States granting women the right to vote. At the same time women were gaining ground in public matters, they were also gaining ground in ecclesiastical affairs.

In 1922 the Presbyterian Church in the USA granted the right of women to serve as brother deacons and brother elders in 1930.

Enter Margaret E. Towner. Towner left a career as medical photographer at the Mayo Clinic to study education at Syracuse University prior to assuming the call of Christian Education. Towner then pursued the three-year Bachelor of Divinity Degree at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and was ordained in 1956 by the Syracuse-Cayuga Presbytery in New York.

Towner's ordination did not bring her equality with males. At the presbytery meeting following her official entrance into ministry, one man asked, "What do we do now, address everyone as brethren and sisteren?" This comment illustrates the problems she faced in dealing with language, along with performance of responsibilities, equal pay, and marriage.

Discrimination was polite but heavy, she recalled. Salaries were low, since it was said women did not need large salaries. But she considered even negative experiences as helpful stepping stones to new challenges. As she looked back on her experiences she concluded that while women had made progress, they still suffered from discrimination. Especially that people were more critical of female than they were of male pastors.



In 1956 the General Assembly of the Church in Southern States instructed a committee to conduct a study of the Scriptures involving this issue of ordination of women. The Assembly rejected the idea of ordination by the presbyteries in 1957 by a vote of 44 to 39. In 1962 the Assembly appointed a commission to suggest changes in the *Book of Church Order*, including the ordination of women at all levels: deacon, elder, and minister. After a final debate on the floor of the meeting, commissioners acknowledged the right of women to be ordained to those offices.

In 1965, Rachel Henderlite, a Ph.D. from Yale University, was approached by a committee at Hanover Presbytery and was encouraged to seek ordination. After an unanimous approval by the 125 Virginia Commissioners in 1965, she was ordained in the service at the All Souls Church. Henderlite served as Professor of Christian Education at Austin Theological Seminary until her retirement in 1971. She also became the first women president of the Presbyterian Church Union in 1976.



Since these earlier years women have played an increasingly important role in the church. The PCUSA 2008 Profile Survey showed that 64% of all Presbyterian congregations were female while 45% of all ministers are women.

In the Presbyterian Church in America, only men are ordained. The PCA's current stance on Ordination is:

Only ordains men in obedience to the New Testament standard for those who rule the church and teach doctrine. Ministers, ruling elders, and deacons in the PCA are men only, in obedience to the New Testament standard for those who rule the church and teach doctrine, though women have a wide range of use for their gifts in our churches.

# Women and Ministry in the United States

## A sampling of women breaking the stain glass ceiling

### 19th Century

**Early 19th century:** In the United States, in contrast with almost every other organized denomination, the Society of Friends (Quakers) has allowed women to serve as ministers since the early 19th century.

**1815:** Clarissa Danforth was ordained in New England. She was the first woman ordained by the Free Will Baptist denomination.

**1843:** Women were first included in Mormon prayer circles on September 28, 1843.

**1853:** Antoinette Brown Blackwell was the first woman ordained as a minister in the United States in the Congregationalist Church.

**1861:** Mary A. Will was the first woman ordained in the Wesleyan Methodist Connection by the Illinois Conference in the United States.

**1863:** Olympia Brown was ordained by the Universalist denomination in 1863

**1866:** Helenor M. Davison was ordained as a deacon by the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, probably making her the first ordained woman in the Methodist tradition.



Lydia Sexton

**1869:** Lydia Sexton (of the United Brethren Church) was appointed chaplain of the Kansas State Prison at the age of 70, the first woman in the United States to hold such a position.

**1876:** Anna Oliver was the first woman to receive a Bachelor of Divinity degree from an American seminary (Boston University of Theology).

**1880:** Anna Howard Shaw was the first woman ordained in the Methodist Protestant Church, an American church which later merged with other denominations to form the United Methodist Church.

**1889:** The Nolin Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church ordained Louisa Woosley as the first female minister of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, USA.

