

2023 TIP Winner

The Abrahamic Sensorium

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Motivation for the Project

- The disparities between embodied knowledge of a heritage tradition and textbook knowledge of other religions can be very inequitable.
- Sensory pedagogy helps enable students to bypass received scripts regarding both their heritage traditions and the traditions of others to promote deeper engagement and more open discussion.
- We are increasingly cognizant of the ways in which Christian-normativity is intertwined with white supremacy, creating conditions for more anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. This project instead invites students to appreciate the entanglements and overlaps in the everyday practices of these three traditions.

What is the project?

- Students from diverse backgrounds and multiple classrooms come together to experience and discuss sensescapes from the historical and ethnographic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
- Example #1: Students gather for a dinner prepared by an anthro-chef that uses historical recipes and ingredients to move through the rise of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in three courses. Participants receive new information about the food cultures and pantries of these moments as they collectively discuss their gustatory experiences of them.
- Example #2: Students are given recreated historical scents that represent sacred masculinity in different Jewish, Muslim, and Christian traditions. Participants share their own affective reactions and olfactory impressions before learning about the social and scriptural background of scent. They then discuss how this sensory experience impacted their understanding of the figures and periods they read about.

Outcomes

- Students engage with one another in a very different mode during sensory learning. They share personal associations and their surprise and curiosity about what their embodied reactions. They are thus able to discuss the class texts in a more engaged and empowered way. We hear very little stereotyping or “script-like” explaining of “official positions” during this learning.
- These experiences de-exoticize minoritized religious traditions for students while enabling new understandings of their own. Participants in hairwrapping workshop run by a Jewish expert, for instance, helped students develop new perspectives on the more familiar Islamic headscarf (the hijab).
- Students consistently come away with new insights into the ways in which these three traditions are historically intertwined and continue to be so. This fosters a classroom climate of diversity, equity, and inclusion.