"THIS IS A HEAD, HEARTS, AND HANDS ENTERPRISE"

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION

by

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(Under the Direction of Aliki Nicolaides)

ABSTRACT

In the growing body of literature in adult education on learning through and from cross-cultural encounters, very little empirical scholarship examining the effects and process of interfaith dialogue as an intentional learning experience exists. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore a community-based interfaith dialogue program between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults. The study examined both the process and results of participation on long-term members in order to understand if and how perspective transformation of alternative faiths occurs through interfaith dialogue. The researcher sought to develop an in-depth and detailed view of what occurs during the dialogue sessions of a specific interfaith dialogue group. Data was collected using interviews, observations, document analysis and focus groups. Findings include: 1) participant learning experiences in the instrumental, communicative, relational, personal, and transformative realms; 2) major values facilitators attend to during monthly dialogue meetings as well as how they take up various roles to guide the discussion; 3) facilitator preparation of dialogue meetings; 4) conversational resources used to navigate moments of disagreement during dialogue; and 5) the process of transformative learning for long-

time participants of the group. Implications included present the study's contribution to

the practice of interfaith dialogue as well as research on interfaith dialogue,

transformative learning theory, and Buber's dialogue theory.

INDEX WORDS: interfaith dialogue; interreligious dialogue; transformative learning
theory; Martin Buber; thematic analysis; conversation analysis;
ethnomethodology; religious other; reflection; respect; trust; embrace;
case study

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INTRODUCTION

According to Pew Research Center's study on religious hostility across 198

countries worldwide, "religious hostilities increased in every major region of the world

except the Americas" from 2007 to 2012 with the sharpest increase in countries in North

Africa, the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific region (Grim, 2014, p. 7). These hostilities

include government restrictions, harassment of religious minorities by individuals,

organizations, and social groups, violent conflict and terrorism, and mob violence (Grim,

2014, p. 9). Many of these hostilities involve members of the "Abrahamic faiths,"

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Specifically, Muslims and Jews experienced the greatest

increase in harassment and Christians and Muslims were groups harassed in the greatest

number of countries considered in the study (Grim, 2014, p. 9). For example, the report

cites the killing of two Coptic Christians in Misrata, Libya in December of 2012, attacks

against Christian and Muslim places of worship in Sri Lanka by Buddhist monks in April

of 2012, the killing of a rabbi and three Jewish children by an Islamic extremist in

Toulouse, France in March of 2012, and Muslim mob violence in Indonesia in May of

2012 against the homes, houses of worship, and schools of other Muslims they

determined to be unorthodox (Grim, 2014, pp. 10-13).

These examples are but a few of the instances of religious violence worldwide.

More recently, violence committed by Muslim extremists is on the rise in Europe and

Great Britain. On May 22, 2017 a Muslim suicide bomber killed 22 at an Ariana Grande

concert in Manchester (Smith, 2017). There have been reports that in Paris, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Marseille, Grenoble, and Avignon, France, numerous "no-go zones" have been established, indicating areas where women are harassed or attacked by recent Muslim migrants who participate in drug trafficking and gang violence (Mamou, 2017). While contradictory reports are common, in Sweden, sexual assaults against women, both immigrant and native, is on the rise, often attributed to Muslim immigrant men (Charen, 2017). Sweden is currently experiencing a "refugee crisis" of Muslim immigrants, with conflict against and by refugees (Watson & Jones, 2017). Similarly, according to police statistics in Germany, "officials said more than 3,500 anti-migrant attacks were carried out last year, resulting in 560 people injured, including 43 children" (VOANews, 2017).

In the United States, there also continues to be instances of religious based violence. Most common in the media, which are both legitimate and proven to be false under the current "fake news" crisis (Davies, 2016), are reports either perpetrated by or against Muslims. Two recent examples include the three Muslim students at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill who were shot and killed in supposedly anti-Muslim based violence in February of 2015 (Stagin & Winter, 2015). In October of 2015, protestors against Islam gathered together in over twenty cities in the United States to hold the "Global Rally for Humanity," an anti-Muslim rally at mosques, community centers, and government buildings (Abiade, 2015). Additionally, members of the Sikh faith are often mistaken as Muslim and have been victims of an ever-growing number of hate crimes in America since 2001 (Suri & Wu, 2017).

On the other hand, we see numerous reports of violence committed by Muslim extremists. In June 2016, a gunman connected with ISIS killed 49 people at a nightclub in

Orlando, Florida (Ellis, Fantz, Karimi, & McLaughlin, 2016). At Ohio State University, a Muslim attacker supposedly reacting to the violence against Muslims across the world, hospitalized 11 after running them over with his car in November of 2016 (Grinberg, Prokupecz, & Yan, 2016). The election of Donald Trump in 2016 has made the situation between Muslim and non-Muslim Americans in the U.S. even more tenuous. Trump's recent policy attempts, such as the "travel ban," and the rhetoric in his speeches have caused fear in Muslim communities across the U.S. (Johnson & Haslouhner, 2017). Examples such as these abound showing that religious based conflict is an unceasing, worldwide phenomenon and one that occurs close to home for some Americans.

Since September 11, 2001 concerns and fears in regards to Islam continue to rise. In 2015 a Pew Research Center poll cites over 60% of Americans to be very concerned with the rise in Islamic extremism and at least 45% to view Islam to be "more likely than other religions to encourage violence among its believers" (Lipka, 2015, np). Interestingly, a more recent poll by Beliefnet.com and ABC News found that most Americans now reject the notion that mainstream Muslims are likely to participate in violent acts against non-Muslims (ABC News, 2017). Unfortunately, many Americans also reported unfamiliarity with Islam and it is this ignorance that seems to perpetuate negative perceptions (ABC News, 2017). The report claims, "fifty-seven percent see it as a peaceful religion – a majority, but not an overwhelming one on such a fundamental question. Fairly few, 14 percent, think mainstream Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims, while 29 percent are unsure" (ABC News, 2017). Thus, negative viewpoints are seemingly based on many factors including legitimate fears and concerns from both worldwide and American current events, fear caused by "fake news" feeding

off the ignorance of Americans in regards to Islam, general misunderstandings of different religious traditions, and prejudice and bigotry of the *religious other*, i.e. people holding differing religious beliefs from oneself.

Western nations are becoming increasingly diverse and pluralistic leading to interfaith and intercultural encounters both in person and virtually. These interactions are by no means going to lessen as time goes by, and learning how to coexist is essential for the success of a global society. For many scholars involved in interfaith relations and studies, interfaith dialogue is the favored method to educate people about their religious other and to help resolve religious conflict. In interfaith dialogue people of different faiths gather together to discuss alternate religions in a safe environment. Yet, interfaith dialogue is not without its challenges and it can fail as often as it can succeed (Boys & Lee, 1996; Charaniya & Walsh, 2001; Dara, 2013; Hussain, 2014; Randolph, 2013). Even with its difficulties, the rewards of interfaith dialogue can be great and may include a change in perspective in regards to alternate faith traditions (Boys & Lee, 1996; Helskog, 2014a, 2014b; Swidler, 2006).

Context: What is Interfaith Dialogue?

Swidler (2006) noted that dialogue occurs when two or more participants with alternative viewpoints discuss the same subject in order to learn from the other. For Swidler, this is in direct opposition to debate, as in dialogue participants are required to listen to each other to learn rather than attempting to refute the point of the other. Therefore, in interfaith dialogue there should be no attempt to change or condemn the faith of others, but, simultaneously, to learn about the faith of the other as well as one's own faith and encourage respect and cooperation (Edelmayer, 2013; Swidler, 2006;

Takim, 2004). Dialogue has the potential to not only add to an individual's knowledge and understanding of the world but also transform perspectives and lead to social action (Smock, 2002; Abu-Nimer, 2002; Swidler, 2014a). Interfaith dialogue does not have to be formally organized, but can take place during any activity in which an individual is engaged with others of different faiths or viewpoints (Acar, 2013). In general, in dialogue people can analyze and assess the different interpretations presented before them in a way that judges and learns from alternative points of view (Mezirow, 1997).

In interfaith literature, the terms *interfaith* and *interreligious* are often used interchangeably. However, for some scholars these terms are not the same. The term interfaith is newer than interreligious and became more commonly used when Protestant Christians, not just Catholics, began to participate in dialogue (Swidler, 2014a). In the early 1960s, when interfaith dialogue began its fast growth in the U.S., the term interreligious dialogue was used to describe scholarship devoted to dialogue between Christian denominations and dialogue from scholars regarding other various religions (Swidler, 2014a). Currently, there are a variety of additional understandings of the terms.

In this study, I use Agrawal and Barratt's (2014) definition of interfaith dialogue as "an *intentional* encounter between individuals who adhere to differing religious beliefs and practices in an effort to foster [understanding], respect, and cooperation among these groups through organized dialogue" (pp. 571-572; emphasis in original). Dialogue, therefore, involves engagement with another in such a way that one attempts to relate to another's tradition and understand what they find meaningful, what their experiences are, and how they understand the sacred within their tradition (Takim, 2004). As such, "an essential component in dialogue is the willingness to reexamine one's own faith in the

light of how others relate to their tradition" (p. 346). Because of this, dialogue should "empower us to 'see through' the faith of others" (p. 346). Avakian (2015) calls this ability the "turn toward the Other" which requires an "understanding and transformation of one's own faith-tradition" and "an unrestrained acknowledgement of the Other" (pp. 80-81).

Common Goals of Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is organized with a variety of goals in mind. To review a few of the most common, the first is to appreciate difference (Fletcher, 2007; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Neufeldt, 2011) which means that individuals not only feel a newfound connection with their religious other but also that they value both what they hold in common and what they do not (Clooney, 2005). The goal of appreciating difference is a stepping-stone on the path to achieve the second goal of interfaith dialogue: conflict resolution (Edelmayer, 2013; Gopin, 2012; Neufeldt, 2011; Smock, 2002; Zia-ul-Haq, 2014). In fact, Gopin (2002) proposes that dialogue is the only means truly to resolve conflict. To do so participants must approach dialogue with a desire to communicate with and understand one another (Ibrahim, 1998; Neufeldt, 2011).

Mutual learning and understanding is a third goal of interfaith dialogue. The learning is mutual because people learn about and begin to understand the other, as well as themselves. This is a mutual process because the other participants will be doing the same. The majority of scholars researching interfaith dialogue have written about mutual learning and understanding as the most important goal of interfaith dialogue (c.f. Boys & Lee, 1996; Charaniya & Walsh, 2001, 2004; Fletcher, 2007; Ibrahim, 1998; Neufeldt, 2011; Smith, 2007; Swidler, 2006, 2014b). The last goal and perhaps one of the most

highly desired outcomes of interfaith dialogue is that of perspective transformation (c.f. Abu-Nimer, 2002; Boys & Lee, 1996; Swidler, 2006). Ideally, through contact with another in interfaith dialogue an individual can be transformed into a more tolerant and accepting person.

Common Challenges of Interfaith Dialogue

In the practice of interfaith dialogue there are several challenges that must be met before desired goals can be outcomes. For instance, learning from experience as a necessary component of interfaith dialogue but also as one of its greatest challenges (Charaniya & Walsh, 2001; Clooney, 2005; Fletcher, 2007; Gopin, 2002; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Pons-de Wit, Versteeg, & Roeland, 2015). Another is navigating and managing the emotions that come to light in dialogue (Boys & Lee, 1996; Gopin, 2002; Helskog, 2014a, 2014b; O'Keefe, 2009; Properzi, 2011; Swidler, 2014b). Honesty can be a problem here, as many people do not feel comfortable expressing their true feelings and beliefs to those whom they consider an enemy (Gopin, 2002). Participants may also hide their feelings from facilitators, which makes it possible for both verbal and nonverbal cues of adversity to be missed (Properzi, 2011). If powerful emotions go unchecked, they can control the scope of the conversation (Gopin, 2002). Fear can be controlling, and when it causes people to hesitate, hide beliefs and feelings, and refuse to participate, the dialogue will fail (Properzi, 2011).

These illustrations reveal the challenge of learning within, and managing, a group. The size of the group impacts learning in interfaith dialogue in which greater numbers seem to lead to more distance between participants and smaller numbers engender more connections (Gopin, 2002). Additionally, the make-up of power in the group becomes

important in a setting of group learning. The more asymmetrical the power ratio, the more uneven the participants feel, and the less likely learning and the creation of relationships become possible (Abu-Nimer, 2002; Gopin, 2002). In regards to power dynamics of interfaith dialogue, the question of authority is a major challenge. Who holds enough power and authority to bring new knowledge out of a dialogue event into the real world? This can become a complex question, for in religions such as Islam there is no one single authority who can speak on behalf of the entire religion. Participants of interfaith dialogue have an authority of their own, regardless of their place or role in their religious community.

Finally, it can be difficult to discuss beliefs in a cooperative manner. As O'Keefe (2009) made clear, being able to discuss differences civilly, without showing hostility, condemnation, or dismissal, is a learned skill. Yet, with flexibility, ground rules for discussion, respect, thinking aloud, room for questioning, and appropriate handling of emotional distress on the part of the facilitator, these conversational abilities can in fact be taught (O'Keefe, 2009). When people learn how to participate in honest and respectful discussion of discuss difficult topics, challenges such as dialogue becoming superficial by only focusing on "hot button" topics and focusing only on the aspect of each religion that are the same, i.e. not embracing the diversity of each tradition, can be resolved. For some scholars (Fletcher, 2007; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; O'Keefe, 2009) an approach to dialogue that focuses only on similarities heightens problems. These comparisons can be seen as superficial (Scott, 1995) and people of differing religions should not attempt to connect with each other solely based on "some universal religious experience common to all religions" (Fletcher, 2007, p. 542).

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Interfaith Relations

Anxiety, turmoil, and disorientation have been historic reactions to interfaith encounters. In Jewish, Christian, and Muslim encounters specifically, a rocky history coupled with a multitude of different understandings of what the goals of interfaith dialogue actually are pose a challenge to dialogue programs. For example, Ibrahim (1998) presents this lack of clear goals and intentions agreed upon by both sides in dialogue as one of the major weak points in Muslim-Christian dialogue today (p. 17). Looking at the history of interfaith interactions does not reveal an encouraging story. For Jews and Muslims, a history of conflict in the Middle East can strangle dialogue (Young, 2002). For Christians and Jews, differing theological and historical understandings of Jesus Christ can lead to animosity. Muslims and Christians are challenged by ignorance, prejudice, and stereotypical understandings of the alternate tradition. History is riddled with examples of interfaith contact which often had the goals of conversion or oppression of groups viewed as having inferior and/or dangerous beliefs. Until very recently, the best interfaith interactions one could hope for were those swathed in indifference while hostility and violence was the more common atmosphere (Swidler, 2014b).

For a major portion of history, many Christian communities dialogue without conversion was seen as pointless because non-Christians were not worthy of salvation and thus conquest, colonization, and missionary trips were the only moral thing to do (Fletcher, 2007). Many attempts by Christian theologians to study other religions were shrouded in the goal to incorporate other religions into a Christian framework and "universality and similarity were invoked alongside a hierarchal ordering with the effect

of rendering the 'other' as 'less than' oneself" (Fletcher, 2007, p. 533). Thus, Christians encountering people of differing faiths began to expect to see the rays of Christianity shining through, reflecting the impact Christ has on all people (Fletcher, 2007).

Similarly, dialogue from the Islamic point of view was often seen as being part of the *da'wa* translated as "mission" or "call to Islam," this generally being the mission to disseminate Islamic teachings (Smith, 2007; Zia-ul-Haq, 2014). In Islam, Jews and Christians are *ahl al-kītāb*, "People of the Book," peoples who received earlier revelations from God. In many early and medieval Muslim dominated societies, they were allowed to practice their religions and paid a tax to the empire for religious leniency. According to early histories regarding the life of the Prophet Muhammad, relationships between Jews, Christians, and Muslims were generally amicable in the early years of the Islamic Empire. However, as time went on laws against Christians and Jews became strict. This made practicing within these traditions difficult and "sometimes Christians and others considered opponents of the state were persecuted" (Smith, 2007, p. 28). Additionally, the relationships between Christians and Muslims became increasingly hostile throughout the Middle Ages.

For Jews, a history of living as a minority in Christian and Muslim controlled countries has shaped their perspective of interfaith relations. Jewish communities developed "mechanisms that allowed them to exist as a minority" and these "mechanisms… were flexible enough to allow for interaction with the dominant power of the day" (Hames, 2004, p. 71). Thus, Jewish communities participating in interfaith relations and dialogue retained a minority status. With the rise and fall of violence against Jews and anti-Semitism across time, many generations of Jews "have been cautioned by

this view of historical experience to relate to non-Jews with basic mistrust" (Lee, 1991, p. 188). Within the Jewish community, ongoing persecution has led to "a view of Christianity associated with violence and persecution" (Boys & Lee, 1996, p. 424). Those who do participate in dialogue with Christians and Muslims often attempt to present a clear understanding of not only their beliefs (e.g. the Covenant, Moses, the Messiah, and, redemption), but the relationship of these beliefs to Christian and Muslim theology, the state of Israel, Israeli and Palestinian relationships, the Jewish identity (Lee, 1991).

Today, this history often becomes an obstacle for Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue. Muslims in dialogue may work to reconcile Qur'anic teachings with the history of interfaith relations as well as Western political policies with which they often disagree (Smith, 2007). This can be challenging because the Qur'an "really does seem to say different things in different places about the relationship between Muslims and members of non-Muslim communities" (Smith, 2007, p. 133). With current events since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 Muslims are often "on the defensive" (Hames, 2004, p. 72) during dialogue having to defend their faith against expectations of violence and terrorism. Sometimes, conversion is the underlying goal of Christians, and much of what is learned about Islam is carried over to their missionary activities (Smith, 2007). Many Muslims fear that this is the underlying agenda of any dialogue attempt (Smith, 2007; Swidler, 2013; Takim, 2004). At other times, Christians view dialogue as a chance to learn about their own theology as well as that of the other, seeking to find common theological ground between the two (Smith, 2007). Jews seek to reconcile decades of hostility with Arabs and Christians in the Middle East as well as explain the "rich diversity and strong differences of opinions" in the Jewish community to both Muslims

and Christians (Young, 2002, p. 69). Perceptions of both the goals and desired outcomes of dialogue can cause challenges and these must be settled and clarified for mutual learning and perspective transformation to be the actual outcome of dialogue events.

Interfaith Dialogue in Scholarship

Interfaith dialogue has been examined empirically in a variety of different fields. For example, in education Helskog (2014a, 2014b) used action research to understand how dialogue promoted respect, mutual understanding and friendship among participants in a Scandinavian school with diverse religious backgrounds. In higher education, Small (2009) used spiritual development theories to examine how interfaith dialogue impacts the identity and faith development of undergraduate students of both eastern and western religious traditions. In the field of religion, Boys and Lee (1996) facilitated interfaith dialogue between Jewish and Catholic educators of religion in an attempt to foster perspective transformation in regards to how they understand and teach about these traditions. Finally, in adult education, Charaniya and Walsh (2001) used an interpretive-constructivist framework in their qualitative study examining the nature of interfaith learning in process. The list continues with scholars in higher education (Acar, 2013), language and communication studies (Brown, 2013; Lando, Muthuri, & Odira, 2015; Riitaoja & Dervin, 2014), religion (Bender & Cadge, 2006; O'Keefe, 2009), theology (Fulton & Wood, 2012; Haug, 2014), sociology (Gonzalez, 2011), and immigration studies (Agrawal & Barratt, 2014).

Unfortunately, empirical literature examining participant experiences in and the outcomes of interfaith dialogue is minimal. As Neufeldt (2011) wrote:

When interfaith dialogue fails, it reinforces arguments that religious-based actors have no bearing on peace processes and religion is more effective at mobilizing people for violence than for peace. When it succeeds, it is seen as a minor footnote to a major political peace process. There is surprisingly little analysis of the influence and consequences of interfaith dialogue in research literature to justify either support or derision. (p. 345)

What is more, examinations of the role of the facilitator in interfaith dialogue are mostly absent from literature. How the facilitator manages and organizes dialogue is rarely, if ever, directly discussed. One must "read between the lines" to understand his or her function. For example, in some of the above cited studies, the facilitator serves as a participant observer in which he or she actively contributes to the discussion while at the same time guiding it (Boys & Lee, 1996; Charaniya & Walsh, 2001; Helskog, 2014b). At other times, the facilitator focuses solely on providing boundaries to assist the discussions in a way that intentionally sets the stage for productive conversation while at the same time letting participants contribute to its development and direction (O'Keefe, 2009; Small, 2009).

To get around this absence of analysis we can look to the literature of transformative learning to better understand facilitator roles and actions as perspective transformation is often a major goal of interfaith dialogue. For instance, Dirkx (1997) wrote that attempting transformation is nurturing the soul as "constructivist, active, and experiential forms of teaching and learning, marked by high levels of uncertainty, ambiguity, contradiction, and paradox, invite expressions of soul" (p. 82). What this means is that it is up to the facilitator of a transforming discussion to recognize the

nuance of the relationships between participants and incorporate these nuances in the learning environment giving them space and voice (Dirkx, 1997, 2001). Methods to use to capture the experiences of and relationships between participants include collaborative and group learning, story and narrative grounded in personal experience, and description of ritual (Dirkx, 1997; McLaughlin, 2013). Dirkx (1997) explained that learning approached from this view is more than just rooted in one's own personal experience, it also has "its meaning shaped and formed through the images that make up experience" (p. 84). It is up to the facilitator to provide a space for this learning.

Transformative Learning and Interfaith Dialogue

Many facilitators of interfaith dialogue wish the experience to be in some way transformational for participants. The development of transformative learning theory began with Mezirow's (1978) qualitative, grounded theory study on re-entry women in community colleges. His initial presentation of the theory discussed how through intellectual, critical discourse and reflection examining the "social, economic, political, psychological, and religious assumptions" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 6) or worldviews meaning structures can be transformed into more adaptable, and discriminating meaning schemes. As a result of this critical self-reflection, "new priorities for action are likely" to develop (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 6). New ways of being and acting in the world are outcomes of this change. Additionally, the process requires that these new ways of thinking and being be based on one's own, autonomous thoughts and actions as the individual reintegrates "into society on one's own terms with a new, inner-directed stance" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 8).

The process of transformational learning can begin with experiences with new and alternative points of view during interfaith dialogue. In fact, Mezirow (2012) suggested that transformation is most likely to occur through discourse. Mezirow (2003) defined discourse as "dialogue involving the assessment of beliefs, feelings, and values" (p. 59). This experience can cause anxiety and turmoil. As the expression of conflicting ideals is commonplace in interfaith dialogue the experience of connecting with and learning from traditions different from one's own can be "radically disorienting" (Fletcher, 2007, p. 546). By becoming reflective in response to a disorienting experience, an individual has the opportunity to develop a new perspective in regards to the religious other. Interfaith dialogue with such a goal of transformation is organized in a way in which ambiguity and disorientation are allowed to encourage participants to honestly admit and reflect upon doubts and beliefs, being self-critical of both themselves and their own traditions (Boys & Lee, 1996; Boys, 1997; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Properzi, 2011; Swidler, 2006).

Abu-Nimer (2002) explained that if dialogue is to lead to a perspective transformation of the other it needs to involve: (1) a cognitive element in which alternative religious views are presented; (2) a "positive emotional experience in meeting the other through the construction of a safe and trusting relationship;" and (3) cooperatively working together in a task or activity (pp. 16-17). Such a transformation during interfaith dialogue opens a participant's own belief system to be more tolerant, discerning, and accepting of alternative worldviews they may have ignored, considered incorrect, or were unaware of (Boys, 1997; Clooney, 2013; Kinch, 2007; Neufeldt, 2011; Pons-de Wit et al., 2015; Small, 2009). Previous perspectives are examined in an attempt

to understand what assumptions underlie them and how these assumptions shape thinking and belief (Cranton, 2006). Integral to this process is the development of autonomous thinking in which an individual becomes aware of the dynamics of power in their relationships and considers how these dynamics have influenced their meaning making.

The surplus of empirical literature on transformative learning theory reveals the nature of perspective transformation. Several studies examined the process of perspective transformation with findings that supported or deviated from Mezirow's (1978) original 10-step model (c.f. Coffman 1989; Dix, 2016; Fleming, 2016; Saavedra, 1996; Nohl, 2015). More literature discusses the disorienting dilemma as a catalyst to perspective transformation (c.f. Christie, Carey, Robertson, & Grainger, 2015; Malkki, 2012; Walter, 2013), transformative learning and its relationship to intercultural competency (c.f. Taylor 1994a, 1994b), and the desire to change as an integral component of transformative learning (Taylor, 2007; Taylor & Cranton, 2013). Taylor and Cranton (2013) found the capacity for empathy is also important, as it "provides the learner with the ability to identify with the perspectives of others; lessens the likelihood of prejudgment; increases the opportunity for identifying shared understanding; and facilitates critical reflection through the emotive valence of assumptions" (p. 37-38).

Many of these findings have a role to play in interfaith studies. For example, an empathetic relationship that allows someone to build a personal or emotional connection with someone enables him/her to bond with that person across religious differences (Charaniya & Walsh, 2001, 2004; Kinch, 2007). While extensive research exists on the process of perspective transformation, deep discussions of this process in interfaith dialogue, specifically dialogue between the Abrahamic faiths, is missing from the

literature. Thus, how transformative learning occurs and is facilitated in interfaith dialogue remains to be studied in-depth even though transformation is the most desired outcome of interfaith dialogue. By examining interfaith dialogue programs between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults, specifically focusing on how the programs are facilitated, organized, and performed, research can begin to clarify the process of perspective transformation through interfaith dialogue.

Statement of the Problem

Religious conflict is an enduring problem that continues into the 21st century. News outlets report on the violence surges across the world and the United States. Such conflict stems from a history of violence, prejudice and bigotry, misunderstandings, misinformation, and a general lack of knowledge regarding alternate faith traditions leading to negative perceptions of the religious other. Yet many scholars believe that interfaith dialogue is central to resolving religious discord (Boys & Lee, 1996; Gopin, 2002; Helskog, 2014a, 2014b; Swidler, 2006).

While at times interfaith dialogue can be successful (Boys & Lee, 1996; Charaniya & Walsh, 2001), it can just as often fail (Dara, 2013; Hussain, 2014; Randolph, 2013). This failure is partly attributed to the fact that interfaith dialogue has many idealized goals and desired outcomes, yet unanticipated challenges in practice can become a detriment to achieving them. In particular, Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue has its own difficulties, such as the expectation of one group speaking on behalf of an entire faith tradition, a lack of trust between participants, historical disagreements, and points of emotional turmoil, all of which can lead to failed attempts at dialogue (Lee, 1991; Siddiqui, 1998; Smith, 2007).

In the growing body of literature in adult education on learning through and from cross-cultural encounters, the impact of interfaith experiences is important, as religion and faith are integral aspects of culture. Across a variety of fields, the majority of academic literature on interfaith dialogue is conceptual, where scholars discuss, reflect on, or analyze their own experiences. Empirical literature examining the effects and process of interfaith dialogue, particularly at smaller and more local levels, is lacking. What is more, how perceptions of the religious other can be transformed through interfaith dialogue has not been adequately researched. Specifically, the literature of adult education still does not "explore the nature of learning that occurs within an interreligious experience when individuals cross into a different religious context, nor does it explore how such experiences reshape their understanding of the world" (Charaniya & Walsh, 2004, p. 30). Interfaith dialogue is a specific type of interreligious experience, and this study addresses Charaniya and Walsh's call to explore how such an experience reshapes people's perspectives of the religious other and their own worldviews.

<div align="center">**Purpose and Research Questions**</div>

The purpose of this study was to explore a community-based interfaith dialogue group between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults, examining both the process and results of meetings, to understand if and how perspective transformation of different faiths occurs through interfaith dialogue. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What happens when Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults engage in interfaith dialogue?

2. How do facilitators of interfaith dialogue prepare for and guide dialogue sessions?

3. In what ways, if any, does interfaith dialogue foster perspective transformation in regards to the religious other?

To answer these research questions, the researcher designed a qualitative case study focused on long standing interfaith dialogue group in the southeastern United States. The researcher held the assumption that community development and positive outcomes of interfaith dialogue may be most powerful in a grassroots, community led initiative rather than a dialogue group between scholars or religious leaders. Additionally, since transformative learning is a process that takes an extended period of time and a willingness to change, working with a dialogue group with a long history of engagement was essential.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the field of adult education and to interfaith studies by developing an understanding of how adults learn in an interfaith encounter through the medium of interfaith dialogue at the community level. It provides insight into how adults learn to incorporate other faiths into their worldview. Additionally, this study adds to the development of transformative learning theory in two ways. First, by looking at the process of transformation during interfaith dialogue. Second, by presenting the importance of interpersonal relationships in the transformative learning process. Ideally, a transformation to a more inclusive worldview in the realm of faith and belief would encourage peaceful relations between people and lessen the uncertainty, anxiety, and fear that can come from an interaction with someone holding different religious beliefs than oneself. In regards to the practice of interfaith dialogue, this study may help facilitators of interfaith dialogue learn how to create the conditions for a deliberate learning space that

leads to a transformation in perspective on another's faith. Thus, this study offers insight into how interfaith dialogue works and how facilitators of interfaith dialogue can promote connections, coexistence, and learning between adults in such an event.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Religious conflict is an enduring problem that continues into the 21st century. News outlets report on the violence surges across the world and the United States. Such conflict stems from a history of violence, prejudice and bigotry, misunderstandings, misinformation, and a general lack of knowledge regarding alternate faith traditions leading to negative perceptions of the religious other. Yet many scholars believe that interfaith dialogue is central to resolving religious discord (Boys & Lee, 1996; Gopin, 2002; Helskog, 2014a, 2014b; Swidler, 2006).

While at times interfaith dialogue can be successful (Boys & Lee, 1996; Charaniya & Walsh, 2001), it can just as often fail (Dara, 2013; Hussain, 2014; Randolph, 2013). This failure is partly attributed to the fact that interfaith dialogue has many idealized goals and desired outcomes, yet unanticipated challenges in practice can become a detriment to achieving them. In particular, Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue has its own difficulties, such as the expectation of one group speaking on behalf of an entire faith tradition, a lack of trust between participants, historical disagreements, and points of emotional turmoil, all of which can lead to failed attempts at dialogue (Lee, 1991; Siddiqui, 1998; Smith, 2007).

In the growing body of literature in adult education on learning through and from cross-cultural encounters, the impact of interfaith experiences is important, as religion and faith are integral aspects of culture. Across a variety of fields, the majority of

academic literature on interfaith dialogue is conceptual, wherein scholars discuss, reflect on, or analyze their own experiences. Empirical literature examining the effects and process of interfaith dialogue, particularly at smaller and more local levels, is lacking. What is more, how perceptions of the religious other can be transformed through interfaith dialogue has not been adequately researched. Specifically, the literature of adult education still does not "explore the nature of learning that occurs within an interreligious experience when individuals cross into a different religious context, nor does it explore how such experiences reshape their understanding of the world" (Charaniya & Walsh, 2004, p. 30). Interfaith dialogue is a specific type of interreligious experience, and this study addresses Charaniya and Walsh's call to explore how such an experience reshapes people's perspectives of the religious other and their own worldviews.

The purpose of this study was to explore a community-based interfaith dialogue group between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults, examining both the process and results of meetings, to understand if and how perspective transformation of different faiths occurs through interfaith dialogue. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What happens when Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults engage in interfaith dialogue?

2. How do facilitators of interfaith dialogue prepare for and guide dialogue sessions?

3. In what ways, if any, does interfaith dialogue foster perspective transformation in regards to the religious other?

This chapter of this manuscript reviews existing scholarly literature ranging across a variety of fields. Interfaith dialogue has been discussed in the fields of religion (Bender & Cadge, 2006; Clooney, 2005, 2010; Fletcher, 2007; Mojzes & Swidler, 2002;

Swidler, 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2009), communication (Brown, 2013; Driskill & Gribas, 2013; Edelmayer, 2013; Keaten & Soukup, 2009), adult education (Charaniya & Walsh, 2001, 2004), theology (O'Keefe, 2009; Small, 2009), and sociology (Pons-de Wit et al., 2015). Thus, many scholars have discussed the theory or methods behind interfaith dialogue or the challenges that this type of dialogue faces. Yet there seems to be a lack of empirical studies examining interfaith dialogue to understand the impact of interfaith dialogue and how such an experience influences an individual's beliefs, understandings of the other, or self-awareness (Agrawal & Barratt, 2014; Charaniya & Walsh, 2001; DeTurk, 2006; Riitaoja & Dervin, 2014).

I began collecting the resources included in this literature review in the winter of 2015. I used the UGA Library's Multi-Search capability on the website as the primary method of identifying these resources. Searches using the key terms interfaith, interreligious, transform*, and dialog* made up the core of the exploration for this chapter. As transformative learning is an integral component of the conceptual framework for this study, searches were done to identify empirical studies involving interfaith or intercultural interactions using transformative learning in their conceptual frameworks. A similar search was done to identify studies using Buber's dialogue theory, preferably situated in intercultural or interfaith experiences.

Finally, as these searches often yielded books as well as articles, I visited the UGA Library in person. I entered the library with a list of resources to look for and ended up finding many more resources through proximity to the books I was looking for. As Nimura (2016) wrote, electronic searches of resources are beneficial in that "you find exactly what you're looking for" (np) but at the same time can limit our approach to the

literature because this type of search also prevents you from finding those influential resources that may have slipped through the cracks of your electronic search.

Throughout this research, the QDAS program ATLAS.ti (Version 7, Windows) was used to aid the organization and analysis of the electronic resources included in this review. Each electronic resource was imported into the hermeneutic unit and added to a document family. These families were organized according to the primary topics of literature included in this review, these being adult learning, Buber and dialogue theory, interfaith dialogue, and transformative learning. I used a process of open coding to identify major ideas and concepts in the literature. Then, following a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I created categories of these codes. To do this, my process was similar to that of axial coding in grounded theory, in which a researcher interrogates the codes to determine which "are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 109). This interrogation involved reorganizing the data set, during which "synonyms are crossed out, redundant codes are removed, and the best representative codes are selected" (p. 109). During this process, major categories represented by the codes were teased out and subcategories were identified. The relationship between categories and subcategories reveals the properties and boundaries of each individual category. After identification of major categories, I created semantic relationships between them and developed overarching themes.

The focus of this chapter is threefold. First, I will present the key components influencing the theories that make up the conceptual framework upon which this study rests. These are Buber's theory of dialogue and transformative learning theory. Second, I will explore the conceptual and practical literature of interfaith dialogue. Finally, I will

examine empirical literature on interfaith and intercultural dialogue addressing the conceptual frameworks and methodologies, and findings of this area of research. I will conclude with a summary and a brief discussion the findings of this literature review.

A Conceptual Framework and Model

Perhaps the most sought after outcome of interfaith dialogue is perspective transformation (Boys & Lee, 1996; Fletcher, 2007; Gopin, 2002; Helskog, 2014b; Keaten & Soukup, 2009). As such, transformative learning theory is a common underpinning of both the research and practice of interfaith dialogue, guiding the development, goals, and desired outcomes of interfaith dialogue. Participation in and the creation of interfaith dialogue programs, particularly among Christians and other faith traditions, with goals of perspective transformation and interfaith learning and understanding has increased dramatically since the 1960s and Vatican II's announcement of Islam and Judaism being valid paths toward understanding and connecting with God (Pope Paul VI, 1965).

Yet, as explained by Neufeldt (2011) and noted in the previous chapter, "surprisingly little analysis of the influences and consequences of interfaith dialogue" (p. 345) is performed in academic research. With this in mind, understanding both the interactions during and the effects of interfaith dialogue on both the participants and the facilitators of interfaith dialogue between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults was the purpose of this study. In this study, I sought to understand not only the general outcomes and processes of engagement in interfaith dialogue, but also attempted to add to current scholarship in regards to how a transformation of one's perspective of their religious other is impacted by one's experience in interfaith dialogue. In order to understand this process, analysis of the phenomenon was influenced through the combination of

transformative learning theory and Buber's dialogue theory. Figure 1 below is a model

representing the theoretical framework guiding this study.

Figure 1. Model of Conceptual Framework
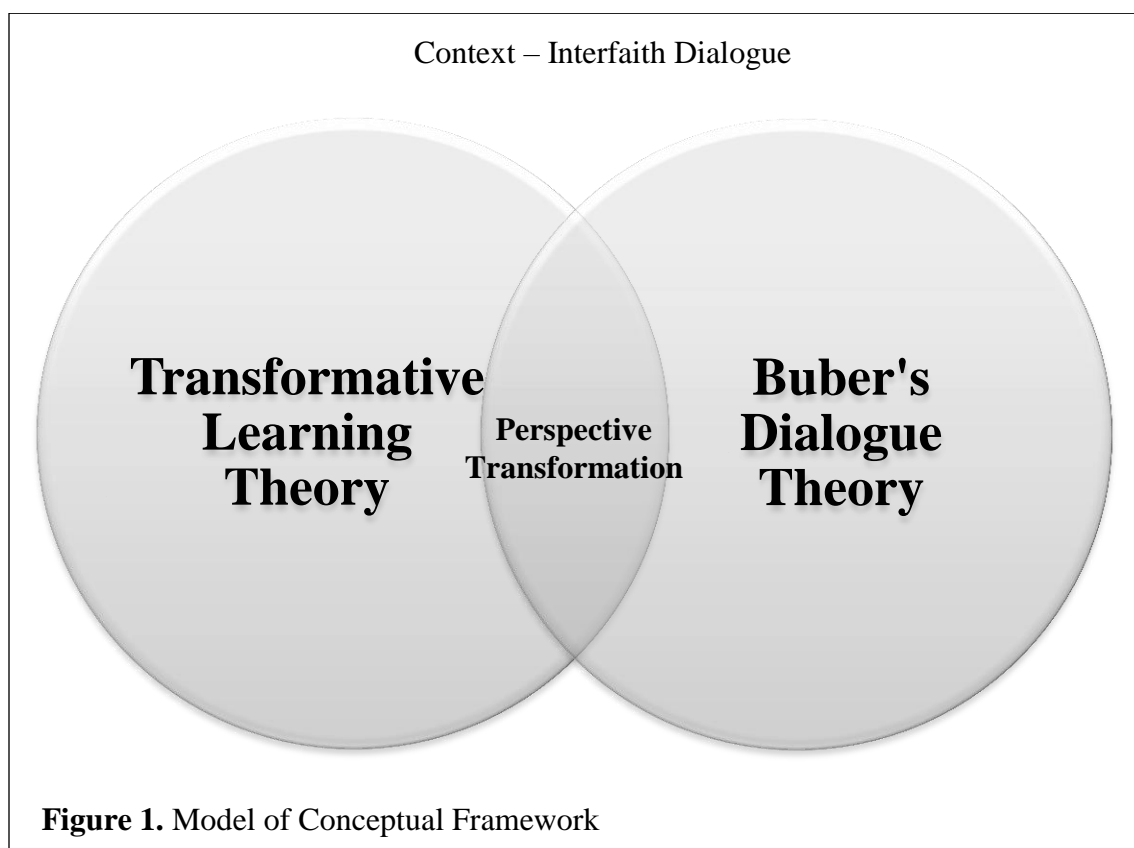
Transformational Learning Theory: A Synthesis

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, transformative learning theory first

emerged in the field of adult education with the work of Jack Mezirow. Mezirow (2012)

provided this definition of transformational learning:

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-

for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets)

to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of

change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will

prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves

participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess

reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight. (p. 76)

For Mezirow (1978, 1994, 2012) the process of transformative learning is a rational process which requires an individual be able to critically reflect and self-reflect in order to develop these new frames of reference. While Mezirow (2012) recognized that transformative learning can be a deeply emotional experience, he argued that the process of transformation occurs through critical reflection and self-reflection leading to new ways of thinking, an inherently rational process.

