DISSERTATION

VOICES OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Submitted by

Stephanie Russell Krebs

School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2014

Doctoral Committee:

    Advisor: Nathalie Kees

    Sharon Anderson
    Shelley Haddock
    William Timpson

ABSTRACT

VOICES OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to explore the lived-experiences of students participating in interfaith dialogue at the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI) in Atlanta. The lived-experiences of the participants were explored though the following research questions: (1) How do participants define interfaith dialogue in their own words? (2) How do participants experience interfaith dialogue? (3) What do participants perceive that they learn or gain through participation in interfaith dialogue? A purposive sample of eleven participants who self-selected to attend the ILI were recruited through the assistance of the IFYC staff. The researcher conducted a brief face-to-face screening in Atlanta with each participant, followed by a semi-structured interview via Skype or phone. Data was analyzed using an interpretive phenomenological approach, inductively looking for themes to emerge. Results demonstrated that the lived-experience of interfaith dialogue was characterized by: (1) the role of the environment, (2) the value of individual relationships through sharing and storytelling, (3) holding an ecumenical worldview, which led to the (4) strengthening of the individual's faith or non-faith tradition. The results of this study support past research on curricular intergroup dialogue and serves as a vehicle to translate similar outcomes to a co-curricular format. Recommendations include: intentionally creating environments to foster interfaith dialogue, expanding formats of interfaith dialogue to include co-curricular options and experiential opportunities, and increasing religious literacy through education and training. In

addition, expanding the faith discussion to include the secular and others that do not fit with the

current paradigm of religion must be explored.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking my advisor, Dr. Nathalie Kees. I am the only member of my cohort who had the privilege of being paired with Dr. Kees, and what a privilege it has been. Dr. Kees has been extremely supportive and encouraging throughout the dissertation process. Her guidance was instrumental, her kindness was motivating, and her ability to assist my progression in a timely manner was greatly appreciated.

I also owe a great deal of thanks to my other committee members, Dr. Sharon Anderson, Dr. Shelley Haddock and Dr. William Timpson. Dr. Anderson, thank you for all your feedback and questions that challenged me to be true to my qualitative methodology. Dr. Haddock, thank you for encouraging me to think about the big picture of this study and your positive feedback during the defense. And to Dr. Timpson, thank you for encouraging me to think of my work in a bigger context. Your insights on connections to faculty development and to interfaith outside of the U.S. were welcomed. And to Dr. Quick, thank you for making the technology work for my defense. And a big thank you to Jared Gassen, my editor, for your insightful feedback, attention to detail, and quick response time.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my husband Rob Krebs. I had already started this program when we met. Rob quickly began helping with my daughter Annaleis so I could do homework, would regularly take her to the waterpark so I could have entire days to write. Rob did all this before he fell in love with the two of us and before we blended our families.

To my children, Annaleis, Riley, and Robby, thank you for sharing your mommy while I completed this goal. Annaleis, I hope when you look back at this time you realize that even

though I spent less time with you, my motivations were always to make our lives better. And Robby, thank you for letting me write my comps during our maternity leave together.

I would like to thank my parents Marie and Steve Russell who have always supported my educational goals. They instilled in me from a young age that I could do anything I set my mind on. To this day they still support me and are very proud of my accomplishments. I love you very much. And to my little sister Marisa Grover, you are an inspiration to me.

I would like to thank Dr. Linda Kuk. Thank you for coordinating the distance cohort Ph.D. program at CSU with such care. We all know how much you support us and we are blessed to have you as a mentor. To my CSU cohort members, it has been a privilege to experience this stage of my life with you. Specifically to my mini-cohort, East Coast Cruisers, John Lehman, Jermain Griffin, and Gina Hurny, and to my travel buddies, Julie Draper, Gina Hurny, Lori Lander, and Tamara Stevens, thanks for all the great memories. And to my honorary travel buddy, Aunt Marlene, for showing Baby Robby Fort Collins while I was in class.

I need to thank all of my wonderful colleagues at The University of Tampa. President Vaughn, thank you for your confidence in me and for your investment in my future. Dr. Linda Devine, thank you for being an example of what a strong female leader in higher education and terrific mom looks like. To Bob Ruday, your mentoring and confidence in my abilities has made all the difference in my life. And thanks to Dr. Cragun for being a great sounding board and for opening my eyes to different perspectives. Thank you to Glenda Sams, Tim Harding, Gina Firth, and Krystal Schofield, for always holding down the fort while I was away at my residencies. I would not have been able to do this low-residency format without your professional competence.

And finally, I must thank the staff of the Interfaith Youth Core for your partnership and my participants for their openness to sharing their stories. I look forward to future collaborative efforts to engage others in the work of interfaith cooperation.

DEDICATION

My life has changed greatly since I started this educational journey. In the last four years I became a single mother to my loving daughter Annaleis, started a new job, met and married the love of my life, Rob, gained a beautiful step daughter Riley, gave birth to a baby, my sweet little Robby, and purchased a new home.

I dedicate this work to my children, Annaleis, Riley, and Robby. I hope when you look back on this crazy time in your mom's life you will remember when life is challenging it is always best to invest in yourself.

And to my husband Rob, you are everything to me. Your support has made my educational and personal dreams come true.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

[We] often hate each other because we fear each other;

we fear each other because we don't know each other;

we don't know each other; because we cannot communicate;

we cannot communicate because we are separated.

- Martin Luther King Jr. (as cited in Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013, p. 74)

Religious diversity presents formidable challenges as a result of ignorance, intolerance, and tension (Patel & Meyer, 2011). Particularly on college campuses, issues of difference across religion, faith, and spirituality are increasingly more divisive (Nash & Scott, 2009). A survey of American religious literacy demonstrated that the majority of those surveyed only correctly respond to half of the questions (Patel & Meyer, 2010). According to Patel and Meyer (2011), "Several studies strongly suggest that amount of knowledge one has about a religion corresponds strongly to positive attitudes toward that religion" (p. 3). While the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey administered by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (Pew, 2008) found that the majority of Americans were "non-dogmatic" (Pew, 2008), a Gallup (2010) survey showed that 52% of Americans reported unfavorable views of Muslims, Evangelicals, Mormons, and atheists (Pew, 2007; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). This lack of knowledge and scarcity of interaction with the religious other can lead to intolerance that negatively impacts communities and increased violence.

According to Johnson and Hayes (2003), multiple studies reinforce that religious struggles are omnipresent in the minds of college students, which leads to personal questioning that can greatly influence well-being. Interfaith dialogue, defined by Swindler (in Beversluis, 1995) as:

1

A conversation between individual persons – and through them, two or more communities or groups – with differing views, the primary purpose of this encounter is for each participant to learn from the other so that s/he can change and grow and thereby the respective groups or communities as well (p. 138)

serves as a forum for these struggles to be explored while connecting with the religious other.

Campbell and Putnam (2011) reinforced this concept when they stated:

Empirical data make clear the consequences of religious bridge-building: Feeling warmly toward a given religion follows from having a close relationship with someone of that religion. As Americans become personally acquainted with someone of a previous unfamiliar religion, their good feelings about that individual extend to members of that group in general. (Campbell & Putnam, 2011, p. 1)

While still a U.S. Senator, Barack Obama eluded to the disconnect between religious America and secular America in June of 2006 ("Barack Obama's Call to Renewal Keynote Address #7," n.d.). He stressed that nothing will change until these issues are taken seriously. This notion echoed Nash and Scott (2009), who said that a pluralistic society will only be realized when spirituality, faith, and religion are brought to the forefront on college campuses, and nationally. If not addressed, divisiveness will continue and positive contact with the religious other will be reduced, if not eliminated. Nash and Scott (2009) advocated for the integration of religious-spiritual issues in the university marketplace as a platform to promote pluralism and expand multicultural education.

According to Eck (2007; 2006), referenced in the Harvard Pluralism Project, pluralism surpasses equality and claims of truth, and advocates for the significance of relationship building within religions and spanning religious differences. Eck accentuated the importance of the active engagement across difference to seek understanding. Eck argued that religions must welcome, accept and seek inclusivity instead of rejecting and ultimately condemning. She delineated the need to bridge differences through dialogue between religions (inter-faith) in addition to managing differences within a specific religion (intra-faith).

This chapter will illustrate the background and historical context of religious diversity in relation to interfaith dialogue in the United States, and will address the gaps this study seeks to address. The purpose of the study, research problem and central question, assumptions, delimitations, limitations to the study, and a glossary of salient terms are provided, culminating in the significance of the study. The perspective and background of the researcher is also shared to provide her personal context to the reader.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The United States is the second most religiously diverse population in the world behind India (Eck, 1997, 2002; Jenkins, 2002). In the book, *When Religion Becomes Evil,* Kimball (2002) stated, "It is somewhat trite, but nevertheless sadly true, to say that more wars have been waged, more people killed, and these days more evil perpetrated in the name of religion than by any other institutional force in human history" (p. 1). Juergenmeyer (2000), the most recognized academic scholar on religion and violence, underscored in *Terror in the Mind of God,* that religion encourages the division of people, the dualism of good and evil, and the polarization of enemies and friends. While religion does not always have to be divisive, religious studies scholar Wentz (1993) argued that absolutism is what causes violence in the name of religion.

Religious absolutism can be countered by interfaith dialogue. Viera (2012) conducted a qualitative case study of religious leaders and scholars at the Auburn Theological Seminary Faculty Development Seminar to explore how interfaith dialogue can serve as a vehicle to improve their spiritual and religious practice. Viera shared this opening statement delivered by Professor Paul Knitter at the first Faculty Development Seminar:

> In the past four years the social conditions that encouraged efforts in multicultural and multi-faith education seem to have disappeared. Fear has closed doors that once were open. Difference is not celebrated, but feared. And those who have hijacked religion in the name of war have become the most dominant voices. What is needed to counter such

3

fear is the courage that comes from engaging the other in spiritual dialogue. Such dialogue affirms and celebrates difference not on the grounds of social tolerance, but on a conviction that we have been blessed with religious diversity. (Viera, 2012, p. 3)

Knitter was responding to the state of religious violence globally. Most violence that has occurred, particularly on a massive scale, has been initiated in the name of religion and countless incidents occurring in the final decade of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first century were in that same vein (Viera, 2012). From violence between Palestinians and Jews, to the Balkan wars, to Christian and Muslim conflict in Africa, religion has been central to these conflicts. Political underpinnings, combined with religious motivation, continue to intensify misunderstanding and ultimately violence. According to Viera (2012):

> The most visually dramatic of these conflagrations occurred on September 11, 2001 when in the name of Allah hijacked airplanes were flown into the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon, and a field in western Pennsylvania. On that day more than planes were hijacked—the global perception of the Islamic tradition was too, as were other religious traditions by association. (p. 4)

Violence in the name of religion reinforces the need for interfaith dialogue and understanding as one way to bring people together after such an intentional, yet senseless, tragedy.

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Juergensmeyer (1993) stated that religion divides individuals and communities, causes friends to become enemies, and ultimately leads to misunderstanding and violence. Huntington (1996) believed that a clash of civilizations cannot be avoided and religion is the permeating factor, while Cavanaugh (2009) asserted that the primary stimulus for interfaith dialogue as a communication process is to influence social change to counter religion as a vehicle to inspire violence. According to Patel and Meyer (2011), issues of religious ignorance, intolerance, and tension are omnipresent and can be addressed through intentional interfaith dialogue, as a component of interfaith cooperation.

While engaging the religious other though interfaith dialogue is one remedy, it is obtuse to believe this engagement will reverse all violence and erase the historical context leading to this juncture in history. However, it is essential to start somewhere. If students learn how to have these difficult dialogues in a respectful way, in the safe environment of their universities, they will be equipped to go out into the world and role model this process of intentional pluralistic interfaith dialogue for others.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to explore the lived-experiences of students participating in interfaith dialogue at the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI) in Atlanta. Interfaith dialogue was defined as:

> A conversation between individual persons – and through them, two or more communities or groups – with differing views, the primary purpose of this encounter is for each participant to learn from the other so that s/he can change and grow and thereby the respective groups or communities as well. (Swindler, as cited in Beversluis, 1995, p. 138)

Often in Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), one central research question is sufficient to guide the study, as a broad approach to questioning is used to not lead or influence participants in a particular direction. Sub-questions were employed during the semi-structured interview schedule and elaborated in chapter three.

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What are the lived-experiences of interfaith dialogue student participants who attend the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI) in Atlanta?

SUB QUESTIONS

A. How do participants define interfaith dialogue in their own words?

B. How do participants experience interfaith dialogue?

C. What do participants perceive they learn/gain through participation in interfaith dialogue?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Terms related to religion, spirituality, and faith are multifaceted and can be defined and interpreted differently. Moreover, the context in which the terms are exercised can alter the meaning and interpretation. For the purposes of this research study, the following specialized vocabulary is used, in the context of interfaith dialogue, recognizing that additional definitions exist. Supplementary definitions will be articulated in the literature review to follow.

Appreciative knowledge: When individuals hold correct and positive knowledge about a worldview, as opposed to incorrect or selective negative knowledge, synonymous with the term interfaith literacy (Patel & Meyer, 2011).

Communication: According to Hackman and Johnson (2004), a circular, complex, irreversible process which involves the total personality with the motivation of "isolated selves competing for recognition and material rewards and efficient exchange of information" (Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2004, p. 1).

Dialogue: "An encounter between two or more human beings" (Massoudi, 2006, p. 421), while balancing individual emotions with someone else's. Czubaroff (2000) went further by defining how the encounter transpires "to acknowledge and respond to the address of the other in the light of her own experience truth" (p. 174).

Ecumenical Worldview:

Reflects a global worldview that transcends ethnocentrism and egocentrism. It indicates the extent to which the student is interested in different religious traditions, seeks to understand other countries and cultures, feels a strong connection to all humanity, believes in the goodness of all people, accepts others as they are, and believes that all life is interconnected and that love is at the root of all the great religions. (Spirituality in Higher Education, 2010, p. 1)

Engagement/ engage positively: People of differing worldviews coming together for formal and informal interactions that promote appreciate knowledge, encounters of meaning, and conflict reduction (Varshney, 2001).

Intergroup dialogue:

> A face-to-face facilitated learning experience that brings together students from different social identity groups over a sustained period of time to understand their commonalities and differences, examine the nature and impact of societal inequalities, and explore ways of working together toward greater equality and justice. (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, Cytron-Walker, & Adena, 2007, p. 2)

Interfaith action/cooperation: When diverse people with different worldviews come together in community to take action for a social concern of mutual interest (Patel & Meyer, 2011).

Interfaith dialogue: Taken at face value, "interfaith dialogue is the encounter and interaction among individuals and/or families who practice differing faith traditions" (Heckman, Neiss, & Ficca, 2008, p. 3). For the purpose of this study, pluralism (see definition) is a condition for interfaith dialogue. Interfaith dialogue involves active engagement across differences to seek understanding through reciprocal communication. Swindler (in Beversluis, 1995) stated:

> Interfaith dialogue is a conversation between individual persons – and through them, two or more communities or groups – with differing views, the primary purpose of this encounter is for each participant to learn from the other so that s/he can change and grow and thereby the respective groups or communities as well." (p. 138)

*Interfaith Leadership Institute: "*Interfaith Leadership Institutes (ILIs) equip undergraduate students, staff, and faculty with the skills to engage diverse religious and non-religious identities to build the interfaith movement on their campuses" ("Be a Leader. Build the Movement.," n.d.).

Interfaith literacy: When individuals hold correct and positive knowledge about a worldview, as opposed to incorrect or selective negative knowledge, synonymous with the term appreciative knowledge (Patel & Meyer, 2011).

Interfaith studies: Interfaith studies are inclusive of interfaith and inter-religious dialogue and are interdisciplinary in nature, but can also be a multi-disciplinary field of study (Massoudi, 2006).

Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC): A Chicago-based non-profit organization, led by interfaith activist, Eboo Patel, PhD, with the mission of making interfaith cooperation a social norm.

Interreligious dialogue: The dialogue that occurs between official representatives of particular religious traditions in an intentional encounter (Heckman et al., 2008).

Involvement: "An involved student is defined as one who devotes considerable energy to academics, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations and activities, and interacts often with faculty" (Astin, 1984, p. 292).

Sustained dialogue: A structured dialogue has an intentional purpose to change the relationships of the members within the group that will then translate to the greater community (Saunders, 2001).

Motivation: The self-guided way in which individuals choose to spend their time and energy. According to Knowles (1980; 1989), motivation is the process by which individuals are "responsible for their own lives" (1980, p. 2).

Othering: The process that people use to disconnect from others that are different, both socially and emotionally. This disconnection makes it easier for individuals to dehumanize others that do not share the same values, religion, etc. (Flores, 2006).

Pluralism: According to Eck of the Pluralism Project based at Harvard University:

Pluralism is the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our deepest differences . . . Pluralism . . . does not displace or eliminate deep religious commitments . . . It does not mean abandoning differences, but holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. (as cited in Shaw, 2008, para. 8)

Pluralistic Dialogue: To promote individual personal religious experience communicated through a narrative that promotes pluralism. Religious differences are seen as opportunities for learning rather than as a means to solve conflict (Keaten & Soukup, 2009).

Religion: "A distinctive set of beliefs, rituals, doctrines, institutions, and practices that enables the members of that tradition to establish, maintain, and celebrate a meaningful world" (Earhart, 1992, p. 37).

Religious pluralism: "A world characterized by respect for people's diverse religious and non-religious identities, mutually inspiring relationships between people of different backgrounds, and common action for the common good" (IFYC, 2013, para. 3).

Religious Other: This term identifies an individual who has a different faith tradition than one's own. Veverka (2004) said, "To hear another's religious story is to hear someone else's story. It is to consider a claim about the fundamental nature of the world that often differs from and challenges our own" (p. 43).

Spiritual Development (in college students): How students make meaning of their education and their lives, how they develop a sense of purpose, the value and belief dilemmas that they experience, as well as the role of religion, the sacred, and the mystical in their lives (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2010).

Worldview: An orientation to a religious, spiritual or secular tradition that gives meaning to a person's value system and ability to create meaning (Baxter, 2013).

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The delimitations of this study encompass the boundaries set by the researcher and are characterized by her choices throughout the project. This study focused on students that attended the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI). Students that attended the ILI in Atlanta, Georgia, from January 31 to February 2, 2014, were invited to participate. Identification of participants was through recommendations from the IFYC staff. An electronic information sheet was distributed to interested participants and then demographic information was used to select eleven participants that represented a variety of religious and non-religious identities, coming from varying types of institutions (public, private, secular, non-secular), and that represented geographic diversity. The study was bound to the Atlanta ILI participants who reflected the diversity that the researcher sought in order to explore the lived-experiences of the phenomenon of interfaith dialogue for the participants.

ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the study focused on areas out of the researcher's control. This particular study focused on the lived-experiences of individuals who were self-motived to participate in the IFYC ILI, participated in the interfaith dialogue components of ILI, and reported frequent to often participation in interfaith dialogue on their campuses. These results were limited to their experience alone and the interpretation of the interfaith dialogue phenomenon they experienced. All study participants were self-motivated to participate in the ILA experience and registered on their own accord. Furthermore, they were self-motivated to participate in the study. If a different set of students were interviewed, then their experiences could vary. As with all qualitative inquiry, this study did not attempt to generalize to the greater

population, instead it was meant to be a trustworthy account of the individual participants at a

single moment in time (Chamaz, 2006; Jones et al., 2006).

A final limitation was researcher bias. While the researcher used member checks to

assure accuracy throughout the process, one can never fully eliminate all bias. Instead, one must

recognize the bias, and be committed to eliminating that bias from the work to the greatest

degree possible. The researcher's role was as a sounding board to interpret and make meaning of

the participants' experiences with interfaith dialogue, without injecting the researchers own

personal experience.

Another limitation was that the sole mechanism for data collection was through

interviews. While the researcher attended the IFYC ILA to initially screen potential participants,

the official phone or Skype interview after the ILA experience served as the primary data

collection and analysis. The goal of IPA is to make meaning of the experience in the words of

the participants; therefore, semi-structured interviews served as the best mechanism to garner the

data.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

According to Rivera (2013), "Religious illiteracy and misunderstanding of issues

surrounding faith and spirituality are growing at alarming rates on college campuses" (p. 7).

Historically, religion was a key component in the design of higher education (Chickering,

Dalton, & Stamm, 2006); more recently, discussions of spirituality, faith, and religion are nearly

invisible in the academy. While interfaith dialogue research is sparse, intergroup dialogue is an

important format of multicultural education that has proven to be a mechanism to improve

conflict and racial strife (Zúñiga et al., 2007). As a communication process, intergroup dialogue

has the ability to affect participants in ways that other formats do not. If lessons learned from

intergroup dialogue can be transferred to co-curricular interfaith dialogue, future research areas could emerge. The outcomes that occur when translated to the greater community could stimulate a ripple effect to influence more than the mere participants. Currently, more research is being produced on intergroup dialogue, college student spirituality, and the interfaith movement; conversely, there is not a substantial amount of research on the dialogue component of co-curricular interfaith programs.

The intersections and divergence of spirituality and religion in the academy is pervasive and needs to be addressed. The IFYC, led by prominent interfaith activist, Eboo Patel, advocates that:

> Effective interfaith programs facilitate positive meaningful relationships between people from different backgrounds and increase appreciative knowledge of other traditions. Social science data tells us that knowledge and relationships are the primary drivers of positive attitudes. And people with positive attitudes toward religious diversity will seek more appreciative knowledge and meaningful relationships. (IFYC, 2013, para. 3)

Interfaith dialogue is a mechanism to build these positive relationships, gain knowledge, and redirect attitudes to aid universities in addressing religious diversity, while also creating moments of personal and communal transformation.

The significance of the study is its potential to expand the limited research in the area of co-curricular interfaith dialogue. Affirming positive outcomes will shed light on the value that interfaith dialogue programs play on college campus, with the hope being that studies like these can inform university administrators so that more resources will be bookmarked for this crucial type of diversity education. Martin (2007) stated that facing the tensions that arise from differing perspectives head-on, is to "generate a creative resolution of the tension in the form of a new idea that contains elements of the opposing ideas but is superior to each" (p. 4).

RESEARCHERS PERSPECTIVE

The researcher lives by this quote, "To speak a true word is to transform the world" (Freire, 2000, p. 75).

As a student affairs professional, I have participated in many diversity programs aimed at preparing individuals to live in a global society. I have attended trainings, large-scale lectures, simulation activities, and classes to reach this end. While I received a benefit from each learning activity, it was not until I participated in an interfaith conversation group that I experienced a true transformational experience. It was this conversation group, comprised of two faculty, two staff, and four students that met once a month over lunch to engage in conversation that was my finest example of how to engage in dialogue across difference.

This low-cost program was the impetus that evoked my passion for interfaith dialogue. I became fascinated with this unsophisticated concept and wanted to learn everything I could about why this small assemblage had such a profound influence on everyone that participated. I contemplated if it was the structure of the group, the format, the purpose, the demographics, the facilitator, or any other factor that made the outcome so positive. It was that experience, along with my university's partnership with the IFYC that began my research journey.

Recognizing that I came to this research because of my own transformational experience speaks to the researcher bias that I must overcome to conduct this study. Creswell (2012) stated that the researcher serves as the sole data collection instrument in qualitative studies, and Bogdan and Biklem (2007) asserted that when it comes to phenomenology, the researcher strives to make meaning of the experience, becoming a sounding board to report the experiences of the individuals. I bring my past experiences to this inquiry, but will segregate them to accurately

give voice to the lived experiences of the study participants and fulfill my responsibilities as a

trustworthy researcher.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Past literature on dialogue programs has focused primarily on curricular initiatives. Therefore, it was necessary to expand the search terms to include transferable topic areas that inform future work on co-curricular interfaith dialogue. The most researched area of dialogue studies on college campus was intergroup dialogue. Interfaith dialogue has emerged from this as a mechanism for creating the conditions for religiously diverse people to come together for transformational conversations (Heckman, Neiss, & Ficca, 2008).

This chapter weaves together aspects of dialogue theory, intergroup dialogue, conflict transformation and peace building, intergroup contact, spirituality, interfaith cooperation, and ultimately, interfaith dialogue. Topics for review are deliberative, seeking to provide linkages across disciplines to inform this study. Gaps in the research are outlined to shed light on research areas that demand further study.

DIALOGUE

The early model of dialogue is linked to the Socratic method of questioning, which challenged individuals to articulate their own opinions on how the world works. According to Zappen (2004), Plato asserted that "dialogues" were rooted in a rhetorical tradition that promoted persuasion as a medium for conflict reduction. Through this process of questioning and discovery, participants eventually came to a common meaning and mutual framework that transcended individual ideologies

Dialogue as an educative practice is evocative of John Dewey and his influence on the democratic education movement (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, Cyton-Walker, & Adena, 2007).

Dewey (1938), a proponent of experiential learning before the term "experiential" was coined, believed that students needed to practice solving problems through critical thinking in environments that simulated the real world (Brockbank & McGill, 2000). Dewey's notion that the goal of a facilitator is to facilitate "experiences that lead to growth" is particularly useful in the interfaith context (Dewey, 1938, p. 40). Dewey used the scientific method, grounded in experience and lives of regular people, as a basis for his philosophy. Dewey recognized that dialogue has a different purpose and approach than other forms of communication. Debate encourages proselytizing, and mediation seeks resolution, while dialogue strives to promote understanding (Dessel & Rogge, 2008).

Though his approach hinged on the relational piece of the dialogue, Buber (1970) strove for deeper meaning. According to Buber, "life is meeting" (as cited in Friedman, 2002, p. xiv). He sought to understand how people treated each other and focused on the space between people and the reciprocity that occurs in conversation. According to Messer (2008), "Buber saw dialogue not as a discipline or something we practice but as a way of life in which we become more human by treating others as human" (p. 20). Buber believed that dialogue did not have an order and could not be controlled. Rather, dialogue emerged through the relationships of the participants.

Buber introduced the characteristics of ethical dialogue as: openness, appreciation of difference, acceptance of conflict, mutual respect and trust, sincerity, honesty, and a willingness to admit errors (Arnett, 1986, p. 96). Buber (1970) coined the concept of "between," referring to the space that exists between people in dialogue with each other. Furthermore, Buber imparted that a community "is built upon a living reciprocal relationship" and the builder "is the living, active center" (Buber, 1970, p. 94). Regarding the sacred aspect of dialogue, he said, "The man

(or woman) who straightforwardly hates is nearer to relation than the man (or woman) without hate or love" (Buber, 1970, p. 68). Early research on dialogue inspired theorists in critical, feminist, and anti-racist theory (see Castenada, 2004; Hooks, 1994; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Friere and Horton connected less-privileged individuals to the idea of challenging societal structures of inequity (Freire, 1970; Horton & Freire, 1990). Freire (1970) believed experiential learning was tied to social justice and it could not be a passive activity if one is fully engaged in the experience. Friere (1970) asserted, "True dialogue is transformational in nature, not solely conversational, as it has the potential to either transform the reality of participants or to embed even further the status quo that the dialogue seeks to expose" (as cited in Viera, 2012, p. 59). This transformation is only achieved through a combination of reflection and action.

Building on the work of Buber, Gadamar (1975) argued, " Understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but of being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (p. 379). He posited that by engaging in dialogue, individuals strive to strengthen the other's argument thorough communal understanding. Gadamar advanced the role of dialogue as a means to reach deeper meaning utilizing hermeneutics, which is "the phenomenon of understanding" (Gadamar, 1975, p. xxi). Another perspective on dialogue came from a physicist focusing on the effects of dialogue. Bohm's (1980) work countered the concept of fragmentation prevalent in physics. Bohm posited that society needed "to think coherently of a single, unbroken, flowing actuality of existence as a whole" (Bohm, 1980, p. xi). In Bohmian dialogue, participants sit in a circle, which has no beginning or end, symbolizing the unending nature of dialogue. Bohm (1992) also coined the phrase "impersonal fellowship" (p. 205-207), which is the connection felt with others that is often absent in daily interactions. Bohm reinforced that

dialogue is not only about what is said, but rather attention is also paid to the unspoken. What is

unsaid can be felt and can be the most salient. Bohm (1994) focused attention on perception and

the need to stratify thought from perception. He said, "You think because you have an intention

to think" (Bohm, 1996, p. 24), the feeling that follows actually occurs in tandem with the

thought.

Massoudi (2006) employed a systems theory approach that integrated thermodynamics

and Buddhist philosophy to integrate how scientists and scholars of religion view dialogue.

According to Massoudi (2006):

> Ultimately, a dialogue is a means for learning and possibly transformation and. . . is a
> dynamic process whereby one exchanges spiritual energy with the other, and under the
> right conditions this process could be a wonderful spiritual experience, leading to unity
> with the other and, ultimately, with the 'whole'. (p. 433)

He argued that a dialogue is comprised of three stages, pre-dialogue, dialogue, and post-dialogue

or reflection, while proposing that the entire dialogue encounter can be viewed as a system.

By examining the work of communication scholars Yagi and Swidler (1993), interfaith

movement scholar Panikkar (1999) found similarities in how to initiate a dialogue, guidelines for

facilitation, and the value of dialogue. Panikkar pointed out that it is nearly impossible to

disregard personal religious beliefs to empathize with another culture. Panikkar (1999)

emphasized that dialogue is what happens between people, rather than the content of the

conversation. Flores (2006) echoed this idea, saying that dialogue is about the people, not the

ideas they hold. Bakhtin (1981) previously said that dialogue is rooted in history and context

and must exemplify the experiences of people, later explained through language. Viera stated,

"language embodies the ways in which a continuing community has learned to grasp its

experience in a coherent way, which can then be taught to and learned by others. This, logically

is central, to interfaith dialogue" (2012, p. 48).

INTERGROUP DIALOGUE

Intergroup dialogue is a respected form of communication and inquiry that is rooted in philosophical traditions and cultural dimensions (Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001).   Intergroup dialogue is defined as:

> A face-to-face facilitated learning experience that brings together students from different social identity groups over a sustained period of time to understand their commonalities and differences, examine the nature and impact of societal inequalities, and explore ways of working together toward greater equality and justice. (Zúñiga et al., 2007, p. 2)

Theory used for intergroup dialogue extracts from multicultural and human relations approaches (Sleeter & Grant, 2007). The human resources approach focuses on finding commonality and harmony among people, while the multicultural approach stresses the importance of recognizing the inequalities in society and teaches individuals how to own them so they can be part of creating change in their communities (see Adams, 1997; Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Sleeter & Grant, 2007).

The majority of intergroup dialogue programs are curricular, consisting of eight to ten participants from different ethnicities, social classes, and sexual orientations. The programs focus on inequalities in society and integrate content, in addition to giving credence to the dialogic process, and promote self-reflection into action; "think, then act, understand, then do" (Alimo, Kelly, & Clark, 2002, p. 50).

