ABSTRACT

Title of Document:	INTERGROUP DIALOGUE AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY: ADDRESSING CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE AND RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION IN US HIGHER EDUCATION
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Interfaith initiatives are increasingly prevalent on college and university campuses around the country. In large part, this trend responds both to ongoing religious violence throughout the world and to increasing religious tension in the United States. The goal of these interfaith initiatives is to increase awareness of different religious identities and to bolster interfaith collaboration. For this research, I analyze a campus-based, curricular interfaith dialogue program that utilizes the Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) pedagogy to increase student understanding of privilege, oppression, and social injustice pertaining to religious identity. This project represents one of the first known empirical studies of religion-themed IGD, as current literature predominately focuses on race and gender. Using qualitative research methods including participant-observation, in-depth interviews, informal interviews, and document analysis, I present a multiple case study of three undergraduate interfaith dialogue courses. Findings suggest that (a) religious minority students are easily marginalized in the IGD process; (b) Christian privilege is a difficult concept for both

students and dialogue facilitators to comprehend, even for those who readily recognize other forms of privilege (i.e., White, male, heterosexual); and (c) religious identity is also a difficult concept for both students and dialogue facilitators to understand because they think of religion as a set of philosophical beliefs, rather than as a social identity deeply intertwined with one's culture. Implications for research and theory include (a) the need to further advance theoretical discourse related to Christian privilege and religious identity, (b) the importance of expanding educational initiatives seeking to promote awareness and understanding of these issues, and (c) the obligation for interfaith dialogue practitioners, faculty, and other higher education professionals to be more sensitive to the experiences of students with minority religious identities.

INTERGROUP DIALOGUE AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY:
ADDRESSING CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE AND RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION
IN US HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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Dedication

To Grandma, Maude Setsuko Okamoto Takahashi, and Grandpa, Kenichi Takahashi.

I left Hawaiʻi and started this PhD program thinking (hoping) I would come back

home to live near you two again before you left. Alas, that did not happen. I hope

that the work I did while I was away made you proud and honored the work you did

in your lives to get me to there. I miss you both dearly. This is for you.

Acknowledgements

There's a Japanese saying that is particularly appropriate for this moment: *okage sama de*. An attempt at a literal translation might look something like, "It is because of your help that I am able to succeed." But it's more than a saying; it's a sentiment that is integral to the Japanese outlook on life. It's an awareness, one that was instilled in me at a young age, that everything you do and achieve in life is possible because of the efforts of those who came before you. While a dissertation is theoretically the work of a single individual, I recognize that I did not do this alone. I am afforded the luxury of pursuing education at this level because of the people, families, and communities that have paved, and continue to pave, my way. To all of you, including those I have never met, *okage sama de.*

In particular, I'd like to acknowledge my parents, my first teachers, for cultivating my inquisitive nature and my activist spirit. Their unconditional love and support eased the burden of this rigorous dissertation process tremendously. The same goes for my brother, Ravi, who uplifts me, keeps me grounded, and inspires me to be my best. And also the rest of my family, related by either blood or love, that all contribute to the fabric of my life that keeps me protected throughout my various endeavors.

Of course, I owe many thanks to my advisor, Jing. I was introduced to her at a time when I was jaded by academia and convinced that no one in the ivory tower would give me the space, let alone the encouragement, to bring forth the issues I cared about in the manner I felt was most appropriate. She proved me wrong. It is because of her that I decided to move forth with the PhD process in the first place, and it is because

of her that I have enjoyed it so much. The rest of my committee – Steve, Sahar, Noah, and Linda – and the rest of the faculty I have had the pleasure of studying with have also positively impacted my graduate studies. Similarly, my fellow graduate students, as well as my colleagues in Academic Achievement Programs and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, have all helped make my journey through this program one of great personal, professional, and spiritual growth.

Another integral component of this dissertation is my husband, Brent. We like to joke that because I left my job to write full-time this past year that he was my dissertation writing fellowship, but in reality he was so much more than that. He was my second advisor, my cheerleader, my personal assistant, my guidance counselor, my travel partner, and everything else I needed him to be. I'm not going to say that I couldn't have done it without him, but it sure would have been a lot harder!

My in-laws have been such a strong support system for me too; I'm lucky to have such a large network of them! They made me feel at home when I was far, far away from home, and continue to make me feel loved no matter where in the world I am. I came to Maryland without even being able to point it out on a map, and ended up with a family that I am deeply grateful for.

To those I mention here, and those I failed to acknowledge above: *okage sama de.*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Throughout the world, religion is a source of conflict, discrimination, and misunderstanding. On one extreme, religious differences delineate opposing sides in war and genocide. In less overtly violent contexts, claims of tolerance and inter-religious acceptance mask underlying prejudices and institutionalized religious stratification. In response to this ongoing reality, interfaith dialogue initiatives are used in hopes of promoting peace and understanding between conflicting religious groups. The general premise underlying the concept of most interfaith dialogues suggests that individuals can reduce their bias against members of other religious groups if they engage in a respectful conversation about their differences and similarities with them. Furthermore, a reduction of bias in individuals or small groups is thought to ultimately lead to peaceful coexistence between differing religious communities on a larger scale. However, despite having comparable goals – i.e., peace building and/or conflict resolution – the structure, content, and context of the various interfaith dialogue programs are extremely diverse. Many of these programs are run by religious organizations in places of worship, others exist in people's homes or secular community spaces, and some even operate in schools and other educational settings, both public and private. The specific nature of each interfaith dialogue is typically determined by the needs and the capacity of the people and communities involved.

While recognizing the need for many forms of interfaith dialogue, this study looks at one specific type of interfaith dialogue occurring in colleges and universities across the United States through campus-based Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) programs.

Originally designed for promoting understanding of race-based injustices, the IGD pedagogical model has been adopted by many higher education institutions for use in courses on gender, religion, sexuality, ability, national origin, and several other identity categories. The goals of IGD are to (a) raise awareness of identity oppression and social inequities, (b) build cross-group communication skills and relationships, and (c) increase intergroup cooperation for addressing identity based social justice issues (Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013; Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007). Thus, through this type of interfaith dialogue, students are taught to critically analyze religious identity and the state of interfaith relations in the United States. In other words, IGD seeks to (a) raise students' awareness of religious oppression and inequality in our rhetorically pluralistic society, (b) build interfaith dialogue skills and increase interfaith friendships, and (c) promote interfaith cooperation for addressing social injustices for minority religious groups.

Existing research on IGD demonstrates positive outcomes in line with its stated pedagogical goals. However, this body of research looks almost exclusively at race and gender identity alone. In an effort to expand our understanding of IGD, and to explore the potential for using IGD as a model for interfaith dialogue, the qualitative case study presented here provides an in-depth analysis of three religion-themed IGD courses at East Coast University (a fictional institution I use throughout this dissertation to maintain the anonymity of the research site). By looking inductively at students' experiences in these classes, and comparing those experiences

with the pedagogical goals of IGD, I discuss some of the unique qualities and challenges of this particular identity theme that previous research has not addressed.

In this introductory chapter, I will outline the relevance of this study to current trends in educational literature and programming. First, I will put forth several arguments used for supporting the inclusion of dialogues about religion and religious diversity in educational settings. Then, I will describe the present state of religious identity[1] understanding amongst scholars in the United States and the lack of depth and breadth that exists in current literature on religious inequality in the higher education context. Lastly, I will clarify some of terminology I use throughout this dissertation and will provide an overview of the content in each of the remaining chapters.

Why Interfaith Dialogue in Education?

In reviewing the literature that supports the inclusion of dialogues about religion and religious diversity in education – particularly, higher education – there are three main categories of reasoning that emerge: (1) the need to promote religious literacy, (2) the need to attend to students' spiritual development, and (3) the need to broaden the discourse on diversity. In this section, I summarize these three arguments in order to provide a holistic and

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[1] While I recognize that some may not use this descriptor as their preferred label, I am choosing to refer to the spectrum of identities associated with belief or lack of belief in a higher power or divine realm as "religious identity" purposefully. As I will explain in greater detail later on in this chapter, I choose the term "religious identity" in order to explicitly refer to the cultural component of religion and how that impacts identity, rather than to describe a specific sets of beliefs.

multifaceted justification for the importance of my research on interfaith

dialogue in education.

Promoting Religious Literacy

"No world peace without peace among religions, no peace among
religions without dialogue between religions, and no dialogue between
religions without accurate knowledge of one another."
Hans Kung (1987, p. 194)

Inter-religious conflict has existed throughout human history, and is older than

many of today's major world religions. Yet, modern Western ideals of separating

religion and government have caused us to shy away from addressing issues

surrounding religion in the public sector, especially in the realm of education

(Marshall, 2010; Prothero, 2008; Wimberley, 2003). This avoidance of education

about religion has led to ignorance among the general population about the

increasingly diverse religious landscape in which they live (specifically in North

America and Western Europe). Steven Prothero (2008) calls this phenomenon

religious illiteracy, and identifies it as a major problem in the United States. In 2001,

the religiously charged terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City,

along with the increased religious bigotry towards Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus that

followed (Blumenfeld, 2006; Radomski, 2010; Takim, 2004), came as a wake-up call

to educators and government officials around the world, and inspired a number of

interfaith and intercultural initiatives. The Council of Europe, for example,

immediately began developing a new strategic plan – one that would encourage all of

its member countries (all countries in Eastern and Western Europe, minus Belarus) to

incorporate intercultural and interfaith dialogue practices into their public education

(Halsall & Roebben, 2006; Wimberley, 2003). Doing so seemed to go against their

own understanding of their role as a non-religious international organization:

> Religion is obviously a major dimension of cultural diversity. Why
>
> then was it not addressed for decades? There are two sources of this
>
> sensitivity. The first is tradition: discussing religion in
>
> intergovernmental co-operation breaks a longstanding convention,
>
> reflecting deep respect for freedom of conscience and religion as well
>
> as the consensus support of the historic confessions for the European
>
> ideal. The second is that the Council of Europe is a public body, and
>
> as such remains resolutely neutral in the debate within and between
>
> religions about ultimate truths. (Wimberley, 2003, p. 200)

This statement illustrates how including issues related to religion in the public agenda

is often conflated with promoting one religion over another (or over no religion), and

thus, is discouraged. Recently, however, there has been an increased recognition of

the need to integrate religion, spirituality, and interfaith dialogue into education and

other public initiatives as a way to increase religious literacy and inter-religious

understanding (Astin, 2004; Kazanjian & Laurence, 2007; Marshall, 2010;

Michaelides, 2009; Patel & Brodeur, 2006; Prothero, 2008). Certainly, such

programs existed prior to September 11, 2001, but since then, the impetus for the

interfaith dialogue movement has undoubtedly grown, as more and more people are

beginning to understand why there is a need for interfaith dialogue in education.

Attending to Students' Spiritual Development

One of the consequences of avoiding religion and spirituality in the public sector, especially in education, is that, until recently, little was known about this aspect of college students' identities. In 2003, in order to address this lack of understanding, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) launched a nationwide longitudinal study[2] that sought to provide data on college student religious/spiritual identities, and to examine the extent to which their time in college facilitated their spiritual development. The project, which ended in 2010, found that 83% of college students identify as religious and affiliate themselves with a religious group, and that 80% of college students are interested in exploring spirituality (Spirituality in Higher Education, n.d.).

Dozens of publications have been produced using this data[3], (i.e., Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, 2006; Bryant & Astin, 2008), through which authors have argued that spirituality and religious dialogue are an essential part of higher education. Findings suggest that spirituality is extremely important in most students' lives, and for that reason, educators need to pay more attention to students' spirituality and internal selves, while also attempting to teach them about the world and their external realities. The project's principle investigator, Alexander Astin (2004), notes that,

> What is most ironic about all of this is that while many of the great
> literary and philosophical traditions that constitute the core of liberal
> education are grounded in the maxim, 'know thyself,' the development

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[2] http://spirituality.ucla.edu/
[3] For a full list, see: http://spirituality.ucla.edu/publications/academic-articles/

of self-awareness receives very little attention in our schools and

colleges, and almost no attention in public discourse in general or in

the media in particular. If we lack self-understanding – the capacity to

see ourselves clearly and honestly and to understand why we feel and

act as we do – then how can we ever expect to understand others? (pp.

34-36)

Beyond the HERI study, the 2000's saw a massive increase in scholarly

literature calling for student affairs professionals (in particular), faculty, and

administrators to support students' spiritual development and to make higher

education a welcoming environment for the exploration of religion and

interfaith dialogue (i.e., Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Ingram, 2007;

McCarty, 2009; Nash, 2001; Nash 2003; Small, 2007; Small 2009; Tisdell,

2003). This new discourse on spirituality in education emphasizes the need to

recognize students' religious identities as a legitimate part of their overall

selves and to treat their curiosity about religion as a legitimate part of the

overall college learning process.

Broadening the Discourse on Diversity and Social Justice

In the United States, education – particularly higher education – has attempted

to address social inequalities by establishing policies and initiatives that seek to foster

diversity on campus and increase social justice for disadvantaged groups. According

to education historian John R. Thelin (2004), the first call for reorienting higher

education towards issues of minority equity and access came in 1971 from the

government commissioned Newman Report, which pointed out the system's lack of

attention to the increasingly diverse student population. However, substantial changes in governance and operations on college campuses were not realized until the 1990s, when larger social movements began to demand recognition and equality for minority racial groups, women, and LGB (lesbian, gay, or bisexual) individuals (Thelin, 2004). In particular, campus-based multicultural programing and curricula sought to advance voices and issues from marginalized racial minorities, as racial tension throughout the country was rampant in the 1990s (Engberg, 2004; Patel, 2012). Today, racial tension and inequality persist, which colleges and universities are continuing to confront. Likewise, there are increasingly well-established campus movements and academic disciplines for addressing gender and sexual orientation issues, fueled by ongoing social injustice for women and the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer) community.

Despite the advances that have been made in the last several decades with regard to issues of identity and social justice, there has been relatively little headway in the effort to understand and address religious identity and oppression (Blumenfeld, 2006; Patel, 2012; Schlosser, 2003). In view of that, Nash and Scott (2009) have suggested that incorporating education about religion and religious difference into our systems of higher education is the "the next logical step for enlarging the meaning of cultural pluralism and diversity" (p. 132). Doing so would push students, educators, and administrators to understand the concept of 'multiple perspectives' on a whole new level (Nash & Scott, 2009).

Eboo Patel, founder of the Chicago-based non-profit organization Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), believes that the emphasis on racial diversity in higher education

has had a positive impact on race relations in our society, and is optimistic about the potential for campus-based interfaith work to alleviate religious tension in a similar way. According to Patel (2012), if colleges and universities were as deliberate about, and attentive to, issues of religious diversity as they have been about issues of racial diversity, we would see a drastic change in the way religious minorities are viewed and treated in this country. In a recent piece published by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Patel stated,

> I'm pretty convinced that one reason Barak Obama is president is because of the 1990s-era multiculturalism movement on campuses. A generation of college students caught a vision of what a multicultural nation should look like – and those were the people who staffed the moonshot Obama campaign. Imagine the impact a 21st-century campus interfaith movement would have on the nation over the course of the next 30 years. Perhaps we won't be Googling "Sikh" when we hear of a hate-fueled murder in Milwaukee; perhaps we'll be electing a Sikh president. (Patel, 2012, para. 11)

While there is a growing body of literature calling attention to college students' religious identities, many of them (i.e. Astin 2004; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Mayrl & Oeur, 2009; Tisdell, 2003) do not address the power dynamics that exist between religious groups, and the ways in which religions are stratified in the United States. Attention to issues of inequality and social (in)justice is a necessary component of incorporating religious diversity into the larger agenda of diversity in higher education.

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Theoretical discourse has developed over the years to help us understand how to address identity and social justice with regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identity categories – i.e., critical race theory, feminist theory, queer theory, etc. – but there is a dearth of literature, certainly not an entire field of study, dedicated to discussing religious identity through a similar critical lens. There is, however, a small, but growing, community of scholars who do represent a critical perspective to analyzing religious identity oppression (i.e., Adams & Joshi, 2010; Blumenfeld, 2006; Clark, Brimhall-Vargas, Schlosser, & Alimo, 2002). These authors examine religion as a social identity (beyond a set of personal beliefs) and argue that religious oppression is a structural issue that is perpetuated by the overarching Christian hegemony in the United States. While I draw strength from all those who argue for the need to include religious identity and interfaith dialogue in higher education, I align my research agenda most closely with those who view religious identity and religious oppression as a social justice issue.

Religious Identity and Inequality in US Higher Education

As I explained in the previous section, many scholars have supported the idea of including dialogues about religion and religious diversity in higher education, especially in the last decade or so. However, not all of them recognize the power dynamics associated with religious identity and how that impacts students' perceptions of and experiences with interfaith dialogue and other interfaith initiatives. To demonstrate that point, this section reviews current approaches to interfaith engagement on college campuses and describes the ways in which scholars and

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practitioners are discussing the need for increased interfaith understanding. First, I
review existing trends in interfaith programming. Then, I describe the bias towards
the three dominant Abrahamic[4] religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) present in
the literature. Finally, I will briefly introduce the concept of Christian privilege, and
the difficulty some have in accepting its existence.

Current Trends in Interfaith Student Programming

Interfaith dialogues and other forms of interfaith programming on college
campuses attempt to engage students from differing religious backgrounds in hopes
of relieving tension on their campuses surrounding religion. To help higher education
institutions assess the types and levels of religious tension that exist on their
campuses, the IFYC is presently administering (at a cost) a second round of their
nationwide survey – the Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey[5]. Data from
the campuses that participated in the first round of their survey suggest that religious
minorities (including non-religious students) are more acutely aware of religious
conflict on their campuses than Christian students, and experience more negative
interactions with, and feelings of coercion from, peers with different religious
identities (Interfaith Youth Core [IFYC], n.d.). To solve this problem, the IFYC
suggests a model of interfaith engagement that is centered on facilitating

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[4] Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are often collectively referred to as the Abrahamic
religions because they share a common spiritual heritage to the Biblical figure
Abraham. Smaller religious traditions such as the Bahá'í faith and Rastafariansim are
also technically encompassed by the term "Abrahamic", but in the literature I speak
of here, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the three religious traditions that receive
the vast majority of the attention. A complementary term "non-Abrahamic" refers to
those religious traditions that do not claim Abraham as a part of their spiritual
lineage.
[5] http://www.ifyc.org/survey

opportunities for students to have positive interactions with peers from other religious identities through service projects and other extra- or co-curricular activities (see: Patel & Brodeur, 2006). In the rhetoric surrounding this model of interfaith engagement, the term "interfaith dialogue" is often used – and the justification is that through bringing students from different religions together in this fashion, interfaith dialogue occurs organically.

With partnerships in colleges and universities across the country, IFYC is beginning to build some momentum in the promotion of this model. The trend has also been fueled by *The President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge*[6], which was introduced by President Barak Obama in March 2011. Within one year of the launch of this presidential call to action, over 250 new interfaith initiatives were formed on college and university campuses around the country, all organized around community service as a means of advancing interfaith collaboration (White House, 2011).

Another approach to interfaith dialogue and engagement that is common on college campuses can be exemplified by Wellesley College's Religious and Spiritual Life Program (detailed in Kazanjian & Laurence, 2007). This program is guided by a team of chaplains[7] and religious advisors, as well as a multi-faith student council, that assist in developing campus-wide campaigns to inspire students, staff, and faculty members to engage in interfaith dialogue and increase their appreciation of religious diversity. The emphasis at Wellesley is on celebrating the traditions of all religious

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[6] http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ofbnp/interfaithservice
[7] See Clark and Brimhall-Vargas (2003) for a discussion on why the use of the word chaplain to refer to religious advisors from non-Christian traditions is indicative of Christian privilege.

groups on campus, and by doing so, educating the campus community about the different religious identities that make up their college. Additionally, the Religious and Spiritual Life team seek to facilitate opportunities for the student body to explore their own spirituality and receive pastoral counseling if they so desire.

With similar intentions, East Coast University opened an interfaith garden in the fall of 2010, including an outdoor labyrinth that was created as a symbol of the campus' commitment to religious diversity. Various workshops and interfaith retreats utilize the garden for dialogues about issues pertaining to religious identity, and also to teach students, faculty, and staff about practices like meditation and inner reflection. These initiatives are primarily organized and facilitated by chaplains and other staff in the campus' interfaith chapel. Despite a lack of academic publications describing this type of programming in more detail, a web search for "campus interfaith dialogue" or "campus interfaith program" will surely produce numerous links to campus interfaith centers describing initiatives much like those at Wellesley College and East Coast University – many of which clearly state that they are operated by chaplains, religious leaders, or religious student organizations.

While these approaches – interfaith service projects and interfaith programming run by religious advisors – certainly seem like a step in the right direction, they fail to address issues of power and privilege as they pertain to religious identity. Patel's opinion, as stated in IFYC's podcast, *What Is Interfaith Literacy?*, is that the solution to interfaith conflict and prejudice is simply to build appreciative knowledge of other religions and being able to identify shared values with individuals from different religious identities (IFYC, 2013). The programs at Wellesley College

and East Coast University seem to echo that sentiment. However, others, like Seifert (2007), would contend that without adequately acknowledging and managing the drastic power imbalance between different religious groups, educational programing that engages issues of religion and spirituality can be damaging to religious minority students may perceive the initiatives as hollow attempts to assuage them, while not actually addressing their marginalization.

Religious Identity Inclusion Beyond the Dominant Abrahamic Faiths

Another aspect of interfaith programming that can be perceived as hollow or insincere to some religious minority students is the bias towards Christianity or the three dominant Abrahamic faiths in much of the existing discourse and practice. Small (2011) pointed out that literature on spiritual identity development, intended to guide student affairs professionals, has either interpreted minority faith students through existing Christian faith identity development theories, or has "lumped students of all religious groups into a categorical definition aligned with mainstream Christianity" (Small, 2011, p. 4). Indeed, Watt, Fairchild, and Goodman (2009) recognized the same problem, and organized a special issue of the journal *New Directions for Student Services* in order to help push the field beyond its Christian orientation. However, in this special issue they attend only to Jewish, Muslim, and Atheist student identities – no other religious identity is represented or discussed. In fact, in the introduction to the special issue, the editors list only Islam, Judaism, or Atheism as non-dominant belief systems (see Watt, Fairchild, & Goodman, 2009, p. 1).

Countless other authors contributing to discussions on spirituality and interfaith dialogue in higher education have also ignored non-Abrahamic religious traditions (i.e. Fowler, 2004; Ingram, 2007; Nash, 2003; Roozen & Hadsell, 2009; Small 2011; Zúñiga & Sevig, 1997). Similarly, the discourse about religious oppression, even in recent publications, is often not inclusive of all religious minorities; the term "anti-Semitism," which refers only to prejudice against Jews, is commonly used in place of the catch-all phrase, "religious oppression" (for example: Maxwell, Nagda, Thompson, & Gurin, 2011; Rodriguez, Rodriguez-Scheel, Lindsey, & Kirkland, 2011). Even the influential text by Adams, Blumenfeld, Castaneda, Hackman, Peters, & Zúñiga (2010), *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, referred to religious oppression as anti-Semitism in their first edition back in 2000. The complete title of the first edition was, *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Anti-Semitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, and Ableism, Classism* (Adams, Blumenfeld, Castaneda, Hackman, Peters, & Zúñiga, 2000).

Slowly, academic publications are beginning to acknowledge the existence of non-Abrahamic religious identities (i.e., Adams & Joshi, 2010; Blumenfeld, 2006; Clark & Brimhall-Vargas, 2003). However, in many cases, these acknowledgements come in the form of a brief comment, much like a footnote, whereas the bulk of the discussion and description covers issues pertinent to the three main Abrahamic faiths primarily. Also, while some religious traditions are recognized – Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Native American spiritualties are most often mentioned – others are still largely untouched; for example: Jainism, Taoism, Shinto, Paganism, Wicca, Voodoo and many others. To be sure, the small number of Americans who

identify with these lesser-known religions contributes to the lack of data U.S.

researchers are able to produce relevant to these identities. Nonetheless, it is

important to call attention to the more privileged positions that better-known religious

traditions enjoy in this country so as not to simply pay lip service to religious

diversity, and to make a genuine effort to include all religious identities in this

discussion.