As transformative learning theory has continued to be developed in scholarship, other researchers have expanded the theory. One such scholar is John Dirkx. In 2006, Dirkx wrote that his own perspective on transformative learning is one that "reflects a focus on the nature of self, the various ways we have come to think about and understand our senses of self, our senses of identity, our subjectivity" (p. 125). Drikx's view of transformative learning is that of a process by which we recognize and make meaning of "emotion-laden images." These images populate our unconscious mind, their effect on our conscious mind often going unrecognized. He called this method "soul work" and presented it as a "heroic struggle to wrest consciousness and knowledge from the forces of unconsciousness and ignorance" (Dirkx, 1997, p. 79). According to Dirkx, the process of transformation is much more than a rational, conscious one. In order for a learner to participate in transformative learning, they must reflect and attempt to be aware of the unconscious, emotional, and imaginative aspects of thought and belief. It is these that serve as a foundation upon which frames of reference and points of view are developed.

He suggested that "conscious expressions of learning are interpreted as also possibly reflecting unconscious meaning" (Dirkx, 2012, p. 118).

For Dirkx (1997), framing transformative learning as purely a rational process neglects the extra-rational processes that underwrite meaning making in adults. He wrote that meaning making is an attempt to "guide the human spirit through the labyrinth of self, society, language and culture" (Dirkx, 1997, p. 79). A rational view of the process, he argued, is only a partial understanding of it. The critical reflection that Mezirow calls for "neglects the emotional, spiritual, and imaginative aspects of transformation" (Cranton, 2006, p. 50). Dirkx (2006) delved into the theory in a way that integrated the "experiences of the outer world…with the experience of our inner world" (p. 126). By nurturing the soul in this way, Dirkx suggested the "wholeness of learners' lives" (Dirkx, 1997, p. 82) are invited to the transformative table. This, he said, encourages what often remains unconscious to come out of the shadows and into the light of conscious thought and understanding.

Charaniya (2012) expanded the extra-rational side of transformative learning by discussing the cultural-spiritual perspective of transformative learning. She explored transformative learning as an integration of all aspects of the Self. When transformation occurs in this way "it is a change that ultimately redefines the individual's place in the world" (Charaniya, 2012, p. 232). It involves all dimensions of learning because culture and spirituality impact thoughts, feelings, actions, and beliefs. In this method, it is then the entire self that is integral to the transformative learning process. Charaniya explained the process of transformation as a combination of the cultural and spiritual contexts of the individual as "not limited to intellectual and logical dimensions alone, nor is it

necessarily a linear progression. Rather, it is a spiraling, creative, collaborative, and intertwining journey of discovery" (p. 236).

As transformative learning theory has continued to be extrapolated, expanded, focused, re-focused, and applied in a variety of settings it has become very complex and at times ambiguous. With this in mind, English and Irving (2012) called new researchers to clarify their view of transformative learning and challenged each researcher to ask: "Which theory is operative here and how am I building or refuting this theory?" (p. 254). The interpretation of transformative learning used in this study's framework a synthesis of the rational and extra-rational viewpoints of transformative learning. Thus, in this study transformative learning is understood as a process of both the mind and the soul, assuming that a view focusing on only one of these areas imposes restrictions and limitations of how the process of transformative learning can be understood. In Cranton's (2006) discussion of the rational and extra-rational viewpoints of transformative learning she proposed that these two processes need not be mutually exclusive and a more holistic view of the theory suggests the validity of both. She implied that privileging instrumental learning over the impact of affective learning limits our understanding of the meaning making process in adults. Specifically, "incorporating emotions, feelings, intuition, and imagination has let to amore holistic understanding of transformative learning (Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012, p. 3).

A model for this combination can be found in the work of Kegan (1982, 2000). He offered a constructive-developmental view of the transformative learning process, proposing that at the heart of transformative learning are two processes. The first is "meaning-forming" in which "we shape a coherent meaning out of the raw material of

our outer and inner experiencing" (Kegan, 2000, p. 52). Second, the process of "reforming our meaning-forming" (Kegan, 2000, p. 53), i.e. changing the way we make meaning. Under this lens, Kegan wrote that the subject-object relationship is at the core of these two processes. Object is that which "we can look at, take responsibility for, reflect up, exercise control over, integrate with some other way of knowing" (Kegan, 2000, p. 53). Subject is what "we are run by, identified with, fused with" (Kegan, 2000, p.53), that which we may struggle to be consciously aware of.

Transformative learning can be a slow and incremental process. What is subject can in fact become object, changing the very relationship with that part of the self, so that it becomes "more complex [and] more expansive" (Kegan, 2000, p. 54). For Kegan, the driving factor of transformation is an individual's capacity to move subject into object and then assimilate the two into an updated, multifaceted worldview. To merge Kegan's (2000) explanation of transformational learning with the views above, an individual has a rational relationship with what is object and an extra-rational relationship with what is subject. It is through an integration of the two, therefore, that the whole self transforms and a new relationship with epistemology and ontology is created. It is this comprehensive view of transformative learning that is taken up in this study, for privileging an understanding of object over subject, i.e. privileging rational thinking over extra-rational feeling, leads to a skewed understanding of the process of transformation.

Buber's Dialogue Theory

During dialogue, critical assessment on alternative, and one's own, viewpoints is critical in the development of new relationships with others. As such, Buber's dialogue theory often plays a prominent role in the scholarship of interfaith dialogue. Specifically,

Buber's explanations of dialogue and his descriptions of I-Thou and I-It relationships in his work *I and Thou* is an essential part of the theoretical framework for this study. Buber (1923) distinguished between two types of relationships: the "I-It" relationships in which the "It" is the object to be used to achieve a certain goal; and the "I-Thou" relationship which is a mutual and holistic existence of two entities. He explained the difference between the two by writing, "as experience, the world belongs to the primary word *I-It*. The primary word *I-Thou* establishes the world of relation" (p. 6; emphasis in the original). What this means is that as an individual experiences and uses the It, they direct conscious actions at the It as an object to be used for a specific purpose (Gordon, 2011; Properzi, 2011).

The I-Thou relationship, on the other hand, is a true relationship between individuals who are seen as equals and not objectified (Morgan & Guilherme, 2012). In this way, life is lived through the modes of experience and relationship (Gordon, 2011). Additionally, an individual, Buber's "I" can only exist within these two realms, so there can never be an I without a relationship with Thou or an experience with It (Morgan & Guilherme, 2012). As Buber (1923) wrote:

> The primary word I-Thou can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to the Thou; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*. All real living is meeting. (p. 11)

For Buber, the realm of the experience of I-It is one of utilization and a means to an end. The I-Thou relationship however is a realm of generativity and endless possibility for personal growth, learning, and development. This point is eloquently reflected when

Buber wrote, "The *It* is the eternal chrysalis, the *Thou* the eternal butterfly – except that situations do not always follow one another in clear succession, but often there is a happening profoundly twofold, confusedly entangled" (pp. 17-18). Throughout life people fluctuate between relating with others as objects to be utilized and as people with equally valid viewpoints to their own. Interestingly, these relationships are not limited to interactions between people. Buber described reality as consisting of relationships within three realms: 1) the realm of nature; 2) the realm of people; and 3) the realm of God (p. 6). A person can have an I-Thou or an I-It relationship with beings in each of these realms, but only in the realm of people can dialogue "manifest in language and speech" (Gordon, 2011, p. 213). Thus, dialogue only really occurs when people wish to communicate and understand, expecting nothing specific from one another and not using prior knowledge to prematurely judge each other (Gordon, 2011). In developing I-Thou relationships with others through dialogue, members create more tolerant and pluralistic communities. Oram (2012) explained, "Adopting the existence of the other person/collective into 'my' consciousness enables the acceptance of the 'other' and paves the way for a pluralistic and tolerant political community" (p. 277).

For Buber then, true dialogue is dependent upon the I-Thou relationship existing between the individuals engaging in dialogue. Indeed, Froeyman (2014) explained that "two people who are talking to each other are not necessarily in dialogical relation" (p.420). Dialogue occurs when two individuals share meaning intersubjectively and is "an ontological phenomenon – a meeting of one whole being with another whole being" (Gordon, 2011, p. 208). Gordon (2011) noted that dialogue in this way is only possible when individuals truly listen to each other, rather than simply waiting for their turn to

speak. Nay, real listening requires each party to be deeply engaged and active in the conversation, attentive to both the meaning and the message behind another's words (Gordon, 2011). Gordon (2011) made clear that to listen, an individual is not required to agree with the viewpoint of the other, but to attempt to understand the significant expression of the other through their words. Dialogue only happens between people when dialogue is approached in a way that people bring their "true beings, self-contribute unreservedly, and appear as their authentic beings" (Jons, 2013, p. 487). Authenticity requires self-awareness and an understanding and embracing of one's own subjectivity. Only when one knows oneself can one attempt to wholly know the other, as Buber wrote:

> But it [the I-Thou relationship] continually breaks through with more power, till a time comes when it bursts its bonds, and the *I* confronts itself for a moment, separated as though it were a *Thou*; as quickly to take possession of itself and from then on to enter into relations in consciousness of itself. Only now can the other primary word be assembled. (p. 29)

The importance of listening is encapsulated through Buber's description of the role of the *embrace* (Buber, 1923; Gordon, 2011). An embrace occurs in dialogue when individuals encounter difference and identify with someone else's opinion yet retain their "self" and not lose who they are by assimilating into the beliefs or viewpoints of the other. Embracing another occurs after an *encounter* (Buber, 1923; Properzi, 2011). An encounter requires their own viewpoints to be temporarily "suspended, hidden or forgotten" to attempt to understand them through the eyes of another (Properzi, 2011, p. 252). This suspension of beliefs requires empathy. Moving from encounter to embrace

requires an individual be willing to participate in the intersubjective realm of meaning created during dialogue (Gordon, 2011).

Understanding Perspective Transformation

According to Mezirow (1978), the term *meaning perspective* "refers to the structure of cultural assumptions within which new experience is assimilated to – and transformed by – one's past experience. It is a personal paradigm for understanding ourselves and our new relationships" (p. 101). When an individual moves toward more mature perspectives their former perspectives are transformed into new ones more appropriate for new relationships formed. Mezirow (1978) continued with an explanation that meaning perspectives are dramatically influential in life as they "provide criteria for more principled value judgments, enhance our sense of agency or control and give us a clearer meaning and sense of direction in our lives" (p. 106). These perspectives are not only influenced by the relationships we hold with other people in our lives, but meaning perspectives also define our opinions and understandings of others. Through interfaith dialogue, meaning perspectives defining the religious other based on previous assumptions that may not have been critically examined before can be transformed.

This study proposes that perspective transformation in interfaith dialogue can be better understood through a combination of the lens of transformative learning and Buber's dialogue theory. Combined, these two theories provide a way to conceptualize perspective transformation of the other by situating it within a framework of both an individual and relational experience. Transformative learning theory can be used to understand the internal impact of a perspective transformation. Buber's dialogue theory provides a perception of perspective transformation through which the religious other

ceases to be an It and becomes the Thou. The combination of these two theories define the nature of a perspective transformation as being both a personal, individual experience and within the intersubjective realm where the nature of one's relationships with the other help define the meaning perspectives that make up a person's worldview.

Conceptualizing Interfaith Dialogue

Theoretical studies regarding interfaith dialogue have several commonalities. In this review, these commonalities are presented as major themes in the conceptualization of the practice of interfaith dialogue. The following section will extrapolate and discuss these themes, which are: 1) the value and necessity of interfaith dialogue; 2) purposes of interfaith dialogue; 3) guidelines for engaging in successful interfaith dialogue; 4) factors impacting the engagement during interfaith dialogue; 5) the desired outcomes of interfaith dialogue; and 6) approaches to interfaith dialogue; and 7) challenges facing all dialogue groups.

The Value and Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue

In our modern world, globalization, an integral aspect of society, has an effect of bringing people together across countries and oceans, making it increasingly difficult to ignore other cultures (Swidler, 2014b). With the influence of technology, encounters between peoples of different faiths, ethnicities, cultures, and value systems are increasingly happening through Internet communication (Pons-de Wit et al., 2015). While globalization has had a positive impact in many ways, it has also led to more conflict because of misunderstandings, miscommunication, and dislike of other values creating a need greater need for intercultural learning and communication. Several scholars (Boys, 1997; Gabriel, 2010; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Patel, 2013) have declared

that a pluralistic society with a multitude of religious values and beliefs coexisting in the same area is becoming a hallmark of modern societies (Fleming & Lovat, 2015). Due to the variety of religious cultures living together, a religious monoculture is no longer the norm for many societies, and America is no exception (Patel, 2013). People must work to make connections with the religious other in American culture (Patel, 2013). Interfaith dialogue and education could lead to peaceful coexistence between the various faiths that now make up the fabric of American society (Boys & Lee, 1996).

These characteristics of modernity make today's communities more permeable, less solid, and in many ways constantly changing leading to societal and cultural ambiguity. Ambiguity creates demands on individuals in regards to necessities for new learning and actions (Nicolaides, 2015). Additionally, it creates a necessity for religious leaders and faith communities to develop ways to respond to cultural ambiguity (Gabriel, 2010). Responses to this cultural ambiguity are twofold. Some respond with isolationism, in which religious communities draw into themselves and attempt to exclude that which is different (Gabriel, 2010). Or, as some scholars believe, isolationism is viewed to be no longer realistic or beneficial (Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Swidler, 2014b; Zul-ul-Haq, 2014), and various communities can learn from and how to coexist with each other through interfaith dialogue (Charaniya & Walsh, 2004; Fletcher, 2007; Pons-de Wit et al., 2015).

Swidler (2013) explained that acceptance and understanding must be cultivated between religious communities because "when a great stress develops in a society, toleration is not a strong enough bulwark against fear, then anger, and even violence" (p. 144). While this is only minimally contested in the literature, the majority of scholars

look at tolerance as a stepping-stone on the way to accepting and respecting difference.

Tolerance alone allows people to "put up with" the existence of people with religious

differences, but they do not respect or accept those differences. Swidler (2013) is not

alone in this concern, Keaten and Soukup (2009) explained that when people see

members in their own communities "in terms of difference, we promote ignorance, fear,

and isolationism" (p. 184). Differing religions can be presented incorrectly because of

ignorance and fear, an example of which is the current presentation of Islam in the

American media as an inherently violent and extreme religion (Takim, 2004; Zia-ul-Haq,

2014). As such, the growing religious diversity within communities is creating the

necessity for understanding through interfaith dialogue (Boys, 1997; Gabriel, 2010;

Keaten & Soukup, 2009; O'Keefe, 2009; Swidler, 2013).

Purposes of Interfaith Dialogue

With this in mind, interfaith dialogue has a variety of proposed purposes. Smock

(2002) wrote, "dialogue sessions that do not have a clearly defined purpose are almost

inevitably doomed to ineffectiveness" (p. 7). The purposes of interfaith dialogue vary

according to the goals of facilitators, participants, and/or stakeholders. For some,

interfaith dialogue is necessary to not only learn about and understand the differences

between various religious traditions, but also to accept and appreciate these differences

(Boys & Lee, 1996; Clooney, 2005; Neufeldt, 2011). An acceptance and appreciation of

diversity can aid in resolving conflict between members of various traditions, a process

that many attempt to facilitate through interfaith dialogue (Gopin, 2002; Hames, 2004;

Lando et al., 2015; Lee, 1991; Neufeldt, 2011). Through conflict resolution, peaceful

coexistence can be promoted between members of various traditions benefiting the global community (Acar, 2013; Neufeldt, 2011; Swidler, 2014; Takim, 2004).

In this way, engagement in dialogue on both an intellectual and emotional level is necessary. Many scholars see interfaith dialogue as a way to battle against fundamentalists and extremists that have undermined the faith of the majority by using it to justify violence and hatred. These scholars see interfaith dialogue as an opportunity to promote mutual learning (Boys & Lee, 1996; Clooney, 2013; Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Lando et al., 2015; Swidler, 2006, 2014b). This means that while a participant is learning about the other religious tradition in the room, the experience of becoming aware of its religious teachings can encourage self-reflection on their own beliefs. As such, interfaith dialogue promotes mutual learning because while one learns about the beliefs of another one simultaneously learns about his or her own beliefs as well.

Mutual learning leads to mutual understanding (Agrawal & Barratt, 2014; Avakian, 2015; Edelmayer, 2013; Haug, 2014; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Lando et al., 2015). This can lead to the additional purpose of perspective transformation in interfaith dialogue in which new perspectives toward the religious other that are informed by learning and engagement with that other can develop through dialogue (Boys & Lee, 1996; Helskog, 2014a). In this way, both sides of the conversation are seeking a new, more developed and dependable understanding of their own Truth (Clooney, 2005; Gabriel, 2010; Kinch, 2007; Neufeldt, 2011; Zia-ul-Haq, 2014), learning to trust themselves and the other during the process (Hames, 2004; Keaten & Soukup, 2009).

Guidelines for Interfaith Engagement

In order to facilitate dialogue with the various purposes listed above, there are several guidelines evident in the literature. First, participants must come to the dialogue session willing to define themselves and self-author their beliefs and identity (Avakian, 2015; Gabriel, 2010; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Larson & Shady, 2009; Swidler, 2006). This authenticity requires that participants come to dialogue with honesty in regards to their own beliefs and openness in their engagement with other participants during dialogue. As Keaten and Soukup (2009) said, "the openness to the inevitability of change via the encounter with the other is essential to productive dialogue" and "ultimately, this vulnerability hinges upon our subjectivity, our willingness to be transformed" (p. 173).

Dialogue must occur in a space that is considered safe for each participant where they feel comfortable and willing to engage with each other to learn about both themselves and the other person (Boys & Lee, 1996; Clooney, 2012; Neufeldt, 2011; Riitaoja & Dervin, 2014). The rule of self-reflection requires participants be willing to examine their own beliefs and experiences to understand them in their own merit and/or how they relate to another's tradition and experiences (Avakian, 2015; Boys, 1997; Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Holtz, 1996; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Properzi, 2011; Swidler, 2006). Self-reflection is essential, as "it is only through such self-critique and an admission of past failings that dialogue can generate both an understanding of and empathy for the other" (Takim, 2004, p. 354). Each of these points requires trust between participants (Lando et al., 2015; Takim, 2004; Swidler, 2006).

Who should participate in interfaith dialogue is also discussed in the literature. For instance, Brown (2013) suggested that dialogue may be more successful when lay

people, not experts, are participating. Swidler (2006) explained that participants in

interfaith dialogue must identify with a particular faith or religious community.

Additionally, the dialogue must be equal on each sides (Swidler, 2006). The participants

must consider themselves equal to the other and not superior or inferior (Swidler, 2006).

These relationships between participants are important because:

> While retaining our own religious integrity, we need to find ways of experiencing
>
> something of the emotional and spiritual power of the symbols and cultural
>
> vehicles of our partner's religion - and then come back to our own enriched and
>
> expanded, having experienced at least a little of the affective side of our
>
> partner's. (Swidler, 2006, p. 156)

Lastly, guidelines for the facilitator(s) are mentioned in the literature, although scantily.

For instance, O'Keefe (2009) explained that facilitators should be sure to ground the

discussion in the personal experiences of the participants and keep the conversation

focused on information that will be understood by all in the dialogue session.

Impact Factors of Interfaith Dialogue

There are several factors identified in the literature that determine how an

individual will engage in dialogue. The first and most influential is what doctrine in a

particular faith teaches in regards to other traditions (Boys, 1997; Clooney, 2012; Driskill

& Gribas, 2013; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Swidler, 2008a). If one's religious tradition

views its own path as the only valid one and argues that believers have a responsibility to

enlighten non-believers it is unlikely an exchange hinged on mutual learning, mutual

understanding, and an appreciation of difference will occur (Pons-de Wit et al., 2015).

Additionally, how each individual understands his or her religious doctrines will have an

impact on their participation in dialogue, as an individual's identity can be determined by his or her understanding and adoption of religious doctrine; therefore how one defines oneself within a religious group will influence engagement (Clooney, 2013; Pons de-Wit et al., 2015). Identity plays an important role in dialogue because it affects a person's response to the encounter with the other and how he or she understands and represents the self within it (Properzi, 2011). If an individual is unsure of who he or she is and what they believe, dialogue will be difficult (Pons-de Wit et al., 2015). Sureness of one's identity serves as a foundation and safe haven for dialogue participants and often provides the security an individual needs to wholly engage in dialogue (Properzi, 2011).

If participants view others as holding inferior or incorrect beliefs, the effect of dialogue will be drastically different than if participants are open to difference (Avakian, 2015; Boys, 1997; Keaten & Soukup, 2009). Avakian (2015) discussed the dangers of such a view, explaining that when one's tradition and sacred scriptures view the other as inferior interfaith dialogue will be hindered. As such, how an individual responds to the other is critical to dialogue (Avakian, 2015; Boys, 1997; Helskog, 2014b). As an example, pluralism is one positive response to the other; it facilitates open engagement with the faith and beliefs of others (Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Patel, 2013; Properzi, 2011). The desired response to the other for interfaith dialogue is to attempt to see oneself reflected when they look at the religious other (Clooney, 2012; Elster, 1996; Kinch, 2007). This reflection can reveal subjectivity, biases, and limits of awareness in a way that can reveal an individual's held truths about his or her own tradition (Clooney, 2013). In this case, coming to know oneself can also be a way of making sense of the other, a learning paradox that can be both enlightening and troubling (Dirkx, 1997). How the

participants of dialogue respond to each other will impact the dynamics of the group and the relationships developed through dialogue (DeTurk, 2006; Pons-de Wit et al., 2015).

Desired Outcomes of Interfaith Dialogue

The literature also identifies several desired outcomes of interfaith dialogue. Many of these outcomes directly relate to the purposes of interfaith dialogue discussed above such as the appreciation and respect of religious difference (Acar, 2013; Fletcher, 2007; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Neufeldt, 2011), mutual learning and understanding (Elster, 1996; Gabriel, 2010; Pons de-Wit et al., 2015; Swidler, 2013), transformative learning and perspective transformation (Charaniya & Walsh, 2004; Fletcher, 2007; Froeyman, 2014; Gopin, 2002; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Kinch, 2007; Neufeldt, 2011; Properzi, 2011), and increased trust and support between religious communities (Boys & Lee, 1996; Fisher, 2014; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Neufeldt, 2011). Boys & Lee (1996) indicated the goals of their study were to encourage participants to change their perspectives of how they viewed other religious traditions and perspectives of their own traditions (Boys & Lee, 1996, p. 425).

There are several desired outcomes that are indirectly related to the stated purposes of interfaith dialogue. For instance, a rule of engagement is that participants in interfaith dialogue hold a sense of openness and wonder toward their religious other (Fletcher, 2007), leading to outcomes such assimilation of religious values, a contested outcome of interfaith dialogue (Fletcher, 2007; Pons de-Wit, et al., 2015; Swidler, 2006). Some believe this assimilation, sometimes termed a *hybridization* or *overlap*, of beliefs is a good outcome as it represents a way of pluralism in which someone holds "a belief in the universality of religion to the extent that religions become cultural traditions of

relating to the same sacred" (Gonzalez, 2011, p. 12). However, others (Bender & Cadge, 2006; Brown, 2013; Gabriel, 2010) view such an overlap as dangerous for fear that it leads to a dulling of the uniqueness and richness of each individual tradition and thus masks their deeper meaning and teachings.

Many scholars hope for a developed sense of community, in which participants of dialogue feel connections to others through newly created relationships that bridge the boundaries of individual faith traditions leading (Gopin, 2002; Fisher, 2014; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Pons-de Wit et al., 2015; Swidler, 1983). Gabriel (2010) explained that a network such as this increases understanding because people use concepts of universal human meaning to understand the beliefs of another. This understanding creates relationships and empathy as this reflection of one's own tradition enables them to make new meaning of other religious traditions. Additionally, through interacting with and learning from the other, participants of dialogue can develop a deeper awareness of their own beliefs and worldviews (Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Haug, 2014; Kinch, 2007).

Desired outcomes of interfaith dialogue are not only reflected in internal growth but also in external, social action (Abu-Nimer, 2002; Charaniya & Walsh, 2004; DeTurk, 2006; Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Krebs, 2015; Neufeldt, 2011). Abu-Nimer (2002) cautioned that dialogue is not a substitute for social action and that "protest and resistance to oppression are still needed for social and political change to occur" (pp. 15-16). Yet interfaith dialogue can be a method to accomplish such changes and it "is a path that is full of positive and constructive joint energy that is based on creativity and trust" (Abu-Nimer, 2002, p. 16). Dialogue can encourage greater participation in the interfaith community, increased reflection before responding to the media, voluntary education

before making decisions about political or theological events, and holding a more positive vision of the other or even the future (Charaniya & Walsh, 2004). Interfaith dialogue with the purpose of conflict resolution and peacebuilding seeks to support more positive social action on the part of its participants (Neufeldt, 2011), which can in turn lead to mutual respect (Gabriel, 2010). Krebs (2015) found that the stories of participants of interfaith dialogue gave a "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" (p. 194).

However, the outcomes of interfaith dialogue are not always positive. If negative emotions are not managed and dialogue is poorly facilitated, people can leave feeling more distanced from their religious other. Pons-de Wit, Versteeg, and Roeland (2015) used interfaith interactions online to shed light on this danger. They wrote that close interactions with religious difference can be threatening and cause anxiety. Outside of a purposely cultivated safe space, such interfaith interactions can "lead to religious fundamentalism and interreligious polarization… prompt[ing] individuals to negate and distance themselves from religious others" (p. 92). This reality highlights the necessity for focus and consideration on the part of facilitators when they create an opportunity for interfaith exchanges.

Approaches to Interfaith Dialogue and Learning

Depending on the purpose of interfaith dialogue the approach used for the dialogue sessions will be different. According to Swidler (2006) interfaith dialogue "operates in three areas: the practical, where we collaborate to help humanity; the depth or 'spiritual' dimension where we attempt to experience the partner's religion or ideology

'from within'; the cognitive, where we seek understanding and truth" (p. 156). As the various purposes for dialogue were discussed above, this section will briefly provide an overview of the two most prevalently discussed models for interfaith dialogue discussed in the literature. These models are: 1) the interreligious learning model; and 2) a model for conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The interreligious learning model (IRL).

The IRL model holds as having several goals. The first is increasing knowledge of religious traditions and how they relate to one another. This can be done through discussion of beliefs, doctrines, practices, and core values (Boys & Lee, 1996; Fulton & Wood, 2012), participating in shared prayer (Lando et al., 2015), or practicing *scriptural reasoning*, a method of dialogue during which members read scriptures of each tradition together (Avakian, 2015; Garber, 2015; Haug, 2014). Scriptural reasoning is a particularly powerful method to us in IRL because through this practice members of various religious traditions "read their holy books together in a context of friendship, honesty, and hospitality, hence making theological and philosophical reasoning and argumentation and also a better understanding of one's own tradition possible, while endeavoring toward a genuine encounter with the Other" (Avakian, 2015, p. 81).

Religious insights, based on individual experiences and theological frameworks, are expressed by participants (Boys & Lee, 1996; Charaniya & Walsh, 2001), deepening their own religious identities and developing a better, "more differentiated comprehension" (Gabriel, 2010, p. 7) of a religious other. Ideally these new cognitive developments lead to mutual respect for the other and an understanding of where they hold similar values (Neufeldt, 2011). This model often uses the similarities between

traditions as a way to bridge perceived differences and to develop more inclusive world views (Boys & Lee, 1996; Gonzalez, 2011). By looking at scriptures and theology, the roots of similarly held values become clearer.

Understanding religious similarities as well as learning about shared ethics and values (Neufeldt, 2011) can create friendships among participants and a greater degree of acceptance of the other (Acar, 2013; Takim, 2004; Zia-ul-Haq, 2014). Yet, when done incorrectly, highlighting similarities can be detrimental as individual religious traditions "are not really allowed to be distinctive" (Fletcher, 2007, p. 534). Religious syncretism, a blending of beliefs from different traditions into one world view, can be an outcome of focusing only on similarities between religions, an effect assessed not problematic by some (Bender & Cadge, 2006; Gonzalez, 2011) and as one of the major weaknesses of interfaith dialogue by others (Fletcher, 2007; Ibrahim, 1998). When using an approach that highlights similarities across faiths, facilitators must be careful in the connections they make in an effort not to be superficial or to misrepresent such similarities (Clooney, 2005; Fletcher, 2007; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Scott, 1995; Swidler, 2006).

Through learning, IRL dialogue seeks to facilitate sustained perspective transformation. According to Boys and Lee (1996), in order to encourage a permanent transformation they provided their participants "with occasions to assimilate their new learnings and to integrate them into the ordinary routines and rhythms of their lives," (p. 426). Neufeldt (2011) explained:

Personal change is accompanied by relational change as new patterns of relationship are established through dialogue amongst participants. Taken together, people hope that personal and relational change will contribute to larger-

scale changes amongst coreligionists when participants spark further personal-

level changes within members of their faith tradition through sermons and relating

their new knowledge and experiences. (p. 351)

When religious leaders participate in IRL dialogue they, ideally, return to their own

congregations, mosques, or synagogues and disseminate their newfound perspective. For

example, in events such as the 2002 Skopje Trialogue (Swidler, 2008), the Jewish-

Christian-Muslim Trialogue by the Dialogue Institute (Swidler, 2009), and the World

Council of Churches "Thinking Together" series (Neufeldt, 2011), the participants were

religious leaders and scholars, authorities in their religious communities, chosen to serve

as specialists on the subject of their religions and as representatives of their own religious

communities (Ibrahim, 1998).

A model of conflict resolution and peacebuilding (CRP).

The second major model practiced in interfaith dialogue is the conflict resolution

and peacebuilding model. Neufeldt (2011) described the four primary aims of the CRP

model as to change perceptions of the other, encourage growth of one's own personal

beliefs, attract participants, and "create a community that solves conflict together as well

as dealing with its consequences" (p. 358). Dialogue following the CRP model attempts

to enhance communication strategies among individuals, helping them learn how to talk

to each other in the face of conflict (Helskog, 2014b; Neufeldt, 2011). Learning how to

do that means developing skills "such as the ability to be open, to ask questions, to speak

to others, to keep in touch with people," (Helskog, 2014a; O'Keefe, 2009). An example

of this model is Helskog's (2014a) Ghandi Project. The event led to the development of

new levels of respect which resulted in an ability to resolve conflict and to "avoid

harassment and bullying, discrimination and violence," all the while making, "peace and harmony in yourself and the relations to those around you" (Helskog, 2014a, p. 237).

Enhanced communication skills coupled with respect for the other, may lead to "mutual understanding, tolerance, empathy, and the courage to wonder openly" (Helskog, 2014a, pp. 237-238) encouraging the development of a more inclusive and discriminating worldview. Thus, the CRP model seeks to reinforce humanization of the "other." Dehumanization and demonization are factors that lead to violence and conflict while humanization and connection with the "other" lead to peace and coexistence. This model helps participants regard the "other" in such a way that they can learn about them, attempt to understand them, and live alongside them peacefully. This happens because better communication can lead to the development of new relationships based on understanding and respect (Lando et al., 2015; Neufeldt, 2011; Zia-ul-Haq, 2014). Ideally, individuals come to this type of dialogue willing, explaining their differences and mutually agreeing on future action (Gopin, 2002). To resolve conflict, CRP's primary method is that of pointed discussion questions and topics relating specifically to the conflict at hand. For example, Helskog (2014b) used a method of philosophical dialogue questions to bring out and seek consensus on universal human ideals.

Challenges Facing Interfaith Dialogue

Whoever is participating in interfaith dialogue, there are always challenges. While several of these challenges have been discussed previously, this section reviews major challenges found across literature in every field. The first lies in the hope of dissemination of new perspectives from theologians and religious leaders to those who did not participate in the event (Neufeldt, 2011; Pons-de Wit et al., 2015). Neufeldt

(2011) wrote that this is perhaps the greatest weakness of interfaith dialogue and the processes used by religious leaders to disseminate any knowledge gained from such an interfaith event needs further understanding. This, in turn, leads to another problem, that of inclusion (Clooney, 2005; DeTurk, 2006; Gopin, 2002; Krebs, 2015; Lee, 1991; Takim, 2004; Zia-ul-Haq, 2014). Dialogue is naturally exclusionary; not everyone can be included. This is because dialogue groups can only be so big, it would be logistically impractical to have every member of each faith community participating in dialogue in the room at the same time. Yet, organizers of interfaith dialogue should attempt to have an equal representation of different faith views (Krebs, 2015) and find ways to include the "average practitioner" as well as the overlooked (Gopin, 2002; Takim, 2004).

Other issues that face interfaith dialogue reside in its design. Clear ground rules and goals should be agreed upon by each participant (Boys & Lee, 1996; DeTurk, 2006; Gopin, 2002; O'Keefe, 2009), confirming that every participant has similar expectations of what the purpose, accepted behaviors, and desired outcomes of dialogue are. Content to be discussed and formatting of the event are also design challenges. Each individual participant may have opinions of what are appropriate or inappropriate ways to interact and topics of discussion with the other. For example, scriptural reading may be viewed as helpful to some and offensive to others (Boys & Lee, 1996; Lando et al., 2015; Neufeldt, 2011). As such, the literature suggests that both the design and content of interfaith events should be dynamic and determined by the participants involved (Gabriel, 2010).

The question of numbers of participants is also raised in the literature. Gopin (2002) suggested that a smaller, more intimate number of participants fosters "emotional honesty, trust, risks taken, confessions made, and apologies offered," while larger

numbers can lead to a "distorted presentation of the self" and a "more tribalistic psychology of adversaries," (p. 5). Balancing this with the challenge of exclusivity, larger numbers may serve as a strain on facilitators. The larger the number of participants the more difficult it is for the facilitator to encourage and guide productive discussion in the group (Gopin, 2002).

Finally, challenges for interfaith dialogue reside in the language and culture. Both have an impact on how an individual understands, engages with, and talks about their own religious tradition (DeTurk, 2006; Fletcher, 2007; Froeyman, 2014; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Clooney, 2005; Bender & Cadge, 2006). Having a clear understanding of what one speaker means when he or she talks can be difficult; one must keep in mind that the meaning of words is often attached to culture, this, in turn, influencing what words an individual uses when discussing religious belief and practice (Fletcher, 2007). In order to understand the beliefs of another, the listener should attempt to understand the connotation of the words the speaker uses within the context of their culture and tradition (Bender & Cadge, 2006; Clooney, 2005, 2012; Fletcher, 2007). Language becomes an additional barrier when participants only use primary language or "beliefs and terms that are unique to a faith group and often not used by others" and this can make others uncomfortable and unsure of what they understand about their religious other (Abu-Nimer, 2002, p. 20).

Empirical Literature of Interfaith Interactions

Conceptual studies on interfaith dialogue abound in a variety of different fields, yet empirical studies of interfaith dialogue are not as prevalent. Interestingly, when examining empirical literature on interfaith dialogue the methodologies and designs of

these studies are strikingly similar. Table 1 below provides an in depth look at the research methodologies and methods, research questions and purposes, theoretical and/or conceptual paradigms, and data analysis methods used in the 19 empirical studies of interfaith dialogue identified for this review. This table enhances the discussion below on findings from the empirical research. Strengths of the research discussed reside in the variety of data collection and analysis methods used as well as the time and length of the studies (i.e. most researchers spent several months or a little over a year in the field). Prolonged time in the field is particularly important for studies with a goal of perspective transformation, as this is not a quick process. For instance, Boys and Lee (1996) wrote that they scheduled their sessions "in five intensive two-day segments over an eighteen-month period," (p. 426). Riitaoja and Dervin (2014) collected data between the years 2008 and 2009 spending time in Finnish schools to perform interviews and observe school activities.

This discussion of findings from empirical literature on interfaith dialogue are organized into four major categories: 1) external factors impacting interfaith dialogue; 2) interfaith dialogue's impact on relationships; 3) how participants in interfaith dialogue learn about and with their religious other; and 4) the impact of interfaith dialogue on self-awareness and transformation. I turn next to the findings from empirical literature on interfaith dialogue and interfaith interactions.

External Factors Impacting Interfaith Dialogue and Interfaith Interactions

Interfaith dialogue does not occur in a vacuum. The setting cannot always be controlled and at times dialogue fails. Factors impacting the failure of interfaith dialogue

Table 1

Research Designs of Empirical Studies on Interfaith Interactions

Author (s) & Year	Concept(s) & Theory	Primary Research Question(s)	Research Design	Research Method(s)	Data Sets & Analysis
Acar (2013)	Extracurricular activities & IFD	How do students perceive the TSA's IFD activities?	Qualitative case study	12 open ended interviews and 4 observations	Thematic analysis of interview data
Agrawal & Barratt (2014)	Contact hypothesis, and role of proximity	Does proximity promote interfaith dialogue?	Exploratory qualitative interview study	8 qualitative semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis of interview data
Bender & Cadge (2006)	Religious hybridization, IFD, and identity	How was Buddhism understood in IFD between Buddhist & Catholic nuns?	Qualitative interview study	21 qualitative interviews	Deductive analysis of interview data
Boys & Lee (1996)	Transformative learning, Shulman's pedagogical reasoning and action	How does knowledge, learning, and participation impact transformation? What resources are needed for transformation?	Qualitative case study	Participant action and observation, document analysis (participant journals and reflections, facilitator reflections and announcements)	Narrative analysis of participant journals, reflections, field notes, and transcript data of colloquiums
Charaniya & Walsh (2001)	Interpretive-constructivist framework	What is the nature of learning in the interreligious dialogue process?	Collaborative qualitative study	Participant observation, semi-structured focus group (collaborative inquiry), individual interviews, & document analysis	Interview data, field notes & recordings. Thematic analysis of 1 interview question presented

Author (s) & Year	Concept(s) & Theory	Primary Research Question(s)	Research Design	Research Method(s)	Data Sets & Analysis
DeTurk (2006)	Intergroup dialogue	What are the effects of intergroup dialogue on participants' consciousness and communicative action?	Qualitative phenomenological study	Observations of open-ended dialogue sessions, interviews, and focus groups	Field notes, transcripts, reflective journals, phenomen. analysis
Fleming & Lovat (2015)	Triune ethics theory, Safety mindset and Narvaez's communal imagination	What is the impact of interfaith dialogue on human behavior?	Mixed methods study	Pre- and post-participation surveys and observations	Survey data, field notes. Thematic analysis of qualitative data that enhanced quantitative data
Fulton & Wood (2012)	Institution-based community organizations	How have IBCOs changed since 1999?	2 part quantitative survey study	Online survey and demographic spreadsheet	Statistical analysis of quantitative survey data
Gonzalez (2011)	Wuthnow's reflective pluralism	How do pluralistic beliefs exist in a single setting?	Qualitative case study	Observation (unclear how many sessions observed)	Deductive analysis of recorded observation data
Haug (2014)	Interreligious hermeneutics	How does interreligious scripture reading contribute to a better understanding of the religious other in dialogue?	Qualitative interview study	19 open-ended, semi-structured interviews	In-depth analysis of interview data
Helskog (2014a)	Concept of friendship based on the theories of Derrida	Can *dialogos* dialogues lead to respect, mutual understanding, & friendship among	Action research study	Observations and 5 semi-structured qualitative	Thematic analysis of field notes, meta-reflection notes (facilitators

Author (s) & Year	Concept(s) & Theory	Primary Research Question(s)	Research Design	Research Method(s)	Data Sets & Analysis
	(1994) and Aristotle (2004)	participants with diverse backgrounds?		interviews	and participants), video-recorded sessions, and interview data
Helskog (2014b)	*Bildung* and transformational learning	How did reconciliation happen through the action research process?	Interactive, participative action research study	Participant observations	Inductive analysis of field notes and meta-reflection notes of participants
Krebs (2015)	Interfaith dialogue and higher education	What are the lived experiences of interfaith dialogue student participants who attend the ILI in Atlanta?	Qualitative interview study	11 semi-structured qualitative interviews	Thematic analysis of transcribed interview data
Lando, Muthuri, & Odira (2015)	Intercultural communication	What are the effects of IFD in achieving organizational goals?	Multi-site qualitative case study	108 questionnaires, 3 in-depth interviews	Inductive analysis of questionnaire and interview data
Linesch (2017)	Art therapy theory	How can interfaith image-making facilitate and enhance interfaith study of sacred texts?	Art-based qualitative research	7 observations of 7 monthly meetings with 21 participants, interviews	Content analysis of participant created art, observation, and interview data
O'Keefe (2009)	Interreligious learning and conversation across difference	How do people converse across religious difference?	Qualitative case study	Observations, 12 interviews, participant journals, and participant evaluations	Grounded theory and open coding to analyze across data sets
Riitaoja &	Post-colonial,	How are Self and Other	Qualitative	Observations and 27	Thematic and

Author (s) & Year	Concept(s) & Theory	Primary Research Question(s)	Research Design	Research Method(s)	Data Sets & Analysis
Dervin (2014)	post-structural, feminist theory, and intercultural communication	constructed in everyday encounters in schools?	ethnographic study	individual and/or group interviews	deconstructionist analysis of interview and field note data
Ross (2013)	Intergroup dialogue, intercultural or interfaith encounters, and transformative learning	What educational approaches facilitate transformation and social change among Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Muslim participants?	Qualitative case study	Observations, 20 interviews with staff and board members, document analysis, and 43 interviews with program alumni	Thematic analysis of field notes, interview transcripts, and educational documents
Small (2009)	Spiritual development theories	How does IFD impact identity development and learning?	Qualitative case study	2 focus groups, 6 interviews, and 4 questionnaires	Thematic analysis of interview and focus group data

include insurmountable tensions between faith traditions (Boys & Lee, 1996), attempts to convert others to one's own faith tradition (Lando et al., 2015), and exclusive responses to perceived threats against the self or one's viewpoint (Fleming & Lovat, 2015). Additionally, sometimes more than just dialogue is needed to actually lead to interfaith learning and understanding. For example, Acar's (2013) qualitative case study looked at a religiously based extracurricular organization on a college campus to understand how it promoted mutual understanding and respect between members of different faiths through everyday conversations and activities. Through observations and open-ended interviews examining the impact of interfaith student activities, his study suggested that these events lead to an enlightened perspective and greater knowledge about the religious other. Acar's (2013) study proposed that interfaith events such as lectures, gatherings, discussions, and even art exhibits can lead to better socialization and tolerance of difference for those who choose to participate.