Nagda and Zúñiga (2003) tested an applied model of engagement over different identity groups through intergroup dialogue that built on the "multicultural mosaic" of Torres (1995). They set out to answer two questions: "(1) What are the effects of participating in interracial/interethnic dialogues? (2) How does the learning process influence outcomes?" (Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003, p. 112-113). Through a hearty review of prior research, practice, and

intergroup dialogue theory, they introduced three domains for engaging across difference: critical

social awareness, dialogic communication, and bridge building (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002).

Nagda and Zúñiga (2003) employed a sample size of 42 students at a large Midwestern

university. They utilized a pre-experimental design, complemented by a pre and post-test

quantitative survey. Students participated in one of five interracial/ethnic dialogues. Student

volunteers were recruited through fliers, and were instructed to take a pre and post-test survey as

well. Eight outcome measures were identified; four measured the overall learning process.

A paired *t*-test analysis that contrasted pre and post-test scores was conducted, two of the

eight outcomes were found to be statistically significant. They found, "Students more strongly

considered race as an important social identity in how they thought about themselves and they

thought more regularly about their membership in a particular group" (Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003, p.

117). The authors hypothesized that the lack of significance in other areas is due to a threshold

effect and/or variation about racial groups. Regression results showed that "the dialogic learning

process predicted significant and positive change in five of the eight outcomes: centrality of race,

perspective taking, and comfort in communicating across difference" (Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003, p.

121).

Through another quantitative longitudinal survey, Gurin, Nagda, and Lopez (2004)

surveyed 140 undergraduate students and 122 graduate students. Research questions sought to

measure: perspective taking, ability to view differences as non-divisive, to improve groups'

perceptions of commonalities, improve shared learning of own group and varying groups,

promote social justice activities post-graduation, and increase ability to make peace with

unresolved conflict. Significant results were found for increased perspective taking and mutual

shared values among white students, while only increased perspective taking was significant for African-American students.

Nagda, Kim, and Truelove (2004) designed a pre-experimental study utilizing a pre and post-test quantitative survey. The authors hypothesized that intergroup dialogue would promote the desire to take action to counter racial inequities and would increase the confidence needed to do so. Results concluded that white students and students of color found intergroup dialogue more salient than lectures and reading on the same topics. However, the students of color indicated that their participation in the dialogues were more instrumental in gaining confidence than their white counterparts.

DeTurk (2006) conducted a phenomenological study as part of a community intergroup dialogue program that utilized a pre-experimental design. The impetus for the study was to assess "structured intergroup dialogue, influenced participants' consciousness, relationships, and communicative action in regard to sociocultural diversity" (p. 34). Forty-five people participated in the dialogue group that occurred in an urban Southwest region and was instituted by the government.

Volunteer subjects formed ethnically, socially, and gender-diverse groups of twelve to fifteen participants that met over a six-week time frame for ninety minutes. The participants were recruited by marketing materials that stated the take-away was "a better understanding of the self, community and ways in which to improve the climate for diversity in the city" (DeTurk, 2006, p. 34). DeTurk served as a participant/observer in addition to nine other diverse facilitators.

The results of that study were congruent with previous literature and served as a vehicle for strengthening the validity of intergroup dialogue. Participants "demonstrated perspective

taking, increased awareness and more complex thinking about diversity, increased confidence

with intergroup interaction, and commitment to action in the interest of social justice" (DeTurk,

2006, p. 39). Limitations of the study included the complex nature of empirically assessing the

development of mutual meaning construction, as well as examining the long-term impact of such

a program. As with any phenomenological study, it is important to note that the analysis was

structured by the ontological, epistemological, social location, and the overall experiences of the

researcher that can lead to bias, which DeTurk (2006) addressed head-on in the article.

Building on the work of DeTurk (2006) in the area of intergroup dialogue, another

quantitative field study was conducted at nine colleges and universities to measure if participants

in intergroup dialogues would show greater analyses of inequity and desire to take action after

graduation (Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, Gurin-Sands, & Osuna, 2009). The purpose of the study

was to counter limitations of: causality, paying attention to outcomes in lieu of process, and

generalizability unaddressed in past research. A randomized experimental design was used as

well as comparisons to social sciences courses. A uniform critical-dialogic model of intergroup

dialogue was implemented at each campus for a four-year period and fixed-field experiments

were used to assess effects of such dialogues. Each intergroup dialogue was conducted for an

academic term and met for two to three hours per week.

Students were assigned to either the dialogue group that served as the experimental

group, or the social studies course that served as the control group. The researchers used

ANOVA for each dependent variable as an additional counterpoint for the independent variable

of separate time points for participants, time and condition. The results demonstrated that

subjects in the intergroup dialogues scored significantly higher in 'critique of inequality' than

their control group as well as their social science comparison groups. Participants self-identified

that they more regularly used all four communication processes that lead to post-graduation action.

The significance of the study rests in the finding that how the intergroup dialogue works was equally as important as the outcomes of such groups. The presence of control groups and having the study span a variety of campuses significantly added validity to the field of intergroup dialogue that was omitted from past research. Prior to Nagda et al. (2009), research on intergroup dialogue did not address causality, attention to outcomes in lieu of process, and generalizability. For example, DeTurk's (2006) phenomenological study argued that participants "demonstrated perspective taking, increased awareness and more complex thinking about diversity, increased confidence with intergroup interaction, and commitment to action in the interest of social justice" (DeTurk, 2006, p .34). These findings, while important, were limited because of the inability to empirically assess the long-term impact of these dialogues. Since individuals self-identified to be part of the dialogue groups, there was no measure to identify if the significant changes DeTurk found would have occurred to these participants in the absence of the dialogue groups.

The work of Nagda et al. (2009) sought to increase validity in the research of intergroup dialogue by implementing a quantitative field study. This randomized experimental design was the first of its kind to expand intergroup dialogue to multiple universities. Prior to this study, the primary method for research in the area of intergroup dialogue was qualitative and primarily phenomenological.

The most robust research in the area of intergroup dialogue to date was a multi-university field experiment on intergroup dialogue that was conducted at nine universities, spanning a three-year timeframe, titled "The Multi-University Intergroup Dialogue Research (MIGT)

Project." The MIGT Project demonstrated that "intergroup dialogue increased the students' intergroup understanding, positive intergroup relationships, and intergroup action," and "students randomly assigned to the dialogue courses showed significantly greater change than those randomly assigned to the control groups on all four measures" (Zúñiga,et al., 2013, p. 4). The results affirmed that dialogue courses had significantly greater impact than social science courses on two-thirds of the measures. Furthermore, the identified differences in dialogue versus the control group were still significant a year later on all but three of the twenty-four items measured (Gurin et al., 2013).

Intergroup dialogue is an important format of multicultural education that has proven to be a mechanism to improve conflict and racial strife (Zúñiga et al., 2007). As a communication process, intergroup dialogue has the ability to affect participants in ways that other formats do not. The future of research in this area is ripe for exploration and discovery. If the outcomes that occur within the intergroup simulation can be translated to the greater community, then a ripple effect could occur that will influence many more than the mere participants.

Taking into account both quantitative and qualitative research, Nagda et al. (2009) affirmed that past research did not use random assignment of students or a control group to ascertain if change over time was a result to intergroup dialogue. Even with strong pre-post designs, other studies have not provided significant evidence showing that the change would not have occurred without the intervention. Furthermore, with the exception of Nagda et al. (2009), primary emphasis has been on the outcomes, not the process. Adequate quantitative research has not been conducted on what actually occurs in the process of intergroup dialogue. Furthermore, another major limitation of other past research is that research studies were conducted at single institutions, severely limiting generalizability.

Across all research, participants self-selected to participate in the intergroup dialogue experiences and only Nagda et al. (2009) used a control group. Future research needs to address deficiencies by conducting studies that are multi-institutional. Furthermore, another concern is that post-tests in the studies were distributed directly following the intervention, with the exception of Hall et al. (2011). Participants easily could have tried to recall how they answered the pre-test and been subject to demand characteristics.

The majority of research on intergroup dialogue evaluated outcomes, not actual behavior change. Coupling an examination of behavior change with a longitudinal study to assess long-term impact would strengthen the body of current literature. More research designs with control groups are needed to add legitimacy to this emerging field of multicultural learning. While intergroup dialogue differs from interfaith dialogue in that it is curricular and sustained over time, many of the assumptions for this method can be transferred to interfaith dialogue.

Critical-Dialogic Framework

Much intergroup dialogue work makes use of a critical-dialogic framework. Practitioners that are looking at creating an interfaith dialogue program should examine this framework as a potential model. 'Critical', in this context, means a meticulous determination to evaluate how individual and group experiences are implicitly linked to group identity, and how these identities exist in organizations of stratification that allow individuals of different privileged and disadvantages groups, which results in inequalities (Nagda et al., 2009).

Zúñiga et al. (2002) articulated a critical-dialogic model for practicing intergroup dialogue that could be incorporated in co-curricular interfaith dialogue programs. The researchers based their four-stage model and guiding principles on a pedagogical foundation that they enhanced after a decade of conducting research and synthesizing empirical data on the

subject. Special focus was paid to identities of participants, both individual and intersecting identities, while acknowledging the privilege and power that are systematically reinforced in societal structures.

Zúñiga et al. (2002) asserted that in order to engage dialogue across difference, a model was needed that "incorporates sustained communication, consciousness-raising, and the bridging of differences" (p. 8). Foundational pieces were woven into a four-stage design of: group beginnings, exploring differences, exploring and dialoguing about hot topics, and action planning and alliance building.

The core principles that facilitate engagement through the dialogues are: maintaining a social justice perspective (Nagda et al., 2004; Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001), balancing process and content, and reflection and action (Kieffer, 1983). Zúñiga et al. (2002) argued that the "critical-dialogic model of intergroup dialogue embraces the notion that dialogue is more than talking or discovering similarities and differences among social groups" (p. 15), but rather addresses the systems of privilege and inequality faced and how this revolution can lead from conversation and questioning to action.

Sorensen, Nagda, Gurin, and Maxwell (2009) argued that a "hands on" approach to diversity is needed in higher education. They produced an article that reviewed empirical evidence in the area of interracial contact. While bounteous evidence exists on the benefit of interactions of an informal nature in courses, naturalist and experimental studies in the social psychology realm have conflicting results that interracial contact can both be positive and negative. Exploration of identity is a salient piece of the critical approach. This lends itself to a multicultural approach rather than one that employs colorblindness (Sorensen et al., 2009).

Meanwhile, 'dialogic' centers on interactions and methods of communication that occur between individuals of different identities within intergroup dialogue (IGD) (Nagda et al., 2009). Through a multi-level modeling analytic approach to explain statistical interdependence in data structures, the following results were revealed about IGD:

> IGD is effective in generating positive educational outcomes that cover the range of understanding, relationship building, and action related to inequality and undoing inequality, showing both immediate and long-term effects; the critical-dialogic communication processes that occur among students in IGD play an important meditational role in connecting IGS method to the desired outcomes; and the IGD pedagogical features help foster the communication processes. (Sorensen et al., 2009, p. 25)

Further research is needed to address how group-level variability impacts the change of individuals (Sorensen et al., 2009). Studying how leadership, from either student affairs or academic affairs higher management, effects participation and keeps groups to maintain a high profile would be informative. More exploration regarding the viability of student peers as intergroup dialogue facilitators could transition to the use of peer facilitators in interfaith dialogue. Motivation for participation is a fertile ground for exploration.

In curricular dialogue programs, the credit-bearing graded environment is quite different than in a co-curricular environment with no extrinsic rewards. Sorensen et al. (2009) stated, "Educators cannot rely on mere exposure to diverse students and perspectives as a mechanism to prepare students for a globalized world" (p. 30). Research is needed to identify the core ingredients that make dialogue effective, not just the overall effectiveness (Sorensen et al., 2009). This leads to the study of dialogue as a communication process, primarily in intergroup dialogue, but with implications for interfaith dialogue.

Intergroup Dialogue as a Communication Process

Heckman and Johnson (2004) stated that communication is "a continuous, ongoing process without a clearly defined beginning or end" (p. 7). They also described a circular process as opposed to the more linear approach of communication associated with ancient Greece. The notion of irreversibility permeated their work. If something is spoken, effects are lasting and cannot be reversed. Multiple theorists discussed dialogue as an interactive process (Pearce & Pearce, 2004; Taylor, 2004). Taylor (2004) focused on the relationship as an anchor in the communication process. Pearce and Pearce (2004) valued the story telling aspect, "Relationship is sometimes the context for and sometimes contextualized by stories" (p. 48).

Deetz and Simpson (2004) outlined these goals: to find common ground, focus on the interaction instead of the individual meaning, and lastly, indeterminacy and otherness. "These positions go back to the liberal-humanist work of Maslow, Rogers, Senge, and Bohm, the critical-hermeneutic work of Gadamer and Habermas, and concluding with the post-modern work of Bakhtin, Derrida, Focault, and Levinas" (pp. 141-142).

In Nagda and Zúñiga's (2003) quantitative research, factor analyses were conducted on the intergroup encounter in relation to communication that illuminated four factors: " (1) appreciating difference, (2) engaging self, (3) critical self-reflection, and (4) alliance building" (p. 553). The path analysis demonstrated that communication processes entirely reconciled the influence of intergroup dialogue on bridging differences and yoking pedagogical strategies and psychological processes.

Nagda (2006) built upon the work of Dovidio et al. (2004), Yeakley (1998), and Comford (2003) by addressing intergroup dialogue communication processes and how the intergroup dialogue process of communication can illuminate the effect of intergroup experiences on

bridging differences. Nagda (2006) surveyed five cohorts of students in a Social Welfare program to address two research questions. First, what communication processes are used in intergroup dialogue? Second, in what ways can intergroup dialogue communication explain the effect of intergroup encounters on bridging differences? Intergroup communication processes, including pedagogical and psychological, served as the independent variable and the impact of the intergroup encounter served as the dependent variable. A factor analyses was communicated on the intergroup encounter in relation to communication that illuminated four independent variables: "(1) appreciating difference, (2) engaging self, (3) critical self-reflection, and (4) alliance building" (p. 553). The path analysis demonstrated that communication processes entirely reconcile the influence of intergroup dialogue on bridging differences and yoke pedagogical strategies and psychological processes.

As hypothesized in research question two, bivariate correlational analyses among the four intergroup dialogue communication processes displayed significant intercorrelations (ranging from .427, $p < .001$ to .657, $p < .001$). Results upheld the author's hypothesis that intergroup encounters and the four communication processes were positively related to bridging differences, as reported in post-tests. The significance of the study was that much of intergroup dialogue centers on appreciating differences through self-engagement in the experience, the study demonstrated the need for self-reflection and alliance building (Nagda, 2006). This study should be examined alongside others because, since only one institution was used, the generalizability factor is low, and methodologically, all the information was self-reported by students versus reporting actual witnessed behavior change (Nagda, 2006).

Future research should include: evaluation of estrangement instead of just engagement, notes and video tapes of participant behavior, a comparison group, and longitudinal data should

be collected to see longer-term impact. In addition, there may be varying orders to the path

analysis than just those demonstrated in the study. While dialogue as a communication process

can bridge differences in intergroup dialogue groups, future studies on if this same

communication phenomenon is applicable to interfaith dialogue programs are needed.

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION AND PEACE BUILDING

Using a case-study approach to examine the experience of religious leaders that

participated in an interfaith dialogue as part of an interfaith seminar, Viera (2012) stated,

"Interfaith dialogue is motivated by the assumption that unless religions make peace with one

another, the world itself will not know peace" (Viera, 2012, p. 5). Boulding (2000) discussed the

notion of "best case thinking" as a way to point towards new insights for peace building. Many

other scholars and world leaders also believe that until there is peace between the world

religions, peace among the world cannot be realized (Kung, 2005). However, this may be an

oversimplification. According to Cavanaugh (2007), forcing religions into dialogue for the sole

purpose of world peace can put responsibility and culpability of the extreme violence onto the

world religions. Cavanaugh stated, "Their violence is religious, and therefore irrational and

divisive. Our violence, on the other hand, is rational, peacemaking, and necessary. Regrettably,

we find ourselves forced to bomb them into higher rationality" (p. 3).

Struggles in communication, perceptions, and meaning-making amid differences are

found in greater systems of social disparity, and practitioners promote collaborative links to

stimulate equal and fair connections between individuals (Zúñiga et al., 2007). Yeakley (1998)

conducted a non-experimental, qualitative study, employing open-ended and semi-structured

interviews of 26 participants in an intergroup dialogue at a Midwestern institution. The

uniqueness of this study was that participants were interviewed months after their experience in

the intergroup dialogue. The study focused on: how attitudes changed in real situations versus simulations, examined processes in lieu of outcomes, emphasized the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral part of the change process, examined long term attitudes, and focused on process, not content. A grounded theory was used to collect and analyze the data. The strength of Yeakley's (1998) study was "that both positive and negative change processes could be explained, and the study of non-dialogue contact experiences allowed for the development of a change process theory that generalized to more contact situations than just intergroup dialogues" (p. 296). Limitations of the study included the retrospective nature of the self-reporting structure that relied on the memory and honesty of the participants.

Gurin, Peng, Lopez, and Nagda (1999) conducted a quasi-experimental design utilizing a pre and post-test compared to a control group. The study was intended to elicit positive intergroup outcomes, minimize negative effects, and foster fruitful effects of both privileged and non-privileged groups. The outcomes showed that "African American, Latino/Latina, and Asian American students reported perceiving less intergroup divisiveness, held more positive views of conflict, increased positive relationship with white students four years later and perceptions of greater commonality with white students" (Dessel & Rogge, 2008, p. 203).

Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) designed a pre-experimental study that surveyed 1,582 University of Michigan students, and 11,383 total students through a cooperative institutional research program at additional universities. A quantitative pre and post-test longitudinal study was used to ascertain the differences and commonalities of groups, while weaving in readings on intergroup dialogues and relations. The study focused on how to handle conflict and determine action steps that groups can take in community with others. The outcomes of this national study confirmed that experiences that are inclusive of dialogues

31

contributed to the outcome of democracy for majority and non-majority students. However, the dialogue groups were more salient for white students, as their perspective taking increased through participation.

Often, prejudice in not based in tangible life experiences, rather it is influenced by perceived differences that come in the form of assumptions (Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995). Resolving conflicts that are rooted in ethnic-based relations, dialogue of an intergroup nature can lead to the acknowledgement of mutual needs, aspirations, and points of views and how social identity impacts both worldview and sociopolitical relationships (Ross, 2000). The six theories Ross (2000) introduced in "ethnic-based conflict resolution practice" were: "community relations, principled negotiation, human needs, psychoanalytically rooted identity, intercultural miscommunications, and conflict transformation" (p. 212). Ross (2000) used this typology to critically address human needs and identity.

Halabi and Reich (2004) employed a pre-experimental design, to conduct semi-structured qualitative interviews with sixteen college students with the purpose of increasing experimental learning about groups in conflict. While intended outcomes were designed to assist participants, acknowledge the identities of other group members, and create a general understanding of shared acceptance, results showed that what transpired were the acknowledgement of oppression and the recognition of the roles of the oppressors. When the concept of interfaith cooperation is introduced later in the chapter, this same phenomenon of shared acceptance leading to action for the common good is further addressed.

INTERGROUP CONTACT

Bridging gaps across divergent social identities became apparent in the 1940's and 1950's (Zúñiga et al., 2007). During this time in the United States, many African-Americans

participated in the "great migration," and moved from the South to the North and a similar phenomenon occurred with Mexican-Americans as a response to World War II (Castenada, 2004). This historical context was the precursor for the need for educational tools to address inequalities. This has led to multicultural, social justice, and anti-bias education, thought to have roots in intergroup education (Adams, 1997; Banks, 2005).

Past studies suggest that when people interact with people that are different than them, intergroup prejudice is reduced (see Castenada, 2004; Cook, 1969; Pettigrew, 1998; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Amir (1969; 1976) agreed that when conditions are optimal, prejudice can be reduced, but he thought this does not translate to larger populations. Furthermore, he said that prejudice and tensions about individuals could be increased if conditions are not favorable. In contrast to this opinion, Viera (2012) said, "O*thering* refers to the basic and common human process by which individuals and groups disconnect emotionally and socially from those who are different from them" (p. 29).

Stephan and Stephan (1985) stressed the complexity of reducing prejudice through intergroup contact. However, many social psychologists have rejected contact theory. For example, Hopkins, Reicher, and Levine (1997) stated that aspirations of contact theorists have failed to materialize. Further effort must be made to address the lack of research in the field of intergroup dialogue specific to contact and prejudice for majority and minority students.

Tropp and Pettigrew (2005) used data from a meta-analytic study of intergroup contact to examine the differing effects for majority and minority students. Results denoted that relationships between contact and prejudice are higher among majority students than their minority counterparts. Furthermore, Tropp and Pettigrew (2005) asserted that Allport's (1954) suggested aspects for optimal intergroup contact do not impact minority students, but do offer a

significant gain in predicting robust contact-prejudice relationships among majority students. Allport's (1954) hypothesis asserted that intergroup contact has favorable results if four specific criteria. The four conditions include: the equal status of the group, mutual goals are presented, exchanges are cooperative, and those in position of power encourage the communication between groups.

Tropp and Pettigrew (2005) brought to the surface that "research has yet to test whether group differences in status might moderate the extent to which intergroup contact can promote positive intergroup attitudes among members of minority and majority status groups" (p. 951). They conducted a comprehensive search using 54 different search terms. The inclusion criteria used "empirical studies in which intergroup contact acted as an independent variable for predicting intergroup prejudice" (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005, p. 952). Minority and non-minority status served as an attribute-independent variable. Relationships between intergroup contact and intergroup prejudice, as well as patterns of effects served as dependent variables. This meta-analysis included both experimental and quasi-experimental research studies.

The researchers were trying to ascertain if relationships among intergroup contact and intergroup prejudice suggests differences between members of minority and majority groups, and if the patterns of differing effects were contingent on conditions of the contact situation. Reviewed research were experimental manipulations and correlational studies, studies that were conducted and assessed on members of specific groups, and studies in which differing identity groups had significant interaction with each other. Furthermore, for the studies to be included, "Outcome measures had to be collected on individuals rather than assessed on an aggregate level and some type of comparative data had to be available to evaluate variability in prejudice in relation to the contact" (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005, p. 952).

The researchers looked from 1940 to 2000, and found 515 studies meeting these criteria. A sample size of 713 independent samples and 1,383 non-independent tests were included. Responses represented more than 250,000 participants from 38 countries (a variety of target groups, contact settings, study designs, research procedures). External validity was high due to the sample size. This study was salient because it clearly showed that more contact research is needed on minority students since the majority of studies in the meta-analysis were samples of majority status groups (Troop & Pettigrew, 2005). The proportion of minority samples was lower than the non-minority samples and chance did not account for this significant difference. Contact prejudice was weaker for the minority sample (mean r = -.18) than the majority group (mean r = -.23, $Q_B(1) = 9.34$, $p < .01$). When examining only racial and ethnic contact, contact prejudice relationships still presented weaker results with minorities (mean r = -.18) than the majority sample (mean r = -.24, $Q_B(1) = 9.15$, $p < .01$).

A weighed, random-effects regression analyses was used for the meta-analysis in an effort to use appropriate parameters and probability values (Troop & Pettigrew, 2005). Since this was a meta-analysis, the control of extraneous experience and environmental variables were different for each study. Subgroups, minority and non-minority, were compared. The minority's significance level was low, which could have been attributed to the small amount of studies identified that were minority focused in the analysis.

Hall, Cabrera, and Milem (2011) "examined the extent to which minority students and non-minority students differ in their predispositions to engage in campus-based diversity activities as well as in their engagement with ethnically diverse college peers at a predominantly White college" (p. 420). Minority and non-minority students served as the nominal, independent variables, while students' predisposition to engage in diversity-related activities upon entering

college, engagement with diverse peers throughout college, and reporting positive interactions among diverse peers during sophomore year served as the dependent, ordinal variables. The researchers used a revised version of the Transition to College Model (Locks et al., 2008) as a basis for the design of the study. Two difference and one associational questions were studied. Findings denote that engagement with diverse peers is a learned behavior that begins prior to college. These past experiences exceed freshman year predictions for engagement. While minority freshman were more likely than white counterparts to engage with a diverse peer group, by sophomore year, this difference dwindled in significance.

A quantitative longitudinal, within groups, pre and post-test study surveyed 927 University of Maryland College Park undergraduate students from Fall 2000 to Spring 2002. Participants completed the baseline survey during freshman orientation called *Preparing Students for a Diverse Democracy: First Year Student Voices and Experiences* (Hurtado, 2003; Locks et al., 2008: Saenz, 2005) to gain data on the experiences of students prior to entering college, their predisposition to interact with a diverse peer group in college, and the quality of diverse relationships inside and outside the high school environment. A follow-up survey, administered at the completion of the sophomore year in 2002, titled *Preparing Students for a Diverse Democracy: Second Year Survey of Student Views and Experiences,* focused on changes in cognitive, social and democracy outcomes as well as attitudinal changes since entering the university environment while measuring to what degree students interacted with diverse peers in various campus settings.

Analysis centered on three constructs, three items, and the corresponding fifteen variables, resulting in an effective sample size of 730.   The associational question resulted

> in opposition to the initial hypothesis, Pre-College Structural Diversity per se bears no connection (-.01) with student Predisposition to Engage in Diversity-Related Activities

36

upon entering college. However, pre-college structural diversity was positively associated (.34*) with interactions with diverse peers prior to college. (Hall, Cabrera, & Milem, 2011, p. 432).

Students who engaged with diverse peers prior to college were more likely to engage with a diverse peer group by the completion of sophomore year (.20*). Freshman predisposed to engage in campus diversity activities reported interacting with diverse peers in their sophomore year (.19*), which aligned with past research on this topic (Locks et al., 2008; Milem & Hakuta, 2000). The discrepancy with past literature demonstrated an absence of an effect between residence on campus and diversity engagement (Pike, 2002; Zuniga et al., 2005).

There was a moderate effect (.46) between minority students and non-minority students on the difference question regarding predisposition to engagement. Minority students were half a standard deviation higher in predisposition than non-minority students to engage in diversity activities. However, by graduation two years later, minority and non-minority students showed similar levels of engagement. The overall limitation to the study was that participants self-identified to complete both surveys, which is a limitation in many quantitative studies.

SPIRITUALITY OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

Intergroup and interfaith discussions on college campuses often revolve around the inner life or spiritual journey of students. Recognizing the deficit of research on the spiritual development of students' and faculty's lives, more research studies have been produced recently that invite educators to promote an enhanced commitment to a holistic education that values self-awareness (Tisdell, 2008). While many definitions of spirituality exist, according to Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2010), spirituality serves as:

> A dynamic construct that involves the internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness; transcending one's locus of centricity while developing a greater sense of connectedness to self and others through relationship and community; deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in life; being open to exploring a relationship

with a higher power that transcends human existence and human knowing; and valuing the sacred. (p. 4)

In an earlier definition, Love and Talbot (1999) based their definition of spirituality on three principles: "(a) the quest for spiritual development is an innate aspect of human development; (b) spiritual development and spirituality are interchangeable concepts; and, (c) openness is a prerequisite to spiritual development" (p. 364). Grounded on these principles, Love and Talbot (1999) suggested five assumptions that outline their definition of spirituality:

(1) Spiritual development involves an internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development.
(2) Spiritual development involves the process of continually transcending ones current locus of centricity.
(3) Spiritual development involves developing a greater connectedness to self and other through relationships and union with community.
(4) Spiritual development involves deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in one's life.
(5) Spiritual development involves an increasing openness to exploring a relationship with an intangible and pervasive power or essence that exists beyond human knowing. (pp. 364-367)

Astin et al. (2010) conducted a longitudinal study from 2003 to 2007 and created a database that measured "changes in individual students' spiritual and religious qualities during the first three years of college" (p. 9). Data was collected on eleven diverse campuses via the College Students' Beliefs and Values (CSBV) survey, compounded with interviews and focus groups of students and selected faculty and staff. The five spiritual measures were: Spiritual Quest, Equanimity, Ethic of Caring, Charitable Involvement, and Ecumenical Worldview. While the five measures of religious qualities were: Religious Commitment, Religious Engagement, Religious/Social Conservatism, Religious Skepticism, and Religious Struggle. Findings showed that religiosity decreased in college as spiritual growth increased. Furthermore, the increase in

spiritual growth positively correlated to other college outcomes, including: academic performance, psychological well-being, leadership development, and satisfaction with college.

To develop spirituality, it is crucial to investigate other spiritual traditions (see Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000; Wuthnow, 1999). According to Astin et al. (2010), spiritual qualities are enhanced when students have the opportunity to engage in activities and experiences with diverse others that promote multiple perspectives. They wrote, "Students who socialize with people from other races grow in feeling overall more interconnected and caring" (p. 81). According to Loder (1998), part of that integration and search for wholeness appears to be about being able to live with the integration and the paradox of the tension of opposites, which adults seem to be able to do more successfully in midlife and beyond.

Tisdell (2008) focused on spirituality as change over time, using a metaphor of a spiral of ongoing development of identity that incorporated human development theorist, Robert Kegan's (1982, 1994) research on evolving self and five "orders of consciousness." However, Fowler (1981) still remains the most often sighted in faith development (Tisdell, 2008). Tisdell (2003) presented seven assumptions about spirituality in conjunction with education. She posited:

1. Religion and spirituality are interrelated but not the same;
2. spirituality is about wholeness and interconnectedness;
3. spirituality promotes meaning making;
4. spirituality is omnipresent in the learning environment;
5. spirituality moves individuals towards a more authentic self,
6. spirituality involves how individuals construct knowledge through unconscious and symbolic mechanisms;
7. spiritual experiences can come by surprise. (p. 28-29)

A plethora of research on spirituality centers on transformation. For example, Vella (2010) said, "Every education event is movement toward a metanoia, the passage of spirit from alienation into a deeper awareness of oneself. A spirited epistemology is based on the belief that all education is directed toward such a transformation" (p. 10). Similarly, Rabbi Michael Lerner

(2000) defined emancipatory spirituality as a desire to work towards environmental sustainability and, ultimately, world transformation. Emancipatory spirituality promotes a love and respect for others, not just others with the same values and beliefs, which is a vital component of interfaith dialogue.

Estanek (2006) outlined commonalities in various definitions including: "(a) spirituality is both deeply individual and communal; (b) that there is some sort of power beyond human existence; and, (c) that humans develop in trying to make sense (meaning-making) of their existence in light of this power" (p. 274). Estanek reinforced the notion that authenticity and wholeness are common concepts throughout the literature on spirituality (see HERI, 2010; Palmer, 2004). Estanek (2006) introduced a spectrum of common themes in the literature, including:

(1) Spirituality defined as spiritual development
(2) Spirituality used as critique
(3) Spirituality understood as an empty container for individual meaning
(4) Spirituality understood as common ground or 'field'
(5) Spirituality as quasi-religion. (p. 272)

Spirituality has also been defined as a search for meaning and purpose. Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm (2006) weaved this throughout their text, *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education.* They wrote, "These definitions of spirituality and authenticity imply that these domains intimately interact with other major vectors of human development: integrity, identity, autonomy and interdependence, meaning and purpose" (p. 9).