**1890:** On September 14, 1890, Ray Frank gave the Rosh Hashana sermon for a community in Spokane, Washington, thus becoming the first woman to preach from a synagogue pulpit, although she was not a rabbi.

### 20th Century

**1930:** A predecessor church of the Presbyterian Church (USA) ordained its first female as an elder.

**1938:** Tehilla Lichtenstein became the first Jewish American woman to serve as the spiritual leader of an ongoing Jewish congregation, although she was not ordained.

**1949:** The Old Catholic Church (in the U.S.) started to ordain women.

**1956:** The Presbyterian Church (U SA) ordained its first female minister, Margaret Towner.

**1964:** Addie Davis became the first Southern Baptist woman to be ordained. However, the Southern Baptist Convention stopped ordaining women in 2000, although existing female pastors are allowed to continue their jobs.

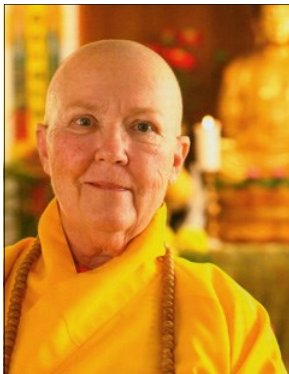
**1965:** Rachel Henderlite became the first woman ordained in the Presbyterian Church in the United States; she was ordained by the Hanover Presbytery in Virginia.

**1970:** On November 22, 1970, Elizabeth Alvina Platz became the first woman ordained by the Lutheran Church in America, and as such was the first woman ordained by any Lutheran denomination in America.

**1972:** Sally Priesand became the first female rabbi to be ordained in Reform Judaism, and also the first female rabbi in the world to be ordained by any theological seminary.

**1974:** The Philadelphia Eleven were ordained to the Episcopal Church of the U.S.A. . These 11 women were "irregularly" ordained to the priesthood in Philadelphia on July 29, 1974, before church laws were changed to permit women's ordination.

Venerable Karuna Dharma



**1976:** Venerable Karuna Dharma became the first fully ordained female member of the Buddhist monastic community in the U.S.

**1977:** Pauli Murray became the first African American woman to be ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1977.

**1980:** Marjorie Matthews, at the age of 64, was the first woman elected as a bishop in the *United Methodist Church*.

**1985:** Judy Harrow became the first member of CoG (Covenant of the Goddess, a Wiccan group) to be legally registered as clergy in New York City in 1985, after a five-year effort requiring the assistance of the New York Civil Liberties Union.

**1988:** Jetsunma Ahkon Lhamo, an American woman formerly called Catharine Burroughs, became the first Western woman to be named a reincarnate lama.

**1988:** The Episcopal Church elected Barbara Harris as its first female bishop.

**1990:** Sister Cora Billings was the first black nun to head a parish in the U.S., specifically in Richmond, Virginia.

**1995:** The Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Takoma Park, Maryland, ordained three women in violation of the denomination's rules - Kendra Haloviak, Norma Osborn, and Penny Shell.

**1998:** On July 28, 1998, Ava Muhammad became the first female minister in the Nation of Islam, heading Muhammad's Mosque 15 in Atlanta, Ga., one of the largest mosques in the country.



## **21st Century**

**2000:** Helga Newmark, born in Germany, became the first female Holocaust survivor ordained as a rabbi. She was ordained in America.

**2004:** Khenmo Drolma, an American woman, became the first westerner of either sex to be installed as an abbot in the Drikung Kagyu lineage of Buddhism, being installed as the abbot of the Vajra Dakini Nunnery in Vermont (America's first Buddhist nunnery).

**2005:** The Lutheran Evangelical Protestant Church, in the USA elected Nancy Kinard Drew as its first female Presiding Bishop.



Amina Wadud

**2005:** On March 18, 2005, an American woman named Amina Wadud gave a sermon and led Friday prayers for a Muslim congregation consisting of men as well as women, with no curtain dividing the men and women

**2009:** Alysa Stanton, born in Cleveland and ordained by a Reform Jewish seminary in Cincinnati, became the world's first black female rabbi.