Regardless of the activities and types of interfaith encounters, the nature of the space seems to be one of the most influential factors impacting interfaith dialogue and engagement. Characteristics of space include aspects such as geographical location, proximity to the religious other in the community, and the atmosphere between participants during interfaith dialogue. For instance, Agrawal and Barratt's (2014) interview study used contact hypothesis theory to examine the role contact and proximity play in "reducing prejudice and minimizing conflict" (p. 572). They found that the nature of the social space impacts interfaith engagement on both the small and large scale and even something as seemingly small as the problem of parking at houses of worship can be a problem for constructive interfaith engagement. Interestingly, they also learned that

close "physical proximity of houses of worship does not translate into increased interfaith dialogue in an informal or organized way" (Agrawal & Barratt, 2014, p. 582).

The literature recommends that the actual space in which dialogue occurs should be neutral and considered safe by both sides (Boys & Lee, 1996; Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Krebs, 2015; Lando et al., 2015) as the "physical, experiential, and emotional characteristics of interfaith environments" have power over the experiences one has through interfaith dialogue (Krebs, 2015, p. 192). Yet what the literature lacks is consideration of the impact of moving to different spaces throughout the course of an interfaith dialogue program. Therefore, more research could contribute in examining how moving between the sacred spaces of the members' participating in dialogue influences the development of relationship between participants and the quality of the dialogue.

Interfaith Dialogue and Building Relationships with Others

Much of the conceptual literature discussed above considers how relationships between participants impact engagement and participation in dialogue. Additionally, a desired outcome of interfaith dialogue is the development of new relationships with the religious other or the improvement of relationships leading to conflict resolution or communal actions for the betterment of the community. In the empirical studies examined for this review, it seems that these were indeed some of the outcomes of interfaith dialogue. DeTurk's (2006) case study[1] used the work of Freire and Shor (1987) and Freire's (1990) concept of communication for social action to examine the impacts of face to face communication through intergroup dialogue in regards to "participants' consciousness, relationships, and communicative action" for "sociocultural diversity" (p.

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[1] While DeTurk claims her investigation was "phenomenological." upon review of the article this does not seem to be phenomenological and the study more accurately reflects a case study design.

34). She indicated that engagement in intergroup dialogue with a diverse group of people can lead to a sense of camaraderie between individuals holding similar views as they could lend validation for these viewpoints, express experiential understanding, and offer encouragement through difficult moments.

The development of new relationships formed through interfaith dialogue was often positive. New positive relationships were characterized by: 1) opportunities for respect or appreciation of both one's own and another's religion, culture, or beliefs (Helskog, 2014a, 2014b; Lando et al., 2015; Fleming & Lovat, 2015); 2) an increase in tolerance for various religious traditions and beliefs (Acar, 2013; Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Helskog, 2014a; Lando et al., 2015; Small, 2009); 3) an expanded capacity for socialization and cohesiveness with members of alternate religious communities (Acar, 2013; Agrawal & Barratt, 2014; Lando et al., 2015; Linesch, 2017); 4) a resolution of conflict between members of differing faith traditions (Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Gonzalez, 2011; Helskog, 2014a, 2014b; Lando et al., 2015); and 5) participation in communicative and social action supporting social justice with members of differing faith communities (DeTurk, 2006). Finally, studies by both Fulton and Wood (2012) and Lando et al. (2015) found that interfaith dialogue and shared prayer in the workplace can impact both work ethic, organizational behaviors, relationships and feelings of cohesiveness in interactions with colleagues of various religious traditions.

Interactions between members of diverse backgrounds within the same society can be complex and difficult to dissect. Specifically, othering and religious marginalization are detrimental to the creation of positive relationships between diverse groups of people. Riitaoja and Dervin's (2014) ethnographic study used observations,

interviews, and focus groups to explore interfaith dialogue in schools to understand how

it impacted the creation of identity and what was the "other." They determined how in-

and out-groups are constructed within Finnish culture through characteristics such as

clothing choice, language use, race/ethnicity, and socio-cultural background were seen to

represent difference. In examining positive relationships, Helskog (2014a) used a

theoretical framework based on Derrida's and Aristotle's of friendship to explore how

interfaith dialogue promoted friendships based on utility, pleasure, and virtue. Facilitating

philosophical dialogues between participants, her work suggests that, "mutual interest in

each other's horizons of understanding is an important prerequisite for real dialogue,

genuine democracy, and true friendship" (p. 233).

Contact with the other in interfaith dialogue can lead to new perceptions and

understandings (Agrawal & Barratt, 2014), a better awareness of the negative impacts of

religious intolerance and fundamentalism (Agrawal & Barratt, 2014; Boys & Lee, 1996),

and the development of friendships between members of different faiths (Boys & Lee,

1996; Charaniya & Walsh, 2001). Some studies revealed that the use of storytelling was

an important method that facilitated the creation of these new intimate relationships

(Boys & Lee, 1996; DeTurk, 2006; Krebs, 2015). Interfaith dialogue was also seen to

increase awareness in participants in regards to which religious traditions within their

own society are marginalized and how this happens (Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Riitaoja &

Dervin, 2014; Small, 2009) as well as leading to a more complex and inclusive

understanding of diversity (DeTurk, 2006). However, due to the complex and dynamic

nature of interfaith interactions, the nature of the relationships between participants in

interfaith dialogue can change. Research seeking to develop better understandings of how

relationships are stressed during or between dialogue meetings and what participants do to maintain or repair their relationships could offer valuable insight into this integral factor of interfaith dialogue.

Learning About and with the Other

The development of new or more positive relationships with the religious other is often facilitated through learning about and with another about various faith traditions. Learning that occurs during interfaith dialogue is characterized in current research in a variety of different ways representing the unique impact interfaith dialogue has on each participant. DeTurk (2006) found that interfaith dialogue provides an opportunity to collaboratively make meaning with other members of dialogue and to develop the ability to suspend one's own frame of reference in order to attempt to understand something from another's point of view. Helskog (2014b) used a participatory action research design to not only solve a specific conflict within a European school, but also to help promote a better learning environment for students afterwards (p. 345).

Bender and Cadge (2016) found that learning with others and collaboratively making meaning of religious traditions other than one's own can lead to an assimilation of other beliefs into one's own faith tradition. During dialogue, it seems to be important for participants to be able to compare similarities and contrast differences between various religious traditions in a way that allows them to develop a better understanding of the other tradition without losing sight of their own (Boys & Lee, 1996; Fulton & Wood, 2012; Gonzalez, 2011; Haug, 2014; Helskog, 2014b; Krebs, 2015; Lando et al., 2015). For instance, Boys and Lee (1996) wrote that "learning about the tradition of the other in

the presence of the other led to both a sharpening and a diminishing of similarities and differences between the two traditions in the perception of the participants" (p. 454).

However, the ability to discuss difficult topics and learn from someone with a different worldview is not a skill with which people are inherently born. Using a conceptual framework of interreligious learning in a grounded theory study, O'Keefe (2009) sought to discover "what contributes to people being able to converse when the *differences between them is* the topic of conversation" (p. 198; emphasis in the original). She found that being able to discuss difference and learn about it in a constructive manner takes time to learn. She identified five major themes arising from her study:

> (1) conversation proceeds in ways different from initial expectations; (2) conversation benefits from ground rules and facilitation; (3) discipline and parameters allow for freedom of inquiry; (4) productive conversation includes respectful disagreement, freedom to question, and thinking aloud; (5) limitations to conversation include using defense mechanisms and avoiding controversy.
> (O'Keefe, 2009, p. 200)

While individuals are quite capable of successfully navigating conversation on a daily basis, O'Keefe (2009) stated clearly that being able to successfully navigate a conversation that crosses the borders of religious difference in a peaceful way is a conversational skill that must be worked at. Interfaith dialogue can be an opportunity to cultivate this ability leading to an increase in intercultural competency and the ability to participate in intercultural or interfaith communication (DeTurk, 2006). To support the development of interfaith dialogical skills, Linesch's (2017) arts-based research study

found that creating images during interfaith dialogue of sacred texts led to greater skill at interfaith conversations and new ways of knowing.

Agrawal and Barratt (2014) and Lando et al. (2015) found that each individual has particular motivations for participating, or not, in interfaith dialogue and these reasons impact their engagement. How and what people learned through dialogue was a finding of the most diversity across studies. At times, interfaith dialogue and encounters helped participants learn about religious conflict (Acar, 2013), consider perspectives they had not considered before and explore complexities within their own beliefs (Small, 2009), or better understand similar yet different teachings across traditions (Charaniya & Walsh, 2001; Haug, 2014). Often the learning that occurs in interfaith dialogue was collaborative in nature, open, respectful, and mutual (Boys & Lee, 1996; Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Gonzalez, 2011; Helskog, 2014a; Krebs, 2015).

Current research has examined how various groups of people learn through interfaith dialogue. Yet only one empirical study examining learning in dialogue between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim participants was identified for this review (Linesch, 2017). Thus, the present study is particularly pertinent as additional study of dialogue with all three faiths could contribute better understandings to how the dynamics of learning change when there are three, rather than two, faith traditions in the conversation. An exploration into the motivations for participation could also contribute in developing more knowledge on recruitment and retention of interfaith dialogue participants. O'Keefe's study collected audio recordings of small group conversations as data, there was no presentation of an analysis of how people work through learning to converse in groups. Here again this study contributes to current scholarship as it includes such an

analysis, one that could be beneficial in understanding how dialogue groups are conversationally successful and where they struggle. Finally, while transformative learning is the most desired educational outcome of interfaith dialogue, very little research exists in which the researcher sought to document the process within interfaith dialogue, exploring how it happens and what its effects are on dialogue participants. The current study attempts to do such a documentation presenting a model combining transformative learning theory with Buber's theory I-Thou relationships within the unique context of interfaith dialogue.

Learning about the Self through Interfaith Dialogue

In addition to learning about others, interfaith dialogue my increase an individual's ability and desire to reflect on his or her own beliefs, leading to better self-understanding and awareness. Experiences in interfaith dialogue led to critical reflection on assumptions, biases, and prejudices (Boys & Lee, 1996; DeTurk, 2006; Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Gonzalez, 2011; Haug, 2014; Helskog, 2014a). This reflection was triggered through various topics of discussion during dialogue. For instance, Boys and Lee (1996), who used a participatory action research design, explained that through "studying the troubled history between Christianity and Judaism" both Jewish and Catholic participants were able to "view their own tradition and history with a more critical eye" (p. 425). Through semi-structured qualitative interviews, Haug (2014) found that Buddhists reading Christian scriptures not only learned about and questioned Christian beliefs, but "in a couple of instances, it also gave raise to reflections on possible weaknesses in one's own religious teaching" (p. 163).

Self-reflection has an important impact on identity. Small's (2009) case study with college students revealed how identity development occurs in interfaith dialogue. Her findings suggest that participation in interfaith dialogue helps to develop an individual's faith identity, particularly in response to the faith identities of others. Throughout the study, she witnessed language modified to be more inclusive of the group revealing two sides to the impact of group membership on identity development. She wrote, "identities are constructed within groups and individuals' beliefs can also diverge from those of their group membership" (Small, 2009, p. 17). Small (2009) is not alone in this, as others also presented findings discussing interfaith dialogue's impact on the construction, development, clarification, and deeper understandings of one's own faith identity as an impact of interfaith dialogue (Bender & Cadge, 2006; Boys & Lee, 1996; Haug, 2014; Lando et al., 2015).

Additionally, self-reflection and awareness of the complexities of one's own identity are important components impacting transformative learning. Interfaith dialogue's relationship with transformative learning is one of the most common findings of studies on interfaith dialogue. In working with Muslim and Jewish adults in a collaborative qualitative study, Charaniya and Walsh (2001) explained that encounters with unknown traditions are "like going through a wormhole toward a new sector of the universe, this tunnel leads to a new universe of possibilities of knowing" (p. 363) of both the self and the other. With an action research design, Helskog (2014a) learned the "inner transformative learning going on in the students also seems to be transforming and deepening their worldviews and views of others, changing the way they relate to each other in a spiritually open direction" (p. 234). From results of her interview study, Krebs

(2015) described how "interfaith experiences created transformative learning experiences and aided in strengthening of individual faith" (p. 195).

Boys and Lee's (1996) study with Jewish and Catholic religious educators was constructed specifically so that transformation would be an outcome, and they discussed in their findings how they felt they succeeded in this. They connected transformative learning in their study with self-reflection and identity development and wrote that transforming and achieving self-understanding and an "understanding of one's tradition poses a daunting challenge" as "reformulating one's own religious identity [is] fraught with uncertainty" (p. 449). Responding to this challenge is integral to understanding how interfaith dialogue can lead to perspective transformation of the religious other, peaceful coexistence, and conflict resolution between various religious communities. Therefore, more examinations of how facilitators of interfaith dialogue work to encourage perspective transformation could greatly enhance current research's understanding of how transformative learning occurs through interfaith dialogue and the role facilitators play in managing it.

Finally, several scholars identified ways future research could work at unveiling more of the intricacies of interfaith engagement through dialogue. Gopin (2002) called new scholars to study traditional and non-traditional models of interfaith dialogue to understand which ones have worked better over the years and which have failed. Charaniya and Walsh (2004) urged scholarship to expand and explore "the extent to which our own religious experiences and assumptions, whether we embrace or reject them, serve as a lens through which we interpret our study of all aspects of adult learning and behavior" (p. 36). Keaten and Soukup (2009) declared that greater understanding of

how different viewpoints toward religious otherness impact participation in interfaith dialogue is needed. Lastly, Swidler (2009) proposed the future scholarship and interfaith participation should attempt to build connections between religious traditions in a way that facilitates cooperative community, both in person and virtually.

Conclusion

This literature review attempted to provide close examination of scholarship in interfaith dialogue. While there is much conceptual literature on the topic, future scholarship should attempt to deepen empirical research on the topic. The designs and methods used, as well as the findings, leave much to be pondered. Transformative learning is a commonly desired outcome of interfaith dialogue that reveals itself in both the empirical and conceptual literature of the field. As Taylor and Cranton (2013) declared, research regarding transformative learning is becoming motionless without many innovative contributions, but understanding transformation in interfaith dialogue could add to scholarship in both interfaith studies and transformative learning theory.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore a community-based interfaith dialogue group of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults, examining both the process and results of meetings to better understand if and how perspective transformation of different faiths occurs through interfaith dialogue. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What happens when Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults engage in interfaith dialogue?

2. How do facilitators of interfaith dialogue prepare for and guide dialogue sessions?

3. In what ways, if any, does interfaith dialogue foster perspective transformation in regards to the religious other?

The following chapter outlines the methodological components of the study. Specifically I discuss the design of the study, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, quality and rigor, my subjectivity as the researcher, and the strengths and limitations of the study.

Design of the Study

This study is a qualitative case study (Simons, 2009). As a case study, this sought to answer the research questions through in-depth interaction with participants within a particular site. This study is aimed at producing rich descriptions through interpretation of the experiences of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults, members of an interfaith "trialogue" group. After obtaining IRB approval, fieldwork for this study lasted approximately seven months. Overt generalization of data is not a goal of this study; it

attempts to provide "more detail, richness, completeness, and variance – that is depth –

for the unit of study" (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301) with the "purposes of illumination and

understanding" (Hays, 2004, p. 218) what happens when Jewish, Christian, and Muslim

adults participate in dialogue with one another.

Qualitative research is complex, dynamic, and interdisciplinary in nature. Denzin

and Lincoln (2011) support this intricacy in their definition of qualitative research:

activities that place the researcher within the world they observe and "consist of a set of

interpretive, material practices that make the world visible… [Q]ualitative researchers

study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena

in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). To try to understand a specific

phenomenon, qualitative researchers use a variety of methods to generate data. While

using multiple methods can complicate a study, it can also provide differing lenses

through which the researcher can view their area of focus, ideally revealing a more

complete picture. In this study, I collected data through non-participant observation,

individual interviews, one focus group, and gathered documents.

Methodological Paradigm

A qualitative researcher stresses "the socially constructed nature of reality, the

intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational

constraints that shape inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 8). This study is based on

Maxwell's (2011, 2013) conception of "critical realism." This paradigm has two parts.

The first is "ontological realism: the belief that there is a real world that exists

independently of our perceptions and theories" (p. 43). This ontological viewpoint held

by the research has an impact that can be seen in its influence on the decisions the

researcher made regarding the design of this study, i.e. the methodology, methods, and standards of quality and rigor.

In critical realism, ontological realism is combined with epistemological constructivism. Maxwell (2013) explained this combination is "one that combines divergent mental models to expand and deepen, rather than simply confirm one's understanding" (p. 43). Crotty (1998) wrote that researchers should "reserve the term *constructivism* for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on 'the meaning-making activity of the individual mind' and to use *constructionism* where the focus includes 'the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning'" (p. 58; emphasis in the original).

This qualitative study attempts to understand more of the participants' experiences in dialogue; thus, it is the individual's creation of meaning of interest in this study. Each individual in interfaith dialogue makes some sort of meaning out of his or her interactions with the religious other. Each participant will make meaning during dialogue that is based on his or her own interpretation of their experiences within dialogue sessions. A constructivist epistemology is particularly useful in observing dialogue, because here a researcher can "construct a meta-narrative of whole people, not reducing people to parts, but recognizing in the interplay of parts the essence of wholeness" (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 107). While this study does not ignore the impact of culture and society on the construction of knowledge, the focus is on how individuals develop their own and, often unique, understandings of reality based on their own experiences and interactions (Lincoln et al., 2011).

The interactions I observed in meetings were informed by prior experiences of group members. How members have learned from their experiences influences their expectations of, and behavior in, group meetings, which again in turn impacts how each participant creates meaning from their interfaith experiences. Making meaning of interfaith experiences involves individual reflection, learning, and then integrating new knowledge structures into their understanding of reality and/or comprehensive worldview (Boucouvalas & Lawrence, 2010), often a desired outcome of interfaith interactions (Charaniya & Walsh, 2001; Clooney, 2010; Fletcher, 2007; Gopin, 2002; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Pons-de Wit, Versteeg, & Roeland, 2015).

A constructivist epistemology assumes "that knower and respondent co-create understandings" and uses "a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13). Accordingly, in this study each participant within interfaith dialogue is acknowledged to have their own socially constructed understanding of reality, personal and unique (Lincoln et al., 2011). A constructivist epistemology also assumes that people create their own understanding of this personal reality through interactions. Lastly, naturalistic methods often include ethnographic data collection procedures such as observation, interviews, and document analysis, with an aim of capturing participants' own understandings of their experiences.

Methodology

A qualitative case study fits well in the constructivist paradigm's call for naturalistic methodological inquiry. Hays (2004) reported that one of the major strengths of the case study methodology is its use of a variety of different methods in data collection. While not all sources of data will be used to answer each research question,

each research question was answered using more than one source of data, lending to the credibility of the study (Hays, 2004, p. 228). The format of a case study is bounded by the site chosen by the researcher as well as the methods determined to be the best modes to collect data within that particular case (Cranton & Merriam, 2015). According to Simons (2009), a case study is "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a 'real life' context. It is research-based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led" (p. 21).

Case study research has a long history and has been used in a wide variety of fields (Flyvbjerg, 2011). While now a fairly common form of research methodology, Flyvbjerg (2011) explained that case study research is fraught with misunderstandings, that, in some cases, have led to case study methodology being less valued than generalizable and statistical research. He argued that generalizable knowledge is often over-rated, as it is only one of many ways in which people gain knowledge. What is more, since case studies are accessible to multiple audiences, document both stakeholder and participant viewpoints of a program or policy, use a variety of naturalistic research methods, they can report "findings that others can recognize and use as a basis for informed action" (Simons, 2009, p. 18). This is an important function of case studies; often their findings are used to both produce detailed understandings of a specific topic or program and inform policy development or community action (Simons, 2009, p. 21).

Case study research is adept in the production of context-specific, concrete knowledge. Simons (2009) wrote that this approach to examining complex systems and innovations in context specific instances is one of the most widely accepted purposes of

cases study research. Cases have been used in a variety of fields to explain and further theory by providing specific and exact instances that either confirm or falsify such theory. For Flyvbjerg, general knowledge independent of context is only beneficial for beginning researchers. It is through context-specific knowledge generated through case study research that a more nuanced view of reality can be produced. This more nuanced view is central to furthering human understanding and learning (Flyvbjerg, 2011). As such, this case study seeks to expand the current understanding of interfaith dialogue by producing detailed and rich descriptions of the interactions within a specific interfaith dialogue group, adding context-specific knowledge to general understandings of this phenomenon.

Sample Selection

The sample for this case was purposefully chosen based on the characteristics of the dialogue group, characteristics of "interest to the researcher" (Cranton & Merriam, 2015, p. 58). This section describes both the site and sample within the case site. The nature of a case study is "particularistic" (Cranton & Merriam, 2015, p. 58), focusing on many variables within a specific event, program or individual. The site of this study was a community organized interfaith dialogue group comprised of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults, aged 18 and older. The site was located in the southeastern United States.

Participants in the study were both facilitators and general members of the interfaith dialogue group. Monthly group meetings averaged 30 to 50 attendees; in order for a more targeted sample of interview participants, members who had attended for three or more years were approached. Eight out of the nine interview participants had been members of the group for 10 or more years. Two facilitators of the dialogue group were contacted through email to assess interest in participation in the study, (the recruitment

script for these emails is found in Appendix A of this chapter). Facilitators were first

approached due to their role as gatekeepers to the group. Email contact was followed up

with a phone conversation with each facilitator during which I asked questions about the

group, described the purpose of the study, research interests, and participation

expectations. Following these, attended a dialogue session, introducing myself and

presenting the study to the general members of the dialogue group. Upon their agreement,

I began collecting the data for this study.

Data Generation Methods

Conducting a case study involves a variety of steps conducted over a period of

time (Cranton & Merriam, 2015). After performing background research on the

phenomenon under consideration and choosing a site, the researcher then begins to

collect the raw data. The primary data collection methods used in this study were

interviews, observations, a focus group, and collecting documents and online data some

of the most common data collection methods for case study research (Cranton &

Merriam, 2015). Data the data generation period of this study ran from August 2016 to

February 2017. The section below describes each collection method in turn. Table 2

below is a summary of the methods used to collect data for this study.

Observations and Field Notes

I observed five large group dialogue sessions and four steering committee

meetings. Written consent forms were completed by attendees at the beginning of each

meeting, copies of which can be found in Appendices B and C. Observations were mostly

unstructured and I held a "passive participant" role, hoping for as much

"unobtrusiveness" as possible (Spradley, 1980). To direct my work, I followed

Table 2

Data Generation Summary

Method	Generation Details	Data Set
Observations	5 plenary session meetings (450 minutes)	Field notes
	4 steering committee meetings (360 minutes)	Audio recordings
Interviews	Set of 3 with 9 participants (1450 minutes)	Audio recordings
		Transcriptions
	1 individual (90 minutes)	Audio recording
		Transcription
Documents	Throughout the study	Email correspondences
Focus group	1 session with steering committee (75 minutes)	Audio recording
		Transcription
Member check	1 session with interview participants (86 minutes)	Audio recording
		Transcription

Spradley's (1980) guidelines, seeking to understand "place, actors, and activities" of culture and social situations. Observations for this study focused mainly on group interactions, identifying major players in dialogue, techniques used to mediate or guide discussion, relationship building, individual expressions of faith, and difficult topics.

To note these interactions, I took field notes to record the meetings activities. I described interactions, the structure of meetings, and as much verbatim talk as was possible. While in the field, "it is humanly impossible to write down everything that goes on or everything informants say" so I wrote a "condensed account" while in the field (p. 69). Field notes also included a drawing of the setting for each session, noting how the room was arranged and where members were seated. Upon returning home from field work, I wrote an "expanded account" in which I "fill[ed] in details and recall[ed] things that were not recorded on the spot" (p. 70). I audio recorded memos in Evernote of my "experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems… [this] represent[ed] the personal side of fieldwork" (p. 71). Over time, my observations and

fieldnotes moved from generally descriptive to more focused an analytical. Spradley described this as moving from "grand tour observations" which give "an overview of what has occurred," to "mini-tour observations," more selective in nature.

Audio Recordings of Naturally Occurring Talk

Observations are particularly helpful in addition to other forms of data because with observations the "researcher may not be able to gather all needed data" (Cranton & Merriam, 2015, p. 121). In addition to observing the steering committee meetings, I obtained informed consent to audio record each session. With these audio recordings, I was able to perform an ethnomethodological analysis of the naturally occurring discussion. This analysis method will be discussed more below. In addition to affording this type of analysis, audio recordings of the observed events allowed me to focus specifically on the interactions between, and behaviors of, dialogue participants and not become overly engrossed with the content of the discussion.

Interviews

The interviews in this study were semi-structured, in-depth ethnographic interviews. As Cranton and Merriam (2015) explained, interviews are "often useful in gathering data when the topic to be explored is complex and emotionally loaded, and/or does not lend itself to conducting observations" (p. 117). Interviews were invaluable in helping to understand the multifaceted and emotional nature of interfaith dialogue, this due to the impact of engaging and learning with the religious other (Boys & Lee, 1996; Gopin, 2002; Helskog, 2014b). Spradley (1979) wrote that a good ethnographic interview can seem like a friendly conversation rather than a formal interview (p. 58). The ethnographic interview is focused on "generating participants' descriptions of key aspects

related to the cultural world of which he or she is part – that is space, time, events, people, activities, and objects" (Roulston, 2010, p. 19). Interview data was integral in understanding each of the research questions. By interviewing participants about their past experiences in interfaith dialogue, these interviews offered a longitudinal look at their experiences and learning by discussing moments that stand out, challenges, rewards, overall learning impressions, and the history and development of the group.

Interviewees were contacted individually through email (see Appendix D). Nine members of the organization participated in a series of three interviews each lasting 45 to 60 minutes. Four of the nine interviewees elected to have interviews over the phone. Seven of these nine interviewees were also members of the steering committee. In these interviews steering committee members were asked to focus specifically on their time participating in sessions, not on their preparation or management. Table 3 offers demographic information about the participants as well as which ones are steering committee members. All interview participants are middle to late-aged, married, many with children, and are currently active members of their community as well as the interfaith dialogue group. In regards to the dialogue group, they had all been active members, attending 90% of meetings and activities, for at least four years. Representatives from each tradition were asked to participate and the interview sample is reflective of the demographics of the members of the group. Thus, purposeful sampling was to assess participants for the desired characteristics.

Consent form and interview guides for each of the participant interviews can be found in Appendices E and F. For those participants who elected to have phone interviews, informed consent was obtained through email before the first interview was

Table 3

Demographics of Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Religious Affiliation	Place of Birth	Time in Group	SC?	Mode
Claudia	Protestant Christian	Northeastern U.S.	4 years	✓	F2F
Daniel	Reform Jew	Southeastern U.S.	15 years	✓	F2F
Harun	Sunni Muslim	North Africa	15 years	✓	Phone
Isaiah	Reform Jew	Northeastern U.S.	15 years	✓	Phone
Khadija	Sunni Muslim	North Africa	10 years		Phone
Luke	Protestant Christian	Southeastern U.S.	15 years		Phone
Matthew	Protestant Christian	Southeastern U.S.	15 years	✓	F2F
Phoebe	Roman Catholic Christian	Southeastern U.S.	15 years	✓	F2F
Yusuf	Sunni Muslim	Middle East	15 years	✓	F2F

conducted. Following Seidman's topical focus of his "three-interview series" method, these ethnographic interviews allowed for "both the interviewer and participant to explore the participant's experience, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning" (Seidman, 2013, p. 20). Interview One was a "focused life history" interview and focused on participants' childhood, education, careers, role in their religious communities, faith, and early motivations for participating in interfaith dialogue. Interview Two, an interview considering "details of the experience," (p. 21) included questions about participating in dialogue, their goals, motivations for continuing to attend, relationships with other group members, and memorable moments. Interview Three, the interview to "reflect on the meaning" (p. 22) of interfaith dialogue, asked participants to spend time discussing what they have learned from participating, how participation has impacted their lives,

particularly meaningful and challenging aspects of their participation as well as what they do in those moments, and what they see as the future of the group and their continued participation.

In addition to interviews with dialogue members, one interview was conducted with the original creator of the group. Thomas, no longer a resident in the community, started the group in 2002 and reached out to individuals in the community to form the dialogue group. After obtaining informed consent through email (see Appendix G), the interview with Thomas (guide in Appendix H) conducted over the phone lasted 90 minutes and was focused on Thomas' early goals for the group, activities planned, roles played, and organization of early meetings. This interview offered a look into the history and purpose of the group from its founder, providing a more complete understanding of the groups beginnings and development over time.

Each interviewee determined the mode of interview, whether face-to-face or over the phone. Interviews were also scheduled at a time convenient for both interviewer and interviewee. Interviews held face-to-face were held in locations chosen by the interviewee that offered comfort to both interviewee and interviewer, which included the public library, a restaurant, group meeting locations, and one interviewee's home. Each face-to-face interview was recorded using Smart Voice Recorder, an audio recording app for the Android operating system. Phone interviews were conducted through Skype and audio recorded using Call Note, a free software developed to record Skype video and audio calls. As Cranton and Merriam (2015) explained, electronic recording is always preferable to hand taken notes as "note taking may result in missed information and thereby reduce the validity of the interview results" (p. 117). Each interview recording

was transcribed, either by hired transcribers from the company Transcription US, the independent transcriptionist Rebecca Hendren, or by me. After the initial, "clean" transcription was written, I re-listened to the interview and, using Express Scribe, added verbatim speech to transcriptions including repeated phrases, pauses, stutters, response tokens, and continuers.

Documents

Online and written documents produced by both facilitators and participants were a third data set for this study. Documents included email correspondences, a written Covenant for the group, handouts produced by facilitators, online and other external resources used to plan and enrich discussion (e.g. interfaith dialogue resources, sacred scriptures, etc.). These documents were used to answer the research questions regarding extent of participant engagement within, and facilitator management of, dialogue in between meetings. These documents also enriched the study by adding information regarding group's mission, activities and planning beyond monthly sessions, and interactions with the community at large. As a non-participant observer, I used these documents as a form of observation, a valuable data set that can be reviewed repeatedly throughout the course of the study (Cranton & Merriam, 2015).

Each document was viewed as a construction of the dialogue group's reality based on how members represent aspects of the atmosphere, culture, history as well as how they plan and advertise events. As McCulloch (2004) wrote, documents "are a significant medium through which to understand the way in which our society has developed and how it continues to develop" (p. 5). Participants of interfaith dialogue groups create their own society and culture, and the documents serve as an important representation of this

society. Additionally, these documents indirectly represent the organizations' views on the importance of interfaith dialogue and their dedication to communicate and build community across areas of religious difference.

Focus Group

One focus group was conducted for this study. Informed consent (see Appendix I) was obtained and the focus group lasted 75 minutes. The seven steering committee members of the interfaith dialogue group participated in the focus group. The intent of the focus group was to discuss facilitator experiences in interfaith dialogue. Questions (see Appendix J for guide) were focused on planning and implementation of the monthly meeting. Facilitators were asked six questions such as what it was like to be a facilitator, their challenges and what is rewarding about working with the group, and their intended outcomes or experiences for the participants. Holding with the critical realist paradigm of this study, the focus group with the steering committee members was particularly useful because it was assumed that "knowledge is socially constructed and the reality of interest is a result of the social interaction" (Kleiber, 2004). Within this particular research context, the planning and behavior of the steering committee before and during the monthly group sessions directly influences the construction of knowledge and learning that occurs during meetings. Kleiber explained that for focus groups:

> [T]he moderator is able to observe how people make private opinions public and
> how that process shapes the formation of their stated opinion (Krueger, 1988)…
> Rather than providing short responses to structured questions, focus group
> participants engage in thoughtful discussion and may actually influence one
> another. (p. 89)

Focus group data was relevant in generating detailed information on the collective experience of facilitators of the group. Interestingly, much of what had been shared in individual interviews was stated or corroborated in the focus group.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

The data for this study was analyzed in an attempt to expose the meaning and experiences of both the participants and facilitators of interfaith dialogue. The section below describes the data analysis methods of the study as well as how the qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) ATLAS.ti (Version 7) enhanced the analysis process.

Thematic Analysis

The primary method of analysis in this study was thematic analysis. According to Saldaña (2013), thematic analysis applies to all types of qualitative research; thus it was used to analyze each data set. Following Baraun and Clarke's (2006) process, I reviewed the data with the intent to identify themes that accurately organized and represented meaning schemes for the data as a whole. These authors explained thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing [sic] and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). Braun and Clarke present thematic analysis as more versatile than many other analytic methods, but stress that with this versatility comes the researcher's responsibility to make the theoretical assumptions behind the analysis clear, as "a good thematic analysis will make this transparent" (p. 81).

With Braun and Clarke's suggestions in mind, thematic analysis in this manuscript can be described as such. First, earlier in this chapter, the methodological paradigm of the study was identified as critical realism. Within this paradigm, "the ways in which individuals make meaning of their experience, and in turn, the ways the broader

social context impinges on those meanings" (p. 81) guided the analysis process. Second, the approach to thematic analysis in this study was inductive; it did not begin with "predefined categories," but "allows categories to emerge from the data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 177). Finally, findings from this study were organized into latent themes that attempt to "identify or examine the *underlying* ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations – and ideologies – that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (p. 84; emphasis in the original).

The analysis process began with "open coding" in which codes were developed "based on what data (including the participants' terms and categories) seem most important" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107). Simultaneous coding and sub-coding were used during the analysis of each data set within this study (Saldaña, 2013). For fieldnote data, the second round of coding used "domain coding" (Saldaña, 2013) based on Spradley's (1980) description of domain analysis. Using Spradley's "strict inclusion" analysis, fieldnote data was interrogated by creating semantic relationships between the data through the categorization: "X is a kind of Y" (p. 93). Y then became a code and X was the sub-code. Interview and focus group data was coded using process, concept, and emotion coding (Saldaña, 2013). The intent behind mixing these various coding schemes was to note the variety and nuance across the data sets.

In creating themes, Saldaña's (2013) description of a theme was kept in mind, as an "*extended phrase* or *sentence* that identifies what a unit of data is *about* and/or what it *means*" (p. 175; emphasis in original). Thus, in an overarching way, themes were used to organize the data into categories representing key ideas identified across entire set. Saldaña (2013) explained these themes can be understood as foundational work that

"leads to the development of higher-level theoretical constructs when similar themes are clustered together" (p. 176). Clusters of themes were then organized into individual findings chapters, using "trends and patterns" and the relationships they illustrated in an attempt to represent a holistic picture of major characteristics of the impact of interfaith dialogue on both individuals and society (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013, p. 400).

An Ethnomethodologically Informed Conversation Analysis

The secondary analysis method used in this study was an ethnomethodologically informed conversation analysis, specifically in deeply considering the talk in the steering committee sessions. By studying dialogue using this ethnomethodologically informed approach, I intended "to examine how members make meaning of one another's utterances and actions, and what that meaning might be in any specific encounter" (Roulston, 2004, p. 140). Within ethnomethodological methods, I took an institutional conversation analytical approach, examining specific instances of talk to understand what talk-in-interaction is accomplishing during steering committee meetings. This in-depth look further supported this study's intent to understand more about how Jewish, Muslim and Christian adults learn through interfaith dialogue. Such an approach to analysis begins by examining instances of naturally occurring talk in a specific interaction rather than beginning with a particular theory to guide analysis (Roulston, 2004).

Conversation analysis began with the work of Harvey Sacks in the early 1960s. For Sacks, conversation analysis was a method of sociological research that would reveal how social reality is constructed through talk. More specifically, conversation analysis is used to answer questions about talk in interaction such as how natural everyday talk is organized, coordinated, and understood in interaction (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). The

method of conversation analysis followed in this study was proposed by ten Have (2007)

in *Doing Conversation Analysis: A Practical Guide*, a text that discusses analytic

strategies on how to begin an analysis, questions to ask of the data, a general strategy for

exploring data, sets up brief analytic examples, and ends by presenting implications of

such an analysis. Ten Have's goal was to "construct a synthesis that might be helpful as a

general guideline for the beginning researcher" (1999, p. 101).

The analysis in this study begin with detailed transcripts of talk-in-interaction

from interfaith dialogue sessions. Each transcript was marked following ten Have's

(2007) guidance for transcription conventions (see Appendix K). After marking the

transcription, the next step was to follow Psathas' (1995) idea of unmotivated looking.

According to Psathas, this term "is intended to imply that the investigator is 'open' to

discovering phenomena rather than searching for instances of already identified and

described phenomena for some theoretically pre-formulated conceptualization of what

the phenomena should look like," (1995, p. 45). After this introductory look, I identified

reoccurring phenomena in the data sets. In particular, instances of disagreement in

dialogue ranged across the data and these moments in conversation were selected for in-

depth consideration. This analysis was done in three steps following ten Have's (2007)

suggestions. As such, I examined turn-taking organization, sequence organization, and

repair organization in detail.

ATLAS.ti (version 7, Windows)

During the process of this study, I used the QDAS ATLAS.ti (version 7,

Windows). Friese (2014) described the benefits of using such software throughout the

analysis process:

Software frees you from all those tasks that a machine can do much more

effectively, like modifying code words and coded segments, retrieving data based

on various criteria, searching for words, integrating material in one place,

attaching notes and finding them again, counting the numbers of coded

incidences, offering overviews at various stages of a project, and so on. (p. 1)

Not only is it easier to analyze data systematically using such a program, but ATLAS.ti

also served an important function in organizing and preparing the data for analysis.