Coupled with religion, spirituality has a different home in the literature. Religiosity is often associated with the practice of following specific faith traditions and the rituals that are involved. Spirituality, on the other hand, is a connection to a personal process of inner development that centers us (Teasdale, 1999, p. 17). Nash (2001) posited, "The words religion

and spirituality are interchangeable parts of the same experience" (p. 18); religion is driven by the head and spirituality by the heart. This juxtaposition of head and heart (religion and spirituality) are at the core of interfaith dialogue.

INTERFAITH COOPERATION

The Interfaith Movement emerged on September 11, 1893 in Chicago, Illinois at what was named the World's Parliament of Religions. In conjunction with the World's Fair, this dialogue consisted of leaders from ten differing faith traditions, attracted a large attendance, and was covered widely by the press. The overarching assumption of the parliament was one of "modernity: that Religion is a source and cause of great violence and tension among the world's people, and nothing is more important to world peace and stability than for religious people to dialogue with another so as to avoid future catastrophe" (Viera, 2012, p. 11). This dialogue opened the door for future learning disciplines in the academy, namely, around world religions and comparative religions. Furthermore, the *Sourcebook of the World's Religions: An Interfaith Guide to Religion and Spirituality,* was published as a byproduct of the parliament. Kimball (2002) claimed, "It is somewhat trite, but nevertheless sadly true to say, that more wars have been waged, more people killed, and these days more evil perpetrated in the name of religion than by any other institutional force in human history" (p. 1).

The Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), a Chicago-based non-profit, led by prominent interfaith activist, Eboo Patel, advocates for interfaith cooperation. Patel believes that interfaith cooperation combats interfaith challenges, as well as brings people together for a common good. Just as universities have led other social justice initiatives in regards to ethnic diversity, gender equality, and sexual orientation, research has indicated that colleges are now bringing interfaith cooperation to the forefront of the social justice initiatives on campuses. Campuses are

addressing this issue by intentionally creating interfaith programs to collectively bring students, faculty, and staff together to engage in interfaith/intergroup dialogue, interfaith co-curricular programs, interfaith curricular programs, and interfaith social justice service and reflection opportunities.

The IFYC believes that religious and philosophical traditions serve as a potential bridge of cooperation, instead of a divider. This bridge leads to an increase in religious pluralism. As defined by IFYC, religious pluralism is creating common action for the common good through a process of respect for people's diverse religious and non-religious identities, while cultivating meaningful relationships between individuals of different backgrounds (IFYC, 2013). Furthermore, IFYC posits that religious pluralism is achieved in two ways:

> *The science of interfaith cooperation:* by creating positive, meaningful relationships across differences, and fostering appreciative knowledge of other traditions, attitudes improve, knowledge increases, and more relationships occur. These three are mutually reinforced and backed by social science data, what we (IFYC) call the 'interfaith triangle'.

> *The art of interfaith leadership:* people who create and foster opportunities for positive knowledge and opportunities for engagement move others around the interfaith triangle and lead to a community marked by pluralism. (IFYC, *About the Movement,* 2013, para. 1)

The White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships assembled a group of university leaders on June 7, 2010 at the White House to engage in a dialogue "about the potential for higher education to serve a role in making interfaith cooperation a social norm throughout American Society" (IFYC, 2010, p. 3). This initial conversation was followed by a smaller gathering in July 2010 at the Harvard Kennedy School, facilitated by Loren Gary of the Center for Pubic Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School and Eboo Patel. This assemblage "identified the importance of interfaith cooperation as a civic good, and set the broader goal of scaling the interfaith movement across higher education" (IFYC, 2010, p. 3). On August 9 and

10, 2010, 75 national leaders in the area of interfaith cooperation convened at DePaul University

in an effort to develop a scaling strategy. The concept of campuses as "ecologies" was presented

and the four key layers of campus ecology were addressed: (1) student involvement and

leadership, (2) staff capacity, (3) faculty and curriculum, (4) high-level administration and

institutional commitment (IFYC, 2010, p. 3).

As a result of these three dialogues, the IFYC put together a comprehensive document

titled, *Interfaith Cooperation and American Higher Education: Recommendations, Best

Practices and Case Studies*, that serve as a framework for campuses wishing to develop,

improve, or assess their current interfaith offerings. Each of the four ecologies is shared, best

practices are identified, and examples from current institutions that have exemplary programs in

each ecology are shared.

Student Involvement and Leadership

Student affairs practitioners would argue that most successful campus initiatives start

with student participation, empowerment, and leadership (IFYC, 2010).   Interfaith programs are

no different. IFYC provided the following recommendations:

1. Incorporate an intentional focus on religious diversity and interfaith cooperation into existing first year programs.
2. Create campus-wide interfaith service and reflection opportunities.
3. Train student leaders to be religious diversity peer educators.
4. Implement an interfaith student council. (IFYC, 2010, p. 7)

Staff Capacity

Staff and faculty are vital to the success of interfaith programs. They serve as mentors

for students in and outside the classroom. In order to engage in conversations of religious

diversity, students, faculty and staff must be trained in religious literacy and sensitivity training.

Uneducated facilitators can counter the positive effects of discussions of religious diversity.

IFYC (2010) provided the following recommendations:

1. Include interfaith cooperation and religious diversity in staff orientation and existing diversity training.
2. Support additional professional development opportunities.
3. Create collaborative partnerships across campus.
4. Work with professional associations. (p. 10)

Faculty and Curriculum

Creating seamless opportunities for student learning and engagement enhances the ability to create lasting cultural change regarding interfaith cooperation. In the classroom, faculty have the unique ability to influence four layers of interfaith cooperation: the civic, professional, leadership, and expert levels (IFYC, 2010). Best practices include:

1. Interfaith cooperation in campus-wide learning initiatives.
2. Short lesson plans that can transcend disciplines.
3. Coursework that stresses the applicability of interfaith cooperation.
4. Minors or concentrations in this area.
5. Experiential learning opportunities.
6. Religious diversity training.
7. Scholarships focused on interfaith cooperation.
8. Curricular or co-curricular center of study. (IFYC, 2010, p. 12)

Administration and Institutional Commitment

Institutions personify what they value by how they spend their time, money, and resources. In order for interfaith programs to succeed, a strong commitment from upper-level administrators is important. Furthermore, an intentional institutional commitment is required. This can be displayed in a mission statement, vision, or strategic plan that encompasses diversity and inclusion. Best practices for building interfaith cooperation at the administration and institutional level include:

1. Create a Presidential Task Force.
2. Conduct a campus-wide data gathering and asset mapping.
3. Review the institutional mission, history, values and strategic plan.

4. Designate resources to capacity building for faculty, staff and administrators.
5. Create a year-long theme of interfaith cooperation.
6. Design a campus-based interfaith center for academic study or for civic engagement.
7. Convene a cohort of per colleges and universities. (IFYC, 2010, p. 16)

The interfaith movement has grown out of the need for greater religious literacy and sensitivity that is required to live in todays' society. Literature on dialogue, intergroup contact, and pluralistic dialogue serves as a historical context for the increased momentum on college campus to promote interfaith cooperation. Patel and Meyer (2011) challenged institutions of higher education to tackle religious diversity with the same passion that has been focused on other diversity issues, to influence the broader culture.

Baxter (2013)—along with Elon University, the IFYC, and Wofford College—produced the "Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric," a tool to assist faculty and staff "define, measure, and analyze student learning that happens from engaging diverse religious and nonreligious perspectives" (p. 259). Baxter built on the Association of American Colleges and Universities' (AACU) VALUE rubrics, "a set of rubrics for evaluating achievement of a wide array of cross-cutting learning outcomes" (Rhodes, 2012, p. 4). The Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric names five criteria: knowledge of own worldview, knowledge of other worldviews, attitudes, interpersonal engagement, interfaith engagement and reflection (Baxter, 2013, p. 263). The rubric was intended to measure student learning and liberal education in both curricular and co-curricular contexts. While at the time of publication, the rubric was yet to be tested; it has the potential to measure the impact that interfaith programs have on student learning.

The literature suggests that successful interfaith programs begin with student leadership and empowerment, capitalizes on the staff's capacity to do the work, weaves the topic into the curriculum through faculty involvement, and is supported from higher levels of administration.

Key components include: dialogue groups, religious literacy programs, opportunities for reflection, learning communities, on-going educational sessions for faculty and staff, in addition to students. Successful interfaith programs offer a diverse spectrum of activities that have the potential to draw in a varied audience. Research demonstrates that universities have the potential to lead the interfaith movement, as educational institutions have pioneered other social justice issues to a positive end as well. Interfaith dialogue proves to be a mechanism to build these positive relationships, gain knowledge, and redirect attitudes to aid universities in addressing religious diversity while creating moments of personal and communal transformation.

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND PLURALISM

Multiple definitions of interfaith dialogue exist. Swindler (as cited in Beversluis, 1995) shared that interfaith dialogue is a conversation among individuals, that bridge "communities or groups – with differing views, the primary purpose of this encounter is for each participant to learn from the other so that s/he can change and grow and thereby the respective groups or communities as well" (p. 138). Programs that promote interfaith dialogue are: conversation groups, collaborative projects, joint service programs, and thematic dialogues. A simpler definition contends, "Interfaith dialogue is the encounter and integration among individuals and/or families who practice differing faith traditions" (Heckman, Neiss, & Ficca, 2008, p. 3). These religious differences are viewed as opportunities for learning rather than as a means to solve conflict (Keaten & Soukup, 2009), differing somewhat from the purpose of intergroup dialogue. Veverka (2004) said, "To hear another's religious story is to hear someone else's story. It is to consider a claim about the fundamental nature of the world that often differs from and challenges our own" (p. 43).

Interfaith dialogue, and even interreligious dialogue, are forums to answer questions like, what significance is paid to my neighbor's faith tradition in regards to my own? Thetamanil (2009) posited that the field of religious studies sprouted from this fundamental question. While dialogue is the most widely recognized term used to describe the interfaith communication process, Brookfield and Preskill (1999) instead used the word "discussion" as a combination of conversation, dialogue, and discussion. They outlined the purpose of discussion as:

1. To help participants reach a more critically informed understanding about the topic or topics under consideration.
2. To enhance participants' self-awareness and their capacity for self-critique.
3. To foster an appreciation among participants for the diversity of opinion that invariable emerges when viewpoints are exchanged openly and honestly, and
4. To act as a catalyst to helping people take informed action in the world. (p. 6)

Reinforcing the connection between spirituality and interfaith dialogue, Massoudi (2006) asserted that it is impossible to release the role of personal emotions and reinforces the Buddhist concept of 'generating *bodhicilla*', the 'mind of enlightenment' or the 'awakening mind' (Williams, 1994, p. 198). Interfaith dialogue participants must be open to a beginner's mind and consider that individual truths are not an absolute. This only comes through a sense of self-awareness and embracing reflection practices.

In an effort to bridge two bodies of literature, communication and pluralistic interfaith dialogue, Keaton and Soukup (2009) conducted a robust review of literature on dialogue from a communication paradigm, with an emphasis on tactics of interfaith dialogue via four distinctive retorts to perceptions of religious pluralism and religious otherness. Four aspects of communication that Keaten and Soukup (2009) found poignant to interfaith dialogue were:

1. The ideal purpose or function of dialogue.
2. The role of the subject (in relationship to the 'other') in dialogue.
3. The roles of epistemology and ontology in dialogue.
4. The role of the sociohistorical context (and the imbedded power arrangements) in dialogue. (p. 170)

Through the exclusivism, relativism, reductionism, and pluralism paradigms, Keaton and Soukup (2009) examined how individuals understand the religious other and questioned if this understanding was based on similarities or differences. The scholars concluded that the only paradigm consistent with understanding dialogue from a communication perspective was pluralism. Key assumptions included that:

> Pluralism is a dialogic response to religious otherness, is a vehicle for interfaith understanding, and pluralism requires a communicative climate in which religious differences and disagreement are interpreted as learning opportunities rather than sources of conflict that must be resolved. (Keaten & Soukup. 2009, p. 180-181)

Keaten and Soukup (2009) determined that additional research is needed on pluralistic interfaith dialogue. While the body of literature on intergroup dialogue is rich, the body of literature on interfaith dialogue lacks dearth. If embraced, "Interfaith dialogue offers people the opportunity to expose the hegemonic processes that fracture notions of community" (Keaten & Soukup, 2009, p. 184).

The scholars argued that pluralism is the only paradigm congruent with the understanding of dialogue from a communicative perspective (Keaten & Soukup, 2009). Eight tenets were introduced that serve as orientations to pluralistic dialogue:

> 1. Pluralism requires active engagement of the religious other. Thus, pluralism is a dialogic response to religious otherness.
> 2. Pluralism focuses on personal religious experience communicated through narrative.
> 3. Pluralism requires empathetic listening (i.e., setting aside assumptions and entering the discursive faith world of the religious other).
> 4. Pluralism neither presumes nor requires a person to adopt the central assumption of religious relativism (i.e., all faith traditions are different manifestations of an ultimate, ineffable ruth).
> 5. Pluralism is a vehicle for interfaith understanding not conversation.
> 6. Pluralism conceived of religious difference as an opportunity for insight and inspiration rather than as a treat to one's own faith tradition.
> 7. Pluralistic dialogue focuses on faith rather than religion.
> 8. Pluralism requires a communicative climate in which religious differences and disagreement are interpreted as learning opportunities rather than sources of conflict that must be resolved. (p. 180-181)

The model of pluralistic interfaith dialogue, based on the tenets listed above and an understanding of communication literature, included four aspects that are synonymous in both bodies of research. The first aspect is having the purpose of an "emergent dialogic reciprocity"; second is the subject that includes "mutuality, responsibility, and difference"; third is the function of ontology or epistemology; and finally, is the position of sociohistorical context (Keaten & Soukup, 2009, p. 182).

Keaten and Soukup's (2009) work supported the earlier work of Hurtado (2005) and Nagda, Kim et al. (2004). Hurtado's pre-experimental, longitudinal study involved multiple paper and web-based quantitative surveys with a substantial survey size of 4,403 undergraduate students. The instruments were designed to measure cognitive, social cognitive, and democratic tendencies. Results affirmed an increase in aptitude for perspective taking and invoking a pluralistic view, which reinforced the work of DeTurk (2006) and Nagda (2006). Increased problem solving, leadership, and awareness of various cultures were also a by-product of the study. How people make meaning of others is a critical component of pluralistic dialogue (Keaten & Soukup, 2009). While Keaten and Soukup (2009) argued that pluralism and effective dialogue are exclusive, research is needed to assess if productive intergroup dialogue can occur in the absence of pluralism on the part of all participants.

Viera (2012) added to the literature on interfaith dialogue by focusing on the experience of the participants in interfaith dialogue by enlisting a qualitative case study approach. Viera's study included 25 participants from a diverse array of religious identities, inclusive of two participants that self-identified as proscribing to two religious identities. Viera's (2012) analysis demonstrated that:

1. A personal relationship was the primary initial motivator to engage across religious difference;

2. Interfaith dialogue increased participants' clarity about their religious identity;
3. The deepest, most impactful learning across religious difference took place informally, not in structured dialogues or academic deliberations;
4. "Spiritual humility" was the reported impact interfaith dialogue had on participants' spiritual practice; and
5. Collaborative practice" was the reported impact interfaith dialogue has had on participants' professional practice. (p. i)

Viera's (2012) analysis revealed that solidifying relationships with religious others served as strong leadership laboratories, while the construct "religion" was a barrier in interfaith dialogue, the religious other was required for spiritual growth and development, and collaboration grounded in equal participation functioned as a model for positive interfaith dialogue.

Supporting the notion that promoting pluralistic dialogue does not mean disengaging from one's our faith tradition. Rine (2012) evaluated a theoretical model for fallibilist Christian spirituality utilizing a national dataset from 14,527 college students at 136 institutions of higher education. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) suggested "that a fallibilist epistemology emphasizing provisionality of belief can empower college students to remain committed to their personal faith traditions while at the same time exhibiting openness toward pluralism" (Rine, 2012, p. 827). Rine asserted that an individual's own epistemology or philosophy of knowledge shapes the ability to engage in religious pluralism.

Rine looked to Alexander's (1995) three epistemological orientations: absolutism, relativism, and fallibism, and their effect on responses to cultural diversity. Absolutism "affirms the existence of an ultimate knowable reality that transcends cultural context," while relativism rejects "existence of an ultimate reality operating outside of particular cultures" (Rine, 2012, p. 828). Fallibilism falls between these two polarities and touts that "differing voices may make unique contributions to our understanding of ultimate reality" (Rine, 2012, p. 828).

50

A factor analysis demonstrated that Christian students can be committed to their own faith and open to pluralism and that these two orientations, taken together, actually reinforced each other. As commitment to the Christian faith is strengthened, so too, is the commitment to pluralism strengthened, echoing interfaith dialogue research. Being open to pluralism does not circumvent commitment to one's own faith. All three components of the fallibilism scale were positively and significantly correlated. Commitment to Christian faith and provisionality of belief ($r = 0.73$) and provisionality of belief and openness to pluralism ($r = 0.76$), were significantly higher than commitment to Christian faith and openness to pluralism ($r = 0.34$) (Rine, 2012). Rine's research reinforced earlier work that emphasized an individual orientation that acknowledges that differences exist in shared mutual space; examples include Perry's (1998) moral commitment, Park's (1986) communal faith, and Fowler's (1981) conjunctive faith (Rine, 2012, p. 836). While Rine's work is geared towards a Christian sample, the hope would be that this study could be generalized to other faith traditions.

INTERFAITH AND THE NON-RELIGIOUS

A common misrepresentation is that interfaith cooperation and dialogue only includes self-identified religious persons. In fact, interfaith work must be inclusive of all religious and non-religious traditions and philosophies. Greg Epstein, Secular Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University, through involvement in the White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships initiative, The President's Interfaith and Community Service Challenge, stressed that "President Obama has gone out of his way to make clear that this initiative must be fully open to and inclusive of atheists, and agnostics, and Humanists" ("Nonreligious Must Embrace White House's Interfaith Service Challenge," 2011, para. 2).

In framing his challenge, Obama stated, "…What I've come to understand is that regardless of your faith … people all have certain common hopes and common dreams" ("Promoting Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation," 2011, para. 1). Epstein shared that the secular population has participated as full partners in the interfaith movement in an effort to examine how people of diverse religious and philosophical traditions can improve society in tandem. Epstein (2011) went on to argue:

> Administrators can no longer afford to ignore the that the Secular Student Alliance now has hundreds of chapters on campuses around the country, or that our Humanist Chaplaincy is now one of the largest chaplaincies on Harvard's campus. And by the same token, secular students must recognize it is now their responsibility to extend a hand, in the spirit of cooperation, to those with whom they passionately disagree on theology. It is no longer enough for any of us to simply tear down and criticize others. (Epstein, 2011, para. 7)

SUMMARY

After dissecting literature on dialogue, intergroup dialogue, intergroup contact, peace building, spirituality, interfaith cooperation, interfaith dialogue, and the place of secularism in the faith discussion, common elements became apparent. All of these bodies of literature demonstrated points of intersection regarding the importance of relationships, reflection, communication processes, and self-awareness. The theoretical and empirical literature referenced, inclusive of these related topics to interfaith dialogue, will serve as the underbelly of the proposed study intended to describe the lived experiences of students that participate in co-curricular interfaith dialogue.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to explore the lived-experiences of students participating in interfaith dialogue at the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI). For the purposes of this research, interfaith dialogue was generally defined as:

> A conversation between individual persons – and through them, two or more communities or groups – with differing views, the primary purpose of this encounter is for each participant to learn from the other so that s/he can change and grow and thereby the respective groups or communities as well. (Swindler, as cited in Beversluis, 1995, p. 138)

This type of inquiry was best approached through a qualitative design, geared towards individual experience. Ultimately, through an inductive process where the researcher served as the primary data collection tool, qualitative research studies develop themes from the ground up (Creswell, 2012). This is followed by qualitative analysis, which is an extremely personal process, "and the analysis itself is the interpretive work which the investigator does at each of the stages" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 67).

The qualitative methodology most congruent with the purpose of this study was an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), which sought to capture the quality of the individual experience (Willing, 2001). Phenomenology can be defined as "a philosophical approach to the study of experience" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 11). Creswell (1998) asserted phenomenology is concerned with "understanding a concept of phenomenon" and hones in on the lived experiences of individuals (p. 38). Van Manen (1990) said, "Phenomenological human science is discovery oriented that strives to find out what a certain phenomenon means and how it is experienced" (p. 29).

Sense-making, by the participant and researcher, is the focus of IPA, lending itself to a partnership with the cognitive model that exists in contemporary psychology (Smith & Osborn, 2003). While Creswell (2012) asserted that the researcher serves as the sole data collection instrument in qualitative studies, Bogdan and Biklem (2007) stated that when it comes to phenomenology, the researcher strives to make meaning of the experience, becoming a sounding board to report the experiences of the individuals. Since participants were asked to recall their experiences and articulate them to the researcher, it is possible that the experiences and events reported by the study participants may not be completely accurate. It is the researcher's responsibility to interpret the responses in an effort to understand and make meaning (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). Utilizing double hermeneutics, two states of interpretation occur, first the participants share how they understand the world, and then the researcher interprets the participants understanding of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

For the purpose of this study, the aim was to "explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 52). The object or event in this study was the interfaith dialogue experience. In addition, IPA is connected to the concept of symbolic interactionism (Denzin, 1995), which focusses on how individuals construct meaning within their social and personal world. Willig (2001) said, "If we want to move beyond sharing an experience with our participants, and understand their experiences well enough to explain them, we need to be aware of the conditions that gave rise to these experiences in the first place" (p. 65).

PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING STRATEGY

For IPA research, it was appropriate to find a fairly homogeneous sample using a purposive sampling approach (Smith & Osborn, 2003). As with other forms of qualitative research, the goal was depth not breadth, thus smaller sample sizes were preferable and complimented the in-depth analysis that was required in IPA. Unlike a quantitative approach, where generalizability is a goal, qualitative analysis does not seek this same outcome (Richie & Lewis, 2003). The power of IPA study is the "light it sheds within the broader context" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 56).

The participants for this study were limited to undergraduate students who self-selected to attend the Atlanta Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI) sponsored by the Interfaith Youth Core, between January 31 and February 2, 2014. All ILI student attendees traveled with a delegation from their university to Atlanta for the ILI. Student participants typically were affiliated with their campus's interfaith center, chapel, religious studies department, or a faith based student organization. The ILI experience was intended to "equip undergraduate students with the skills to engage diverse religious and non-religious identities to build the interfaith movement on their campuses" (IFYC, n.d., para. 3). This was accomplished through a series of interfaith dialogues that were facilitated during the three-day ILI experience.

For a phenomenological design, the focus was on a smaller, quality sample. While each ILI session can have a population of up to 150 attendees, the researcher used a purposive approach to select eleven participants that fit the study requirements. As "the primary concern of IPA is with a detailed account of individual experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 51), the focus is on quality, not on quantity. Once there was saturation of the data, there was not a need to interview further participants. According to Creswell (2007), saturation is achieved when no

new information adds to the understanding of the category. "The researcher attempts to 'saturate' the categories – to look for instances that represent the category and to continue looking (and interviewing) until the new information obtained does not further provide insight into the category" (Creswell, 2007, p. 160).

Both the 'Better Together Director' and 'International Projects Manager' of the IFYC agreed to serve as the liaisons between the researcher and the collegiate advisors that recommended potential study participants. Prior to the start of the Atlanta ILI, eleven students completed an electronic information sheet and served as the pool of study participants.

DATA COLLECTION

IFYC Access

The researcher identified the IFYC's Atlanta ILI as the desired site to recruit participants to examine the lived-experiences of interfaith dialogue participants. Each ILI is comprised of a population of between 100 and 150 students, faculty, and staff. These participants come from a diverse set of institutions of higher education across the United States. Participants self-identified their religious or non-religious identity. The researcher believed this population would provide a purposive sample that would be diverse, both institutionally and individually.

The researcher conducted a similar pilot study in the spring of 2013. This study was conducted at the researcher's home institution. The sample consisted of three students that had participated in at least three different interfaith dialogue experiences. The pilot study was helpful in informing the design of the proposed study, and many lessons were learned. Based on the pilot study, the researcher deliberately decided that a sample of students from multiple institutions, rather than students from one institution, would produce a richer study. The intention

being that a diverse sample of participants, all motivated to attend the same interfaith dialogue

program (ILI, Atlanta) would provide fertile data to interpret.

The researcher was familiar with the IFYC, as her institution has partnered with IFYC on

campus programs and initiatives. The researcher reached out to the IFYC 'Better Together

Director' and the 'International Programs Director' who agreed to assist in the recommendation

and referral of student participants. The directors agreed to be the conduit to gain access to ILI

participants. The researcher held two conference calls with the IFYC directors to discuss all

aspects of the potential partnership. After the first conference call, the directors reviewed all of

the information with the rest of the IFYC team to seek approval for the study. During the second

call, the directors confirmed IFYC's participation and it was at this point that the researcher

outlined the proposed recruitment strategy. The researcher and the IFYC worked together to

finalize a recruitment strategy that was comfortable for both parties.

After outlining the study for IFYC, the researcher was given permission to solicit

participants from registrants and attend the ILI to meet and screen participants. The researcher

provided a Letter of Cooperation (Appendix A) to IFYC in order to confirm the organization's

approval of the study and acknowledged IFYC's comfort with the protection of human subjects

that was provided to each participant.

In addition, IFYC required the following of the researcher:

1. The researcher obtain IRB approval from Colorado State.

2. The researcher allow the IFYC staff to send out the initial communication to select
   collegiate advisors asking them to recommended participants.

3. The researcher only meet with the potential participants face-to-face in Atlanta during mutually agreed upon times with IFYC staff as to not interfere or distract participants during the program.

4. The researcher participated in the ILI, but as a staff ally. The researcher was not placed in an interfaith dialogue group with any of the research participants and was placed in a faculty/staff track.

Student Access

Once approval occurred through IFYC and IRB approval from Colorado State University, the next step was identifying student participants. The researcher provided IFYC with the Participant Cover Letter (Appendix B). The letter addressed: the purpose of the study, the time commitment involved in participation, a description of the brief participant screening meeting in Atlanta, and a description of the semi-structured phone interview. IFYC emailed the letter to collegiate advisors that registered students for the Atlanta ILI and asked them to forward to students that met the criteria. The IFYC sent the letter to collegiate advisors that they had previously worked with that were identified as having strong interfaith dialogue programs on their campuses. Interested students were asked to fill-out the Electronic Information Form (Appendix C). The electronic information sheets were sent directly to the researcher through the Qualtics system. The researcher reviewed all the electronic information sheets and selected all eleven students that filled out the information sheet for the study based on diversity of individuals and institution.

First, the electronic information sheet was used to verify that individual participants met the criteria for the study. The criteria for the participants included being an undergraduate student at an institution of higher education, being at least eighteen years old, being registered for the Atlanta ILI, and serving as a willing participant in all aspects of interfaith dialogue at the

58

Atlanta ILA. Second, the electronic information sheet was used as a mechanism to select a diverse sample. Factors that contributed to a diverse sample for the nature of this study included: institutional type, geographic location of institution, religious or non-religious identity of participant, ethnicity, gender, and past interfaith dialogue experiences. The researcher emailed the selected students to schedule a ten-minute screening meeting at the Atlanta ILI. Names of participants were not revealed to the IFYC staff, unless the student granted permission to the researcher.

The screening meeting of individuals in Atlanta took place at mutually agreed upon locations in the conference hotel and convention center. An Informed Consent Form (Appendix D) was given to each participant and reviewed in-depth so that each participant had a clear understanding of the responsibilities involved with participation. All information on the form was verbally communicated to the participant. Information included the voluntary nature of participating, and allowance for any participant to drop out at any point in time. Participants were made aware that they may skip or not answer any questions during the interview. The researcher went over the measures used to ensure confidentiality, including pseudonyms of participants and institutional names. Participants were made aware that they would not be compensated for their participation. The participants were asked to verbally explain back to the researcher their understanding of the informed consent. Once they had done so, participants were asked to sign the informed consent form. Each screening meeting ranged from ten to fifteen minutes.

After the informed consent form was signed, the researcher went over the electronic information sheet with the participant to verify the information. This allowed the researcher to verify that the information submitted was accurate and make necessary adjustments. The

researcher scheduled an interview with the participants to occur within two weeks after the ILI. Since the primary data collection was a semi-structured phone or Skype video interview, the face-to-face screening meeting was intended to assist the participant in feeling comfortable with the researcher, and building rapport for the interview to follow. This allowed the researcher to observe body language and non-verbal cues of the participant that were not available in a phone or Skype video interview format. The researcher allowed each participant to choose if they preferred a Skype video or phone format. Six participants selected Skype and five participants selected the phone option.

Semi-Structured Interviews

A series of semi-structured interview questions were the primary method for data collection. According to Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005), semi-structured interviews are the preferred method to gather data for an IPA study. The individual interview format was "well-suited to in-depth and personal discussion" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57). Each interview spanned forty-five minutes to an hour. This timeframe was identified as the time needed to "facilitate an interaction which permits participants to tell their own stories, in their own words" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57).

Before the interview began, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the study, consent information, and confidentiality. Participants were asked to provide a pseudonym they would like to use for the study. They were informed that the researcher would select a pseudonym for the institution. The researcher asked each participant for permission to audio record the interview, explaining that this allowed the researcher to listen more activity during the interview. It was articulated to the participants that the recording would be used to make a transcription. All audio files were stored under password protection until transcribed and erased. The hard

copy informed consent forms and demographic information sheets were stored in a lockable cabinet in the researcher's home.

At the start of each interview, the researcher went over the semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix E). This protocol consisted of a series of questions falling into three broad categories and served as the interview schedule. While the questions were in an order, that was intended to build on each other, the researcher was prepared to adjust as needed. The interview schedule served as a loose agenda (Smith et al., 2007) and could be altered at any point during the conversation so the "researcher is generally able to be a more engaged and attentive listener, and a more flexible and responsive interviewer" (p. 59). The researcher was nimble and exercised her judgment during the conversation in order to follow the spirit of the protocol, but deviate when necessary to truly reveal the lived-experiences of the participants. Smith and Osborn (2008) said, "The researcher and participant engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participant's responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise" (p. 57).

Interviews were recorded so the researcher could focus on the participant. The researcher took limited notes during the session, primarily recording communication style and resisted the urge to interpret the data during the interview (Flowers et al., 2009). The researcher focused on her ethical obligation to the participants, and aimed to gently guide the participants through the questions, use prompts when needed, check regularly for clarification and understanding, and dig deeper to increase the depth of the conversation to garner stronger data.