**2011:** The Evangelical Presbyterian Church's 31st General Assembly voted to allow congregations to call women to ordained ministry, even if their presbytery (governing body) objects for theological or doctrinal reasons. Such congregations will be allowed to leave the objecting presbytery.

**2011:** The American Catholic Church in the United States, ACCUS, ordained their first woman priest, Kathleen Maria MacPherson, on June 12, 2011.

**2013:** The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the largest Lutheran denomination in the U.S., elected its first female presiding bishop: the Revd Elizabeth Eaton.

**2013:** Jean A. Stevens became the first woman to pray in an LDS Church general conference session.



Jean a Stevens

# Feminism in the United States

For centuries, women have struggled to find economic, financial, political, social, and institutional equality in the United States. Dating back to 1848, at the start of the Women's Suffrage Movement, American women have fought for the right to vote, improved working conditions and wages, property rights, and other socialist rights. Even when the first "wave" of U.S. feminism was reformed in 1920 with the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the fight for women's equality was far from over.

The second wave of United States feminism returned in the 1960s, with issues expanding into roles in the workforce, sexuality, fighting patriarchal dominance in institutions and professions, reproductive rights, and achieving higher perceptions of women as a sex. Highlighted below are important events of this second wave feminism. With *God Girl*, taking place between 1966-1976, the story lies in the heart of the movement, highlighting issues of women as professionals in the workforce and in higher institutions.

While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited much discrimination in the workforce, it did not include discrimination in religious associations and activities. In the Presbyterian Church of the USA (PCUSA), it wasn't until 1956 that women could be ordained as minister. Even then, women struggled for the same recognition as men, facing years of prejudice. Today, however, women and men hold equal position in the PCUSA.

## 1960s-1970s Feminist Movement Timeline

**May 9, 1960-** The Food and Drug Administration approved the first oral contraceptive, which became available for purchase as birth control the following year.

**November 1, 1961-** The organization, *Women Strike for Peace*, brought over 50,000 women to protest against the use of nuclear weapons and the United States involvement in Southeast Asia.

**December 14, 1961-** U.S. President John Kennedy establishes the President's Commission on the Status of Women. Previous first lady Eleanor Roosevelt is appointed as the chairwoman.

**February 19, 1963-** Betty Friedan published "The Feminine Mystique." It challenged the widely believed role of women as housewives and mothers, and was an inspiration to many women for the following decade.

**June 10, 1963-** The Equal Pay Act of 1963 became law. It guaranteed that men and women doing similar work in a similar establishment received the same wages.



Bella Abzug, one of the founders for Women Strike for Peace, protesting during the 1961 strike to end the use of nuclear weapons

**July 2, 1964-** President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibiting sex and race discrimination in a work environment.

**September 24, 1965-** President Lyndon B. Johnson announced his Executive Order 11246, enforcing federal agencies to take action against sex discrimination.

**June 30, 1966-** The National Organization for Women was established.

**September 7, 1968-** A 100-woman protest against beauty pageants. They claimed that the pageant made a woman's beauty indicative of her worth.

**March 22, 1972-** The Equal Rights Amendment, which prohibited sex discrimination and equal rights for men and women, passed in the Senate and enforced in the States. This was a major success and a turning point for women in the movement.



Women protested the degradation of women in Miss America Pageant in 1968.



President Lyndon B. Johnson signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

**June 23, 1972-** Title IX bans sex discrimination in schools. No one could be denied access to any activity or education that was given federal assistance. This greatly increased the number of women in athletics and post-secondary education.

**January 22, 1973-** The *Roe vs. Wade* case gives women the option for a legal, safe abortion.

**1976-** The first marital rape law is established.

**October 31, 1978-** The Pregnancy Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination against pregnant employees. No woman can be fired, denied a job, or forced to take a leave of absence due to a pregnancy.