Additionally, if codes or analysis of multiple sections of data needed to be changed, this

was more efficiently done with ATLAS.ti. As Friese (2014) explained, it is likely that the

definitions or even names of codes may change during the analysis process as the

researcher gets deeper into the data, and using a program like ATLAS.ti 7 enabled the

researcher to be sure that modification occurred in each coding instance for in software-

supported analysis, you can rename a code in interview 20 and all instances that are

coded with this code will be renamed" (p. 19).

After loading each data set into ATLAS.ti 7 as PDF's, I followed Friese's (2014)

NCT analysis method. NCT stands for "noticing things, collecting things, and thinking

about things" (p. 12), which takes a recursive approach to analysis. This means that I will

first ran through the data and attached preliminary codes to important segments (noticing

things); then began identify patterns of similar codes, merging and redefining code labels

as necessary (collecting things). The final stage, thinking about things, was when I asked

myself how the various aspects of the individual findings fit together into a

comprehensive understanding of interfaith dialogue (p. 14). This process was recursive

because there was back and forth movement between the noticing and collecting phases,

rather than a linear progression across the three phases (p. 16). This allowed new insights, i.e. any new things noticed, to be integrated into each collecting phase and thus followed through into the thinking phase.

While ATLAS.ti has powerful potential at increasing efficiency and depth in any qualitative analysis, unbridled use can also lead to over coding. It is not difficult to develop hundreds or even a few thousand codes using this program. This is one of the drawbacks of using analysis software as it is unlikely that a researcher would develop over 1000 codes by hand. The program does not offer any guidance on the coding process; it only offers a way to manage data and analysis in an electronic environment. As Friese (2014) cautioned, without a methodological understanding of coding one will likely not be able to use the software to enhance their analysis process. To avoid this pitfall, extensive research and preparatory work was done on both coding and the use of QDAS in qualitative research before beginning the analysis phase of this study. Much of this work involved extensive training and study on ATLAS.ti and its various uses, then implementing ATLAS.ti in various research projects (e.g. a paperless literature review, interview studies, and survey research), and working with skilled researchers as mentors using either ATLAS.ti or NVivo 10 in several qualitative studies.

Quality and Rigor

Methodological triangulation, researcher reflective memos, and member checks were used to enhance the quality and rigor of this study. In addition, I referred to Tracy's (2010) eight criteria for establishing quality in qualitative research: having a worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence (2010, p. 840). The topic of this study is worthy because

understanding how adults learn through interfaith engagement is significant to scholarship in both adult education and interfaith studies. Looking at interfaith dialogue as a learning experience could lead to a better understanding of how people's perspectives of other religions or their practitioners can be changed based on education and respectful interactions. Learning how to dialogue with one's religious other may mitigate strife and conflict while promoting peace. This research makes a significant practical and moral contribution to the field of adult education. Finally, closely examining the role faith plays in an interfaith learning experience, knowledge can be added to adult education's conceptions on religion and spirituality and their impact on adult learning.

This study has rich rigor through the combination of two theoretical constructs, prolonged time spent in the field and the variety of data generation and analysis procedures. Sincerity is accounted for through the researcher's reflexivity and reflectivity throughout the study, discussed in more detail below. Credibility will be gained through thick description of the case and triangulation of data sources, also discussed in more detail below. I hope to achieve resonance with later studies through transferability of findings. I followed ethical guidelines by attending to relational ethics with my participants and the situational and contextual ethics of my research site. Finally, this study has meaningful coherence through transparency of research goals, use of appropriate methods to achieve these goals, and coherence between "literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other" (Tracy, 2010, p. 840).

Finally, it is important to note the trustworthiness of the study. The first is this document, which outlines the procedures used in an effort to keep as detailed of a record

on the process of the study as possible (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) explained additional trustworthiness methods attempt to remove errors and mistakes from transcription during the transcription process and keeping the definition of codes up to date and clear throughout the analysis process (p. 203). Both of these methods was used during the course of this study. The section below outlines how triangulation, reflexivity, and member checks were used in this study.

Methodological Triangulation

Qualitative researchers often use a variety of methods when they collect and analyze their data. This use of multiple methods is often an attempt to secure the most well-rounded and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of concern (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 5). Based on the constructivist paradigm that is at this study's foundation, obtaining some sort of pure or objective view of the experience of interfaith dialogue is not the goal. Rather, through the use of multiple methods of collection the various viewpoints and understandings of the experience can be patched together from the participants. Rather than converging, the various data collection methods added complexity to the study and triangulation in this way "gets away from the idea of convergence on a fixed point and accepts a view of research as revealing multiple constructed realities" (Seale, 1999, p. 474). Accordingly, the "combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 5).

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explained that "triangulation is the display of multiple, refracted realities simultaneously" (p. 5). When each of these realities become clear, they

offer a view of reality that is more holistic. As Flick (1998) argued, triangulation used in this way "increases scope, depth, and consistency" in a study (p. 230). Because there is not one single method of research that can be used to capture the whole of human experience, triangulation is particularly valuable for qualitative research in which the researcher seeks to understand a particular facet or aspect of human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 12).

Several different approaches to triangulation were used in this study. First, method triangulation, (i.e. using focus group, interview, observation, and document collection methods) allowed for an enhancement of the rigor and quality through the use of several different data collection methods in examining the same phenomenon (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Secondly, data source triangulation was used in which data was collected from "different types of people" in this case including individuals and groups, "to gain multiple perspectives and validation of data" (p. 545). The data sources collected were invaluable in the production of the rich, in-depth descriptions included in the findings and case description. Finally, theoretical triangulation, which used two separate yet complimentary theories to guide analysis and "generate deep understandings and explanations" of the phenomenon in consideration (Pitre & Kushner, 2015, p. 285). These different theories assisted "the researcher in supporting or refuting findings" in the study (Carter et al., 2014, p. 545).

Reflectivity and Reflexivity

As the instrument in this qualitative study, my own preconceptions and viewpoints directly impacted the collection and analysis of data for this study. Due to the interpretive nature of qualitative analysis, "research is an interactive process shaped by

one's own personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 5). Recognizing and clarifying this bias is one way that the quality of this study was increased. My own beliefs about the importance of conversation and dialogue in conflict resolution fuel this study. In personal relationships, societal interactions, and even fictional narratives, an inability to talk with another people often leads to strife, a societal problem that causes me to feel anxious and stressed in my own life. I have learned that dialogue is vitally important based on my own experiences with miscommunications and this belief plays a key role in my interest and motivations in working with my topic of research.

Throughout the course of this study, I wrote memos, both reflective and reflexive. To offer some clarity on the difference between the two positions, being reflexive in research means that the researcher works to examine and note themselves within the research process, "studying ourselves as we study our topics, participants, and settings" (Preissle & deMarrais, 2015, p. 190). Reflectivity on the other hand, is a process of reflecting on one's actions and behaviors as a researcher to understand how they impact each phase of the research process (Preissle & deMarrais, 2015). On the point of reflexivity and reflectivity in qualitative research, Peshkin (1988) wrote:

> When researchers observe themselves in the focused way that I propose, they learn about the particular subset of personal qualities that contact with their research phenomenon has released. These qualities have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement. If researchers

are informed about the qualities that have emerged during their research, they can

at least disclose to their readers where self and subject became joined. (p. 17)

Maxwell (2013) explained reflective memos can take a variety of forms, but what

is important is that they document ideas and facilitate reflection throughout the research

process. What is more, Maxwell equates not writing memos with research Alzheimer's

because a researcher may not remember important insights when looking back on the

data collected. He wrote, "when your thoughts are recorded in memos, you can code and

file them just as you do your field notes and interview transcripts, and return to them to

develop the ideas further" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 20).

With this in mine, not only did these memos serve the purpose of encouraging

self-reflection throughout the course of the study, but they also served an important

analytical role. The topic of this research is how adults learn, possibly transformatively,

through interaction and dialogue with member of faith traditions different from their own.

To understand learning within the context of interfaith dialogue, I attempted to use

Martin Buber's theory of the movement between I-It and I-Thou relationships for

guidance. As I conducted this research, learning in the data generation and analysis

processes, my own relationships with my participants moved along this continuum. As I

was able to document this movement throughout my study through memoing, I can here

note how it impacted the quality of my research, particularly my efforts to maintain

ethical relationships with my participants. These efforts guided how I engaged with them

throughout the interviews, observations, focus group, and member checking session and

in my data analysis approach. To discuss my reflexive analysis throughout this study, I

present below my subjectivity statement.

Subjectivity statement.

Since I started my undergraduate studies in 2005 I have been interested in studying religions and learning how people incorporate religious teachings into their lives, wanting to know not only what people believe to be true because of their religious upbringing, but also what they see as wrong or false and what they see as valid sources of knowledge in the world. I was raised in a Presbyterian household, something that influenced the way I learn from the world around me as well. I was also taught that knowledge comes from many sources and embraced the various fonts of knowledge within my educational experience. As I have grown older and continued my studies, I came to the belief that it is not God that determines which knowledge of the world or viewpoints of reality are valid, but mankind. For me, this makes faith and its relationship to knowledge a fascinating aspect of human nature. In many cases, this relationship has influenced people in determining what aspects of human society or human knowledge should be embraced and what should be shunned. This knowledge must also be accounted for in this study because in researching matters of faith, my opinion of another's faith tradition or beliefs could greatly influence my interpretation of the data and my findings.

In teaching religion in higher education, I spent much of my academic career fleshing out and developing confidence my own worldview because I believe confidence in what I believe enables me to present a relatively objective viewpoint of differing belief systems to my students. I say "relative objectivity" because I think it is impossible to hold truly objective knowledge about anything, here referring again to the paradigm of critical

realism in this study. Each person has his or her own set of experiences and beliefs that influence how we learn from and perceive the world.

My desire to strive for such an objective view in my scholarship of of various religious traditions across the world stems from a genuine interest and acceptance of the possible validity of each. This acceptance comes from my beliefs in mankind's inability to know the absolute nature of objective reality surrounding us; thus, I have a very analytical way of examining and learning about the teachings, practices, historical development, cultural context, and societal impact of religious traditions. This analytical scrutiny could be deemed disrespectful of the traditions of my participants. Throughout my study then, it was important for me to continue to maintain respect in my fascination in what religious traditions hold. I used this as motivation for my research and engagement with the members of my case.

Throughout the course of this study, I continued to learn about my own interests and motivations in pursuing the scholarship of adult learning within interfaith and intercultural interactions. I hold an insistence in the necessity of dialogue to work to resolve conflict and a desire to better understand how an adult's religious beliefs impact their ability and willingness to learn with and about other religions. In my academic future, I will likely continue pursue my endeavor to know how one's faith and beliefs impact their learning and engagement with people and society, as well as how their learning experiences in turn influence their worldview.

Member Checks

A final method used to improve the quality of the study was member checking. Creswell (2014) explained the process of member checking as a way to "determine the

accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate" (p. 201). Roulston (2010) described membership validation as being done through a variety of methods. In this study, member checks were completed at a variety of stages. First, I offered participants the opportunity to review fieldnotes and transcriptions of their interviews. Only one individual from the larger group meeting requested seeing either of these.

Second, on February 14, 2017 I met with eight of the nine interview participants in this study to present initial findings written up in the form of a brief memo. Participants offered their thoughts, affirming, editing, and enhancing my initial assessment. As the site description and each findings chapter of this manuscript were written, each was sent to the nine interview participants (the site description was also sent to the tenth, Thomas) for their review. Comments and suggestions that were emailed to me, either noted in the body of the email or on the written draft, were considered for inclusion of the final draft of each chapter. In most cases, all of the participants commentary was included in the write up, this following Roulston's suggestion that in many cases differences that emerge between the researcher's and participant's interpretations may be added into the final report (p. 85). Member checking is a way to ensure study quality by checking to be sure the researcher's understanding of the participants' experiences is accurate (Roulston, 2010, p. 87).

Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of this study lie primarily in its design. By being able to use a variety of data generation methods, the study has high levels of rigor and quality. These

different methods allow for a better view of the interfaith dialogue group as a whole because they offer a look at participant experiences from several different vantage points. Additionally, this study's conceptual framework was created through the combination of two different theories, theories that, separately, are often used to study participant experiences of interfaith dialogue. The combination of the two theoretical lenses allows for a more detailed analysis, an analysis that is further strengthened and supported through the two separate analysis methods.

By interviewing each participant three times, this study design allowed the researcher to collect a large amount of data in which participants chronicled their experiences in the interfaith dialogue group over a long period of time. Since observing the group for such a long period of time was not possible, these interviews provide a look into the long-term effects of participation in interfaith dialogue. Thus, the combination of extended interviews, observations of both steering committee meetings and the large group monthly meetings, a focus group with the steering committee members and document analysis provided an intimate look at this study's case that is long-term and based in the experiences of the participants.

While the researcher spent seven months in the field for this study, a primary limitation is in the sample. Members of the interfaith dialogue group chosen as the case for this study mostly identify with similar political orientations. In order to better assess the conflict resolving and transformative learning potentials of such an experience, a study in which participants come from a wide variety of political orientations would have been stronger. As is, each of the participants in interfaith dialogue joined due to a genuine interest in the other and a mindset already willing to tolerate their religious other.

A second limitation comes from the participant observations conducted in this study. While the researcher attempted for as much "unobtrusiveness" as possible (Spradley, 1980, p. 48), the presence of the researcher could have impacted the way participants engaged with each other during the meetings. The impact of the presence of the researcher could not be helped, however, and as such, a role of "passive participation" was chosen (p.59). Additionally, unlike the steering committee meetings, the large group monthly meetings could not be audio recorded and much of the dialogue recorded in these observations are in the researcher's attempt to follow Spradley's "verbatim principle" which states, "the enthnographer must *make a verbatim record of what people say*" (p. 67; emphasis in the original). While the researcher attempted to record as much verbatim discussion as possible, recording everything was impossible and less was recorded as would have been so with an audio recording. However, it is possible that audio recording itself may have caused additional limitations in that members may have behaved differently than normal if the meeting had been recorded.

Summary and Conclusion

This document outlined the methodology and methods that were used in this case study. Under a paradigm of critical realism, using a realistic ontology and a constructivist epistemology, this study used naturalistic methods to generate data. Using ATLAS.ti (version 7), these data sets were then analyzed thematically. As a secondary method, conversation analysis was used to further understand the interactions of interfaith dialogue in action using audio recordings of steering committee meetings. Insurance of quality and rigor was done through a combination of methods triangulation, reflective and reflexive practice, and member checks.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEXT: THE INTERFAITH TRIALOGUE GROUP OF ABRAHAM COUNTY

Introduction

In the worldwide struggle against religious conflict, many scholars in fields such as interfaith studies, theology, religious studies, communication, and conflict resolution propose interfaith dialogue as a promising method to connect members of various faith traditions and possibly even solve religious conflict. However, very little empirical scholarship investigating interfaith dialogue groups exists. In what has been done, scholars have primarily examined the immediate outcomes of interfaith dialogue groups with little focus on what occurs during dialogue sessions and or the long-term effects of participation in these groups. This study seeks to contribute to current scholarship by helping to fill these gaps in scholarly knowledge.

The purpose of this study was to explore a community-based interfaith dialogue group between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults, examining both the process and results of meetings to understand if and how perspective transformation of different faiths occurs through interfaith dialogue. The research questions guiding this study are:

4. What happens when Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults engage in interfaith dialogue?

5. How do facilitators of interfaith dialogue prepare for and guide dialogue sessions?

6. In what ways, if any, does interfaith dialogue foster perspective transformation in regards to the religious other?

The following chapter includes a detailed description of the context of this study, an interfaith "trialogue" group in the southeastern United States. This chapter is organized into three sections: 1) an illustration of a typical interfaith trialogue meeting; 2) a description of the context of the trialogue group including its history and development, meeting structure, and purpose; and, 3) an explanation of the fluid character of the group. Each section will be presented in detail.

The Interfaith Trialogue of Abraham County: A Meeting Illustration

By 6:15 PM in late January of 2017 the sun has completely set when I arrive at the Synagogue for the monthly meeting with the Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham County. I park my car and get out into a cold, dark evening. As I walk around the Synagogue to the side entrance that leads down to the fellowship hall, I see Phoebe[2], one of the group's Catholic members, and a few others providing parking guidance for arriving members. I wave, stopping to say hello, then walk down the stone steps to the fellowship hall, entering the Synagogue. The room has white walls, a tiled floor, and is much warmer than outside. It is set up with about 35 grey folding chairs organized in a large circle; these chairs are all filled by the time the meeting begins. A few other members have already arrived, Claudia, Mary, and Bethany, a few of the group's Protestant Christian members and Ezekiel, a Reform Jew. We greet, I answer questions about my drive, how things are going in Athens, and what I'm thinking of the sessions so far. I choose a place to sit in the circle that gives me a view of the door and the whole room. I look around and notice the Torah and a copy of the Jewish calendar on the wall.

As members arrive they mingle and exchange small talk. Their greetings have an easy, natural feel to them. They say hello and catch up by asking questions about

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[2] Pseudonyms are used throughout this manuscript.

families, jobs, and anything that might be new in their lives. I can hear Claudia and

Phoebe laughing together as Claudia says, "I'm not quite ready for tonight, but I'll be a

good moderator!"

Ezekiel and Mary are talking about rituals in Judaism while looking at the

Hebrew Bible. Ezekiel's explanation begins with, "Well, it's a blood sacrifice…" the rest

is lost to the conversational din in the room.

Khadija and Yusuf, two members from Abraham County's mosque, are looking

over the handout with the passages for discussion this evening. Khadija looks to Yusuf

and says, "Is this a different translation? From a reading perspective, I think this one is

easier."

At 6:30 PM Claudia calls the session to order, standing in front of her chair across

the circle from me. She introduces me and heads turn my way. I stand too. I explain who

I am, the purpose of my study, what I'm hoping to learn, and request consent for my

observation of the evening. I walk around the room, passing out copies of my consent

form, and sit quietly when I finish, opening my computer to take field notes of the

session.

Claudia, still standing, begins, "Welcome everyone, we're glad you're here! I'm

Claudia, I think a lot of you know me from my emails that I send relentlessly;" this is

greeted with laughter from the group. Claudia sits and invites other members to introduce

themselves. Introductions move around the circle as participants offer their name and

religious affiliation. While there are people from the mosque and synagogue in

attendance, the majority is Christian, representing denominations such as Baptist,

Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Associate Reformed Presbyterian, and Catholic. After

introductions, Claudia welcomes announcements from group members. We are reminded of the Open House at the mosque by Yusuf, seated farther down to my right. Matthew, several chairs down to my left, gives the group a link for a website he found on interreligious dialogue. The interfaith discussion officially begins with a prayer, led by a Methodist minister, asking for love, peace, and learning.

At the end of the prayer, Claudia explains the structure of the meeting in looking at sacred scriptures from each tradition, "We take turns, each speaks for about a half an hour and we try to wrap up by 8:30." She presents the evening's topic, "Tonight's topic is really interesting to a lot of us, life after death. Matthew brought it up and he sent out some good information." As I look around, I notice that several members are pulling out printed copies of the readings Claudia emailed the night before, or hard or electronic copies of their own.

Matthew begins the session by reading passages from the copy of the New Testament he is holding in his lap. He reads about life after death, orating several passages from the second half of the Book of Revelation. He says, "From a Christian perspective, Revelation tells us more about Heaven than any other scripture. For me, Heaven is getting to know God and to be with God. There will be no sin there. A few weeks ago, Khadija talked about *jihad* being an internal struggle with self and sin, and, I can't imagine it, but there will be no such struggle in Heaven."

Claudia invites others to speak by asking what their perceptions of Heaven are from a Christian perspective. She shares her thoughts on Heaven, describing memories of watching cartoons and how Heaven was portrayed with pearly gates, clouds, and St. Peter

as a gatekeeper. "These are folkloric or cultural things our Christian faith has led us to believe about Heaven."

Simon, a Christian member, reads Philippians 1:23 in which an imprisoned Paul wrote, "I am hard pressed between the two, my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." From Matthew 24:31 he reads of the Resurrection, that "the Son of Man… will send out his angels with a trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other." He speaks for some time, "In Heaven, there will be an eternity of things to experience and learn – that's gonna be fun!" I look around and see some members are leaning forward in their chairs, others follow along in their own copies of the New Testament, and a few sit with bowed heads; all appear to be listening and engaged.

Claudia takes the floor by explaining the perspective of a period of suspension until the Second Coming of Christ, thickening Simon's reading by teaching about the context of the scripture and the Christian beliefs it informs. The conversation flows through various attendees across the room. Mary asks about descriptions of Hell. Heads move to Christine, another Christian member, who from across the circle asks about the difference between the Catholic and Protestant views of Heaven and Hell. A few chairs down, Phoebe answers, building on Claudia's comments and introduces the idea of Purgatory, which in early Catholicism was understood as a time of purification before entering the presence of God in Heaven.

Daniel, his legs crossed, hands folded in his lap, and seated comfortably in the chair to my right, thanks everyone who has spoken. He says, "This has been very eloquent and I've learned a lot, that point of suspension, I've never heard that. The

elephant in the room, and we're not going to solve this tonight, is how do we get there. The getting there and the choices one makes. Is it strictly deeds? Is it faith? What are some similarities and differences between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam?"

There is a moment of silence as members look around at others in the room, waiting for someone to offer the first answer. I find myself looking around, my fingers paused on the keyboard, waiting too. Claudia breaks the silence and replies, "What you're talking about is Grace and works. Yeah, I think you're right, human beings believe various things. There is some emphasis in Christianity that much of it is Grace and you don't know if you've been chosen to receive this Grace."

Mary adds, "I've got a lot of scriptures here from John that say if you believe you will have eternal life, it's not by works alone. If you believe it's by the Grace of God."

Daniel asks, "Wait, believe what? Specifically believe what? We just need to put it out there."

Mary says, "Belief in Jesus Christ" at the same time Simon says, "Jesus Christ, that He died for us." Mary adds that it's belief "In Christ and that He is God."

Claudia regains the floor, breaking in with, "Let's shelve that. Jesus and His role in salvation is a bigger topic, tonight should just be what is Heaven and Hell, not how you get there."

At 7:09 PM Claudia turns the discussion to Judaism. Unlike Christianity and Islam, very few sacred texts in Judaism discuss the afterlife. There is no Torah to read aloud. When I had heard the topic last week, I wondered how the Jewish conceptions of life after death would be presented. Daniel begins by talking about the history and development of conceptions of the afterlife in the Jewish narrative. He says, "This will be

the shortest segment. I'll say as best as I can and Ezekiel will correct me and Isaiah will

finish it up. I won't talk much, but I'll say how this narrative came to be because it wasn't

always there. In the Torah, there is less of an abject mention of what happens after you

die, there's pretty much none."

When Daniel finishes, Ezekiel, seated to the right of Daniel, takes up the

explanation. He tells the group that once Rabbinic Judaism began, "the rabbis tended not

to describe it in great detail. It was a time of bliss and judgment. There is a certain

vagueness of what Heaven's like, maybe because it's like trying to explain what God's

like which is hard to understand." Ezekiel cites the Zohar and the Kabbalah, noting that

those books have some of the greatest influence on mainstream Jewish belief of the

afterlife. He finishes with, "even today, some Jews believe in Heaven, some do not. We

know that Heaven is good, but we don't know much about it. Probably we can't know

about it."

After Ezekiel stops speaking there are a few questions from Christian group

members about the concept of reincarnation, what sitting *shiva* is, and how long the

period of mourning lasts. A brief moment of silence falls across the group. Claudia fills

it, asking Isaiah if there is anything he would like to add.

Isaiah, a few chairs down to the right of Ezekiel, has been quiet so far in the

meeting. He sighs, straightening in his chair. "Within Judaism, there's a variety of

belief," he beings. "The life here is the anteroom to Heaven, the afterlife. Everything we

do here is preparation and we should be following the *mitzvot,* all 613 of them. The name

of the game is to do everything that the Bible describes that we should do. At the other

end of the continuum are folks, more like us, who believe that our task is *tikkun olam*, to

heal the world, which is not necessarily following the *mitzvot*, we don't always follow the rules but we do believe in social justice activities. We believe that if we die, the work we did in healing the world would be more important than following all the commandments. So, there's a real tension between those two dynamics."

There is a brief pause. Isaiah continues speaking and proposes some difficulties Jews have in understanding Christian conceptions of who enters Heaven and Hell. When the clock reaches 7:37 PM, Claudia calls an end to the discussion of Judaism and orients the conversation to Islam. Harun, a member of the local mosque, stands and walks around the circle, passing out a handout with a brief outline of major beliefs in Islam on the afterlife. The title of the handout is "Life after death in Islam" and has 5 lines of writing:

What is death (small and big)

Preparing the deceased for burial. (Wash, prayer, burial)

In the grave

What happens between the time in the grave to the day of judgment

Life after judgment day either in heaven or hellfire

Harun narrates, "It says in the Qur'an that every soul will taste death. We are counting on God's mercy in the end. It's how we reach the end. And we know that there is Hell and Heaven. As humans, we are not 100% perfect, so we have to pay for some mistakes we've made back before we reach Heaven. So, how long will we stay in Hellfire before you reach Heaven?" He moves through the main points on the handout, outlining major beliefs, comparing them to other points of view presented this evening. He explains why Muslims do not embalm their dead or use an elaborate casket. Daniel says, "That's

identical to the Jewish ritual." Harun pauses, nodding his head along with his wife, Khadija, seated beside him.

Harun provides a detailed rendering of what Heaven will look like, as described in the Qur'an. As he talks, I note people listening intently, again leaning forward in their seats or sitting with their heads bowed, hands folded, and eyes closed. Harun says, "In Heaven anything you can think of, anyone you want to see, anything you can desire will come to you. People, objects, food, meat. Someone talked about lamb. You say, I want to have lamb chops today. It will come to you. Whatever you desire will come to you. No hate, no sickness, no suffering. Regardless of where you are in Heaven you are happy with your location. We will see God every day and on Friday He will appear for everybody in Heaven."

Daniel looks to Ezekiel beside him and whispers, "this is fascinating."

After Harun finishes there is another moment of silence. Daniel breaks it, "Wow! I'm struck by a few things. First off, differences. One of the differences is the amount of detail that you shared and the certitude. I mean, you heard from Ezekiel, 'I don't know, but it's gonna be good'." Khadija, directly across the circle from Daniel, replies, telling Daniel that descriptions of Heaven and Hell appear in both the Qur'an and Hadith.

The discussion of the Islamic teachings begins to wind down and Claudia asks, "What's an appropriate way to wrap up? How's the spirit leading us?" People bow their heads; Phoebe ends with a prayer. Claudia says, "Go in peace." The group disbands and members mill around. As I save my notes and close my computer I look around. James, Isaiah, and Musa are talking together about the detailed descriptions of the afterlife held in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Several people approach Claudia, submitting their names

for the email list. I pack up, mingle a bit, say my goodbyes, and exit with the others

heading back into the dark, cold evening.

Context: The Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham County

The illustration above is representative of a typical meeting of the Interfaith Trialogue

Group (ITG) of Abraham County. The group refers to itself as a *trialogue* rather than a

dialogue because their members are from each of the three Abrahamic traditions –

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As Khadija explained:

> When we talk about trialogue we know we're talking about the three major and
>
> most well-known of the religions. And they're what we call 'People of the Book'
>
> because each of those faiths have received a book or written … words of God.
>
> And so that's what we call People of the Book.[3]

On how the term was chosen Claudia said it was, "As descriptive as we could come up

with. And is it perfect? No. 'Trialogue' is not a word, it's something that we just kind of

bastardized and we just use that. So, it's very imperfect and it's very us." With these

descriptions in mind, the term trialogue will be used to refer to the characteristics of the

case of this study, rather than dialogue, for the remainder of this manuscript.

The ITG began meeting regularly in 2002, when it was started by Thomas, a

member of the community who had formed "trialogue" groups twice before in other

locations. In 2011 Thomas moved from Abraham County and the group fell into a hiatus

period. When it began again three years later its structure and organization was different,

but the mission was the same. In this section, I will present in detail the history,

development, structure, and focus of the ITG.

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[3] Excerpts have been edited for clarity. Three periods (…) indicates that several words have been omitted; repetitions and words such as "you know" and "um" have been omitted.

A History of the Interfaith Trialogue Group: Beginnings

In 2002, after the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, Thomas, a Catholic lay minister and resident of Abraham County, began reaching out to community members, gauging interest in participation in interfaith dialogue. Thomas asked members of a few churches in the community, the county's mosque, and the county's synagogue, forming a group of about 10 people who met monthly. For Thomas, "the best way to understand any religion is not in a book. It's best understood by talking to people that practice that religion."

These early meetings were by invitation only, Thomas knowing that trust needed time to be nurtured among participants. Meetings began with members focusing on getting to know each other. Early topics were similarities between traditions, prayer, food, holidays, and music. When the U.S. entered war for the second time with Iraq in 2003, group activities expanded to include events like interfaith prayer vigils for peace. At monthly meetings, they discussed books they had chosen and visited neighboring faith communities. Thomas took up various roles during these meetings including teaching, facilitating discussion, or as a participant. As Thomas explained, it depended on the evening's activity, "I never tried to just do one thing and I don't want to be expected to be the same thing every time. I don't want people to expect that I'm going to be the one making all the time and the effort." Thomas' goal for the ITG was to:

> Cross the boundaries and to help people, this can be a huge source of conflict and
> it doesn't have to be. By beginning to understand each other we begin to create a
> better peace where we are and that has effect everywhere else… My broad agenda

is the more we could understand each other I think there can be a better peace in the world. Even though it doesn't always look like that.

Thomas attempted to design the monthly meetings in a way that would encourage participation from a diverse group of people. He said, "A lot of times it's on a specific topic or issue, a specific holiday or musical performance but to try to make as much time for discussion and dialogue in general." Thomas explained that starting with specifics enabled the conversation to eventually move to the more general. By formatting the dialogue session in this way, he was attempting to embrace the richness in the specific differences of each tradition:

> I want to celebrate the differences and for people to learn and understand all the different ways that people practice all these different religions and live all these different religions. And whether you're okay with the fact that we don't all worship the same God or not, that's never something that's important to me. What's more important is to understand what's different about each person, about each faith.

To accomplish this, he used various methods. At times they would read scripture together or they may begin with personal anecdotes about individual experiences of God and discuss who God is to members of each faith.

Members of the early years of the group who are participants in this study include Daniel, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, Jews from the county's only synagogue; Luke, Matthew, Phoebe, Christians of the Presbyterian, Associate Reformed Presbyterian, and Catholic congregations; and Harun and Yusuf, members of the only mosque. Daniel described early sessions saying, "Thomas had a curriculum more or less… He was able to run

interference and he was a facilitator. Not uncritical, he did not come to the table with an uncritical eye about Christianity… He was a very fair minded person." Harun explained, "For maybe a year or so or three years maybe we didn't talk anything except the fundamentals of each religion and the basics." Isaiah said:

> We would decide on a topic and have the Christians, the Muslims, and Jews articulate the viewpoint that was commonly held in their religion… So we might pick a topic like a holiday, so one night might be the Christian interpretation of Christmas and we would have the opportunity to talk and ask questions.

A powerful and distinguishing factor of these early meetings is in their location. Abraham County is the home of a smaller town located in the southeastern U.S. While interfaith dialogue organizations on college campuses or among theologians and academics are becoming more common, it is much less likely to find a similar group that is community led and oriented. The population of Abraham County is mostly Christian of various denominations and many of its residents are conservative in religious and political orientation. Even with this conservative leaning of the county, the ITG has not experienced pushback or discrimination. From its inception in 2002, Thomas worked to make larger meetings and the group public and noticeable in the community. He described his reasoning for this saying:

> For us to have a safe place where other Christians and other people could express their own beliefs and their own perspectives was very valuable. That's why I always tried to be as public as possible with it so people can find us that way.

This public orientation led to a greater presence of the ITG in the community of Abraham County and, it is possible, directly influenced its growth and development in the 15 years since its launch in 2002.

In 2011, Thomas moved out of Abraham County and left the ITG behind. He expressed sadness in moving, but "knew it [the ITG] would continue because it wasn't my group, it's the [ITG] and had all kinds of people that were willing to keep it going." This is exactly what happened. In 2012, Claudia reached out to Isaiah to express solidarity and support from the Christian community to the Jewish community of the county. They met for lunch and discussed her sincerity in wanting to create an interfaith relationship between members of the two faiths. Following this meeting, Claudia and Isaiah met with Harun and Yusuf. In describing their meeting, Claudia said, "they told me at that time that they had had the interfaith trialogue, but it had fallen by the wayside and when Thomas moved away, that the impetus was gone." After several meetings with members of the original group, they decided to form a steering committee and bring the ITG back to life. In 2013 they restarted their monthly meetings.

While Claudia is the designated moderator and organizes the meetings through dedicated emails and reminders, the current leadership of the group is more communal than it was in the past. Claudia did not want to hold leadership power on her own, and encouraged a more collective engagement. The steering committee, made up of Claudia, Phoebe, Matthew, Daniel, Isaiah, Harun, and Yusuf, meet once a month to plan the larger group meetings, typically one week prior. They choose a topic for discussion, determine the moderator, and set the direction for the upcoming session. The group has continued to have a public face in the community through activities and educational events with

Abraham County's residents such as open houses at the local mosque, a 5K Peace Walk through the town, interfaith prayer sessions, and setting up discussion panels of religious leaders from outside the community. As a result of this public expression of interfaith solidarity, the group has grown to a regular number of between 30 and 40 participants at monthly meetings, averaging around 50 at their public events, showing renewed interest from the community.

The group has changed in several ways since Thomas began the ITG 15 years ago. While much of the message and purpose for meeting remains the same, there are several key differences in how interfaith dialogue is practiced now in Abraham County. In addition to the communal leadership structure, they now follow a methodology of scriptural reasoning. In the next section, I turn to the current structure of the monthly meetings of the Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham County.

The Current Structure of Trialogue Meetings

Since it was re-organized in 2013, the ITG has met monthly throughout the year except for the months during which Ramadan and Christmas occur. The general structure of a dialogue session follows the same ritual and routines. The room is typically organized with chairs in one large circle, putting everyone on equal footing dialogically. Claudia, the primary moderator, will call the session to order by welcoming everyone, thanking them for attending, and either providing announcements or offering a space for other group members to announce events in the community. At times, the sessions begin with introductions, with members providing names and religious orientation. The larger the group, the more likely introductions occur.

Claudia explains the structure of the sessions, which follows a method of interfaith dialogue called scriptural reasoning developed by Cambridge University. According to Cambridge's Inter-faith Programme, scriptural reasoning is a methodology in which:

> [P]articipants meet to read passages from their respective sacred texts. Together they discuss the content of those texts, and the variety of ways in which their traditions have worked with them and continue to work with them, and the ways in which those texts shape their understanding of and engagement with a range of contemporary issues. The goal is not agreement but rather growth in understanding one another's traditions and deeper exploration of the texts and their possible interpretations. ("Scriptural Reasoning Overview," n.d.)

Participants may continue to reference sacred texts, either reading passages or citing them, to support their commentary, and many bring print or electronic of scripture with them.

The primary facilitators of discussion during ITG meetings are members of the steering committee. As a whole, the facilitators are among the participants who are more willing to take the floor during the discussion. Other active participants are long time members such as Luke, a Presbyterian, Khadija, a Muslim, John, a Catholic, Musa, a Muslim, and Ezekiel a Reform Jew. In each of my observations, the interactions seemed to be respectful, inquisitive, and jovial as humor is used often to teach lessons, gently make points, and diffuse, or even pre-empt, any possible tension, with an overall air of a desire to learn.

Each member of the ITG knows the Covenant for discussion written by Thomas at the group's inception. The rules of ITG meetings stated in the Covenant are:

1. All [ITG] events and activities are meant to be times of learning and growth. This teaching cannot be done solely by the presenters and facilitators. We commit to learning and growing as much as we can, as well as teaching and sharing with others as much as possible. We commit to helping others do the same.

2. Conflict and confusion are inevitable components of learning and growth. We commit to working out our differences and diversity with respect for all participants.

3. We pray that we will be receptive to God's presence here. We commit to prayer during our times together, to listening to God, and to asking that God guide all of us to a greater understating of God's Truth. We commit to putting our prayers into action, and to allowing this Truth to be active in our thoughts, words, and actions as well.

4. These times together are done in a dialogical environment, in one of speaking AND listening. Our goal is never to monologue, or to attempt to convince others that our positions and beliefs are right and theirs are wrong, or good/evil, etc. We commit ourselves to listening to others as much as we speak to them. We commit to listening for God as well, in everything that is said, by ourselves and by others, as well as everything that is not said.

5. Any unnecessary conflict, provocation, side conversations and comments are not welcome here. We commit to putting our faith into action while here, as we do at

every moment- loving all of our neighbors, even ones we might perceive as our

opponents or enemies.

Before joining the ITG, members are emailed a copy of the Covenant to ground them in

the dialogic boundaries of the organization. Attending to rule number four in the

covenant, each participant is afforded an opportunity to speak. Throughout my time

observing this group, steering committee and more veteran members spoke more often

than others, but were conscientious, taking care to bring in newer members through direct

questions and discussion prompts. It seemed the group relies upon specific individuals to

continue and/or deepen the conversation. In what I observed, facilitators work to ensure

the discussion is generative, flowing through group members with purpose with little lag

time in the conversation. A detailed examination of the inner workings of ITG meetings

appears in Chapter 6 of this manuscript.

Focus and Purpose of the ITG

When the ITG was formed in 2002, the Covenant provided a focus for current

members and introductory guidelines for new members. For Thomas, learning about faith

from people who practice is the purpose of interfaith work. Each discussant comes with

different expectations and has something unique to contribute to group dynamics. They

have different worries, fears, concerns, and ideas of what they see as particularly

important to be addressed. This richness of religious diversity is channeled into the

overall purpose of the group which, broadly stated, is honest and thoughtful discussion of

various beliefs and traditions across the different faiths, listened to respectfully by others,

with an outcome of learning about others and oneself.

Learning to listen to each other was one of the first tasks of the group. As Khadija explained, the mindset of participants when learning how to listen is, "being respectful and coming with a positive attitude about what was being said and definitely no one was going to be telling someone else 'well that's really wrong' or accusing, or putting down someone else's belief and/or faith." Knowing one's beliefs were safe to be expressed has created a trustworthy dialogic atmosphere, described by Isaiah:

> Most of us understand that the spirit of trialogue is: I follow my religion because it speaks to me. I accept that other religions exist because they speak to their followers and there is no need for any religion to be dominant over another. And to be in the company of people who think and feel that way, is just very affirming for me.

Members of the ITG have created an atmosphere that encourages respect in listening and learning from one's religious other. The group works to have sessions that embrace differences of opinion and encourage an honest expression of faith. Luke affirmed this saying, "I find that even when we state things that I know are beliefs not held by all members of the group, at least my experience is the group respects those differences." ITG meetings are not a time for religious syncretism; similarities and agreement on matters of faith and belief are not to be forced or placed at the forefront of the conversation. Monthly ITG meetings are a time for building a community focused on peace, respect, and learning. In a steering committee meeting, Isaiah explained this focus:

> This is not a place for me to necessarily agree or disagree with you. This is a place for me to be part of the conversation and for everyone else to be a part of the conversation. And as a result we walk away with a deeper set of understanding of

each other and maybe even more questions which if we stay with them will

deepen our understanding.

Through work and dedication, long-term members have achieved these goals.