At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher asked the participants if they had any questions. The researcher explained the next phase of the process, explaining that the participant would be emailed a thank you letter (Appendix F) and a transcription review letter (Appendix G)

accompanied by the actual transcribed interview. The participant had ten days to review the transcript for accuracy and let the researcher know if there were any discrepancies. It was explained that if the researcher did not hear from the participant in those ten days it would be understood that no changes needed to be made. It was also explained that participants could be asked to participate in a second interview via Skype or phone to expand upon or clarify information received during the first interview. However, based on the initial screening and the level of saturation obtained during the first interview, a second interview was not necessary for any of the participants.

Seven of the eleven participants responded back within the ten days, responding that they had reviewed the transcripts. Three participants had minor changes and the rest remained satisfied with the transcripts. Later in the process, the researcher sent each participant a draft of their biography and the demographic table to check for accuracy. Two participants had minor suggestions for their biography. The researcher also shared a draft of the fourth and fifth chapters with the participants for feedback. Three participants responded back with minor edits, the rest of the participants reported back that they were comfortable with what was written, or did not respond.

Field Log and Reflexive Journal

A field log and reflexive journal was used to record information pertinent to the study, such as participant availability, interview schedules, and observations during the initial screening. The log and journal was used for the researcher to record initial reflections after the screening and after the semi-structured interviews. Body language and tone was recorded. Notes in the log and journal were used to supplement the interviews but did not replace the information provided by the participants. These notes only aided in helping the researcher

interpret and make meaning of the lived-experiences of the participants. They were not intended

to be notes that inserted opinions or biases of the researcher.

DATA ANALYSIS

Given that the purpose of qualitative research is to make meaning or interpret a

phenomenon, the analysis process was the means to reach this end (Merriam, 1988). Eatough

and Smith (2008) stated that the goal of IPA analysis is "the identification of the emergent

patterns (i.e., themes) within this experiential material, emphasizing convergence and

divergence, commonality and nuance, usually first for single cases, and then subsequently across

multiple cases" (p. 79). With this in mind, the researcher listened to each individual transcript

multiple times and read and re-read them to listen for themes. After the transcripts were coded

using NVivo 10, the researcher organized all nodes into four salient themes. The steps outlined

by Smith et al., (2009): reading and re-reading, initial noting, developing emergent themes,

searching for connections across emergent themes, moving to the next case, and looking for

patterns across the cases, served as the framework for analysis.

During the reading and re-reading process, the researcher first read each individual

transcript in its entirety and then re-read section by section. The researcher also listened to the

transcript while reading the transcript to fully hear the voice of each participant, a practice the

researcher found useful during an earlier pilot study. The initial noting by the researcher focused

on formulating a detailed set of comments and thoughts on the data.

The next step involved searching for emergent themes. Preliminary themes were

identified during the initial noting stage by looking for common elements, key words, and

frequency of ideas. During the coding stage, the researcher used NVivo 10 as a tool to track the

emergent themes. The researcher worked to reduce the volume of detail in the transcripts to

concise statements that gave voice to the participants. Each of the eleven cases were coded individually. Once all of the cases were coded, the researcher went back and coded across cases. A variety of nodes were created to serve as a framework to map the themes. Initially, after coding across cases, 144 nodes were identified. Once the subordinate and super-ordinate themes were reduced to 34, a physical map to hang on the wall was created to cluster the themes, drawing connections between themes to further reduce. Themes that were not salient or did not have connections to others were discarded.

According to Willig (2001), "Some themes will form natural clusters of concepts that share meanings or references, whereas others will be characterized by hierarchical relationship with one another" (p. 55). After creating the first iteration of a theme map, seven themes were identified. The researcher took a break and stepped away from the analysis process for a week before revisiting. The researcher come back and looked at the themes with a fresh set of eyes after a week as a check and balance system to make sure the themes still made sense. Upon review, it was clear that absorbing three of the themes into the other four categories could further reduce the seven themes. After the researcher solidified the themes, she shared with two peers to gain feedback through the peer scrutiny process.

The final part of the analysis process included the researcher's perceptions of the participants' experience. This required immersion into the themes and interpreting how the participants communicated, thought, and felt. Different people can attach different meanings to a phenomenon (Giorgi, 1992). As a phenomenologist one "lives amidst a world of expressive surfaces, amidst a world of endless references and interconnections" (Jager, 1989, p. 221).

TRUSTWORTHINESS

The concept of trustworthiness is vital in qualitative research, just as validity and reliability are necessities of a quantitative paradigm. However, "the trustworthiness of qualitative research generally is often questioned by positivist, perhaps because their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way in naturalistic work" (Shenton, 2003, p. 63). Guba (1981) introduced four constructs – credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability – that the researcher used in pursuit of trustworthiness.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is a key factor to address trustworthiness. Credibility involves the use of well-tested research methods. Prior to embarking on this project, the researcher reviewed many phenomenological research studies that employed a semi-structured interview protocol to learn from other scholars. The researcher conducted a pilot study and used that experience to make adjustments to improve the design of this particular study. The researcher shared her background and qualifications during the face-to-face meeting with research participants to gain credibility prior to the interviews.

Peer scrutiny of the research project (Shenton, 1981) enhances credibility. In addition to the researcher's advisor and committee, two experts were consulted in an effort to gain feedback to refine methods and strengthen the overall design. One expert was a faculty member at the researcher's home institution that specializes in sociology of religion and the other was a professor of higher education at a neighboring institution that specializes in college student spirituality using a phenomenological approach.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1995), member checks are the most important aspect of trustworthiness. Therefore, the researcher used member checks throughout the design. All participants were given the opportunity to check the transcript for accuracy (Appendix G). The

researcher reached out to participants during the analysis stage to verify that the interpretation accurately described the experience of the participant. Brewer and Hunter (1989) and Miles and Huberman (1994) reinforced the idea that researchers can consult participants on the patterns observed by the researcher to ascertain if participants can offer a rationale.

Producing a completely transferable study is an unrealistic goal, as qualitative research is bound by context (Shenton, 2004). Understanding a phenomenon in greater detail is done gradually through multiple studies. Findings are not generalizable, but they still have the ability to shed light on a phenomenon. This research is intended to add to the scholarly research on interfaith dialogue, in the context of a co-curricular program.

The researcher provided a guide map to demonstrate the ability to replicate the design. If the same participants and same methodology were used, similar results would be found to demonstrate conformability. An audit trail was employed that allowed others to follow the process and procedures. The researcher openly admitted bias and assumptions, again striving for conformability.

In addition to Guba's (1981) constructs, Polkinghorne (1983) offered four qualities to evaluate the trustworthiness in phenomenological designs: vividness, accuracy, richness and elegance. The researcher made every effort through the analysis to provide an accurate account that clearly articulated the experience of the individual. At its core, "phenomenology is a low-hovering, in-dwelling, meditative philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person-world relations and accords lived experience, with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity, primacy over the known" (Wertz, 2005, p. 175).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As a vital part of qualitative inquiry, ethical issues permeate the research design (Glesne, 2006) and "are inseparable from your everyday interaction with research participants and with

your data" (p. 129). From the onset of the study, participants were explained the informed consent process. They were made aware that they could decline answering any question during their interview. They were instructed that they could drop out of the study at any point. Participants were explained the measures the researcher took to protect their confidentiality, the primary mechanism being through the use of pseudonyms for the individuals and the institutions.

The participants were not manipulated or coerced to answer questions in any specific way. The goal of the semi-structured interview was to provide a comfortable format for individuals to share their lived-experience. The researcher was committed to capturing the authenticity of the participants' voices. At multiple points throughout the study, from the initial interest letter, to the screening in Atlanta, to the semi-structured interview, to the transcript review, the rights of the participants as described in the informed consent were reiterated and checked with the participants for understanding.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This study explored the lived-experiences of students participating in interfaith dialogue at the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI) in Atlanta. The researcher selected an IPA methodology to allow the participants to tell their stories in their own voice. This voice, individually, then collectively was used to identify common themes across narratives.

This chapter presents the four main themes that emerged through the semi-structured interview process. The interview guided students through a conversation on their definition, experience, and self-learning that occurred through interfaith dialogue participation. The eleven participants are introduced by displaying a demographic characteristics table, brief biography, and their accompanying initial definition of interfaith dialogue, followed by the presentation of themes central to the lived-experience of interfaith dialogue.

PARTICIPANTS

Eleven participants, five women and six men, were interviewed for this research study. Each participant was a student at an institution of higher education in the U.S. All participants attended the IFYC ILI in Atlanta. Participants came from varying religious and non-religious identities, ethnic backgrounds, and various types of institutions. These institutions included public and private, one historically black, and two that were religiously affiliated.

Experience participating in interfaith dialogue prior to college varied. Some participants recalled interfaith conversations from a very young age, while others did not have an understanding of what interfaith dialogue was until attending college. All of the students in the study reported having moderate to extremely frequent interfaith dialogue conversations during

their collegiate years. To preserve the anonymity of the students involved, pseudonyms were used throughout the duration of the study.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Race	Religion	Class	Institution Type
Eleanor	Female	White	Muslim	Senior	Public
Ezra	Male	White	Jewish	Senior	Public
James	Male	White	Atheist	Junior	Private
Judah	Male	White	Jewish	Senior	Public
Kevin	Male	Black	Muslim	Junior	Private, Religious, HBCU
Layla	Female	Iranian	Baha'i	Senior	Public
Marie	Female	White	Atheist	Sophomore	Public
Riley	Female	White	Christian	Junior	Private, Religious
Sean	Male	Multi-Race	Christian	Freshman	Private
Steve	Male	Indian	Muslim	Senior	Private, Religious
Taylor	Female	White	Christian	Junior	Private

Eleanor

Eleanor was raised in a conservative Christian household. Upon entering college she became disenchanted with the church at the same time as she began identifying as "queer." At this juncture, she left the church and became an Atheist. Through a religious emersion program, she visited a mosque and began learning about the Muslim faith. She then converted to Islam. Eleanor's family is not aware of her religious conversion. Eleanor enjoys participating in interfaith dialogue because she enjoys learning about others and feels supported in interfaith environments. Eleanor defined interfaith dialogue as an "effort across differences and cultural, identifying borders in an effort to meet somewhere in the middle."

Ezra

Ezra is the son of a Reconstructionist Rabbi. While raised in a religious background, his parents shared with him the concept of multiple truths. Ezra enjoys learning about other religions through religious emersions, meaning actually practicing another religion, to truly live

69

the experience. Ezra also identified as a religious scholar. He enjoys taking religious study courses and learning from studying the religious texts of other religions. Ezra defined interfaith dialogue as "any kind of comparison or question that really seeks to understand the other's experience whether it's spiritual value based, that's what I would have to say."

James

James was raised in an episcopal household and made the decision to become an atheist as a freshman in high school. James found a book for summer reading during his freshman year of college, *Acts of Faith*, (Patel, 2010), to be very inspiring. He was captivated that the non-religious were included in the faith discussion. This, along with his interest in learning about others, led James to become an interfaith leader on his college campus. James defined interfaith dialogue as "coming together and talking about shared values from different religious and non-religious views. Or not necessarily sharing values, it could be differences as well."

Judah

Judah grew up in a Jewish home and recalls having interfaith conversations as a child, specifically with his Catholic nanny. Judah is a religious study major and plans to become a Rabbi. Through his coursework and his personal passion for interfaith work, Judah has examined the religious texts of religions other than his own, and has found important messages that have had added value to his life. Judah defined interfaith dialogue as:

> I think it's getting people of all different belief systems in a comfortable space where they can talk about different issues that aren't going to be necessarily abrasive. So you can first build a sense of trust. So by different people of belief systems, I mean people that are Catholic, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, any religious system, also philosophical.

Kevin

Kevin's parents converted to Islam and brought Kevin up in a Muslim household. Kevin's primary interest in interfaith dialogue is his desire to do good. He believes that all religions are connected, and through this deep connection, the world can be improved. Kevin attends a religiously-affiliated, historically-black, Baptist institution and resonates with the values of the institution, which he feels aligns with his desire to do good in the world. Kevin described interfaith dialogue as:

> It is healthy dialogue and in dialogue where both parties or the parties involved are comfortably and respectfully sharing their background and their experiences and sharing who they are, but at the same time, willing to listen to and relate to other people on the base level, not on a religious level, ethical level or philosophical level but on the base level, just human beings. You're connecting with another person whether we believe in some divine power or higher power or just from an ethic to do good.

Layla

Layla is a practicing Baha'i and is very active in interfaith activities on her campus. She enjoys the feeling of community and peace that she experiences through participation in interfaith dialogue. She lives her life by the Baha'i motto of "living in universal brotherhood or sisterhood." Through her engagement in these dialogues, she has become more open to other faiths and non-faith traditions, and has specifically found a connection with atheism, which was a surprising revelation for her. Layla defined interfaith dialogue as:

> It's not just having a religious dialogue with someone or non-religious dialogue, but it's more of just sharing your story, your values. And a lot of your values could include what you believe in whether it's religious or spiritual. So, just being able to talk with one another and understand each other and share your story of pretty much who you are and why you do what you do.

Marie

Marie identified as a Christian until the tenth grade, when she became an atheist. She believes that as an atheist, she has a unique role to play in bridging the gap between the religious

71

and non-religious. She feels that interfaith dialogue has the ability to break down stereotypes

and that these types of dialogues can dismantle religious differences that lead to conflict. Marie

defined interfaith dialogue as "a discussion, a productive discussion between different religious

and non-religious identities on impacting the environment or communities."

Riley

Riley was raised in a Christian home and tried a variety of churches prior to college. She

chose to attend a conservative Baptist university but was not sure about getting involved in

campus religious life. Riley was drawn to interfaith dialogue on her campus and found that this

work utilized her talents and brought her closer to her own Christianity through the challenging

of her own faith. Riley defined interfaith dialogue as:

> When you create a space for people who are religious and non-religious identities to
> come together and speak about issues that are important to them or relevant to our world
> currently. I think that it's a forum for people to briefly express their beliefs and I think it
> can also be a forum for people to find solutions to difficult issues.

Sean

Sean is a first-generation American and comes from Korean, Lebanese, and British

decent. Until the age of ten, Sean's family was active in the Mormon Church. At that point, his

dad became unaffiliated with any organized religion; his mother became Christian, but non-

practicing. Sean credits being religious, suddenly unaffiliated, and then independently seeking

out his Evangelical Christian identity, as an important journey. Sean believes he was called to be

a good witness to Christ by seeking out interfaith relationships. Sean defined interfaith dialogue

as "a manageable conversation between people who share radically different ideas, these ideas

that probably that you'd think wouldn't work together, that are self-exclusives."

Steve

Steve recalled having interfaith conversations from a young age. Raised Muslim, his parents had a great appreciation for other religions and fostered that outlook with Steve. Steve wanted to attend a university where religion was not a fringe activity so he selected a private, religiously-affiliated university that respected all types of religious practice. Steve has aspirations of being a doctor and believes his experience in facilitating interfaith dialogue will help him when having difficult discussions in the medical field. For Steve, his definition centered on "people of different religious and non-religious identities coming together to discuss their similarities and also to respect their differences."

Taylor

Taylor was raised Christian and does not recall having many interfaith conversations in her youth. She was brought to interfaith dialogue through service work and believes the desire to do good through service can bridge religious differences. For Taylor, creating a safe space for interfaith dialogue is an important aspect of the experience. Taylor defined interfaith dialogue as "people from non-religious, religious backgrounds being able to acknowledge their differences and coming together on those differences for the common good."

EMERGENT THEMES

Each interview was unique in that each student came to participate in interfaith dialogue programs carrying a different background and set of experiences. Throughout the initial face to face conversation the researcher had with each participant in Atlanta at the ILI and the follow-up semi-structured interview, four themes emerged that were central to the lived-experience of the participants. First, the narratives suggested that the environment was a significant factor that set the tone for their experiences. Second, the focus on relationship building through sharing and storytelling enhanced their experience. Participants felt that an ecumenical worldview or "we are

73

all human" mindset enhanced the dialogic experience, culminating in the final theme, that the interfaith dialogue experience strengthened the participants' individual faith identity and religious or non-religious tradition.

Environment

Each participant discussed how the environment impacted his or her experience in interfaith dialogue. Spaces that were welcoming, comfortable and casual contributed to their participation. "Circle" environments created a sense of needed belonging. Safe spaces, with an emphasis on respect, trust, and honesty created a foundation for productive conversation. Experiential environments were fertile grounds for interfaith dialogue engagement. Dialogue that occurred in the context of service activities added to the depth of the experience. Religious emersions were fertile ground for meaningful dialogue. All of these aspects of environment led to the participants describing their experience in these environments as positive, hopeful, and peaceful.

Comfortable, casual, and organic spaces. Spaces that were comfortable for participants helped them fully engage in the lived-experience of interfaith dialogue. The location itself did not seem to make the difference; rather, it was the feel of the space that was more important. Steve noted that distinction:

> A lot of it is the culture of the place that you're at. Like there are times that we are comfortable talking about religion anyway so you can get a bunch of people in the room and they are not shy just bringing up what their faith said in a particular issue.

> Judah echoed that same sentiment:

> Just the fact that you have these different people talking and having a good time and building relationships, I think it's what would be important for me. So whether they'd be doing that over coffee or just sitting at a couch in a hotel or something.

Taylor shared that sometimes people do not even know they are engaging in interfaith dialogue. She said, "They might be in a roommate's situation, they might be in even friends that are staying up until three o'clock in the morning and talking about things."

When asked how often and where Sean engaged in interfaith dialogue, he shared:

I think often it happens pretty often to me, not every day or something, but once a week. And usually it's just in my friend's room, I mean just hanging out with people and then we start talking about stuff.

While talking about the interfaith center on her campus, Eleanor shared that the space consisted of a little lounge with plush chairs and snacks, but the essence reflected was "it is a place where people feel comfortable." James echoed this sentiment when talking about the chapel on his campus, "It's a great location in the middle of campus. It has comfy couches, food, coffee and all the different groups are around through the chapel. There's always food. [Laughter] So yeah, we head there all the time." Layla described the comfort level of the environment on her campus, "We usually do our safe space conversations while on campus, just like there's couches. And it's relaxing for everybody, so they're more comfortable to speak and just open up when they're relaxed."

Marie shared that in order to have this comfortable level, no one in the space can feel threatened. Marie described two environments she had experienced that were conducive to interfaith dialogue. The first was a coffee and conversation program on her campus, "the first thing that comes to mind is our coffee and conversation we had on campus where there's a bunch of people from different religious and non-religious identities discussing their relationship with existence."

The second was more unexpected:

> The cool thing is that I witness really great interfaith dialogue happening in places that I didn't expect it to. So on the green, which is like the lawn, interfaith there; it really doesn't have boundaries to have some dialogue.

Once the comfort level of the environment is established, productively tackling a sensitive conversation is more likely. Judah stated, "I think it's getting people of all different belief systems in a comfortable space where they can talk about different issues that aren't going to be necessarily abrasive." Judah also shared, "A lot of times you're just running, you're walking on the street and you run into somebody. You had a program last night and then you start talking. So it's really, I think organic."

When Kevin was asked how he defined interfaith dialogue, comfort was central to his definition:

> It is healthy dialogue and in dialogue where both parties, or the parties involved, are comfortably and respectfully sharing their background and their experiences and sharing who they are, but at the same time, willing to listen to and relate to other people are on the base level, not on a religious level, ethical level or philosophical level but on the base level, just human beings.

Kevin continued by sharing a poignant example of how comfort level establishes the amount of sharing that occurs. He was involved in an interfaith dialogue where the participants were asked to share an interfaith failure story. Kevin described the experience of hearing the interfaith failure stories of others:

> I think I found it very, very interesting how, all of us, being of different backgrounds, religions, non-religions, we all came to a point where we were comfortable sharing all aspects of our personal failures with each other. That, I think, was a sweet experience.

Riley shared that she believes that people show a certain part of themselves that is not always apparent when engaging in interfaith dialogue. She said, "I think that another part of people's lives come out in interfaith dialogue. So, I think that in the beginning, I wasn't so aware

76

that interfaith dialogue needed to take place in a welcoming space." According to Riley, the environment "needs to be a very inclusive environment where people can not only believe, but speak up for other issues they care about." Riley provided an example of a comfortable environment that fostered interfaith dialogue on her campus:

> We had an interfaith living community on campus, and so we have students who are very interested in interfaith, who actually lived in-house together, and that's where we had our meetings. And we have prayer flags and pictures of Gandhi and quotes from interfaith leaders in the house. So we really have surrounded ourselves with all varieties of interfaith heroes, and we always brought a bunch of chairs for people, so whenever people came they felt welcomed and we found the hospitality was really important to making them feel that.

Circle environments. The researcher asked each participant to close their eyes and describe what interfaith dialogue looked like to them. The circle theme emerged among seven of the participants. Kevin described a circle, not clearly recognizing why that image came to mind for him. Marie articulated the circle of participants in a coffee and conversation dialogue, "There's a bunch of people sitting in a circle from different religious and non-religious identities discussing their relationship with existence." When asked the image question, Steve also described a circle that facilitated an equal playing field for engagement in conversation. He shared that everyone in the circle would have an opportunity to jump in the conversation and be heard, promoting an "equal time to speak and talk about their identity."

James and Layla both described images of people in community together, talking and sharing in a circle. When asked what image came to mind that represented interfaith dialogue, James shared, "The image that comes to my head is during our coach training week in Chicago last summer. It's me and the other ten coaches sitting around the room in a circle in the hotel we're staying and talking." Layla's image of what interfaith dialogue looked like was focused yet simplistic, she shared:

77

What I see when I close my eyes is people when they're working together, they're about to work with someone who is wearing a hijab or wearing a turban and not judge them based on their beliefs, or I don't know. My vision is, I see people holding hands and singing Kumbaya, it's the dream.

When Riley described the circle she imagined, the circle environment facilitated more respectful conversation:

I picture a really standard definition, where there would be a group of people who were different who were sitting in a circle. And whoever is speaking, everyone watches the person speaking. They sit in a circle while everyone who's speaking, I think that's important to the environment is maybe everyone is equal in the area.

Riley then described an example of an interfaith dialogue that occurred at the ILI in Atlanta:

I think that whoever is facilitating the conversation really sets the tone too. There's a leader or someone else who's setting up the conversation, they should know when they need to help everyone to calm down or to move to another subject. There's a lot of different ways that you set the environment for interfaith dialogue. I think there's a couple of things I've observed and different things I've used.

When Judah was asked to describe his image of interfaith dialogue, he pictured different people sitting around engaging in conversation. From his image of "sitting around the table" a circle image was formed. Judah shared:

I'd probably draw people; I'd try and draw as many people of different types in there as possible. Talking, sitting around the table, or at a couch or something like that, or in a comfortable space. Smiling, laughing, and being engaged and just talking around some issue, I don't think the issue would necessarily matter in the picture.

Safe spaces. Nine of the eleven participants expressed how creating a safe space enhanced their experience in interfaith dialogue and the other two shared indirect references, by sharing the importance of creating respectful environments. James described a safe space as one that has safe space rules that the group formalizes. According to James, "The safe space rules, those are great tools and I statements, active listening, and related things." Marie described a

safe space as "controlled" and on "neutral ground." Eleanor shared that safe spaces that have

guidelines help her feel supported and understood, which encourages her not to "hold anything

back, or be afraid or hesitant in any way." Judah emphasized the importance of building trust.

For Ezra, creating a safe space helps temper "marginalization of identities that already from the

get go feel marginalized, I think that's creating neutral space, which isn't any single groups as

well."

Layla's passion for creating safe spaces came through when she shared:

I'm really big on safe space. So it's pretty much you can set the environment, you can set that place and as long you make sure people are aware what safe space is and that it's okay to talk about interfaith and talk about whatever you want to talk about.

She believed that safe spaces can help combat the apprehension people feel for engaging

in interfaith dialogue. Layla added:

I think a lot of people are scared to talk about it because religion, or just anything that has to do with religion or your faith or anything that you believe in, it's a very sensitive topic. A lot of people are scared and they're not really -- they're not in, they feel they're not in a safe space, I guess that's the best way to put it. But, I did talk to a lot of people and a lot of them were like, "Well we're kind of scared to talk to somebody about it because we don't know how the other person would react." So, it's more of just afraid of, just the initial reaction if you do talk about it. So I guess that's why a lot of people don't talk about it. And I also think that it's just a lack of religious, non-religious literacy that has a lot to do with it, especially at my school, because one-third of our student body identifies as unaffiliated or they don't know anything about it or about anything. So when it comes to interfaith, they didn't even know that we have an interfaith center.

Overall, for Layla, when you create this safe space "you can speak your mind."

Riley defined a safe space as one that is welcoming. She shared that in addition to

creating safe space rules, it is important to respect the rules of the spaces you are entering,

especially if they are spaces of other religious traditions. According to Riley:

Some places you need to take off your shoes, we've gone to Muslim temple where you have to cover your head and you just need to -- when you're going to have a dialogue, recognize the rules of the space that you're entering.

Riley's passion for dialogue in a safe space comes through when she explained, "I've always loved dialogues because I really do like to talk, but I love the space that you can create that allows everyone to have a place at the table, everyone will be able to speak." She added:

> Although some students who have been accustomed to interfaith dialogue, they've learned how to do it before. So I really enjoy observing the way that they set up their interfaith environment. I noticed that they first set their same space rules and a lot of the things that they said was define all the terms so when you're speaking in an interfaith dialogue, there's a lot of clarity, people speak in a very respectful tone, no one's speaking over each other. And since there is always the potential that the conversation is going to get heated they set up ways to recognize that, if someone's hurt they could say, "oops" "ouch". That's one of the things they could use to bring up something that's disrespectful to you, you can say ouch and then you work together and move on from it so the tone stays consistent.

Riley shared an example of a safe space she was part of on her college campus:

> This year we don't have interfaith house, so we thought how do we create an environment where people know that they're doing interfaith work without making it seem too similar to the Christian group? So we moved our meetings from the chapel to the student center because it's where students essentially are located and there is really no religious connotation to that area. So I think when you're on campus, something that's tricky about creating interfaith environment, it's not making it seem like it's connected to one certain thing and wherever we go to religious places and some things, we always try to make sure that we respect the tradition and customs of that place.

Like Riley, Judah felt that in order for a space to be safe, it needs to be neutral and not connected to a specific faith or non-faith tradition. He shared:

> That said I think it's also an important thing to have it more often in communities then religious house of worships and different things like that. And, I think it's difficult in part because we, a lot of the time, we think of our religious house of worships and things like this as these communities that are -- they're by themselves, they're not connected with other places.

Taylor believed a safe environment encourages sharing. When asked what type of spaces are conducive to interfaith dialogue, she stated:

Definitely a place where people are safe, where people feel they can share maybe personal experiences, and also religious things or personal experience from that are not exactly the easiest things to talk about. So I definitely think a place where people feel they're not judged and a space where people feel that they can freely share things without being persecuted for certain things or thoughts they are feeling.

Sean believed safe spaces combat the desire to defend your own faith tradition. He shared:

And then sometimes I think religious groups feel they have to defend their own position and work against these people and I think that's wrong. I think that we should allow them to make use, need to have a very inclusive environment where people can not only believe, but speak up for other issues they care about.

Experiential environments; service and religious immersion. Seven of the participants shared how a service and social justice environment deepened their interfaith dialogue experience. Eleanor shared that interfaith dialogue "doesn't always have to be the topic of the conversation." She was referring to an interfaith service project she participated in. During the service, interfaith dialogue grew organically in the conversation and added meaning to the experience. Eleanor recognized that a service mentality is a common element of many religions and can serve as a vehicle to bring people together. At Eleanor's university, they hold interfaith dialogues on different religious texts. She described a conversation that was meaningful for her on religion in the text study:

The last month's text study, like I said, is on service and charity and it was just amazing how so much of the same concepts regarding that were in the Qur'an and the Bible and how just it is prevailing, like a command in all those religions, and we have so many people there also who identified as students and were identified as agnostics and atheist. And everyone found a way to relate it to their own experiences with other religions and on their own identities that it would be just like a very great experience.

Judah, while Jewish, quoted Mathew 25 from the Bible when encouraging Evangelical Christians to get involved in service and social justice. Using his knowledge of a Christian text

and connecting it to a service mentality has proved useful for him when working with others in interfaith service. Judah personally engaged in service as a means to practice interfaith dialogue. He shared a recent internship experience that incorporated service and interfaith dialogue, "We had an event and raised some money for a local homeless shelter, things like that."

For James, interfaith dialogue and service go hand-in-hand and lead to action, "I think action is a huge part of it . . . . I think doing service together is a huge part of every dialogue." When asked if service leads to dialogue, or the dialogue leads to service, James responded, "I think it can be either way . . . we were talking and we were sharing values or something and then did service or also some service together and then afterwards talk about why that was important."

Kevin reflected on positive experiences he had in interfaith service environments:

For the most part, I think that most of our good experiences happen here between individuals and I would say that when we hold events, we were celebrating Martin Luther King Day, there was an interfaith service, multi-faith service. I think that these type of conversations and experiences more readily occur when people are serving in relationship together, or social justice issues, social awareness.

After graduation, Kevin plans to continue his interfaith dialogue involvement through service work. He shared, "I should stick to doing service and helping whoever needs it, whether it's outreach, or volunteering through the local network, I challenge myself to do charitable work."

When asked to visualize what interfaith dialogue looked like, an image of service emerged for Riley:

I picture people who enjoy their places of worship or community or public areas doing things together with people who are different from them, especially with service projects. That's something that I love to do with interfaith, where people of different faiths volunteering together or raising money together, raising awareness together and showing everyone. I think that's the most poetic picture, that's definitely the first thing I think of is a diverse group of people who are working together in their community.

Like Riley, Taylor's participation in interfaith dialogue began because of her love of

82

service. At first, she did not realize that interfaith dialogue enhanced her experience and the

connection for her has grown over time. When asked to describe a recent international interfaith

dialogue experience, Taylor got visibly excited to describe a recent alternative Spring Break

service trip:

> I would say in service, because that's one of my favorite things to do by far. There were so many different people that came on those trips with me, and I really got to know on a personal level. And that was really cool because we got to not only immerse ourselves on a different culture and learn about them, which I think most of the trips when you think about them are basically interfaith to begin with because you go to different cultures and you're learning about them and you're learning about their beliefs in a way. And on top of that, you get to learn about how everyone is connected to that. Those are powerful moments for me. I'm just engaging in dialogue from that.

In addition to service, participant narratives reflected how engaging with other faith

communities, in their houses of worship, enhanced their experience. Ezra said he engaged in

religious emersion quite often. For him, to truly experience the faith tradition of another, he

believes it is important to practice like they practice:

> I think another level of interfaith dialogue is when you're ready to begin to experience something that you haven't ever experienced before. I don't think I can fully have an interfaith dialogue unless I've been to mass with a Christian before.

When asked for an example of this type of religious experiential emersion, he shared a

recent experience during lent:

> I'm Jewish but I've been going to -- last year, the four weeks prior to Christmas, and I went every Wednesday to mass, because it's four weeks, I forgot exactly what they called it. So I went through the four weeks in Advent and I talked to the Catholic -- it was a Catholic service -- I talked to the Catholic friends that I have, what exactly is going on? What are the songs they're singing, what did you think about what the Priest was talking about and then, in that way, as I could get the experience and then the dialogue that other people had about conceptions or misconceptions of what the Priest was saying about their own faith.