# **Discussion Questions & Class Activities**

# **The Struggle for Women's Equality**

## ***Suggested Homework Assignments***

1. Write a short essay on what it means to be a feminist and how the feminist movement has or has not impacted your life or your future. In writing the essay, think of the goals of the feminist movement relating to women's political, economic, and social equality.

2. Discussion: What are the goals of the feminist movement. Examples are below:

- \*Political, social and economic equality for women.
- \* Constitutional equality for women.
- \* Integration of male-only clubs.
- \* Increasing women's wages and job opportunities.
- \* Election of women to political office.
- \* Ending violence against women.
- \* Improving women's access to health care.
- \* Ensuring equal educational opportunities for women and girls.
- \* Improving the image of women in the media.
- \* Ensuring reproductive rights.
- \* Ending discrimination on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, marital status, physical disability, age, religion, creed, or ethnicity.

3. Discussion: Are you surprised by the goals of the women's rights movement? Are they what you think they should be?

4. Ask friends and family members to describe how the women's movement has affected their lives.

5. How do you think that a girl's life today is different from her mother's life or her grandmother's life? Why do you think things are different for girls today?

6. How has the women's movement helped or hurt men and boys?

7. What happened when the Supreme Court altered Title IX, with their *Grove City v. Bell* decision?

8. Discuss examples of discrimination against women or of sexism that you have experienced or observed.

- a. Who was affected by this discrimination?
- b. How did you and others respond?
- c. What action could you take to change the situation?
- d. What do you think is likely to happen if you take this course of action?

## **Class Exercises**

### **Organizing for Women's Rights**

#### **SESSION ONE**

Ask students to free write for 8–10 minutes on this question: “What specific experiences have you had that caused you to think that you were treated in particular way because of your gender?” Encourage them to write about more than one experience if applicable.

Ask students to share their responses orally. Encourage them to explain why they felt they were treated in a certain way and to describe the feelings they had in the situation. Expect lively discussion!

Now pose this question: “Do you believe males and females are equal in American society today?”

Ask students to free write again for 8–10 minutes, and encourage them to include specific reasons for the views they express.

Ask students to share their responses orally.

#### **SESSION TWO**

During this session encourage students to identify the issues that the feminist movement addresses and to examine their own opinions and ideas on these issues.

Put students into small groups. Have them discuss the following areas. Remind students that they need to support their opinions with specific examples and that they need to listen to and reflect on the comments of their peers.

Observe the discussion, but if possible do not participate—so that you can avoid influencing students’ opinions.

For each of the following topics, note whether or not it is important to you and why:

- Equal opportunity in education
- Equal opportunity in employment
- Equal pay
- A woman’s right to control her body
- Violence against women (rape, domestic abuse, etc.)
- Maternity leave
- Childcare

What problems do you imagine encountering in your future as a woman or as a man?

Has the feminist movement made life in the United states better? Why or why not?

After they have responded to the questions, ask students to discuss their answers with one another. It’s likely that enthusiastic discussion will ensue.

## Examining how gender stereotyping affects relationships

This class activity explores different situations where gender stereotyping can alter an outcome and can both physically and mentally damage a person. It should be emphasized early on that just because we accept something as natural or as traditional, it does not mean that such opinion is appropriate.

### Discussion

- A. Define sex and gender. Ensure that the students are aware that there is a difference. A person's sex is biological, but a person's gender is a socially constructed identity assigned to a person as a result of their sex.
- B. Ask students what they understand by the term gender stereotyping.
- C. What comes to mind when you think of feminine or masculine characteristics? Give the students five minutes to write down a few brief examples, then select a couple to present their opinion to the class.
- D. Discuss preconceptions of gender roles. For example: because men are physically stronger, only they should be allowed to play football is inappropriate and that anyone, regardless of gender should be able to partake in a sport if that person desires to do so. The teacher should try to remain neutral.
- E. Have the students brain storm on other stereotypes for each gender. Reinforce that though some of these ideas are commonly accepted by society, they do not have to be the norm.
- F. Agents of socialization—discuss the reasons as to why gender roles are reiterated every day through these aspects:
  - Family
  - Peers
  - Religious and cultural
  - Media

### Group Activity

Divide the class into small groups. Each group will receive a case study involving issues of gender stereotyping. Each group will read and discuss together their example and then prepare to present to the rest of the class how stereotyping has affected the circumstances of their case and the repercussions of this.