Recognizing Christian Privilege

Christian privilege is a fairly new concept. In 2002, Clark and her colleagues

introduced the idea, relating Christian privilege to the concepts of White privilege and

male privilege made famous by Peggy McIntosh (1988, 1998). They describe it as,

"an invisible set of unearned and unacknowledged benefits with which Christians in

the U.S. walk casually around" (Clark et al., 2002, p. 54), and they adopt McIntosh's

(1988) famous list of White privileges to relate specifically to religious identity. A

few examples from this list include:

- It is likely that state and federal holidays coincide with my
  religious practices, thereby having little to no impact on my job
  and/or education
- I can share my holiday greetings (e.g., Merry Christmas, Happy
  Easter, etc.) without being fully conscious of how it may impact
  those who do not celebrate the same holidays
- My religion and religious holidays are so completely "normal"
  that, in many ways, they may appear to no longer have any
  religious significance at all

- I can deny Christian privilege by asserting that all religions are essentially the same

- The elected and appointed officials of my government are probably members of my religious group

- I can openly display my religious symbol(s) on my person or property without fear of disapproval, violence, and/or vandalism (Clark, et al., 2002, pp. 54-55)

Since that initial introduction to Christian privilege, a handful of other scholars have also joined the conversation (i.e., Adams & Joshi, 2010; Blumenfeld, 2006; Case, 2013; Schlosser, 2003; Seifert, 2007). Thus, there is an emerging body of literature arguing for the recognition of Christian privilege in our diversity and social justice education initiatives[8]. The language for addressing religious identity from a critical perspective, as this new body of literature does, is still in the process of being developed, and has not yet been fully integrated with the discourse on interfaith dialogue (since most interfaith dialogue initiatives, as I said previously, tend to focus only on creating positive interfaith connections).

As is the trend with student identity recognition, some scholars offer a limited understanding of religious identity based privilege. Small (2011) developed a three-tiered hierarchy of religious privilege, which I have represented visually in Figure 1 below. In this model, Christianity is at the top as the most privileged group because

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[8] In my view, Christian privilege extends far beyond what has thus far been discussed by the people I cite here, but that discussion does not squarely fit into the purview of this dissertation, so I will save it for a more appropriate outlet.

of their majority status and the normative nature of the Christian worldview in the United States. At the second tier of this three-tiered structure are Muslims and Jews.

Figure 1: Small's (2011) Three-Tiered Hierarchy of Religious Privilege

Tier 1: High Privilege Level
Christians

↓

Tier 2: Medium Privilege Level
Muslims   Jews

↓

Tier 3: Low Privilege Level
Atheists
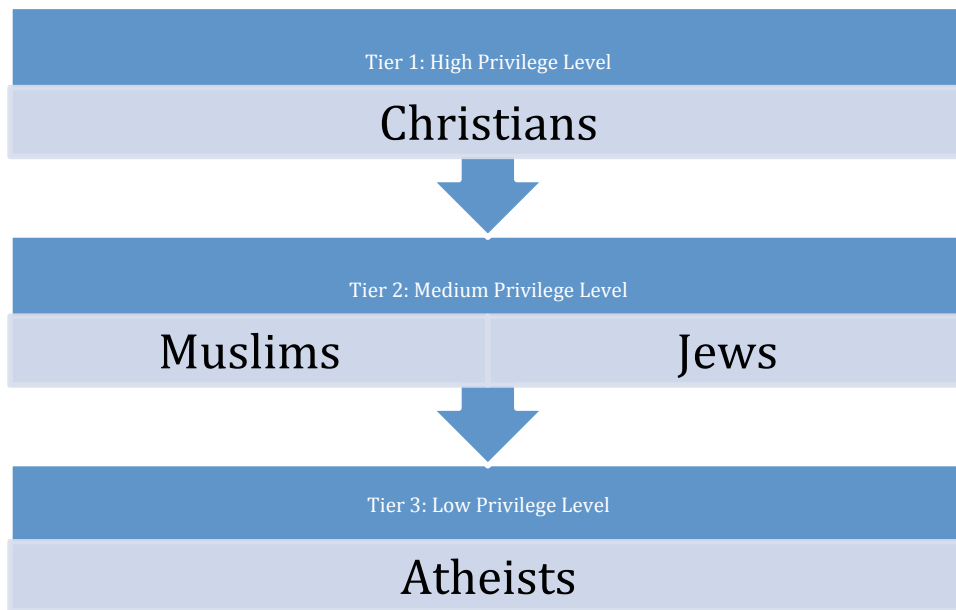
She places them here because they fit into the predominately religious society of the United States, and they have a shared connection to Christians as members of the Abrahamic spiritual lineage, but they are still religious minorities in a Christian-dominant society. Atheists are at the lowest level of this structure, with the least amount of religious privilege and the most religious oppression. The reason for this is, according to Small (2011), is because Atheists reject the most important value of our religious society, belief in God, and are therefore seen as the antithesis of our society's mainstream value system. While this hierarchical model is helpful as an initial attempt at understanding the spectrum of religious privilege, it is clearly incomplete. Where do non-Abrahamic religious students fit into this hierarchy? Where would a student who holds a Native Hawaiian spiritual worldview fit? A Jain?

A Taoist? In explaining her choice to put Jews and Muslims in the second tier of religious privilege, Small (2011) quotes a research participant who says, "we all pray to the same source, … I mean besides, … Judaism and Christianity and Islam are all … Abrahamic religions, they all pray to the same God, just … have a different name for God and have different views on who Christ was" (p. 113). What about those who do not believe in the God of Abraham at all? Small complicates her own model by suggesting that Evangelical Christians often face oppression because of their religious identity and thus, are at once both privileged and oppressed. Yet, she does not question the way various denominations of Judaism or Islam are privileged/oppressed differently. Clearly the framework of privilege and oppression as it pertains to religious identity needs to be more inclusive and better understood.

Other scholars overlook Christian privilege altogether. For instance, Kimmel & Ferber's (2010) *Privilege: A Reader*, which includes sections on male, White, heterosexual, and class privilege, does not address Christian privilege at all. There is a mention of anti-Semitism in one chapter (Sacks, 2010), but primarily in the context of racial, non-Nordic prejudice rather than as a discussion of religious oppression. Others are expressly uncomfortable with the full list of Christian privileges, and assert that Christians are also oppressed. Nelson (2010) critiques, in great detail, the explanation of Christian privilege that Clark et al. (2002) put forward, claiming that in secular settings like schools, Christians find themselves stifled from full expression of their religious identity. Still others flat out reject the idea of Christian privilege, suggesting that what some think is Christian privilege, is really just White privilege. Stewart and Lozano (2009) argue that people of color who are Christian do not

benefit from Christian privilege because they often do not fit in with White Christian congregations – a claim that disregards the experiences of non-Christians altogether.

As I have demonstrated here, Christian privilege is hotly debated, and is by no means universally understood or accepted – even by those who fervently advocate for the recognition of other forms of privilege. Recognizing that this field of critical religious identity studies is still in its infancy, the present study is, in part, an effort to develop to a more complex and comprehensive knowledge base on issues of religious identity and oppression. To be sure, the discourse on this issue needs to be further advanced in academic literature.

Selecting the Appropriate Terminology

Before I move forward with the rest of this dissertation, it is important that I clarify some of the terminology that I will be using here throughout. As many of the issues I will be discussing do not yet have well-established language, I will use this section to explain my reasoning for the words I choose to use.

Religious Identity

As I mentioned briefly in a footnote above, I understand that the term religious identity – as a blanket term that refers to all individuals' religious, spiritual, secular, and/or atheist identities – may not be the preferred terminology of choice to all. Some refer to students' religious identities as "faith identities" (Patel, 2012; Small, 2009, 2011). Others use the term "spiritual identities" (Astin, 2004; Bryant, 2006). Nash and Scott (2009) developed the expression "religio-spiritual identities" as their preferred label. I, however, am purposefully choosing to use the term

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"religious identity," even to describe the identity of those students who do not ascribe to a particular religious tradition. I am doing so in order to make the point that religious identity is more about the religious culture that one has been socialized into than the specific faith or set of beliefs that an individual holds. As Tisdell (2003) explains, an individual's worldview, including perspectives on spiritual matters, is largely influenced by their culture. Stewart and Lozano (2009) also make this claim. While I disagree with them regarding the existence of Christian privilege, part of their argument is that culture and religion are so deeply intertwined that they are difficult to separate – which is precisely my point. Someone who is raised in a Christian family and in a Christian environment, who learns to see the world through a Christian lens, does not lose all of their Christian privileges if they decide one day that they no longer believe in the tenets of Christianity, even if they no longer chose to identify themselves as a Christian. Similarly, an individual who is raised as a Muslim, whose family members are all Muslim, who attended a religious Muslim school all of their lives, cannot instantly shed their Muslim identity by adopting a new set of beliefs.

Certainly, there are ways in which a person can convert from one religion to another, and can become absorbed into a new religious culture, making religious identity more fluid than, for instance, racial identity. However, that does not negate the complex social, familial, and historical factors that contribute to one's overall identity development. Beverly Tatum (2010) describes how an individual's identity is largely dependent upon the invisible social and cultural messages they receive throughout their lives about who they are. These influences cannot be deleted.

Individuals can choose to forge a new spiritual path for themselves later in life, but their upbringing, and the religious socialization they received, remains a part of them. As Tatum (2010) puts it, a person's identity is developed by, "Integrating one's past, present, and future into a cohesive, unified sense of self" (p. 6). Even those who were raised in seemingly secular homes, and were never formally inducted into a specific religious tradition, have likely been socialized into a worldview that aligns with the religious cultures of their communities and extended families. In that way, one's religious identity speaks to the religious and spiritual culture that has been ingrained into them, rather than to the details of what they claim they do or do not believe.

Adams and Joshi (2010) assert that a discussion of religious oppression should not focus squarely on, "Individual dimensions of faith and belief, but on the societal role of religion in justifying and helping to maintain a social system characterized by religious domination and subordination" (p. 228). My choice to use the term religious identity seeks to honor that idea – that religious identity is not about the individual dimensions of a person's beliefs, but on the context in which that person was socialized, and how their religious identity fits into the larger social system of domination and subordination.

Religious Oppression

Religious oppression is a commonly used term amongst scholars from various fields that refers to the structural marginalization of religious minorities, similar to other –isms used in discourse on identity based prejudice and social injustice. While in the same vein as the concept of anti-Semitism, religious oppression goes further to include prejudice and injustices against all religious minorities. Although the term is

not debated in literature (to my knowledge), I feel the need to explain my use of it here based on my personal experience explaining my research to others.

I have, on several occasions, witnessed negative reactions (sometimes bordering on hostility) when I use the term religious oppression to describe the state of inequality religious minorities face in the United States. To my surprise, many of these individuals were academics themselves, who I presumed would understand the social-structural context in which I used the word "oppression." Nevertheless, I have been told that the term is much too strong to use when referring to the state of religious minorities in this country because of "how good they have it" here, when compared with the type of extreme violence and oppression religious minorities face in other countries. With that in mind, let me clarify that when I say "religious oppression" throughout this dissertation, I do not mean to suggest that the type of religious conflict we have in the United States is equivalent to religious oppression in, say, North Korea, Sudan, or Myanmar. I readily admit that there are greater protections for religious freedom here in the United States than there are in those countries. However, when I say "religious oppression" I do mean to point out that, while our country is rhetorically accepting and pluralistic, and while many people believe that all religions enjoy equal status in this country, there are extreme prejudices, disadvantages, and oppressive forces that religious minorities face in the United States.

I must also clarify that when I use the term "religious oppression" I do not only refer to singular acts of interpersonal discrimination that religious minorities experience. I use the term on a broader scale to characterize the subordination of

religious minorities that is deeply imbedded in the social, political, and historical fabric of this country. Understandably, these two meanings of oppression can get conflated, as our socialization often prevents us from thinking about the larger forces of oppression at work in our society. McIntosh (1998) explains this phenomenon in terms of racism when she says, "I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in the invisible systems conferring unsought social dominance on my group from birth" (p. 151). Likewise, many are taught to think of religious oppression only in individual acts of meanness, when in reality, it is far more than that. Bell (2010) explains that using the term oppression – as opposed to discrimination, bias, prejudice, or bigotry – emphasizes the "pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness" (p. 21). As such, I choose to use the term "religious oppression" throughout the following chapters to refer primarily to the social-structural system of Christian hegemony. When discussing religious identity based interpersonal discrimination, I will use the label, "religious discrimination."

Review of Dissertation Contents

This introductory chapter sought to describe the current discourse and practice related to interfaith dialogue in higher education as a means of providing some context to the discussion I hope to contribute to with this dissertation. In the next chapter, I review the literature on interfaith dialogue in terms of philosophy, theology, theory, and pedagogy. Due to the wide range of interpretations on what interfaith dialogue means, is, and should be, it is necessary to cover not only empirical research in this area, but philosophical debates as well. Chapter three turns to the IGD

pedagogy in particular, summarizing its origins and theoretical foundations, the four-stage process that defines it, and the empirical support for IGD that has been garnered thus far. Here, I also point out necessary areas for future research within the IGD framework. In chapter four, I describe my own positionality as it pertains to this topic, the ontological and epistemological lens that I carry as a researcher, and the methods I used in conducting my investigation of the problem and the questions I have defined. Chapters five, six, and seven serve as case profiles for the three cases included in this study – which were all extremely different – and describe the major findings from each case. Chapter eight explores themes in the findings and cross-case analyses – revisiting the contextual, philosophical, theoretical, and empirical discussions from chapters one, two, and three. Finally, chapter nine discusses the implications of my findings for current theory, practice-based trends, and future research on interfaith dialogue in higher education.

Chapter 2: Philosophical and Theoretical Foundations of Interfaith Dialogue

In this chapter I turn to the philosophical and theoretical foundations of interfaith dialogue. First, I review the theological debates surrounding the meaning of interfaith dialogue. Next, I explore several pedagogical and practice based theories that explain the function and potential outcomes of interfaith dialogue. Last, I summarize some of the discourse on social justice education, and how it can help us understand how interfaith dialogue can be used in education contexts to promote equality for religious minorities.

Review of Theological Concepts

The concept of interfaith dialogue is passionately debated amongst philosophers and theologians. While it may seem straightforward to some, many scholars of religion have vastly different ideas of what these terms mean. Furthermore, when attempting to understand the experiences of those who participate in interfaith dialogue, it is important to understand the varying epistemological approaches each individual may have (Keaten & Soukup, 2009). For that reason, I present a synopsis of the debates below, disclosing my own understandings of the terms in order to be forthcoming about my potential biases as a researcher. I start here with an explanation of the terms exclusivism, inclusivism, parallelism, and pluralism, which are important for understanding the later discourse on the purpose and practice of interfaith dialogue.

Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Parallelism

There are three primary approaches to religion that categorize religious adherents, as commonly described by theologians and scholars of religion (Heim, 1992; Hick, 1993; Huang, 1995; Kimball, 2002; Panikkar 1978/1999; Smith, 2007). The first, *exclusivism*, is the belief that one's own religious tradition is the only real Truth[9], and that anything contradictory to that Truth (i.e., another religion or belief system) must thereby be false (Panikkar, 1978/1999). Secondly, *inclusivism* is the perspective that one's own religious tradition is the most correct version of the Truth, while other religions or belief systems may possess an element of truth. Inclusivists, according to Panikkar (1978/1999) seek to incorporate others' belief systems into their own by creating justifications for the differences or possible contradictions that exist between their own Truth and another person's beliefs, maintaining that their version of the Truth is superior. Lastly, *parallelism*[10] is the position that although one's own religious tradition is best suited for him/herself, it is not the only Truth, and there are actually multiple Truths that exist in parallel (Panikkar, 1978/1999). Each religion, therefore, is imperfect, yet is appropriate for those who choose to follow it. All religions, according to the parallelist perspective, are different paths to the same end goal, and it is not necessary to find commonalities among them in order to validate the real Truth.

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[9] I capitalize Truth here to indicate that it represents a belief about the divine reality of human and spiritual existence.

[10] Parallelism is often interchangeable in philosophical literature with the term pluralism. However, since pluralism itself is a complex term, here I offer Panikkar's (1978/1999) explanation of parallelism to represent an approach to religion that theologians distinguish as separate from exclusivism or inclusivism.

The approach one takes to religion, spirituality, and Truth impacts the motivations for and goals of interfaith dialogue for that individual. Huang (1995) claims that while it is possible for all people to engage in interfaith dialogue, for those who hold either exclusivist or inclusivist beliefs, the goals of interfaith dialogue are simply to convince others of the Truth according to their religion. He cites theologians like John Scott (1981) who says that, "in true dialogue and encounter, we seek both to disclose the inadequacies and falsities of non-Christian religions and to demonstrate the adequacy and truth, the absoluteness and finality of the Lord Jesus Christ" (p. 168) – a statement Huang (1995) would argue does not actually describe dialogue at all. Instead, Huang (1995) posits that genuine interfaith dialogue is only conducive amongst those who hold a more pluralistic view of religion. Abbott (2013) furthers this point, suggesting that undercover proselytism in the form of "dialogue" is a human rights abuse when powerful religious groups prey on less powerful (i.e. vulnerable) communities. Other theologians (i.e., Hall, 2005) argue that interfaith dialogue is necessary for all people regardless of their level of exclusivist, inclusivist, or parallelist beliefs – that an exclusivist religious individual can, and should, engage in dialogue with people from other religious groups simply to gain exposure to another point of view.

As an interfaith dialogue researcher myself, I take a position similar to Hall (2005) and others, that interfaith dialogue and education about varying beliefs and worldviews is extremely important for all people, not just those who believe in multiple Truths. At the same time, I recognize how certain people or groups like Scott (1981) can use the guise of interfaith dialogue to proselytize and seek out

converts, and how that can make individuals from marginalized religious groups skeptical of "dialogue" with individuals from more powerful and suppressive religious groups. Through my involvement with various Hindu groups and community based interfaith dialogue efforts, I am aware that many people from non-proselytizing religious groups, like Hinduism, are extremely distrustful of anything labeled "interfaith dialogue" precisely for that reason. Thus, I use my research to shed some light on the difficulties religious minorities face in interfaith dialogue situations in hopes of contributing to the increased inclusiveness of future interfaith initiatives.

Despite disagreements among religion scholars about the purpose of interfaith dialogue and what constitutes genuine dialogue, most would agree that one's understanding of his/her own and other religions can take many forms, which in turn has the potential to impact the process and outcome of interfaith dialogue. Moreover, one's interpretation of the term pluralism can take many forms, and can similarly impact one's engagement in interfaith dialogue.

Pluralism

Pluralism is one of the key concepts used in explaining the purpose for, and goals of, interfaith dialogue (Eck, 2007; Eck & Pluralism Project, 1997; Huang, 1995; Massoudi, 2006; Michaelides, 2009; Panikkar, 1978/1999). However, finding one universally applicable definition for it proves somewhat difficult. The first Parliament of World's Religions in 1893 is often noted as the "dawn of religious pluralism" (Massoudi, 2006; Seager & Ziolkowski, 1996) and the debate surrounding pluralism has burgeoned ever since. In the literature I reviewed in chapter one

(drawing from education and other social sciences), pluralism refers to the acceptance of religious diversity – but religious studies scholars and theologians complicate the seemingly simple concept.

In the notion of parallelism described above, pluralism is the belief that all religions are separate paths to the same ultimate end. Another view suggests that all religions do not have the same end (Heim, 1992; Prothero, 2010). Instead, each religious tradition has its own end, its own reality, and its own Truth. Pluralism, according to this perspective, is the acceptance of many Truths, rather than the acceptance of multiple paths to a single Truth. Other scholars of religion (i.e., Coleman, 2008; Wagoner, 2010) state that pluralism is simply the willingness to listen to and tolerate opposing points of view for the sake of peaceful co-existence. Massoudi (2006), on the other hand, asserts that versions of pluralism that simply require respect and tolerance of others' beliefs – the kind of pluralism Patel (2012) and Kazanjian & Laurence (2007) from chapter one describe – are not sufficient, that authentic pluralism requires a belief that others' perspectives are equally as valid as your own.

Huang (1995) proposes yet another model of pluralism, one that "emphasizes unity without universality and uniqueness without separateness," which he calls dialogic pluralism (p. 143). This interpretation of pluralism seeks to address the human experience with religion instead of making it a purely theological question. The focus here is how individuals (rather than religious groups) make meaning of the transcendent reality, including those who do not believe in a higher power (Atheists) and those who believe that the Truth about a higher power is unknowable

(Agnostics). Huang's model of dialogic pluralism, as indicated by its name, also stresses the importance of communication with others as a means of developing and evolving one's own pluralism. Additionally, dialogic pluralism incorporates both contemporary and historical studies of religious traditions in order to contextualize each individual's beliefs (Huang, 1995). Clearly, Huang's dialogic pluralism has direct implications for the interfaith dialogue movement, but other authors, as described above, have also impacted the practice of interfaith dialogue through different understandings of the term.

The version of pluralism that I adopt for my own ontological and epistemological paradigm is that Truth about the super natural dimensions of life is largely unknowable and that religious or spiritual practice is simply a human effort seeking to bring us closer to the Truth about one's self and the world. As such, religious and/or spiritual practice can take multiple forms, can have multiple names, and can believe, for the sake of the human experience, in multiple versions of the Truth. With that, I understand that other people have different understandings of pluralism, which I wholeheartedly accept as long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others to believe and practice in the manner they chose without fear of oppression based on their religious identity. This perspective certainly impacts my approach to research, and has led me to take on an interpretivist and constructivist methodology – to be explained in further detail in chapter four.

The Purpose of Interfaith Dialogue

As discussed above, people participate in interfaith dialogue for a variety of reasons and approach interfaith dialogue with a variety of mindsets. Huang (1995)

suggests that interfaith dialogue should be listening to others as a way of learning more about yourself and about the historical context of each individual's religious experience. Hick (1993), on the other hand, because of his belief that all religions are in essence just different manifestations of the same Truth, sees interfaith dialogue as a chance to collaboratively develop the best, most pure, understanding of the divine reality possible to mankind. However, for those who do not see all religions as the same, such as Heim (1992) and Prothero (2010), the purpose of interfaith dialogue is to uncover fundamental differences between religions in order to develop greater understanding, acceptance, and respect for one another.

Raimon Panikkar (1978/1999), who was raised in a multi-faith household and identifies as a Christian-Hindu-Buddhist, emphasizes the need for intra-religious dialogue as well as interfaith dialogue because he claims that you cannot begin to understand another religious tradition until you understand your own – or at least your own interpretation of your religious tradition(s), which is at once rooted in both ancient customs and the ever-evolving contemporary human experience. As such, similar to Heim (1992), Massoudi (2006), and Prothero (2010), he describes the purpose of interfaith dialogue as, "Not to win over the other, or to come to total agreement or a universal religion. The ideal is communication in order to bridge the gulfs of mutual ignorance and misunderstandings" (p. xxvii).

For the purposes of this research, interfaith dialogue is defined through the IGD pedagogy, but aligns somewhat with Panikkar's (1978/1999) perspective that interfaith dialogue is primarily about learning more about yourself and others, without the purpose or desire to uncover the "real" Truth or determine who is "right" and who

is "wrong" about the spiritual realm. Additionally, IGD interfaith dialogue has similarities to Huang's (1995) dialogic pluralism in that it seeks to incorporate both historical and contemporary issues of inter-religious relations in our society as a way to give context to the topics being discussed, beyond the thoughts and feelings of individuals alone. A more detailed description of the IGD pedagogy, and the purposes of interfaith dialogue established in this model, can be found in chapter three.

Pedagogical and Practice-Based Theory

Beyond the theological and philosophical theories speculating the true meaning of pluralism and interfaith dialogue, educators have also developed a range of pedagogical and practice based theories to help us understand the purpose of interfaith dialogue, and what leads to successful interfaith dialogue. In this section I will discuss peace education theory, specifically the causal flow of violence and the theories of negative and positive peace, which provide an understanding of how interfaith dialogue is important for helping to promote inter-religious peace. Additionally, I will examine the contact hypothesis and the intergroup contact theory, which inform practitioners of all forms of intergroup dialogue (interfaith, interracial, etc.) regarding criteria, processes, and outcomes of contact between conflicting groups. Lastly, I will review social justice education theories, which offer an explanation of how education can be used to bring justice to marginalized groups.