After completing this emersion during lent, Ezra shared that for him, "really practicing and experiencing and then being able to reflect on the practice" is what interfaith is all about for him personally. The same theme emerged in the conversation with Riley and Kevin, who regularly engaged in religious emersions at different places of worship in their communities and surrounding area. Kevin described a religious emersion trip that included various houses of worship. He said:

> So I participated in an interfaith program, and I went and toured a Jewish school and a Christian school and from that one experience, that one weekend, those few days, I really came to appreciate everything, the vastness of my faith and you think you're intricately connected in the smallest detail and really highlight what binds people together and sometimes its beliefs, I think the least really, they really bond people together well.

Environments that promote happiness, hope, and peace. When asked questions about how participants experienced dialogue, emotions were at the forefront of how the experience was described to the researcher. Environments that fostered happiness, hope, and peace resonated with the participants. While some participants experienced interfaith dialogue from a scholarly perspective, all experienced interfaith dialogue by some type of positive emotional reaction. Kevin described feeling "a gratitude that the world doesn't offer."

Ezra, when describing a weekly interfaith dialogue that brings Muslim student to a Jewish Friday night service, the image that he described was everyone looking very happy and involved:

> There's one image that sticks out in my mind, which was my school, I help to bring in Muslim students to a Jewish Friday night service and I really think what interfaith looks to me. I don't know if it's specifically in a synagogue or a church or in a mosque or any other religious practices, but seeing – you know those questions like what doesn't belong in those images, I think when you have a lot of people that are not belonging and looking very happy and involved, that would be the image for me.

Judah's description for a recent interfaith dialogue was, "Smiling, happy, fun, smiling, laughing, and engaged." When describing his emotional reaction to his interfaith dialogue experiences, he shared:

> I would say I get energized. It's almost a burst of energy. I start getting really excited, my foot might start tapping or something, I want to get up, and start talking a lot. It might feel I had a boost of caffeine in a sense; it's probably a rush of endorphins.

Marie experienced interfaith dialogue with a sense of "hope, contentment, and peace." Riley, when picturing what interfaith dialogue looks like, described the emotion of "joy." Riley shared that when she leaves a dialogue she usually feels positive, "I think that in the end you'll find that it's something really positive for you. . . it's just a super positive thing for people of any tradition." Sean also felt "hopeful." For him, it is "hope that there can be a relationship . . . as much as I want to accept someone else's faith or background that they'll be accepting of your faith."

Eleanor described the "peace" she felt in interfaith dialogue as the same peace she felt when she is praying on her own or reading the Quran. She said, "It's just sort of a peace of we're all gathered here, the same goal and the same sense of self and sense of togetherness, it's like a nice, warm sort of feeling." The warm feeling was echoed by Judah, "I might get warm in a sense . . . your blood starts pumping because you really get into it."

Keith, felt "amused" by interfaith dialogue, along with "peace," but overall the emotion he felt as "hope." When reflecting on the emotional backdrop for his most meaningful interfaith dialogues, Kevin shared:

> Let me think, I'd say that the most prevalent thought that I notice was what are we trying to get out of this, that is the first thing I think, what's the goal, how do I best work with these people to accomplish this goal? What I feel like? A myriad of emotions, sometimes you feel like a type of relief from hearing people's stories or learning that people share

the same values as you. Oh, how do I say this? Peace, might be too strong of a word, not sadness, but a, sometimes, being from a certain faith tradition it can be a little, let me find this word, sometimes it feels a little sad that people don't align with you on your views, it can be conflicting. I feel hope, great hope when the goal is remembered.

Relationships

Throughout the semi-structured conversation, participants were asked to define interfaith dialogue in their own words, express how they experienced interfaith dialogue, and describe what they perceived they learned or gained through participation. In each of the three categories, participants described how the spaces between individuals guided their definition, experience, and learning in interfaith dialogue. The theme of relationships was stratified into relationships among individuals, the impact of sharing, and storytelling.

Individuals. Steve valued the religious literacy he gained through academic learning; however, he recognized the value that personal relationships played in bringing that learning to life. Steve said:

> I learned that, as much as I've studied or learned about religions, I'm not going to know anything unless I talk to somebody else. The academic literature can say one thing about what a religion believes, but unless I talk to a person who actually believes that, then I won't really understand it. So, a lot of it has shown me the value of talking with other people and developing personal relationships with them.

Steve demonstrated that concept as well when he shared how personal interaction brings a text to life. He stated:

> Part of the thing that I like about interfaith dialogue is I'm also a religious studies minor. So I'm -- when I take a course on Hinduism or Buddhism, sometimes I do it because I'm interested in the thing specifically or because I've met somebody that's Buddhist and I didn't know about that religion as much.
>
> And now, when I meet that person again, I am thinking about what is the academic stuff that I've been learning. And then how well does this match with this person and where are the disconnects? So part of it is when I'm talking to a person. I'm thinking inside and trying to link these things and say, "How -- what representation? Where does this person fall on that line?" So it's giving a face to the text in a sense.

When, talking about the importance of relationships, Eleanor stated, "I think it's like on an individual level." She shared a story of how she was about to write-off an Evangelical Christian she worked with because she never "sought out an Evangelical Christian to share," because she felt as a Muslim and former Atheist she could not relate. Through getting to know the Evangelical Christian on an individual level, she realized, "It's not fair to write an entire group of people off, even if you'd had conflict with some people."

For Ezra, the building of individual relationships was central to his definition of interfaith dialogue. His definition of interfaith dialogue included, "building human relationships, I think it's what it is. I think the building of human relationships across the religious and non-religious landscape." He described that the intent must be to approach others "as a person" first, and that will lead to the relationship building. He also shared that for the relationship to develop, there must be authentic interest in learning about the other individual. Ezra stated it is this "personal interaction that makes you feel significant."

Kevin expressed that the "enriching relationship" helped him experience the "vastness of my faith." He said, "When you do interfaith, you really see how a person is and you can get lost in the true essence of a person. It's so . . . consuming." These "good experiences happen here between individuals" and this is one of the factors that inspired Kevin to stay involved in interfaith dialogue. Kevin shared an example of how the individual relationship of two friends sustained the interfaith movement on his campus, "The interfaith movement is kind of being sustained by myself and a few other individuals. It's mostly, I find that it's between good friends from the MSA and Chaplaincy, we are friends with each other." Like Kevin, Marie enjoyed experiencing "an intimate side of somebody else. Very personal relationship with reality, in

interfaith dialogue I get to experience this very personal and intimate, vulnerable side of somebody."

Sean believed his Christian faith calls him to build relationship with others, "I've always considered myself somewhat called to have relationships with people who aren't Christian so that if they have their questions and if they ever need help I could be there for them." For Sean, this builds friendships that are an important part of the dialogue. Sean shared that "maintaining my friendship is so, some part, of the dialogue." When Sean was asked to share his image of interfaith dialogue, he stated, "I'd picture two guys or people in an empty classroom, sitting on the tables and just talking to each other." When asked to describe an example of this dialogue, Sean shared:

> I definitely think it happens best personally, one-on-one. I think that if there are more people that belong to either side, that's too easy to -- I don't know, get back up? I also think it's easy if there's already some external relationship there. Like, if I was approached by a stranger and it's one-on-one still, but I still wouldn't be open to talking with him about interfaith anything. But, if it's an organization, someone who is trying to work towards the common goal in our community, it could work on many levels.

Sean had great hope that this personal one-on-one time would lead to a meaningful relationship. He shared, "And, I guess you're just hopeful that there can be a relationship between you two that, as much as I want to accept someone else's faith or background, that they'll be accepting of your faith." Eleanor, coming from her Muslim faith, shared the same rationale for building relationships from an example she gave from the Prophet Muhammad, "He (Muhammad) was friends with people who were not Muslims, but he treated them very respectfully, and we should all strive to be like that too." This philosophy led Eleanor to develop friendships similarly to Sean.

Layla stated that relationships are built through individuals sharing their identities, resulting in a relationship. She shared:

In the beginning, I used to think interfaith dialogue was just people sitting there talking about their identities. But over time, I realized there's a lot more than just sitting and sharing like, "My belief is this and my belief is that." It's more of getting to know someone and working together while you're having a dialogue just to make the – make your community a better place.

When Taylor was asked to close her eyes and describe interfaith dialogue, a picture of

individuals in relationship with each other came to mind:

I'm such a people person. I love being around people and helping people, it's one of the reasons why I'm in Psychology and have a thing with interfaith. So, I think I just see a group of people, different faces representing whether they're non-religious and religious, it's just spending time together.

Riley, like Taylor, enjoyed being around people. She shared an example of how a bond

was formed with an atheist friend and how that friendship led to great exploration of diversity:

The next year, they decided to send me to an interfaith leadership institute in Chicago and I went with one of my friends who's leading the organization that year and her name was Emily and she's an Atheist. And the two of us went to ILI and I realized then how much bigger interfaith was than myself. And I encountered a lot of diversity that I haven't really been able to on campus and I made a lot of friends who were very different from me, and some very similar to me, but none were exactly the same. And so I think that even outside of the realm of talking about religion, which is how we might see interfaith dialogue, it teaches you to work out what's happening in everyday life a little differently. It helps you to think more deeply about people and think more about the way to communicate with people.

Steve shared an example of an interfaith conversation group called Faith in Conversation

that promoted relationship building. He shared:

So we have a program, a couple of years ago called, Faith in Conversation, and we created groups of like three or four students each, and they are supposed to meet informally. So they were in the coffee shops or in the dining hall and virtually any place on campus, with the goal of talking about religion. In the course of the semester, they built deeper friendships, so they are okay discussing deeper theological things.

Judah expressed how forming friendships could assist in tackling challenging topics. He

said:

I think it's important also to talk about things that we disagree on, but I think the first thing that we need to do before we do that is we've got to build a sense of trust. So I think the dialogue helps in building that sense of trust, and then once you have that friendship going on, then you can get into deeper issues that are going to be more problematic.

James believed his experiences in interfaith dialogue would affect him long after graduation. In regards to relationship with individuals, he shared, "I definitely think it will affect my future relationship and friendships."

Sharing and storytelling. The participants reflected that many relationships were initiated through sharing. For example, Kevin said:

Sharing their background and their experiences and sharing who they are, but at the same time, willing to listen to and relate to other people are on the base level, not on the religious level, ethical level or philosophical level, but on the base level, just human beings.

Kevin added that sharing helps him "feel like a type of relief." Layla, like Kevin, described an emotional reaction in interfaith dialogue and stated, "Being able to share like that with someone instead of hiding it" was central to her experience in interfaith dialogue. For Layla, this sharing leads to deeper storytelling, it's also the sharing of "your values and pretty much who you are and why you do what you do." For Marie, personal relationships developed through sharing exposed a "personal and intimate, vulnerable side of somebody."

James, Judah, and Sean provided examples of how sharing is facilitated in an interfaith dialogue. Judah started with the voicing of his own values. James did the same thing and then encouraged the other party to follow suit. James described the sharing process:

Generally, I think it starts by someone saying, stating their beliefs, voicing their beliefs. And then someone else will say, "Oh that's interesting and connects to something for my beliefs. I believe something similar," or "Oh that's interesting. I see it this way."

90

According to James, when someone shares their story and experience, it allows others to form a closer connection. James shared that interfaith dialogue provides a:

> Good framework, you talk about place and not even to use the whole structure every time, you're telling a story to someone but I think it's stories are good ways to tell someone about an experience you've been through that allows them to see from your perspective a little bit and see things from your shoes.

Sean's approach mirrored James:

> I definitely ask them first, ask them about their faith or belief system is, and ask them more than just what is on the surface. And then I ask for the personal story, why they believe in what they do. And usually I open up with them, be honest with what I believe. And then I think I just try to affirm their state as much as I can, affirm what I agree with.

Eleanor emoted that "it's nice to share things that are so important and so drawn to your faith with other people and you see them get something out of that, even though it's not like their own." This sharing is a key component of storytelling, which Eleanor described:

> I've learned that everyone had a story and everyone has something that people want to talk about. And they don't often get the opportunity to do so, and it's like a stage, like interfaith supportive environment, and just giving people that opportunity, just sitting down and letting them know that you're there. Listening to them can make a huge difference for people in just a way that they experience religion and their own identities and how they relate to other people.

Taylor shared that her own beliefs were strengthened through storytelling. She shared:

> I think I learned a lot about my own beliefs in that, but then I also feel like I maybe learned a sense of vulnerability that I may not have experienced before because I think that when you tell your stories and when other people are telling you theirs, there's a sense of vulnerability there and I think that that's – I don't know, it's important. I come from – very things you go through happen for a reason and I'm a person that strongly believes those makes me stronger for going through them. So I think I've learned a lot about that whenever I have these conversations with people.

Riley said, "When people feel they can share maybe personal experiences, and also religious things or personal things," these relationships are enhanced and, "Every single person has an equal amount of important things to share." Throughout the researcher's conversation with Riley, she shared that for her, interfaith dialogue has served as a medium for her to align her

talents with her passion. She believed her "gift as a storyteller were not just helpful to interfaith but essential," and she worked with other student leaders to "become better storytellers and become even more connected." Storytelling has challenged her to be a better person, she "recognize(s) that every person I meet had a tradition, has an identity, so they also have a story and that's what's really cool." Stories help others realize that, according to Riley, "There's a lot more to a person than when you initially meet them because there's so many stories behind where they are now and their faith and their faith traditions." Storytelling can assist in clearing up miscommunication and lack of understanding. Steve provided advice on how storytelling can clear up miscommunication, "Don't come up with any kinds of misconceptions; let the person tell their own story about it."

Ecumenical Worldview

All eleven participants expressed an ecumenical worldview when describing their definition, experience, and learning that occurred through interfaith dialogue. As defined by "Spirituality in Higher Education" (2010), an:

> *Ecumenical Worldview* reflects a global worldview that transcends ethnocentrism and egocentrism. It indicates the extent to which the student is interested in different religious traditions, seeks to understand other countries and cultures, feels a strong connection to all humanity, believes in the goodness of all people, accepts others as they are, and believes that all life is interconnected and that love is at the root of all the great religions. (p.1)

For participants, their narratives gave voice to their desire to: seek understanding, their yearning for learning, the connections they experienced, the acknowledgement of multiple truths, and the desire to collectively do good.

Seek to understand. To hold an ecumenical worldview, seeking to understand the religious other is a primary component that the participant voices demonstrated. For example, Ezra credited curiosity and desire to learn as tools that helped him seek understanding:

I think curiosity level and a real desire to learn, and I think that's something that you always get with interfaith people, or people who are willing to go out of the way to do that for a good dialogue, not everyone necessarily. I'm doing my best to try and understand someone else's faith or experience.

Judah demonstrated that same curiosity and desire to learn when he provided a situational example of how to put this curiosity and desire to learn into practice:

It might be that you're walking on the street and you see this, a student wearing a hijab, meaning you might want to go up to that person and say, "Excuse me, I was just curious why are you wearing that?" And not in a negative way, but just an interesting way, being respectful and you say, "I'm Jewish and I was just curious what the hijab means to you." And if you're that person walking in the street you're going to think, "Whoa, that's kind of cool." So it's a different way of approaching that person and then they can start talking and that's when you need to listen. Looking at them in the eye, just really using body language, and really trying to listen and to understand what they're saying. So I think a lot of it is, so after they've said what their saying, you can rephrase that so that – "so if I hear you correctly, this is what you mean and is that right?" And then you can relate that back to your own experience and say, "I don't know if you knew it, but in Judaism women wear head covering." So a lot of it I think is approaching, listening, mirroring, and then relating back to your own experience.

Sean expressed this curiosity as well when he shared a relationship he had with one of his friends:

It may have been when we got older. I know that my best friend is also Evangelical Christian, but he and I would have theological debates all the time. We really tried to consider all these different, other options and so I couldn't really figure out a way to deny agnosticism as invalid. And so when I got to college, decided to join the Christian group on campus. I also joined the Agnostic Secular Skeptics group.

And so from there, I think I really began to see some -- from the beginning of my college experience, I think it was when I really started to see that it's important to just checking it out with other people.

Kevin shared that it's "important to understand where the specific faith tradition kind of comes from and its approach to dealing with interfaith." Riley, as an evangelical Christian, has struggled in the past with seeking this understanding. She admitted, "I think there has been some challenge for me to be able to define what my experience is, but if I have lot more patience on this conversation with them, I want more understanding." For her, she recognized that others

want "to know traditions" that should be reciprocated, even when "there are things that are uncomfortable." When expressing how she seeks understanding on a daily basis, Riley shared:

> I think day-to-day, it gives me a tool to understand people in every aspect of their life. I really try to be more patient ever since I started doing interfaith dialogue. There's a lot more to someone than maybe you can see right away. So I think that in my day-to-day life, I try to think more about who people really are, and I try to become a better listener and interfaith dialogue has made me a much better listener because you have to be really conscious about what people are saying and we should show a lot of respect. I think it's just… it also inspired me to appreciate diversity in everyday life more, or to appreciate it even when it doesn't appear to be a lot of diversity, like since my campus is mainly white Christians from the Midwest, there's very little deviations on that. I found that there's diversity within that, there was a lot of different opinions that are presented by people who even grew up in the same place and then some different traditions.

> Like Riley, Steve emphasized the importance of listening as a tool for understanding.

Steve expanded upon the skills he uses to seek this understanding:

> Number one is definitely listening. So listening, in terms, when someone says something, giving them the full attention and understand what they are saying. And part of that is to give people the benefit of the doubt. So if you don't understand what they are saying and you think it might be something you don't agree with, try to let them explain what they are feeling and let people define themselves in their own terms. Don't come up with any kinds of misconceptions; let the person tell their own story about it. Another one is, I think just being humble, having humility because nobody should be an expert on anything. So we may know a lot of things about religion but we have a lot of things to learn more, so I think it's always good to come in expecting to learn more from somebody else.

> Both Taylor and Marie pinpointed times when they struggled with seeking understanding.

Taylor said, "If I don't understand where they're coming from, I try to better understand that before I make any statements regarding those types of things." Marie shared how being patient during the seeking understanding process has been important for her journey:

> People have trouble understanding questions, people take things too personal, which leads to someone not understanding themselves, and misinterpreting questions as an attack. I definitely feel that it's important to understand that often questions they come with the best of intentions no matter how they end up being asked because a lot of times some people speak without thinking, without actually trying to hurt somebody, you have to have a high degree of patience, I think.

Learning. James's love of learning about others drives him to participate in interfaith dialogue. He shared, "You learn something about another person, what drives them, what motivates them and where they come from." Layla's comments reflected a focus on learning about others, "I learned so much about other people and just more of how they got to where they are now and a lot of it did have to do with some faith or non-faith." Marie's ultimate goal in interfaith dialogue is to learn, "Just to learn, really I think is what everyone's goal ultimately is. My role is to be one of the best listeners as possible and contribute to productive discussions." Sean pinpointed a moment, when learning led to insight, "There's a moment you definitely learn their history and you get a lot of insight into the culture and their background."

In order to be open to this learning about the religious other, Ezra shared that suspending judgment opens that ability. According to Ezra:

> One of the things that I do is I really suspend judgment from the get go. If I suspend the judgment really, everything is a surprise but also nothing is. You're expecting anything to come out, something does. Usually it's a lot less crazy or ridiculous than maybe you hoped it would be.

Layla also said she suspends judgment, "I tend to not be so judgmental about a person if they did something." Riley alluded to the element of surprise that Ezra mentioned when she stated:

> I think a lot of the time, like in the conversation, there's certain expectations of what we may be talking about, and usually I'm very surprised because you never know exactly where the conversation's going to go or what people are going to offer because even if you've met a secular humanist, or atheist, or Hindu before, you've never met that particular person. So I try to go into it now with a more open mind because I don't know enough to really know what people are going to talk about.

Multiple participants mentioned reflection as a means to make meaning of interactions to enhance learning with the religious other. Layla discussed a time where she reflected alongside two others that were from other faith traditions. Riley believed that reflection leads to learning:

It clears your mind a little bit, you feel like you're really able to lay some things out on a table and really evaluate and I think that self-evaluation is important, I usually walk away from that feeling pretty relaxed and I've learned something.

Taylor regularly reflected. When talking about a service activity she shared, "It's cool to reflect on that and to see where it's going to take me." When reflecting on what she's learned from other religions through interfaith dialogue, Taylor shared, "I really appreciate Buddhism and Hinduism beliefs just because they're all about not going after desires, feeling like what you did in this world matters in the next, they really acknowledge that."

Judah believed that when a person takes the time to learn about others, that person expands their own religious literacy. This enables them to act on behalf of others. Judah described how learning translates to action when he shared:

But I think it also it really does help having a decent amount of knowledge of other peoples. Just to know what the four noble truths are is huge because it can make that discussion with that Buddhist that much more meaningful, and that much more interesting, and you can relate to that person, really connect more deeply.

I think part of being an interfaith leader also is the idea that when that person isn't there and somebody makes a comment that's not -- doesn't necessarily represent Buddhism. If you have some of that knowledge, you can cite a specific thing that really helps. But if you don't have that knowledge, you can't do that. So I think knowledge, the literacy part is very important.

Judah also expressed how college campuses are fertile grounds for learning when he stated:

So I think one of the places that's good for definitely is college campuses because people are being exposed to all these different ideas and need to ask people that they might not have met before. And they're taking classes on things that are new for them and usually people in college are trying to explore the world and learn about different things. So I think that's one of the ideal places for it.

Like Judah, Layla's learning about others has enabled her to find her own voice and has led to action. She mentioned a Coca-Cola commercial during the Super Bowl that was very

controversial. The commercial had the patriotic song, *America the Beautiful* sung in eight

different languages. Because of her experience in interfaith dialogue, she felt equipped to have a

dialogue with others regarding the commercial:

> I tend to defend the Coca-Cola commercial, people were so angry about that, I'm like, "This was the best commercial, it's the best!" So I was defending that commercial and something happened with the GAP ad -- when the Sikh man, he was wearing a turban and people were making fun of him. So instead of sitting back and letting these people talk, I would stand up and be like, "That's their belief. Let them wear what they want or let them believe what they want."

Layla acknowledged that before fully engaging in interfaith dialogue, she would not have

been able to express her voice:

> A couple of years ago, I was really, really shy. I didn't really speak up much, but I think since being involved with Interfaith Youth Core and interfaith center, I've had, I've grown where I can speak up and share my values or I voice my values with other people instead of just sitting back and just taking everybody's judgments and all this stuff. So I've been more vocal since all this. And being able to share that with someone instead of hiding it, I feel that was my biggest accomplishment, being able to express my beliefs as well as hear other people's beliefs.

She shared another example of a time when she defended the views of atheists in class:

> But, just to get a better understanding of atheism and what it means. And funny thing was I defended atheists because I thought of my friend in my class the other day because we were talking about faith, and religious and non-religious identities. And someone just said something about you get your values through your faith in God or something and I was like, "Well it's not entirely true." And I just went on from there. And I told him, I was like, "Dude, you would have been so proud of me because --"

Ezra promotes learning as a means to breakdown stereotypes:

> I think one of the best things that interfaith dialogue gets is it breaks down preconceived notions and stereotypes, that's what really, what the dialogue does to the best degree is saying, we believe this rule because that's how we've been taught. Jews don't drive on Sabbath. Some Jews do, others don't, so it's a lot of you asking, this is a stereotypical thing that I've been taught about you and another person being able to totally disassociate

them with that stereotype in which case your conception of another religion has been broken down and I think that's interfaith.

Eleanor's love of learning about other religious identities keeps her motivated to stay engaged in interfaith dialogue. She shared:

I haven't really lost any, like, loving to learn like other religions that I really loved hearing how other people experienced their religion. I'm an Anthropology major so a major thing that we talk about in anthropology is of religion, courses, and there's variations - so much variation and if it means from this person, then it won't ever be the same what it means to other person, and that's true to like any faith or non-religious identity, and I just really like listening to other people's experiences on their own identity.

Eleanor shared an example of her love of learning:

And it's really great. I love it, like text are some of my favorite things about religion and so just getting that, even having grown up in a Christian church and having no hobby in this Bible version, like hearing from other people who have studied in a different way or taught in a different way was interesting to hear different interpretations, like I wish I have gotten that interpretation like when I was a kid, I'm still trying to do this. It is really interesting and it is even more interesting to see the differences like one of our… last semester when one of our themes were creation stories and we… in the Quran, we talked about there's a version in the Quran that taught me about creation that specifically uses the word "sperm" and really scientific term and analogies that you wouldn't expect to talk about described in 600 AD. And people of all faiths didn't know that was the Quran, like really shocked. It's nice to share things that are so important and so drawn to your faith with other people and you see them get something out of that, even though it's not like their own.

Connections. Kevin expressed his connection with people of all backgrounds. When talking about his interfaith dialogue experience on his HBCU campus, he shared:

It's been a rather interesting experiencing, everyone experiences challenges coming into a new community, but for the most part, the student body is characterized by an arm of brotherhood and um you'd probably hear that a lot. We are all African-American, we all have the shared experience, and sometimes it transcends faith, but I really think it really lies in a shared reliance of something greater, that's greater than just our experience, so it's been interesting, it's had its ups and downs, for the most part, for the most part I'd respond positively of my experience.

Kevin emphasized that "there are always those special people that you can meet anywhere in the world, any race, if they are genuine, if they are any race of background or

98

gender, they'll still have that special warmth when you see them." This connection fed his desire

to seek out interfaith dialogue experiences.

Taylor, while raised Christian and not having many interfaith dialogue experiences in her

childhood, has grown to recognize the connection piece of interfaith dialogue. She said, "I think

the number one thing I learned through interfaith is that literally, almost all these religions are

connected." When she experiences these connections, specifically through her involvement in

interfaith service activities, she acknowledged that "those are powerful moments for me." These

connections for Taylor enhance her understanding of diversity. She shared:

> I think it opens my eyes to a lot more diversity and people, I think it will enable me in my future to realize the people that I'm working with, the people that surround myself, by the differences that they have and I feel like I'm more accepting of people now, engage in a lot of this and I feel it's going to give me a broader view of just where people are coming from.

When defining interfaith dialogue, Judah shared that conversations about similarities and

connections were salient to his experience:

> So again, that connection, seeing that similar idea that I think is very interesting. This is -- so that idea of making connections and seeing how these developments happened over time and then be reinterpreted. And in a sense, inscribed in these people as they live their religion today, I think it's interesting for me.

Judah also described the connections he experiences as "seeing the similarity in

difference," when he shared:

> But then also seeing the -- seeing how other people can have similar hopes and ideals because of their own experiences that are different from mine, might draw in some more values and stuff. So I guess if I was trying to make that a little more precise, it's seeing the similarity in difference, if that makes sense.

Layla provided an example of a connection that was meaningful for her. She developed a

friendship with a student who was atheist. Up until this point, she did not think she could have

anything in common with someone from this philosophical tradition, particularly because she did

not have a clear understanding of atheism. Once he explained it to her, she realized, "I had a lot in common with him." She said:

> Just because he doesn't believe in a God, it doesn't mean he's a horrible person, he's more into science and the cool thing about the Baha'i faith is we're really into science too… And the funny thing was, he told me that if he did believe in a god, he would have been a Baha'i.

> As an evangelical Christian, Sean's ability to see the connections across religions has been an evolution:

> Now when I think of what happens when you see the common avenues between each other's point of view, I think each person also sees interesting or cool facets of the other's religion or tradition. I think it really just helps me realize how human we all are. How connected and how similar we all are.

> Riley provided an example of a connection she had to a Mormon student she dialogued with about the afterlife:

> I was very troubled by some of the things that Christianity says about the afterlife. . . I changed my point of views about it and here we got into a great conversation about what Jesus seems to say and from our different convictions he told me that he has a friend who struggled with the same exact thing.

> Steve said he has struggled with how to help others recognize the purpose of interfaith dialogue. He shared his frustration:

> People often don't understand what's involved in dialogue. The goal is to build understanding and connections, not to agree on things, and the other side of that is, it happens more in Midwest not so much at my school, but people come to the dialogue because they want to proselytize, like they want to convert people to their religion. In certain religions, proselytizing is important to them and that's okay, but when you're coming to dialogue, the point should be like; you're trying to learn from someone else.

> For Steve, once participants internalize that the goal of the dialogue is learning, not conversion, the window for productive dialogue opens. When asked to describe a meaningful interfaith conversation, Steve shared a program on his campus that promotes connections between Hindu and Muslim students:

Yeah, one thing I started a couple years ago at my school was a Hindu Muslim dialogue. I found it especially meaningful because I'm Indian and most of my friends are actually Hindu, but then I'm also Muslim, so I have a lot of friends like from the Middle East and Pakistan. That's the first time that I've really seen those two groups come together about religion, usually it was like cultural. It was the first time that these two groups could come together and talk about deep theological things. And I had a great time because I could relate to all Hindu things because, being Indian, I knew about them by just being around people like that and I could also relate to the Muslim thing because that was my religion, so it's a good way to bring those two ethnic identities together.

Multiple truths. The connections the participants felt to other individuals and other faith traditions led the participants to acknowledge the concept of multiple truths. Ezra, Layla, Judah, Kevin, and Steve recognized multiple truths earlier because they were exposed to different religions during childhood. Ezra shared a story of how his mom adapted a Hebrew prayer to acknowledge multiple truths. The literal prayer is "bless us thee our God, ruler or king of the universe." Ezra's mother substituted the word *spirit* instead of *ruler or king*. Ezra shared that "this is a very re-constructionist thing. The idea is really to reconstruct within traditional structures a religion that fits the experience of the present," thus acknowledging the experience of others. Ezra's farther was a president of the rabbinical college for the majority of his childhood. Ezra was able to meet all of the different re-constructionist rabbi's. The philosophy they were taught at the Rabbinical College reflected an appreciation of other faith traditions and embraced the spirituality of others. Ezra shared a story of a Rabbi that spent three years in a Buddhist temple:

So one of them spent three years in Buddhist temple as a Buddhist monk and then became a rabbi, so there's some things, some who are Jewish Buddhist and so it fluctuates and it varies so that each person, one of the things is like what kind of community can be created which is Jewish in identity but which is able to express itself spiritually in the best spiritual way as the community needs it.

Ezra summarized his philosophy by stating:

I think one of the many things you get is that there's no one who has the same faith that you do or even conception of what the experience or reality is. It's very much an understanding of individuality.

Judah's experience with multiple truths came from a young age. He recalled going to a Union for Reform Judaism Youth Camp when that concept was introduced. He shared:

> I saw a movie at camp . . . a Union for Reform Judaism Youth Camp. And the movie was called God in the Box and basically – so people of all different beliefs systems, I'm going inside this telephone booth sized box, answering two questions which were; what does God look like to you, what does God mean to you. And the movie was just really interesting the way it pieced together all these different people's perspectives.