## Case Studies

### Number 1:

Jamal and Rebecca have been in a relationship for just under one year. Jamal always decides where they go, what they do, and pays for everything. Rebecca has suggested, that as both of them have part-time jobs, and they are low on money, that they should pay an equal share when out together. Jamal however believes this is inappropriate, and tells Rebecca that it is the 'man's job' to make decisions and have financial control. Is he right to think this? Suggest that following the group discussion, they should organize a short piece of dramatic role play for the class, whereby the case for both Jamal's and Rebecca's case is heard. For example, the group could be split into boys and girls acting out an argument similar to the above case.

### Number 2:

During a mixed sex football tournament, the referee announces that when a girl scores one goal, it will count as three goals, as he believes girls are not as good at football as boys, as it is a 'male sport'. What is wrong with that statement? Is there such a thing as male and female sports? Suggest that the group present to the class a short list of reasons against discriminating in sports on the grounds of your sex? Suggest the group write a script in the style of a radio broadcast, reporting on a mixed football match. However, instead of girls being discriminated against, in the script inform them to discriminate against the male players.

### Number 3:

Deepa is thirteen years old and lives in a small, rural town in Eastern Nepal. She has been told by her father she is to be married in three months' time to an eighteen year old man, whom she has never met, or even seen a picture of. Deepa protests, but her father tells her it is of no use, and she must marry, and ownership of her will pass from her father, to her new husband. Is it right for Deepa to be forced to marry? Why is it inappropriate for girls to be traded and treated like products? Hand the group a piece of A2 paper, and suggest they create a colorful poster, which can later be exhibited in the school, which argues against forced marriage across the world.

#### Number 4:

Joey is a 12 year boy who is very active and loves participating in sports. He is on the football and basketball teams at his school, and is a hardworking and valuable player. His father is very encouraging of his participation and comes to all of his games and cheers Joey on. A few times either during a game or while practicing Joey has gotten hurt. It is usually nothing serious, but his father has a very strict attitude on how Joey should behave when he gets hurt. From a young age Joey has been sternly warned by his father that "boys shouldn't cry". This has caused Joey to feel conflicted about how to deal with getting hurt and the associated emotions. He doesn't want to disappoint or anger his father, and so he works very hard to hide his pain and not cry, and is very ashamed when he does cry. Should men or boys cry? Do men and women experience different emotions and should they feel like they need to hide them or express them differently? What are the advantages and disadvantages of hiding one's emotions versus expressing them?

#### Number 5:

Alice has recently completed a politics degree from Bangor University, She hopes, one day, to become a member of parliament for her local constituency. However, as of 2012, less than 25% of the House of Commons is female, with it being seemingly more difficult for a women to receive candidacy, and therefore gain election to parliament, than it is for men, making Alice question whether or not she should pursue her political ambition. Why is it inappropriate for people to consider men more suited to governing and dealing in politics than that of women? Three individuals in the group should act out a political debate, two arguing why either as a woman or a as a man, they should be elected, and the third arguing why gender is an ineffective selection tool in politics, and instead policy and the desire to make a change for the better is what matters.

# Women in Religion

Team up pupils into pairs.

Have each group do a one page biography on one of the females listed below.  
Have teams present their information to the classroom.

## **Buddism**

Nancy Wilson Ross born 1901

A writer whose last three books introduced Buddhism to Western readers: "The World of Zen: An East-West Anthology" (1960), "Three Ways of Asian Wisdom" (1966) and "Buddhism, a Way of Life and Thought" (1980).