Peace Education

Peace education is an entire field of study based on the premise that despite the pervasiveness of violence and conflict in our world, individuals are capable of learning to be peaceful, and that education has the ability to create peacefulness in individuals, communities, and societies (Reardon, 1988). Due to the broad nature of that foundational principle, peace education has evolved uniquely in different areas of the world, according to the types of violence that exist, and the type of peace that is needed there. For instance, peace education in Japan is used to advocate for nuclear disarmament and to teach students about peace using Japan's history as both a victim and perpetrator of violence (Ide, 2008; Murakami, 1993). In Central and South America, peace education largely focuses on human rights, economic justice, and the need to recognize the oppressive nature of many national and international policies (García, 1983; Novelli, 2010). India's peace education, on the other hand, often promotes gender and caste equality, cultural and religious pluralism, and environmental sustainability (Bajaj, 2010; Ganguly, 2012; Harris, 2004). As Reardon (1999) explains, "peace education has sprung up in many parts of the world, often independently of efforts in other countries, and has been developed in various subject areas" (p. 3). This has, at times, led to confusion from those outside the field as to what the true nature of peace education is, as Bar-Tal (2002) noted in his essay, *The Elusive Nature of Peace Education.* However, the common goal is that all peace education programs seek to,

Foster changes that will make the world a better, more humane place

… to diminish or even to eradicate a variety of human ills ranging

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from injustice, inequality, prejudice, and intolerance, to abuse of

human rights, environmental destruction, violent conflict, war, and

other evils in order to create a world of justice, equality, tolerance,

human rights, environmental quality, peace, and other positive

features. (Bar-Tal, 2002, p. 28)

Negative and Positive Peace

In defining peace, peace education literature makes a distinction between

negative peace and positive peace. Negative peace is the absence of overt violence

and oppression, whereas positive peace is the presence of justice, cooperation, and

other values related to peace (Galtung, 1964; Reardon, 1988). Some may consider a

society 'peaceful' simply if it is not presently engaged in a war. In fact, many peace

studies researchers define peace as the lack of armed conflict, and dedicate most of

their time to discussing civil and international wars (i.e., Goemans, 2000; Fortna,

2004; Walter, 2002). Moreover, data sets like the Correlates of War[11], which many of

these peace studies researchers rely on, classifies war as a conflict resulting in at least

1,000 battle deaths per year, not including civilian casualties – meaning that any

conflict with less than 1,000 military personnel deaths does not actually count as a

war (Sarkees, n.d.). Thus, the range of possible meanings of "peace" in the field of

peace studies is extremely wide.

In 1964, Galtung first clarified the difference between negative and positive

peace in response to his fellow peace theorists who were focusing too much on direct

violence (i.e., war). Instead, he says, peace advocates should focus on addressing

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[11] http://www.correlatesofwar.org/

indirect violence (i.e., structural and systemic forms of violence that perpetuate prejudice, poverty, and injustice) because "war starts in the minds of men" (Galtung, 1996, p. 95). Thus, researchers and educators seeking to promote positive peace look more critically at indirect violence in hopes of resolving injustice before it reaches the level of direct violence. After all, "positive peace is the best protection against violence" (Galtung, 1996, p. 32).

Other peace educators go even further to describe different types of positive peace such as intercultural peace, peace with the environment, and inner peace (Harris & Morrison, 2003; Lin, 2006; Smoker & Groff, 1996). Harris and Morrison (2003) describe intercultural positive peace as peace that "exists when different religious and ethnic groups live together harmoniously" (p. 13), and that is certainly the most relevant goal when it comes to interfaith dialogue. Regardless of the state of affairs between religious groups – whether it is a state of extreme violence, or simply a silent level of discomfort and misunderstanding – intercultural positive peace is the ultimate aim. To that end, many peace education programs around the world, directly address religious conflict, discrimination, and oppression as an issue needing resolution before a peaceful society can be created.

The Causal Flow of Violence

To further situate interfaith dialogue within the broad range of literature on peace education, I turn to Galtung's model of the causal flow of violence. Beyond the mere distinction between negative and positive peace, Galtung (1990) posits that the foundation of all conflict is what he calls cultural violence:

By 'cultural violence' we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic

sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology,

language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic,

mathematics) – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or

structural violence. (p. 291)

The existence of cultural violence allows for the manifestation of structural violence,

described by Galtung (1969) as social injustice and a disproportionate distribution of

power, which in turn has the potential to lead to direct violence (i.e., war, genocide,

and other deadly human rights abuses).

Generally, a causal flow from cultural via structural to direct violence

can be identified. The culture preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on,

and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and

natural, or into not seeing them (particularly not exploitation) at all.

Then come the eruptions, the efforts to use direct violence to get out of

the structural iron cage (Weber, 1971), and counter-violence to keep

the cage intact. (Galtung, 1990, p. 295)

Figure 2: The Causal Flow of Violence

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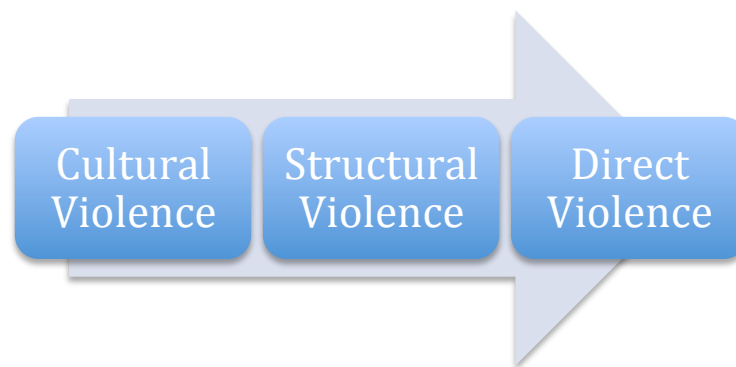
When we consider the causal flow of violence with regard to religious conflict, we can think of cultural violence as religious intolerance, beliefs in the superiority of one religion over another (i.e., exclusivity), or even religious illiteracy and apathy towards the marginalization of minority religious groups. Examples of structural religious violence include policies or societal norms that give preference to one/some religion(s) over others – much like the concept of Christian privilege described in chapter one. Finally, direct religious violence includes any/all forms of direct violence that are religiously motivated or occur across the lines of religious difference. Through this lens, interfaith dialogue is used in an attempt to (a) resolve cultural violence and develop cultural/intercultural positive peace, (b) address issues of structural violence by identifying unjust policies and raising awareness of them, or (c) bring an end to direct violence by building relationships between people of differing religious groups. Instances of all three types of interfaith dialogue can be found worldwide, and many of them rest on the theory that contact between members of conflicting religious groups has the potential to lead to the reduction of bias, discrimination, and war.

The Contact Hypothesis and Intergroup Contact Theory

As mentioned above, interfaith dialogue is practiced extensively on an international scale, in many forms and through many venues, in order to restore or promote peace in a given region. Practitioners of interfaith dialogue often based their efforts on the notion that contact with those who have different cultures, beliefs, and experiences will reduce ignorance, fear, and hatred between groups. Thus, this section will focus on two of the main theories used by scholars to explain the benefits

of interfaith dialogue. The first, *contact hypothesis*, suggests that contact between individuals of historically conflicting or segregated groups will result in participants' reduced hatred or prejudice of the other[12] if the contact situation meets certain conditions (Allport, 1954). The second, *intergroup contact theory* – which evolved out of the contact hypothesis and is usually mentioned in tandem with it – posits that beyond mere contact between individuals or groups, attention is needed for the actual process of a facilitated contact experience in order for a reduction of prejudice towards outgroup[13] members to occur (Pettigrew, 1998). While these two theories are not exclusive to religion in terms of discussing intergroup relations – actually, they are more often used in reference to race and ethnicity – most of the academic discourse on the practical applications of interfaith dialogue use the contact hypothesis and intergroup contact theory as a foundational lens.

Allport (1954) initially developed the contact hypothesis based on his social-psychological research on intergroup relations, primarily in the contexts of education, employment, and residential environments. While much of his work deals with the existence of prejudice between Blacks and Whites in the United States, he also discusses inter-religious contact (mainly Christian-Jewish) in the development of his contact hypothesis (Allport, 1950; Allport, 1952). He says that in order for intergroup

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[12] See Hall (1997) and Lévinas (1969) for more extended discussions of the widely used term "other." Hall outlines the historical roots and structural perpetuation of stereotyping "others" who are seen as not normal, or who are different from us. Lévinas, on the other hand, provides a philosophical discussion of the need to think beyond the "I" and truly understand the "other."

[13] By "outgroup" I mean those who are different from you based on the identity marker most salient to the circumstance. See Brewer and Miller (1984) for a collection of works on "ingroups" and "outgroups" and other issues related to intergroup contact.

contact to result in positive attitude changes in individuals (i.e., reduced feelings of prejudice or intolerance of another group of people), there are four conditions that must be met (Allport, 1954):

1. All participants must have *equal status* in the contact situation (recognizing that all participants often do not have equal status outside the contact situation)

2. Participants in any intergroup contact situation must all have a *common goal*

3. Additionally, they all must *work cooperatively* to reach that goal

4. There must be *institutional support* enforcing the equal status of all participants and preventing individuals from speaking or behaving in a discriminatory manner (this can also come in the form of social norms)

Since then (the mid 1950s), many researchers have supported Allport's claim through their own empirical demonstrations of positive intergroup contact outcomes (i.e., Cook, 1984; Harrington & Miller, 1992; Shook & Fazio, 2008). Even longitudinal studies (i.e., Binder, Brown, Zagefka, Funke, Kessler, Mummendey, & Maquil, 2009; Smith, 1994) and a meta-analysis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) analyzing the impact of Allport's criteria for intergroup contact have shown the continued relevance of the contact hypothesis. However, there have also been a large number of studies that have shown the need for additional considerations, beyond Allport's (1954) four conditions, when attempting intergroup contact, indicating the shortcomings of the contact hypothesis. For example, Hubbard (1999) indicates that difference in cultural communication styles make it difficult for all parties to have

"equal status" if they are communicating in a Western context. Similarly, Wagner and Machleit (1986) found that mastery of the same language is necessary for all participants to be positively impacted in an intergroup contact situation, and also suggests that economic prosperity of the region and the level of willingness to participate in intergroup contact impact outcomes. Additionally, Ben-Ari and Amir (1986) state that individuals who enter an intergroup encounter with extremely negative views of the other group do not experience increased positive attitudes. In sum, the literature on the contact hypothesis is somewhat assorted, and the deliberations continue.

Pettigrew (1998) recognized the varying responses to the contact hypothesis, and the growing list of additional mitigating, facilitating, and hindering conditions of intergroup contact. His concern was that, "Writers have overburdened the hypothesis with too many *facilitating*, but not *essential*, conditions" (p. 80, emphasis added). He also noted that the contact hypothesis did not adequately address *how* and *why* prejudice would be reduced, only that it would. To that end, Pettigrew (1998) reformulated and broadened Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis into the *intergroup contact theory*. This theory distilled the essential criteria related to both context and process and sought to predict how and when the impact of intergroup contact would generalize to other people, groups, and experiences. Pettigrew (1998) maintains the four original conditions laid out by the contact hypothesis, and adds an additional criteria: *friendship potential* (p. 76). According to the intergroup contact theory, it is necessary for the contact situation to have the potential to lead to cross-group friendships. In other words, longer, more sustained contact, and the ability for

participants to stay in touch on a long-term basis, is an integral part of intergroup

contact programs. Additionally, Pettigrew (1998) reminds us that societal context as

well as the experiences, attitudes, and personality characteristics that each contact

participant brings to the group, impacts the contact experience – something that

contact facilitators should keep in mind and account for if necessary. Beyond

contextual conditions, the intergroup contact theory outlines four processes of change

that should occur during contact in order to produce an attitude change among

participants (Pettigrew, 1998):

1. Intergroup contact must include opportunities for *learning about the other*
   in order to replace old stereotypes with new knowledge (i.e.,
   decategorizing assumptions about outgroup members)

2. Developing new group norms which include acceptance of outgroup
   members allows for *behavior change* – this is intensified by repeated and
   extended contact, ultimately leading to *attitude change*

3. Incorporating *emotions* (such as empathy or admiration) into the contact
   situation helps to *generate affective ties,* and increases the likelihood that
   positive attitude changes will generalize to other outgroup members rather
   than just the individual

4. Through the contact situation, individuals should reassess what they think
   they know about their own group – a process called *ingroup reappraisal*

These processes have been used in intergroup contact programs ranging from

interracial relations in an ethnically diverse high school in South Africa (Swart,

Hewstone, Christ, & Voci, 2011), to perceptions of HIV/AIDS patients by nurses in

Hong Kong (Yiu, Mak, Ho, & Chui, 2010), to adolescents' attitudes towards the

LGBT community in the United States (Heinze & Horn, 2009), and much of this

research has shown support for the intergroup contact theory. With regard to

interfaith dialogue, both the contact hypothesis and intergroup contact theory have

proven helpful in understanding the ways in which contact between members of

conflicting religious groups can reduce prejudice or hatred group members have

towards each other (Yablon, 2007).

Social Justice Education

Similar to Galtung's (1969, 1990) writings on cultural and structural violence,

the body of literature on social justice education can help us understand how efforts

like interfaith dialogue can help lead to a more balanced society through increasing

equality for oppressed groups. As North (2006) points out, the term "social justice" is

often used in education rhetoric, but does not always refer to the same thing. Some

use the term to argue for the redistribution of resources and value, while others argue

for recognition of minority groups, identities, and/or individuals. Some assert the

need to emphasize sameness and equality of all people, while others counter that

differences between groups must be emphasized and celebrated. Some claim social

justice issues are best addressed on an interpersonal (i.e., micro) level, while others

say they are best addressed at the structural-societal (i.e., macro) level (North, 2007).

Recognizing of the various approaches to social justice advocacy, it might be

easiest to understand social justice simply as an umbrella concept which provides a

vision for society where all forms of oppression – racism, sexism, classism,

heterosexism, transgender oppression, religious oppression, ageism, ableism, sizeism,

etc. – are eradicated and where, all people are able to fully and equally participate "in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (Bell, 2010, p. 21). Social justice education, then, is a philosophy of education designed to teach students about the various forms of inequality and oppression, and, in turn, to promote equality and the larger social justice vision. In this section, I will review some of the theoretical foundations of social justice education in order to elucidate some of the principles behind the critical approach to interfaith dialogue that is presented in this dissertation.

Critical Theory

If you trace the literature on social justice back to its philosophical origins, you will find that it is rooted in the works of Hegel, Marx, and other German scholars of the 1800s. Until Hegel (1807/1977), philosophers primarily interpreted various elements of the world and the role of human kind in a theoretical fashion (Rasmussen, 1996). However, in 1807, with his essay *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel began to combine traditional philosophy with an evaluation of current political and economic policies. In essence, he combined theories about the world and our place in it, with current practices of managing our world and the people in it, in order to "locate philosophical reflection in a discourse about the history of human freedom" (Rasmussen, 1996, p. 13). Marx, a student of Hegel's, later developed a series of essays, including his famous *Communist Manifesto* (Marx, 1848/1964), analyzing class conflict and theorizing about the future of political and economic policy. Drawing from these ideas, with both support and critique, Horkheimer (1972) points out the need to consider relational power dynamics between classes, and explicitly develops critical theory as a unique theoretical perspective with a primary concern for

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satisfactory life conditions for all people. Thus, through situating philosophical

reflection in the context of social-political history, coupled with an emphasis on

human wellbeing, we can understand critical theory as a foundation of current day

literature on equality and social justice. Rasmussen (1996) explains that critical

theory was born out of the realization that "theory, when allied with praxis has a

proper political end, namely, social transformation" (p. 12). Social justice education

adopts the same perspective; that when theory and action are properly used in tandem,

education has the potential to transform society in the direction of greater justice for

all.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical theory has been incorporated into many fields of study. In education,

the adoption of a critical theory perspective is known as critical pedagogy. The most

seminal work influencing the field of critical pedagogy is Paulo Freire's famous

book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968/2000). Throughout the book, Freire

references Hegel's and Marx's critical philosophies as he develops his own approach

to education he calls pedagogy of the oppressed. While Hegel's and Marx's writings

were situated in the context of class oppression and workers movements in Germany,

Friere writes about the impact of class oppression on education in the context of poor,

rural Brazil. He suggests that oppression often goes unnoticed by the oppressed

because they are socialized to think that what they experience is normal and

acceptable. Oppressed peoples then, must engage in "conscientization" – or the

development of a critical self-consciousness – in order to recognize their oppression

(p. 54). With this in mind, a key role for educators is to allow students to learn about

the ways in which they are oppressed by adopting a "problem-posing" teaching style

(p. 66). A problem-posing education is one that rejects the banking approach to

education (which sees students as empty vessels for teachers to fill with knowledge)

opting for collaborative teaching/learning approaches built on mutual trust between

student and teacher, where together they "engage in critical thinking and the quest for

mutual humanization" (p. 62)

To accomplish this goal, Freire claims that, "The correct method lies in

dialogue" (p. 54). Dialogue, as Freire describes it, is a process in which oppressed

peoples are able to name the world – their realities, their existence – in their own

words, rather than with the words their oppressors use to name the world. Doing so

re-creates the world in the image of oppressed peoples and gives them the kind of

agency they were previously denied. Educators, then, must see themselves as

working *with* students and not *for* students because dialogue, "must not be a situation

where some name on behalf of others" (p. 89). Domination of educators over

students directly contradicts the pedagogy of the oppressed that Freire speaks of.

Ultimately, this pedagogy serves as a guideline for a system of education

designed to facilitate the liberation of all systemically oppressed groups – not just the

poor and working class. Since the initial publication of his book in 1968, scholars

and practitioners from around the world have adopted his ideas to advocate for the

liberation of many other oppressed identity groups. While literature on critical

pedagogy has not yet explicitly examined religious identity and oppression, the

implications of Freire's work lay a strong foundation for understanding how dialogue

can also be used to liberate religious minorities from systemic social oppression.

Critical Identity Studies

Much of critical theory and critical pedagogy was developed with the notion of class-based oppression and power dynamics in mind. However, other fields of critical studies have blossomed as scholars have combined the ideas embedded in critical theory with other identities that categorize/divide people on a societal level. Given that religious identity, and the analysis of religious oppression/power, has not yet emerged as its own, stand-alone subfield of critical studies, I look to other areas of critical identity studies to help me explain the critical perspective on religious identity and oppression that I adopt for this research. Much of the literature on these varying approaches to critical theory is rooted in the work of Freire (1968/2000) and others inspired by Freire (i.e., Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1998); examples include, Critical Race Theory, Feminist Theory, Queer Theory, and Deaf Critical Theory. I will not go into detail about all of them here, but I will provide a brief overview of Critical Race Theory and Feminist Theory as examples of the many fields of critical identity studies.

In addition to its roots in the philosophy of critical theory, Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged as a field of study in part through the anti-racist activism of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s (Ladson-Billings, 2009). While there are diverse perspectives represented in the body of CRT literature, what unites CRT scholars is their goal of raising awareness of White dominance – and the corresponding oppression of people of color – and to equalize the current racial power imbalance that exists in legal and social systems (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Critical Race Theorists in education point out the inequalities in

curricular representations of race, racial biases in standardized assessments, racial discrepancies in public school funding schemes, and a host of other ways in which issues of race and education intersect (for more details see: Ladson-Billings, 1998). As Hegel (1807/1977) did, CRT positions a philosophical reflection about racial identity in the context of the political history defining the rights and freedoms of people of color in this country. Also, as Horkheimer (1972) did, CRT carefully examines the status of people of color in view of, and in relation to the power that White people have had throughout history. Thus, when using CRT as a basis for pedagogical approaches to teaching about racial identity and racial oppression, we can see that in order to understand how these concepts (racial identity and racial oppression) are manifested in our society, it is important to include the legal history of racial power imbalances as well as current forms of structural oppression. Certainly, examples of individual cases of race-based discrimination or bigotry can help students recognize that racism is alive and well in their own communities, but like McIntosh (1998) pointed out, the structural level of social oppression/dominance that people are taught not to see is far more detrimental to minority groups as a whole, and thus, is more urgently in need of our attention.

Feminist Theory was also born out of a movement for legal equality, and, similar to CRT, has many sub-fields (i.e., Black Feminist Theory, Feminist Political Theory, Feminist Literary Criticism, etc.), and a variety of conflicting perspectives (Fraser, 2007). The common theme amongst the different versions of Feminist Theory, however, is the attention to the historical domination of men over women and to the societal implications resulting from the continued power imbalance between

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men and women (hooks, 2010). In the context of education, Feminist scholars examine (among other things) issues such as the role curriculum plays in defining gender roles and maintaining the subjugated role of women (i.e., Weiner, 1994), or how sexism on a global scale restricts girls' access to quality education around the world (i.e., Stromquist, 2001). As we see in Critical Theory, and in Critical Race Theory, attention to policy, power, and historical trends are also important when approaching gender from a critical perspective. Therefore, in order to align with social justice education, such issues cannot be ignored when teaching about gender and gender identity.

In a similar vein, discussing religious identity with a critical social justice approach requires careful consideration of the historical social, political, and legal power imbalance between religious groups. Just as White and male hegemony have hindered people of color and women, so too has Christian hegemony in the United States caused oppression of religious minorities. It is with this view that I approach the topic of interfaith dialogue.

To summarize, the reasons one may engage in the process of interfaith dialogue, and the purpose one seeks out of the experience, can vary greatly. It is important to understand a person's motivations when seeking to understand their outcomes. Nevertheless, despite their motivations, theories of peace education and intergroup contact suggest that, under the proper conditions, interfaith dialogue has the potential to lead to a reduction of bias (i.e., cultural violence) between conflicting religious groups. To tackle larger issues of structural violence and institutionalized privilege/oppression, we learn from theories of social justice education that

pedagogical approaches to interfaith dialogue need to directly address legal and political inequality between religious groups.

In this study, I examine the practice of interfaith dialogue through a pedagogical model known as Intergroup Dialogue (IGD). This pedagogy was developed to explicitly advance a social justice agenda, and thus, directly engages issues of power and privilege reviewed above. In the following chapter, I will describe IGD in greater detail, and will review the existing empirical literature regarding student outcomes when using IGD pedagogy.

Chapter 3: Intergroup Dialogue Pedagogy

Interfaith dialogue takes many forms and exists in many different sectors of our society. One specific form of interfaith dialogue that can be found on college campuses in the United States is the type that follows the pedagogical model of Intergroup Dialogue (IGD). The IGD pedagogy was established in the late 1980's at the University of Michigan's Program on Intergroup Relations as a way to engage students in proactive learning about diversity and social justice (Program on Intergroup Relations [IGR], 2009). Since then, schools – mostly post-secondary schools – throughout the country have adopted Michigan's model of IGD, which uses sustained and facilitated dialogue to help students learn about identity and structural power relations (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007).

Empirical literature on IGD has primarily examined student outcomes in race and gender themed IGD courses. Nevertheless, researchers have consistently documented the benefits and successes of this particular dialogue process. This section includes (a) a brief history of the origins of the IGD pedagogy, (b) a description of the way IGD incorporates the theories upon which the pedagogy was developed, (c) a summary of the IGD process, and (d) an examination of existing research on the outcomes of this pedagogy.

The Origins of Intergroup Dialogue

The pedagogy of IGD was born out of an effort to increase education for and about diversity on campus at the University of Michigan (Gurin, 2011). The faculty and staff at Michigan's Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR) believed in the

benefits of a diverse educational setting on students' learning and development, but they knew that in order to most effectively harness those benefits, cross-group interaction needed to be deliberate and facilitated – as opposed to passively assuming that students would engage with, and learn from, diverse peers on their own (Sorensen, Nagda, Gurin, & Maxwell, 2009). In fact, when the constitutionality of the University of Michigan's pro-diversity admissions policies were under review by the Supreme Court in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), it was then IGR Director of Research – and one of the founding scholars of the IGD pedagogy – Dr. Patricia Gurin, who testified as an expert witness in support of the educational benefits of diversity for all students, minority and majority alike, through programs and courses like their IGR offered. To that end, IGD was established as a specific process of dialogue used to teach students how to engage in a dialogue about identity and structural power relations in order to promote intergroup understanding between two or more historically conflicting groups (Nagda, 2006; Sorensen et al., 2009). Authors of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) Reader on IGD define it as:

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

As alluded to in the definition above, IGD was created with three specific educational goals in mind: (1) raise awareness of identity oppression and social inequities, (2) build cross-group communication skills and relationships, and (3) increase intergroup cooperation for addressing identity based social justice issues (Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013; Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007). In order to assure that the practice of IGD was deeply rooted in theoretical knowledge about the nature of dialogue, intergroup relations, and critical education, the pedagogy incorporates elements from a variety of philosophical traditions and research areas.