Yusuf stated, "It's a process, it's not rosy all the time. There are ups and downs, there are

challenges, so it's definitely a learning opportunity for all of us." Each member of the

ITG interviewed in this study expressed his or her own challenges. For Isaiah, at times

the conversation dives a bit too deep into the theology of other traditions and becomes

challenging for him follow. He said, "When they get into the real theological talk, I

sometimes get left on the side of the road." Others expressed that at times it is a challenge

for them to understand specific concepts and teachings of other religions that do not

appear in their own. Daniel, for instance, described concepts within Christianity, such as

Grace and the Trinity, with which he is "vaguely familiar," but even after years of

trialogue meetings he does not yet have a firm handle on. Harun and Matthew stated that

articulating theological differences or differences in belief regarding important figures

shared by several traditions is challenging. Claudia explained that it is important and

challenging to overcome preconceptions and biases one may have of other religions. She

asked herself, "What's my prejudice? What do I have to put aside? Is my love greater

than my own self-interest?"

The biggest challenge for the ITG is keeping the atmosphere one of learning and

respect, where proselytizing is not tolerated. Claudia said facilitators are "united to not

proselytize" and if it does occur, facilitators will step in to reorient the conversation.

Steering committee members explained that other than politics in the Middle East, which

Daniel described as "mine field of emotion," proselytization is the only out-of-bounds

topic for the group. In observed meetings, individual interviews, and the focus group this behavior was condemned. As Phoebe explained, "We are so sensitive to that [proselytization]… When all of a sudden it starts creeping in a little bit, I think all of us can feel it and we say, 'Oh no'."

When proselytization does occur, it has a profound effect on participants and these moments throughout the years were often cited as being particularly offensive. Steering committee members expressed that learning how to participate in dialogue without proselytization is something that takes time. They watch for this behavior closely work collectively to cull this behavior from group dynamics:

Isaiah: We've really got to be sure that we avoid the natural tendency to proselytize. To say to people here's how I believe and this is real important to me and I want you to believe it too.

Claudia: Forcing agreement. We're not here to agree.

Daniel: This happened only in an overt way a few times, fortunately. I think that's actually a credit to the group and our moderators and the culture we've created. And generally those who do are newer.

Claudia: Mm hmm

Daniel: Because they haven't listened quite enough and they –

Claudia: Then we ask them what's your point (laughing), where are you going with this?

Phoebe: You do a very good job in facilitating and moderating. You step in when someone needs to say something.

Claudia: Good

      Daniel: I think it's happened surprising little –

      Claudia: Yes

      Daniel: Under the circumstances and the potential.

Veteran members stated that in recruitment of new members, they make it clear this behavior is not allowed. In fact, veteran members do not invite individuals to join the ITG if they think these people would have difficulty following to this rule. As Isaiah explained:

> There are people in my congregation who have expressed interest in coming and I very gently discourage them because they're the kinds of people who would have a hands-on-hip conversation and would very likely wag a finger and say something like, 'you people.' So the bottom line I think is, these groups are not for everyone.

Long time members cherish the ITG and see the group as unique and worth protecting. They also understand the possible power in benefiting the community this group has, as Matthew expressed, "My experience tells me that these people are rare. And the more we learn and the more we experience one another, maybe we can take it to our different communities and start to change the way they think." The trust and relationships they have developed with the people in the group have taken time and effort on both sides. They see proselytization as a behavior that will disrupt and disturb the dynamics, foundation, and nature of the interpersonal relationships within the group.

For the members of the ITG, meetings should lead to a conversation of learning and respect. Matthew clarified:

There's a word going around and the word is "tolerance." Personally, I don't like

that word. It's got a negative connotation. Respect now, respect is a different

word and that kind of levels the playing field. To me, understanding and respect is

the desired outcome of this.

Here members of each faith feel embraced and valued in the knowledge they add. Phoebe

represented this mindset when she described what "interfaith trialogue" means to her:

I'm always just full when I leave because of the respect and listening that we give

to each other. And the learning, it makes you reflect on your own faith, grow in

your own faith, to polish. And you think, "How does this relate to mine? Where

do I see this in my faith? Where is God in all this?" And I keep saying that,

trialogue, the spirit, the God spirit, it just seems to grow and grow.

It is these feelings that the Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham County works to

support.

Final Thoughts and the Fluidity of the ITG

In the following chapters of this manuscript, I illustrate the results of data analysis

in three findings. In Chapter 5, I present the Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham

County as a community of practice. This community is characterized by its learning and

social components, a combination of which has directly impacted the continuance of the

group. In Chapter 6, I detail the Trialogue in action. Here I examine the actions and roles

of the steering committee and other key players as well as conversational strategies and

tactics used in discussions of religious belief. Finally, in Chapter 7, I explore the process

of transformative learning of long-time members of the ITG. This chapter follows the

steps taken in transforming I-It relationships between members of the group, making

room for I-Thou relationships to blossom. The final chapter of this manuscript considers the implications of this research for scholarship and practice.

Each of the analyses to come describes an important facet of a phenomenon that is constantly in flux. Very little about the Interfaith Trialogue Group is static and it is an organization that continues to ebb and flow with the changing tides of leadership and attendees. As such, the ITG is intended to be represented in this study as an ever evolving and dynamic entity. The learning and interpersonal relationships developing through the ITG can be symbolized with the metaphor of a dance in which each partner entices and inspires the other, leading to rich learning experiences and robust friendships.

Each aspect of the ITG examined in the following chapters is indicative of this character of interfaith dialogue (or in this case trialogue) as a continual process, one with ups and downs that requires effort and dedication to meet and attempt to understand alternate belief systems. Daniel eloquently described this:

> It resonates with my experience that… it has over time sometimes been two steps forward and one step back… There have been moments. There have been incidents. There have been things in the news, there have been whatever has happened. We had some difficult people at times over the years and so it has not been linear, like a stock market.

The give and take within the composition of the ITG also portrays the connectivity between individual events. They build upon one another in a way that generates a cumulative experience and adds a sense of community and relatedness between monthly meetings.

With the growth of the group, the time between monthly meetings has been filled with activities that bring together the ITG and the community of Abraham County. Matthew described the expansion of the ITG as having a powerful potential to influence the community of Abraham County. He described it as a ripple effect, like dropping a rock in a pond, where the learning and relationships built among the participants at the meetings spreads outside of the group to others. In the member checking session with the interviewees for this study, Daniel referenced Matthew's metaphor and said:

> The ripple effect can be small, or the ripple effect can be big. And if we have the courage and wherewithal… it creates that counter narrative to the people who are, in my view, among the worst among us… We want to try to find a way to make our community better and safer.

This study's interviewees described how other people in the community have become more interested in the group, have begun asking when the next meeting will be, and have become more attentive to the existence of the group in the community. They find this encouraging and noted this as an example of ways the ITG has possibly begun to change their own community. Each meeting of the ITG is lively and members describe a feeling of participating in a community of deep inquiry leaving with a sense of intellectual and spiritual fulfillment. The ITG has worked to create such a culture through 15 years of dedication and community engagement.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING AND BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH INTERFAITH

TRIALOGUE

Introduction

Over the last 15 years of practicing interfaith dialogue, the work of the Interfaith

Trialogue Group (ITG) of Abraham County has led to the development of an interfaith

community. Practitioners within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam come together to

discuss their religious beliefs and practices with a mindset of openness and learning. Both

similarities and differences between religious traditions are embraced. Learning about

similarities across traditions fosters a sense of camaraderie and the differences show the

richness and uniqueness of each faith. In between ITG meetings, members continue their

conversations through email, individual meetings, and various other activities.

By creating a space that welcomes religious diversity, members of the ITG are

building deep interpersonal relationships connecting the various communities of faith in

Abraham County. This space has the characteristics of a holding environment; members

feel safe and confident that their beliefs will not be criticized, degraded, or discredited.

Each time the ITG meets, these bridges are strengthened and at times extended to touch

other residents of the County. To study the phenomenon of interfaith dialogue between

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults, I gathered data through interviews, observations, a

focus group, and documents. I then employed thematic and conversation analysis

techniques to examine this data. Findings from this analysis are organized into three

chapters within this manuscript. The present chapter is organized into three themes: 1) the characteristics of the ITG as a learning community; 2) the characteristics of the ITG as a social community; and, 3) how building an interfaith community has sustained the ITG. In what follows, I present each of these concepts.

The ITG as a Learning Community

Following the first rule of their Covenant, the ITG is a community of continuous interaction and learning. There are four distinguishing characteristics of this learning community: 1) instrumental and communicative learning; 2) relational learning; 3) personal learning; and 4) transformative learning. Each area of learning is related to, dependent upon, and built on the others. Figure 2 below is a model that represents the relationship between each realm of learning. Each cog in the model is for one of the types of learning members of the ITG experience. Learning experiences move each cog, thus each type of learning is related to the ones that come before and after it. The following four sections work through each cog in the model, outlining the four realms of learning that occur during ITG sessions with respect to the data.

Instrumental and Communicative Learning

Mezirow (1996) defined learning as, "the process of using prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (p. 119). Meaning making in adulthood is complex and dynamic. Learners work to integrate a variety of experiences, beliefs, opinions, and knowledge into nuanced worldviews that frame their understanding and engagement with the world around them. Within the process of constructing knowledge, instrumental and communicative learning are integral components. According to Mezirow (1996),
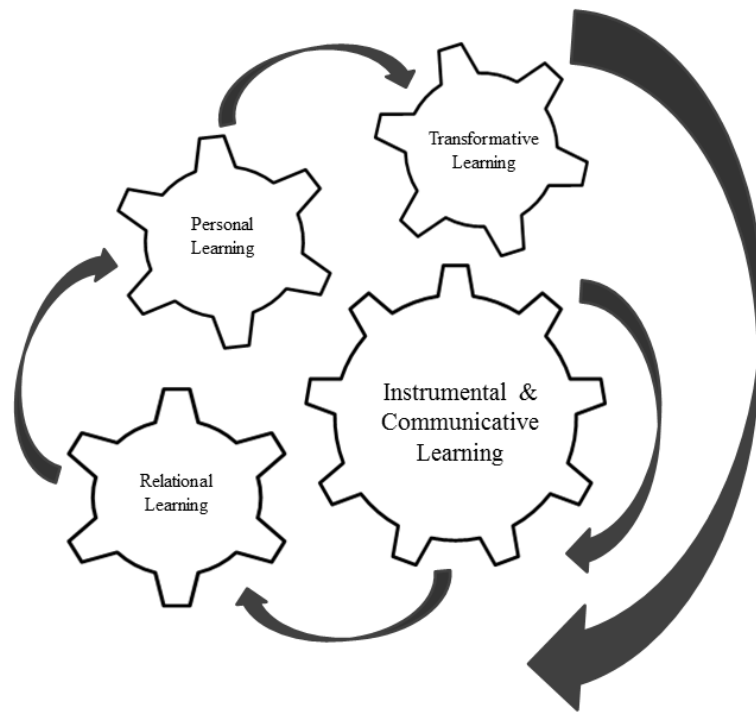
Figure 2. A Model of Learning during Interfaith Trialogue

instrumental learning "involves task-oriented problem solving with the objective of

increasing proficiency in performance" with "an assertion or implication that something

is true can be tested" (p. 120). In the context of the ITG, instrumental learning transpires

in combination with communicative learning, in which learners work at "understanding

what someone means when they communicate" (p. 121). This communication involves

"intentions, purposes, feelings, values, and moral decisions… In this kind of learning we

validate beliefs by assessing their justification… by engaging in discourse" (p. 121).

This combination of instrumental and communicative learning form the

foundation of the learning cycle. First, learning through dialogue is the primary mode of

learning. Second, participants expressed both learning about their religious other and the

"art of dialogue" (interview, Matthew, November 21, 2016) have been outcomes of their

experiences in the ITG. In several interviews, members explained how participating in the group has taught them to be better dialogue partners, learning dialogic skills such as listening to learn and not just wait to respond, hearing and interpreting questions as they were intended, and being open and honest in response. Yusuf described learning how to dialogue with one's religious other, saying it is "an experience you gain by having exposure to one another… by being submerged in the conversation rather than being or learn[ing] in an academic way" (interview, November 21, 2016). Isaiah noted to be good listeners and dialogue partners, "you not only have to be present, but you have to do it in a certain spirit" (interview, November 10, 2016). He said:

> This is a head, hearts, and hands enterprise. You've got to open your mind, you have to open your heart, and your behavior or your hands… because if you don't have the right feeling about others, and the right attitude… anything you say or do is going to reflect your position. (interview, November 10, 2016)

An outcome of this presence is mutual respect. Khadija said, "It makes me feel good to know that there are people out there who can be respectful and still talk about a very serious subject like religion… because I see examples of the opposite all the time" (interview, December 7, 2016).

Within the ITG, instrumental learning is primarily comprised of learning about the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam with a goal of increasing knowledge on major tenets and beliefs of each faith. In the monthly meetings, topics of discussion range between scripture, traditions, practices, history, and general beliefs held by members of each faith. Members with more "scholarly" knowledge teach others about the context and history surrounding the composition of certain scriptures and their

resulting contextual meaning. For example, Ezekiel is a participant who is often relied upon for this purpose. When discussing the concept of a covenant with God, Daniel asked Ezekiel to "do a little Midrash" before he offered interpretation of a specific passage (observation, October 17, 2016). Daniel was requesting Ezekiel to quote teachings from the Midrash, a collection of commentary on the Hebrew Bible dating back to before the second century CE, something that Ezekiel was capable of due to his exegetical knowledge of the Hebrew Bible.

For new members, instrumental and communicative learning often includes learning about similarities between traditions, a component integral to the learning community. When discussing the passages in the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament about Noah, Claudia turned the conversation to Islam, attempting to forge connections with Qur'anic scripture:

> Claudia asked, "Are there any stories of flooding in the Qur'an?" Yusuf answered, "Of course. There's the story of Noah in the Qur'an and it highlights the process when Noah asked his people to come back to God. And, of course we know the story from the Bible as well as the Qur'an." (observation, October 17, 2016)

Learning about similarities between religious traditions can be surprising and disorienting; it may force members to reassess what they thought they knew about other religious traditions, members of those traditions, or even how they understand and see themselves in their own tradition. A prime example of this comes from Daniel sharing an experience from one of his first meetings 15 years ago:

When I was saying goodbye to Yusuf after the first meeting that I came to… I

told him that there is something in the Talmud saying that when two people are

sitting across from one another and they're studying scripture with people… he

finished it and he said that God rests between you in this space. He knew that, and

he didn't know it was from Talmud of course, it was in the Qur'an… It stands out

as an example of how much we have to learn from each other 'cause he was

surprised to know it came from the Torah… It was like, what? It's in the Qur'an?

You're kidding me, that's Talmud, it's totally Talmud!... It couldn't be more

Talmudic. But it's in the Qur'an. (interview, October 31, 2016)

Through continued attendance of ITG meetings, members begin to see that

religious similarities are exceedingly prevalent. During meetings, members work to

create connections between traditions, synthesize what they've learned about each, and

construct interpretations of similar scriptures together. For example, in one meeting

observed for this study members discussed common characteristics of prophets such as

why they are chosen by God, how they often do not willingly accept their role, and how

each of the three traditions venerate many of the same prophets (observation, September

19, 2016). These discussions are jovial; members seem to enjoy identifying shared

meaning across the three religious traditions, such as when discussing how to know God:

Ezekiel said, "So I think that's a similar question, the answer is you can't see Me

[God] but you can indirectly know Me and My essence is love." Harun added,

"that's the beauty of the belief, you know that God, you can't see Him, but you

know He's around you… that's what the good feeling we have, when you have

the feeling, you feel like God is with you, you know?" Simon replied, "He knew

you before you were born," and Harun exclaimed, "Oh, millions of years ago!"

(observation, November 21, 2016).

The realization of how prevalent religious similarities are opens members up to the possibility that building relationships with the religious other is more accessible than they may have previously believed. For example, Claudia explained:

I'm fascinated how much Judaism influenced Muhammad and… there's so much Old Testament information in the Qur'an. And the characters! And it's astounding to me how many similarities there are between us. Jacob and Joseph and Adam and Jesus! Mary! Learning about Mary was really amazing, that they venerate Mary so much… And one thing is that the three of us all propound being kind and caring and taking care of widows and sojourners and the alien in your land and orphans. That there's a great deal of emphasis that God teaches us to take care of each other. And not to kill, not to harm. (interview, December 5, 2016)

Other topics of instrumental learning include characteristics of God and content of scripture. Some participants expressed a newfound respect for practices in other faiths, "[Daniel] was talking about Yom Kippur and if you have hurt someone you go to them and say, 'I'm sorry.' You don't just say, 'Oh God forgive me.' And I think, isn't that the greatest thing?" (Phoebe, interview, November 21, 2016). As another example, Yusuf explained how participating in the ITG has taught him about the nuances within Christianity, "All people, they may worship in one faith but they have different thoughts and different ideology and different ways to go about [it]" (interview, December 5, 2016). A willingness to forge new connections with, and to learn from, the religious other pushes ITG members into the second realm of learning, relational learning.

Relational Learning

Relational learning, the second realm of learning, develops out of the combination of instrumental and communicative learning. Hollingsworth, Dybdahl, and Minarik (1993) described relational learning as learning through relationship with both self and others, in which learners bring their own unique subjectivities and perceptions to the table. The learning environment in which relational learning occurs is one in which learners are open and receptive to others, goal oriented toward understanding and empathy, and hold "tension between subjective certainty and objective uncertainty," (p. 10). In learning through relationship with others, members of the ITG learn about who people are within their religious traditions. They begin to see other religious traditions through the eyes of practitioners, as Harun explained, "I wanted to know what other people think or how they practice or how they see… I wanted to hear from the main source, why do you think that?" (interview, November 10, 2016).

Relational knowledge is bounded by what individual adherents hold to be sacred and meaningful in their traditions. In her interviews, Claudia discussed a particularly meaningful learning experience she had with Khadija regarding her decision to wear *hijab*. Claudia learned how Khadija feels when following the dress code, a feeling that was contrary to common Western perception. Claudia said, "She wants to cover. This is how she wants to live her life… Here these women are covered, it actually frees them. They feel like it's freeing and that was a really strong idea that hit home for me" (interview, October 31, 2016). Relational learning enhances instrumental learning; the example above illustrates how participants gain a more personalized view of the experience of their religious other.

Within a model of scriptural reasoning, members practice relational teaching and learning by sharing what passages have personal importance to them, what meanings they derive from scripture, and what they find challenging in their own faith tradition. They explain how certain teachings and beliefs impact their daily and personal lives. For instance, in one monthly session participants discussed how reading the story of Joseph in the Hebrew Bible, Old Testament, and Qur'an taught them about relationships between siblings and the importance of forgiveness (observation, August 15, 2016). Another example comes from a steering committee meeting during which personal understandings of faith and prayer were discussed. The excerpt below is worth quoting in length as it represents each of the characteristics of relational learning noted above:

Matthew: I mean, the prayer changes your perspective. I think.

Claudia: It absolutely does.

Matthew: The thing – the most challenging thing for me is to pray for God's will no matter what.

Isaiah: So, explain that.

Matthew: Well you're going to trust God no matter what's happening in your life. I'm going to trust God. He's going to help me get through this.

Isaiah: You pray to understand God's will?

Matthew: To understand it, to experience it –

Isaiah: Yes.

Claudia: A lot of times patience is in there too.

Matthew: Yes.

Claudia: If you're going to pray for something, that is a lesson in patience a lot of times.

Matthew: Yeah, God's delay is not God's deny. That's the way Jesus taught us to pray. Pray the uh, the Lord's prayer.

Claudia: Right.

Matthew: Your will be done – your will be done. God's will done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. It's easy to say.

Claudia: Yes.

Matthew: It's more difficult to deal with because we want people in our family to be secure. We want them to be healthy. All of this is not going to happen.

Claudia: We want them to have faith.

Harun: The thing of it is, it's just prayer. I'm looking to do –

Matthew: I agree, right.

Harun: And never be impatient with him.

Matthew: Right.

Harun: I never ask how long it's going to take. Yeah, because a lot of people doing – why are you not answering me?

Matthew: People get it wrong.

Harun: As soon as you have a doubt in your mind when you stop praying to God that'll be the end of it.

Phoebe: What's the most difficult thing of course is what we, human beings, are going to do something about. But how some people can be so needy

just like the destructions our hurricanes and all. How they can hit such

an impoverished place, you say dear God I cannot understand this.

That's the big question –

Harun: Yeah. I mean, there's a reason, you might not know it now. I mean,

why take the life of infant, for instance. I mean, nobody knows.

Matthew: Sure.

Harun: He has a reason for it. We don't know it yet. Are we going to know it?

Maybe yes, maybe no, maybe never. (observation transcript, September

12, 2016)

In these intimate discussions, ITG members get a unique learning experience that

forges interpersonal relationships through direct connections with others. Empathy is

strengthened as members determine how another's experience relates to, or differs from,

their own. As Isaiah explained, he has developed greater empathy through a better

understanding of Islam:

I'm smarter about Islamic biblical interpretation. And more compassionate about

the plight that its adherents face for their beliefs. I better understand how the

Jewish experience is echoed in the Islamic experience and how the Islamic

experience is echoed in the Jewish experience… I live in my own world, as we all

do. And there's only so much that I can absorb in information, and also in pain

from other people. But the more I get in touch, the more I understand and feel and

empathize with other people, whose backgrounds are different than mine, the

more I'm humbled and grounded in the ebb and flow of life that goes on around

me. (interview, November 29, 2016)

An outcome of relational learning is that ITG members learn, and even feel confident teaching others, the nuances of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For example, Claudia taught a six week course on Islam at her place of work. She explained, "it [the ITG] helped me a great deal to understand Muhammad, Medina, Mecca, the *hajj*, their clothing, a lot of different things. It's been just a wealth of information, and knowledge, and understanding" (interview, December 5, 2016). It is this type of learning that sparks the ability to see the religious other for who they are rather than how their religious tradition may define them. With this clearer, unencumbered view, deep relationships can form. Luke explained this bond saying, "It's interesting, at times I feel more at home in the Trialogue Group than I do in church groups because I just get the sense that we're all saying the same thing, we are worshipping the same God" (interview, October 12, 2016).

Personal Learning

The third realm of learning that occurs during trialogue meetings is personal learning, arising through the intermingling of the previous two domains. Where relational learning rests in inter-subjectivity, personal learning is intra-subjective, characterized by learning about the self, one's own religious beliefs, and/or preconceptions and biases one may hold toward other religious traditions or its adherents. Khadija said she feels more assertive and confident talking in front of large groups of people, "I still don't like it all that much, it still makes me a little uncomfortable… but I'm much more confident than I used to be" (interview, December 7, 2016). Harun noted, "I didn't expect that I [could] be sitting or standing and talking about my religion in front of fifty people… but I did it" (interview, December 1, 2016). The empathetic growth described by Isaiah quoted above is also representative of personal learning; it is insight into his increased relational

knowledge. These revelations are particularly important because it is here that learning in interfaith trialogue truly becomes mutual; through the combination of instrumental, communicative, and relational learning personal learning is enhanced and members learn about themselves and their own traditions as they learn about and with others.

Personal learning in ITG meetings does not occur easily. The ITG has spent many years developing an environment characterized by safety and security in which members feel comfortable examining and explaining their own religious beliefs. As Isaiah said, "I'm with my friends and I'm comfortable and I'm glad and I feel safe enough to say the things I need to say" (interview, November 10, 2016). Members feel a sense of support, feeling secure in showing vulnerability; this leading to an ability and proclivity to practice critical self-reflection. In other words, members of the ITG do not feel a need to be defensive of their religious tradition and beliefs because they feel secure in the knowledge that when they express their beliefs these will not be criticized, discredited, or degraded. A prime example of this comes from Harun:

> When we go we feel comfortable to sit there and talk without feeling like someone is going to say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, what are you talking about? Are you crazy?" No, no. We never feel that way, me and Yusuf, we can say what we need to say without having any people looking at us like, "Yeah, right, you guys are crazy, why am I listening to you?" (interview, November 10, 2016)

This sense of safety is underscored by a high level of trust. Participants explained that developing trust between group members took time and effort but was integral to the success of the group. In sharing his early feelings with Muslim members of the group, Daniel described developing trust as a process:

I had to give up a little bit that they were genuine and representing a genuine

view. And that trust has evolved to where it's pretty absolute… I have come to the

view that they are authentic and representing what they want to be as an authentic

Islam here in this country. (interview, October 31, 2016)

Members cherish this trust. For example, Matthew explained, "It's so rare to be able to be

with a diverse group of people and have enough trust to talk about things that you're just

sometimes 180 degrees different" (interview, November 21, 2016).

With feelings of safety, members are more willing to be open and honest about

their beliefs and opinions. This openness encourages a willingness to be vulnerable in

discussing confusion or challenges one has with one's own religious tradition. It also

encourages members to participate in honest inquiry around traditions that are not their

own. Referring back to Matthew, he illustrated this in saying:

I am very comfortable… with these people, to tell them what I believe and to

challenge them and ask them questions about what they believe. "What does that

mean? Who's saying this? What's the setting?" And I don't do it to trip them up

or anything. I just want to know what they believe and I think they're comfortable

giving an answer. (interview, October 31, 2016)

In ITG meetings members respectfully challenge each other to more deeply learn about

the beliefs and traditions of other participants.

Within this space of safety and honest engagement members are encouraged to

critically reflect upon their own beliefs and opinions, at times simply to be able to clearly

articulate and explain them to others. Daniel explained, "I've done a lot of reading and

writing and research and things like that. [It] allows me to help convey it and teach it and

talk about it to other people" (interview, December 5, 2016). Members also may re-examine their own traditions' scriptures, this often leading to deeper understandings. Phoebe demonstrated this well saying:

> Hearing about the Jewish faith and tradition… it helped me understand more about Christian faith… It gives me a deeper understanding of the Christian faith, of why we do things, where it came from…. Just like the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, in Judaism they have the table fellowship, which is such a part of the religion. And I think, 'Oh, this is where we came from. And we see it in the scriptures, Jesus gathering his friends around and the things that happened at table… it means brotherhood, community, to sit down and eat with somebody. So, all of that tradition coming from Jewish roots comes to us today in our Christian worship and what's Catholic, being the center is Eucharist around the table. (interview, November 6, 2016)

These new and deeper understandings of faith are made more robust by learning about how other traditions are similar to, and different from, one's own. It is in embracing both the areas of similarity and difference that the final facet of learning, transformative learning, can occur.

Transformative Learning

The final stage of the learning process that occurs through interfaith trialogue is transformative learning. The previous forms of learning have led to this, a culmination of the learning process expressed through critical self-reflection and an openness to learning about and with others. The outcome of transformative learning in this context is one's worldview becoming more permeable and accepting of religious diversity. As Isaiah

noted, "I've learned about what our religions have in common and what they have in difference. It's real important that we not overlook the differences because that's what makes us unique. It's given me a more nuanced view of the world" (interview, November 10, 2016). Developing this new and more permeable worldview takes time, effort, and a willingness to challenge oneself to grow. Luke described this eloquently:

> I really do think it's when our beliefs and pre-set ideas are challenged that we actually learn something new. And it's hard, it's like muscles. You can't build muscle unless you stretch and strain and stress it and I think the same thing is true about ideas and beliefs. We don't change them easily and they don't expand easily. (interview, November 16, 2016)

As an outcome of this transformation, some members have begun to respect or even cherish tenets of other religious traditions. For example, Matthew said, "I've been to the mosque, I've seen them worship, I respect their desire to know God and to worship God. I respect their discipline… Five times a day they pray" (interview, October 10, 2016). Transformative learning ends the initial cycle of learning occurring in interfaith trialogue and sets participants up to re-enter the learning cycle with a new mindset. This mindset is characterized by a broader and more inclusive worldview where members have a willingness and openness to see their religious other in a new light, identified by Mezirow (1997) as a transformation of perspectives. Phoebe described learning through ITG meetings having an outcome that, "widens your perspective… it's just widened my perspective of religion, of faith… It broadens your faith tradition, it'll make you dig a little deeper into what you believe" (interview, November 6, 2016). Transformative

learning as an outcome of ITG meetings is a deep and nuanced process; thus, the process of transformation will be more fully examined in Chapter 7 of this manuscript.

The ITG as a Social Community

The second aspect of the ITG as a community is that of the social. Members take their deep, interpersonal relationships out of the ITG and into the community to, as Phoebe described, "show people that you can be open to each other" (interview, November 21, 2016). They see the group as having a role of community leadership by serving as a symbol of solidarity across faith traditions. Claudia explained, "Living in this town… we have to be leaders and to show other people the way of not fighting and not being fearful, contributing and participating, we have a common purpose with that" (interview, October 31, 2016). Group members expressed that presenting an example of how working with one's religious others can establish a norm of peace, learning, and understanding, as well as build relationships across boundaries of religious difference, is an important role of the ITG. Daniel described his participation as a way to get "boots on the ground, to use the phrase, is what it means to make our community better and the world, or my part of it" (interview, December 5, 2016).

For some members, building relationships with others of different faiths is one of the most important outcomes of their participation in the group. Long time ITG members discussed in their interviews that their relationships have become true and genuine friendships, for instance Claudia expressed, "these are my friends… and it just feels like extended family. It feels like family" (interview, October 31, 2016). Phoebe identified the interpersonal relationships as a primary reason she continues to attend; because of her relationships she feels like she can draw others in and "be a bridge to the greater

community and to our churches and friends" (interview, November 6, 2016). The greatest impact of the interpersonal relationships is in the influential role they play in the transformative learning process; as such their deep impact within that context will be considered in Chapter 7 of this manuscript.

Outside of the relationships between long time members, ITG participants hold more cursory interpersonal relationships. Isaiah explained:

It's the people you see once a [month] and most of them you don't have deep, deep relationships with, but the majority of them you're comfortable with and you feel good and glad to be with them… And there's always the potential for a deeper relationship but at this point, it's not there and no one's any worse for wear. (interview, November 10, 2016).

Members enjoy seeing others once a month, they catch up with them before and after the meeting, talking about family, jobs, etc. Matthew described the relationships with members of the larger group as "very friendly" and "very respectful" (interview, October 31, 2016). The level and depth of the relationships within members of the ITG varies across participants and is likely determined by the length of time and comfort level of engaging intimately with others.

The deep interpersonal relationships that have developed through time and close interactions are built throughout the learning cycle described above. Within their construction, a member moves along a continuum of depth throughout a mutual learning process. The deeper the relationship, the more likely members are to embrace others as they are and not as one expects them to be, expanding their worldview in the process. Members of the ITG see people, who may have seemed so different and alien to them at

first, as having common values and life goals. They are willing to bracket, or put aside, their biases and identity to open a space that openly hears the voice of the other, an immensely important tendency for members who feel their traditions are misunderstood or demonized through the media. For instance, the demonization of Islam in the media is why Harun is emphatic in encouraging other members of the mosque to be active in the community of Abraham County and the ITG:

> That's what I always tell people in the mosque, "Guys, we are in front of the gun. People see us, we have to act the right way, we have to act the Islamic way for people to see who we are." When you're in the mall with your wife beside you wearing the *hijab* they might stop you and ask you a question. Don't say, "Well I don't know," or get scared or "I don't want to talk about it." No! Talk! Explain!
>
> Give them a reason not to be scared about you. (interview, October 3, 2016)

Harun explained that he feels confident people in the community see who he is as contrary to misconceptions of Islam perpetuated by bad press. He said that when something violent or destructive happens in the world people come to him and say, "Why [are] those people not like you? What's the difference between you and them?" (interview, October 3, 2016). These descriptions present the deep impact of learning, enhanced by interpersonal relationships, between members of the ITG.

Members are attempting to bring this sense of community out of the boundaries of the ITG into Abraham County, hoping to improve relationships across various faiths within the community. They do this through organizing events for all residents of the county to attend. Members have organized or supported activities, such as a Walk for Peace, open houses at the mosque, and community prayer sessions. Daniel noted these

activities as helping the group "have a higher profile" which "would have been easy enough not to do," but that being active and visible "with all the risks that go with that" is something that was needed for Abraham County (interview, October 31, 2016).

By planning more activities than just monthly trialogue sessions, the group has begun to take the ideals they've developed through trialogue and apply them to the community at large. Isaiah said these activities keep the conversation going:

> [This] is what happens when you have a conversation. You have involvement of people, all stepping out of their comfort zones and all building new relationships that say, 'I want to look at the good in people and I want to find that good in people, rather than using a broad brush to vilify all the members of any given group.' (interview, November 10, 2016).

These types of activities reflect a purpose of religion, to feed the individual and private self spiritually in a way that leads to public service and engagement with the community. It is possible that through the development of relationships and learning with and about the religious other, the group is becoming a touchstone of interfaith engagement for the larger community of Abraham County.

Community Building Sustains the Trialogue Group

The Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham County became its own community through the combination of a safe and secure learning environment and intimate relationships developed over a considerable period of time. The learning process and subsequent social community examined above is what continues to keep members engaged. Therefore, this chapter ends with a presentation of the characteristics above as reasons members continue to participate in ITG events organized topically as: 1) a sense

of moral or spiritual responsibility; 2) continued learning; 3) increasingly deepening relationships; and 4) a feeling of participation in the group as a form of community service. I now consider each of these in detail.

A Sense of Responsibility

A sense of spiritual or moral responsibility is the primary factor leading to continued participation on the part of the long-time members. Every participant interviewed in this study expressed this feeling. They described feeling morally or spiritually responsible to participate in the group for several reasons. For instance, Khadija explained, "I feel like I need to do it so I can dispel some of the myths that people believe about women in Islam. That we don't have a voice, that we are suppressed" (interview, December 7, 2016). Yusuf said, "I feel like I need to do this… I am a bit responsible to share my thoughts and my feelings and my faith with the folks of the group; responsible to answer their questions and comments" (interview, December 5, 2016). Other interview participants noted that within their religious traditions they have a requirement to teach their religion and beliefs to others. Jewish participants cited the Talmud saying that if one knows Torah one should teach Torah. Muslim participants explained that by participating in the ITG they are fulfilling *da'wa*, or sharing Islam with non-Muslims. Harun said, "We have to play an important role in our faith from our individual self to our religion to show what our religion is, especially here… it makes me feel like I can serve a very small duty in my religion" (interview, December 1, 2016).

Participants indicated their membership in the ITG is responding to a sort of religious calling, as a kind of mission work to Abraham County. Claudia described this feeling saying, "I feel like I've been charged. It's on my heart" (interview, October 31,

2016). Daniel said participation as a mission, "I really feel this is some of the most important work what we have… Creating the counter-narrative and having the relationships is some of the most important work that I'll ever do" (interview, October 31, 2016). Isaiah cited the Torah when disclosing feelings of pride in participating, "Seek peace and pursue it, that's from Deuteronomy. It's an obligation… this is my small way of doing my little bitty share" (interview, November 29, 2016). This reaction to participating in interfaith trialogue is particularly significant as it represents the deep impact this type of experience can have on the moral and spiritual development of an individual. It shows the depth of feeling and sense of spiritual fulfillment that can be a result of participating in interfaith trialogue. This sense of responsibility underlies the following three reasons for remaining in the group.

Continued Learning

Several interview participants expressed that they keep coming because it's fun or because they're learning. While the cycle of learning was described in depth above, here it is prudent to briefly present learning as a motivation for continued participation. Luke explained a dual commitment in attending ITG meetings, "I'm committed to the group both for my own learning but also I'm committed to the public witness that it makes" (interview, October 26, 2016). Matthew mentioned learning about faith, "I'm interested in how they see their faith and the fact that I'm seeing it so counter to what they're seeing" (interview, October 31, 2016). Yusuf said he keeps coming because of an "eagerness to learn and knowledge; at the same time the eagerness to share my faith" (interview, November 21, 2016). Isaiah insightfully expressed what it is about learning about other faiths that encourages him to keep attending meetings:

I feel compelled to go not just because I like the people, I could go to a bar if I

wanted that. But this is about the content and the quality of the conversation and

the process of mutual exploration and discovery that I find really engaging…

Building cooperation, collaboration, decision making, removing hierarchies, and

so on and I think we do that in our group and the net effect is that we are really

breaking boundaries for each of us and all of us in developing new understandings

of our neighbors. (interview, November 10, 2016)

Deepening Interpersonal Relationships

Coupled with learning and feeling a responsibility to participate, other interview

participants in this study explained that they continue to attend ITG meetings because

they have deep friendships with the people in the group and they enjoy continuing to

engage with them in this setting. When asked why she has been an active member for 15

years, Phoebe said, "I think relationship. It always comes back to something personal. It's

just the good friends that we have met along the way and just wanting to be with them"

(interview, November 6, 2016). Over time, relationships between long time members

have become robust and intimate. Isaiah said through what he's learned he now has "a

more nuanced view of the world and its politics" and "I've developed some very nice

friendships with people who I otherwise would not have met and known" (interview,

November 10, 2016). Khadija described the ITG as its own community when asked why

she continues to attend:

It's almost a sense of now this has become a new community and there's a sense

of comfort and seeing the same people on a routine basis. Sometimes we have

new people that come and it's nice to have a fresh perspective as well. But for me,

the thing that I enjoy most is learning about other faiths and learning about the individual people who are in those faiths. (interview, November 14, 2016)

Participation as Community Service

Finally, some participants stated participating in the ITG is a form of community service. Participating in this group shows their commitment to one another and to their community at large. For Claudia, helping people in her life who may have been marginalized or ostracized is something she feels is imperative, "If I ever had any kind of power or influence that I would use it to help and protect and to… make a stand for them" (interview, October 10, 2016). Yusuf explained that participating in the ITG and bringing it into the eye of the larger community "strengthen[s] the community bond… we have developed [a] format where people can come and talk and discuss things in a civil way" (interview, November 21, 2016). The bond between faith communities brings feelings of cohesiveness as Harun said:

> We have this bridge now between us [that] is open versus, they were on the other side of the river and we cannot reach one another. So now it's like after we meet, after we have all those times with them there's a bridge now between us. I can go or they can come, we can meet in the middle. (interview, December 1, 2016)

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Conclusion

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Members of the Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham County are dedicated to one another to learn with and about each other, forming an interfaith community bound by learning, engagement, and personal development. This community is characterized by a continued presence and growth in an attempt to influence the larger community of Abraham County. This community has been carefully constructed through intentional

planning of, and engagement during, monthly trialogue meetings. The following chapter

examines how facilitators plan for monthly meetings and the strategies they use in

managing them. I turn next to the trialogue in action.

CHAPTER 6

TRIALOGUE IN ACTION: DIALOGUING WITH THE RELIGIOUS OTHER

Introduction

The steering committee of the Trialogue Group of Abraham County works to
facilitate discussion and navigate monthly group meetings according to values and
principles each member holds in common. They meet the week before each monthly
meeting to plan the session: they to choose passages of scripture to read aloud, decide
who will be doing the reading, discuss what could come up in the conversation, and
assess the previous month's meeting. Observational data in this study greatly informs the
understanding of planning and facilitation of ITG meetings. This chapter examines how
members of the ITG navigate the monthly meetings and is broken into three themes: 1)
facilitator strategies in guiding trialogue meetings; 2) tactics used in the preparation of
trialogue sessions; and 3) conversational approaches to attend to instances of
disagreement between trialogue members.

The work of the facilitators during ITG meetings creates a space for productive
engagement between ITG members. Through intentional planning and conscientious
guidance, members of ITG's steering committee work to ensure each meeting stays
within the stated rules of the group. Their preparation and negotiation through
interpretational difference leads to an environment in which a deep conversation can
occur. As such, the first section of this chapter examines their behaviors during meetings.
Their actions and interactions with others serve as a base upon which learning and the

development of relationships occurs. What they do in monthly meetings is carefully planned; thus I will next examine the tactics they use in preparation for meetings. Finally, using the method of conversation analysis, I explore the approaches facilitators use to navigate through moments of discord in steering committee meetings. These conversational approaches to dissipate potential tension resulting from disagreements offer an in-depth understanding of how differences in opinion can be used to enrich and deepen an interfaith conversation rather than derail or end it.