Maurine Stuart born 1922

One of the first female Zen masters to teach in the United States, and in 1979 became president and spiritual director of the Cambridge Buddhist Association.

## **Catholicism**

Dorothy Day

An American journalist and devout Catholic, who co-founded the Catholic worker movement.

Edith Stein

A German Jewish philosopher who converted to the Roman Catholic Church and became a Discalced Carmelite nun.

## **Hinduism**

Amma Sri Karunamayi born 1958

A Hindu spiritual leader. Sri Karunamayi travels internationally promoting meditation.

The Mother 1878-1973

Known to her followers as The Mother, was the spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo. Her full name at birth was Blanche Rachel Mirra Alfassa.

Mother Meera born Kamala Reddy; 1960

Believed by her devotees to be an embodiment of the Divine Mother (Shakti or Devi).

Sarada Devi born Saradamani Mukhopadhyaya (1853 –1920)

Saradamani Mukhopadhyaya was the wife and spiritual counterpart of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, a nineteenth-century mystic of Bengal. Sarada Devi is also reverentially addressed as the Holy Mother by the followers of the Ramakrishna monastic order. Sarada Devi played an important role in the growth of the Ramakrishna Movement.

Gurumayi Chidvilasananda (or Swami Chidvilasananda)

The current spiritual head of the Siddha Yoga path. She is formally known as Swami Chidvilasananda or more informally as Gurumayi (the word translates to "immersed in the Guru")

Daya Mata born Rachel Faye Wright, 1914 –2010

was the president and sanghamata (mother of the society) of the only organization that Paramahansa Yogananda created to disseminate his teachings, Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) in Los Angeles, California Yogoda Satsanga Society of India for over 55 years.

Sister Nivedita born Margaret Elizabeth Noble (1867 –1911)

A Scots-Irish social worker, author, teacher and a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. She was also one of the major influences behind Ramakrishna Mission and also with all brother disciples of Swami Vivekananda.

## **Islam**

Aisha Rafea

Co-leader of the women's group at The Egyptian Society for Spiritual and Cultural Research (ESSCR). She is a devoted writer, researcher and teacher of spirituality. She has a vision that without spiritual awareness, people turn the most precious divine guidance into dogma and stagnant tradition.

Aminah Assilmi 1945-2010

Served as the Director of the International Union of Muslim Women. Her accomplishments included collecting millions of signatures for petitions that were presented to the UN in support of the thousands of women who were abused and raped during the ethnic cleansing campaigns in Bosnia.

Cemalnur Sargut born 1952

President of the Turkish Women's Cultural Association, Istanbul (TURKKAD), founded by her teacher, Samiha Ayverdi in 1966. Under her leadership TURKKAD works to organize international symposiums and address a wide range of people who would like to apply solutions to today's problems in the Sufi view that knowledge is a state to be practiced and worship is a journey toward love.

Aziza Abdel-Halim

Currently the Chairperson of the Women Movement South-East Asia and the Pacific; Vice President of the Regional Islamic Dawah Council of South-East Asia and the Pacific (RISEAP); and President of the Muslim Women's National Network Australia.

## **Judaism**

Lynn Gottlieb born 1949

One of the first ten women rabbis, she became a voice for peace between Jews and Muslims. Gottlieb became spiritual leader of Temple Beth Or of the Deaf in New York at the age of 23 and began studying at several seminaries before her ordination through the Jewish Renewal Movement in 1981.

Marcia Falk 1946

Marcia Falk transformed the art of prayer with feminist blessings and modern translations of ancient writing. Falk, a Fulbright scholar with a doctorate in English and comparative literature from Stanford, won international acclaim for her first work of translation, *The Song of Songs: Love Lyrics from the Bible*, which used poetic techniques and vivid language to bring the book to life for modern readers.

Judith Plaskow 1947

Deeply learned in classical and modern Christian theology yet profoundly committed to her own Judaism, Plaskow created a distinctively Jewish theology acutely conscious of its own structure and categories and in dialogue with the feminist theologies of other religions. She is the first Jewish feminist to identify herself as a theologian.