Incorporation of Foundational Theories

Building on the theoretical frameworks summarized in chapter 2, this section will describe how IGD purposefully incorporates theories and perspectives such as conscientization and problem posing pedagogy, optimal conditions for intergroup contact, and direct engagement of social justice into their prescribed dialogue process. Each of the subsections below corresponds with one of the three stated goals of IGD.

Conscientization and Problem Posing Pedagogy

The first goal of IGD is to raise students' awareness of identity oppression and social inequities. Thus, the first body of literature influential to IGD is based in critical pedagogy – specifically, Freire's (1968/2000) writings on conscientization and problem-posing, or learner centered, approaches to education. Freire (1968/2000) emphasizes the need for students and teachers to cultivate critical self-consciousness in order to recognize the historical circumstances and socio-cultural

processes leading to their oppression – and that the best way to do so is to engage in critical dialogue where both students and teachers can join in the "quest for mutual humanization" (p. 62). In the pedagogy of IGD, conscientization is seen as necessary for privileged peoples in addition to those who are oppressed.

> Intergroup dialogue aims at raising the consciousness of all participants, not only those who are members of the less advantaged groups. For a genuine dialogue to occur, it is just as important for members of privileged groups to understand how they and others have been affected by privilege as it is for members of less-advantaged groups to understand how they have been affected by subordination. All participants need to grapple with understanding their own social identity group's history, involvement in patterns of privilege or oppression, and the impact of this history on themselves and others. (Zúñiga et al., 2007, p. 9)

Also akin to Freire's notion of critical dialogue, IGD utilizes a problem-posing model of learning where two dialogue facilitators (notice they are purposely not called "teachers" or "instructors") guide dialogue participants through an examination of self and other, and the social structures that impact us all. Facilitators are not seen as the source of all knowledge. Instead, the two cofacilitators represent the dominant/subordinate identities most salient to the theme of the dialogue (i.e. one Christian and one non-Christian), and exemplify the type of communication processes and alliance building needed for successful dialogue. Indeed, as articulated by Yeakley (2011),

Much of the learning comes from the dialogue participants themselves,

as they share their personal experiences and diverse perspectives along

their different social identities … thus, it is the quality of engagement

among the dialogue participants – the extent to which they share

honestly, actively listen, challenge each other's assumptions, and seek

to understand each other's perspectives – that influences their learning

in the dialogue. (p. 23)

Through the use of students' own voices, dialogue participants are exposed to various viewpoints. Dialogue facilitators, then, are able to guide the conversation in a way that allows students to discover how their differing experiences and perspectives are indicative of the power imbalances in our social-structural institutions.

Optimal Conditions for Intergroup Contact

The contact hypothesis and the intergroup contact theory were also instrumental in the intergroup education movement and the formation of the IGD pedagogy (Zúñiga et al., 2007). The second goal of IGD is to build cross-group communication skills and relationships. In order to increase the likelihood of success in developing these relationships and communication skills, IGD follows the optimal conditions of intergroup contact outlined by the contact hypothesis and intergroup contact theory. Table 1 below summarizes how IGD accounts for Allport's (1954) original four conditions for optimal dialogue – equal status, common goals, collaborative work, and institutional support – and Pettigrew's (1998) additional condition – friendship potential – within the pedagogical design.

Table1: IGD Pedagogy's Optimal Conditions for Dialogue

Optimal Conditions for Dialogue	IGD Conditions
Equal status among participants	• Application for courses (as opposed to open enrollment) allows administrators to create a dialogue group that is well balanced between majority and minority groups • Facilitators emphasize at the beginning of the course that all viewpoints, beliefs, and identities are equally welcomed and valuable for the learning process
Common goal for all participants	• Participants work together during the first dialogue session to create goals and rules that they all agree upon • In credit bearing IGD courses, a goal for all participants is to complete the course and receive credit and a grade
Collaboratively work to achieve stated goal	• Dialogues in themselves are collaborative • Activities during dialogue sessions emphasize collaboration • Participants are encouraged to remind each other about the goals and rules throughout the dialogue
Institutional support enforces group norms	• Facilitators are present to remind participants about democratically determined rules • University faculty and staff represent institutional support for the dialogue on a larger level
Friendship potential	• Sustained engagement over 6-14 weeks • Participants are all undergraduates at the same institution • Small group project assignment completed outside the dialogue group[14]

With particular attention to the first condition, equal status, IGD seeks to achieve that goal by enrolling an equal number of students from minority and majority identity groups into each dialogue (Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Zúñiga, 2003). Several scholars (i.e., Hubbard, 1999; Wagner & Machleit, 1986) have noted that truly reaching equal status in intergroup contact is highly complex and difficult. However, IGD attempts to tackle that issue by ensuring not only that the student representation is balanced between majority and minority, but also that there are two

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[14] This is true of many IGD courses around the country, and is certainly the case at ECU, but is not explicitly discussed in literature on the IGD pedagogy.

dialogue facilitators – one from the majority group and one from the minority group – in order that students see "authority" figures from both dominant and subordinate identities.

Regarding Pettigrew's (1998) four processes of change – learning about the other, establishing new group norms, generating emotions and affective ties, and ingroup reappraisal – IGD facilitators are trained to incorporate these processes into the dialogue through various facilitative techniques. For instance, to establish new group norms, students are asked to collectively determine group agreements (i.e., guidelines for dialogue) that they will follow throughout the semester. Also, in order to help students engage on an emotional level, facilitators will ask students to describe their experiences with and perspectives about their identity using "feeling" words (i.e., angry, happy, sad, etc.) instead "thinking" words. Other examples of techniques for facilitating IGD include: engaging students in interactive group activities, screening film clips or television commercials, analyzing print advertisements or other media outputs, incorporating key readings, modeling appropriate dialogue, utilizing instances of negativity or disagreement to point out larger socio-political issues, and encouraging additional learning opportunities outside of the dialogue (Maxwell, Nagda, & Thompson, 2011). While facilitator training is not as uniform across IGD programs as the dialogue process itself, all programs train their facilitators (both rookie and veteran facilitators) in the IGD model prior to the start of each semester. These trainings can come in the form of a weekend workshop series, a week-long retreat, or even a full semester credit bearing course (Maxwell et al., 2011).

Direct Engagement with Social Justice Issues

The third goal of IGD is to increase intergroup cooperation for addressing identity based social justice issues. As such, IGD draws upon theory and practice related to social justice education and various forms of critical identity studies. In keeping with the recommendations from these bodies of literature, IGD overtly addresses key issues such as privilege and oppression, identity socialization, and institutionalized political hegemony. This is a contrast to other types of campus based dialogue programs that adopt a democratic model (such as the program described in Voorhees & Petkas, 2011). In a democratic dialogue, students are given complete authority over what is discussed, and facilitators do not insert opinions or attempt to change the direction of the conversation. Instead, in IGDs, facilitators explicitly structure the dialogue around social justice issues, and students share experiences within the given framework. Literature on social justice and critical identity studies has shown us that privilege and oppression are often unseen and difficult to talk about (McIntosh, 1998). Thus, in a democratic dialogue, it is possible that students either will not recognize or will not want to deal with controversial topics like power and domination. For that reason, IGD adopts a social justice approach to dialogue to ensure that these important issues are not ignored.

This direct approach plays out in several ways in IGD courses. To start, students are asked to read about privilege/oppression and identity politics in the writings of social justice scholars such as Beverly Tatum (1997), Patricia Hill Collins (2000), and bell hooks (1984). Then, they are asked to respond to what they read based on experiences they have had in their own lives. This gives students the

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opportunity to disagree with or challenge the concepts of privilege and oppression, but guarantees that it will at least be a topic of discussion. Moreover, IGD facilitators are given the freedom to interject, to pose questions to specific individuals, or to ask the group to consider a perspective that was not previously shared. In this way, IGD is designed to push students beyond their comfort zone and into genuine, honest, and critical dialogue about identity and social injustices.

Combining these theoretical foundations, Nagda (2006) conceived of the critical-dialogic framework as a way to understand IGD. Then, Sorensen, Nagda, Gurin, and Maxwell (2009) expanded on that framework to create what is currently understood to be the critical-dialogic framework of IGD.

Figure 3: The Critical-Dialogic Framework
(Sorensen et al., 2009, p. 18)
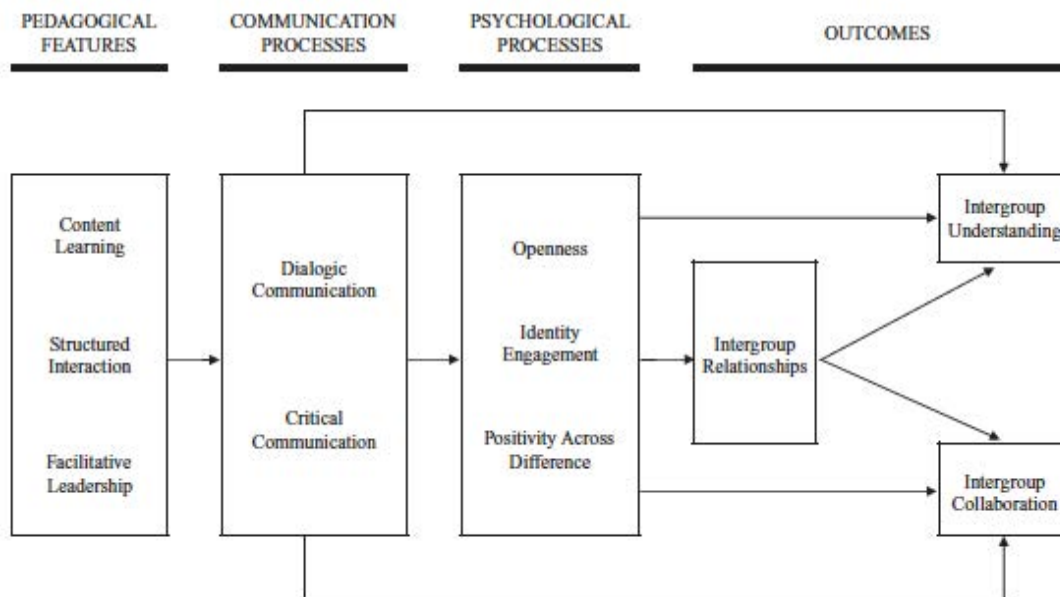
The framework, as shown in Figure 3 above, illustrates how the pedagogical features, communication processes, and psychological processes all work together to achieve

the desired outcomes of intergroup understanding, relationships, and collaboration. The next section will explain the processes and the pedagogy in more detail.

Process and Pedagogy

Using the foundations and frameworks articulated above, IGD has a unique pedagogy that differentiates it from other forms of dialogue and intergroup contact. Important elements of this pedagogy include:

- Thematic grouping of dialogues in order to focus on one specific form of identity privilege/oppression (examples include: race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, ability, and national origin; courses on more specific topics such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see Khuri, 2004) do exist, but are less common)

- Purposeful control over course enrollment in order to ensure that the group contains an equal number of students from dominant and non-dominant identities

- Paired facilitation (i.e., two cofacilitators are assigned to each group – one from the dominant identity and one from a non-dominant identity)

- Incentives for participation (when possible) such as course credit or required enrollment on a program, department, or even institutional level (Nagda, 1999)

- Sustained dialogue over the course of 6-14 weeks, with one two-hour meeting each week

A particularly distinguishing characteristic of the IGD pedagogy is the clearly defined four-stages process that each course follows (Alimo, Kelly, & Clark, 2002; Khuri, 2004; Zúñiga, 2003; Zúñiga et al., 2007):

Stage I: Creating an Environment for Dialogue

In this introductory stage, facilitators work on creating a safe space where students feel comfortable opening up about their thoughts and feelings. Community agreements (i.e., ground rules) are set according to group consensus, with facilitators offering suggestions when students miss certain key guidelines that are needed for a successful IGD experience. Examples of essential community agreements include: listen respectfully and consider all perspectives; prepare to be offended and admit when you have been; maintain all group members' confidentiality when speaking about the class with others; participate fully without dominating the conversation; and ask questions of each other without fear of judgment. During this stage, facilitators will explain the difference between dialogue and debate (i.e., trying to understand vs. trying to win), and describe the structure of the course that the students can expect throughout the semester. Facilitators will also explain the goals and expectations for the course, which invariably include the aim of understanding privilege, oppression, and other social justice issues as they pertain to the identity theme of the course. Sometime in the first or second class, group members (including facilitators) will introduce themselves and their various social identities. At this point, there is a strong emphasis on openness and respect, but students are reminded that disagreement, honesty, and alternative opinions are strongly encouraged, and that hiding your frustrations for the sake of maintaining a positive group environment is

unproductive. Students are reminded that the quality of learning that the group will experience rests on their ability to engage truthfully and critically with themselves and with the others.

Stage II: Exploring Differences and Commonalities of Experience

During this stage, students are asked to share more details about their life experiences as a member of their identity group (i.e., describe what it is like to live in this society as a person of your religious identity). Group members begin to recognize parallels and divergences in experiences, and begin to build connections with others. At the same time, students are able to clarify their own identities and learn to situate their experiences within a larger social-structural framework. Students in the dominant identity tend to struggle with this more than those of subordinate identity categories because, as Tatum (2010) explains, individuals often do not think about their privileged identities as an integral part of who they are. To help facilitate an understanding of identity oppression, socialization, and institutionalized power dynamics, facilitators use readings, videos, activities, and other pedagogical tools to introduce historical and contemporary contexts that create the current social structure. At the end of this stage, students are asked to select specific topics they would like to discuss in the following stage; facilitators typically encourage them to select topics that, (a) would bring out differences of opinion rather than unanimous agreement, (b) are relevant to the purpose of the class, and (c) would enable students to speak from experience rather than in intellectualized hypothetical situations.

Stage III: Using 'Hot Topics' to Dialogue about Conflict and Multiple Perspectives

Each class in this stage centers on the day's 'hot topic.' While students are asked to select ideas to use as hot topics, ultimately, facilitators determine how to frame those topics in a way that would be most conducive to a social justice oriented dialogue. Examples of common hot topics (for race dialogues) include racial profiling, affirmative action, and self-segregation (Zúñiga, 2003). For religion-themed dialogues, some examples of hot topics students may choose include: interfaith dating/marriage, the separation of religion and government, or death and the afterlife[15]. Prior to the start of each class, facilitators often select a reading/video assignment to get the students prepared for the hot topic dialogue. Then, each class session begins with an introductory activity to introduce the idea and open up the dialogue, followed by an open floor period where students are asked to share their own experiences with, or perspectives on, the hot topic. Throughout the dialogue, facilitators encourage students to take control of the dialogue by posing their own questions to the group or to individual people, yet also encourage students to remain attentive to how the topic(s) impacts identity in a larger social-structural sense. This stage of the course is the least scripted and requires the facilitators to develop curriculum based on the particular needs and interests of the group.

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[15] As there is no literature on religion-themed IGD to this point, this information is based on my own experiences as an IGD facilitator and the experiences of others who have facilitated religion-themed IGD whom I have spoken to informally.

Stage IV: Action Planning and Alliance Building

In the final stage, students reflect on their experience and what they have learned through the IGD process. They discuss with each other how, if at all, they have changed as a result of the dialogue, and are able to pose any additional questions or concerns that may not have come up in the previous stages. Facilitators guide students through brainstorming and sharing ideas about what tangible steps they can take beyond the IGD course (both individually and in groups) to address social injustices on their campuses, in their communities, or around the world.

Empirical Support of Intergroup Dialogue

Empirical research on the impact of IGD on college student learning has been somewhat limited (see Table 2 for a full list), but existing literature has repeatedly shown support for its positive effects, particularly with regard to IGD's three stated goals. For example, Nagda and Zúñiga (2003) found through analyzing pre- and post-tests of students in five sections of race themed IGD at one institution that students increased their critical social awareness as it pertained to race. Using a longitudinal (two year), pre-post survey across nine universities, Sorensen, Nagda, Gurin, and Maxwell (2009) also determined that students who participated in IGD had increased intergroup understanding and awareness of structural inequality. Both of these studies (and several others) have been used to suggest that the first goal of IGD – to raise awareness of identity oppression and social inequities – is typically achieved using the IGD pedagogy.

Regarding the second goal if IGD – to build cross-group communication skills and relationships – Alimo, Kelly, and Clark (2002), found through a qualitative case

study of students in a race themed IGD course that students reported having more positive interracial interactions after their participation in the course. Also, in a mixed-method, pre- and post-test, comparison group study on students in four different sections of IGD (race, race and class, race-gender-sexuality, and class), Werkmeister-Rozas (2003) found that students who participated in IGD experienced an increase in diversity of their friendship groups more so than students who did not participate in IGD. Furthermore, fitting with Pettigrew's (1998) theory that friendship potential would lead to a decrease in intergroup bias, Werkmeister-Rozas's (2003) participants also demonstrated an increase in positive attitudes towards interracial interaction in general.

The final goal of IGD – to increase intergroup cooperation for addressing identity based social justice issues – has also been supported empirically. When measuring the success of IGD in achieving this third goal, researchers have operationalized students' ability to address identity based social justice issues as the ability to critique inequality (Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, Gurin-Sans, & Osuna, 2009), their expressed commitment to post-college action (Nagda et al., 2009), their attitudes towards democratic citizenship (Gurin, Nagda & Lopez, 2004), and self-reported instances of students educating others about inequality (Gurin-Sands, Gurin, Osuna, & Nagda, 2012). All of the studies referenced above (all quantitative, pre-post test, control group research designs) have suggested that students with IGD experience have significantly greater ability to promote social justice than students without IGD experience.

Recently (from 2006-2009), researchers at the University of Michigan's IGR led a longitudinal, nation-wide, mixed-methods study – known as the Multiversity Intergroup Dialogue Research Project, or MIGR – including 52 race and gender themed IGD courses at nine colleges and universities in the United States (Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013). The project has produced several empirical publications and the results have shown continued support for IGD goals and outcomes as well as insight into the processes of learning and change among students (i.e., Gurin, Nagda, & Sorensen, 2011; Zúñiga, Varghese, DeJong, Keehn, & Mildred, 2012).

As a tool for analyzing and comparing existing empirical research on IGD, I created Table 2 below, which is presented in chronological order to show the progression of this research field. To compile the studies selected for this table, I started with the list of research publications advertised on the University of Michigan's IGR website[16]. I then expanded my search with the WorldCat search engine, and Google Scholar, looking specifically for any referenced studies I came across in the books/articles I read. To narrow my focus for the purpose of this research review, I only included primary empirical pieces in this table. I also excluded studies looking at dialogue outside the context of higher education (i.e., K-12, work place, or community based dialogue programs) and those that did not analyze students' experiences or learning outcomes (i.e., those focused on facilitators or faculty members). In the end, I came up with 27 empirical publications analyzing student experiences and/or learning outcomes from the IGD pedagogy in a college or university setting.

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[16] http://www.igr.umich.edu/respub/publications

Table 2: Empirical Research on IGD

Year	Theme	Methods	Central Focus
1997	Race	Quantitative	Cognitive and behavioral outcomes of IGD
1998	Race	Qualitative	Positive and negative outcomes of IGD
1999	Race	Mixed Methods	Evaluations of IGD compared to other courses
2002	Race	Qualitative	Impact of IGD on cross-race interaction
2003	Race	Quantitative	Student outcomes related to IGD goals
2003	Race	Mixed-Method	Impact of IGD on cross-racial interaction
2004	Race/Gender	Quantitative	Impact of IGD on attitudes towards social action
2004	Israel-Palestine	Qualitative	Student experiences in Israel/Palestine IGD
2004	Race	Quantitative	Impact of IGD on confidence in social action
2005	Race	Quantitative	Impact of IGD on democratic sensibilities
2006	Race	Quantitative	Processes linked to positive IGD outcomes
2007	Gender	Qualitative	Personal transformations resulting from IGD
2009	Race/Gender/ Sexuality	Quantitative	Processes of change through IGD
2009*	Race/Gender	Quantitative	Impact of IGD on commitment to social action
2009*	Race/Gender	Quantitative	Student outcomes related to IGD goals
2010*	Race/Gender	Quantitative	IGD's ability to create feelings of empathy
2011	Sexuality	Qualitative	Experiences of LGB individuals in dialogue
2011*	Race/Gender	Mixed Methods	Student outcomes related to IGD goals
2011	Race	Quantitative	Impact of IGD on confidence in social action
2012*	Race	Quantitative	Impact of IGD on developing white racial allies
2012	Race	Qualitative	Minority student experiences in IGD
2012*	Race/Gender	Quantitative	Impact of IGD on commitment to social action
2012*	Race/Gender	Qualitative	Engaged listening processes in IGD
2012	Arab-Jewish	Qualitative	Impact of IGD on perceptions of the "other"
2013*	Race/Gender	Mixed Methods	Student outcomes related to IGD goals
2013	Sexuality	Qualitative	Heterosexual student experiences
2013	Sexuality/Religion/ Israel-Palestine	Qualitative	Intersection/comparison of outcomes in three dialogue themes

Data drawn from the MIGR study (for details see Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013)

There are some definite trends in what I found, beyond the emphasis on how and if the goals of IGD are realized. Notably, 21 out of 27 of the studies had race as a primary focus of the study, despite there being at least five different themes that are consistently mentioned in these publications as possible social identity categories that can be addressed using the IGD pedagogy. Additionally, 17 out of 27 of the research was primarily quantitative in nature. Included in that number are two mixed methods studies because the presentation of the research in those publications were very quantitatively oriented. Lastly, only two of the listed studies emphasized the experiences of IGD from the perspective of students representing minority/oppressed identity groups (Dessel, Woodford, & Warren, 2011; Ford & Malaney, 2012). Other articles/books/dissertations certainly mentioned disaggregated findings based on identity difference, but they did not attempt to represent marginalized voices as recommended by critical identity scholars like hooks (1994) and Freire (1968/2000) – both of whom are cited by the original IGD scholars as being foundational and influential to the theory and practice of IGD.

Gaps in IGD Research Literature

By identifying trends in the empirical literature on the IGD pedagogy, I have also been able to identify gaps in research and knowledge about IGD. In this section, I will discuss the three main areas I see that are necessary for future research on this topic. I will also briefly explain how my own research seeks deliberately to fill these current gaps in knowledge.

Additional Theme-Specific Research

One of the major weaknesses I see in the existing literature on IGD is that while the vast majority of the research is done with a specific emphasis on interracial interaction and increasing students' awareness of race issues, leaders in the field (i.e., Zúñiga et al., 2007) continue to promote the pedagogy as one that addresses all forms of diversity. Even studies that claim to be analyzing multiple themes (i.e., Kivlighan & Arseneau, 2009; Werkmeister-Rozas, 2003) still present findings that are very much slanted towards outcomes and implications related to race relations in higher education. While I recognize that race-based privilege/oppression is certainly a topic of extreme importance, I would argue that the other themes found in the practice of IGD – religion, sexual orientation, ability, etc. – are also necessary and valuable, and are in need of empirical attention. After all, if scholars claim that IGD is successful in raising awareness, building relationships, and motivating social action across a wide range of identity categories, than it seems imperative that this theory be tested in all possible themes independently.

To highlight the potential for different themes to result in different student experiences or outcomes, I turn to the MIGR study. The study was designed to investigate only race and gender themed dialogues, however even between those two themes, differences were found in the way they impacted students. For example, when analyzing student papers and looking for indications that students educated others about what they were learning in their IGD class, Gurin-Sands et al. (2012) found that students in race themed dialogues did so significantly more than student in gender themed dialogues did. Zúñiga et al. (2012) also found differences between

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students in race and gender dialogues. Through in-depth interviews, they determined that students in race dialogues demonstrated more instances of engaged listening during their IGD course than students in gender dialogues. Thus, if differences exist in the way students experience or learn from race and gender IGD, researchers should further examine possible differences in other themes as well. Until then, it is difficult to say definitively how or if IGD is effective for students in the ways that current theory says it is.