Facilitator Guidance during ITG Meetings

Facilitators of the ITG come to meetings with complementary agendas, agreeing on the purpose of group meetings and goals for each week, which is then disseminated to other members of the group. Before each trialogue meeting, Claudia sends out several emails to remind members of the upcoming meeting, disseminate the passages for discussion (which are either included as attachments or in the body of the email), and sometimes provide suggestions of how members could prepare themselves for the week:

Dear Friends in Faith,

Here's another reminder of our upcoming meeting at the Temple on Monday, November 21st at 6:30 pm.

The readings are:

Jewish text: Exodus 3:1-8

Muslim Text: Ta-Ha 20:9-23

Christian Text: Acts 9:1-9

See you there! (email, November 15, 2016)

Members may reply to these emails with expressions of gratitude, appreciation for the group, or questions they would like to be covered in conversation. For example, On August 10, 2016 Claudia sent out this email to prepare the group for the August 15 meeting:

> Here is our reading from the Quran regarding Joseph (Yusuf). We also plan to cover Genesis 42:1 to Genesis Chapter 44:17. Please read these passages to prepare for our meeting on Monday night, August 15th at 6:30. We will be meeting at the [local hospital] in the Oak and Holly rooms adjacent to the parking deck. [Email continues with passages from the Qu'ran in the body]. (email, August 10, 2016)

To this, Matthew replied:

> I would just like to say how grateful I am to be part of such a group that trusts on[e] another to be able to discuss, respectfully listen and learn from each other as our faiths inform us. To me this is so rare, but I pray that God will enable us to grow so that we will discover it will become less rare. Look forward to seeing you all again. (email, August 15, 2016)

Facilitators and major players work together to keep the group focused. When the discussion remains within the intended parameters, the monthly meeting is deemed successful. Using various techniques, such as overtly referencing the Covenant, asking specific members to speak, noting topics as in or out of bounds, or redirecting the conversation through the use of humor and/or personal anecdotes, facilitators guide discussions from month to month.

The ITG uses the Covenant as foundational rules that create conversational boundaries for the monthly sessions. Early in the group's history this Covenant was handed out at monthly meetings; more recently, the Covenant is emailed to new members and referenced at the beginning of or during group meetings. If participants step out of conversational bounds, facilitators and key players of the ITG cite the Covenant or cut their participation short to bring the discussion back within them. In one group meeting, a conversation between Christians on the nature of the divinity of Christ became heated and Luke stepped in to redirect the focus:

> We're here to learn from one another, I think your argument has been made before, that the divinity of Christ is a later interpretation of these sayings of Jesus. But it nevertheless is a matter of belief… I'm not trying to say that exclusively, I'm just trying to remind us that I don't think the measure of success at the end of this is that we agree on the identity of Jesus or the identity of Muhammad or decide the role of Jerusalem to the faith, but to understand one another and push one another on what our faith means to us today. (observation, October 17, 2016)

In these instances, citing the Covenant is a sanction of sorts, a way to indicate when the conversation is moving into inappropriate territory and re-focus it to expressed goals for the evening.

Working from the original Covenant, current facilitators of the ITG manage dialogue sessions according to seven major values. These are the values for: 1) authentic, honest discussion; 2) appreciating religious diversity; 3) collaborative discussion within the group; 4) members to respectfully listen to the beliefs and opinions of others without judgment and/or assessment; 5) staying on topic; 6) even amounts of time to each

tradition; and 7) learning. In addition to attending to these values, the facilitators and key players of the ITG take on a variety of roles characterizing their participation during meetings. The next sections will examine both these values and roles.

Authentic, Honest Discussion and Appreciating Religious Diversity

The values for authentic, honest discussion between participants and members respecting religious diversity are foundational values for group sessions. When these values are present the others emerge and determine the course of the discussion. Authenticity in discussion and an appreciation of religious diversity are also integral components in the learning cycle discussed in the previous chapter of this manuscript; as such, these goals are integral to the purpose of the group. Yet, an appreciation of religious diversity should not interfere with one's own beliefs. In fact, members of the steering committee expressed that anyone who thinks the purpose of the group is to change someone's beliefs or synthesize the various traditions into one is misunderstanding the point of the group. In the focus group with facilitators, they explained this perception as a misconception of trialogue:

> That idea that either you are going to have people try to convert you or to your
> faith… this was a misconception. Or that you are trying to merge these three
> faiths into something that's palpable to everybody, they completely
> misunderstood the point… It's just the opposite. It makes you grow in your own.
> When you come to these things, people emerge out of it with a greater
> understanding of their faiths, usually more committed in their own, and more
> knowledge in their own. (Daniel, focus group, December 5, 2016)

These two characteristics determine the nature of the discussion; they are valued and embraced by facilitators and members alike. These two aspects add stability to ITG meetings and encourage the rise of the following six valued conversational features.

Collaborative Discussion

Facilitators encourage different group members to talk throughout the meeting. They see meetings as successful if many group members participate, if one member does not monopolize the conversation. If the latter does occur, facilitators step in and reorient the conversation. For instance, in the meeting where the topic of discussion was the afterlife, Simon, a Christian member, held a speaking turn for an extended period. Claudia stepped in, thanked Simon for his discussion, offered thoughts about her perceptions of Heaven, and asked the group, "Is there anything else any Christians want to say?" (observation, January 16, 2017). Re-orientations of discussion occur by facilitators gently asking the speaker to clarify their point as it pertains to the topic of discussion, asking specific members follow-up questions, or by opening the floor with a general question posed to encourage participation from other members. As another example, when talking about encounters with God, Phoebe asked the group, "Who has spoken to you as an angel to the Lord? Who has been a burning bush in your life?" (observation, November 21, 2016). In these ways, facilitators encourage the conversation to be both collaborative and generative.

Respectful Listening

First time attendees are recommended to listen and not speak. Veteran members explained that it takes time for new attendees to learn the culture of the group and the norms for behavior during meetings. New participants need to take time to observe group

behavior, listen to other participants, and think about how alternate expressions of belief and opinion impact their own. Khadija stated, "The very first time I would say listen and don't take anything personally from the other faiths' comments… because the whole thing is around understanding what someone else's perspective is. And listening is, I think, the key to good communication" (interview, November 14, 2016). By only observing at first, a new member can more accurately assess their own interest and capability of being a part of the group. As Yusuf explained, "Listen and refrain from commenting, by listening you'll learn more about the group and the interaction" (interview, November 21, 2016). Members are expected to listen to the opinions of others without judgment and/or assessment. Harun said it has been this way from the beginning, "Respect me and I will respect you, because we are not going to covert you, you're not going to convert me and you have your belief and I have my belief" (interview, November 10, 2016).

Staying on Topic

Religious belief is dynamic, nuanced, robust, and powerful, leading to an incredible potential for discussions of it to become uncontrolled and unfocused. Facilitators of the ITG work to keep each monthly meeting focused on a specific topic, attempting to keep the discussion manageable for participants. For example, when discussing the characteristics of Heaven and Hell, the conversation began to drift to accessibility and how to achieve admittance to Heaven. Claudia broke in and asked if the group could "shelve that" because Jesus' role in salvation was a "bigger topic" and on that night the discussion "should just be what is Heaven and Hell, not how you get there" (observation, January 16, 2017). By preventing the conversation from moving off topic,

there is a coherence to the discussion and members are able to more deeply inquire into one specific area.

If the discussion spirals off topic members could get lost in it, forget the purpose of the sessions, or fall into the trap of proselytizing. The email correspondences sent out by Claudia before the meetings help keep the focus for the week by preparing members in what they should be discussing for the month. These emails frame the discussion as one of open-mindedness, the trialogue space as one for various opinions and beliefs. Members are reminded several times what will be discussed and which scriptures will be read. Conversational resources used to keep the group focused during meetings include direct questioning, presenting personal viewpoints about the topic at hand, or asking specific members to offer commentary on the topic of focus or piece of scripture read.

Equality in Time Spent on Each Tradition

When Claudia explains the rules and purpose of the ITG at the beginning of each monthly meeting, she explains that the group attempts to spend the same amount of time discussing scripture from each tradition. By doing this, they are logistically attempting to ensure that one tradition does not monopolize the conversation for the evening. Throughout the course of this study, this was the case. Other than a slight deviation in one observed meeting, facilitators were consistent in their time keeping ensuring each tradition received between 28 and 32 minutes of focused talk. Typically, the role fell to Claudia to announce that discussions of one tradition should end and the conversation should move to another. If Claudia got caught up in the conversation, another facilitator would note the time and the discussion moved forward.

Learning

      How learning occurs was extensively examined in Chapter 5 of this manuscript; however, it is important to briefly note it here as a value to which the facilitators attend. To review, members come to ITG meetings expecting to learn about the beliefs, tenets, practices, scriptural teachings within each tradition in the room and end up also learning about themselves and the individuals who are practitioners of those other faiths in the process. Members see learning as a pathway to developing respect for religious diversity. They also see this as difficult to achieve, as Daniel explained:

      It can be done. When people get into a room and you have this stance of learning instead of lecturing and trying to convince people, you can build these bridges. It can be done. It ain't easy. It may take 15 years. But it can be done. And if it can be done in a little town like [Abraham County], a conservative community like this, it can be done anywhere. (focus group, December 5, 2016)

      To learn about others as well as coherently teach their own traditions, members must be knowledgeable and clear in what they believe. As such, having a clear awareness of oneself and one's tradition is integral to participation in the group. Matthew asserted, "It's an opportunity for really stimulating engagement, it makes you question your own. If you can't explain your faith, well what do you really know about it? And you learn from that" (interview, November 21, 2016). The previously described cycle of learning may end in members' viewpoints of different traditions to shift and change resulting in re-entrance into the learning cycle with a new, more permeable worldview.

Changing Roles in Guiding Group Discussions

To attend to the values above, facilitators and key participants behave in specific, carefully constructed ways while in trialogue meetings. I have constructed these characteristics into eight specific roles to clearly present the ways in which active, long-time members participate in the monthly meetings. The roles identified below were created from interview and observation data. Each key player, a group of 12-15 regular participants including the steering committee members, takes on various roles throughout the evening, oscillating between them in a way that helps steer the structure and topical direction of the conversation. While there is movement between roles during meetings, some participants are more inclined to take on certain roles than others. These major roles are: 1) the Teacher; 2) the Learner; 3) the Facilitator; 4) the Facilitator as Provocateur; 5) the Clarifier; 6) the Believer; 7) the Comparer; and 8) the Diversifier.

The teacher. The Teacher in ITG meetings is someone who works to educate others on aspects of their own religion. This can include providing interpretations of meaning or content of scripture, explanations of the context of scripture (e.g. historical, geographical, social, etc.) or teachings, beliefs, or practices. As reflected in field notes, in discussing when Jacob's name was changed to Israel, Ezekiel taught others about the writing of the Hebrew Bible:

> Ezekiel gives the background and development of the writing of the Hebrew Bible (J, E, P, D, & Redactor[4]) and how the Talmud was compiled. He tells the group that some of the writers refer to him as Jacob and some as Israel and the fact that the writings were merged together into one narrative is why it seems that the two

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[4] For more information about Hebrew Bible scholarship's explanation of the authors of the Torah see Freidman, R. E. (2003). *The Bible with sources revealed: A new view into the Five Books of Moses.* San Francisco, CA: HaperSanFrancisco.

names were used interchangeably. He explains the meaning of the name Israel

and why Jacob was given this name. He ends by letting everyone know that his

answers are based on what literary and Talmudic scholars say, not his personal

opinion. (observation, September 19, 2016)

The Teacher plays a very important role in ITG meetings. They have a focus on

promoting learning in the meetings and try to ensure that others are able to distinguish

between comments based on scholarship or religious teachings and what comes primarily

from personal opinion. In this role, they go beyond simply answering questions to

providing a lesson.

The learner. At some point in every meeting, each participant plays the role of

the Learner. The primary behavior characterizing this role includes questioning others for

understanding. The Learner may be seeking understanding of something that was posed

in the discussion for the evening or they may bring with them questions on a particular

scriptural passage or practice. For example, in one meeting Norah, a Christian member,

asked, "Jesus says He came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law. So, what's the

difference between the law and the Covenant?" (observation, October 17, 2016). The

Learner may also pose questions about confusing aspects within their own traditions. For

instance, after reading a passage on Moses' encounter with the burning bush, Ezekiel

offered his own questions to the group:

Why does God call out to Moses twice? Why, why was a little bush chosen for

God to represent himself or to call out to Moses. Also, why do you take your

shoes off? And another question that I would, well two questions actually, is all

land holy or is some land holier than other land? Are all people addressed by God

on Sinai or is it only Moses? These are some questions I thought of in the

readings. (observation, November 21, 2016)

The Learner is in direct relationship to the role of the Teacher; each role informs and

supports the other. Without members both seeking to learn and teach, it is unlikely that

learning during ITG meetings would be as deep or impactful as it is.

The facilitator. Due to the content of the previous section, I only briefly present

this role here. The Facilitator in group meetings is someone who works to manage

discussion through adherence to the seven values above. As an example, in the November

2016 meeting, Ezekiel initiated a conversation of holy places to the Abrahamic faiths. At

one point, the conversation deviated to Hinduism and here, Luke spoke up and asked

Ezekiel, "How do you respond to the question, is all ground holy or are there particular

places that are holy?" (observation, November 21, 2016). Luke was successful in

reorienting the dialogue; Ezekiel identified Jerusalem as particularly holy in all three

faiths. Facilitators work collaboratively and take turns in steering the conversation by

asking follow-up questions, sharing their beliefs, and what meaning they find in scripture.

The facilitator as provocateur. An additional role of the Facilitator is the

Facilitator as Provocateur. Working within the parameters noted above, members who

take on this role during group meetings work to keep the conversation generative and

flowing. This person "will purposefully propel things forward," to prevent "pauses,

sometimes, where nobody wants to say anything" (interview, Daniel, October 31, 2016).

If at any time the conversation lags, the Facilitator as Provocateur may offer a personal

interpretation, pose a question to the group as a whole, or ask someone specific a

question. For example, in the November group meeting the topic for the evening was

"Encountering God." To begin, Ezekiel read Exodus 3:1-8. There was silence after he finished:

> After Ezekiel finished reading there were a few moments of silence where
> members looked around at each other. After the silence went on for a while
> Claudia began by asking Ezekiel, "What would you like to say about
> encountering God?" Ezekiel replied by giving an explanation about the meaning
> of Hebrew vocabulary words in the scripture. (observation, November 21, 2016)

A variety of veteran members play the role of the Provocateur throughout group meetings. While the Facilitator may strive to keep the conversation on track and within the parameters of the group, the Facilitator as Provocateur works to be sure the conversation continues.

The clarifier. The Clarifier in ITG meetings asks questions and gives statements attempting to make sure participants understand the dialogue. Members who take up this behavior may ask for concepts to be spelled out or attempt to clear up stated confusions; in this way directly supporting the Teacher. For instance, when Matthew was presenting Christian perceptions of life after death, Daniel asked, "That is from where, drawn from where?" to which Matthew responded, "Revelations" (observation, January 16, 2017). The Clarifier serves an integral role in promoting accurate understanding among group members by trying to prevent misinterpretations or misunderstandings. In turn, this helps in preventing such misinterpretations or misunderstandings from being disseminated to others outside the group.

The believer. The Believer in the group often shares their impressions of what they find meaningful and spiritually significant in their own tradition. They may provide

personal interpretations of particular scripture, religious practices, or teachings. In the

October meeting, John, a Catholic participant, offered a personal explanation of how he

thinks of God's support:

> John said he had been told God is a rope in Islam and he also believes this. He
>
> described people as in a hole, or a chimney of sorts, which is very long. God is on
>
> one end of the rope, "God is saying, you hold on to one end because I'm hanging
>
> on to the other. And with Me, you'll get there." This was responded to with "Mm
>
> hmm," "Amen," and "Preach it!" (observation, October 17, 2016)

Adding a personal touch to meetings, this role is essential in the learning cycle discussed

above. It is when members take on the role of the Believer others have the opportunity to

see a tradition through the eyes of a practitioner rather than being presented with the

religion as some sort of monolithic entity. The Believer allows people to learn about the

intimate connections people have with their traditions by presenting their own beliefs and

what they find fulfilling, striking, troubling, and truly meaningful within their tradition.

The comparer. When members take on the role of the Comparer, they try to

synthesize the discussion and highlight similarities that exist across the three Abrahamic

faiths. Members may discuss similar interpretations of teachings or scriptural narratives

that exist in all three faiths. They may also participate in collaborative exegesis to build

interpretation together. For example, field notes for the September meeting note, "The

bulk of the discussion is on prophets, such as why certain people are chosen to be

prophets while others are not, what common characteristics of prophets are, and who are

prophets in each tradition" (observation, September 19, 2016). This conversational tactic

expands and enriches the discussion by bringing in more contextual or theologically

different interpretations of a similar concept within each tradition. As an example, in the

September meeting Yusuf described Joseph saying, "a leader of his people is the

servant," offering a hadith alongside Matthew's New Testament based assessment of

Joseph as a servant throughout his life (observation, September 19, 2016). This behavior

is at the core of instrumental learning. And, as discussed in the Chapter 5 of this

manuscript, it is in learning about these similarities that the learning cycle often begins.

The diversifier. In contrast to the purpose of the Comparer, the Diversifier notes

differences between traditions. This role exists due to the time and effort the ITG has

spent developing respectful learning relationships. Members do not solely wish to learn

about similarities across faith traditions, they also want to learn about what makes each

tradition unique. The diversifier presents both inter- and intra-faith differences, so is

integral to both relational and personal learning. For example, in the September 2016

meeting, Claudia explained the concept of predestination within Presbyterian

Christianity. Additionally, Phoebe discussed the Catholic concept of Purgatory in the

January 2017 meeting.

Members may also note these differences to present what they admire or highly

respect about another tradition. Isaiah explained learning about these differences,

"teaches me that there's a whole lot of pathways and interpretations of the same story and

that I should be open to the other points of view that others have without giving up mine"

(interview, November 29, 2016). Phoebe revealed a conversation she had at the prayer

group at her church, "I was saying I have such respect for my Muslim friends, for their

dedication to prayer... I said this is so inspiring to me. It has helped me make some

changes in my life to make it just a habit" (focus group, December 5, 2016). While in contrast to the role of the Comparer, these two roles complement each other.

The Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham County has worked for several years to create a community of learning and a space for respectful dialogue. The values they cherish and the roles they play in meetings developed over time and with conscientious effort and planning. The following section includes an illustration of the tactics steering committee members use in preparing for monthly meetings.

Tactics for Preparation of Trialogue Sessions

The ITG is led by a steering committee of seven veteran participants that meet one week before monthly sessions. During these meetings, committee members prepare for the upcoming session using specific techniques. Members begin each session by grounding the discussion; they start where the previous discussion had ended and determine whether to pick up there or move on to a new subject. In choosing a topic for discussion, steering committee members select what they themselves are interested in and what they think will generate discussion, characteristics of self-directed learning. For instance, in the September meeting, Isaiah offered up the topic of prayer saying, "If we were to go back to listing some ideas about topics, I would really love to probe what prayer means in our different traditions because I continually, personally question what prayer means" (observation transcript, September 12, 2016).

Second, committee members rehearse the chosen topic. Members may practice reading the passages, practice providing a contextual introduction of scripture to see how it sounds, or simply work on timing for the reading. In this way, they attempt assess how their selection may play out in the ITG meeting the following week. For instance, they

practiced reading contextual information about the passage for discussion in the October

planning meeting:

> Phoebe: Would you all like to do some of this just right now, just to see how it
> sounds and how it goes? What I was wanting to ask, it has a nice little
> intro here at the bottom, to give the context a little bit before you read
> it. Do you think we should do that? [Phoebe continues to read the
> contextual introduction]

> Daniel: I think the intro was helpful. (observation transcript, October 10, 2016)

A topic is deemed appropriate if it generated a discussion in the steering committee

meeting. In September, the steering committee chose passages to finish their discussion

on the story of Joseph in each tradition. They dove into the topic themselves first:

> Claudia: Although you get the impression that Jacob loved Joseph and Benjamin
> the best.

> Isaiah: Clearly.

> Claudia: But the rest of them, the other 10 –

> Isaiah: It didn't matter.

> Claudia: It didn't matter.

> Isaiah: Where they came from, who their moms were.

> Matthew: What's so interesting to me is that when Jacob came to Egypt, Jacob
> blessed Pharaoh. I, that was, whoa man!

> Claudia: That's pretty cheeky! I want to say, "I bless you Obama" (laughing).

> Matthew: The higher status usually blesses the lower status, right?

> Claudia: Right.

> Matthew: Did it twice, I mean it's mentioned here twice. I don't know what that means.
>
> Isaiah: So, we'll have a rich discussion. (observation transcript, September 12, 2016)

This behavior also helps the steering committee set a structure for the upcoming meeting. They decide who should read passages aloud, whether it should be the same person reading for every meeting, and what the role of the facilitators is. Thus, steering committee meetings function both as planning sessions and a form of interfaith dialogue.

To achieve the above, members of the steering committee practice collective decision-making. They expressed that this is particularly important to them as there is no one designated leader of the group. For Claudia, collectivity in management and decision-making was very important for her when she joined the group. As she explained in an interview, "I don't necessarily want to be 'The Leader' of this group. I want us all to have an equal part in it" (interview, December 5, 2016).

The steering committee meetings seem to be a way that veteran members strengthen the bridges of interfaith learning that stretch between them. This organizing body of the ITG serves as an intimate circle of dialogue and these members dive more deeply into interfaith topics. One such topic was predestination in the Presbyterian Christian tradition:

> Isaiah: Yeah, I was confused when [Luke] was talking about…
> predetermination.
>
> Claudia: Oh, predestination.
>
> Isaiah: And election.

Claudia: And election.

Isaiah: Free will, free will.

Claudia: Okay. What's so confusing about that? (laughs)

Isaiah: Nothing, but all of it, (other members laugh) uh…

Claudia: There was a guy named John Calvin. He took this stuff very, very

seriously, very, very – he was lawyer along with being a priest. And he

sat down and figured all this out. And he called the people who were,

that God determined were going to Heaven they would be elected.

Isaiah: Oh.

Claudia: Yes. So, bec-, and it's only because God is omniscient and knows

everything that this, I don't even want to call it theology. I guess, so

yeah, predestination is a, is a –

Matthew: But, but uh, Paul wrote about that.

Claudia: Yeah. But I mean, that, that's where it comes from.

Matthew: Right, right.

Claudia: Just because God is all knowing He's going to know who is chosen to

go Heaven and who is going to go to Hell. That's where it comes from.

(observation transcript, September 12, 2016)

In steering committee meetings, members comfortably ask deep questions and

express disagreement. They did not share any concern that their comments will be taken

the wrong way and they take care in clearly explaining their beliefs, as well as the history

behind them. These meetings are a representation of the power of small, intimate

interfaith dialogue groups in learning from people of other faiths. It is a process that takes

time, yet may have an outcome of appreciation and acceptance of religious diversity. But within discussions between religiously diverse groups disagreements may come and these disagreements could derail or end an interfaith conversation. Both the larger group and the steering committee successfully navigated moments of conversational discord. I next present moments of disagreement in detail.

Attending to Disagreement Within and Across Faith Traditions

In any sort of discourse among members of different ideological groups, there will likely be moments of disagreement across participating parties. The Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham County is no exception. Being able to respectfully and appropriately attend to and navigate through these moments of disagreement is an invaluable characteristic of the long-term success of the ITG. A closer look at disagreement in meetings may help better understand what dialogical characteristics are used to ease tension and promote respectful dialogue. These moments have potential to be either moments that build connection and promote learning or be moments of discord that disrupt dialogue.

Some members identified instances of disagreement as adding richness to the discussion. For instance, in the January steering committee meeting, members were preparing for a discussion the following week on the topic of the afterlife. In determining whether the topic should be descriptions of the afterlife or how to enter Heaven or Hell, Matthew suggested holding a discussion on both. Claudia cautioned his suggestion saying, "That's a pretty wide topic and one that could be kind of prickly too, because even among Christians we don't agree." To this Matthew responded, "Well sure, that's what gets a good discussion going," a positive assessment of diversity in opinion and

possible disagreement (observation transcript, January 9, 2017). Ezekiel also expressed a positive opinion of disagreement in the October large group meeting, "It is good to disagree if you're gaining more knowledge and looking for understanding and closeness to God. He could have made all people the same, but He didn't. This must be for a positive purpose" (observation, October 17, 2016).

Conversely, presenting a "united front" of one religious tradition to others is a desire of some participants, and with this mindset instances of disagreements are challenging moments. In interviews, a few Christian members of the ITG revealed the difficulty here. For instance, Luke noted this as a challenge for him even though he acknowledged that not all Christians think, behave, or believe in the same way:

> The challenging part of it at times has been to keep the Christian participants pulling together… I guess I've got such a lifetime of experience of Christians disagreeing with one another and challenging one another to the point of declaring someone outside the faith that I always enjoy the insights of the Jews and Muslims more easily than I enjoy my own fellow Christians' insight 'cause I sometimes worry. We had a discussion last time about the divinity of Christ, which of course goes to the core of Christian faith, and when someone in open conversation raises the questions about the divinity of Christ or of some other aspect of the faith I start worrying that if we push too hard some of the Christians may give up on the group and declare that this is not a welcome place for believing Christians. (interview, October 26, 2016)

Different religious traditions obviously espouse different teachings and beliefs. Across each large group meeting observed in this study, disagreements occurred. It was

more likely that members within one faith tradition disagreed with each other than with members of other religions, but the latter did happen. For example, in one meeting Claudia attempted to synthesize and summarize their discussion about the Messiah by saying that all three traditions in the room believed this individual would usher in a Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. Daniel disagreed and presented an alternative Jewish viewpoint (observation, October 17, 2016). On the former point above, in the November 2016 meeting, Christian participants disagreed on the nature of Saul's conversion to becoming Paul. More often than not, these differences seem to be accepted as a presentation of religious diversity.

It is in how the ITG has worked through these tensions that we can learn more about their continuance and success as a group which regularly participates in interfaith dialogue. Interestingly, in contrast to larger group meetings where disagreements were more likely to transpire between members of the same faith tradition (as presented in the examples above), disagreements in steering committee meetings often occurred across religious lines. It is possible this is because of the level of comfort and rapport developed between steering committee members from participating in interfaith conversations with one another for over a decade. Because steering committee members consented to allow me to audio record steering committee meetings, I am able to use the method of conversation analysis (CA) to examine the dialogical interactions occurring during these moments of divergence. This close engagement with dissenting conversation helps inform understandings of how members learn, connect, and accept diversity in belief through dialoging with the religious other.

Conversational Resources to Negotiate Difference in Scriptural Exegesis

In the September 12, 2016 steering committee meeting, members were discussing

the story of Joseph across all three religious texts.[5] This meeting was held to plan the

final discussion in the story of Joseph, the third in a series of three monthly meetings

during which Joseph's life was discussed. The excerpt below is an excellent example of

differences in biblical exegesis across different faiths and as such is the primary excerpt

for analysis in this section. The excerpt also reveals how, even in steering committee

meetings, members' conversation remains under the guidance of the Covenant and the

group's purpose to accept religious diversity and not attempt to create religious

syncretism. Eighteen minutes in to the steering committee meeting, a disagreement

occurred in members' assessments of Jacob, Joseph's father, his actions in relationship to

Joseph, and what they reveal about his character.

Excerpt 1 (18:45-19:38)

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 1  Isaiah:   <So Matthew> (.) a very typical Jewish
 2            interpretation is, is that Jacob (1.0) of (.)
 3            Of Jacob and his relationship with Joseph (.)
 4            was really pretty stupid for favoring (.)>one
 5            son< over the others=
 6  Matthew:  =Jacob was a ↑weak, uh weak person=
 7  Isaiah:   =Mmm=
 8  Matthew:  =He's weak in ↑faith and he's weak as a
 9            ↓father (0.2) I [think-
10  Isaiah:                   [<I don't know that I would
11            use the word weak> but, but [he]
12  Matthew:                              [I do-
13  Isaiah:   But he's so discon[tent
14  Matthew:                     [<He was manipulated> by
15            his ↓mother (.) and he was manipulated by his
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[5] A note on scripture: In the large group meeting on August 15, 2016 the readings were Genesis 42-46 from the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and *Surah al-Yusuf* (chapter 12) verses 33-68. As the entire selection from the Hebrew Bible was not covered in the August meeting, steering committee members decided for September 12, 2016 that they would review Genesis 43-50 in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and *Surah al-Yusuf* (chapter 12) verses 58-111.

```
16              ↑wives, uh and ↑Laban (.)
17 Claudia:  Mm hmm, °he was manipulated by Laban°
18 Matthew:  I mean you know he (.) kept try-
19 Harun:    Who?
20 Matthew:  Laban
21 Claudia:  [LABAN
22 Matthew:  [The father-in-law, his father-in-law.
23           (1.0)
24 Claudia:  ['Cause he was ((inaudible))
25 Isaiah:   [And yet he had great success building the
26           ↓herd.
27 Claudia:  He sure ↑did?
28 Matthew:  (↑God did it right?)
29           ((crosstalk - inaudible))
30 Isaiah:   He had faith.
31 Matthew:  That's true? (1.0) Every time Laban tried to
32           mess him up he]
33 Isaiah:   (clears throat) He'd out smart him.
34 Matthew:  °Yeah, well°
35 Isaiah:   Yeah.
```

There are a variety of conversational resources in this excerpt made visible when the transcription conventions of CA are applied to the text. Transcript symbols used in this chapter are based on the resources developed by Jefferson (1989) and adapted by ten Have (2007).[6] Ten Have (2007) noted these symbols are "meant to explain the major conventions for rendering details of the vocal production of utterances in talk-in-interaction" (p. 215). In the excerpt above members co-construct a list highlighting personality characteristics of Jacob, participate in collaborative storytelling, express shared epistemics of the characters and narrative, practice corrections and repair, and end with a willingness to re-assess previous, as well as be open to alternate, interpretations. Ten Have (2007) recommend initially looking at four elements when using CA to examine conversation: 1) turn-taking organization; 2) sequence organization; 3) repair

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[6] For a full explanation of transcription symbols, please see Appendix K of this manuscript.

organization; and 4) the organization of turn-design (p. 128). In what follows I consider the first three as they have a long-standing analytical tradition in CA.

Turn-taking organization. There are three primary ways turns are negotiated between speakers during a conversation: other-selection, self-selection, and continuation (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). In Excerpt 1, turn-taking is done through self-selection; Isaiah chooses to begin the sequence by directing his commentary to Matthew, constructing a request for Matthew to listen to the explanation. With the phrase, "a typical Jewish interpretation" Isaiah frames his commentary as not necessarily his own personal interpretation but that of the Jewish collective, a conversational resource that attempts to add more validity to his suggestion (Pomerantz, 1986).

In response, Matthew takes a turn quickly, allowing no silence between utterances, a resource called *latching* in CA. Isaiah receives Matthew's comments, exhibited by "mm," a response token (Jefferson, 1984) used to indicate listening, also ensuring no lag time between speakers (Silverman, 1998). The overlapping speech between Isaiah's and Matthew's turns in lines 9 through 14, shows a struggle at maintaining control of the conversational floor through a rapid-fire assertion and counter-assertion period. The instances of overlap here are a powerful resource for the vying for interpretive dominance. Additionally, each turn constructs lists characterizing two separate interpretations of Jacob's behavior (Jefferson, 1990). In line 30 Isaiah ends a period of crosstalk by reiterating his assessment that Jacob was a man of faith. Matthew takes another turn, which is subsequently cut off by Isaiah in line 33. A consensus is not reached at the end of the excerpt yet Matthew offers slight acquiescence, exhibited by the

"Well" online 34. While not giving up on his original assessment, his acquiescence

concedes his turn and ends the sequence.

Self-selected turn taking continues. After Matthew finished speaking in Excerpt 1,

Claudia offered a turn to Yusuf and Harun by asking, "Is that a story that you guys

have?" With this question, Claudia re-distributes the speaking turns and opens the floor

for others. While this question is directed at both Muslims in attendance, Claudia turned

to look at Yusuf when she asked and Yusuf offered a brief response. But at 21 minutes,

three minutes after Yusuf began speaking, Harun interjects, self-selecting the turn to

explain the Muslim interpretation of Jacob.

Excerpt 2 (21:21)

```
 1   Harun:    So to ↑us that's a this is >very strong
 2             belief<. This is >↓strong (.) faith<.=
 3   Matthew:  =That's interesting, I]=
 4   Harun:    =From that person to (.) God.
 5   Matthew   I'm not claiming to be [↑right. But I-
 6   Harun:                           [↑Right ↑right. Yeah,
 7             yeah.
 8   Matthew:  (laughing) And I'm not saying this as a
 9             ↑Christian ↑either. I don't know. [It's just
10             the way I ↑read]
11   Harun:                                      [Yeah yeah.
12             I would say the <point here it is like> like
13             (Yusuf) was ↑saying ↓that when ↑they told him
14             that (.) that the wolf (.) <°ate him°. He
15             ↑knew right away> they're lying.
16   Matthew:  °Yes°.
```

What is particularly interesting about Excerpt 2 is Matthew's accounting for

himself. In each utterance in the sequence above, Matthew sets himself up as an earnest

learner. He is not speaking on behalf of anyone but himself and his interest is genuine

and open. His accounting has multiple purposes, it provides reasoning for why he takes

so many of the turns in the sequence and why he is such an active participant in the conversation. In both excerpts we see self-selection, latching, overlapping speech, and the use of response tokens, such as "right," to indicate listening and affirmative assessment of another person's commentary, elements that characterize turn-taking in the meeting. Also, in both instances parties are willing to end with acknowledgement of the other's viewpoint while not setting aside their own. In this way, disagreements in interpretation of similar scriptural passages are a negotiation of sorts, indicative of the ITG's value of appreciating religious diversity.

Sequence organization. *Sequencing* in conversations means "utterance[s] in interaction considered to have been produced for the place in the progression of the talk where it occurs, especially just after the proceeding one, while at the same time it creates a context for the next utterance" (ten Have, p. 130). Certain types of sequence structures present together in cycles (p. 132). In Excerpt 1, there appears a cycle of assertions and counter-assertions based on a disagreement in scriptural interpretation. Each party constructing the differing interpretations of Jacob brings in evidence to upgrade their own assertion and support their disagreement of the other. For instance, in line 4 Isaiah says Jacob is "pretty stupid for favoring one son over the other." However, when Matthew agrees and upgrades Isaiah's assertion to one of Jacob being stupid and weak, Isaiah begins to offer counter-assertions.

The assertion and counter-assertion sequence truly begins on line 6 with Matthew's upgraded assertion that in addition to being stupid, Jacob is in fact weak. To this, Isaiah replies in line 13 by downgrading Matthew's assertion that Jacob was weak to one in which Jacob was merely discontent. He then upgrades his own assertion in line 25

explaining again that Jacob was not weak because he "had great success in building the herd." In response to Isaiah's assertions, we have Matthew's commentary that Jacob was weak. He supports this with Jacob's manipulation by members of his family in lines 14 through 16. He upgrades his original assertion of Jacob being weak in line 28, saying that perhaps it was God that was responsible for building the ancient Israelite community, not Jacob, effectively contradicting Isaiah's assertions. The disagreement here is clear and artfully posed. Neither party accuses the other's assertions of being wrong or unfounded. Additionally, neither party degrades the other's interpretation. They simply continue to present their opinions, responding after listening to the other in a way that brings in outside opinions from their own faith communities as evidence, and concede an agreeable sort of disagreement at the end.

Across the data in assertion sequences speakers clarify what viewpoints are personal and which are the, more often than not, "typical" interpretations within a faith community, an extreme case formulation adding evidence to their assertions (Pomerantz, 1986). This occurs again during a disagreement of how the Torah was written, occurring 45 minutes into the steering committee meeting.

Excerpt 3 (45:33-46:09):

```
 1  Isaiah:    So the um
 2             (2.0)
 3  Claudia:   When when?=
 4  Isaiah:    =the story in Judaism is that the >↓Torah< is
 5             our ↓portable phone line
 6             (1.0)
 7  Claudia:   °Mm hmm.°
 8  Isaiah:    And it's the basis for (.) people of the
 9             Jewish faith to have ad↑here to the faith
10             °these thousands and thousands of years.°
11  Matthew:   But you don't think, <y'all I don't believe
12             that> (.) >Moses wrote it down< (.) in a
```

```
13          scroll?
14          (2.0)
15 Claudia: Mm ↓mm
16 Isaiah:  That's not what it ↑says.
17 Matthew: Huh? Well it says that in the ↑Bible. (.) God
18          told him <↑write it down.> And and when you
19          have ↑kings <every king should make his o:wn
20          ↑copy>.
21          (0.2)
22 Isaiah:  Well I'd have to look it up=[I don't ↑think
23          so-
24 Claudia:                             [Yeah where is
25          that?
26 Isaiah:  I've never heard that.
27 Matthew: .hhh ppfff WHAT?
```

During this third excerpt, both Matthew and Isaiah reference a source outside their own personal experience, which seems to add validity to their viewpoint. While traditional sequencing happens commonly throughout meetings, the excerpts above are excellent examples of a cycled sequencing through a conversational negotiation of interpretation. In these sequences, speakers reference outside sources, add clarification or evidence to support their commentary, and listen to the alternate opinions expressed; characteristics of conversations between ITG members.

Repair organization. Kitzinger (2013) wrote that *repair* was defined first by Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) as the "set of practices whereby a co-interactant interrupts the ongoing course of action to attend to possible trouble in speaking, hearing or understanding the talk" (p. 229). These scholars distinguished between *self-initiated* and *other-initiated repair*. In the Excerpt 1, there are two types of repair. In the insertion sequence of lines 19-22, Harun initiates the repair by asking for a clarification of who is being discussed, using the next turn repair initiator, "Who?" (ten Have, 2007). Claudia

offers repair, Matthew then self-repairs, both repeating the name and clarifying Laban's relationship to Joseph.

There is also a series of corrections running through lines 6 through 16. This series is an example of "abdicated other-correction" (Jefferson, 2007, p. 446). Matthew does not correct himself after Isaiah's initial contrasting interpretation of Jacob in lines 10 and 11, thus abdicating (i.e. ignoring) Isaiah's offered repair. In this instance of abdicated other-correction during the argument sequence, the repair represents what ten Have (2007) called "problems of 'misalignment' rather than misunderstanding" (p. 134). The abdicated other-correction brings the disagreement in interpretation to the fore of the conversation. The concession reached by the end of the assertion sequence in Excerpt 1 was accomplished through a series of abdicated and accepted other-repairs. By the end of Excerpt 1, Matthew's critical assessment of Jacob is downgraded. Beginning in line 10, Isaiah offers a delicate repair saying, "I don't know that I would use the word weak," which is not taken up by Matthew in line 12. When Isaiah suggests that Jacob had "great success at building the herd" Matthew delicately offers a repair in the form of a question on line 28, questioning Jacob's responsibility. This other-repair is then abdicated by Isaiah, who finishes Matthew's statement in line 33 with his own assertion.

This is not to say that other-initiated repairs are always abdicated. Later in the discussion, we have an instance of a received other-initiated repair, Excerpt 4 below, occurring at 26 minutes into the conversation. Here a repair sequence is first initiated by Yusuf's request for clarification. Claudia answers and is corrected by Isaiah.

Excerpt 4 (26:48-26:57)

```
1  Claudia:  But ↑Leah lived o::n (laughing).
2  Yusuf:    The what?=
```

```
3  Claudia:  =The one who was >slow of ↓ey:e< (laughing)
4              [LEAH.
5  Isaiah:   >[Weak of eye.>
6  Claudia:  ↑Weak oh (.) we ↑have (0.3) oh (.) °okay
7             <weak of eye>.°
```

The structure of repair reveals how members of the steering committee work through corrections in the expression of difference in scriptural interpretation. They find common ground and often end in a recognition of the alternate point of view.