The movie ignited his passion for exploring the concept of multiple truths. In response to a series of anti-Semitic events on his college campus, Judah worked with students of other faith traditions to produce another God in the Box program. He shared:

> I guess in my freshman year in college when there's a series of anti-Semitic instances that happened on campus. And what I did from there was I got some other people involved to see if we can put on a program, getting all different people together to work on, putting on our own God in the Box program. And then I just got interested in interfaith more like that.

Through Judah's academic course of religious studies, he began seeing the concept of multiple truths referenced in different religious texts. This was demonstrated to Judah when the same verse appeared in both the Torah and the Quran. Judah said:

> When I learned something like there's the exact same verse in the Quran that's in the Torah. When I hear 'to save one life is to save the entire world', and then hear that's the same passage, in a different text, in a different religion, it's just fascinating.

He provided another example that demonstrated the value of independent opinions in religious matters:

> And I'm taking a course on religious relationships and what does it mean to have a relationship to God, with God, to different people, in different religions and for me that's all interfaith.

> And we were doing a program and there was this verse that they were projecting on there from the Mishnah and it was really interesting. It basically said that our sages once asked, "What do you do?" or "Have you blessed?" If you see a group of strange looking people together. And it's said that -- it first talked about diversity and saying that if you see a red head, an albino, a blonde or something like that. You say, "Blessed be he then for blessed be he, God for he changes men."

And then it went on to a different one and saying, "But if you see a large group of people together." And I'm not putting this exactly correct, but it said, you say something similar, "Blessed be he, the master of secrets for just as their faces are different so does each and every individual has his or her own independent opinion." And the idea being that each person's independent opinion is valued as important.

Steve shared that, in his experience in interfaith dialogue, a person can't "come in like you have some monopoly on Truth." He expanded on this when he said:

> All of us believe in different things but we're all seeking the truth whatever that is for us. There are different opinions on how we can approach that and part of the conversation should be how we can learn from each other.

Taylor, who was raised Christian, did not acknowledge the connection of multiple truths until her experiences of interfaith dialogue during college. She said, "There are common beliefs in all of them. And it's taking me from a really important time in my life where I felt one way was the right way to a place we can all do this together." Marie came to this realization later as well. For her as an atheist, this concept created some apprehension. She shared a philosophical tradition that believes "you can't really prove anything else exists other than your own existence, to there's a possibility that everything is made up in your head and you're actually alone." Through an interfaith dialogue she participated in, she found two people from other religions, Christianity and Buddhism, who made peace with this concept. It was one of her most meaningful dialogues.

Eleanor also shared:

> There's a verse in Quran that said "There is no compulsion in religion." And I believe that it might be the same chapter with a verse that says, "To you be your way and to me be my way," and it's like reading that and having come from the upbringing very like, this is the only way and don't bother making friends with people and you must try to convert them. It was so enlightening and really comforting to me. So to have that in a holy text and have that be a main foundation of what Islam is supposed to stand for, like it's all about protecting other people and their faith and their right to practice whatever belief system they have the way that they want to, and I feel like that's a really foundational thing in Islam that gets forgotten in the media.

James shared a poignant story that serves as an example of Eleanor's notion of protecting the faith of others. James's most meaningful moment in interfaith dialogue was a heartfelt account of a moment with a homeless man:

> So my most meaningful interfaith moment was also during our coach training week. We made a habit of after our dinner, getting the leftovers -- this is in Chicago, so we made a habit of getting our leftovers after dinner and finding homeless people to give it to. So there's one night, it was me, one of the Protestant Christian coaches and the Unitarian Universalist coach and we're walking and I saw a homeless man and so I offered him my food and he's like, "How did you know?" And I said, "You looked hungry." He said, "No. How did you know? I was going to go in that back alley and kill myself." It turned into the three of us talking to him and hearing his life story for an hour and a half to two hours, and we gave him bus pass, he gets to the hospital or to the homeless shelter he was supposed to be in, but there's a moment where he was saying how Jesus is the one, his one saving grace, the one positive thing in his life, he then was like, "Do you believe in God? Do you believe in Jesus?" to the Protestant coach and she was, "I do." And then he turned to the Unitarian Universalist and, "So you don't, then because she said I do." [Laughter] He said, "No, I do too."

James was asked what happened when the homeless person got to him, the atheist. James said, "He didn't bring it to me luckily. [Laughter] But I don't know what I was going to do." James added, "Yeah. I don't think I would have been the person to tell him that, oh yeah that one positive thing in your life, I don't believe in that. I don't think I could do that." This reaction demonstrated James's respect for the homeless man and James did not have a desire to take away his truth.

Desire to do good. Participants expressed what motivated them to participate in interfaith dialogue. The most common theme was the desire to do good. When Eleanor described her involvement in the interfaith student organization on her campus, she said it was all about bringing religious and non-religious identities together in an effort to "help other people and improve humanity." For her, this support of others occurs in a variety of different ways, "financial or physical or emotional support."

For Kevin, the connection he builds with others is grounded in the "ethic to do good."

He provided the following example that references his recent experience at the IFYC ILI:

> When I think of interfaith dialogue, when I think of my daily interactions, when I think of anyone that isn't the same background as me or the same religion as me and I see that as interfaith dialogue, unless I'm in some type of situation where someone approaches me out of nowhere, my discussions seem to be so full. I'm not always talking about how to make the world better but um it's kind of characterizes how you can navigate through life, because after this weekend or the course of this weekend, I started to think that about other faith traditions, when it comes to doing work together, faith tradition is just one aspect of it. It really includes everyone, so if I think about my everyday interactions it's really diverse, it's a diverse nation, we are all trying to live a good life and encourage others to live a good life too.

Kevin expressed how dynamic and inspiring his desire to do good could be:

> One thing that really stands out to me is how dynamic, how dynamic that human beings can be. You can come from any background, any type of upbringing, from the most negative to the most positive, and you can still harbor this strong will to do good, and a strong sense of empathy and compassion, and I find it very interesting that very few people, very few people don't harbor some passion for good.

Layla, grounded in her Baha'i faith, sees "everybody as your brother and sister, and just working together in peace and harmony." She added, "People of faith in general, we can accomplish much more together than we can, when we protect ourselves individually." Taylor acknowledged this as well. She believed individuals can lead social change by "acknowledging their differences and coming together on those differences for the common good." Sean shared the same motivation. He thought he was inspired and called to do good, "I want to do as much good in the world that I can possibly do and more of it can be accomplished through cooperation."

Judah shared that the Jewish faith does not explicitly incorporate interfaith as other faiths do. However, it was Judah's passion to be the type of Rabbi that makes interfaith dialogue a social norm in his congregation that has kept him involved. Judah said:

> So what I'm interested in is how can we bring that out in the public sphere as how can we get different houses of worship working together, collectively, consistently. And that's

What I want to do as a Rabbi, how to move, lead that thing. . . We're not trying to convert other people or anything like that, or wash away religion or something. We're simply trying to get people to work together and to show that we believe different things, we can make a difference.

So even the existentialist, different people like that and then atheists, agnostics and secular, so people of all different belief systems that are pluralistic, meaning that they're going to be respectful and think that it's important that people work together.

Marie also expressed her desire to incorporate interfaith work after graduation, "Well I know that post college my work in the interfaith center will help me become more culturally sensitive and I hope that I can help whatever company I'm in contribute to an increasingly globalized and diverse world."

Strengthening Own Faith

As participants described their definitions of interfaith dialogue, their experiences, and what they learned through participation, it was clear that their encounter of experiencing the "religious other" actually strengthened their own faith. For some, this evolution began in their formative years; but for most, the transformative experience did not occur until they were fully engaged in interfaith dialogue during their collegiate years. Through the broadening of their religious upbringing, having their faith challenged, acknowledging the connection between their own faith or non-faith tradition and interfaith, the strengthening of their own faith occurred.

Broadening of religious upbringing. Interfaith dialogue experiences served as a vehicle for participants to broaden their religious upbringing. Eleanor, Riley, Taylor, Sean, and James were raised in homes where interfaith dialogue was not the norm. Their interfaith dialogue experiences shifted dualistic messages they had received during their childhood and assisted them to have a more pluralistic worldview.

Eleanor was raised in a conservative Christian home, which turned her away from religion and led her to become an atheist before later converting to Islam. Eleanor became

106

extremely involved in the interfaith center on her college campus. When discussing some of her experiences, she lamented, "I wish I had gotten that interpretation like when I was a kid." Her childhood messages did not promote inclusivity and did not encourage her to seek understanding from others of differing religions.

Before practicing interfaith dialogue, Eleanor harbored a lot of anger towards Christianity. Because she received messages during her childhood that Christianity was the only correct path, she became an atheist and was consumed with a negative attitude towards religion. When asked about her upbringing, she shared:

> I guess the first thing that comes to mind is going back to how I felt when I first identified as an atheist. When I first turned away from the church, identifying atheist, I felt really a lot of anger, just towards… like in my head, it was towards all the religions and it was mainly Christianity and it felt like I wasted so much time like trying to be the thing that everyone has said I had to be a good Christian. And what I've learned is that you don't have to be angry even if you had horrible experiences regarding religion or religious institutions or religious people like there's nothing much inherently hateful about any religion itself and it's one of those things like there's variation and everything and I guess, I've learned that it's not like a requirement to be angry even if you don't believe in this thing anymore.

This realization for Eleanor came through her involvement in the interfaith center at college. She became involved when she transferred to her institution and connected to the mission of the center through interaction with religious leaders from various traditions. This experience of seeing different religious leaders come together in solidarity was nothing she had ever been exposed to during childhood. She shared:

> I knew that there was an interfaith center there and I was sort of interested in getting involved with that for the learning aspect of it. And about a week before class started when I transferred there, the Sikh temple shooting in Wisconsin happened and the local Sikh community opened their Temple up to the public for a memorial service and if anyone wanted to come show solidarity and support they can do that. So I went and while I was there, there were people who spoke up and support - there was a Catholic nun there,

there was a Rabbi, a representative from the local mosque was there, a few different pastors and that was the first time that I've actually seen anything like that. Growing up, it was very closed off, like Christianity, your church, that was it. And seeing that interfaith support and solidarity just really touched me and that's when I knew that this was something that I could become passionate about and that's when I started getting involved with the interfaith center club and better together.

Eleanor has kept her conversion to Islam a secret from her family. However, she has opened up to some of her childhood friends. Her friends, while still conservative Christians, have been surprisingly open to her transition. Eleanor, while still closed off to her family, shared that her interfaith dialogue with her childhood peer group has been a learning experience for all involved:

> It's just something that… I wear Hijab and I have to put it on after I leave the house and I don't pray at home because I was at my grandma's. It's just too difficult to feel comfortable so I usually pray either at the mosque or in our prayer room at [her school]. The group of friends that I went to school with and all throughout, like elementary and middle school, high school, they're still pretty conservative Christians but they've been really supportive of me and they just ask questions about it sometimes and they're not like closed minded like I originally had anticipated. From then on, sometimes they feel like they think that they ignored it, like it's not actually happening but they haven't been like rude or anything. When I first converted, I first started going to the Mosque- they're really curious and just ask questions like, what made you choose this and what does Islam say about this and this and this? And so, I felt like it was a learning experience for everyone involved.…

James, like Eleanor, shared how his view of the world has changed through engagement in interfaith dialogue. He harbored negative feelings towards individuals that identified as religious when he became an atheist:

> I definitely think I maybe see the world a little differently. So after I had decided I was an atheist in high school, I definitely felt like a little bit of animosity towards other religions, just what I would see in the news and all that but I definitely see things differently now.

Riley had limited interaction with anyone of different religious or non-religious identities prior to college. Through engagement in interfaith dialogue, her definition of interfaith evolved and became central to her existence:

> Before going to college, I knew close to nothing about any other religion and I knew close to nothing about being an atheist or I didn't know what secular humanist was. And so when I talked to these people, they're very open to talk about what they believe and I think that I've become stronger and more knowledgeable of what type of people there are in the world. It's taught me a lot since I started.
>
> I think it has, I think when I first started interfaith work, I thought interfaith dialogue meant that um you bring in someone that is totally different from you or you force people into a situation of diversity and someone has something to teach to somebody else or sometimes for someone to talk exclusively about what their beliefs meant and exclusively what their religion meant. I realized that it's not just talking about your religious tradition but realizing how your religious tradition is included in all aspects of your life and I think that another part of people's lives come out in interfaith dialogue.
>
> So I think that definition has evolved from including different religious communities and seeing that those people respected their visitors as much as you respected them and they wanted to know our traditions as well and seeing other students interact with each other and there are things that are uncomfortable, so you purposely set up a space that is welcoming for everyone.

Taylor and Sean, like Eleanor and Riley, broadened how they were raised through their interfaith dialogue experiences. Taylor had a moment in high school, and Sean a moment in middle school, which foreshadowed their future involvement in interfaith dialogue. Taylor described her poignant high school moment:

> When I was in high school, I did have a - - like I said it wasn't that diverse in high school but I did have - - there was a group, not a group but maybe a few Muslims that went to my high school who were oftentimes were made fun of in school so I remember having one of the Muslim girls that I knew, she was in one of my classes and I remember personally someone making fun of some of the things she was wearing and I just remember feeling in that moment, this can't be right. People should freely express how they want to feel and what they believe in and how they're reacting. So I think from then on, I started beginning opening my eyes to these things, but that was definitely a changing moment I think in my life where I felt I definitely needed to broaden how I was raised and how I view certain things.

In his formative years, Sean thought that interfaith dialogue was solely a means to

convert others:

> Yeah, I [Laughter] did have conversations, but they weren't so much dialogue, they were definitely just three conversations about how I was Christian and other people weren't or someone who'd make a snide remark about Christians and I would defend myself briefly and then that'll be it.

Sean's moment that foreshadowed his future involvement occurred in his first interfaith

conversation that he can recall when he was 13 or 14. He said:

> The first time for me probably was when I was something like 13 or 14 and I was raised Christian and my friend decided that he was an atheist. And so we talked about it for so many days or something and it was a very good conversation and we were okay with each other being different, but it was very awkward.

Sean's experiences in interfaith dialogue changed his perspective. Sean admitted that he

did not know much about other religions until his family, once religious, pulled back and he went

on a spirituality quest himself that led him from Mormonism to Christianity.

Ezra, Steve, Judah, and Kevin each experienced interfaith dialogue at a younger age. For

them, interfaith dialogue during their college years helped to expand and enhance their

ecumenical worldview, rather than change it like the other participants previously discussed.

Ezra's upbringing introduced interfaith discussions at an early age, he said:

> So a lot of it has to do with the way I was raised. My father is a re-constructionist rabbi, re-constructionist Judaism is an interesting type of Judaism. One of the first moments that stood out to me as a pivotal moment and made me interested was in the seventh grade, I went to a private Jewish based school, and usually we would have a class called Jewish history where you go through and you learn about Jewish history from the beginning to the end.
>
> In seventh grade they decided instead of doing Jewish history, they were going to teach about -- the first half of year, about Christianity and the second half of the year about Islam. They taught the five pillars of Islam and the theology of Christianity. I'm still having this very seventh grade question which was, well if my parents were Christian, would I believe in a Christian God?

So as I started thinking, why exactly am I with the Jewish God, why is it this one? So one time, as a rebellious seventh grader, I wanted to annoy and pick on one of the traditional rabbis, so I became the middle school atheist, sitting in the Jewish classes, arguing.

Until I came back on a Monday, my father was a rabbi and I said to him, Abba which is Hebrew for dad, Abba I don't believe in God and my dad looked at me and goes, "Oh yeah? Cool, why not?" And I really think that that willingness and allowance, that really shook me. So, oh this is okay? That conception of any kind of faith as not being central to the practicing of religion, it has kept me involved in any kind of religious conversation since then. It has opened me up to wanting to explore how religion works differently for different people and really see if I could share someone's experience of that religion for themselves.

For Ezra, in addition to reinforcing the theme of multiple truths, this opened the door to build on his upbringing and explore deep questions of faith, religion, and spirituality. Steve also had foundational interfaith experiences as a young boy, he said:

So I grew up in Connecticut, small town, and it was mostly white. My neighborhood is actually unique because we had Jewish, catholic and some Hindus nearby. So I grew up around lots of religions. I grew up talking about different things with my friends. Like during holidays, we go to each other's houses and talk about it and we would celebrate together.

We're Muslims so we do all the things for Islam; my parents really wanted me to get a respect for other religions so they made me learn other faiths and things that other people do. I felt like interfaith was normal like everybody did that. And even after 9/11 happened, when people thought Muslim people were strange people, my town, they were really nice to us; they wanted to learn more about Islam instead of attacking us. So it's a good opportunity, I got practice explaining a lot of stuff with other people and things about Islam and even explaining to kids in school. I didn't think of it as interfaith and so when I went to look at colleges, I wanted a college that took religion seriously.

Steve's experiences as a child influenced his decision to attend an institution of higher education that is committed to religious diversity and encourages students to attain appreciative knowledge of other faith and non-faith traditions.

Judah, while Jewish, was raised with an appreciation of other faith and non-faith traditions. He has built on this interfaith foundation during his collegiate years and will continue to do so when he becomes a Rabbi. Judah wished that younger children would have these experiences earlier. He shared his rationale:

You can do programs where you play together and then you might learn about a holiday or something and they get to do it afterwards or something like that. So I think that would be another ideal place to do that because people are just growing up and they're learning about all these different things. And if they have that first interaction at a younger age it can really change their perceptions at a later age instead of having to try and deconstruct stereotypes that they've already formed. So I think that's another ideal stage and place to do that.

Kevin's experiences as a child were congruent with the philosophy that Judah described:

I've learned that I've been blessed with a lot of experiences that other people don't have, a rich childhood, I've lived with different diverse backgrounds, actually during my interfaith work, it helped me develop my social skills, it's kind of surprising, in interfaith, I've showed a different side of me that I typically only show to my fellow Muslims, I found that interesting, I've found something in people that could excite me, in a similar way to the people that I was raised around so I've learned that I could be versatile.

Steve, like Judah and Kevin, shared that he grew up having interfaith conversations. The one change in his definition that occurred over time, congruent with one of Riley's realizations, revolved around Steve's desire to include the non-religious in the interfaith discussion. He shared:

I definitely started to include more of the non-religious; as I participated in more dialogues. First I thought it was only for people who had faith, but later I realized, non-religious people, they are still interested in discussing things about spirituality so it was important talking to them as well.

Faith challenged. Participants shared a common theme of having their faith challenged. Eleanor left the Christian church angry. She became an atheist as a way to demonstrate her desire to segregate herself from her former religious tradition, and then converted to Islam. She shared her experiences of challenging faith in interfaith dialogues:

Interfaith dialogue can challenge you to be strong in what you believe or to be open to exploring it and questioning yourself and being okay with reassessing things and changing if you feel like you need to, and I feel like that's something that people can be wary of.

Eleanor expanded on her personal struggle when she shared that fear and complacency add to the challenge of interfaith dialogue:

I think a lot of it has to do with both fear and complacency. I was actually talking to one of my friends about this before she was involved in the interfaith center.   Hearing people and their experiences with their own faith and it presents as a challenge to you to be able to be a strong advocate or it makes you explore something that you haven't thought of before, and I think it's the concept of the possibilities of your own faith being questioned. Or even if other people are not directly challenging you by asking some questions or something, I think interfaith dialogue brings that out, like other people can explain what Christianity thinks about this and I should be able to say what does it say about me., It's that fear of having to address an insecurity of your own faith which goes hand in hand. Most of my friends who went to high school with me were Christians and they go to Christian school, they're all teachers in Christian schools and they don't really spend a lot of time with people who aren't Christians and I feel like it just goes hand in hand with a few things. It's a lot easier to be able to hang out with people who know the same things and beliefs and if someone has a problem, you just read a Bible verse.

Eleanor shared that when she converted to Islam, she had to acknowledge that she could only speak from her own experience. In doing this, she questioned herself and reassessed her beliefs. This reflective process creates challenge and dissonance for her. Eleanor shared how this challenge is central to her experience, but can be something that proves difficult for others. Eleanor provided an example:

> Yeah, I like recently converted, so learning and one of our main things that we always discuss in campus or in interfaith dialogue is the use of "I Statements" so there's no way that I can represent all like no matter how many million Muslims and Christians on earth or knowing like represent all Muslims and on earth and everyone has their own identity and it does challenge you to be strong in what you believe or to be open to exploring it and questioning yourself and being okay with reassessing things and changing if you feel like you need to and I feel like that's something that people can be wary of.

Ezra's faith was challenged when he began reading theologies of other religions. He said:

One of the things that I'm doing also is beginning to identify myself; I've been reading more Christian theology now that I have been Jewish theology. So what does it mean if I really enjoy Paul Tillik and all of a sudden he's this person that I'm reading and I'm understanding my Judaism from the Christian theologian and I'm beginning to think about faith and religion in a different way? They all work together.

Judah, also a scholar of religious theology, shared:

So that being able to talk to another person, once they talk about their values, I got to be able to voice my own values and to do that I got to know a little bit about my own religion. So in learning more about my religion, I'm strengthening my skills in interfaith literacy, I think.

Judah expanded on this by stating, "You need to know about your own diocese and stuff, so whether if you're an atheist and you're really interested in other religions, you need to know a lot about your own belief system." Judah's desire to continue learning about his own Judaism on his quest to be a Rabbi has kept him engaged in interfaith dialogue. By deeply knowing the intricacies of Judaism, he is can accurately describe his values to others when challenged.

Riley has been challenged in her own Christianity throughout her involvement in interfaith dialogue. While she acknowledges that it has been worth it, she has had moments of personal struggle:

> I have my faith very challenged by doing interfaith work and I've been surprised about the ways that your faith can be strengthen by learning other faith, which I think is completely true. I think I have a stronger Christianity when I started doing interfaith work. At the same time, I have a more challenged Christianity and through interfaith work, I've learned, I thought more about why I believe in Christianity, how I believe as a Christian and it's made me more conscious of the way that I communicate with people and the social fear I taught myself. And I think that it just helps me be more comfortable, the fact that my Christianity maybe different from somebody else's or that when I see an issue maybe different from someone else's and that's okay because I only speak for myself.

> I found that my faith is very challenged when I do interfaith dialogue,, I had a lot of – I suppose you can call it faith crisis, but I question a lot what I believe and I have a lot of doubt and so that point makes me angry or nervous and in those times I find that I don't want to believe something that is a challenge or that I haven't thought very hard about.

> I think that we all really need to recognize the challenge that it's not necessarily easy to engage in interfaith dialogue and that it will challenge your faith and there will be moments where you might panic a little bit about what you believe, or getting nervous, or sometimes you might make a mistake while you're having a dialogue with someone but that's okay.

Taylor's challenge has come in the form of truly hearing what others have to say about her Christianity, she said, "I think maybe, I probably learn how people view my beliefs a lot of

the times because I know that there's a huge stereotype against a lot of Christians for how they

talk to people or how they represent their beliefs." This led her to the self-awareness that

"there's a lot that I feel I still don't know, there's a lot that I can probably still learn."

Sean, Steve, Riley, and Judah, shared how a person's individual faith can be challenged

through engagement in interfaith dialogue because there is the perception that in order to be

involved in interfaith, one must disconnect from their own faith or non-faith tradition. Sean

shared how this can be a challenging concept for many:

> Yeah, I guess, I just think that interfaith dialogue is really hard because most people can't
> resign their faith and so they're just uncomfortable, never talking about it with anyone
> else because it's not something that they've developed consciously.

Steve shared a strategy for how he combats the mentality that interfaith conflicts with

individual faith identity:

> I think one of the challenges is people feel like they have to compromise their beliefs in
> the dialogue. They are not comfortable disagreeing on things. So when I talk to a
> Christian and they're like, "We believe that Jesus is the son of God." Then I can say, we
> don't believe that, but Muslims have other beliefs in common with you about Jesus, so
> people can have a disagreement and want to come to a consensus on something.

Riley's friends also expressed the concern that she would become "less of a Christian"

through engagement in interfaith dialogue:

> I have certain friends that are too afraid that I would become less of a Christian because I
> did interfaith, and most of my friends from high school who went to church with me, are
> now atheist and they don't really associate with the church. There's a little bit of
> bitterness there, and it's been, I think, difficult for some of them to talk to me about what
> I do because they still have a little bit of bitterness towards the church.

> And so I think one of the biggest barriers for interfaith dialogue is fear that they are going
> to hurt their connection to their own individual community by engaging in interfaith
> work. Which I think is a valid concern when, especially, you've never done interfaith
> work before and you don't have a lot of time on your hands. College students have to be
> really selective about what they spend their time on. So it's hard for us to convince
> people that they have time for one activity or they have time to try to enrich their lives
> through interfaith, when they haven't thought of it before. It's just convincing people that

they can be active with their individual faith community and spend time with people who believe the same things they do and still step out of that zone every once in a while and engage in interfaith. And I think it's a tough line to get people to walk sometimes.

Judah provided an example of a time when a new atheist, who felt that the interfaith movement was a guise for watering down religion, challenged him. Judah said:

> And I posted on the Student's Secular Alliance Facebook page and then one of the people replied, "Wait a second, interfaith sounds like we're trying to wash out religion." And really that's the problem, very typical response that you might expect from a new atheist.

> And he said, "Can you explain to me? I don't understand why we would do this." And then I posted a really short response in this and said, "We're not trying to convert other people or anything like that, or wash away religion or something. We're simply trying to get people to work together and to show that we believe different things, we can make a difference."

Strengthening individual faith identity through interfaith dialogue. As an atheist, James shared that his secular identity has served as a motivator for him to stay engaged in interfaith dialogue. He feels a compelling desire to help educate others about atheism:

> I think that there's a huge negative connotation toward atheism and I do interfaith dialogue to try to litigate that by showing people that I'm not all those things. And also, I think that those differences too often can end in conflict and through interfaith dialogue, we can show differences can end in to something positive.

Similarly, Marie expressed the same connection between her atheism and educating others:

> I feel like I have a very unique role to play on integrating or helping the religious and non-religious identities, I feel they are on the line and I feel like I am in a unique role to help bridge the gap and help them transition into an increasingly more diverse, free thinking world.

Marie's interfaith dialogue experience helped her "have a more comfortable feeling with being an atheist. I've learned I would be a better conversationalist, and express my curiosity in a more constructive manner."

Riley connected the congruence between interfaith dialogue and her Christianity as

rooted in the Bible:

> Within the sphere of Christianity, with all sorts of different denominations, it's really
> taught me to interact with Christians, so that everyone speaks for themselves but they
> also -- I see a lot of… I talked about this with the other one of the Christian coaches,
> there's a lot of themes in Christianity that I think are whole-heartedly for interfaith, like
> anytime the Bible says love thy neighbor, I used to think back in the day that those were
> either people who were Christian, I mean other Christians that I see eye to eye with, and
> now interfaith has really opened up my definition of my neighbor and just helped me
> recognize that every single person has some kind of identity.

Riley provide an example from the Bible of how Christianity promotes interfaith

dialogue:

> I also think you see a lot of example of Jesus doing interfaith work, I know the Good
> Samaritan, an example I use a lot of an actual interfaith story in the Bible and I think that
> if you're following the example of Jesus, you see these types of people he interacted with
> and the types of things that were important to him. I think that he would definitely be part
> of the interfaith mission because I think that he sees the importance of being with people
> who didn't maybe see eye to eye with what he was doing and he always met with people
> who may believe in a different way from him and so I think that there's a lot of teaching
> with Christianity that actually point to interfaith even greater than the thing that
> Christianity have point to keeping ourselves to very exclusive and people who are
> connected only within the church. I think that our ministry and the church really, it's
> something that we're meant to do in the world.

Sean's identity as an Evangelical Christian was strengthened when he and a friend tried

to learn more about agnosticism:

> My best friend is also Evangelical Christian, but he and I would have theological debates
> all the time. We really tried to consider all these different, other options and so I couldn't
> really figure out a way to deny agnosticism as invalid. And so when I got to college, I
> decided to join the Christian group on campus. I also joined the Agnostic Secular
> Skeptics group.

For Sean, this exploration connected him more deeply to his Christianity. He came to the

realization that:

> I want to do as much good in the world that I can possibly can and more of it can be
> accomplished through cooperation. I also know that I want to be a good witness to

Christ. We're not called just to witness to people who are going to listen, we're called to witness for everyone.

I think it helps while I'm engaged in interfaith dialogue it makes part of the picture clearer, part of the picture of all the different religions and different beliefs that people have. And so through that helps me figure out where I stand.

I think a lot of the times that happens in interfaith dialogue is that even though you disagree with someone else's beliefs, you end up respecting them or something. And it's very convincing like, "Wow they're so great at this, I should be able to do that so that I could represent myself and my faith better too."

Taylor's Christianity also aligns with her interfaith dialogue experiences. She stated:

My religion focuses really around being able to bring people together in general and I think that's all what interfaith is about and I don't think I'd feel very Christian like, not accepting other people for what they believe in and how they want to do things with their lives. So I mean, I think really, all the things I learned from my Christian faith is about accepting people, is about appreciating them for who they are and not judging them and not persecuting them for anything that they believe.

Judah looked to the Torah for interfaith messages and found that while implied, specific

passages were not evident, as in other religious texts:

So if you look at the classical sources like the Torah and things, I don't think you find a specific interfaith thing that is explicit. That said, you definitely find things, you know, like treat other people the way you want to be treated.

Recognizing this dearth of information on interfaith dialogue in the Jewish community,

Judah learned, "For me, a lot about importance of going outside the Jewish community, it's

really been very enriching." Judah provided a historical context for his desire to branch out when

he shared:

The 1960s was really Universalist decade, we had interfaith work, we had civil rights era. People -- 50% of the whites that were participating in civil rights movement were Jews, which is really interesting. But then after that, the turn inward, a lot of people started doing things, turning inward and not interacting. So Jews generally, I think don't see the value or necessarily, aren't concerned about it as much as other people because of that, I think.

So for me, it's been very important seeing that is a vital part and to break out of that inward turn and to turn outward so to speak. And I think the other part about it that's

important for me was this has helped me also grow as a Jew because I'm learning about other people and what they believe. I've also learned about maybe what I don't believe. So that's part of the reason I do this, in interfaith work because to learn more about my own religion, I have to learn what it's not. So that's been really helpful for me too.

While the Torah does not explicitly promote interfaith dialogue, it was these interfaith dialogue experiences that strengthened Judah's Judaism. Judah shared how this expanded his own religious literacy:

> So that being able to talk to another person, once they talk about their values, I got to be able to voice my own values and to do that I got to know a little bit about my own religion. So in learning more about my religion, I'm strengthening my skills in interfaith literacy, I think.