The specific theme of IGD I draw attention to with the present research is the religion theme. When mentioning this theme, some have called it Christian-Jewish dialogue (Sorensen et al., 2009) or dialogue between Christians, Muslims, and Jews (Zúñiga, 2003; Zúñiga et al., 2007; Zúñiga et al., 2002). In an attempt to be more inclusive of all religious identities, East Coast University's IGD program has titled their religion-themed IGD course interfaith/secular dialogue. This name does not seek to suggest a religion vs. secular dichotomy, but simply that all worldviews, including non-religious or atheist worldviews, are welcomed as a valuable contribution to the dialogue about interfaith relations and religious identity based privilege/oppression. Interfaith dialogue has the potential to improve interfaith relations on college campuses in the United States, and to increase justice for religious minority students as well. To further investigate that potential, research on the impacts and outcomes of religion-themed IGD in the context of U.S. higher education can increase our understanding of how to deal with issues of religious illiteracy, oppression, and marginalization through campus based interfaith dialogue initiatives.

To date, published IGD research on this theme has been extremely limited. There are only two studies listed in Table 2 that even mention religion as a topic of analysis. One of them was a dissertation project by Ross Messer (2007) from Gonzaga University; a phenomenological case study of students in a gender themed IGD course. While he claims to be analyzing students' views on gender, politics, and religion, gender remains the primary focus of the study, and politics and religion are only discussed if and when they pertain to gender issues (such as abortion, birth control, or women's role in family and society). The second (Dessel, Masse, & Walker, 2013) was a book chapter that discussed the intersections and commonalities in IGDs on sexuality, religion, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. In this chapter, student outcomes in religion-themed IGD received approximately one page of text. Despite the limited amount of information provided about this IGD theme, Dessel and her colleagues (2013) offer some intriguing insight into the uniqueness of a dialogue about religion. They mention that, while the goal of the course is to raise awareness of Christian privilege, very few students actually mention Christian privilege in their descriptions of their experience in the course. Seemingly, this indicates that religion-themed IGD may not be as successful in building critical identity awareness in students, but without an expanded discussion of this phenomenon (certainly, more than one page) it remains a bit of a mystery.

Additionally (although not featured on Table 2), I found one non-empirical, newsletter style article in *Diversity & Democracy* (Dessel, Maxwell, Masse, & Ramus, 2010) discussing a new project the University of Michigan's is undertaking to analyze their religion-themed IGD courses. The article did not contain a methods,

analysis, or findings section, and was seemingly only written to give a brief introduction to the type of religious diversity initiative that Michigan's IGR program is undertaking. According to their website[17], the project mentioned in the article was a qualitative interview study conducted from October 2008 to September 2010, and sought to determine how/whether students are impacted differently by religion-themed IGD based on any previous course work they may have had on the topic of religion. Presumably study will produce publications in the near future. This is an important step – one in the direction of increased empirical review of religion-themed IGD – and will hopefully lead to continued efforts on this topic.

Inductive, Exploratory, and Qualitative Methods of Inquiry

Another shortcoming I have noticed in IGD research is the limited amount of inductive, exploratory, and qualitative methods of inquiry that have been employed thus far. As discussed above, much of the existing empirical support of IGD is closely aligned with the stated goals of the pedagogy. Due to the deductive, tightly controlled nature of the research design in these studies (the MIGR study for instance), finding anything beyond what is asked in the research question(s) is understandably difficult. Some of the inductive, qualitative research that has been done has produced some interesting results and findings that would not have been discovered with a more deductive, quantitative research design. Yeakley (1998), for example, discovered through semi-structured interviews that there were actually certain processes within her participants' IGD courses that led to negative outcomes. One of the things she learned was that when students observed unlikable

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[17] http://www.igr.umich.edu/respub/research

characteristics or behaviors in their group members without the ability to talk about those characteristics or behaviors as a part of the dialogue, they came away from the course with intensified stereotypes and prejudices about the racial groups those individuals represented. In 2004, Khuri's participant-observation and focus group study on an Israel-Palestine dialogue course also yielded new information about dialogue processes and students' perceptions of the IGD pedagogy. The researcher's presence in the dialogue group in this study, allowed her to describe how students reacted to specific activities (ones that are commonly used by IGD facilitators around the country) and how conflicts were managed throughout the course. Participants were also able to explain that one of the best outcomes of the course for them was actually learning how to effectively manage their own emotional reactions in a confrontational situation – an outcome that falls outside of the standard three outcomes that other IGD researchers have looked for: critical awareness of identity relations, development of communications skills and cross group relationships, and commitment to social action.

Another type of finding that prior deductive research projects have not uncovered, are students motivations for and expectations of the class before the start of their IGD course. Using a grounded theory approach, Dessel et al. (2011) analyzed reflective writings of students in seven different LGB/Heterosexual IGD courses. They found that students who identified as heterosexual often indicated that they took the course out of an interest in learning more about lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) individuals and the LGB community. Additionally, they found that students who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual often noted that because they were not entirely

open about their identities in public, they sought to meet and connect with other LGB

individuals and to learn more about the community that they identified with. This

finding is important for faculty and administrators seeking to provide a welcoming

campus environment to their students – especially those who may not yet be entirely

comfortable with their own identity – but is one that would have been difficult to find

using deductive or quantitative methods of inquiry without designing a study

specifically geared for answering a research question such as that.

　　　　With continued inductive, exploratory, and qualitative modes of inquiry into

IGD pedagogy, scholars can continue to broaden the body of knowledge about the

impacts and outcomes of IGD, and of students' experiences with and perceptions of

the critical-dialogic process. Deductive, quantitative, larger-scaled studies definitely

have advantages in being able to provide a more generalizable picture of how this

pedagogy works, but as an area of study that is so full of unturned rocks, it is

necessary to take advantage of the more creative and flexible research techniques that

we have to choose from. For that reason, this dissertation presents a qualitative

exploratory study of an IGD theme that very little is known about (religion). The

highly inductive and descriptive nature of this research allows for the discovery of

new information that contributes to future research and practice in this field.

Attention to Marginalized Identity Voices

　　　　A final area of research that needs expanding beyond what is currently

available on IGD is that which highlights the voices of marginalized identity groups

and individuals. The IGD pedagogy is an educational process that seeks to teach

students about the pervasiveness of identity oppression and the ways they can act to

reverse that oppression (Zúñiga et al., 2007), yet there are surprisingly few pieces of empirical literature that seek, explicitly, to bring to light the stories of those who are oppressed. Ford and Malaney's (2012) article is one of those pieces. It places an emphasis on describing how students of color and/or multiracial students experience learning about racial identity development through race themed IGD at a predominately White institution. Through analyzing students' reflective writing, they were able to recognize, among other things, that many of the students of color and multiracial students struggled with self-esteem – an issue, for them, that was tied to their skin color and their minority ethnic or cultural traditions. Dessel et al. (2011) also made a point of closely attending to the writings of LGB students when reading about their experience in a sexual orientation themed IGD course. In their article, LGB students' own words were presented in order to demonstrate a common feeling that their interaction with the heterosexual students was not sincere, and that despite them claiming to understand LGB oppression, they did not feel the heterosexual students truly understood them. Their article also highlighted that while IGD is supposed to be a group effort at self-examination, many LGB students felt that they were forced to do much more sharing and explaining about their identities than the heterosexual students were – an experience they felt forced them to be vulnerable while allowing the heterosexual students to remain unengaged. Increasing the amount of available scholarly literature accentuating minority student voices and experiences seems essential for IGD practitioners and university administrators in their quest to promote diversity and intergroup understanding.

As I discuss in chapter one, a prime example of a minority voice that has been under-represented in the discourse on identity, privilege/oppression, and intergroup relations, is the voice of religious minorities – specifically, students from non-Abrahamic religious identities such as Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, and Jain (the four Dharmic religions), as well as Shinto, Taoist, Confucian, Indigenous, Pagan, and other Earth-based religious traditions. I explained in chapter one that the discourse amongst higher education and student affairs scholars largely ignores this non-Abrahamic minority population. Likewise, many who specifically write about IGD have themselves overlooked this group by naming only the three dominant Abrahamic faiths as part of interfaith dialogue (Sorensen et al., 2009; Zúñiga et al., 2007; Zúñiga et al., 2002) or referring to religious oppression simply as anti-Semitism (Maxwell et al., 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2011).

It is my opinion that scholars of IGD, student affairs, student development, and all fields of education should expand the reach of current knowledge on oppressed religious identities, with a particular intention to empower the voices of these individuals. In an effort to bring increased attention to this under-research minority group, I dedicate a portion of my analysis of this study specifically to the experiences of IGD participants with religious identities that are not Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. The following chapter presents a more detailed account of my research design, my positionality within this research, and the methods I used to carry out this project.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Implementation

The research presented in this dissertation is a multiple case study (Merriam, 1998) of three religion-themed Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) courses at East Coast University (ECU). As detailed in chapter three, current literature on IGD is overwhelmingly grounded in issues of racial identity and oppression, and does not adequately consider other identities in theoretical discussions of how this pedagogy impacts students. Furthermore, as discussed in chapters one and two, religious minority students, particularly students with non-Abrahamic religious identities, have been neglected in the larger discourse on identity based privilege and oppression. Thus, this study seeks to investigate religion-themed IGD courses in order to (1) understand students' experiences in religion-themed IGD courses, (2) determine the applicability of current IGD theory to this under-researched theme of the pedagogy, and (3) consider the perspectives of students from non-Abrahamic religious identities in contrast to students from the Christian majority, or other dominant Abrahamic groups.

This chapter will describe the research design I have determined is best suited for this study. However, before I get into the methodology and precise methods I plan to use, I first describe my own personal and academic journey that has brought me to this study as a way of reflecting on my own positionality in this research. Next, I offer some context to the campus within which my research is situated, ECU's IGD program itself, and my own connection to the program as an IGD facilitator. After explaining my research questions, methodological approach, and research methods, I discuss the quality dimensions I have incorporated into this research design, as well

as the ways in which I am taking into account ethical considerations in the research process.

My Journey to This Research

My involvement with the Intergroup Dialogue Program at ECU began in the fall of 2011, but my interest in dialogue began much earlier than that. As an undergraduate I studied Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) because I believed that mediated dialogue, as an alternative to a long and messy formal litigation process, should be more widely practiced. For my Masters I switched gears and studied religion, focusing primarily on modern religious practices that resulted from the blending of indigenous Polynesian religious traditions with the various forms of Christianity that now largely dominate in the Pacific region. When I searched for a link between my interests in ADR and religion, I found interfaith dialogue.

Aside from my studies, which taught me about past and present religious conflicts around the world, I learned through personal experience how difficult it can be to talk about an issue as sensitive as religion. Whenever anyone asks me what my religion is, I get really nervous – even now. I always have to think about what I want to say, how I should say it, and what the other person is going to think of me based on my answer. For a long time, I legitimately had no idea what my religion, or my religious identity, was. I knew I believed that something spiritual connected me with the people and natural environments around me, but beyond that, I had no labels to describe my faith. At home when my family prayed or referenced God we always used the name Ramji or Hanumanji (both Hindu deities), we attended a Jodo Shin Buddhist temple for any important events (like a funeral or death anniversary), and

we celebrated both Buddhist and Christian holidays – albeit the Christian holidays were celebrated in an extremely secular fashion. My father (who is more "religious" than my mother) is Hindu, which is why our home life was more strongly influenced by my dad's religious practices. My mother (who is not very strict about following any kind of religious practice) is Buddhist/Shinto, but because I was raised primarily with her side of the family, our religious rituals outside the home were primarily Buddhist. Additionally, I grew up in Hawai'i, dancing hula[18] and learning about the native gods and goddesses embodied by the various elements of nature. Having been raised in a family context rooted in Japanese Shinto culture, I developed an orientation towards Earth-Based spirituality, and thus have always felt a deep affinity towards the Indigenous Hawaiian traditions embedded in natural environment where I grew up. Most of my friends, and some of my extended family members, were Christian, and my dad (a professor of comparative religion) raised my brother and me with the knowledge and awareness of all the world's religious traditions. Despite all of that, no one had ever told me what my religion was; I had to figure it out on my own. As an adult, I now describe myself as spiritual with a strong connection to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Earth-Based traditions – but that can be a mouthful so sometimes it just comes out as, "I'm spiritual." I often sense confusion or disapproval from others when I say this, which is what propels my continued hesitation around the topic.

Separately from the process of coming to terms with my own spiritually, I struggled with developing a critical awareness of my religious identity. Religious

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[18] For a more detailed explanation of the spiritual aspects of this native Hawaiian tradition, see: Edwards (2013).

identity, as I describe in chapter one, is not defined by my personal set of beliefs.

Instead, it is a social category that classifies me in comparison to others and is shaped

by the historical and cultural context in which I was raised. For that reason, my

religious identity may be slightly different from how I choose to describe myself

because of the way social identities are impacted by how others view me. I have

come to the understanding that my religious identity is Hindu/Buddhist/Shinto.

While I may not always feel like this is completely accurate for me (since, after all, I

do not celebrate traditional Hindu or Shinto holidays, nor to I attend any type of

Hindu, Buddhist, or Shinto religious ceremonies on a regular basis), I recognize that

this is the category I am placed in by society. I may not be a practicing

Hindu/Buddhist/Shinto, but I am a Hindu/Buddhist/Shinto nonetheless. I was raised

in a family environment that shaped my understanding of the world, of myself, and of

others from a Hindu/Buddhist/Shinto perspective. Throughout my life, I have been

consistently reminded by the people and institutions around me that I am not

Christian and that I do not fit in with the dominant religious culture of the United

States. And, even though I (like most people) would prefer to define myself

according to my own view of myself, I cannot erase my religious/spiritual upbringing

and how that has biased me towards Eastern and Earth-Based traditions. When I

share my religious identity with others, I am often met with unease or even a slight

sense of fear. Similar to my hesitancy with sharing my spirituality, a lifetime of

sensing discomfort with my religious identity from others has made me keep that part

of myself fairly private. At the same time, I know that it is precisely for that reason

that issues relating to religion and peoples' religious identities should be discussed.

After all, my ADR training taught me that in order to solve a problem – in this case, a lack of tolerance or understanding of others' religions – the underlying roots of the problem need to be identified and addressed (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1991). Thus, I decided that education was a promising tool to tackle prejudice, ignorance, and fear surrounding to religion.

I chose to pursue a Ph.D. because the program I enrolled in offered the opportunity for me to study education as a tool for international peace building. Through this program, I began to think and learn more about identity development and the impact of identity on our everyday experiences. The identities we tended to focus on were race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and place of origin. As a mixed-race female from Hawai'i, I appreciated the insistence from our faculty that education needs to be more culturally relevant and that educators should be mindful of the systems of power related to identity. I also valued the campus wide emphasis on diversity evident in the various initiatives geared towards promoting intercultural understanding. However, I was frustrated by the lack of attention paid to religious identities; especially given my own struggle with naming my spirituality and my religious identity. Scholars from both education and sociology (i.e., Gunn, 2003; Leak, 2009; Small, 2009) have recognized that religious affiliation is often more about identity than ritual practice, and that religious identity is a key element of overall identity development, so I found it curious that discussions about this type of identity marginalization were still so uncommon.

In my attempt to advocate for the inclusion of religious identities in our conversations about identity relations, I encountered apathy, or sometimes even

outright resistance, from many of my peers and instructors. Once, in response to me sharing my interest in researching interfaith dialogue in higher education, a classmate (we can call him Bill) told me that he thought religion should only be discussed at home, not in school. I was discouraged, but I persisted. Reminding myself about all the times I have felt uncomfortable and unwelcomed because I did not share the religious identity of those around me, I continued to vocalize my assertion that religious oppression is just as much of a problem as racism, sexism, heterosexism, and any other form of identity oppression. I wondered why people like Bill felt that one's religious identity was not appropriate to discuss in a school setting, while their other identities were. Was it because he did not believe in a higher power and assumed that talking about religion meant preaching? Was it because he had a narrow view of religion and was not open to hearing about other religions or beliefs? I had no idea, but he had made it clear that he did not want to talk about it. I was frustrated.

To me, not being able to talk about religious identity, or the existence of religious oppression, was particularly frustrating for two reasons. For one, I felt it perpetuated ignorance about the different religious identities and how they impact peoples' lives, thereby potentially allowing continued prejudice and even hatred of religious "others." To put it bluntly, it lets biased attitudes go unchecked and unnoticed, and limits minority religious advocates' ability to speak up for themselves and others. Secondly, it makes religious minorities, like me, equally unaware of the lived experiences of people with majority religious identities. For example, one day I found myself at a table with an extremely diverse group of people with regard to age,

race, gender, and national origin. Most of the people at the table were just meeting

for the first time so initially the conversation was awkward and littered with extended

pauses. Somehow, one of the people at the table began talking about how much she

liked the church she attended. Suddenly, everyone at the table (except for me) was

jumping into the conversation, adding anecdotes about their respective Christian

communities, and other enjoyable church memories. Clearly, their shared religious

identity acted as a bond between them. Hoping desperately that no one would ask me

about my church (if they thought I had one), or my religious identity, I got out my

Blackberry and pretended to be preoccupied with something important. Actually, this

has happened to me on multiple occasions. Once it even happened on a job interview

– for a full-time administrative position at a higher education institution, no less! –

which led me not to accept the position I was offered because, as I told my family, "I

don't want to be the one everyone thinks is going to hell!" Now, I will be the first to

admit that it is unfairly presumptuous of me to assume that just because all the people

at the table were Christian that they all disapproved of me or thought I was going to

hell. However, due to the absence of any sort of dialogue about beliefs or religious

identities among my classmates and colleagues, I am stuck with memories of the

times in which I have been told directly that I am going to hell, leaving my

assumptions to, at times, get the best of me.

At the end of my class with Bill, he admitted to me that he had changed his

mind about my research. He said that he now realized the value in being able to

discuss religious identities in school, and even shared that he had always felt so

confused about his own religious identity because his parents had different religions

and they never taught him about either of them. It turned out that I had more in common with Bill than I originally thought! His honesty comforted me, and reassured my belief that my research and my advocacy is important. However, I was still left wondering why he had been so against it in the first place. Why does it seem like my peers' research topics on minority race, gender, socio-economic, and sexual identities are more easily accepted by others than mine? The fact that my topic of interest sparks resistance from others further demonstrated, in my mind, the marginalization of the voices I was trying to bring forward. My job, then, and what I seek to do with my research, is to make those voices heard through collective and collaborative dialogue among all religious identities, and to help others become more comfortable discussing religious identity – something that I continue to struggle with myself.

Simply put, my journey to this research has been both academic and personal. Current and historical research gives me the scholarly impetus to fill the gap left by the absence of literature on interfaith dialogue in education, while my lived experiences as a religious minority have allowed me to see, first hand, why this topic deserves more empirical attention.

Research Context

The present study is set at East Coast University, a large public institution of higher education in the mid-Atlantic region, in an extremely diverse and cosmopolitan city in terms of religion, race, socio-economic status, national origin, and a variety of other social identity markers. Christianity certainly has the largest representation on ECU's campus, yet the school is much more religiously diverse

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than the country as a whole (see Figure 4 below). In 2009, ECU researchers[19] found

that 34.8% of all incoming students aligned themselves with a minority faith identity,

and according to Hillel (2011) ECU maintains a consistently high Jewish population

compared to other public universities around the country. There are active student

organizations on campus representing the spectrum of religious traditions, even a

thriving secular student organization, so it can be confidently stated that minority

faith identities are represented on this campus.

<div align="center">Figure 4: Religious Breakdown of the U.S. and East Coast University[20]</div>

United States

East Coast University

- Christian
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Buddhist
- Atheist/Agnostic
- Other
- Unknown
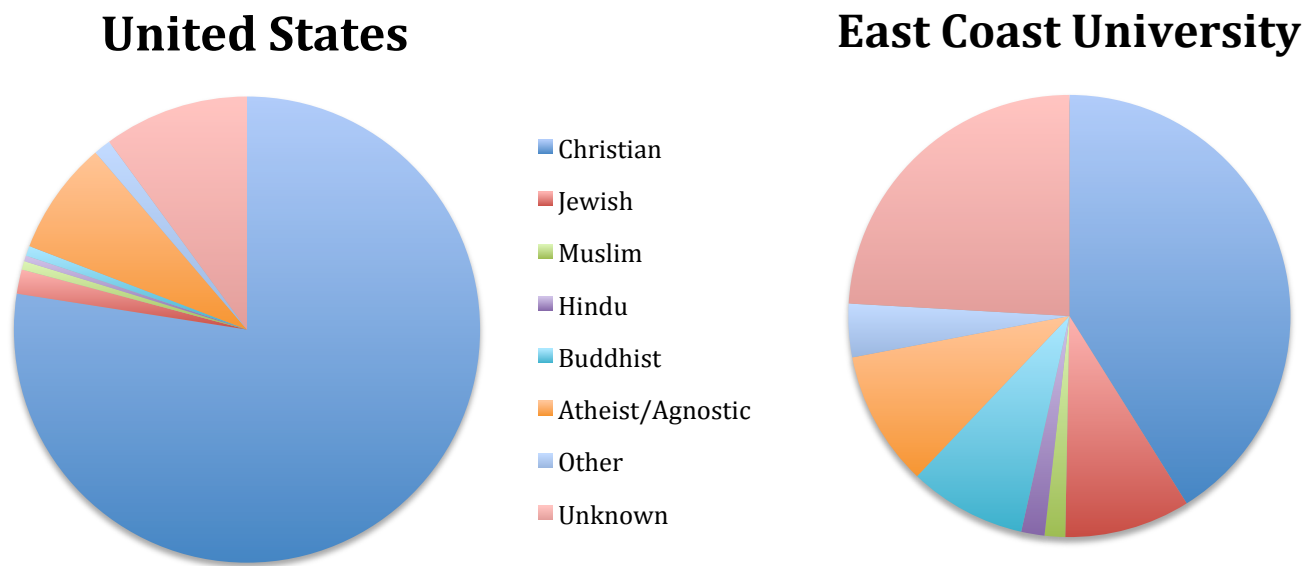
However, there is no academic department dedicated to the study of religion – only a

religious studies minor that is comprised of courses taught by professors in

departments ranging from history to art, and others taught by campus chaplains. This

mix makes East Coast University an interesting location for an investigation of an

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[19] All data sources for ECU's student demographics have been purposefully excluded
to maintain the anonymity of the institution.
[20] United States data drawn from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008).

interfaith dialogue course; the student body is fairly diverse with regard to religious

identity, but it is uncertain whether or not they have opportunities to learn about, or

even talk about, different religions through their coursework.

The religion-themed IGD course (which at this institution is named

"interfaith/secular"), has been offered at ECU since their IGD program began in

2000. The program was modeled after the University of Michigan's IGR program

with regard to the pedagogical tenets of the courses, meaning each of the courses

offered follows the same four-stage process unique to IGD pedagogy, as described in

chapter three above. East Coast University was one of the institutions that

participated in the recent large scale, longitudinal, multi-university IGD research

project – the MIGR study – that has produced several key scholarly pieces on IGD

(Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, & Zúñiga, 2009). Moreover, ECU's IGD program staff

(past and present) have contributed to the academic discourse on IGD and other

diversity issues in higher education, including at least one of the empirical studies

featured in Table 2 above.

At ECU, the IGD program is administered by, and housed in an administrative

office charged with promoting diversity and multicultural awareness; an office which

falls under the purview of the Office of the President. They offer at least eight one-

credit IGD courses per semester, covering themes such as: race, gender, sexual

orientation, religion, national origin, ability, socio-economic class, and emergent

theme – a course that allows the students to determine the identities and individual

issues they will discuss. Courses are labeled under the College of Education, and as

of fall 2012, completion of one IGD course satisfies the University's general

education diversity requirement for all undergraduates. Additionally, some departments require their students to take an IGD course in order to complete certain degree, certificate, or minor programs (i.e., the minor in engineering leadership). As a result of this trend (increased exposure and inclusion of IGD courses in program requirements), the number of courses offered is on the rise. After several years of offering eight courses per semester, they increased that number to ten in fall 2013.