Conclusion

Interfaith Trialogue meetings are complex and dynamic. They require conscientious planning and active guidance in practice. The first part of this chapter examined the role facilitators play in guiding and preparing for the large group monthly meetings. They adhere to the seven major values of: 1) authentic, honest discussion; 2) appreciating religious diversity; 3) collaborative discussion within the group; 4) members to respectfully listen to the beliefs and opinions of others without judgment and/or assessment; 5) staying on topic; 6) even amounts of time to each tradition; and 7) learning. Additionally, they cycle through eight roles based on identified characteristics in the data for this study. These roles were: 1) the Teacher; 2) the Learner; 3) the Facilitator; 4) the Facilitator as Provocateur; 5) the Clarifier; 6) the Believer; 7) the Comparer; and 8) the Diversifier.

The second portion of this chapter provided an in-depth conversational analysis of transcript data from one steering committee meeting. The excerpt examined is an excellent example of the conversational resources used by steering committee members when managing disagreement. The analysis looked at the ways in which speakers work through turn-taking and allocation, abdicated and accepted repairs, overlapping speech,

assertions, and counter assertions. An analysis in this way reveals a bit more about the delicate act of negotiating disagreement in interfaith conversations. Additionally, it is another view of the ways in which the steering committee exemplifies a major purpose of the group, to embrace diversity of thought and opinion in a way that makes room for a variety of religious understandings and interpretations. Disagreements are not always solved and consensus is not always reached, but the talk is artfully managed in a way that leads to a generative and inclusive conversation.

Facilitators and long-time members have worked to create an environment built on principles such as respectful listening, equality, patience, and an acceptance of religious diversity. When learning within such an atmosphere, there can be transformative results. The next chapter in this manuscript will consider in detail the process of transformative learning in Interfaith Trialogue Group meetings.

CHAPTER 7

BECOMING THOU: THE PROCESS OF PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION

Introduction

The Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham County has worked for over a decade
to create a conversational space that welcomes and supports religious diversity. By doing
this, they engaged in a dialogue that embraces individuals holistically. Within this
dialogical space, I-Thou relationships founded on mutual trust and respect have come to
life. True to Martin Buber's dialogue theory, members in the ITG oscillate between I-
Thou and I-It relationships.[7] Participants' lengthy dedication cultivated these
relationships. As such, the final finding of this manuscript, and the focus of this chapter,
is the depth and outcomes of the interpersonal relationships within the ITG. Using
primarily interview data, I illustrate the evolution of these relationships with the intent to
show how the movement from I-It to I-Thou relationships between group members also
reveals the process of transformative learning. According to Buber, I-It relationships are
those between people with specific purposes and expectations. He wrote, "as experience,
the world belongs to the primary word *I-It*" (p. 6). By contrast, it is the I-Thou
relationship that, "establishes the world of relation" (p.6) and people are embraced for
who they are. For Buber, mankind does not stay solely within one type of relationship,
but moves between them, continually establishing and ending each depending on time,
place, and experience.

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[7] For more on I-It and I-Thou relationships as explained by Martin Buber (1923), please see Chapter 2 of
this manuscript.

A Model for Transformative Learning in Interfaith Trialogue

As described in Chapter 5 of this manuscript, the learning cycle within the ITG is dynamic and continually developing. The final phase in the cycle is transformative learning. I have aligned the process of transformative learning with Buber's theory because of the focus Buber's work is on interpersonal relationships between members of a dialogue, in this case trialogue. Interviewees in this study repeatedly stressed the importance of the good relationships between them. Through thematic analysis, I identified six steps to the process of developing I/Thou relationships within the context of the ITG: 1) the disorienting dilemma; 2) developing trust; 3) critical reflection; 4) the intersubjective move toward thou-ness; 5) the mutual embrace; and 6) re-encountering dialogue with new frames of reference. This transformative process was often spurred on through particularly meaningful moments between members, called *watershed moments* in this chapter. Interview participants described feeling appreciated and accepted for who they are, wholly. In turn, they often described embracing the other in the same way.

Interpersonal Relationships: A Foundation

Feelings of developing some kind of bond with the religious other was briefly discussed in Chapter 5 of this manuscript, but the social cohesion between members of the ITG has its greatest impact in the transformative learning process. Good interpersonal relationships between members support the process from beginning to end. Having good rapport with people of different faiths, regularly hearing about differences in personal belief and practice (rather than reading about the religion in a book or hearing about it on TV), and interpersonal learning led to an outcome of participants' being confident in their knowledge and interactions with others. To reiterate this manuscript's previous findings,

how interfaith dialogue is managed, how members of the group interact with each other, and the outcomes of this interaction on both a personal and interpersonal basis is a constantly moving phenomenon.

While unanimously claiming a good rapport with one another, the interview participants in this study did have diversity in opinion regarding the depth of these relationships. Descriptions of relationships with long-time members of the group appeared across varying levels of friendship ranging from "friendly" to "extended family," with the relationships between steering committee members more often presented as residing on the latter end of this spectrum. Interview participants explained that developing these friendships has taken time and dedication. Daniel noted members "began to grow to have a genuine, deep affection" for each other (interview, October 31, 2016). Claudia gave a similar assessment explaining one of the reasons she continues participating is because of the "great joy that it brings knowing these folks, I'm so thankful" (interview, December 5, 2016). When asked why she has attended almost every single monthly meeting for 15 years, Phoebe explained, "It comes back always to something personal, relationship, relationship, relationship (laughs). And it's just the good friends that we have met along the way and just wanting to be with them" (interview, November 6, 2016).

These friendships directly contribute to feelings of acceptance and support from the group. For Harun, this was an important point, he said:

> I can depend on [them] if I need something… If I go to them I know they won't let me down because they know who I am and who we are and we know who they are… So now it's like, after we meet, after we have all those time[s] with them,

there's a bridge now between us. I can go or they can come, we can meet in the

middle. (interview, December 1, 2016)

Participants described this support as reliability; if something happened in the community

they knew the members of the ITG would be there for help. Isaiah said, "I try to make a

point now if I meet someone who by their dress conveys to me that they're Muslim… to

greet them with *as-salamu alaykum*… I feel it's a miniscule way of saying, 'I've got your

back'" (interview, November 29, 2016). Claudia said that because group members have

become close, they now know "that if something bad does happen we would all be

united… that if someone bombed the Temple we would all the right there to support

them… or the same thing with the mosque" (interview, October 31, 2016).

A note of caution, the discussion in this chapter is not meant to insinuate

developing these relationships was always easy. On the contrary, many of the experiences

appearing in the analysis below were extremely challenging and difficult moments for

participants. Additionally, interview participants described what they still struggle with in

regards to their interactions with other members of the group. It does seem however,

those struggles more often happened toward the beginning of the transformative learning

process explained below. A common outcome of these early struggles was the

development of stronger feelings of trust between members. But, the fact that these

difficult moments continue to occur could represent the ever evolving nature of

interpersonal relationships between members of the ITG.

The ebb and flow of these interpersonal relationships also shows an oscillation

between I-It and I-Thou relationships that Buber focused on in his writing. While long

term members certainly show the characteristics of having I-Thou relationships with

others, at the same time they still have a purpose for coming together and expectations of

what they hope to gain from the monthly meetings. For instance, Matthew's comments

on the rarity of the group show a primary purpose for people coming together, "I tell

them all the time, you don't meet people, even within your own faith, that want to sit

down and talk about things. It's rare" (interview, October 10, 2016). For Buber, the

fluctuation between relationships is critical because no human can live a life purely of I-It

or I-Thou relationships. It is his or her movement between the two that defines the nature

of relationships with others throughout their lives. With this foundation in mind, I next

present the six major steps in the process of transformative learning through the lens of

Buber's theory.

The Journey from It to Thou

Figure 3 below visually represents the steps in this process of transformative

learning. It is important to note that, while this process is shown as a cycle with

individual phases, it is not necessarily direct in nature. For instance, some of the steps

described below may occur out of the typically expected order of the transformative

learning process. And, while this process is presented here in an orderly cycle, movement

through the phases could be thought of through the metaphor of a ladder. While

participants move up the ladder, due to the challenging nature of transformative learning

they may end up sliding back into previous phases rather than moving up. ITG members

needed to practice critical reflection and develop self-awareness to move up this ladder.

Additionally, as this process is built on interpersonal relationships, members move up and

down the ladder together, supporting each other making this process also is one that is

fluid, generative and dynamic. With the guidance of this study's theoretical framework,

Figure 3. Transformative Learning within the Experience of Interfaith Dialogue
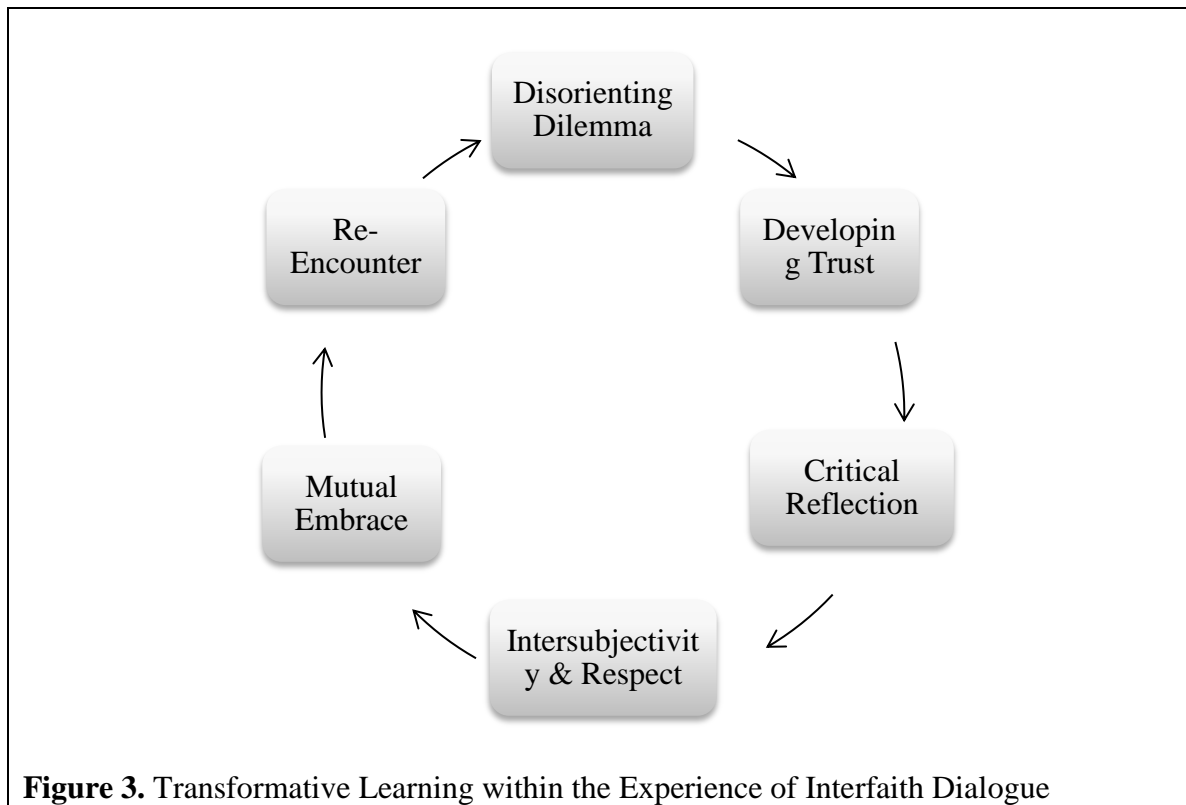
the explanation below and the model above are an attempt to present a clear, collective,

and organized picture of an experience that is at times unorganized, individualistic, and

hard to grasp.

Finally, a vital characteristic of this process is the time it takes for it to occur. It

involves prolonged interaction with the religious other. Isaiah explained that it takes time

to "put a face on the issue" and help people in the community learn through engagement.

He said, "Instead of saying 'All those Muslims are bad,' suddenly you know half a dozen

Muslims and you understand that they are peaceful and peace loving and they are looking

for the same things in their lives that you're looking for" (interview, November 29,

2016). Daniel described witnessing the impact of this prolonged engagement on another

ITG participant. This individual originally came to "lecture white Christian [Abraham

County] residents about the dangers of the Qur'an and Islam" but through his

participation over time, "you could see him transform" because Muslims were "able to suddenly not be the boogieman… and not only did he soften his tone, he recognized the folly of putting an abject anti-Muslim rant out in the public sphere" (interview, December 5, 2016). In what follows, I provide a detailed consideration of each step of this process ending with a discussion of its major outcomes.

Step 1: Disorienting Dilemma

In alignment with the theory, the transformative learning process in this context began with a moment of "disorientation" (Mezirow, 2012). Disorientation in this study was caused by an experience that made participants pause and think, an experience that had them "off-kilter" for a moment. Interviewees noted moments occurring across the length of their participation in the ITG, but many clustered toward the beginning. Claudia's description of meeting Isaiah for the first time is a striking example. She said:

> I'm trying to explain to him that I've got this love of Jews, I don't have prejudice against Jews and he says, "You say that now when things are easy and nice, but what happens when the tide turns? What do you do?" He asked me that point blank. And that gave me pause! It's like golly, you're right, I mean, would I sell you down the river to save my own skin? (interview, December 5, 2016)

These moments are monumental in some way, watershed moments that changed the course of their interactions with other members of the group. As noted in Chapter 5, many interview participants often noted learning about similarities, whether religious or otherwise, as jarring. A good example of this comes from interviews with Isaiah, who described learning that Muslims, as do Jews, pray directly to God rather than through an earthly intermediary such Christian clergy, as "really surprising. I didn't expect it… when

I heard that I was just stunned" (interview, November 29, 2016). This revelation shook

his assumption that Judaism and Christianity had more in common than Judaism and

Islam. Other disorienting moments came from learning about differences in scriptural

interpretation. Isaiah explained how difficult it was for him to read the story of Abraham

in Genesis and then again in the Qur'an:

> When I learned about the different interpretations of the story of Abraham and his
>
> relationship with his son, Isaac in our world, and Ishmael in the Islamic world, I
>
> was stunned. I thought the whole world would accept the Hebrew Bible as the Old
>
> Testament and would understand it the way we did. And I was absolutely shocked
>
> to hear this interpretation and I was fascinated! And I'll be honest with you,
>
> initially my thought was, "How are they bastardizing this story! This is the story!
>
> How could they do this?" (interview, November 29, 2016).

Luke explained how following a model of scriptural reasoning has brought both

similarities and differences to light better than the structure of early meetings. He

described the impact of reading scripture together with ITG members in the member

checking session:

> I really do want to stress the value of this scriptural reasoning we've been doing
>
> lately… To get with groups from other faiths that enjoy thinking about scripture
>
> in relation to our faith and lives like this group does… one reason I do this is
>
> because it's just so much fun. I come driving in tired and go back energized…. I
>
> think it's just, it has helped me learn and grow and not simply up here [motioning
>
> to his head]. Yeah, that's what Ramadan is. Or I hadn't thought about Joseph or
>
> Abraham in that way. I do think our lighting on this process of reading our

scripture to one another and talking about it is transforming for me. (member

check, February 14, 2017)

In several disorienting moments described by participants, they saw something

they themselves hold to be sacred reflected in another faith. Other times it came from

learning about similarities not based on faith, but in politics or general views on life. For

Khadija, learning about fears shared by both the Jewish and Islamic communities during

the 2016 Presidential Election was "eye-opening" and "really struck" her (interview,

December 7, 2016), dramatically changing her understanding of the experience of the

Jewish community as a minority in the United States. These early instances began the

process of participants changing what they thought they knew about someone of another

faith or about the other religion itself. Whatever disorientation these moments caused,

participants' needed to make meaning from them which led them down the pathway

through the next phases of the cycle.

Step 2: Developing Trust

Participants reported an outcome of increased levels of trust when working

through their disorientation to make meanings of their experiences. Trust is a

foundational element of Buber's I-Thou relationship. Interviewees described difficult

experiences as moments when their budding trust with others was challenged. They may

have even felt required to reflect on the wisdom in their choice to trust the other. Upon a

satisfactory outcome of the dilemma, they reported stronger trust with individuals and at

times extended this assessment to describe their relationships with the other's entire faith

community. One experience Daniel shared in his interviews is particularly poignant and

is worth quoting at length as it beautifully demonstrates increased trust as an outcome of
disorientation:

> We were having these Trialogue meetings and learning about tradition and ritual
> and observances and holidays and food and whatever. And that bombing
> happened [referencing the "Passover Massacre" bombing in 2002[8]] and I just, it
> put me into a tailspin. And I looked at these two men [Yusuf and Harun], and I
> had to wonder if it was all just bullshit. How do I know that they sent a couple of
> these guys that speak English very well to be the face of the mosque? And to what
> could be a charade, a complete charade? And yet they may not hold these views,
> but are there people in the mosque that would do the same thing given the
> opportunity? But were they, everybody else at the mosque, sympathetic to people
> who would blow up a roomful of 85-year-old Holocaust survivors? How am I
> supposed to know and really trust that these guys are genuine and representing a
> genuine, egalitarian view of Islam and the world? And I was really, really, really,
> deeply, deeply conflicted and angry, and suspected the worst, to tell you the truth.
> 'Cause I don't think at that point I could have really called them [Yusuf and
> Harun] friends. We just saw each other at meetings. So, my real growth with them
> and my building up of trust with them emerged after that. Because we had
> separate personal, private conversations, those two [Yusuf and Harun] and I, and
> [Isaiah] I think was involved. (interview, December 5, 2016)

---

[8] For a CNN news article on the Passover Massacre please see: "Passover massacre at Israeli hotel kills 19" located at http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/meast/03/27/mideast/

This example expertly illustrates the tenuous nature of relationship building in interfaith groups. Not only do moments within group engagement impact developing trust, but current events and the political climate are just as important.

Members also described moments when they knew ITG members trusted them. Harun noted meetings after instances of violence committed by Muslim extremists, in which he and Yusuf would be told, "Guys this is not you and we know that this is not true Islam." He continued, "That makes me feel like I gained the trust and I succeeded to show them this is not the Islam that the media is talking about." He explained his confidence in this knowledge, "I know they aren't faking it, I know they believe that this is not the religion they see on TV from the way we act with them and speak with them and explain our religion to them" (interview, November 10, 2016).

Interview participants cited the regulations of the Covenant as being part of the bedrock of their ability to trust the other. The third rule of the ITG ends with the sentence, "We commit to putting our prayers into action, and to allowing this Truth to be active in our thoughts, words, and actions as well." God's Truth is used as a foundation upon which dialogue in the ITG is intended to rest, leaving an expectation that members speak truthfully, honest in their interactions with others. This means honesty both in what they have complete assurance of within their faith as well as what they struggle with. Interview participants explained that it is the latter that is an indication of a genuine discussion. The following excerpt from field notes taken during a discussion on the Kingdom of Heaven in the October 17, 2016 monthly meeting is an excellent example of this behavior:

Luke said, "In Christian tradition, theologians have been real confused on why God needs this numeric… What worries me about this passage, in Christian tradition, we've focused on this 'I will not destroy by waters of the flood' but there have been some sermons talking about the fire next time… And Revelations is sometimes quoted along these lines, when God brings in a new Heaven on this Earth it will be by destruction by fire… I'm just wondering if this interpretation is part of the Jewish tradition as well?" Ezekiel said, "I'm not sure," to which Luke replied, "I see Khadija nodding." Khadija interjected, "From what I understand it will be a whole new world, we will not understand it as we do now, but I don't remember mention of a fire bringing it in." Ezekiel said, "Jewish tradition, and even in the Bible, is not always consistent… generally in the tradition, I think people say, 'We don't know. We don't know when the Messiah will come and we don't know what it'll be like. But it becomes a time of peace and closeness to God'." Then Harun added, "There are signs before it comes" [*Referencing the Qur'an here*]. Someone in the group then brought up contradictory commentary of the Old Testament. Ezekiel continued, "Mm hmm, but Jewish tradition is contradictory; when we become good it'll come or when we became evil it'll come." Daniel yelled from the back, "And that's just two Jews in the room, what would happen if we had five?" This joke is met with laughter. (observation, October 17, 2017)

Being willing to express what one struggles with or what one is not sure of in one's own tradition is a vulnerable position and a position people more likely take when they trust and feel supported by those around them. In the above excerpt, we see a beautiful

exchange where Luke presents something personally challenging in Christian tradition for him and then offers the floor to Ezekiel seeking, and incidentally receiving, support and a request for information on the existence of similar scriptures. In the interviews with participants, many described ITG meetings as a place to admit that no one has all the answers all the time and to discuss sometimes difficult questions with one another.

While the impact of trust in honest engagement does not correspond to the steps of transformative learning theory, it is integral to this data set. According to Properzi (2001), Buber's "encounter" can be described as a moment when an individual encounters another during dialogue and their own beliefs are "completely suspended, hidden, or forgotten" to avoid offending the other (Properzi, 2001, p. 253). For Buber, this is a key aspect to being able to have an I-Thou relationship with another person. Interviewees noted moments of suspending their own beliefs, listening to others speak in an attempt to support the inclusion of beliefs not of their own in the dialogue. These moments are exemplified in the ITG's commitment to exclude proselytization from the group meetings, discussed at length in previous chapters in this manuscript. Thus, the "encounter" in this study does not seem to include hiding or forgetting one's own beliefs, but listening and contributing to the discussion in a way that is generative rather than closed and exclusive.

Step 3: Critical Reflection

Step 3 in this cycle corresponds to the self-examination and critical reflection phases in the transformative learning process. This self-examination and critical reflection is integral to communicative learning, discussed at length in Chapter 5 of this manuscript. Here, an individual can change his or her frames of reference and points of

view for in communicative learning, "it becomes essential for learners to become critically reflective of the assumptions underlying intentions, values, beliefs, and feelings" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 6). The examples above illustrate moments in which interview participants felt inner turmoil, prompting critical reflection. As another example, Phoebe noted a moment in trialogue when a Muslim participant asked how Christians were monotheistic if they believed in a Trinity saying, "It kind of sounds like Hinduism doesn't it?" (interview, October 17, 2016). Unable to adequately answer this in the meeting, Phoebe described this as a challenging moment in which she needed to "go home and think; I've got to think this thing through" (interview, October 17, 2016). Referring back to Isaiah's experience learning the different interpretations of the story of Abraham he said:

> After a little reflection… it showed me that my religious stories and the way that I see them are not followed by other religions that still claim to follow "The Book"… Indirectly it teaches me that, there's a whole lot of pathways and interpretations of the same story and I should be open to other points of view that others have without giving up mine. (interview, November 29, 2016)

While Isaiah's commentary ends with an eloquent illustration of Buber's "embrace," discussed in Step 5 below, these examples above are also moments in which interview participants revealed instances of deep reflection and inquiry.

These moments of introspection led to a better understanding of participants' own beliefs and views toward the religious other, bringing the motives behind participating in the interfaith trialogue to the fore. In transformative learning theory, Mezirow (1997) explained that critical reflection and self-examination comes when members focus on the

assumptions and biases they bring with them in their lives. As an outcome of practicing critical reflection throughout his time in the ITG, Isaiah explained, "I recognize that I have my biases, that I've not always been fair in my thinking. I've also learned I've been naïve and I've learned I need to learn a lot more" (interview, November 29, 2016). Matthew stressed the dangers of not challenging preconceptions and assumptions, something that can happen when people only associate with others that believe and think the same way they do. He explained it is necessary to branch out of that sort of social circle because without associating with different groups of people "you can't understand where they're coming from" and then "you're ignorant. And when you're ignorant, you make assumptions and assumptions can be bad" (interview, October 31, 2016).

The combination of the disorienting event, developing trust, and subsequent critical reflection on assumptions and beliefs often began members' acceptance and appreciation for religious diversity. Therefore, the outcome of the first three phases often encouraged people to begin to embrace the second rule in the ITG Covenant, that differences between faiths should be respected and learned from. When new meaning was made and participants were reoriented with the budding of a broader mindset, they described being better able to accept and understand beliefs within alternative faith traditions. Here listening again plays a critical role. As Isaiah explained early in his second interview, listening and participating in dialogue with members of alternative faiths takes time and a particular mindset. The willingness to be confronted with different, difficult, and potentially disorienting information is integral in beginning the process of building I-Thou relationships.

Step 4: The Intersubjective in Moving Toward Thou & Developing Respect

After members reflected on their own values, beliefs, and assumptions, they often became more self-aware and confident in their own positions and subjectivities. It is here they began the "turn toward the Other," described by Avakian (2015) as "understanding and transformation of one's own faith-tradition" and "an unrestrained acknowledgement of the Other" (pp. 80-81). This phase is when intersubjectivity between participants blossomed and they strengthened relationships through mutual respect and shared understandings of the purpose and intent of the ITG.

In this turn toward their religious other, mutual respect developed when participants were able to see the other holistically, fully becoming "Thou" rather than "It." Yusuf described members of the group as "willing to understand one another and tolerate one another and respect one another" (interview, November 21, 2016). Phoebe said, "I have such respect for the knowledge of the different ones… with the knowledge of their religion… it's been hard work, it's been experiencing some hard work and we've hung in there" (interview, November 21, 2016). Isaiah stressed the importance of respect saying, "You have to respect the leaders of other religions… If I don't respect them, how can I talk about them with an open mind? How can I talk about their lifetimes, their teachings, their tenets of faith?" (interview, November10, 2016).

This phase had dramatic effects. Through the previous phase of critical reflection and self-examination, members confronted their own assumptions and misconceptions. It is here members described being comfortable in discussions that confronted others' misconceptions of their own or other traditions, particularly Islam. In line with Isaiah's commentary of "putting a face on the issue," Matthew described how meeting and

interacting with the Muslim participants in the group helps people "break out of the mold of what you think Muslims are" (interview, November 21, 2016). Interview participants described numerous experiences when the group confronted, countered, or contradicted stereotypes and ill-informed preconceptions of the religious traditions in the room. In his interviews, Yusuf explained how he continued a conversation one-on-one with an individual after ITG monthly meetings to discuss his misconceptions of Islam. Luke also described countering misconceptions of Islam outside of ITG meetings:

> I've become a little bolder in countering stereotypes about, and I hope it flows into people of all other traditions beyond Muslim, Christian, and Jew, but if I can speak much more personally now on the basis of this community, you know "you need to meet [Harun], you need to meet some of these other people that I've gotten to know face to face in this group before you dare say something like that again." So, I'm inspired to be more courageous in saying no when someone's talking about why all Muslims are filled with hate. I can't be quiet when I hear such things said. (interview, November 16, 2016)

In confronting stereotypes and misconceptions within the group, individuals in this transformative process are exploring their new roles in the group and planning how to implement these roles in the group and community around them, two traditional phases of Mezirow's transformative learning process. Through these conversations and the interpersonal relationships that make them possible, members of the ITG are working together to create a counter-narrative, their course of action (Mezirow, 2012). Harun said that participating in this counter-narrative is immensely important for Muslim participants, "this is on our shoulders and we have to act upon ourselves to turn that bad

image about Islam… if we did it in our community on a small scale, we succeed"

(interview, October 3, 2016). The narrative they create together in their dialogue

meetings runs counter to the narrative seen in the current media and political landscape

regarding the teachings of Islam and who can be considered "mainstream" Muslims.

Daniel, who continually impressed in his interviews the importance of creating

this counter-narrative, described meetings as challenging for new attendees because of

how they confront individuals' assumptions and preconceptions. When asked to

elaborate, he said:

> Number one, if you come in with an understanding, so let's say this is going to
>
> typically be somebody Christian. If you've been taught something your entire life
>
> about Jews and Judaism, or Muslims and Islam, it's not going to be that. You're
>
> going to have that foundation of Christianity, of Judaism, of Islam through a
>
> Christian lens, is now going to be shaken. Because now… you're hearing it from
>
> somebody that lives it every day. And you may find Christianity has had an
>
> impact on people in ways that you would not have predicted. (interview, October
>
> 31, 2016)

This "shaking" of someone's foundational beliefs is a keen description of the

disorientation interfaith learning experiences can create and is representative of how

creating the counter-narrative begins. Once that constructed view of the religious other is

disrupted, the opportunity for another to create a different conception becomes available.

Members can now construct a more porous worldview that incorporates a narrative

counter to anti-Muslim rhetoric, often more accurate regarding alternate faiths.

Many interview participants described creating this counter-narrative as a moral necessity. They reported its construction as influential in leading to a different articulation of the identity of more misunderstood religious traditions. Claudia described this important role in helping to change the perceptions of the greater community toward the members of the local mosque. She said the members of the mosque have become more active in the community because "they know they have a support system behind them" (interview, October 31, 2016). By being vocal and present in the community, Abraham County's Muslims "can teach the rest of the community in [Abraham] what this [the ITG] is about and they don't have two heads and that they're not making bombs in the basement" (Claudia, interview, October 31, 2016). Through this co-construction of the counter-narrative, members of the ITG strengthen their relationships by incorporating newly informed understandings of religious difference. Daniel explained the need of this activity saying, "the urgency to be part of that counter-narrative, I just really feel in my bones" (interview, December 5, 2016).

Step 5: Embracing the Religious Other and Being Embraced by the Religious Other

Once intersubjectivity and respect have been established, members' interpersonal bonds were increased. Not only did members note meaningful moments when they reached out to their religious other, but they also shared moments when they themselves felt embraced. Yusuf described an interfaith Thanksgiving service in which he read passages from the Qur'an aloud to the group. At one point he looked up and "there were a few tears… those were tears not from Muslim people" (interview, December 5, 2016). He described seeing he had moved members of other faiths with his own scriptures as personally poignant. In her interviews, Khadija talked about connecting with a Christian

member of the ITG during the Peace Walk they held in July of 2016. She said after a particular conversation of a difficult interfaith experience from her childhood, she felt "a stronger connection because he understood what I went through and it makes me more human in general" (interview, December 7, 2016).

Harun explained that he feels comfortable and secure in his beliefs in the group because members are open minded and no one says "my way or the highway" (interview, October 3, 2017). What this shows is more than just tolerance of the other, but a full acceptance in which participants feel embraced and understood. Gordon (2011) explained Buber's "embrace" as "the act of identifying with someone else's position and lived situation while simultaneously maintaining a clear sense of self" (p. 212). Here, one accepts others' beliefs as validly theirs while holding on to their own at the same time. Several excerpts provided above illustrate this point. As Claudia eloquently said, "No one from the mosque says you have to be Muslim to me. No one tells me I have to be Jewish" (interview, October 31, 2016). They can be wholly themselves in the I-Thou relationship, being the whole "I" and receiving the other as "I" in their wholeness.

In learning through ITG monthly meetings, and steering committee meetings for facilitators, members have gained the knowledge and experience needed to proceed in this new relationship. Thus, Step 4 and Step 5 of this process correspond to transformative learning's stages of exploring new roles, trying out new courses of action, acquiring knowledge needed to implement one's plans and building competence and confidence in one's new relationships (Nohl, 2015). Interestingly, members also described instances when their embrace of individuals of different faiths extended to the different faith communities as well. In this way, members who typically are not within

the "in-group" of a particular tradition begin to be embraced as part of an extended in-group. In the interviews, participants described getting to know the families, children, and spouses of other members of the ITG. They also described participating in these other communities' events. Claudia shared an experience of being invited the 100th anniversary of the local temple. It was a night of festivity and celebration, she said "they were just dancing and partying. There just was a very strong connection. And I remember [Isaiah and Daniel] hugging me and just, you could see how extremely happy and proud they were" (interview, October 31, 2016).

Step 5 shows a triumph over one of the most challenging aspects cited in interfaith dialogue literature, the challenge of one individual being seen to represent their entire faith. Thinking one person speaks for the whole of a faith tradition is dangerous for a variety of reasons, one of which is that no one person can represent the diversity of belief and expression in a religious tradition. In Chapter 5 of this manuscript, I presented participant explanations of the importance of being self-aware and in-tune with their own personal beliefs order to explain them to another. In this step of the transformative learning process and developing I-Thou relationships, participants no longer feel as though others are under the impression they are speaking for their entire community.

Daniel explained such a dialogic responsibility as a "burden," that he, Isaiah, and Ezekiel are somehow "speaking for all Jews" (interview, October 31, 2016). Yet at the same time, he cautioned that people who participate in interfaith dialogue must be aware, "you're representing your faith and its tenets and its belief systems and its world views and its ethics and its spirituality in front of these people who are trying to soak that up and you want to do it right" (interview, October 31, 2016). At one point in his second

interview, Isaiah made the point that even with the necessary self-awareness to be able to articulate your beliefs, no one person can capture the whole spirit of what an entire religious community believes. In observations conducted during this study, I noticed Khadija also being clear to distinguish her own personal beliefs in discussion. In one interview, she explained that her viewpoint is based on her own experiences and how she applies what she knows about her religion to her life:

> So, that makes me unique, and I think everyone would agree that… your personality is very unique and so how you take things in and learn them and apply them is going to be different to everyone even though you may be at the same starting point of information. (interview, November 14, 2016)

It is in this step of the process that the nuances within each tradition become embraced.

An outcome of this embrace and the confidence it builds is in participant descriptions of leaving the ITG stronger in their own faith. Each interviewee in this study indicated stronger faith to be a vital outcome of the group. As Khadija explained:

> I know that I have heard others say it during the trialogue, when we say certain things and we describe certain things, and we talk about the differences between what the other traditions say about that same story or topic, it just makes me continue to get stronger in my own belief. And I think many people feel that way. (interview, December 7, 2016)

This point was also discussed in Chapter 5 of this manuscript as part of the personal learning occurring in ITG meetings. Here we can see the impact that feeling embraced has on individual faith development. Matthew's words help demonstrate this point, "I'll say they've helped me with my own faith… it has reinforced my faith… It helps you to

be a good witness to your faith and it helps you grow in your faith" (interview, November 21, 2016). With stronger faith, embracing religious diversity, and fully formed I-Thou relationships, members enter the final phase in the transformative learning process.

Step 6: Re-Encountering with New Frames of Reference

Upon completion of the first five stages of this process, members re-engage with others in the ITG with a new perspective of their religious other. When asked if they feel they have changed through their participation in ITG, participants gave various responses. Claudia explained, "It's made me not so fearful. It's made me trust people that in the past I would have been very suspicious of. It's made me mistrust the media, that's for sure" (interview, December 5, 2016). Daniel noted he feels a change in his "relationships with the Muslim community" and "that change is really profound" (interview, December 5, 2016). Harun said, "I feel more comfortable to go there and talk[ing] and maybe sometimes, not necessarily argue, but make different points without getting criticized about it because I know the respect is there" (interview, December 1, 2016). Luke reported a change in his "appreciation and understanding of my neighbor in these two other faith's traditions… it's expanded my understanding and openness to learning new things about God" (interview, November 16, 2016). Matthew said, "I used to have this fear of them [Muslims]… Now? Great people… If I hadn't had the exposure and all I did is sit there and watch television, shoot, I wouldn't want to have anything to do with them" (interview, October 10, 2016). All these changes show ITG members' new frames of reference and meaning schemes, which have deeply influenced their continued interaction with others and participation in the ITG's monthly meetings.

A powerful outcome of this transformative learning cycle is that members of the ITG feel confident in expressing what they've learned outside the ITG community. They are more likely to advocate, support, or "speak up" for members of other faiths to their peers and family. Phoebe described disseminating what she's learned to others outside the ITG, "I feel like I'm a bridge. I feel like I can be a bridge for our religious traditions coming together, of listening, of respect" (interview, November 21, 2016). In their separate, individual interviews, Harun, Yusuf, Claudia, and Daniel all described one particular ITG meeting in which Islam was being judged according to the actions of violent extremists. Daniel and Claudia spoke up, as Yusuf described, "to our surprise and gratitude we see people of faith from different denominations coming and explaining. They say 'No, this is not the faith of Muslims, this is this or this is that'" (interview, November 21, 2016). It is possible that in this behavior, the members of the ITG are working toward transformative learning on a societal level.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the six major stages in the transformative learning process for participants in the Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham County. It is through the lens of understanding the development of their interpersonal relationships that the outcome of an expanded worldview can be best seen. Members have moved along a continuum of their early I-It relationships to create robust and inclusive I-Thou relationships. A prime example of this is in the value the group places on honesty and sincerity in discussion as well as the trust they have that each person in the room will also commit to this. As Matthew explained, "We've gotten to a point where we can trust one another in what we say. We may not agree, but… they have enough trust to questions…

and we usually end up respecting one another, even though we don't agree" (interview, November 21, 2016). Trust and respect are important for the I-Thou relationship as within such a relationship people are honest with each other, embracing them with sincerity. Such an experience has monumental effects, and long-time participants of the ITG have felt changes in the way they understand and interact in the world around them. Isaiah movingly explained the power of the ITG:

> Life is different when you're in the majority than when you're in the minority. As a Jew, and I probably say this pretty much holds for Muslims, we have to understand others to survive, because we're the few among the many. It's when the many try to understand the few and respect and appreciate them that I think the magic takes place. (interview, November 29, 2016)

The next chapter situates each of the major findings of this study in the literature of interfaith dialogue, Buber's dialogue theory, and transformative learning theory while providing implications for practice and theory. It ends with final reflections and conclusions about the study.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Interfaith dialogue is one of the most accepted methods of solving religious conflict and promoting interfaith competency and learning in diverse communities (Boys & Lee, 1996; Gopin, 2002; Helskog, 2014a, 2014b; Swidler, 2006). As a method for learning and promoting peaceful relationships between members of various faith traditions, interfaith dialogue has its successes and failures. Failed attempts at dialogue are often contributed to unanticipated challenges in practice, such as disagreement on allowed behaviors and desired outcomes of the dialogue group. In particular, Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue is fraught with complex and unique difficulties, arising from both historical disagreements and the continuation of violence between the faiths in our current time.

In the field of adult education, there is a growing body of literature on learning through intercultural contexts. Yet, very little literature exists in adult education on learning through interfaith interactions. As Charaniya and Walsh (2004) stated:

The literature does not address interreligious dialogue as a learning experience that can be systematically directed, planned for, or researched. It does not explore the nature of the learning that occurs within an interreligious context, nor does it explore how such experiences reshape their understanding of the world… We believe that interreligious learning is an ever more crucial focus for the emerging border-crossing inquiry within adult education, with the borders defined by

religious understanding and the resulting sense of belonging derived from

participating in a community of shared religious commitment. (p. 30)

Across a variety of disciplines little empirical research exists that examines both the

process and the outcomes of long-time participation in an interfaith dialogue group.

Additionally, virtually no research exists that examines interfaith dialogue between

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults. Various scholars have called for continued research

of interfaith dialogue events, encouraging examinations of interfaith dialogue, adult

learning in interfaith dialogue, and community building through interfaith relations

(Charaniya & Walsh, 2004; Gopin, 2002; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Swidler, 2006).

Given this gap in empirical research on interfaith dialogue, particularly in adult

education scholarship, the purpose of this study was to explore a community based

interfaith dialogue group between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults, examining both

the process and results of meetings, to understand if and how perspective transformation

of different faiths occurs through interfaith dialogue. The research questions guiding this

study were:

1. What happens when Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults engage in interfaith
   dialogue?
2. How do facilitators of interfaith dialogue prepare for and guide dialogue sessions?
3. In what ways, if any, does interfaith dialogue foster perspective transformation in
   regards to the religious other?

This study is timely due to the continuance of religious based violence across the world.

By providing an in-depth examination of a successful interfaith dialogue group, this study

contributes to both scholarship and practice. Specifically, it provides insight into adult

learning in an interfaith encounter and the nuance of the transformative learning process within this context. Finally, by considering the role facilitators play in learning and engagement through interfaith dialogue, this study contributes to both scholarship and practice as facilitator voices are largely missing from current research.

