



John Howard Yoder (1927-1997)

A Considered Response to Lambelet and Hamilton:
Vis-à-vis the topic of being made invisible...one more time¹

Lambelet, K. and Hamilton, B. (February 29, 2016). Viewpoint: Engage Survivors More, and Yoder Less (p. 1). *National Catholic Reporter Online*. Retrieve from <http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/engage-survivors-more-and-yoder-less>

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Thesis: When male Yoderian scholars seek to bury me and my academic scholarly work about John's life and his patterns of victimization in silence, they simultaneously also bury the story of Yoder's victims in the very same breath. These are the voices the Yoderians now claim they want to hear. They cannot have it both ways. Either the narrative, including my contributions to this narrative, is allowed to stand on its own and be recognized for what it is, or the narrative is skewed and we can learn nothing from it of value. When the narrative is manipulated and skewed, the victims' voices are once more buried inside a dominant male prerogative to define reality.

The processes of invisibilization are subtle ones because the other is simply not seen or acknowledged. In academic settings, this is a sophisticated form of academic shunning. Experienced dominant men in the academy teach it to their male students by example as well as by words. This kind of gender-based shunning (and race-based shunning as well) is generationally transmitted much as a defective gene is passed silently but harmfully to new generations of academic scholars.

Feminist scholars have faced this issue of being silenced and ignored for generations. Women who do sexual violence advocacy work have also faced this silencing of their voice and a denial of their presence.

Individual and institutional betrayals abound everywhere in this narrative of sexual predators inside the religious academy. They range from the original betrayals done by sexual predators to the cover-up betrayals done by administrators in the name of protecting the institution. Somewhere in the middle are the betrayals done by professional colleagues who seek to silence the voice of victims and their advocates by simply not allowing their voices to emerge in the academic or religious commons. Sometimes these are the acts of blind betrayal – of deliberately choosing not to know: a strange psychological process of knowing and not knowing.

Women in mixed gender academic settings speak up about some matter or another only to be ignored and silenced. Maybe minutes later or maybe hours later or maybe days later, a man says the very same thing – using the woman's own vocabulary, syntax, and content and is praised and honored for his contribution. The woman is ignored; the man is promoted. In my lifetime, women scholars began to speak up and say, *I said ten minutes ago exactly what Samuel has just said. Let me elaborate more about my statement/my own thinking here.*

One consequence is that this woman scholar is often seen as and subsequently labeled by her academic peers and supervisors as a castrating bitch. This is a double-bind of massive proportions for academic women. To be promotable and to survive in the academic environment, they must solve it. Their original work must be

recognized *and* they must be able to have collegial relations with the men who are in power and the men who are the gate-keepers.

My solution to this kind of academic silencing as a tenured professor and peace studies program director at Goshen College was to not only speak up but to put stuff into a written format – either before meetings where I knew I was going to speak or after the fact. I would usually volunteer to be the minute keeper – a good female subordinate task because I could shape the minutes to reflect a gender-truthful narrative of the work which was done and by whom it was done. I tried to do this work honestly and became recognized for it. Consequently, women’s voices were recorded as were men’s voices.

Ways men and women scholars betray their female counterparts

- The refuse to read women’s scholarship
- Most especially they refuse to read feminist women’s scholarship
- If they do read it, they critique it from male perspectives and presuppositions
- After they’ve read it, they often co-opt the ideas of this work in their own in future work and scholarship settings without crediting that work – a very subtle form of plagiarism.
- They refuse to take it seriously – keeping it isolated from main-line discourse
- They trash the character or the author as “an angry woman” or “as an inadequate scholar” or as someone “ignorant of the field.” In my particular situation, Mennonite Yoderian Male scholars have decided I am an “angry woman” with a “personal vendetta” against the Mennonite Church.” The first time a friend told me that Yoderians saw me as a vendetta-slinging woman I had to look up the word. The word vendetta is defined as a person who seeks vengeance; a person seeking to kill; a bitter campaign against someone. I must say I didn’t recognize myself at all.
- In addition it has become quite clear to me that the Yoderians do not see me as a serious academic scholar; thus they can ignore my work on sexual violence and never need to read it at all.