Courses are seven weeks long – either the first seven weeks of the semester, or the last seven weeks of the semester. Students who enroll in these classes are mostly undergraduate students, as the course is listed as an undergraduate course. Facilitators are usually graduate students or university staff, but on rare occasion an upper level undergraduate may facilitate a course if he/she has previously taken an IGD course, passes the interview stage with the IGD staff, and has gone through the proper training (either completing a three credit, semester-long course on IGD or serving as a junior facilitator in an IGD course with two veteran cofacilitators). All facilitators, old and new, participate in semi-annual training sessions that last anywhere from five to fifteen hours and provide facilitators with the philosophical and theoretical roots of IGD, along with the practical skills for facilitating IGD courses, through discussions, group activities, and role play exercises.

In the fall semester of 2011, I became an IGD facilitator for ECU's IGD program. During that semester, I cofacilitated two separate race themed IGD courses, and simultaneously carried out a pilot study of the interfaith/secular IGD course by conducting in-depth interviews with seven students both before and after they took the course. The following semester, spring 2012, I cofacilitated an interfaith/secular

IGD course myself, and wrote weekly memos about my own experience, both emotionally and intellectually, as a facilitator of this IGD theme in order to begin my introspection process in preparation for my dissertation research. During the fall 2012 semester, my first semester of dissertation data collection, I cofacilitated a socio-economic class themed IGD course, and subsequently cofacilitated an LGBT/Heterosexual IGD course while in the second semester of my dissertation data collection, in spring 2013. My varied, and continuous experience with ECU's IGD program has allowed me to understand the IGD process from multiple angles and helped me formulate research questions best suited for this pedagogy.

Research Questions

For this study, I have selected three research questions. Each question was carefully constructed to match the three gaps in IGD literature I discussed above.

RQ #1. What do students experience by participating in religion-themed Intergroup Dialogue, and what meaning do they make from those experiences?

I recognize that the concept of "making meaning" is a somewhat vague and is arguably over-used, but for this question, I have deliberately chosen to use the words "make meaning" to assert that my interest is in learning about how my research participants themselves describe their understanding of the experience they have/had in the interfaith/secular dialogue course. My purposes, with regard to my first research question, are not to determine any kind of measurable impact that the course has made on the students, or to ascertain their opinions only as they relate to existing IGD theory, but to allow their voices to dominate the conversation about the IGD

experience. Through allowing them to describe, in their own words, what they make of the experience, I can inductively construct thematic findings that represent new and unique ways of understanding the IGD pedagogy as it applies to religion-themed dialogue. As I will explain in greater detail below, I approach this research through a constructivist paradigm, which means that I recognize the co-constructed nature of the data analysis process. While I seek to represent my research participants authentically, I understand that the discussion of results and findings that I offer here are naturally impacted by my own experiences and worldviews.

RQ #2.   How do students' descriptions of their experience of the dialogue align with the theoretical goals and outcomes of Intergroup Dialogue pedagogy?

The purpose of this second research question is so that any future publications that result from this study can speak directly to the body of literature that theorizes students' learning outcomes from IGD. Currently, theory states that through IGD courses, students gain a greater critical awareness of identity and social injustice, develop skills in cross-group communication and relationship building, and experience and increase in their commitment to social action. By asking my participants about their perspective on these theoretical outcomes, I hope to gain an understanding of how applicable IGD theory is to the students in my cases.

RQ #3.   How do students from non-Abrahamic religious identities experience religion-themed Intergroup Dialogue, in comparison to their Christian/Abrahamic peers?

In order that I am able to address the issue of religious identity based power inequality, and to point out the need for expanding Small's (2011) faith identity frame (comprised of only Abrahamic and Atheist identities), this question is designed to look specifically at the how the religious identities of the non-Abrahamic students impact their experience in the dialogue. In order to answer this question, I rely heavily on my participant-observation in each of the three cases, so that in addition to the students' own description of their experience, I am able to describe the dynamics that I observe between the non-Abrahamic students and the other students in the class. The four non-Abrahamic research participants serve as nested cases in this study.

Methodology

The methodological approach to research one chooses, is not a decision to be taken lightly. When I began the process of selecting a methodology, I opened the text from my first doctoral research methods course and noticed a note I had scribbled to myself in the margin: "Choosing a research method is kind of like being a learning specialist, you have to choose the appropriate method for the subject just like you choose the appropriate approach with working with a student." Prior to starting my PhD program, I had worked for several years as a learning specialist for student-athletes who either had a learning disability or who were, for one reason or another, deemed "difficult" to work with by their coaches and advisors. The most important part of my job, I thought, was to figure out what approach was best suited for each student, and in transitioning back into academia I recognized that the job of the researcher is very similar: to figure out what approach was best suited for each

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research question. This section will describe the methodology that I have determined is best suited for the questions I seek to answer with this study.

Ontological and Epistemological Lens

As a researcher, I approach learning and empirical investigation from a constructivist paradigm. This paradigm posits that reality is socially constructed and that individuals interpret meaning from a given experience or object based on their situation and circumstances (Mertens, 2005). Moreover, researchers who adopt the constructivist paradigm are encouraged to understand the phenomena they study from the perspective of those who are experiencing it (Schwandt, 2000). At the same time, the values and perspectives of the researcher are not denied, in fact, they are typically made explicit – as I have attempted to do here. Researchers and research participants, then, interactively construct knowledge based on the research participants' interpretation of their experiences and the researcher's interpretation of the rendered experiences (Mertens, 2005). Aligned with this approach are mostly qualitative methods of inquiry such as interviews and observations as they are the most appropriate for achieving in-depth understandings of why and how realities are interpreted and constructed within a given context. As such, the research I present here is entirely qualitative in nature.

Selecting a Methodology

After determining my methodological approach, I had the task of selecting a specific research methodology from among many options within the qualitative/constructivist paradigm. Initially, I considered phenomenology. After all,

I was interested in understanding student lived experiences of interfaith dialogue. However, I also wanted to be able to analyze existing theoretical outcomes of the IGD pedagogy, and after reading more from Moran (2000) and van Manen (1990) I realized that phenomenology does not address theory in the way I was hoping to. Similarly, I ruled out grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) as a methodology because I knew I wanted, for at least one of my research questions, to look for specific learning outcomes based on what others have found to be impact of IGD on students.

Knowing I was interested in observing students interact in an interfaith dialogue course, ethnography was a consideration for my methodological approach. However, ethnography is typically defined as a research method geared towards analyzing the culture of a given group (Patton, 2002), and that was not my intention with this project. Another approach to ethnography, as described by Wolcott (2002), requires prolonged and persistent engagement for sometimes a year or more, and that also did not sound feasible for my topic given that IGD courses at the ECU only last for seven weeks.

Additionally, I read about participatory action research (PAR), thinking that because the course I analyze seeks to create a transformative participatory experience among students, that maybe it would be an appropriate research method for my study. What I learned from Kemmis and McTaggert (2000) was that while PAR does emphasize using dialogue to liberate oppressed groups and develop increased political capacities in them – something IGD attempts to do – it typically suggests that the researcher create and establish a new project in collaboration with the group of people

being studied. Since the IGD courses I study here are pre-established, following a pedagogy that is over 20 years old, and does not directly involve the student in defining the process of the course, I determined that my research was not consistent with PAR.

For a short period of time, I also considered simply using a qualitative/constructivist paradigm to guide my research without necessarily having an explicit methodology. Several authors including Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), Warren and Karner (2010), and Maxwell (2005) have helped me understand the process of designing, implementing, analyzing, and writing up a research study without having to use any of the methodological approaches designed above. Yet, I wanted the structure of a defined methodology to make it clear to my audience what my project's goals and procedures were.

Initially, I hesitated at the thought of labeling my project a case study. I have seen too many "case study" projects that did not seem to actually have a clearly defined case, leading me to question what the methodology really meant. I did not want to select a methodology simply for the catchall nature it seemed to have. However, the more I read about the case study approach, the more I realized how well suited it was to help me define my project and answer my research questions. Therefore, after careful consideration of a wide variety of research methodologies, I determined that for my purposes with this study, case study was the most appropriate label to use. In the following section, I will provide an overview of the case study approach and how I have applied it in my current project.

Case Study Approach

The case study approach has been defined in detail by Merriam (1998), Yin (2003), and Stake (1995), among others. For the purposes of this research, and this proposal, I will be drawing primarily from Merriam (1998) as her work in describing the methodology has proven to be the most helpful to my understanding of it.

A case study, first and foremost, is a bounded unit that is intensively studied in order to produce a holistic description or analysis of that unit (Merriam, 1998). The bounded nature of the unit of study is what separates a case study most clearly from other methodological approaches. Some may define case study more in terms of the process by which one investigates a case (i.e., Yin, 2003), while others suggest that it is at the discretion of each researcher to determine how to proceed in order to further understand the case (i.e., Stake, 1988). Nevertheless, most would agree that in order for a research project to be determined a case study, there needs to be an intrinsic boundary around which the limits of the study can be drawn. Cases can be as small as a single conversation, or as large as an entire country; either way, the researcher should not have to select arbitrary boarders for restricting the unit of interest.   These borders determine what is relevant for the case study, and what information is irrelevant, making a clear distinction about what is to be analyzed. In the study presented here, a multiple case study, my cases are single sections of an interfaith/secular IGD course. Students, course materials, facilitators, and the program level documents impacting each course are all included in my analysis of each case.

Due to the in-depth nature of case study research, this methodology is particularly well suited for understanding process and determining cause (Merriam 1998; Stake 1988). For that reason, it is a useful methodology for further analyzing theoretical cause and effect derived from quantitative experiments. Beyond that, as Flyvbjerg (2006) points out, case studies also have the potential to develop their own theories and frameworks, and are not limited only to testing previously established theory. As I stated previously, part of what I seek to do with this research is to describe how the theoretical outcomes of IGD pedagogy (based largely on previously conducted quantitative analysis) apply to students' experiences in religion-themed IGD courses. Moreover, I also look inductively at students' experiences and their perceived learning outcomes from the course, as well as how non-Abrahamic religious minorities are uniquely impacted by the course. Therefore, a case study approach is well suited for (a) examining existing IGD theory, (b) potentially adding to the existing theory or developing a new theory about this IGD approach, and (c) uplifting the voices of the marginalized non-Abrahamic participants.

Within the broader case study methodology, there are multiple types of case studies that more explicitly define the researcher's purpose and procedures. For example, a descriptive case study seeks only to describe a phenomenon, without attention to theoretical implications, whereas an interpretive case study provides both description and theoretical analysis, and an analytical case study attempts to build its own theory (Merriam, 1998). Another variation of a case study is a multiple case study, also known as multicase, collective case, or comparative case studies. Multiple case studies allow for more variation within the study, thereby increasing the

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generalizability of the findings (Merriam, 1998; Stake 1988). The present study is a multiple case study that examines three separate interfaith/secular IGD dialogue courses.

Another layer of case study research design is the possible addition of nested cases (Patton, 2002). Nested cases can be understood as sub-cases within the defined unit of analysis. Patton (2002) notes that single cases are often comprised of many smaller cases, and that stories from individuals within a case are useful in understanding the larger case. For this study, I use four individual students as nested cases – one in each of the first two cases, and two in the third case (the only four students who enrolled in the courses I analyzed that had religious identities other than Jewish, Christian, or Muslim). A more in-depth analysis of these particular students' experiences allows me to highlight their voices, which is part of my intention here.

Methods

To recap my research design, I have conducted a multiple case study using three cases of interfaith/secular IGD, with four non-Abrahamic students as nested cases across all three cases.

Defining and Bounding the Case

As Merriam (1998) emphasized, the most important aspect of designing a case study is determining the case. Thus, I have defined my case as a single interfaith/secular IGD course. This includes students, course materials, facilitators, and program level documents and policies that impact the structure of the course. The entire study, across all three cases, includes 39 students and six facilitators. Out

of the 39 total students, only four represented non-Abrahamic religious identities. Thus, I have four students as nested cases. In my presentation of my findings, I discuss the group of students in each case, and the religious identity dynamics that played out in each class. However, I will focus on these nested cases specifically to answer research question #3, which looks at the non-Abrahamic minority student experience.

Another way in which I have bounded this case study is by identity topic. To be sure, issues pertaining to religion often intersect with, among other things, race, culture, and politics. However, this study looks is religious identity alone, due to the lack of existing literature examining this particular identity separate from other topics or identity categories.

Entrée and Access

Although I was an IGD facilitator through ECU's IGD program, I did not serve as a facilitator in any of the courses that I used for this research. However, because of my history as a facilitator, I have developed relationships with the program's administrative staff members and other IGD facilitators. The program coordinator, along with all other program staff, has supported me through the research process and provided me with access to program level information whenever I asked for it. Prior to the start of each case included in this research, I contacted the individuals scheduled to facilitate the course to ask them for permission to participate and observe as a researcher. All six of the facilitators (two for each class) agreed. During the first class session for each case, I introduced myself and my research intentions to the class, explaining the procedures I would be following to ensure their

privacy and confidentiality. At that time, I distributed IRB consent forms, reminding

students that their participation in my research was completely voluntary and would

not impact their grade in the course. I also informed them that they were encouraged

to contact me at anytime if they are uncomfortable about the research process for any

reason. In the case where there were students who attended the second class session

who had not attended the first, I re-introduced myself and asked that student to sign

an IRB consent form. All 39 students across the three cases signed the consent form

affirming their consent to my research. Additionally, I asked the facilitators in each

case to sign consent forms, and all six agreed.

Data Collection

I adopted a multi-pronged approach to data collection in this study; data

sources include: (a) participant-observation in all class sessions of the three cases; (b)

semi-structured, post-dialogue interviews with 29 students across the three cases; (c)

document analysis of 29 students' weekly journal reflections – which were a required

part of the course; (d) unstructured interviews with dialogue facilitators and program

staff; (e) course materials such as syllabi, assigned readings, and in-class handouts; (f)

program documents from ECU's IGD program website and facilitator training

workshops – including one conducted by Dr. Nagda, co-founder of the IGD pedagogy

who is cited many times throughout this dissertation; and (g) extensive researcher

memos, both reflective and descriptive.

The three primary methods of data collection I use in this study are

participant-observations, interviews, and student reflection journals. Merriam (1998)

notes that observation, interviews, and document analysis are the three most common

methods of data collection employed in case study research. Firstly, data drawn from observations "represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview" (Merriam, 1998, p. 94). As such, collecting data in this way allowed me to interpret the students' IGD experience through my own lens, in addition to hearing my participants' interpretations of their experience. Certainly, there are varying levels of observation and participation, ranging from complete participant to complete observer. For the purposes of this project, I determined that the "observer as participant" role was most appropriate (Merriam, 1998, p. 101). In this role, I made it clear to the students in all three cases that my research intentions are my primary purpose for participating, and any participation in the group on my part is secondary to my data collection. I contributed to the dialogues from time to time with comments or anecdotes, so as not to make the students uncomfortable with my silence, but I made a purposeful effort not to demonstrate any strong opinions in order not to influence the way the students interacted with me during our post-dialogue interviews. Also, I refrained from any comments that would have drastically changed the direction of the conversation. I recognize that my being there must have had an impact on the group in some way, but I did my best to minimize that impact by carefully considering the type and level of my engagement. I chose not to record dialogue sessions because I thought it would make the students hesitant about opening up, especially towards the beginning of the class. However, in order to document my observations, I wrote extensive field notes (descriptive) and researcher memos (reflective) within 24 hours of each course

session. In total, I observed 40 hours[21] of interfaith dialogue, and wrote 226 double-spaced pages of notes and memos.

Regarding interviews with participants, 29 out of 39 total students across the three cases agreed to be interviewed by me after the course was over. I informed all students on the first day of their course that I would be requesting an interview of them at the end of the class. Then, two weeks prior to the end of the course, I announced in class that I would be emailing them individually to schedule an interview, and reminded them that they were not obligated in any way to respond to me, nor would their grade in the course be impacted because their facilitators would not be informed about their participation, or lack their of, in my research. Funded by a research grant from my college, I was able to offer my participants $25 to compensate them for their time with me. In my email to them, I informed them of this. For all but one student, if I did not get a response to my initial email, I did not pursue them further. However, in one case (when the only non-Abrahamic student in the class did not respond after one week), I sent a follow up email as a reminder that I was interested in an interview. Three participants (out of the 29 whom I interviewed) refused to accept the $25 I offered them.

The interviews I conducted were in-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews, as opposed to highly structured or unstructured interviews, are designed to obtain specific pieces of information from the participants, but are also largely guided by a list of conversation topics rather than

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[21] Each course was seven weeks long and met two hours per week, but in case two, one class was cancelled due to inclement weather, bringing the total number of course hours across the three cases 40 (instead of 42).

rigidly standardized questions (Merriam, 1998). This type of interview was most

suited to help me answer my research questions because while there were certain

specific questions I wanted to ask them (i.e., did the class impact the way you think

about religious inequality in this country?), I also wanted to allow my participants

some freedom to guide the direction of the interview in order to understand their

experiences from their perspective – rather than simply asking questions that I

perceive to be relevant to their experience. Therefore, I used a pre-prepared interview

protocol, but at times diverged from that protocol based on the responses and interests

of each participant. All interviews took place in my office on campus – where only

myself and the participant were present, and the door was closed – and were all audio

recorded with the participants' consent. They ranged in time from 31 minutes to 112

minutes. Interviews for each case began after the last class session of the course, and

were completed within two weeks. I transcribed all interviews myself (more details

about that in the next section on data analysis); with over 30 hours of interviews, I

ended up with a total of 510 double-spaced pages of interview transcriptions.

Participants' reflection journals were another major source of data for this

research. As a part of the IGD course, all students are asked to complete a weekly

reflection on their feelings, experiences, and self/group analyses. Merriam (1998)

classifies this type of document as a "personal document" (p. 115), and notes that

personal documents are useful in capturing personal feelings and inner discourse the

same way observations capture overt behavior and actions. In the IGD context,

journal reflections often uncover frustrations or feelings of discontent that students do

not share in the dialogue session, and also depict their internal debriefing process in

the wake of each session. All students who agreed to be interviewed also agreed to share their weekly reflections with me. I asked them to send me these journals at the end of the course when I asked them to schedule an interview. Prior to each interview (on the same day, and usually in the hours directly preceding the interview), I read through my participants' journals and made notes about any follow up questions I wanted to ask them based on what I read in their journals. In the end, I amassed 542 double-spaced pages of my participants' own writings about their experiences in the interfaith dialogue course.

In addition to my 40 hours of participant-observations and 246 pages of notes and memos, my 29 interviews totaling over 30 hours and 510 pages of transcription, and the 542 pages of participant reflections that I collected, I also conducted six informal interviews (unrecorded) with facilitators and program staff, and collected 431 pages of course and program documents to assist me with making sense of my three cases. Inclusive of all data sources, I collected a total of 1,729 pages worth of written data. Qualitative research scholars (i.e., Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam 1998; Patton, 2002) agree that the use of multiple data sources increases the trustworthiness and internal validity of qualitative research because it allows researchers to confirm their findings using more than one resource. This concept is knows as triangulation. Triangulation is also helpful for pointing out inconsistencies in a story or phenomenon, which can also be used to help the researcher draw conclusions about a case (Merriam, 1998). Table 3 below summarizes the data sources used in this project, and the amount of data that was ultimately collected.

Table 3: Summary of Data Sources

Document Type	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Other	Total
Researcher Notes/Memos	105	64	46	31	246
Participant Journals	271	101	170	N/A	542
Course/Program Documents	152	103	144	32	431
Interview Transcriptions	223	118	169	N/A	510
Total	751	386	529	63	1729

Research Participants

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 describe each case, and the participants in each case, in greater detail, but I will provide a brief summary of my research participants here. There were a total of 39 participants across three cases that allowed me to participate and observe their IGD course as a researcher. Of those participants, 29 met with me individually after their course ended and allowed me to conduct an audio-recorded interview with them. All of the participants were undergraduate students at the East Coast University, and all except one were traditionally aged college students (18-22 years old). There was a great deal of diversity when it came to race, gender, sexuality, and a number of other identity categories, but I will not go into detail about those demographics because they are not the identities of interest in this study. Regarding religious identity in particular, Christians were the majority (20/39), followed by Jews (11/39), Muslims (4/39), Hindus (2/39), and one Jain/Hindu and one Buddhist participant. When describing the students' religious identities here, I choose purposefully to label them by their religious identity (i.e., their socially defined identity category) as opposed to the way they described themselves. I think it is important to use their religious identity labels in order to recognize the historical, political, and cultural power (or lack thereof) that is intertwined with those labels.

Table 4: Participants' Religious Identities

ID#	Case #	Participant Role	Religious Identity	Self-Description
S1	1	Student	Christian	Born-Again Christian
S2	1	Student	Christian	Christian
S3	1	Student	Christian	Christian
S4	1	Student	Christian	Methodist
S5	1	Student	Christian	Catholic
S6	1	Student	Christian	Questioning Christian
S7	1	Student	Christian	Questioning Christian
S8	1	Student	Christian	Atheist
S9	1	Student	Jewish	"Conservadox" Jewish
S10	1	Student	Jewish	Conservative Jewish
S11	1	Student	Jewish	Reform Jewish
S12	1	Student	Jewish	Agnostic
S13	1	Student	Muslim	Muslim
S14	1	Student	Hindu	Hindu
F1	1	Facilitator	Christian	Presbyterian
F2	1	Facilitator	Christian	Atheist/Agnostic
S15	2	Student	Christian	Follower of Jesus
S16	2	Student	Christian	Presbyterian
S17	2	Student	Christian	Catholic
S18	2	Student	Christian	Catholic
S19	2	Student	Christian	Catholic
S20	2	Student	Christian	Atheist
S21	2	Student	Jewish	Orthodox Jewish
S22	2	Student	Jewish	Orthodox Jewish
S23	2	Student	Jewish	Reform Jewish
S24	2	Student	Jewish	Agnostic Jewish
S25	2	Student	Muslim	Muslim
S26	2	Student	Muslim	Muslim
S27	2	Student	Jain/Hindu	Jain/Hindu
F3	2	Facilitator	Christian	Christian
F4	2	Facilitator	Buddhist	Buddhist Atheist
S28	3	Student	Christian	Christian
S29	3	Student	Christian	Methodist
S30	3	Student	Christian	Methodist
S31	3	Student	Christian	Catholic
S32	3	Student	Christian	Questioning Catholic
S33	3	Student	Christian	Questioning Catholic
S34	3	Student	Jewish	Conservative Jewish
S35	3	Student	Jewish	Spiritual
S36	3	Student	Jewish	Jewish Atheist
S37	3	Student	Muslim	Atheist Muslim
S38	3	Student	Buddhist	Atheist
S39	3	Student	Hindu	Agnostic/Atheist
F5	3	Facilitator	Christian	Presbyterian
F6	3	Facilitator	Christian	Quaker

For example, if someone chose to describe themselves as "a follower of Jesus" and rejected the label "Christian" altogether, it is still necessary to recognize their Christian religious identity in any discussions about privilege and power. Similarly, if someone who was raised entirely in a religious Buddhist household, but recently decided that he/she did not believe in God (at least not the hegemonic Christian version of God) and therefore prefers the label "Atheist," his/her Buddhist religious identity cannot be ignored when talking about dominance and subordination of religious groups in this country. For this reason, I have labeled each of my participants according to their religious identity, but have also shared the label they use for themselves (see Table 4). When I quote my participants in subsequent chapters, I chose a label for each of them that I felt most accurately combined both their religious identity and their self-description in an attempt to offer a truer sense of who each quote represents.