To address the research questions above, I employed thematic and conversation analysis to examine participant and facilitator experiences in the Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham County. This chapter provides a discussion of this study's connections with existing literature and implications of the findings for both theory and practice. I conclude with final thoughts about the study.

Discussion

Findings from this study align with several key aspects of both conceptual and empirical research on interfaith dialogue. However, each finding in this study was a new contribution to scholarship because this study occurred within the context of "interfaith trialogue" or dialogue between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults, a context unique to existing empirical scholarship on interfaith dialogue. The discussion of the alignment with current research is presented in the three following sections, each corresponding with the individual findings chapters within this manuscript.

Learning and Building Community through Interfaith Trialogue

The Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham County as a community is the first major finding of this study. This community has been sustained over a long period of time due to the continued interest and participation of its members. This community is based on several key factors of interfaith dialogue groups that existing scholarship identifies as integral. First, the importance of a safe space in which participants trust each

other is integral to creating such a community in which participants feel comfortable learning, being challenged, and challenging others (Boys & Lee, 1996; Clooney, 2012; Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Neufeldt, 2011; Riitaoja & Dervin, 2014). The environment created by the ITG is reflective of Kegan's (1982) holding environment. Kegan described the holding environment as a space where people feel encouraged, supported, and challenged to learn, grow, and develop. This environment encourages such learning and development through continuity, i.e. an environment of support and safety that is a consistent backdrop for learning and development.

Each participant in the ITG maintains what Fletcher (2007) called a sense of wonder and openness toward the religious other. This characteristic was integral to the development of the learning community and in building relationships between members. Each participant interviewed in this study explained that their interfaith community is not based on an attempt to force similarities between religious traditions with the effect of religious syncretism, but that each tradition is embraced for the similarities and differences it holds with others. Thus, the fear of hybridization and overlap of traditions (Bender & Cadge, 2006; Brown, 2013; Gabriel, 2010) does not seem to come to light in the ITG as a core tenet of the group is to accept the diversity and nuance within and across each religious tradition in the room. The hope of numerous scholars that recurrent interfaith dialogue meetings will lead to a sense of community between participants is certainly the case here (Gopin, 2002; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Pons-de Wit et al., 2015). Gabriel's (2010) suggestion that such a group will create an interfaith network of mutual understanding, respect, and empathy is reflected in the findings from this study.

Other desired outcomes of interfaith dialogue identified in the literature directly relate to the findings of this study. Members of the ITG emulate the desired outcome of respecting and accepting religious diversity (Acar, 2013; Fletcher, 2007; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Neufeldt, 2011), so much so that this is a core guideline for participation in the group. The learning community developed has led to mutual learning and understanding, both of oneself and the other (Gabriel, 2010; Pons-de Wit et al., 2015; Swidler, 2013). Learning with and about the other was an overall theme running across each data set in this study. Participants in the ITG were able to learn about other traditions without losing sight of their own, a goal of interfaith dialogue common in scholarship (Boys & Lee, 1996; Fulton & Wood, 2012; Haug, 2014; Krebs, 2015). It seems that members of the ITG have learned the conversational skills necessary to have successful and productive dialogue on difficult topics (DeTurk, 2006; O'Keefe, 2009). Reflected in much of the data for this study is the idea that the ITG serves as a sign for the larger community of Abraham County, working in the community to promote interfaith cooperation and engagement. For several scholars, social action is a vital outcome of interfaith dialogue, supporting more peaceful coexistence in their own community (Abu-Nimer, 2002; Charaniya & Walsh, 2004; DeTurk, 2006; Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Krebs, 2015).

Trialogue in Action: Dialoguing with the Religious Other

The second finding of this study, the process and inner-workings of both dialogue meetings and steering committee meetings, has very little to align with in the literature. Specifically, literature on the preparation of dialogue meetings and the roles that facilitators play is mostly absent. However, the process of dialogue and the major values

attended to during dialogue meetings that are identified in this study align with existing

literature on the method and models of dialogue. Particularly relevant for this study, is the

concept of the interreligious learning model, proposed first by Boys and Lee's (1996)

seminal work on interfaith dialogue.

In the interreligious learning model, participants work through the beliefs,

practices, and core values of each faith represented by participants in the room. As

suggested in the literature, one way to go about this is by following the method of

scriptural reasoning (Avakian, 2015; Garber, 2015; Haug, 2014). In following this

method, the ITG has been able to take a deep and meaningful exploration of Judaism,

Christianity, and Islam in a way that participants explained did not occur previously. It

seems that Avakian's (2015) assertion that the power of scriptural reasoning lies in

reading scripture across traditions in a spirit of friendship and honesty is confirmed by

this study's findings. Members of the ITG explained that reading scripture in the monthly

meetings both deepened their own faith and enhanced their understandings of the

complexity of different religious traditions (Boys & Lee, 1996; Charaniya & Walsh,

2001). Additionally, members expressed that they had much more to learn, something

that they came to realize through continued engagement in dialogue.

The behavior and focus of the members of the ITG also represents the importance

of authenticity and self-awareness in discussion. This is accomplished by listening, a vital

component of both dialogue and developing I-Thou relationships with another person

(Gordon, 2011; Froeyman, 2014; Jons, 2013). Participants in this study repeatedly

stressed the need for authenticity and self-awareness in discussion because they both

enhance an individual's ability to participate in dialogue and increase the chances that

authentic relationships and connections will be built among members. These characteristics compliment Buber's (1923) assertions that dialogue only truly occurs when these conditions are met. Additionally, the components of dialogue reflected in the ITG support Mezirow's (1997) proposition that discourse composed of both instrumental and communicative learning is a powerful avenue for transformative learning and perspective transformation.

Becoming Thou: The Process of Perspective Transformation in Interfaith Dialogue

The conception of transformative learning within this study is a combination of the rational and extra-rational components of the individual. The findings from this study support the writings on the importance of reflection (Clooney, 2012, 2013; Dirkx 1997, 2006, 2012), that in order for transformative learning to occur the individual must reflect upon and be aware of both conscious, unconscious, emotional, and imaginative aspects of their worldviews (Charaniya, 2012; Dirkx, 2001). Critical self-reflection was a particularly important component of the transformative learning process of this study. Rodger's (2002) explained that critical reflection is a form of thinking that connects one experience to experiences that follow in a way that "gives direction and impetus to growth" (p. 850). Similarly, Brookfield (1998) noted reflection is a way to become aware of the way individuals interpret the world and how their beliefs and assumptions impact this interpretation. Reflection as discussed in this study reflects both of these characteristics. As Tennant (1993) wrote, "reflective learning leads to a transformation of meaning schemes and transformative learning which leads to a transformation of meaning perspectives" (p. 39).

Additionally, the results of this study align with several major steps along the transformative learning process and in developing Buber's I-Thou relationships. As Gordon (2011) explained, developing I-Thou relationships are dependent upon an individual's willingness to listen to the beliefs of another, temporarily suspending one's own during discussion. In ITG meetings observed throughout the course of this study, this indeed is what happened. Participants did not speak over one another but listened respectfully to others. Participants embraced the beliefs of others in a way that allowed for the co-creation of meaning in an intersubjective realm.

It was the relationships developed between participants that allowed the transformative learning process to occur. Swidler's (2006) work highlighted the importance of these relationships. An attempt to experience the tradition of another is possible with strong interpersonal relationships, as reflected in the findings of this study. Thus, the outcomes of building relationships across boundaries of faith in the ITG are similar to those cited in the literature including more respect and appreciation for both one's own and another's religion (Helskog, 2014a, 2014b; Fleming & Lovat, 2015), increased levels of tolerance, acceptance of religious diversity (Acar, 2013; Lando et al., 2015; Small, 2009), and expanded social and learning communities led to an increase of interfaith social action in the larger community (Agrawal & Barratt, 2014; DeTurk, 2006). Additionally, in learning about the tradition of others in the environment of the ITG, members developed a better awareness of the negative impacts of religious intolerance (Agrawal & Barratt, 2014; Boys & Lee, 1996) and friendships across borders of faith (Charaniya & Walsh, 2001, 2004).

Several scholars proposed that the number of participants from each tradition needs to be equal in order for these relationships to develop (Gopin, 2002; Swidler, 2006). This was not the case in this study, as the number of Christian participants was far greater than participants from Judaism and Islam. Yet, it is possible that the uneven numbers did not hinder this dialogue group due to its length of time practicing and that early on in its existence the number of participants did indeed have an even representation of each faith. The strong relationships created early on may have prevented the growth of the group and increasingly uneven numbers of adherents of each tradition from negatively affecting the quality of dialogue.

Additionally, many participants in this study were from relatively liberal branches of their religious traditions, belonging to faith communities that more often than not encourage openness and acceptance of the religious other. This view is integral to the relationships and interactions that occur through interfaith dialogue, with scholars indicating that views of other traditions as inferior will dramatically hinder dialogue with the aims of mutual learning and acceptance (Avakian, 2015; Boys, 1997; Keaten & Soukup, 2009). Overall, this study's findings seem to confirm Abu-Nimer's (2002) assertion that for interfaith dialogue to have an outcome of transformative learning it must involve a cognitive element, positive emotional experiences in a trusting and safe environment, and cooperation in learning and action (pp. 16-17).

Implications

In the current political environment of the United States and religious conflict across the world, understandings of the long term impact of interfaith dialogue are pertinent. Specifically, understanding how they impact individual communities can help

inform practitioners seeking to develop interfaith dialogue groups in their own community. Additionally, findings from this study inform possibilities for future research and theory. Each of these implications is discussed next.

Implications for Practice

This study underscored the need for intentional planning and management of interfaith dialogue meetings. Facilitators play a key role in the trajectory of dialogue sessions; intentionality in planning and guidance during meetings may help ensure that the desired outcomes of the dialogue session are reached. Dialogue sessions should occur in a series, giving participants time to get to know one another, develop relationships, and become comfortable with each other while learning to converse about difficult topics such as faith and religion. This study also revealed the importance of dialogue sessions occurring over an elongated period of time, with enough time in between sessions in which participants can reflect and make meaning on their experiences in each session. In regards to structure of dialogue and numbers of participants equality is extremely important. However, this may not necessarily mean equality in numbers but in focus and time spent discussing topics of time within each faith. The findings from this study suggest it is the latter that may be more influential on successful dialogue groups, that even with uneven numbers participants can feel welcomed and not outnumbered, where the contributions of the few are as important as the contributions of the many.

This study also revealed the power in collective leadership of interfaith dialogue groups. By having adherents from each tradition as leaders, issues of representation and marginalization may be mitigated in interfaith groups. Collective leadership offers guidance and management of dialogue sessions in a shared way between many people.

The meetings observed in this study were consistently on track with the stated goals and guidelines of the trialogue group. Thus, as in practice dialogue sessions need the time and flexibility to address the concerns and expectations of the various members in attendance; it is possible that when leadership responsibilities are shared among several people this is more likely that this will occur.

Finally, this study revealed the importance of a sense of safety in the space in which dialogue sessions occur. While neutrality was a desire for some scholars (Fleming & Lovat, 2015; Krebs, 2015; Lando et al., 2015) this was not necessary for this dialogue group. In fact, members expressed the significance of having dialogue sessions in various places of worship around the community rather than one, neutral space. This indicates that practitioners and facilitators of interfaith dialogue must carefully consider the location of dialogue events and align their decisions of such locations with the desire of the participants within the dialogue group.

Implications for Theory

Implications for theory in this study mainly reside in contributions to research on transformative learning theory. As Taylor and Cranton (2013) warned, research in transformative learning theory has the potential to become stagnant, as in recent years very little scholarship making a unique contribution to the theory has been completed. This study adds to the concept of transformative learning theory in several ways. First, findings from this study bring to light the vital component of interpersonal relationships in transformative learning. Much of the existing research on transformative learning theory focuses on the process within the individual, with almost no mention of how the intersubjective realm impacts transformative learning. Findings from this study highlight

how interpersonal relationships and intersubjectivity in meaning making and dialogical expectations enhanced and served as a foundation for the transformative learning process. Transformative learning was encouraged by the sense of safety and security that was managed through guided interactions between participants in dialogue. With facilitators ensuring each faith had an equal amount of time at talk and embracing the contributions of each participant, it is possible that in this context transformative learning was facilitated through this management of the interactions. In examining transformative learning within the context of interfaith dialogue and the relationships formed between members, this study keeps in mind the importance context and society play in the transformative learning process (Tennant, 1993).

This study also contributes to transformative learning scholarship in the conceptual framework. As of yet, no studies have been identified that used a combination of transformative learning theory and Buber's dialogue theory to understand learning within an interfaith context. Yet, looking at the phenomenon of interfaith dialogue in such a way enhanced understandings of the transformative learning process and shined a light on the importance of having relationships characterized as "I-Thou" in transformative learning contexts. Therefore, further research on the intersection of these theories, as well as how they may enhance or contradict each other, is needed. Additionally, this lens honed in on the necessity of trust in interpersonal relationships in order for transformative learning to occur.

Future research should also further consider the impact space has on interfaith dialogue groups and how holding sessions in various sacred spaces may serve as an additional way for adherents to share about their faith in a way that enhances the dialogue

meetings. This study's findings revealed that while physical place is important, it is more important for the group itself to be a holding environment, thus taking feelings of safety and security to each physical location in which dialogue meetings are held. In this way, the holding environment was internalized by the participants of interfaith dialogue and it was brought into each place in which dialogue meetings occurred such as libraries, hospital meeting rooms, churches, mosques, and synagogues. In this vein, future research could examine the intersection of space and place, the differences between the two, and the need of developing an intentional space between dialogue groups regardless of place.

Finally, future research could more deeply examine the community developed within interfaith dialogue organizations. It is possible that the community in this study is reminiscent of a community of inquiry (Torbert, 1976, 2004) rather than a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In such a community, an ongoing inquiry, not practice, occurs. It seems the ITG may have created a community of inquiry rooted in faith and spirituality that has expanded beyond a shared common interest or behaviors. Additional research into the role communities of inquiry have to play in interfaith dialogue could shed additional light on community building between participants of interfaith dialogue groups and how interfaith communities are created and sustained.

Conclusion

Hopes for conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence often lie in the possible power of interfaith dialogue. Yet, in order for such to occur, participants in interfaith dialogue must have dedication, patience, and a willingness to continue the conversation for several months, if not years. When this happens, interfaith dialogue groups have the potential to encourage transformative learning in the participants and positive social

action in the larger community, particularly when the dialogue group is a grassroots effort led by laypeople in the community.

This manuscript presented findings from a qualitative case study examining such a dialogue group. Through years of practice, members of the Interfaith Trialogue Group of Abraham County have created a strong and long-lasting interfaith community, one which was carefully cultivated by facilitators and participants alike, having an outcome of robust learning and building relationships across boundaries of faith. The success of this organization can serve as a model for other groups hoping to bring Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults together for generative, enlightening, and possibly conflict resolving discussion. Additionally, the findings from this study align with current research and deviate in fascinating ways, offering insight into practice, theory, and the possibilities of contributions of future research.

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Appendix A

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hello,

My name is Elizabeth Pope and I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Georgia in the College of Education pursuing a degree in Adult Education. My dissertation research is on adult learning and perspective transformation through interfaith dialogue. I am conducting a case study of an interfaith dialogue program that will involve observations, interviews with members and facilitators, and analysis of program documents. I came across your organization and would like to talk with you to see if you and your group would be interested in working with me. I would be very interested in learning about your group and how your dialogue sessions work. If you would be interested in talking with me about my study and/or your participation in my study please feel free to email (ebmartin@uga.edu) or call me (770-712-4716) at your earliest convenience. Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,

Elizabeth (Liz) Pope, MA, ABD
Doctoral Candidate and Graduate Assistant
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
President of UGALLA
Certified Professional Trainer, ATLAS.ti Qualitative Data Analysis Software

ebmartin@uga.edu

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM FOR OBSERVATIONS

Researcher's Statement
I am asking that you take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you information about the study so you can decide whether to participate. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Aliki Nicolaides
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
alikin@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to explore a community-based interfaith dialogue program between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults. Both the process and results of the program will be examined to understand participant learning as well as if, and how, perspective transformation of alternative faiths occurs through interfaith dialogue. The information generated will be used for academic research and possibly publication. All information obtained will be treated confidentially.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will allow the researcher to observe meetings of the interfaith dialogue group you participate in. There should be no additional time commitment on your part other than the time you have already committed to participate in the dialogue session. It is possible that you will be asked to participate in three 45 to 60 minute in-depth interviews regarding your experiences with interfaith dialogue. If this is the case, an additional consent form will be needed for interviews, which will be audio recorded.

Risks and Discomforts
I do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.

Benefits
I do not anticipate any direct benefits to you from participating in this study. However, there will be benefits based on how this study will contribute to knowledge regarding interfaith dialogue. The findings generated by this study will contribute to theoretical and practical knowledge on interfaith dialogue by providing context-specific information. This will further and deepen our understanding of the process, outcomes, and benefits of interfaith dialogue.

Privacy/Confidentiality

All information obtained during this research project will be treated confidentially. Pseudonyms will be used rather than your real name. Field notes from taken this observation will not include any directly identifiable information. When reporting findings, I will take care not to include details that may identify you as a participant. No affiliations will be used in findings.

Taking Part is Voluntary

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time should you become uncomfortable with it.

Questions or Concerns

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me, the main researcher conducting this study at ebmartin@uga.edu, or my advisor/principal investigator, Aliki Nicolaides (alikin@uga.edu) at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all your questions answered.

_____   _____   _____

Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Appendix C

CONSENT FORM FOR OBSERVATIONS
Steering Committee Meetings

Researcher's Statement
I am asking that you take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you information about the study so you can decide whether to participate. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator:	Aliki Nicolaides
	Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
	alikin@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to explore a community-based interfaith dialogue program between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish adults. Both the process and results of the program will be examined to understand participant learning as well as if and how perspective transformation of alternative faiths occurs through interfaith dialogue. The information generated will be used for academic research and possibly publication. All information obtained will be treated confidentially.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will allow the researcher to observe and audio record steering committee meetings of the interfaith dialogue group you participate in. There should be no additional time commitment on your part other than the time you have already committed to participate in the steering committee meetings. It is possible that you will be asked to participate in three 45 to 60 minute in-depth interviews regarding your experiences with interfaith dialogue. If this is the case, an additional consent form will be needed for interviews, which will also be audio recorded.

Risks and Discomforts
I do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.

Benefits
I do not anticipate any direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, there will be benefits based on how this study will contribute to knowledge regarding interfaith dialogue. The findings generated by this study will contribute to theoretical and practical knowledge on interfaith dialogue by providing context-specific information.

This will further and deepen our understanding of the process, outcomes, and benefits of interfaith dialogue.

Audio Recording
In order for the researcher to perform analysis of these meetings, audio recordings are necessary. By signing this consent form, you are agreeing to allow the researcher to audio record steering committee meetings.

These audio recordings (or transcriptions of these recordings) may be used in the future to present findings at research conferences, for publication, and/or in teaching settings. Any material used from the audio recordings will be kept confidential and pseudonyms of any participants will be used so that identifying characteristics are left out of findings. These recordings will be archived after transcription on the researcher's personal computer, which is password protected. These audio recordings, and the transcriptions of the recordings, will be kept indefinitely by the researcher for teaching and research purposes. If you do not want your data retained, you may choose to have all identifiable material removed from your data as soon as collection is completed.

Please provide initials below if you agree to allow the researcher to use these recordings of the meetings for presentation at conferences and/or in teaching settings. You may still participate in this study even if you are unwilling to allow the researcher to use the recordings, or transcriptions, in these additional settings.

_____ I do not want to have these recordings used for teaching or conference presentations.

_____ I am willing to have these recordings used for teaching or conference presentations.

Privacy/Confidentiality
All information obtained during this research project will be treated confidentially. Pseudonyms will be used rather than your real name. Field notes from taken this observation will not include any directly identifiable information. When reporting findings, I will take care not to include details that may identify you as a participant. No affiliations will be used in findings.

Taking Part is Voluntary
Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time should you become uncomfortable with it.

Questions or Concerns
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me, the main researcher conducting this study at ebmartin@uga.edu or 770.712.4716. You may also contact my advisor/principal investigator, Aliki Nicolaides (alikin@uga.edu) at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research

participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Appendix D

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR INTERVIEWS

Hi _____, I've very much enjoyed coming to the meetings of the [Interfaith Trialogue Group] and learning from all of you. Based on the length of time you have been a member in the Trialogue, I would like to invite you to participate in three 45-60 minute interviews to discuss your background and history, your experiences in the Trialogue, and your reflections on your learning throughout your time participating in the Trialogue. Would you be interested in participating in these interviews?

If so, please email me back and we can set up times to schedule your interviews. We can do them in person (surrounding the steering committee meetings or the Trialogue group discussions) or over the phone. Please let me know which you would prefer and we can go ahead and get them on the calendar :-)

Thanks!

Elizabeth (Liz) Pope, MA, ABD
Doctoral Candidate and Graduate assistant
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
President of UGALLA
Certified Professional Trainer, ATLAS.ti Qualitative Data Analysis Software

ebmartin@uga.edu

Appendix E

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

Researcher's Statement
I am asking that you take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you information about the study so you can decide whether to participate. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Aliki Nicolaides
                                Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and
                                Policy
                                alikin@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to explore a community-based interfaith dialogue program between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish adults. Both the process and results of the program will be examined to understand participant learning as well as if, and how, perspective transformation of alternative faiths occurs through interfaith dialogue. The information generated will be used for academic research and possibly publication. All information obtained will be treated confidentially.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will participate in three 45 to 60 minute in-depth interviews regarding your experiences with interfaith dialogue. You are being asked to participate in these interviews based on your long-term participation in the group. You also provide the researcher with a varied and well-rounded interview sample that will be used to help represent the beliefs of participants in your interfaith dialogue group.

Risks and Discomforts
I do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research. However, there may be some discomfort from talking about sensitive topics in relationship with this research study. If you experience any discomfort you may request that the interview be stopped at any time.

Benefits
I do not anticipate any direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, there will be benefits based on how this study will contribute to knowledge regarding interfaith dialogue. The findings generated by this study will contribute to theoretical and practical knowledge on interfaith dialogue by providing context-specific information. This will further and deepen our understanding of the process, outcomes, and benefits of interfaith dialogue.

Audio Recording
In order for the researcher to perform analysis of interview data, audio recordings are necessary. Only the researcher will have access to these audio recordings. These audio recordings (and/or transcriptions of these recordings) may be used in the future to present findings at research conferences, for publication, and/or in teaching settings. Because of this all material from your interviews will be retained. If you do not want your data retained, you may choose to have all identifiable material removed from your data as soon as collection is completed.

Any material used from the audio recordings will be kept confidential and pseudonyms of any participants will be used so that identifying characteristics are left out of findings. Additionally, these recordings will be archived after transcription on the researcher's personal computer, which is password protected.

Please provide initials below if you agree to allow the researcher to use the recordings of your interviews for presentation at conferences and/or in teaching settings. You may still participate in this study even if you are unwilling to allow the researcher to use this information in these additional settings.

_____ I do not want to have these recordings used for teaching or conference presentations.

_____ I am willing to have these recordings used for teaching or conference presentations.

Privacy/Confidentiality
All information obtained during this research project will be treated confidentially. Pseudonyms will be used rather than your real name. Field notes from taken these interviews will not include any directly identifiable information. When reporting findings, I will take care not to include details that may identify you as a participant. No affiliations will be used in findings.

Taking Part is Voluntary
Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time should you become uncomfortable with it.

Questions or Concerns
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me, the main researcher conducting this study at ebmartin@uga.edu or 770.712.4716. You may also contact my advisor/principal investigator, Aliki Nicolaides (alikin@uga.edu) at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line on the following page. Your signature below indicates you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Appendix F

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW 1:
FOCUSED LIFE HISTORY

Thank them for participating.
Engage in some small talk to put participant at ease.
Remind interviewee of your purpose.
Assure that the interview is confidential.
Ask them to sign the consent form and give them a copy
Get verbal permission to tape record.
Ask if they are ready for you to begin recording.
Test equipment by recording the following information:
Date, Time, and Location
Participant pseudonym
Interviewer's name
Conduct the interview (using the protocol).
Watch the time and do not go over time. Ask if you can schedule another interview if needed.
Stop the recorder.
Thank the participant again.

Lead Question: <u>Tell me about your background.</u>

Possible Prompts:
- Marital Status
- Career (past or present)
- Family/ethnic background
- Education
- Religious Membership
- Political background

<u>Did you grow up as a (Jew, Christian, or Muslim)? What was that like?</u>

Possible Prompts:
- Religious or public school?
- Converted or born into current religion?

- o   If converted, from which tradition?
- o   What was it like to convert to another tradition?
- How involved were you (and your family) in your (church, mosque, or synagogue) community?

What role does religion play in your life?

What is your current role in your religious community?

Possible Prompts:
- How active are you?
- How long have you been active/a member of this community?
- How did you become part of this community?

What does it mean to you to be a (Christian, Muslim, or Jew)?

Think of one of your first times interacting with someone of a different faith (outside of this group), and tell me about that.

What led you to want to participate in interfaith dialogue?

Final Question: Is there anything you would like to tell me about your background that we have not discussed?

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW 2:
DETAILS OF EXPERIENCE

Thank them for participating.
Engage in some small talk to put participant at ease.
Remind interviewee of your purpose.
Assure that the interview is confidential.
Ask them to sign the consent form and give them a copy
Get verbal permission to tape record.
Ask if they are ready for you to begin recording.
Test equipment by recording the following information:
Date, Time, and Location
Participant pseudonym
Interviewer's name
Conduct the interview (using the protocol).
Watch the time and do not go over time. Ask if you can schedule another interview if
needed.
Stop the recorder.
Thank the participant again.

Lead Question: <u>What is it like to participate in interfaith dialogue?</u>

Possible Prompts:
- What does the term "interfaith dialogue" mean to you?
- What do you hope to gain or learn through your participation in interfaith
  dialogue?

<u>When did you begin participating in interfaith dialogue?</u>

Possible Prompts:
- How did you hear about the dialogue group?
- How did you become active in the dialogue group?
- How often do you participate in the dialogue group?

<u>What has made you continue participating in interfaith dialogue?</u>

Think of what happens in a dialogue session and describe that to me.

Have you participated in activities other than dialogue with members of this group? If so, what are these activities?

How would you describe your relationships with other members of this dialogue group?

Possible Prompts:
- Think of a time when you felt a connection with someone of a different religion during dialogue and tell me about that.
- Think of a time when you felt distanced from someone of a different religion during dialogue and tell me about that.

Think of an experience that stands out to you from your time participating in dialogue and tell me about that.

Final Question: Is there anything about your experience participating in this dialogue group that you would like to tell me?

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW 3:
REFLECTION ON THE MEANING

Thank them for participating.
Engage in some small talk to put participant at ease.
Remind interviewee of your purpose.
Assure that the interview is confidential.
Ask them to sign the consent form and give them a copy
Get verbal permission to tape record.
Ask if they are ready for you to begin recording.
Test equipment by recording the following information:
Date, Time, and Location
Participant pseudonym
Interviewer's name
Conduct the interview (using the protocol).
Watch the time and do not go over time. Ask if you can schedule another interview if
needed.
Stop the recorder.
Thank the participant again.

Lead Question: <u>Given what you have said in the previous interviews, how do you
understand the role interfaith dialogue plays in your life?</u>

Possible Prompts:
- How has participating in interfaith dialogue impacted your life?
- Has participation in interfaith dialogue changed you in any way? If so, how?

<u>What have you learned through your experiences in dialogue?</u>

Possible Prompts:
- Learned about yourself?
- Learned about your own tradition?
- Learned about other traditions?
- What have others in the group done to help you learn during dialogue?

Think back on your time participating in interfaith dialogue and tell me about your most meaningful experience?

Possible Prompts:
- What made this experience meaningful for you?

Think back on your time participating in interfaith dialogue and tell me about your most challenging experience?

What other group member has made the most meaningful impression? What did they do?

Think of a time when your experiences from interfaith dialogue impacted your everyday life and tell me about that.

Given what you've discussed in these interviews, where do you see yourself going in the future?

Last Question: Is there anything else about the impact participating in interfaith dialogue has had on your life that you would like to share with me?

Appendix G

EMAIL CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

Researcher's Statement
I am asking that you take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you information about the study so you can decide whether to participate. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Aliki Nicolaides
                              Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and
                              Policy
                              alikin@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to explore a community-based interfaith dialogue program between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish adults. Both the process and results of the program will be examined to understand participant learning as well as if, and how, perspective transformation of alternative faiths occurs through interfaith dialogue. The information generated will be used for academic research and possibly publication. All information obtained will be treated confidentially.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will participate in one 60-90 minute in-depth interview regarding your experiences with interfaith dialogue. You are being asked to participate in this interview based on your interest and your role as a facilitator of the dialogue group.

Risks and Discomforts
I do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research. However, there may be some discomfort from talking about sensitive topics in relationship with this research study. If you experience any discomfort you may request that the interview be stopped at any time.

Benefits
I do not anticipate any direct benefits to you from participating in this study. However, there will be benefits based on how this study will contribute to knowledge regarding interfaith dialogue. The findings generated by this study will contribute to theoretical and practical knowledge on interfaith dialogue by providing context-specific information. This will further and deepen our understanding of the process, outcomes, and benefits of interfaith dialogue.

Audio Recording
In order for the researcher to perform analysis of interview data, audio recordings are necessary. Only the researcher will have access to these audio recordings. These audio recordings (and/or transcriptions of these recordings) may be used in the future to present findings at research conferences, for publication, and/or in teaching settings. Because of this all material from your interview will be retained. If you do not want your data retained, you may choose to have all identifiable material removed from your data as soon as collection is completed.

Any material used from the audio recordings will be kept confidential and pseudonyms of any participants will be used so that identifying characteristics are left out of findings. Additionally, these recordings will be archived after transcription on the researcher's personal computer, which is password protected.

Privacy/Confidentiality
All information obtained during this research project will be treated confidentially. Pseudonyms will be used rather than your real name. When reporting findings, I will take care not to include details that may identify you as a participant. No affiliations will be used in findings.

Taking Part is Voluntary
Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time should you become uncomfortable with it.

Questions or Concerns
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me, the main researcher conducting this study (ebmartin@uga.edu or 770.712.4716), or my adviser/principal investigator, Aliki Nicolaides (alikin@uga.edu) at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To provide your consent to participate in this study, please reply to this email with the fields below copied. First, select of two of the three options below. The first option indicates your consent to participate in the interviews. The second and third options indicate whether you will allow the researcher to use the recordings of your interview for presentation at conferences and/or in teaching settings. You may still participate in this study even if you are unwilling to allow the researcher to use this information in these additional settings.

Second, type your name, type I CONSENT, and type in the date. Georgia is an open records state and email records may be opened to the public, so your participation in the study may be made public. However, there are no known risks to you.

Please select two:

_____ I would like to participate in the interviews.

_____ I do not want to have these recordings used for teaching or conference presentations.

 _____ I am willing to have these recordings used for teaching or conference presentations.

Type your name here (participant):
Type your consent here (I CONSENT):
Type the date here:

Name of Researcher: Elizabeth M. Pope, M.A.

Signature:

Please keep a copy of this email for your records.

Elizabeth (Liz) Pope, MA, ABD
Doctoral Candidate and Graduate Assistant
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
President of UGALLA
Certified Professional Trainer, ATLAS.ti Qualitative Data Analysis Software

ebmartin@uga.edu

Appendix H

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FACILITATOR INTERVIEW

Thank them for participating.
Engage in some small talk to put participant at ease.
Remind interviewee of your purpose.
Assure that the interview is confidential.
Ask them to sign the consent form and give them a copy
Get verbal permission to tape record.
Ask if they are ready for you to begin recording.
Test equipment by recording the following information:
Date, Time, and Location
Participant pseudonym
Interviewer's name
Conduct the interview (using the protocol).
Watch the time and do not go over time. Ask if you can schedule another interview if needed.
Stop the recorder.
Thank the participant again.

Topic Domain 1: Background

Lead Question: Tell me about your background.

Follow Up Questions:
1. What led you to become a facilitator of interfaith dialogue?
2. Tell me about a time in which the need for interfaith dialogue became clear to you.
3. What does the term "interfaith dialogue" mean to you?

Prompts:

Topic Domain 2: Facilitating Interfaith Dialogue
(This topic domain may not be necessary after the focus group)

Lead Question: Tell me about what your role was in the dialogue group.

Follow Up Questions:
1. What were your goals for this interfaith dialogue group?
2. Do you think these goals were accomplished (why or why not)?
3. What techniques did you use to manage each dialogue session?

4. Walk me through a typical dialogue session.

Prompts:

Topic Domain 3: Experiences in Interfaith Dialogue

Lead Question: What was working in this dialogue group like for you?

Follow Up Questions:
1. What was your most meaningful experience?
2. What was your most challenging experience?
3. Did working with this dialogue group change you in any way?
4. What have you learned through facilitating interfaith dialogue?

Prompts:

Final Question: Is there anything you would like to tell me about managing interfaith dialogue that we have not discussed?

Appendix I

CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUP

Researcher's Statement
I am asking that you take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Aliki Nicolaides
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
alikin@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to explore a community-based interfaith dialogue program between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish adults. Both the process and results of the program will be examined to understand participant learning as well as if, and how, perspective transformation of alternative faiths occurs through interfaith dialogue. The information generated will be used for academic research and possibly publication. All information obtained will be treated confidentially.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will participate in one 60 minute focus group regarding your experience facilitating interfaith dialogue. You are being asked to participate in this interview based on your role in the steering committee of this dialogue group. You also provide the researcher with a varied and well-rounded sample that will be used to help represent the goals, activities, and beliefs of facilitators in your interfaith dialogue group. There is a possibility that the researcher will ask for your participation in a second focus group depending on the outcome of the first focus group.

Risks and Discomforts
I do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research. However, there may be some discomfort from talking about sensitive topics in relationship with this research study. If you experience any discomfort you may end your participation in, or request that the focus group be stopped, at any time.

Benefits
I do not anticipate any direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, there will be benefits based on how this study will contribute to knowledge regarding interfaith dialogue. The findings generated by this study will contribute to theoretical and practical knowledge on interfaith dialogue by providing context-specific information.

This will further and deepen our understanding of the process, outcomes, and benefits of interfaith dialogue.

Audio Recording
In order for the researcher to perform analysis of focus group data, audio recording is necessary. Only the researcher will have access to this audio recording. This audio recording (and/or transcription of this recording) may be used in the future to present findings at research conferences, for publication, and/or in teaching settings. Because of this all material from this focus group will be retained. If you do not want your data retained, you may choose to have all identifiable material removed from your data as soon as collection is completed.

Any material used from the audio recording will be kept confidential and pseudonyms of any participants will be used so that identifying characteristics are left out of findings. Additionally, this recording will be archived after transcription on the researcher's personal computer, which is password protected.

Please provide initials below if you agree to allow the researcher to use the recording of your focus group for presentation at conferences and/or in teaching settings. You may still participate in this study even if you are unwilling to allow the researcher to use this information in these additional settings.

_____ I do not want to have these recordings used for teaching or conference presentations.

_____ I am willing to have these recordings used for teaching or conference presentations.

Privacy/Confidentiality
All information obtained during this research project will be treated confidentially. Pseudonyms will be used rather than real names. Field notes from taken this observation will not include any directly identifiable information. When reporting findings, I will take care not to include details that may identify you as a participant. No affiliations will be used in findings.

While the researcher will emphasize to all participants that comments made during the focus group should be kept confidential, it is possible that participants may repeat comments outside of the group at some time in the future. Therefore, your respect for the privacy of focus group members is essential.

Taking Part is Voluntary
Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time should you become uncomfortable with it.

Questions or Concerns

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me, the main researcher conducting this study at ebmartin@uga.edu or 770.712.4716, or my advisor/principal investigator, Aliki Nicolaides (alikin@uga.edu) at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line on the following page. Your signature below indicates you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all your questions answered.

_____   _____   _____

Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Appendix J

FACILITATOR FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

- Thank them for participating
- Remind them of the purpose of the focus group
- Assure them the focus group is confidential – all names and identifying information will be removed from transcript and write-up
- Ask them to sign consent form and give them copies to keep
- No right or wrong answers to questions – interested in hearing from everyone
    - Goal for today is not necessarily a consensus of opinion but to hear your experiences with facilitating dialogue
- I will ask questions – please answer in a way that is comfortable for you; you may ask clarifying questions or choose not to answer if the question makes you uncomfortable
    - If you have questions feel free to ask them at any time
- This session will last no longer than one hour
- Focus group will be audio recorded so we don't miss what's said and I will be taking notes – gain permission to begin recording

What was it like transitioning from a participant to a leader of trialogue?

What are your goals for the trialogue group? Are these goals being met?

How do you balance moments of instructive discussion with discussions of personal experience and interpretation?

What topics/behaviors do you consider to be "in" or "out of bounds" for group sessions? How do you manage this?

What are the most challenging aspects of facilitating group sessions? Rewarding aspects?

Appendix K

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS
(ten Have, 2007)

"The glossary of transcript symbols given below is meant to explain the major conventions for rendering details of the vocal production of utterances in talk-in-interaction as these are used in most current CA publications. Most if not all of these have been developed by Gail Jefferson, but are now commonly used with minor individual variations. The glosses given below are mostly based on, and simplified from, the descriptions provided in Jefferson (1989: 193-6; see also 2004), at times using those in Heritage and Atkinson (1984), Psathas and Anderson (1990); see also Psathas (1995) and Ten Have and Psathas (1995). I have restricted the set given below to the ones most commonly used, omitting some of the subtleties provided by Jefferson.

Sequencing

[A *single left bracket* indicates the point of overlap onset.
]   A *single right bracket* indicates the point at which an utterance or utterance-part terminates vis-à-vis another.
=   *Equal signs*, one at the end of one line and one at the beginning of a next, indicate no 'gap' between the two lines. This is often called *latching*.

Timed intervals

(0.0)   *Numbers in parentheses* indicate elapsed time in silence by tenth of seconds, so 7.1) is a pause of 7 seconds and one-tenth of a second.
(.)   A *dot in parentheses* indicates a tiny 'gap' within or between utterances.

Characteristics of speech production

word   *Underscoring* indicates some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude; an alternative method is to print the stressed part in *italics*.
::   *Colons* indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound.
          Multiple colons indicate a more prolonged sound.
-          A *dash* indicates a cut-off.
.,??,   *Punctuation marks* are used to indicate characteristics of speech production, especially intonation; they are not referring to grammatical units; an alternative is an italicized question mark: *?*
.   A *period* indicates a full stopping in tone.
,   A *comma* indicates a continuing intonation, like when you are reading terms from a list.
?   A *question mark* indicates a rising intonation.
,?   The *combined question mark/comma* indicates a stronger rise than a comma but weaker than a question mark.

	The absence of an utterance-final marker indicates some sort of 'indeterminate' contour.
↑↓	*Arrows* indicate marked shifts into higher or lower pitch in the utterance-part immediately following the arrow.
WORD	*Upper case* indicates especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk.
°	Utterances or utterance-parts bracketed by *degree signs* are relatively quieter than the surrounding talk.
< >	*Right/left carets* bracketing an utterance or utterance-part indicate speeding up.
.hhh	A *dot-prefixed row of* h*s* indicates an inbreath. Without the dot, the *hs* indicates an outbreath.
w(h)ord	A parenthesized *h*, or a *row of* h*s within a word*, indicates breathiness, as in laughter, crying, etc.

Transcriber's doubts and comments

( )	*Empty parentheses* indicate the transcriber's inability to hear what was said. The length of the parenthesized space indicates the length of the utteran-scribed talk. In the speaker designation column, the empty parentheses indicate inability to identify a speaker.
(word)	*Parenthesized words* are especially dubious hearings or speaker identifications.
(( ))	*Double parentheses* contain transcriber's descriptions rather than, or in addition to, transcriptions." (pp. 215-216).