Ezra compared his experience in interfaith dialogue to his Judaism and provided the example of the separation from night and day:

> So for someone to be able to say my religion is an important part of my identity but I am willing to be loose and experimental enough in order to talk with other people about their experiences, I think that's very hard because at least in my experience, in Judaism for example, the first thing you get is separation from night and day, and I think to some degree a lot of what religion does is separates the sacred from the profane, setting something apart that is more special, and that separation so much of it is okay. Here are the rules; this is the rigid system to some degree.
>
> When I'm talking to Jewish friends or anything, if I say I'm talking to someone who believes in God, I'll say I'm an Atheist. If I'm talking to an Atheist, I'll identify myself as a believer, so the conception is interfaith, how do you identify, how do I understand my Judaism and the interfaith. I've been reading more Christian theology now that I have been Jewish theology. So what does it mean if I really enjoy Paul Tillik and all of a sudden he's this person that I'm reading and I'm understanding my Judaism from the Christian theologian and I'm beginning to think about faith and religion in a different way, they all work together. I'm a very theoretical person, clearly.

Ezra explained that at face value, it appears that individual participants in interfaith dialogue do it to learn about others. However, the reality is that they really desire to know themselves better. Ezra described this notion:

> A lot of students want to know and learn about themselves when they go into interfaith dialogue, and I think that's very interesting because the guise of that is I want to learn

about you. Tell me about you and each person is really trying to clean some understanding of themselves in that.

Ezra also shared that examining religious structures has the ability to shake or strengthen individual faith traditions:

So to find someone who's willing to like say, these are the structures that I've been given um and those are, and this is that person's structure, and then to be willing to talk about different structural conceptions. It requires confidence in one's foundation or a total lack of confidence in one's foundation, but I think there's something tricky about the looseness of identity, the people who are involved in interfaith dialogues as well as a confidence that they have in themselves.

Eleanor connected her motivation for engagement in interfaith dialogue to a verse in the Quran:

There's a verse in Quran that said, "To you be your way and to me be my way," and it's like reading that and having come from the upbringing very like, this is the only way and don't bother making friends with people and you must try to convert them. It was so enlightening and really comforting to me, so to have that in a holy text and have that be a main foundation of what Islam is supposed to stand for like it's all about protecting other people and their faith and their right to practice whatever belief system they have the way that they want to and I feel like that's a really foundational thing in Islam that's gets forgotten in the media. So many Muslims that I met personally, there's a part to them like whenever people brought it up to them that is one of the first thing they would quote from the Quran - there's no compulsion in religion; we don't have to proselytize to anyone, that's not the point of Islam. So, yeah I feel like that's really informed and made me feel better now in my involvement in interfaith now.

For Eleanor this concept of "no compulsion in religion" has assisted her in releasing the anger she harbored towards Christianity, while enhancing her identity as a Muslim devoted to interfaith cooperation.

Judah expressed an appreciation for other faiths, particularly Islam:

One of the things that I like so much about Islam and some other religions is that there's really an expressed idea of interfaith cooperation. In Islam, where it talks that God could have created one religion and he chooses not to.

Steve shared that identical concept:

First, the Quran, a lot of times it says that, if God had wanted to, he would have created mankind as one religion, he did not intentionally. So the point is that we can all learn from each other and work together for the common good. I think anything I do interfaith relates to that.

For Kevin, participating in interfaith dialogue helped him "appreciate everything, the vastness of my faith." He provided examples of connections he made with Christianity and Judaism that strengthened his identity as a Muslim:

> For the most part I'd say, for me personally I'd say, when it comes to dealing with others, and the moral law that one should abide by, it's kind of funny, there is a specific mention towards dealing with Christians and Jews, there isn't any specific mention towards how one should deal with different people in terms of interfaith, it's always just practicing ethical living with everyone. Of course, different religions have different rights and respects over you, let's see, um, um, like a Christian, he has certain rights, as a Muslim, I may have the same rights and a little more, for the most part, it's not really different, my behavior is supposed to be reflective of my faith, no matter who I deal with, I'm supposed to follow the simple principles, like do unto others as you want done unto yourself, I think that pretty much summarizes, interfaith for me.

Conclusion

The lived-experience of interfaith dialogue was characterized by participants' description of the environment, the importance of building relationships through sharing and storytelling, the connection to an ecumenical worldview, and the strengthening of participants' own personal faith or non-faith tradition through engagement in interfaith dialogue. The four themes were salient to the essence of the interfaith dialogue experience and served as a map to shed light on the research questions of the study. The next chapter introduces the key findings under each theme and connects those findings to the research questions.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This study explored the lived-experiences of students participating in interfaith dialogue at the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI) in Atlanta. While religion has been a key component of higher education history (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006), past studies on dialogue of this nature have focused primarily on curricular intergroup dialogue experiences (Zuniga et al., 2007). A gap in research exists on co-curricular interfaith dialogue for college-aged students. This particular research study aimed to fill this gap by examining the essence of the co-curricular interfaith dialogue experience for a sample of religiously diverse students that attended the IFYC ILI in Atlanta.

This study sought to shed light on the essence of the interfaith dialogue through one overarching research question, and three sub questions. The primary question explored was: what are the lived-experiences of interfaith dialogue student participants who attend the IFYC ILI in Atlanta? The sub questions for the study were: (A) How do participants define interfaith dialogue in their own words? (B) How do participants experience interfaith dialogue? (C) What do participants perceive they learn/gain through participation in interfaith dialogue? The research questions were explored through a series of semi-structured interview questions developed to capture the true essence of the interfaith dialogue experiences of the eleven participants. This final chapter provides a summary of the entire study, reveals key findings and how they align with the research questions, implications for the field of higher education, and gives recommendations for future research and practical applications.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH STUDY

Each participant interacted with the researcher on two occasions. The first encounter was a brief face-to-face screening and introductory conversation in Atlanta to orient participants to the study. The second conversation was a phone or Skype semi-structured interview, based on participant preference, within two weeks after the conclusion of the ILI. Each interview and interpretation of the participants' opinions was unique, personal, emotional, and thought provoking. The narratives produced from the interviews and the reflexive nature of the researcher's interpretation, provided data that organically clustered into four themes through the coding process. The emergent themes revealed that: the type and feel of the environment impacted the interfaith dialogue experience, the development of individual relationships through sharing and storytelling was salient, demonstrating an ecumenical worldview was universal among participants, and strengthening of the individual faith or non-faith tradition through interfaith dialogue was an outcome of the experience.

KEY FINDINGS

This section elaborates further on the key findings and how they related to the research questions and past research.

Environment

The environment was a key component of the experience of the research participants. Data from the interviews showed environments that were welcoming, casual, comfortable and circular in nature contributed to participation. Environments that were deemed safe spaces created a more inclusive atmosphere for participants. Experiential environments such as service opportunities and religious emersions added breadth and depth to the experience. These environmental factors created a positive, hopeful, and peaceful environment for engagement.

123

Past research demonstrates the importance that physical environment contributes to positive outcomes of a group. Strange and Banning (2001), researchers in the area of campus ecology, stated, "Institutions must also look beyond issues of belonging, stability, and comfort to consider the nature of environments that might encourage engagement and the investment of time and effort, in other words, those that call for participation and involvement" (p. 137). According to Strange and Banning (2001), this culminates and underscores how "common sense and experience suggest that when the physical environment of a campus, building, or classroom supports the desired behavior, better outcomes result" (p. 20). This notion was weaved throughout the participants' narratives with vivid descriptions of the environments that promoted, fostered, and enhanced their interfaith dialogue experiences.

While a direct study of a co-curricular interfaith dialogue environment could not be located, past studies have been conducted on the curricular environment. Griffin (1990), conducted one of the best known classroom environment studies. He recommended flexible classrooms, moveable chairs, lighting that can be adjusted, adjustable temperatures, and warm color decorations. Research participants also outlined this comfort and flexibility.

Furthermore, another study was conducted on a community college classroom and perceptions of that environment. The students in that environment shared that physical arrangement did matter and could create the avenues and conditions for a productive dialogue. Findings of that particular study suggested a classroom with "furniture, which allowed for group work and interaction; a room arrangement, which allowed them to see visuals regardless of where they were seated, and a classroom, which had a light and cheerful atmosphere" (Veltri et al., 2006, p. 521). This cheerful atmosphere, as reflected by Veltri et al., was reflected in the emotional environment that promoted positivity, hope, and peace, was vividly described by

research participants. Viera (2012) researched a curricular interfaith dialogue program and found that "the deepest, most impactful learning across religious difference took place informally, not in structured dialogues or academic deliberations" (Viera, 2010, p. i).

The participants' commitment to a service environment echoed the work of Freire (1970) who emphasized that learning was tied to social justice; as well as DeTurk (2006), who said, "Intergroup interaction, and commitment to action in the interest of social justice" (p. 39). Maintaining a social justice perspective has been emphasized by many researchers in the field of intergroup dialogue (Nagda et al., 2004; Zuniga & Nagda, 2001) and moves dialogue to action. The IFYC (2010) shared best practices and the creation of experiential learning opportunities was outlined as a mechanism to create lasting cultural change regarding interfaith cooperation.

The circle environment described by participants was reminiscent of Bohmian (1980) dialogue, where participants sit in a circle, symbolizing the continuing, unending nature of dialogue. The safe space that was illustrated by participants reflected Buber's (1970) commitment to characteristics of an ethical dialogue, comprised of mutual respect and trust. In studying intergroup contact, Tropp and Pettigrew (2005) asserted that Allport's (1995) hypothesis had positive results if four conditions exist, all four conditions were aspects of creating a safe space, as described by research participants.

Relationships

When describing their personal experience of interfaith dialogue, participants expressed the importance of individual relationships and the value of sharing and storytelling in deepening these relationships. Buber (1970) introduced the concept of "between," which refers to the space between people in a dialogue. Many of the participants in the study described the "between" as the space where these meaningful relationships were initiated. Comments from participants

described that getting to know another person was a primary motivator for involvement in interfaith dialogue and served as a reason students stayed involved in such opportunities. Furthermore, Buber (1970) shared that a community "is built upon a living reciprocal relationship" (p. 94); and Gurin et al. (2011) asserted that in effective dialogue, it is important that participants stop making assumptions and judgments of others to build relationships. Participants clearly articulated the "reciprocal nature" and also shared that to build relationships they had to release assumptions and judgments, as Gurin et al. (2001) mentioned.

As referenced in the previous chapter, sharing and storytelling was a pivotal aspect of the interfaith dialogue experience for the participants. Participants articulated that building friendships with those that were different and engaging in storytelling with these newly developed friends was vital to their experience. This coincides with the findings of Zúñiga et al. (2007), that fostering friendships with those that are different is a condition for productive dialogue. Like Zúñiga et al., Small (2009) also emphasized the ability to dialogue over difference through storytelling.

The narratives of the participants gave meaning to what each individual meant when they used the term relationship. Their descriptions mirrored the philosophy of the IFYC's, "mutually inspiring relationships between people of different backgrounds" (IFYC, 2013). The participants' focus on relationships and storytelling echoed the finding of Gilchrist's (2006) dissertation that evaluated ten types of dialogue programs and resulted in a "focus on relationship . . . a safe space for storytelling" (p. 187-188). Participants voiced that sharing stories helped them move beyond separation and fear, which was congruent with the finding of Mackenzie et al. (2011), which included storytelling as one of the five stages of interfaith dialogue. The context of the relationship was important for participants and aided in the participants' abilities to openly share

126

their stories. Participant narratives aligned with Taylor's (2004) emphasis that "relationship is sometimes the context for the ideas people hold" (p. 18). This concept of emphasizing people, not ideas, was weaved throughout Flores's (2006) dissertation on encountering the religious other through interfaith dialogue and how this relates to religion and peace promotion. In regards to the communication process, participants described relationships as the epicenter, which aligned with Taylor's (2004) finding that the focus on relationship is the anchor in the communication process in intergroup dialogue. Keaten and Soukup (2009) introduced four aspects of communication that are salient to interfaith dialogue, one being, "the role of the subject (in relationship to the 'other') in dialogue" (p. 170).

The participants revealed that building relationships with individuals and sharing stories reduced their own intergroup prejudice. This aligns with earlier studies that suggested when individuals spend time with people that are different than them, intergroup prejudice is reduced (see Castenada, 2004; Cook, 1969; Pettigrew, 1998; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Viera's (2012) qualitative case study analysis demonstrated that "a personal relationship was the primary initial motivator to engage across religious difference" (p. i). In regards to college student spirituality, Astin et al., (2010) asserted, "Students who socialize with people from other races grow in feeling overall more interconnected and caring" (p. 81). This concept carries over to the third theme of holding an ecumenical worldview, which is discussed next.

In summary, relationships, sharing, and storytelling with the religious other leads to positive attitudes. Patel advocated, "Knowledge and relationships are the primary drivers of positive attitudes. And people with positive attitudes toward religious diversity will seek more appreciative knowledge and meaningful relationships" (IFYC, 2013, para. 3). This was evident

as participants repeatedly reported their desire to keep seeking out these meaningful

relationships, not just during college, but well into their adult life.

Ecumenical Worldview

All of the participants in the research study vividly described holding an ecumenical

worldview as meaningful to their interfaith dialogue experience. They may not have used the

word "ecumenical," but their description of the experience aligns with the definition used for the

study. The components mentioned by participants that fit with the definition of an ecumenical

worldview (Spirituality in Higher Education, 2010) were: the desire to seek understanding, the

yearning for learning, the connections they experience, the acknowledgement of multiple truths,

and the motivation to collectively do good. The definition states:

> *Ecumenical Worldview* reflects a global worldview that transcends ethnocentrism and
> egocentrism. It indicates the extent to which the student is interested in different religious
> traditions, seeks to understand other countries and cultures, feels a strong connection to
> all humanity, believes in the goodness of all people, accepts others as they are, and
> believes that all life is interconnected and that love is at the root of all the great religions.
> (Spirituality in Higher Education, 2010, p.1)

Participants in the research study sought to understand the beliefs of others and used

interfaith dialogue as a mechanism for greater self-learning. This reinforced one of Beversluis's

(2000) ground rules for interfaith dialogue, "Dialogue to seek understanding of other persons'

beliefs" (p. 127). Multiple times, the participants mentioned the importance that listening plays

into seeking understanding, underscoring Swindler's (2002) statement, "In dialogue each partner

must listen to the other as openly and sympathetically as possible in an attempt to understand the

other's position as precisely and, as it were, as much from within as possible" (p. 9).

Multiple participants described the concept of empathetic listening. Weaved through the

narratives, they illustrated examples of releasing judgments to remain open to the experience of

the religious other, which is one of the eight tenets of pluralistic dialogue (Keaten & Soukup,

2009). In seeking this understanding, participants recognized that they had to embrace their personal faith or non-faith tradition. This seeking to understand affirms Shafiq and Abu-Nimer (2007), who stated:

> Interfaith dialogue means to hold on to our faith while simultaneously trying to understand another person's faith. It demands honesty and respect from its participants so that both individuals may present their religions sincerely. Uniformity and agreement are not the goals, rather collaboration and combining our different strengths for the welfare of humanity. (p. 2)

The process of learning was voiced by multiple participants. Their description of the learning process fits "reciprocal learning," as defined by Swindler (2002, p. 8). The concept of multiple truths was also pervasive in the interviews. Participants shared stories of struggling through their journey of accepting multiple truths and multiple realities. For the participants in this study, the concept of multiple truths was a difficult aspect of the interfaith dialogue and reflected "the willingness to consider the incompleteness of one's own information of truth and to learn from the other" (Beversluis, 2000, p. 126). As each participant explored their individual spiritual journey, they identified that "it could be said that religions provide options for people to choose from and believe in a certain explanation of the meaning of their lives" (Pestova, 2013, p. 28). The participants' stories demonstrated that they viewed their religious differences in a pluralistic way, as opportunities for learning instead of a way to solve conflict, which echoes Keaten and Soukup (2009).

Through the process of seeking understanding and learning, participants shared stories of deep connection with others. This reinforced Gadamar's (1975) concept, "Understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but of being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (p. 379). This understanding, learning, and connection led participants to be open to the

concept of multiple truths and reinforced emancipatory spirituality as a component of interfaith dialogue. Emancipatory spirituality is the love and rapport for others, not just others with the same values and beliefs (Lerner, 2000). Participants demonstrated deep learning, rather than surface learning as explored by Ramseden (1992). Deep learning is characterized by a commitment to understanding, rather than mere memorization.

The participants in the study expressed a desire to do good in the world. In intergroup dialogue, the premise is "to explore ways of working together toward greater equality and justice (Zúñiga et al., 2007, p. 2). Participants exhibited this through their desire to do service work and contribute to peace building, and this adds to the literature on interfaith dialogue as a means for peace building. Joyner and Mengistus (2012) said, "Interfaith dialogue [is] an important tool in this tiered peace building process with the goal of increased cooperation, understanding and participation in creating sustainable peaceful co-existence" (p. 5). The participants identified the connection they felt to doing good and believed it encourages the ability to use social capital to create "common action for the common good" ("About the Movement", 2013). The attitude reflected by the participants affirmed their belief that "religion is also one of the greatest forces for good" (Prothero, 2010, p. 9-10).

Strengthening Individual Faith

Each participant came to the interfaith dialogue with a different unique history. As participants shared their story and their definition of interfaith dialogue, it was evident that through participation, their individual faith or non-faith identity was strengthened. For some participants, this started in the home they were raised, for others, this spiritual journey did not occur until college. Through the broadening of their upbringing and challenging their individual faith or non-faith tradition, participants felt stronger and more grounded in their individual

tradition. Participants were able to describe how their individual religious identity was clearer due to their participation in interfaith dialogue, and reinforced Viera's (2012) finding, "Interfaith dialogue increased participants' clarity about their religious identity" (p. i). This echoed Perry's (1968) notion of multiplicity and growth through understanding and different perspectives.

Challenges and struggles were voiced throughout the semi-structured interview sessions. Participants shared the fundamental dissonance they felt when they listened to the truth of another faith and how that impacted their connection to their own faith. This was hard for the participants, and aligned with what Vereka (2004) said, "To hear another's religious story is to hear someone else's story. It is to consider a claim about the fundamental nature of the world that often differs and challenges our own" (p. 43). For some of the participants, especially those completely committed to their religious identity, there was a threat that if they were open to the faith of others they would be resigning their own identity, and in essence betraying their beliefs." This concept introduced the religious other as a threat. Swinder (2002) asserted, "Since our religion is so comprehensive, so all-inclusive, it is the most fundamental area in which the other is likely to be different from us – and hence possibly seen as the most threatening" (p. 8). This cognitive dissonance experienced by participants could be viewed as part of their moral development, as explained through Kohlberg's (1974) stage theory of moral development, which reinforced Dewey's (1938) belief that all education is a vital aspect of development.

Some of the participants held an exclusivist view in their early years that impaired them from being open to pluralism. Through reflection, these participants were able to recognize this state in their lives and move beyond it. This fits what Pestova (2013) said, "Exclusivist view of one's own religion presents the biggest obstacle in interfaith dialogue because interfaith dialogue needs people to view everybody as equally entitled to their own faith" (p. 51).

Participants in the study moved beyond an exclusivist view of religion reflecting the work of Rine (2012), who evaluated a theoretical model for fallibist Christian spirituality. Rine found that promoting pluralistic dialogue and being committed to one's own faith were not exclusives. Interfaith dialogue can actually "empower college students to remain committed to their personal faith traditions while at the same time exhibiting openness toward pluralism." (Rine, 2012, p. 827). Rine's finding reinforced past studies by Perry (1998) on moral commitment, Park (1986) on communal faith, and Fowler (1981) on conjunctive faith. The eleven participants in this study had moments of personal and communal transformation that aligns with the previous literature affirming that having meaningful dialogue with those that have different religious and non-religious beliefs will strengthen one's own faith or non-faith tradition and actually promotes pluralism.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study have a variety of implications for student affairs administrators, multicultural affairs staff, religious studies departments, interdisciplinary faculty, and students. The findings demonstrate that the lived-experience of the participants are influenced by the environment, the participants' focus on relationships, and holding an ecumenical worldview, which led to the strengthening of the participants faith or non-faith tradition. The results of this study can inform stakeholders on the benefits that students in interfaith dialogue identify and can serve as the catalyst for program development in this area. For students to have the opportunity to engage in these quality dialogues, educational institutions must devote resources—physical, financial and staffing—to develop and sustain interfaith dialogue programs. This can only be achieved by creating a culture where interfaith dialogue is welcomed and embraced.

The primary implication revolves around the concept of the creation of the environment that fosters, promotes, and embraces religious diversity, pluralism, and interfaith dialogue. It means thinking differently about who is involved in the faith discussion in the first place and the intentional inclusion of the secular population. It means reinventing how interfaith dialogue programs are delivered, expanding from primarily curricular programs to co-curricular. It involves recruiting faculty and staff allies that are willing to increase their own religious literacy to provide a solid foundation to students.

Higher education must evolve to embrace religious diversity at the same level as other areas of multicultural education and explore ways to rethink the church-state divide so this can happen. Creating a culture where deep dialogues of meaning and purpose are integrated into the university experience will permeate and create pockets of transformational learning on campus. This culture will only develop, as Giamatti, former Yale president asserts, if there is recognition that "…an educational institution teaches far, far more, and more profoundly, by how it acts than by anything anyone within it ever says" (Giamatti, 1988, p. 191-192). The recommendations and future research areas that are suggested in the remainder of this chapter are intended to provide guidance on how faculty, staff, and students can facilitate an inclusive culture that embraces the four findings of the research study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from the research study suggest that environments must be created intentionally to foster interfaith dialogue. New formats of interfaith dialogue should be explored, specifically co-curricular options. Resources must be devoted to the creation and sustainability of service opportunities and religious immersion programs to serve as a playground for interfaith dialogue. Educational and training opportunities must be offered to increase the religious literacy of the campus community. Discussion of who is included in the faith discussion must be expanded to

include the secular population, and anyone that traditionally does not fit into the current paradigm of religion.

Intentional Environments

First, institutions should inventory where current interfaith dialogue conversations are happening and explore options for creating more comfortable, casual spaces for these dialogues to take place. While classrooms are traditionally viewed as the primary learning laboratory on campuses, participants shared that neutral, comfortable, informal spaces fostered their learning through interfaith dialogue. Staff should review the physical environment, the lighting, the furniture, and the symbolism in the space. Great intention should be paid to the construction of new spaces on campus and the renovation of current spaces that could foster interfaith dialogue. Exploring options for interfaith dialogue in the residence halls through living-learning communities is also a fertile area for exploration.

Co-Curricular Formats

While the results of this study mirrored the positive impacts of curricular intergroup dialogue programs, all participants in this particular study were involved in co-curricular experiences. Findings demonstrated that co-curricular, like curricular, interfaith experiences created transformative learning experiences and aided in strengthening of individual faith. Institutions should evaluate the form that they are offering interfaith dialogue programs. Co-curricular programs are typically lower cost and have more flexibility in format. Institutions should use curricular programs as a model and adapt them for the co-curriculum. Including multiple forums for dialogue is recommended. Examples include: weekly discussions, coffee and conversations, book clubs, sacred text studies, speed faithing—similar to speed dating activities, and interfaith retreats to name a few. Furthermore, low structure or even no structure

formats should be explored. This coincides with the finding that casual spaces foster interfaith dialogue. The space could be created and eventually the dialogue could organically emerge.

Experiential Opportunities

Institutions should commit resources to experiential opportunities where students can practice interfaith dialogue in action, specifically through service and religion immersions. Incorporating interfaith reflection as part of experiential opportunities can be a mechanism for making the connection between the experience and the interfaith component. Including students in the planning of experiential opportunities is suggested as a way to create a deeper experience for the students.

Religious Literacy

Religious literacy and appreciative knowledge has been identified as a foundation for interfaith dialogue. Offering training opportunities for faculty, staff, and students on religious and non-religious traditions is a way to increase this knowledge. These can come in many of the forms listed in the co-curricular recommendations section. Institutions should also review the core curriculum and consider adding a requirement of a world religions class and/or an interfaith cooperation class. Patel (2013) beckons educators to create a curriculum of interfaith studies that would develop interfaith leaders, incorporate Religious Studies, Political Science, and Sociology. Including religious diversity as a topic in faculty training, providing resources on how to broach discussions of religious diversity in the classroom, and legal requirements of religion in higher education, can all give confidence to faculty considering incorporating discussions of faith in the classroom.

Including the Secular

Interfaith can be viewed as an exclusive term because faith is implicit in the word. Among the participants in the study, two identified as atheist, and five identified as spiritual but non-religious. However, their involvement in interfaith dialogue was pivotal in their lives, and each became involved because, for them, interfaith dialogue included all faith and non-faith traditions. In order to get more secular individuals to engage in interfaith dialogue, education must continue to connect with this population. There is a perception that the secular population's, primarily the New Age Atheist's, mission is to counter the interfaith movement and seeks to bring down organized religions (Prothero, 2010). However, findings in this study reinforce that secular humanists are likely to benefit from interfaith dialogue because of their value of seeking answers to existential questions. Developing relationships with atheist and/or secular humanist groups can add diversity to the program, again leading to deepening individuals' faith or non-faith tradition. Interfaith dialogue should be "inclusive of all faiths, religions and world views, including those of secular and atheism'" (Javier Declaration, 2006, p. 62, as cited in Michealides, 2009, p. 455). Widening the conversation to fully embrace the role of values in both the religious and secular world will educate the community on the deep connection between the interfaith movement and atheism:

> The irony of this worry is that the atheist and the interfaith movement actually share a common point of origin: they both started, in part, as a reaction to religious extremism. Much like the atheist movement, the interfaith movement seeks to build inter-group understanding, encourage critical thinking, and end religiously-based sociological and political exclusivism. The fundamental misunderstanding that many atheists have is that they imagine the interfaith movement as uninterested in combating religious totalitarianism and solely existing to maintain religious privilege – as an excuse to show that religion, in its many diverse forms, has a monopoly on morality – but that couldn't be further from the truth. (Stedman, 2011, p. 1)

FUTURE RESEARCH

Many of the research areas needed to explore the findings of this study are suggested to provide additional data for educators to obtain institutional support, resources, space, and staffing for interfaith dialogue. Further research on the role that the environment, experiential opportunities, and the secular population contribute to interfaith dialogue is fertile grounds for future exploration. In addition, examining these fundamental areas through longitudinal studies that assess behavior change over time will add to the literature on interfaith dialogue.

Environment

A future research study should focus solely on the environment and how it contributes to the overall experience of participants. Conducting this research on environment, utilizing campus ecology as a framework, would be a good way to evaluate the environment through a different lens. Banning (2012) asserted, "Campus ecology is the behavioral study of the complex transactional relationships among the social and physical dimensions of campus environments and those who inhabit them – students, staff, faculty, and visitors" (p. 1). Examining campus ecology in interfaith dialogue can further examine the role that place contributes to the experience. Employing an ethnographic inquiry would be one way to answer questions regarding the culture of the group (Patton, 1990), specifically in interfaith dialogue. This approach would allow the ethnographer to "live in" the culture and be fully emerged in the culture as a participant observer. This would lend the researcher to serve as a participant observer and data collection would be expanded beyond interviews and would add observations, review of the physical space, and evaluation of symbolism in the space (Banning, 2012).

Experiential Opportunities

Conducting a study, specifically on the connection of experiential activities, such as service and religious immersion, to interfaith dialogue could expand the literature in an additional way to increase a social justice worldview of college students. While participants in this study reinforced DeTurk (2006), Nagda et al. (1999), and Schoem & Stevenson (1990), each "discovered concerning the connection between intergroup dialogue and a student's awareness of others, ability to consider the struggle of diverse individual, and commitment to social justice efforts" (Hoelfe, 2014, p. 22). Research approaches to further explore the connection of service and religious immersion could utilize a phenomenological approach, similar to the approach used in the study, but adapting research questions to isolate the phenomenon of the experiential component of interfaith dialogue. It would be interesting to dig deeper into participants' experiences to identify if interfaith dialogue was the byproduct of service and religious immersion or if, conversely, the dialogue led to the social action or both. Connecting this study to literature and past research on other areas of social justice would prove fruitful.

Secular Role in Interfaith Movement

There is still much more information needed for educators to fully grasp the role of the secular in the interfaith movement. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, it is recommended that this particular study be replicated, but change the sample to only include students that identify as secular, atheist, humanist, or agnostic. The data could then be analyzed to see if themes of this population differ from a more diverse sample.

Research needs to address how the non-religious population define interfaith dialogue and if they feel that the term "interfaith" is inclusive or exclusive of non-religious philosophies. Conversely, targeting those that identify as religious and explore their perceptions, stereotypes,

138

and overall attitudes regarding the secular would also be needed to integrate with the research on the secular population. A mixed-methods methodology could be used, incorporating both a quantitative and qualitative approach to more fully examine the connection between secularism and interfaith dialogue.

Behavior and Longitudinal Studies

This particular study and other similar studies on intergroup dialogue (Hoefle, 2014) looked at the phenomenon of dialogue through the eyes of the participants at one particular moment in time. Future research should address the outcomes of the participants over time, regarding co-curricular interfaith dialogue programs and if that translates into behavior change in adulthood. Conducting a longitudinal study that measures behavior change, not solely outcomes, would be enlightening.

Adding the ability to interview participants with multiple interviews after graduation would enable the researcher to see if the same themes of environment, relationship, ecumenical worldview, and strengthening of individual faith were sustained into adulthood. It would be enlightening to see if these participants engage in interfaith dialogue in their communities, with their families, and in their workplace. Questions to ponder include, has interfaith dialogue altered their career choice? Has interfaith dialogue influenced who engages in personal and romantic relationships? Has interfaith dialogue influenced how they spend their time?

Evaluation of Co-Curricular Dialogue Experiences

Recognizing that co-curricular dialogue experiences are not confined to a classroom, are not attached to course credit, and may not have structured learning outcome to assess, present a gap that needs to be addressed. There is a body of literature on how to improve relationships and resolve conflict, but not much on evaluating such programs (Abu-Nimer, 2011; Garfinkel, 2004;

Gilchrist, 2006). Garfinkel (2004) asserted, "Despite the increasing popularity of interfaith dialogue rarely are . . . [they] subjected rigorous evaluation . . . for their impact and effectiveness" (p. 1).

LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

This particular study focused on the lived experience of eleven individuals who were self-motivated to participate in co-curricular interfaith dialogue programs. These results are limited to their experiences alone, and the interpretation of the interfaith dialogue phenomenon they experienced through the lens of the researcher. If a different set of students were interviewed, their experiences could vary. As with all qualitative inquiry, this study does not attempt to generalize to the greater population; instead, it is meant to be a trustworthy account of eleven individuals at a single moment in time (Chamaz, 2006; Jones et al., 2006).

The researcher met each participant in person for a short orientation and screening. This aided the researcher is building rapport with participants. However, the primary data collection instrument, in-depth semi-structured interviews, occurred over the phone or Skype. The Skype format was helpful in assessing participant body language, but nothing replaces an in-person interview where body language and eye contact can be observed at a greater level. Another limitation is that the sole mechanism for data collection was through interviews. Adding an observed behavior aspect to the data collection could enhance the study.