Beyond student participants, I also observed six facilitators across my three cases, and spoke with each of them informally after their course was complete. Their identities are also listed in Table 4, as they are also important to their role as facilitators (to be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters). The participants in Table 4 that are highlighted in gray represent the ten students who did not participate in post-dialogue interviews with me. Admittedly, I was hoping to include students with Indigenous, Earth-Based spiritual identities (e.g., Native American spirituality, Shinto, Pagan, etc.), but as I did not have control over student enrollment, I conducted the study using the students who were admitted to these three IGD courses through standard enrollment procedures.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research is an iterative process that requires the researcher to balance both data collection and data analysis simultaneously (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). For that reason, as soon as I begin my data collection, I also began data analysis through the use of memos. There were two different types of memos I wrote in my research and analysis process. The first were reflective identity memos. Maxwell (2005) explains that identity memos can help a researcher uncover the motivations and assumptions he/she holds going into the research process and along the way as well. Before I began the research process, I began the identity memoing process by writing the section of this chapter titled *My Journey to This Research*, where I investigated my own identity and how it has led me to select this research topic. I then continued the memoing process during data collection and analysis as a way to further investigate some of the ways in which I, as a human with my own feelings and emotions, may be interpreting my data based on my identity markers and set of life experiences. I kept a running document where I wrote all my thoughts and ideas throughout the 18-month data collection/analysis process. I also wrote thematic/analytical memos. Thematic/analytical memos can help a researcher to talk through the data, explain interesting themes that he/she notices, and keep track of how trends and ideas evolve throughout the data collection process, with an emphasis on comparing, contrasting, and analyzing those themes through writing (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011; Maxwell, 2005). This memo was also kept as a running document throughout my data collection/analysis process, and because I used to it begin comparing my observations to existing literature and theory in this memo, it proved to

be extremely helpful when it came to developing my discussions section of this dissertation.

Completing my own transcriptions also served as a data analysis process for me. Through listening to each interview with such great care and detail, I was able to continuously add to my identity and analytic memos. Because I was able to pay such attention to each interview during the transcription process, I did not transcribe each one completely. Instead, I wrote incomplete transcriptions, leaving out any tangential comments or unrelated ramblings. However, when I did choose to leave a portion of an interview out of my transcription, I made a note of what I was skipping over, and the time marker where I could find it, in the event that I the topic did become relevant and I needed to go back and listen to my audiotapes – which luckily never happened.

In order to organize all of my data, and to manage the coding and theory building process, I utilized the qualitative research analysis software HyperRESEARCH – which I was also able to purchase thanks to the grant I received from my college. HyperRESEARCH stores written, audio, and visual (photographs) data, allows you to apply codes anywhere you deem appropriate, and assists with keeping track of the frequency, location, and other trends in the codes you apply. The ability to use HyperREASEARCH during this process made the volume of data I was working with much more manageable.

Once I had all of my written data (memos, participant journals, and transcriptions) organized, I employed a multi-step process for coding and analyzing. First, to align with my first research question, I read through all of my data twice in order to apply inductive open and axial codes. An initial round of coding allowed me

to break the data apart into smaller, more manageable chunks and label them with concepts or titles – a process Corbin and Strauss (2008) call open coding. Next, through axial coding, I compared, contrasted, and related concepts and groups of data to each other, which assisted in theme development (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During this inductive coding process, I was looking for my participants' own descriptions of what their IGD experience was like, what they felt like they learned from it, and how they felt their religious identity played a role in their experience.

Then, to answer my second research question, I read through all of my written data a third time and applied deductive codes based on the conclusions that previous IGD research has made about the theoretical impact of IGD on student learning: critical awareness, skill and relationship building, and capacity for social action. As Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) explain, deductive codes are pre-established codes that are used when a researcher is looking for something specific. As such, I created codes aligned with existing IGD theory before I began my third round of coding.

After grouping and labeling my data with codes, I used HyperRESEARCH to develop reports on the overall usage of my codes as a way of giving myself a bird's eye view of all the data I collected. Doing so made it easier for me to keep track of where I could find interesting quotes or salient pieces of information within my larger catalogue of data sources. When writing the case profiles, thematic findings, and discussions portions of this dissertation, the ability to quickly sort through my code lists in HyperRESEARCH allowed for a much more efficient compilation of ideas and quicker development of the points I sought to make.

To ensure quality in my research, I used Merten's (2005) *Listing of Criteria for Judging Quality in Qualitative Research* as a guide (p. 253). Paramount on this list is the notion of credibility, which asks if the researcher portrays the phenomenon of interest in the same way that the research participants perceive it. Similar to internal validity in quantitative research, the credibility of qualitative research findings rest on the degree to which they can be considered accurate to what was actually observed, tested, discussed, or read. Strategies for increasing credibility in qualitative research include: prolonged and substantial engagement, persistent observation, negative case analysis, member checks, triangulation, progressive subjectivity, and, peer debriefing. In this project, I engaged in a prolonged and substantial way, and achieved persistent observation, because I was a participant-observer in the entirety of each dialogue session of all three courses I selected as my cases. As I show in my findings throughout the rest of this dissertation, I sought out instances where my findings were not consistent with my assumptions and conclusions (i.e., negative case analysis). Also, after I determined my themes and noteworthy discussion points, I shared them with some of my participants as a form of member checking (those who agreed and were interested in giving me their feedback). According to Mertens (2005), member checking, the act of verifying constructed analyses with the research participants, "is the most important criterion in establishing credibility" (p. 255). Furthermore, triangulation was incorporated into the design of this study. Triangulation, as Mertens (2005) explains, involves comparing data collected from different sources to check for consistencies, and in

turn leads to increased credibility of the research outcomes. Thus, the multiple modes of data collection I described in this chapter – primarily: participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, and personal document analysis – provide me with data triangulation.

Beyond all of the elements of my research design and analysis presented above, my strategy for monitoring my progressive subjectivity and simultaneously engaging in peer debriefing, was, in my opinion, one of most valuable things I did as a researcher to ensure quality in this study. I did this through participating in a bi-weekly discussion group consisting of one fellow graduate student, three university administrators, and one campus chaplain. The group came together out of a common interest in exploring questions about religion and spirituality, and met consistently throughout the entire school year in which I was engaged in data collection. While my research was not the central focus of the group, it served as an outlet for some of my personal questions and frustrations about my research where I could get feedback on my initial reactions to the data I was collecting. The group was extremely diverse with regard to religious identity, gender, race, sexuality, age, and level of education, which helped me get a wide range of perspectives, and ultimately gave me a great deal of clarity on my own subjectivity as a researcher.

Another element to consider when judging quality in qualitative research is transferability. Some consider transferability to be the qualitative equivalent of quantitative researchers' concept of external validity and generalizability (i.e., Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mertens, 2005). Others claim that qualitative research – case studies in particular – can be generalizable with the right strategies (i.e., Flyvbjerg,

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2006; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1988; Yin, 1994). Nevertheless, most qualitative research scholars seem to agree that thick descriptions and multiple cases increase the ability of qualitative research to be transferable and/or generalizable. My reasoning for selecting three cases for my study was precisely for this reason. Furthermore, my attention to providing thick descriptions in my subsequent chapters is also to increase the transferability of my research. Providing thick descriptions of your case allows the readers to determine whether or not your findings are applicable to their purposes (Mertens, 2005), and it is my hope that future researchers and practitioners of IGD, or other forms of interfaith dialogue, can use the descriptions of my study to further their work on interfaith relations, peace building, understanding religious identity, or any other related topic.

Ethical Considerations

Conducting my research in the most ethical and honorable manner possible was (and continues to be) of great importance to me. Due to the sensitive nature of religion and religious identity, I was careful to incorporate ethical considerations into the design of my research using both Institutional Review Board guidelines as well as my own knowledge of the nature of IGD and other interfaith dialogues. Drawing also from Patton's (2002) *Checklist of Questions for Conducting an Ethical Research Project* (pp. 409-410), along with Hesse-Biber and Leavy's (2011) chapter, *The Ethics of Social Research* (pp. 59-89), I determined several strategies for ensuring high ethical standards prior to my carrying out this study.

First and foremost, all students in the courses selected for my research were informed about the research on the first day of their class. This initial disclosure

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allowed the students make an informed decision about whether or not to stay enrolled in the course. Informed consent, such as this, is integral to the ethics of social science research, and historical research studies failing to obtain informed consent from participants (i.e., the Tuskegee syphilis study) are the primary reason for the establishment of research policies and institutional review boards (Hesse-Biber & Leavey, 2011). Further details of my research purposes, intentions, and goals were also given to the students on the first day their course, and all participants received a consent form disclosing my research plan. I also encouraged students to ask questions of me (either in the group, or in private) if they needed clarification or had any concerns. If they were not comfortable participating in my research, they had two options. One option was to simply not sign my consent form, which would have meant that I would not have included them in my study or taken any notes about their participation in the course. The second was to drop the class altogether. According to university policy, students have two weeks from the first day of the course to drop the course without penalty. Both of these options were explained to the students on the first day of their class.

Beyond informed consent, upholding the confidentiality of my participants was/is another key ethical dimension of my research, and of social science research in general (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). To do this, I have kept all identifiable information about part my participants on password-protected computers in locked rooms and offices belonging to me only. Additionally, all names used in transcriptions, memos, and written reports are pseudonyms. Throughout this dissertation, students are identified by their religious identity primarily, as that is the

most salient identity to this project, but are, at times, also be identified by their race, gender, national origin, level in school, major, or other identity marker when it is relevant to the description of my findings. Participants were informed of this process prior to the start of the study and were given the option to leave out any identity markers they were not comfortable with me revealing.

Certainly, conducting ethical research cannot be boiled down to a specific set of prescriptive techniques (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Thus, I also relied on my own knowledge base of ethical research practices, along with my human intuition, to keep my participants' identity confidential and to prevent any potential negative effects (emotional, psychological, or otherwise). Patton (2002) raises the point that researchers cannot expect to make important decisions about the ethics of their research on their own. He asks, "Who will be the researcher's confidant and counselor on matters of ethics during the study?" (p. 410). For this project, I relied heavily on the on Associate Director of ECU's IGD program and my dissertation committee chair. With their help, I carried out this project, and continue to move forward with writing about and disseminating this research in a manner that maintains my participants' confidentiality to the best of my abilities.

Summary of Case Profiles

The following three chapters offer profiles of the three cases in this study – each very unique and represent a very different aspect of the larger scholarly conversation around religion-themed IGD. In chapter five, I present case one, which was the most "successful" of the three cases in terms of adhering to the IGD pedagogy. In this chapter, I highlight some of the ways students make sense of

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religious privilege and oppression through IGD, and how the demographics of the group (in terms of religious identity) impact the direction of the dialogues. I also feature my first nested case in this chapter, emphasizing how her experience of the dialogue exemplifies the way smaller minority religious groups are often over-looked in interfaith dialogue situations.

Chapter six describes case two, a course that did not follow the IGD pedagogy at all, despite having an extremely experienced facilitator guiding the class. Case two brings up some important issues about the unique qualities of using IGD to discuss religious identity, and how difficult it can be to understand religious identity as a social identity similar to race and gender. The portrayal of my second nested case in this chapter shows how detrimental interfaith dialogue can be to some religious minorities, especially when prescribed pedagogical processes are disregarded.

Lastly, in chapter seven, I profile case three. This final case exemplifies the type of interfaith dialogue that students often hope for, yet ultimately does not address any of the concerns about privilege, oppression, and power dynamics that IGD seeks to tackle. In particular, this case draws attention to the tension between understanding religious identity as distinct from religious belief. Nested cases three and four offer examples of religious minority students who struggle to attain a critical consciousness of their own religious identity and marginalization.

Chapter 5: Case One, Delving into Christian Privilege – or Not?

At the outset, this research intended to explore what happens when Intergroup Dialogue pedagogy is used to facilitate dialogues between students from differing religious identities. However, in all three cases included in this study, adherence to the social justice aspect of IGD pedagogy (which is heavily emphasized in IGD literature) was limited at best. In chapter three, I explained that IGDs are designed to purposefully and explicitly raise issues of privilege/oppression pertaining to the relevant identity category, but all three cases represented here fell short of that goal – an outcome that, in itself, raises some important questions and discussion points that I grapple with further in chapter eight. The first of the three cases, summarized in this chapter, follows the course that most closely aligns with IGD pedagogy. Thus, this chapter offers a descriptive example of the potential processes, successes, and challenges involved with religion-themed IGD.

Introduction of Participants in Case One

Case one comprises 14 student participants (all agreed to participate in the participant-observation portion of this study, and 12 also participated in post-dialogue interviews): eight Christians[22], four Jews, one Muslim, and one Hindu. Of the eight Christians, three stood out as particularly strong in their literalist biblical beliefs, and were described by their classmates as "very religious." One Christian participant identified as Catholic, another as Methodist. Two Christian participants described

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[22] I refer here to the religious identities of the participants as described in chapter four, not to the participants' own descriptions of their faith.

themselves as "questioning" – one of them identified as Christian from the beginning of the course, another hesitated to identify as Christian at first, but through the course came to understand her Christian religious identity separate from her doubts about Christian religious dogma. The final participant I have included in the Christian group identified as Atheist in the class and was referred to as such by all students and both facilitators in the class. As I explained in chapter four, I am purposefully labeling this participant as Christian because he was raised by Christian parents (albeit, non-practicing) and a Christian extended family, and in a Christian community context – thus, is culturally Christian in terms of his social identity.

Of the four Jewish participants, one identified as "Conservadox" in order to suggest a blended mix of Conservative and Orthodox Jewish practices. Another identified as Conservative, another as Reform, and the last as Agnostic or "mostly cultural, not religious." The one Muslim participant in this case identified himself as Sunni and as devoutly committed to his religion. Lastly, the only Hindu participant in this case followed the Arya Samaj branch of Hinduism, and described himself as fairly strong in his religious beliefs. This Hindu student is the first of my four nested cases that appear in this study. For that reason, he is profiled in greater detail towards the end of this chapter.

The facilitators in this case both have a Christian upbringing, and thus both have Christian religious identities. One is an ordained and practicing Reverend in the Presbyterian tradition and clearly embraces the Christian label. The second was raised in a devoutly Christian family but has stopped all religious practice as an adult and now describes herself as Agnostic. In the class, the Agnostic-Christian facilitator

filled the role of the non-dominant facilitator. Since people who self identify as

Agnostic or Atheist are a minority in this country – less than 6% (Pew Research

Center, 2012 October) – her filling this role was determined appropriate by the

program coordinators.

Setting the Stage for Dialogue

On the first day of the course, students entered the classroom to find an open

space with chairs arranged in a circle – a surprise to those who were new to IGD.

Everyone took a seat, and waited in silence for the class to begin. The first stage of

this dialogue (or any IGD, as described in chapter three), was to establish a

foundational expectation for the rest of the dialogue and to create a safe environment

where students felt comfortable opening up about potentially sensitive topics – to take

the students from their current state of hesitation and uncertainty, to the point where

they felt like they could share very personal thoughts and feelings with virtual

strangers. In this class, the facilitators initiated this process by asking the students to

write down their hopes and fears for the class, and then discuss them with the group.

The most common response from the students was the desire to learn more about

religions other than their own and to have open, honest discussions about religion

because they rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to do so. Conversely, most students

expressed a fear that being truly honest about issues surrounding religion would be

difficult, which might lead to an inauthentic dialogue.

Guided by the students' expressed desire for openness and honesty, and

following an in-depth review of the syllabus and course expectations, the group

worked collaboratively to list a set of "community agreements" (i.e., ground rules)

they would adhere to throughout the course. A reoccurring theme throughout the list of agreements was the idea that group members need to be respectful of others' perspectives in order to allow everyone to share their thoughts and feelings without fear of condemnation by their peers. Also, that if anyone in the group is ever hurt by or uncomfortable with a comment made by someone else, that they should not assume malicious intent – an agreement made in an effort to encourage people to speak openly without fear of offending others. Having sat through many of these community agreement building activities during my years as an IGD facilitator, I can say that the ideas put forward by this group were very similar to what most groups typically come up with. Furthermore, as IGD facilitators are trained to do, the facilitators in this class helped the students by suggesting ground rules they could all agree on, which assisted in directing the brainstorm. Examples of community agreements in most IGD classes (including this one) are:

- Speak your truth; respect others' truths

- Speak from your own experience; don't be a spokesperson for a group

- Listen for others' unique experiences; don't expect others to be spokespersons

- Listen; don't interrupt

- If you are a talker, make sure to let others contribute to the dialogue

- If you are shy, push yourself to contribute to the dialogue

- Be aware that you might be offended; say when you have been

- Assume good intentions; ask clarifying questions instead of reacting in anger

- If you talk about this class with others, keep class members' confidentiality

These community agreements were, as they are in all IGD classes, posted on the wall during each class session throughout the semester as a constant reminder to the group.

For the second class session, the entire two-hour period was dedicated to an activity where students take turns sharing their "personal stories" (i.e., sharing about their religious identities). It is common for IGD facilitators to ask students to share personal stories about their relevant identities towards the beginning of a dialogue course, as it is a process that has proven highly effective in getting students to open up to each other and to understand the existence of multiple perspectives (Lopez et al., 1998; Yeakly, 1998; Zúñiga, 2003). The personal stories activity in IGD typically asks students to describe how their relevant social identity has impacted, and continues to impact, their day-to-day experiences at school or in the various communities they belong to. In preparation for this, students in this class were asked prompting questions for their first reflection journal, including:

> What are your earliest memories relating to your faith, spirituality,
>
> religion or secular worldview? … How much does your family influence
>
> your current belief system and practices? What do you like about being
>
> (your religious/spiritual/secular identity)? … What struggles or
>
> challenges do you have with your identity? How has your secular,
>
> religious, or spiritual identity impacted your relationship with others?
>
> (Journal assignment #1)

Additionally, the facilitators modeled the activity in the previous class by sharing their own personal stories.

The first student to share, told an emotional story about how, despite being raised in a Christian home, the sudden alleviation of a series of heavy burdens on her family (cancer, financial difficulty, etc.) led her to fully accept Christ into her life on her own accord. This story made a strong impression on the group – in my post-dialogue interviews, several students referenced that moment in particular as one of the most memorable parts of the entire class – and gave the rest of the students in the class the confidence and willingness to share more than they may have previously intended to share. In a similar fashion, other students' personal stories primarily explained the extent to which religion was a part of their childhood, described the specific beliefs they now hold (with an emphasis on clarifying when they do and do not agree with the teachings of their religious tradition), and detailed their own personal process for reaching their current set of beliefs. At the end of the class, spirits were high, and students seemed genuinely pleased with the level of comfort the group achieved in such a short time.

Making Sense of Differences and Commonalities

Stage two of IGD is designed to help students situate their differences and commonalities in experience within a larger framework of social power dynamics (Zúñiga, 2003). Accordingly, the syllabus template provided to all IGD facilitators by ECU IGD program coordinators explicitly states that session three should cover the topic of identity socialization and that session four is reserved for a discussion of identity-based privilege. In this class, however, both course sessions in stage two focused predominately on stereotypes/stereotyping.

Taking Advantage of an Opportunity

The third course session, as is the case with most dialogue sessions, began with an activity – used to warm up the group before jumping into more serious topics. On this day, the facilitators chose a commonly used IGD activity named Circles of My Multicultural Self. Students select four identity labels that fit them, and explain how they are impacted by these identities; it is intended to serve as both a getting-to-know-you exercise and as a primer for a critical discussion about social identities. For this activity, students were randomly assigned into pairs and were asked to complete the activity with their partner, rather than with the entire group. In pairs, the students shared their reasoning for choosing the "identity" labels they listed – which, for most, included at least one label that was not a social identity category (for example, "traveler" or "passionate").

During the pair conversations, one Christian student commented on his partner's personal story from the previous class. His partner, also a Christian, shared about being turned off by her experiences with her church causing her to opt for a more personal/spiritual relationship with God. Her story, along with a few others who shared similar experiences, had disappointed him. So, when given the chance to speak to one of them individually, he offered to help her return to formal Christian practice. As his partner described, this encounter made her feel a bit awkward.

> Toward the end of our mini duo group discussion, [he] told me he
> wrote [in his journal] about how my story made him feel last week.
> This made me uncomfortable … he said that my story made him sad

and that he would like to help me in any way possible to get back to

liking religion and the "church." (*S6, Questioning Christian*)

In his interview with me, he explained that, as a Christian, it was his responsibility to

reach out to his classmate in that way, because "the Bible teaches Christians to be

witnesses to all people" about how faith in Jesus and involvement with the church

improves one's life (*S2, Christian*). Despite knowing that the purpose of the class, or

the activity, was not to encourage others to change their religious beliefs or practices,

the pair activity gave him the opportunity to do what he deemed necessary as a

Christian, rather than what was appropriate as a participant in the IGD course.

Debunking Stereotypes

Following the pair activity, each student was asked to name a stereotype about

their religious identity that did not apply to them – for example: "I'm a Jew, but I'm

not stingy" (*S11, Reform Jewish*) or "I'm a Catholic, but I'm not closed-minded or

conservative" (*S5, Catholic*). After each student shared, the facilitators opened the

floor for a more general dialogue about religious identity stereotypes. The first

person to speak, a questioning Christian student, stated that religious minorities suffer

from stereotyping more than Christians simply because they are not the norm in our

Christian-dominant society – a point that would have nicely led into a discussion

about how minority/majority power dynamics impacts stereotyping. However, a self-

described Born-Again Christian student immediately responded that she often feels

stereotyped as a Christian and explained how upset she feels when people make

assumptions about her based on her religious identity. As a result, the conversation

took off in the direction of stereotypes about Christians, with many of the Christian

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students claiming victimhood and actively defending themselves against each stereotype they mentioned.

The only non-Christian religion mentioned during this stereotype dialogue was Islam. An Atheist-Christian student admitted his own surprise when discovering that not all Muslim women cover their hair with a headscarf, which opened the door for other students to share instances where they caught themselves stereotyping Muslim women. With no Muslim woman present, there was no one to speak from personal experience about being stereotyped as a Muslim woman, so the conversation never advanced past listing examples of stereotypes. The male Muslim student stated that he felt bad for Muslim women because of how their headscarves make them stand out, but he did not participate in the dialogue aside from that one comment.

Why Is It So Hard to Talk About Religion?

In the next class (session four), the facilitators began the class by posing a simple question to the group: "What experiences have you had being stereotyped?" (*F1, Presbyterian Christian*). Nearly three full minutes passed before anyone spoke; an awkward tension filled the room. The first person to share an experience was the Born-Again Christian student – the same student who impacted the direction of the previous class by speaking up about being stereotyped as a Christian. This time her example was about her race, not her religion. Notably, this class took place two days after the presidential election in which Barak Obama secured his second presidential term. The experience she shared, which she was clearly upset about, was a recent interaction where someone assumed that she had voted for President Obama because she is Black. Another student then shared that people also assume that she voted for

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President Obama because she is a woman. A conversation about stereotypes ensued, and students were sharing experiences left and right about race and gender stereotypes, but religious identity was mysteriously unmentioned.

Eventually, one of the facilitators pointed out that the group had not yet discussed religious identity stereotypes. Several students quickly stated that religion is just so much more difficult to talk about than other identities like race and gender. They offered several reasons for this, most stemming from the perspective that religion involves personal choice. One student explained the difficulty with discussing religion by comparing this class and his race-themed IGD class.

> When I took my race class earlier in the semester, I felt like I opened
> up a lot more, just because I kind of felt comfortable with the fact
> color was not something that I could ever change, and color isn't
> something that I could ever instill on someone else. Like, I can't
> change an African-American person to a White person, you know
> what I mean? But religion, on the other hand, is something that you
> can actually almost feel influential about, and you can kind of change
> someone's persona about the entire idea of it. So, based on that idea,
> it's a little bit different because of the fact that a lot of times you feel
> like you're pushing your faith on someone else, when you're just
> talking about your faith. (*S5, Catholic*)

Another student explained that insulting someone's religion is like insulting someone's spouse. "People seem to avoid the subject of religion because they do not

want to say you chose a "wrong" religion, just as they would avoid the subject if they did not agree with your choice of spouse" (*S13, Muslim*).

Interestingly, one of the required readings for their previous class, Harro's (2010) *The Cycle of Socialization*, describes, in great detail, how social identities, including religion, are not actually selected by choice.

> Our socialization begins before we are born, with no choice on our
> part. No one brings us a survey, in the womb, inquiring into which
> gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, cultural group, ability status,
> or age we might want to be born. These identities are ascribed to us at
> birth through no effort or decision or choice of our own. (p. 46)

However, no one in the class raised this point – suggesting that many of them may not have actually read it. To be fair, many of the readings assigned to them in the common IGD syllabus which emphasizes issues of socialization, privilege, and power, did so predominately in terms of race and gender – as is the case for most of the scholarly literature in this area, as pointed out in chapters one and two. For example, the reading assigned for this class (the fourth class), Johnson's (2010) *Social Construction of Difference*, builds upon Harro's description of how our various identities are constructed in a social context, to explain that such differences inevitably privilege some, and oppress others. Johnson (2010) provides examples of several kinds of privilege, including White privilege, male privilege, heterosexual privilege, and nondisabled privilege but never mentions Christian privilege or religious identity at all. Thus, without explicit attention given to the analysis of

Christian privilege in the classroom, many of the students struggled to make the connection between privilege and religious identity on their own.