- They actively stand in the door keeping stuff from being published; the web is changing this – thus my decision to self-publish my series of books about what I have come to call the Yoder-Mennonite mess on my webpage, *Enduring Space*, (www.ruthkrall.com) because my concerns and my intellectual work cannot be silenced or denied space in these important academic conversations. Thus, the Yoderians cannot completely silence me because they do not control me or the web. Nevertheless, by ignoring my presence in the Yoder mess narrative, they seek to minimize it, to deny its importance: in short, they seek to invisibilize me and to invisibilize my work.
- Some Mennonite scholars and Mennonite churchmen are overtly friendly to my face while trashing me and my contributions behind my back as *a very angry woman who hates the church*; I assume they think I do not know what they are saying about me. This is not true. A rather large interdisciplinary network of Mennonite colleagues and friends, some of them scholars - male and female - tell me what they hear in order to help me protect myself.
- Yoderian scholars refuse to consider the alternative intellectual thinking about Yoder and his life – from a woman’s perspective – as valid. Only men’s work has importance. As I have pointed out in a new book *Living on the Edge of the Edge: Letters to a Younger Colleague* (in press) this is especially true in Mennonite pacifism and peace work. As women peace and justice activists and scholars, our work is often ignored. This is one of issues that the clergy sexual violence issue has pried open. Largely sexual violence advocacy work and scholarship has been driven by feminist women. Father Thomas Doyle, a Roman Catholic expert on clergy sexual abuse in a Roman Catholic context, acknowledges in numerous speeches and written articles that what happened in a Lafayette, LA diocese in 1984/subsequently was made possible, in part, by feminist women’s prior advocacy and scholarship work on rape, domestic violence and child abuse/incest in the 1970’s.

My total invisibility in this *National Catholic Reporter* article is of concern to me because when they bury my presence and my scholarship in their narrative, they also bury the survivors of the Yoder mess narrative – the very survivors they say they want to hear from. I

am not seeking fame or praise by making this response: I am saying that you cannot begin the Yoder mess narrative in 2014 or in 2015 without betraying the women who were victimized in the 1970s and the women who stood up as their advocates – only to be seen as angry women bitches slinging vendettas against the church. Nothing could be further from the truth. My written work in 2012, 2013, and 2014 preceded the work done in 2015 and 2016. It begins with the narrative story of 1978 and brings that story forward to 1997. It urges the church to listen to the stories of victimized individuals and it urges the church to pick up its healing mission toward everyone touched by the narrative: survivors, advocates, the community as a whole, and the Yoder family. My work is very visible and it continues to be regularly down-loaded. Any use at all of a search engine tool, brings my work to the fore. One must be deliberately blind to miss the presence of my scholarship in unpacking and beginning to debrief the Yoder mess.

The Goshen College women faculty members who did the original networking activism were all tenured clinical faculty with skills in organizational administration which, parenthetically was why they had been actively recruited to teach at Goshen College in the first place, skill that they learned in the secular world of their clinical professions. Each of these women by 1978 was well aware of the individual predatory behaviors of Yoder. They were also well aware of the institutional cover-ups done at a seminary level, at a denominational level and at international levels in the ecumenical church. As they began to seek a way to hold Yoder accountable and to protect additional women from his acts of predation, they were initially very hopeful that their work inside the boundaries of the church would bring accountability and healing to (1) the victims of Yoder's predatory behavior, (2) to Yoder's extended family, and (3) to the church itself, and hopefully to Yoder.

In summary, when men make women's work of advocacy invisible, they make the victims invisible as well. Both of these consequences reveal the deep and abiding nature of sexism and betrayal by men of their female colleagues. One abiding consequence is that factual truth is also made invisible.

¹Endnotes

This essay was first published on March 6, 2016 Bill Lindsey's blog **Bilgrimage**. Retrieve from <http://bilgrimage.blogspot.com/2016/03/ruth-krall-considered-response-to.html>. For Stephanie Krehbiel's response on March 11, 2016 retrieve from <http://bilgrimage.blogspot.com/2016/03/stephanie-krehbiel-on-ruth-kralls.html>