Rachel Adler 1943

The writings of Rachel Adler on Jewish law and ritual have catapulted her into the center of modern Jewish religious discourse, and she is unquestionably among the leading constructive Jewish theologians, translators and liturgists of the modern era, garnering attention from Jewish and non-Jewish scholars, women and men alike.

## **Protestant**

Janet Edwards

Presbyterian minister from Pittsburgh, PA, board member of More Light Presbyterians, who was tried and acquitted by her church in 2001 for presiding at the wedding of two women.

Bishop Minerva Carcaño

Broke through the glass ceiling to become the first Latina bishop in the United Methodist Church.

Delores Williams

Delores Williams, one of the founders of black womanist theology.

## God Girl and Religious Hypocrisy



An issue central to the story of *God Girl* is the issue of religious hypocrisy amongst those at Seminary. While the Presbyterian Church supports a place of tolerance and acceptance, the faculty at Seminary causes Kris to feel anything but welcome. Rather than seeing all people as equal, the men in charge of the seminary school continue to treat women as lesser individuals, and male students repeat the behavior. The men deride the women for being sexually suggestive, but it is they who are making advances based on their desires, unaware that they are the pursuers. Women in our society are sexualized in ways that men are not and held to double standards that make it difficult, if not sometimes impossible, for them to have equal ground with men. Female leaders are held against certain standards of leadership. However they act, they are criticized as too hard or too soft, too feminine or too masculine, too quiet or too loud. These ideas focus on image, not leadership ability. They are developed around ideas of sexism and stereotypes of women. It is in these double standards that hypocrisy develops.

Hypocrisy is a common issue and is a problem that provokes a great deal of argument and discussion. People can do harm using their religious convictions to support their own self-interest, often skewing beliefs into harmful actions. Often hypocrisy is based upon a set of contradictions – one believes one thing, but behaves in a way that is opposing to this belief. In terms of psychology, this is known as *cognitive dissonance*. Dissonance causes guilt and shame, which can be seen in aggressive reactions, withdrawing from a situation, and using practices (such as confession) to ease one's mind. Research shows that in order to get rid of such feelings, people generally do one of two things: change their attitudes or change their actions. However, in terms of religious hypocrisy, a different result takes place – people increase their religious attitudes and assert their beliefs rather than reconciling the dissonance between thought and action.

In this way, a sort of mental alternative exists, a denial of the problem that distorts what is really occurring. In *God Girl*, this situation is heightened by the historical situation of the time. To avoid the draft during the Vietnam War, many young men declared themselves conscientious objectors and enrolled in seminary school. The Supreme Court case, *US v. Seeger*, more concretely defined that religious objector status after three separate cases claimed they were conscientious objectors. By 1970, the conscientious objector clause was broadened to include those who did not have religious affiliations. This allowed men who claimed they wanted to be ministers to avoid the war conflict without having to prove or openly state their faith status. The sincerity of these students' interest in the ministry is debatable and the issue of hypocrisy is made all the more troubling.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of hypocrisy is the way in which we see it in ourselves. Though many have not done the highly problematic things the characters of *God Girl* have done, many counteract their principles or beliefs through their actions. Often, we hate hypocrisy so intensely because it



highlights our own hypocritical actions. Audience members may be able to recall instances when they behaved unprofessionally towards people of a different race or gender. It is difficult to overcome hypocrisy when humanity is so susceptible to it, but it isn't impossible. As the play demonstrates, sometimes the best reaction is action. At times, one's beliefs can strengthen the fight against hypocrisy, as Kris does, and can motivate oneself to make a larger change than complaining and inaction can.

### **Discussion Questions**

Do you see aspects of hypocrisy in your own life? How so?

Where do you see hypocrisy still present today?

If you were faced with a hypocritical situation, how would you react? How should one handle hypocrisy?

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