A final limitation is researcher bias. While the researcher used member checks to assure accuracy throughout the process, one can never fully eliminate all bias. The researcher interacted with the participants at the IFYC ILI in Atlanta over a three-day period, however, none of the participants were in the researcher's small group at the conference in an effort to not set a pre-bias prior to the official interview.

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSION

When I reflect back on this study, I recognize the privilege it was to be permitted into the lives of this diverse group of participants. Hearing their stories of challenge and struggle with their religious or non-religious identity reaffirmed for me that, as educators, we must to do better when it comes to incorporating religious discourse into the academy. Institutions must take a stand to role model inclusive environments where students feel comfortable engaging in interfaith dialogue. Hearing participants yearn for environments that are welcoming serves as a call for institutions to evaluate space design and functionally to foster intentionality in interfaith dialogue spaces. Listening to participants share that relationships of mutual trust fed their soul, calls for student affairs professionals to help facilitate these relationships for students at all costs. Experiencing the sheer joy, warmth, and peace in the voices of the participants provides hope that these types of dialogues do make a difference and have the potential to create social change in society. This study supports past literature on the value of intergroup and interfaith dialogue and affirms that participation in interfaith dialogue, ultimately, strengthens individual faith or non-faith identity.

In summary, the U.S. is racially, culturally, and socially diverse. Recognizing this diversity, it is the job of educators to make sure to unequivocally do everything in our power to prepare students for the joys and challenges of living in a global society. If we do not fully support all areas of student development, including religious identity and greater understanding of world cultures and religions, we have failed our students, and ultimately our society. If these important transformational interfaith conversations do not happen on our campuses, they will not happen in the world.

REFERENCES

Abu-Nimer, M. & Shafiq. (2007). *Interfaith dialogue: A guide for Muslims. Herndon*, Virginia: International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIT).

Adams, M. (1997). Teaching for diversity and social justice: A sourcebook. *Pedagogical frameworks for social justice education* (pp. 30-43). New York: Routledge.

Alexander, H. A. (1995). Religion and multiculturalism in education. *Religious Education*, *90*(3-4), 377–387. doi:10.1080/0034408950900306

Allport, G. (1954). *The nature of prejudice.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Amir, Y. (1969). Contact hypothesis in ethnic relations. *Psychological Bulletin*, *71*(5), 319-342. doi:10.1037/h0027352

Anderson, R., Baxter, L. A., & Cissna, K. N. (2004). *Dialogue: Theorizing difference in communication studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Arnet, R. C., (1986). *Communication and community: Implications of Martin Buber's dialogue.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Ashwin, P. (2003). Peer facilitation and how it contributes to the development. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, *8*, 005-018. doi:10.1080/13596740300200137

Banks, C. A. M. (2005). *Improving multicultural education: Lessons from the intergroup education movement*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Barack Obama's Call to Renewal Keynote Address #7. (n.d.). Retrieved September 22, 2013, from http://www.beliefnet.com/Video/News-and-Politics/Obama-Call-to-Renewal/Barack-Obamas-Call-To-Renewal-Keynote-Address-7.aspx

Baxter, K. B. (2013). Measuring student learning of interfaith cooperation: The pluralism and worldview engagement rubric. *Journal of College and Character*, p. 259 – 266.

Be a Leader. Build the Movement. (n.d.). *IFYC*. Retrieved: September 22, 2013, from http://www.ifyc.org/ILI

Beversluis, J. (2000). *Sourcebook of the world's religions*. Novato, CA: New World Library.

Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Bohm, D. (1980). *Wholeness and the implicate order*. New York: Routledge.

Bohm, D., & Peat, F. D. (2010). *Science, order and creativity*. New York: Taylor & Francis US.

Boulding, E.M. (2000). *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History.* Syracuse University

Press: Syracuse, New York.

Brenner, D. (2005). *Inaugural faculty development seminar*. Retrieved from

http://www.auburnsem.org.

Brewer, J., & Hunter, A. (1989). *Multimethod research: A synthesis of styles*. *Sage Library of Social Research* (Vol. 175, p. 216). Retrieved from http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0654/89010258-d.html

Brockbank, A., & McGill, I. (2000). *Facilitating reflective learning in higher education.* Buckingham, UK: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

Brookfield, S.D. & Preskill, S. (1999). *Discussion as a way of teaching.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Castenada, C. R. (2004). *Teaching and learning in the diverse classroom*. New York: Routledge-Falmer.

Cavanaugh, W. T. (2009). *The myth of religious violence: Secular ideology and the roots of modern conflict*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing rounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chickering, B. A. W., Dalton, J. C., & Stamm, L. (2006). Encouraging authenticity and spirituality in higher education. (A. W. Chickering, J C Dalton, & L Stamm, Eds.) *Journal of College and Character*, *67*(1), 164-167. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA. Retrieved from http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/jcc.2004.5.1/jcc.2004.5.1.1373/jcc.2004.5.1.1373.xml

Cook, S. W. (1969). Motives in a conceptual analysis of attitude-related behavior. *Racial attitudes in America: Analyses and findings of social psychology* (J. Brigham & T. Weissbach (Eds.)., pp. 250-260). New York: Harper and Row.

Covey, S. R. (1989). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change.* Free Press; New York.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design* (Second Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Third Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Czubaroff, J. (2000). Dialogical rhetoric: An application of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *86*(2), 168.

Dale, E. (1954). *Audio-visual methods in teaching*. New York: Dryden Press.

Denzin, N. (1995). Symbolic interactionism. In J.A. Smith, R. Harre, & L van Langenhove. (Eds.), *Rethinking psychology,* pp. 43-58. London: Sage.

Dessel, A., & Rogge, M. E. (2008). Evaluation of intergroup dialogue: A review of the empirical literature. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, *26*(2), 199-238. doi:10.1002/crq

DeTurk, S. (2006). The power of dialogue: Consequences of intergroup dialogue and their implications for agency and alliance building. *Communication Quarterly*, *54*(1), 33-51. doi:10.1080/01463370500270355

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Collier Books.

Dovidio, J. F., Gaertner, S. L., & Kawakami, K. (2003). Intergroup contact: The past, present, and the future. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *6*(1), 5 -21. doi:10.1177/1368430203006001009

Earhart, H.B. (1992). *Religious traditions of the world.* New York: Harper Collins.

Eatough, V., & Smith, J.A. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In C. Willig and W. Stainton Rogers (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Psychology,* pp. 179-194. London: Sage.

Eck, D. (n.d.). *What is pluralism?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University. Retrieved from http://pluralism.org/pages/pluralsim/what_is_pluralism.

Eck, D. L. (2001). *A new religious America*. San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins.

Eck, D. (2007). American religious pluralism: Civic and theological discourse, in T. Bancroft, Ed. *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*, p. 243-270, New York, Oxford University Press.

Flores, T. N. (2006). *Encountering the other through interfaith dialogue: A constructive look at a praxis of religion.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Accession Order No. 3234015).

Friedman, M. S. (2002). *Martin Buber: The life of dialogue.* New York: Routledge.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Gadamer, H. G. (1975) *Truth and method*. tr. Weinsheimer, J & D.G. Marshall, New York: Continuum.

Garfinkel, R., & Zymelman, K. (2004, July). What works? Evaluating interfaith dialogue programs. *Special report 123 of the United States Institute of Peace.* Retrieved from http://www.google.cz/books?id=DRqq5HNvhFEC&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs#v=onepage&q&f=false

George, M., & Peštová, B. J. (2013). The importance of interfaith movement in the 21st century.

Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Giamatti, A. B. (1988). *A free and ordered space: The real world of the university.* New York, NY: Norton.

Griffin, T. (1990). The physical environment of the college classroom and its affects on students. *Campus Ecologist*, *8*(1), [online]. Retrieved from http://www. campusecologist.com/1990/01/05/volume-8-number-1-1990/

Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *ECTJ*, *29*(2), 75–91. doi:10.1007/BF02766777

Gurin, P., Dey, E., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. E. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard Educational Review*, *72*(3), 330-366.

Gurin, P., Nagda, B. A., & Lopez, G. E. (2004). The benefits of diversity in education for democratic citizenship. *Journal of Social Issues*, *60*(1), 17-34.

Gurin, P., Peng, T., Lopez, G. E., & Nagda, B. A. (1999). Context, identity and intergroup relations. *Cultural Divides: Understanding and Overcoming Group Conflict* (D. Prentice and D. Miller.). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Hackman, M.Z. & Johnson, C. E. (2004). *Leadership: A communication perspective* (4th ed.) Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

Halabi, R., & Reich, D. (2004). *Israeli and Palestinian identities in dialogue: The school for peace approach*. New York: Rutgers University Press.

Heckman, B., Neiss, R. P., & Ficca, D. (2008). *Interactive faith: The essential interreligious community-building handbook*. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing.

Higher Education Research Institute. (2010). Spirituality in higher education: A national study of college students' search for meaning and purpose. Retrieved April 9, 2010, from http://spirituality.ucla.edu/HERI

Hoefle, N. S. (2014). *Engaging differences of religious belief: Student Experiences with an intergroup dialogue course.* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from google scholar.

Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom.* New York: Routledge.

Hopkins, N., Reicher, S., & Levine, M. (1997). On the parallels between social cognition and the "new racism." *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *36*(3), 305-329. doi:10.1111/j.2044-8309.1997.tb01134.x

Horton, M., & Freire, P. (1990). *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Huntington, S.P. (1996). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of the world order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Hurtado, S. (2005). The next generation of diversity and intergroup relations research. *Journal of Social Issues*, *61*(3), 595-610. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00422.x

Interfaith Youth Core. (2013). Retrieved from http://www.ifyc.org/

Interfaith Youth Core. (2010). *Interfaith cooperation and American higher education: Recommendations, best practices and case studies*. Retrieved from http://www.ifyc.org/kit-signup?prev=/teaching-interfaith

Interfaith Youth Core (n.d.). Pluralism and worldview engagement rubric. Retrieved from www.ifyc.org/teaching-interfaith

Jacobsen, D., & Jacobsen, R. H. (2012). *No longer invisible: Religion in university education.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, P. (2002). *The next Christendom: The coming of global Christianity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johnson, C. V., & Hayes, J. A. (2003). Troubled spirits: Prevalence and predictors of religious and spiritual concerns among university students and counseling center clients. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 50*, 409-419.

Joyner, N.F. & Mengistus, B. (2012, May). Transforming tolerance into empathy: Cultural imperatives in the interfaith dialogue. *Global Awareness Society International 21st Annual Conference.* Retrieved from

http://organizations.bloomu.edu/gasi/2012%20Proceedings%20PDFs/MengistuTransform
ing%20Tolerance%20into%20Empathy.pdf

Juergensmeyer, M. (1993). *The new Cold War? Religious nationalism confronts the secular state. Oakland, CA:* University of California Press.

Keaten, J. A., & Soukup, C. (2009). Dialogue and religious otherness: Toward a model of pluralistic interfaith dialogue. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *2*(2), 168-187.

Kieffer, C. H. (1983). Citizen empowerment: a developmental perspective. *Prevention in Human Services*, *3*(2-3), 9-36.

Kimball, C. (2002). *When Religion Becomes Evil.* San Francisco, CA: Harper.

Knowles, M. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy*, Chicago: Follett.

Knowles, M. (1989). *The Making of An Adult Educator*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kohlberg, L. (1974). Education, moral development and faith. *Journal of Moral Education* 4*(1):* 5–16. doi:10.1080/0305724740040102.

Kramer, K.P. (1990). A silent dialogue: The interreligious dimension. In *Buddhist-Christian Studies,* 10, 127-132.

Lalley, J. P., & Miller, R. H. (2007). The learning pyramid: Does it point teachers in the right direction? *Education*, *128*(1), 64-79.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Massoudi, M. (2006). A system theory approach to interfaith dialogue. *Intercultural Education*, *17*(4), 17.

Michaelides, P.E. (2009, December). Interfaith dialogue in global perspective and the necessity of youth involvement. *Asia Europe Journal*, 7(3-4), 449-462. doi:10.1007/s10308-009-0240-4

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis.* Thousand, Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Miller, J., & Donner, S. (2000). More than just talk: The use of racial dialogues to combat racism. *Social Work with Groups*, *23*(1), 31-53.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods* (1st ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nagda, B. A. (2006). Breaking barriers, crossing borders, building bridges: Communication processes in intergroup dialogues. *Journal of Social Issues*, *62*(3), 553-576. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2006.00473.x

Nagda, B. R., & Zúñiga, X. (2003). Fostering meaningful racial engagement through intergroup dialogues. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *6*(1), 111-128.

Nagda, B. R., Gurin, P., Sorensen, N., Gurin-Sands, C., & Osuna, S. M. (2009). From separate corners to dialogue and action. *Social Problems*, *1*(1), 45-55. doi:10.1007/s12552-009-9002-6

Nagda, B. A., Kim, C. W., & Truelove, Y. (2004). Learning about difference, learning with others, learning to transgress. *Journal of Social Issues*, *60*(1), 195-214. doi:10.1111/j.0022-4537.2004.00106.x

The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement. (2012). *A crucible moment: College learning and democracy's future.* Washington, DC: Association of American College and Universities.

IFYC. Nonreligious Must Embrace White House's Interfaith Service Challenge. (n.d.). Retrieved September 22, 2013, from http://www.ifyc.org/content/nonreligious-must-embrace-white-house%E2%80%99s-interfaith-service-challenge

Palmer, P. J. (2004). *A hidden wholeness: The journey toward an undivided life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Panikkar, R. (1999). *The interreligious dialogue* (revised edn.). New York: Paulist Press.

Patton. M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patel, E. (2013). Toward a field of interfaith studies. *Liberal Education, 99*(4).

Patel, E. (2012). *Sacred ground.* Boston, MA: Beacon.

Pearce, W.B., & Pearch, K. A. (2004). Taking a communication perspective on dialogue. In Anderson, R., Baxter, L.A. & Cissna, K.N. (Eds.) *Dialogue: Theorizing difference in communication studies* (pp. 39-56). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Perry, W. G.. (1968). *Patterns of development in thought and values of students in a liberal arts college: A validation of scheme.* Final Report. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Bureau of Study Counsel.

Pettigrew, T. (1998). Intergroup contact theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *49*(1), 65-85.

Polkinghorne, D. (1983). *Methodology for the human sciences: Systems of inquiry*. Albany, New York: SUNY Press.

Promoting Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation | The White House. (n.d.). Retrieved September 22, 2013, from http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ofbnp/policy/interfaith

Prothero, S. (2007). *Religious literacy: What every American needs to know and doesn't*. San Francisco: Harper.

Prothero, S. (2010). *God is not one: The eight rival religions that run the world – and why their differences matter*. New York: HarperCollins.

Ramsden, P. (1992). *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*, Routledge: New York.

Reid, K., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2005). Exploring lived experience: An introduction to interpretative phenomenological analysis. *The Psychologist, 18*, 20-23.

Rhodes, T. (2012). Emerging evidence on using rubrics. *Peer Review, 13*(4), 4-5.

Riera, J. (2013). *Walking the labyrinth: Examining the intersection of spirituality and leadership among senior student affairs administrators. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 301. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1432744069?accountid=10223. (1432744069).

Rine, P. J. (2012). Committed to faith yet open to difference: Validating a model for Fallibilist Christian spirituality among college students. *Journal of College Student Development* 53(6), 827-839.

Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (eds.) (2003). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for Social Science students and researchers*. London: Sage.

Robinson, R. J., Keltner, D., Ward, A., & Ross, L. (1995). Actual versus assumed differences in construal: "Naive realism" in intergroup perception and conflict. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, *68*(3), 404-417.

Ross, M. H. (2000). Creating the conditions for peacemaking: theories of practice in ethnic conflict resolution. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *23*, 1002-1034. doi:10.1080/014198700750018397

Saunders, H. H. H. (2001). *A public peace process: Sustained dialogue to transform racial and ethnic conflict*s. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schoem, D., & Stevenson, M. (1990). Teaching ethnic identity and intergroup relations: The case of black Jewish dialogue. *Teachers College Record, 91*, 579-694.

Shaefer, S. L. (2013). *Evaluation of a communication skill and dialogue program focusing on interfaith and interreligious empathy. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses,* 149. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1442475989?accountid=10223. (1442475989).

Shaw, S. (2008, March 9). Religion and society: Pluralism. *Religion and Society.* Retrieved from http://religionandsocietycourse.blogspot.com/2008/03/pluralism.html

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, *22*(2), 63-75. Retrieved from http://iospress.metapress.com/index/3ccttm2g59cklapx.pdf, 10.1111/j.1744-618X.2000.tb00391.x

Sleeter, C. E., & Grant, C. A. (2007). *Making choices for multicultural education: Five approaches to race, class and gender* (6th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Sleeter, C. E., & McLaren, P. (1995). *Multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and the politics of difference*. Albany, New York: SUNY Press.

Small, J. L. (2009). Faith dialogues foster identity development. *About Campus, 13*(6), 12-18.

Smith, J. A. & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (ed) *Qualitative Psychology*. London: Sage.

Smith, J. A., Larkin, M., & Flowers, P. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*: London: Sage.

Sorensen, N., Nagda, B. (Ratnesh) A., Gurin, P., & Maxwell, K. E. (2009). Taking a "hands on" approach to diversity in higher education: A critical-dialogic model for effective intergroup interaction. *Analyses of Social Issues & Public Policy*, *9*(1), 3-35. doi:10.1111/j.1530-2415.2009.01193.x

Stephan, W. G., & Stephan, C. W. (1985). Intergroup anxiety. *Journal of Social Issues*, *41*(3), 157-175. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.1985.tb01134.x

Strange, C. C., & Banning, J. H. (2001). *Educating by design*. San Francisco; Jossey: Bass.

Swindler, L. (2002). A vision for the third millennium the age of global dialogue: Dialogue or death! *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies 1*(1). Retrieved from http://jsri.ro/ojs/index.php/jsri/article/view/6/7

Taylor, J. P. (2004). Dialogue as the search for sustainable organizational co-orientation. In Anderson, R., Baxter, L.A. , Cissna, K.N. (Eds.) *Dialogue: Theorizing difference in communication studies* (pp. 125-140) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Teasdale, W. (1999). *The mystic heart*. Novato, CA: New World Library.

Torres, A. (1995). *Between melting pot and mosaic.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Tropp, L., & Pettigrew, T. (2005). Relationships between intergroup contact and prejudice among minority and majority status groups. *Psychological Science*, *16*(12), 951-957.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* New York: State University of New York Press.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Varshney, A. (2001). Ethnic conflict and civil society: India and beyond. *World Politics, 53,* 362-98. Retrieved from http: //muse.jhu.edu/journals/world_politics/v053/53.3varshney.html

Veltri, S., Banning, J. H., & Davies, T. G. (2006). The community college classroom environment: Student perceptions. *College Student Journal, 40,* 517-527.

Veverka, F. B. (2004). Practicing faith: Negotiating identity and difference in a religiously pluralistic world. *Religious Education*, *99*(1), 38-55. doi:10.1080/00344080490269380

Viera, J. A. (2012). *Exploring participant experience of interfaith dialogue: A case study on encounters with the religious other.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Accession Order No. 3511201).

Wentz, R. E. (1993). *Why people do bad things in the name of religion.* Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.

Wertz, F. J. (2005). Phenomenological research methods for counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *52*(2), 167–177. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.167

Williams, P. (1994). *Mahayana Buddhism*. New York: Routledge.

Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

The World Religions Common Ethical Values. (2005). Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. Retrieved from http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/focusareas/global_ethics/laughlin-lectures/kung-world-religions.html

Yagi, S., & Swidler, L. (1993). *A bridge to Buddhist-Christian dialogue*. New York: Paulist Press.

Yeakley, A. M. (1998). *The nature of prejudice change: Positive and negative processes arising from intergroup contact experiences.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Accession Order No. 9910030).

Zappen, J. P. (2004). *The rebirth of dialogue: Bakhtin, Socrates, and the rhetorical tradition.* LOCATION: State University of New York Press.

Zúñiga, X., & Nagda, B. R (2001). Design considerations in intergroup dialogue, In D. Shoem & Hurtado (Ed) *Intergroup dialogue: Deliberative democracy in school, college, community, and workplace*, (pp. 1-21). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Zúñiga, X., Nagda, B. A., Chesler, M., & Cytron-Walker, A. (2007). Intergroup dialogue in higher education: Meaningful learning about social justice. *ASHE Higher Education Report 32(4).*

Zúñiga, X., Vasquez-Scalera, C., Sevig, T. D., & Nagda, B. A. (1996). *Dismantling the walls: Peer facilitated inter-race/ethnic dialogue processes and experiences (PCMA working paper #49).* unpublished paper, Ann Arbor: The Program on Conflict Management Alternatives, University of Michigan.

IFYC
INTERFAITH YOUTH CORE

Date: November 1, 2013

Colorado State University
Institutional Review Board
321 General Services Building
Campus Delivery 2011
Fort Collins, CO 80523-2011
Attention: Janell Barker, Senior IRB Coordinator

Dear Ms. Barker:

I am aware that Stephanie Russell Krebs, a graduate student in the School of Education at Colorado State University, is conducting a research study entitled: "**Interfaith Dialogue: A Phenomenological Study**," and she has shared with me the details of the study. I feel comfortable that the participants in this study will be adequately protected, and I give **Stephanie Russell Krebs** permission to conduct this study with the participants of the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI).

IFYC has agreed to assist the researcher in recruiting participants. An IFYC staff member will email advisors that are sending delegations of students with a recruitment letter, provided by the researcher. The advisors will be asked to share the recruitment letter with students that meet the criteria for the study. In the recruitment letter the students will be instructed to email the researcher directly if they are interested in participating.

IFYC requests that CSU keeps the name and identifiers of its students' confidential in the research results. Stephanie Russell Krebs has agreed to provide my office a copy of the CSU IRB approval document before beginning recruitment.

If there are any questions, please feel free to contact me at srkrebs@ut.edu or 813-449-0859.

Sincerely,

Jenan Mohajir

Jenan Mohajir
Director of Interfaith Leadership Institutes
Interfaith Youth Core
325 North LaSalle, Suite 775, Chicago, IL 60654
Direct 312.573.8828 | jenan@ifyc.org

IFYC

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT COVER LETTER

Date

Dear Participant,

My name is Stephanie Russell Krebs and I am a researcher from Colorado State University in the School of Education. The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study is to explore the lived-experiences of interfaith dialogue student participants at the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI) in Atlanta.   The title of the project is *Interfaith Dialogue: A Phenomenological Study.* I am serving as the Co-Principal Investigator under the supervision of my dissertation chair, Dr. Nathalie Kees, School of Education.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete an Electronic Information Sheet: 5-10 minutes

- Participate in an individual orientation/screening meeting for the study at the ILI in Atlanta: 10-15 minutes

- Participate in an interview via a Skype/phone after the ILI: 45-60 minutes

- Review a copy of the transcribed interview: 30 minutes

- If needed, participate in a follow-up 2nd Skype/phone conversation: 45-60 minutes

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty.

Participants will identify a pseudonym to be used throughout the study to protect confidentiality. While there are no direct benefits to you, we hope to gain more knowledge on the phenomenon of interfaith dialogue.

All interviews will consist of questions about interfaith experiences/activities. No questions will be asked about the participant's specific doctrine or beliefs, rather questions will be centered on attitudes and perceptions of interfaith dialogue. No deception will be used and participants are able to decline from answering any question that makes them uncomfortable. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

If you are willing to participate in the study please fill out the Electronic Information Sheet. You will be contacted prior to the ILI to let you know if you have been selected for the study. If you are selected Stephanie Russell Krebs will email you to set up a 10-15 minute orientation/screening meeting with you at the ILI in Atlanta.

If you have any questions, please contact Stephanie Russell Krebs at srkrebs@ut.edu or 813-449-0859 or Dr. Nathalie Kees at Nathalie.Kees@colostate.edu or 970-491-6720.

If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator, at 970-491-1655.

Sincerely,

Dr. Nathalie Kees   Stephanie Russell Krebs
Associate Professor   Ph.D. candidate
School of Education   School of Education

Q1 Name:

Q2 I am a:
○ Freshman
○ Sophomore
○ Junior
○ Senior

Q3 I identify my gender as: (fill in response)

Q4 I live:
○ On-campus
○ Off-campus

Q5 My ethnicity is:
○ White
○ Hispanic or Latino
○ Black or African American
○ Native American or American Indian
○ Asian or Pacific Islander
○ Other

Q6 I identify my religious affiliation as:
○ Catholic
○ Jewish
○ Southern Baptist
○ Atheist/agnostic/none
○ Hindu
○ Muslim
○ Pentecostal/Charismatic/Holiness
○ Christian
○ Other
○ don't know/no response

Q7 I have attended a past Interfaith Youth Core Interfaith Leadership Institute:
○ Yes
○ No

Q8 I engage in interfaith dialogue:
○ Never

○ Rarely
○ Sometimes
○ Often
○ Unsure

Q9 The higher education institution I attend is: (fill in response)

Q10 My higher education institution is: (check all that apply)
○ Public
○ Private
○ Religiously affiliated
○ Not religiously affiliated
○ Historically Black University
○ Tribal College
○ Liberal Arts College
○ Comprehensive University
○ Research Institution

Q11 Total enrollment at my institution is:
○ Under 2000
○ 2000-7000
○ 7000-12,000
○ 12,000-20,0000
○ 20,000+

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: *Interfaith Dialogue: A Phenomenological Study*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Nathalie Kees, Ed.D. LPC, School of Education, 970-491-6720, Nathalie.Kees@colostate.edu

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Stephanie Russell Krebs, School of Education, College University Leadership, Ph.D. student, 813-449-0859, srkrebs@ut.edu

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? You qualify for this study because you are an undergraduate student at an institution of higher education, are at least 18 years of age, are registered to attend the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI) in Atlanta, January 31 – February 2, 2014, and agree to participate in all interfaith dialogue experiences at the ILI.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? This research is being conducted by Ph.D. candidate Stephanie Russell Krebs, as monitored by her dissertation chair, Dr. Nathalie Kees and her dissertation committee.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study is to explore the lived-experiences of interfaith dialogue student participants at the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI) in Atlanta.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? Your total time commitment for this research is no more than about 2 hours and 55 minute.
- You will be asked to fill out an Electronic Information Sheet: 5-10 minutes
- You will participate in an individual orientation/screening meeting for the study at the ILI in Atlanta: 10-15 minutes
- You will be interviewed via a Skype/phone interview after the ILI: 45-60 minutes
- You will be provided a transcript to review: 30 minutes
- If needed, you may be asked for a follow-up conversation: 45-60 minutes

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? To conduct this study, you will be asked a series of questions about: how you define interfaith dialogue, how you experience interfaith dialogue, and reflections on what you learned/gained through engagement in interfaith dialogue experiences. You will have the opportunity to answer with as much detail as you feel comfortable providing. With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped. You will have the opportunity to review the transcription of your interview for accuracy.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? You should only participate in this research if you are at least 18 years old and are currently enrolled at an institution of higher education in the United States and attend the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI) in Atlanta. The researchers are recruiting up to fifteen students for the study based on diversity of individuals and institution

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?
There are no known risks associated with participating in this research. All interviews will consist of questions about interfaith experiences/activities. No questions will be asked about your specific doctrine or beliefs, rather questions will be centered on attitudes and perceptions of interfaith dialogue. No deception will be used and you are able to decline from answering any question that makes you uncomfortable. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this research. Participants will choose to be in the study for the intrinsic satisfaction of reflecting on their interfaith experiences and taking part in scholarly research.

Page **1** of **2** Participant's initials _____ Date _____

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. In the dissertation a pseudonym that you provide will be used to protect your confidentiality. When we write about the study to share with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private. The research files may be shared with the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee, if necessary for audit purposes.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? The researchers would like to audiotape your interview to be sure that your comments are accurately recorded. Only our research team will have access to the audiotapes, and they will be destroyed when they have been transcribed.

Do you give the researchers permission to audiotape your interview? Please initial next to your choice below.

Yes, I agree to be digitally recorded _____ (initials)

No, do not audiotape my interview _____ (initials)

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Stephanie Russell Krebs at srkrebs@ut.edu or 813-449-0859. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing __2__ pages.

_____   _____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date
_
_____
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____   _____
Name of person providing information to participant   Date

_____ _____
Signature of Research Staff

Page **2** of **2** Participant's initials _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The first series of questions will ask you to define interfaith dialogue.

- Tell me about your recent interfaith dialogue experience at the Atlanta ILI? *Prompts: how would you describe it, what was most meaningful*

- What does the term "interfaith dialogue" mean to you? How do you define it?

- How did you come up with that definition? *Prompts: from people, places, events*

- How has your definition of interfaith dialogue changed over time?

- What images come to mind when you think of interfaith dialogue?

- Describe the environment that comes to mind when you think of interfaith dialogue? *Prompts: what does it look like, feel like, sound like*

The next series of questions will ask how you experience interfaith dialogue.

- Could you describe what happens in interfaith dialogue, in your own words?

- What do you **do** when you are engaging in interfaith dialogue?

- How do you **feel** when you are engaging in interfaith dialogue? *Prompt: physically, emotionally, mentally*

- What do you **experience** when you are engaging in interfaith dialogue?

- How does your experience in interfaith dialogue affect your everyday life?

- If you had to describe what interfaith dialogue means to you, what would you say? *Prompt: What words come to mind, what images?*

The final series of questions will ask you to reflect on what you learned/gained through engagement in interfaith dialogue experiences.

- What did you learn about **yourself** through engagement in interfaith dialogue?

- How do you know you learned this through interfaith dialogue?

- What did you learn about **others** through engagement in interfaith dialogue?

- How do you know you learned this through interfaith dialogue?

- Please give an example of the most meaningful lesson you learned through your overall participation in interfaith dialogue experiences?

APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT THANK YOU LETTER

Date:

Dear (name):

I want to formally thank you for your help with my dissertation research study. I am eager to review the audio tape of our conversation. Once the transcription is complete I will email you a copy of the transcript in its entirety so you can review it for accuracy. Once the study is complete I will send you a summary of my findings.

Again, thank you for your willingness to participate and for your generosity with your time. I am hopeful that your participation will help shed light on the phenomenon of interfaith dialogue.

Regards,

Stephanie Russell Krebs
School of Education
Ph.D. candidate
srkrebs@ut.edu
813-449-0859

APPENDIX G: TRANSCRIPTION REVIEW LETTER

Date:

Dear (name):

As we discussed, attached is a copy of the transcript from our interview on (insert date).

Please review the transcript and contact me if you would like to clarify any of your responses.

If I do not hear from you by (insert date) I will assume that you believe the transcript is an accurate depiction of our conversation.

As mentioned in an early communication, once the study is complete I will forward you a summary of the findings.

Again, thank you for your participation and for your generosity with your time.

Regards,

Stephanie Russell Krebs
School of Education
Ph.D. candidate
srkrebs@ut.edu
813-449-0859

APPENDIX H: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Colorado State University

Knowledge to Go Places

e-protocol

Jarell Barker