"Good" Stereotypes vs. "Bad" Stereotypes

Continuing the conversation on stereotypes, the facilitators led the students through another common IGD activity called an Opinion Spectrum. Facilitators read a number of statements and students silently move from one side of the room to another based on whether the statement applies to them or not. The activity provides a visual representation of people's experiences and/or perspectives as they pertain to the selected statements. For this class, the facilitators chose to read statements from the list of Christian privileges provided in the course text (Adams et al., 2010, pp. 246-247), although they never explicitly stated that was what they were doing. Examples they read from the list include:

- I can assume that I will not have to work or go to school on my significant religious holidays
- I can buy foods (e.g., in grocery store, at restaurants) that fall within the scope of the rules of my religious group
- I can be sure that when told about the history of civilization, I am shown people of my own religion who made it what it is

When debriefing the activity after it was complete, one statement in particular sparked conversation amongst the students: "I can be financially successful and not have people attribute that to the greed of my religious group." When this was read, the only four students on the "disagree" side of the room were the four Jewish students. One of the Christian students also remembered that in the previous class,

when students were asked to name a stereotype of their religion that does not apply to them, all four of the Jewish students in the class chose the stereotype of Jews being rich and/or stingy. She remarked that she always thought it was a "good" stereotype to be rich and frugal, and three other Christian students chimed in with agreement. However, the Jewish students quickly responded by explaining how hurtful the stereotype was to them. Immediately, she apologized to them and admitted how bad she felt for believing this stereotype.

> I felt really bad for the Jewish students in the class about them feeling
> they were stereotyped as greedy and rich. I felt bad because I had this
> stereotype because of what was told to me from people outside of the
> religion. I felt ignorant and I shared this to them. I told them I was
> very appreciative to them for correcting me and showing me that that
> stereotype about them was incorrect. (*S6, Questioning Christian*)

This moment – where a student allowed herself to be vulnerable, and admitted to having ingrained stereotypes about Jews – was one of the more memorable moments of the class for several of my participants, of all religious identities. Several Christian students expressed gratitude to the Jewish students for showing them a new perspective, and the Jewish students also noted that it was nice to witness others become more aware and sensitive.

> I really appreciated that [my Christian classmate] addressed my
> statement and said that she had never thought of the stereotype that
> way because she always felt like it would be nice for people to think
> you're rich. I'm glad that I was able to give a new perspective and

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hopefully change the way that people feel about Jews. (*S11, Reform Jewish*)

This revelation led to a larger discussion about how "good" stereotypes are often just as damaging as "bad" stereotypes – something that a couple of Christian students stated was the most important realization they had throughout the class.

In this case, stage two included a fairly thorough analysis of stereotyping, and, at times, hinted at the privileged position of Christians and the oppressed positions of religious minorities. However, the concept of privilege was never explicitly named or discussed. Assigned course readings for this stage (which overtly cover socialization and privilege) were never brought up in class, and in general, the one Muslim and one Hindu student did not contribute any perspectives or experiences that suggested a lack of privilege with regard to their religious identity.

Hot Topics

Stage three of IGD uses hot topics to explore conflict and different perspectives. Earlier in the class, facilitators asked students to make a note of topics they would like to dialogue about in one of their reflection journals. A compilation of these suggestions was provided to the entire class. The most commonly mentioned topic was the role of religion in the government and politics, regarding both domestic policy and international relations. As a result, the vast majority of the dialogue topics in stage three of this class fell under the umbrella of this larger topic.

"No Offense"

An issue that was buzzing around campus around the time of this class was the topic of gay marriage. In the recent election, the citizens of ECU's state voted in favor of legalizing gay marriage, so the students had been hearing campaign messages for the last several months, and were now seeing reactions from both supporters and opponents of the bill on the news and all over social media. In an effort to make the topic of the class timely and relevant, the facilitators assigned an extra reading (not included on the original syllabus) that used biblical teachings to support gay marriage (Miller, 2008), hoping to spark a discussion about the impact of religion on public policy. Consequently, gay marriage became the first "hot topic" of this IGD class.

During the dialogue on gay marriage, several of the students – including three Christians, one Muslim, and one Hindu – took a stance against gay marriage. The most vocal of this group were the three Christian students who repeatedly asserted that homosexuality is wrong – disregarding the reading assignment as incorrect. When one of the Jewish students responded by saying, "It's making me really uncomfortable that you keep referring to homosexuality [in that way]" (*S11, Reform Jewish*), a handful of other students echoed a similar sentiment. Reacting defensively, the Christian students claimed that their classmates were attacking their perspectives, and that it was an example of how Christians' beliefs are attacked by the larger society. As one of them explained to me in our post-dialogue interview, the view that these three Christian students projected during this hot topic dialogue was that US public policy should uphold the Christian values the country was founded on,

but that instead, Christianity is marginalized. "Why does America want to suppress Christianity? Why are we the target religion? It's not my fault or any other Christians of today's fault that this country was established on the principles of Christianity" (*S3, Christian*).

Undoubtedly, the use of religion to justify prejudiced perspectives about sexual minorities is an example of oppression and social injustice (one that lies at the intersection of religious and sexual identity). However, these three Christian students did not recognize that. When the rest of the group began to unify in defense of marriage equality, one Christian student in particular attempted to defend her position.

> I explained to the whole group that I am not a hater of the LGBTQ
> community because I feel like in most instances most people assume
> that I am against gays, which is false. I do not believe in the practices
> of the LGBTQ community, but I certainly do not hate the people who
> identify as such. (*S3, Christian*)

She even went so far as to say that Christianity can help LGBTQ people "fix" themselves, in the same way drug addicts and alcoholics can reverse their unhealthy behaviors through a relationship with Christ.

Ironically, this was the same student who, in a previous class, drew quite a bit of sympathy from her classmates when she told a story about a time she was offended, as a Black woman, by a comment someone made about Black women. In the story, her roommate remarked how loud and obnoxious Black women are, but then said, "No offense, I'm not talking about you." She explained to the class how

"no offense" does not take away how hurt she was by her roommate's comment.

Everyone in the class agreed with her that "no offense" is meaningless when

following such a clearly racist statement. Two of the Jewish students remembered

this moment when reacting to her anti-gay marriage stance in a small group activity

that took place in the following class (the activity split Christians and non-Christians,

so they were able to speak freely without her hearing what they said). They

referenced the "no offense" story by suggesting that her comments about being

against gay behavior, but not against gay people, was just another way of insulting

them and then saying, "no offense."

For those students in the small group where this conversation took place (all

non-Christians), the criticism of their classmate for her inconsistency in recognizing

offensive, prejudiced comments did not lead to any resolution in terms of the anger

they felt during the gay marriage hot topic dialogue. They did not get the chance to

confront her with their concerns – because she was not present at the time, and

because no opportunity presented itself later in the class to do so – so their impression

of her, in particular, and of biblical literalists in general, was actually worsened by

this interaction. What they did get out of the discussion, however, was an increased

ability to point out the irrationality of prejudice, and articulate a response they could

use the next time they found themselves in a similar situation.

"Happy Holidays" vs. "Merry Christmas"

The small group activity I mentioned above was a Caucus/Fishbowl activity,

which is recommended by IGD program coordinators for groups that are struggling

with direct communication. While there had been a few disagreements voiced

between the students, it was clear from the students' journals that there was a lot more they had to say that they were not sharing with their classmates. So, session six started with facilitators splitting the class into two groups: Christians and non-Christians. The Presbyterian facilitator took the Christian students outside the classroom, and the Agnostic Christian facilitator stayed in the classroom with the non-Christians (I stayed in the room with the non-Christians). The facilitators asked the respective groups to discuss their perspectives on the class so far – i.e., what they had enjoyed, what frustrated them – and what they wished they could say to the other group that they had not been able to say. After about 30 minutes in Christian/non-Christian "caucuses" the Christians came back into the room, and sat in a circle, facing each other, inside of a larger circle made by the non-Christian group. Inside the "fishbowl" (as the inner circle is called) the Presbyterian facilitator guided the Christian students through a repetition of what they discussed outside; the non-Christian group was asked to remain completely silent and the Christian group was asked to speak only to each other, not to the non-Christian students. Then, the groups switched places and the non-Christian students were put in the "fishbowl" to repeat what they had discussed amongst themselves while the Christians were gone. After both groups shared inside the fishbowl, the whole group was reunified to discuss their reactions to what they heard. By separating the dominant/non-dominant groups, the activity encourages students to share opinions/perspectives that they hold back in the larger group. Thus, it is a common activity used in IGD courses to bring deeper issues to the surface that the group seems to be avoiding (Zúñiga, 2003).

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While in the small group caucuses, several issues were discussed. In addition to the "no offense" conversation described above, the students in the non-Christian group shared some general frustrations about being a religious minority. Examples include: people assuming all people of your religious group believe exactly the same things, holidays not coinciding with your significant religious events, and the social expectation to have some general knowledge about Christianity even though Christians are not expected to have any knowledge about your religious tradition. Unanimously, the non-Christian students thought that the Christian students did not understand or sympathize with their frustrations.

The Christian students, in their small group, talked about how they thought the non-Christian students were holding a grudge against them for atrocities that Christians committed several centuries ago, and how they wished the non-Christian students understood that Christians and Christianity as a whole cannot be blamed for what happened so long ago. They also talked about holiday greetings (Thanksgiving had recently passed and the Christmas season, including decorations, music, and advertisements, was in full swing) and how, for many of them, coming to college was their first experience with religious diversity.

Once in the fishbowl, a bit of debate ensued amongst the Christian students regarding the holidays. One student shared that through taking this class, and learning more about Christianity's privileged position in U.S. society, he pays more attention to all of the Christian symbolism and rhetoric that he sees everywhere, and that he now feels badly for religious minorities who have to face it everywhere they

go – a sentiment he described in more detail during my post-dialogue interview with him.

> Imagine going around everywhere and hearing "Happy Hanukkah,
>
> Happy Hanukkah, Happy Hanukkah." It doesn't represent who you
>
> are, and you feel out of place. So taking a step outside of your shoes,
>
> its kind of interesting to think about. I would personally feel tense
>
> about that; it's something that stresses me out. While everyone else is
>
> around me and happy, and you look around at the malls and there's
>
> Santa Clause, there's a Christmas tree. I was at the mall the other day
>
> and there were carolers singing religious songs, and it's just like, I
>
> mean, after going to that class, and then seeing that the next week, it
>
> just doesn't seem right. (*S5, Catholic*)

A couple of other students shared that before their small group discussion, they never understood why people said "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas," but that they now understood that it was an effort to be more inclusive of those who celebrate winter holidays other than Christmas. Then, someone interjected and said, "I'm not willing to water down my own faith because someone else might be offended … is it really that bad to express my faith identity outwardly to other people in the form of a greeting?" (*S2, Christian*). This comment made the two other Christian students (mentioned above), who were beginning to see the inclusiveness of the "Happy Holidays" greeting, change their minds and further argue that they did not think they should have to "censor" themselves for the sake of others. The Catholic student who made the original statement about the exclusion of religious minorities remained

fairly silent as his Christian group mates carried on, but looked extremely displeased – as did the Methodist student. There was clearly disagreement amongst the Christian students regarding this issue, but those who dominated the conversation were those who preferred to say "Merry Christmas" instead of "Happy Holidays."

After the groups switched and the non-Christian students were in the "fishbowl," they chose to speak mostly about the holidays – not much about any of the other topics that came up in their caucus group – as a reaction to what they heard from the Christian group. Three of the four Jewish students dominated the majority of this conversation; they talked a lot about feeling excluded from mainstream society and being forced to live in a world that was not made for them, which became most clear to them during their own religious holidays. One student said, about her Christian classmates, "I wish they had a test on Christmas day, just so they could know what it feels like to have to choose between school and your faith" (*S9, "Conservadox" Jewish*). The Muslim student also shared about a time when he had to take an exam on Eid because his professor would not allow him to reschedule it. The group went on to explain what goes through their minds when people say "Merry Christmas" to them – that when people assume you celebrate Christmas, it feels like your own religion is unrecognized and unappreciated.

When the time came to dialogue as a full group about the Caucus/Fishbowl exercise, the holidays were, once again, the focus of the discussion. Both sides – those Christians who were unwilling to say "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas" and the non-Christians (mostly the three vocal Jews) – continued to assert their positions and spoke over each other for the remainder of the class. Dialogue

gave way to debate, as the students who participated in this discussion (some stayed quiet throughout) stopped trying to see the opposing perspective and became increasingly insistent on their own truth. Christian students argued that the commercialized version of Christmas was not religious anyway, so the non-Christians students should not be offended.

> I mean, come on! *Christmas can hardly even be considered a Christian holiday anymore*! I understand that it can be celebrated for religious reasons, but never having celebrated it in that way myself, I can appreciate the non-religious values associated with the day. (*S8, Atheist Christian*, emphasis in original)

Non-Christians rebutted that the commercialization of Christmas is just another example of how normalized Christianity is in our society, and that the Christians were still missing the larger point about inclusion of religious minorities. However, the vocal Christian students never directly responded to their rebuttal.

For most of the students, there was no sense of closure to this particular hot topic, because the class period ended while they were all still repeating their own perspectives. However, every student I spoke to referred to this particular dialogue as the best class session of the semester because it was the first time that they were entirely truthful with one another. At the beginning of the course, they all said they wanted to have an honest exchange of ideas, and in week six, they finally got it. While the Caucus/Fishbowl activity certainly exposed them to a different perspective on this issue (many of them, for the first time), it may have also negatively impacted

their view on the possibility of interfaith understanding. One Christian student wrote in her reflection journal:

> Different religions and religious people can relate to each other on an everyday casual level, but when religion comes into the picture and as relations go much deeper, there is no common ground for people of two different faiths to stand. If there was a common ground and if I could be swayed left or right by other religions then what is the essence of my religious foundation? I am the type of Christian that refuses to undermine my God and Bible to please men. In this same way, I do not feel the need to say "Happy Holidays" during the Christmas season because it is the season MY SAVIOR was born. (*S3, Christian*, emphasis in original)

Furthermore, it may have led to increased unfavorable generalizations about the other group, as this Jewish student's journal entry exemplifies:

> Listening to the other group's concerns about Christianity made me realize that a lot of Christians have never bothered to put themselves in the shoes of religious minorities. They consider their tradition of saying "merry Christmas" more important than including other people, and the most crucial concern about Christianity that they could come up with was that Santa and the Easter Bunny have no correlation to their religion. I was sad that they couldn't comprehend larger issues like inclusion and respect, and even more sad that they didn't seem to want to. Members of non-dominant religions are practically forced to

understand Christianity, but because Christians are in the dominant

group, they don't have any reason to understand religions other than

their own. (*S11, Reform Jewish*)

At the very end of the holiday hot topic dialogue, one of the facilitators asked

students to raise their hands if they felt "heard" in the class – three Christian students

raised their hands. Then she asked them to raise their hands if they did not feel heard

– three Jewish students raised their hands. Due to time constraints, no further

discussion probed into the relevance of who raised their hands. There was palpable

tension in the room, with most of the anger exuding from the three vocal Jewish

students.

Planning for Social Justice Action

The last stage of IGD is reserved for guiding students through the process of

analyzing how they might use the lessons they learned in this class and take action in

the direction of social justice for minority groups (in this case, religious minorities)

moving forward. In this IGD program, stage four takes place during the seventh

dialogue session – the last class meeting. However, in this class, the facilitators

decided to forgo the Action Planning/Alliance Building activity that is recommended

by the common syllabus. Instead, they gave the group time to reflect on the previous

class' holiday dialogue, in hopes of resolving some of the hurt and resentment it

created.

Giving Up On Dialogue

After placing students in pairs – pairs that were purposefully chosen to bring together students with opposing views – the facilitators guided the group through a sharing/listening exercise. Students were asked to listen to their partner's reflections on the previous class, repeat what they heard, and comment on how their partners must be feeling based on what they shared. For those students who were not actively involved in the holiday hot topic dialogue (i.e., the Muslim student, the Hindu student, and a couple of the Christian students) the activity was quick and easy. On the other hand, for those who were engaged and emotionally invested, the activity was uncomfortable and, for some, lacked authenticity. At this point, some of the students were still upset, and knew that after this last class they would likely never have to see their classmates again. They had little hope that further dialogue about the same topic would lead to a different conclusion, giving them little motivation to attempt to bridge the divide. For example, the two students who were the most vocal on each side of the debate were paired together, but instead of trying again to understand where her Christian partner was coming from, the Jewish student had already given up and admitted to just going through the motions.

> We were actually paired up for the last activity, which I know was on
> purpose … it was really awkward … she talked about how in the last
> class she felt attacked and how there are so many negative stereotypes
> against Christians. I just felt like saying, "No" … but I wasn't about to
> disagree with her to her face … I just don't think it's that productive.
> (*S11, Reform Jewish*)

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Power vs. Faith

During this reflective discussion, one of the Christian students commented on how ironic she found it that religion was such a divisive issue, when, in her view, religion was supposed to unite people. One of the Jewish students responded by suggesting that for certain groups, religion is more about power than it is about faith – referencing the Crusades and other religious missions and conquests throughout the world. This statement re-invigorated the three Christian students who had been so vocal throughout the class, and, once again, put them on defense. They explained that spreading Christianity through missionary work is a positive thing, and is not violent – at least not any more. "Christian missionaries are telling people about the Word [of God], and they are accepting it so, yay, that's a good thing, right? The people who are converting understand that it's a good thing" (*S2, Christian*). One Christian student even explained that Christian evangelists raided and burned down her grandmother's temple (where they practiced indigenous African traditions), and while she disagreed with the method they used to proselytize, she still understands that the spread of Christianity is a positive thing.

No one responded directly to this story in the class, but a few of my non-Christian participants brought it up in our post-dialogue interviews, expressing their confusion about her perspective on this issue. While they did not understand how she could still feel positively about Christian evangelism after knowing how it impacted her grandmother's community, they lacked a desire to question her about it because they did not believe that she was willing to recognize their concerns – i.e., the historical and current power dynamics between the Christian church and other

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minority religious groups. Instead, they made indirect comments about the connection between the use of violence and the historical spread of religions like Christianity and Islam. Conversely, several Christian students (even one who claimed to be questioning her Christian faith) continued to insist that religion is about faith and not about power.

> I was trying to say that religion is about love. Religion has been used to gain power, but don't confuse the two – this is what man has done with religion, but the basis of religion itself is to bring fulfillment and self-betterment … I was really upset. She wasn't budging and I wasn't budging. I just couldn't understand why she wouldn't separate the two. (*S6, Questioning Christian*)

Similar to the previous class' discussion about the holidays, a majority of the students (not all) who participated in this class' dialogue tended to speak past one another by repeating themselves again and again, rather than actually addressing each others' perspectives or exploring the deeper roots of their frustrations.

This conversation continued until the class was nearly over. The last person to speak was a Christian student who stated that dominance and oppression need to be taken into context – reminding the rest of the group that Christians are persecuted in many places around the world, and for that reason, Christianity cannot be seen as a dominating or oppressive religion if we take a more global perspective. "No one talks about the Christians killed in Muslim countries, about the missionaries who give up their entire lives to serve the poor and needy" (*S3, Christian*). As a result, the class ended with somewhat of an unfinished feeling for many. Nevertheless, the

tension that was so noticeably present at the end of the previous class had subsided quite a bit, and the class even decided to take a group picture to remember each other and all they had been through together.

Nested Case 1: Parth

Parth was the only Hindu student in the class, and was also the only student from a non-Abrahamic religious background. He does not appear much in my description of this class because he simply did not participate in many of the dialogues beyond the structured activities. In this section, I will introduce Parth in a more intimate way, and will describe his experience participating in this religion-themed IGD course.

Hinduism – which is essentially an umbrella term for all of the various religious practices originating in the Indian sub-continent – comprises hundreds of unique-yet-similar branches of religious practice. Parth follows the Arya Samaj branch of Hinduism. Arya Samaj, as Parth explains, "states that these Gods that Hindus believe as Gods were not really Gods but were wise men. Arya Samaj claims that God is a power or spirit in non-human form. It condemns idol worship of statues of Gods" (*S14, Hindu*). He made a point of asserting this many times (both during the class and during my interactions with him) in a way that almost seemed like an effort to distance himself from the heathen image of Hinduism held by mainstream society in the United States. In fact, when he introduced himself to the class through the personal story activity, it was the very first thing he said, "I am Hindu, but I don't worship idols" (*S14, Hindu*).

Throughout his life, he has experienced quite a bit of bullying and

discrimination because of his religious identity.

> I remember growing up early in my childhood I would be the only
>
> Hindu kid in class … other kids mocked me for being Hindu. They
>
> would say things like "shouldn't you be wearing a red dot on your
>
> head," and "do you have a pet cow?" … It made me very angry. (*S14,*
>
> *Hindu*)

He grew up in a predominately Christian community, and says that he has gotten used

to the fact that most people he associates with do not understand his religion.

However, he did express frustration over people using an Abrahamic perspective as a

yardstick for measuring his religious practice.

> I only go [to the temple] like twice a year. I have these principles, but
>
> I mean it's hard to even define religion because like people say "are
>
> you religious or are you not religious" but everyone has principles, but
>
> if you don't follow the traditional set of rules, does that make you not
>
> religious? … [non-Abrahamic religions] have a totally different way of
>
> approaching religion. You don't have to go to temple every week to
>
> be religious. (*S14, Hindu*)

Facing this reality, he was hesitant to open up in the class about his religion in

the class out of fear that his classmates would not understand him. He lamented the

absence of other Hindus in the class that could have helped him explain Hinduism

and also show the diversity of traditions and beliefs within the broad category of

Hinduism.

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Having more Hindu students would have helped me to explain better, because I noticed in dialogue a lot of the conversation revolved around certain religions and sometimes I couldn't really say much because there was a good chunk of Jewish students. I mean, what if there was only one Jewish student and four Hindu or five Hindu kids? The Jewish kid would probably feel the same way that I was feeling. (*S14, Hindu*)

In the dialogue about the holidays, for instance, Parth did not contribute anything to the discussion regarding Hindu holidays, or his experience not having federal holidays during his important Hindu events. During the non-Christian caucus activity – which is designed to make students more comfortable sharing with people of their own group – Parth explained that he was no more comfortable in that group than he was in the larger group that included the Christian students. He was still the only Hindu and the only student with a non-Abrahamic religious identity; he was still the one with an entirely different way of approaching religion than the rest of the group and still did not feel as if his classmates would understand his perspective.

Nevertheless, Parth participated in the course by actively listening and inwardly engaging in self-reflection. When I asked him to describe what he thinks he got out of the course, he explained that more than anything he learned about himself by listening to, and genuinely considering, what other people had to say. The conversation about gay marriage particularly impacted him and caused him to challenge his previously held views.

One thing that impacted me was when me and [my partner in the gay marriage pair discussion activity] had our conversation, we were talking about what defines marriage. She said that sometimes people marry for the wrong reasons, so why not let gay people get married if they truly love each other? Once I thought about that, I was like, yeah that's really true, because sometimes people marry for fame or status or money, which is not even love, and people should get married because of love, and if two people, regardless of sex, love each other, shouldn't they get married? (*S14, Hindu*)

He had not expressed this change of sentiment in front of the rest of his classmates, but he referenced that discussion in both his journal and his interview as a powerful moment for him.

Another outcome of this course for Parth – also a result of the strong Jewish presence in the class – was the exposure to Judaism and Jewish individuals' perspectives that he had not previously had. Prior to this class, he says he had quite a bit of experience learning about and engaging with Christians and Muslims, but never with Jews. Due to the overwhelmingly Christian vs. Jewish tone of many of the dialogue topics, he says, "I learned from the Jewish students. I got to understand where they're coming from and things they believe" (*S14, Hindu*). Also, watching and listening to the Jewish students verbalize their perspectives the way they did made Parth re-evaluate the way he would have liked to present himself to the group. Looking back on the course, he explained that he went into the dialogue not knowing what to expect, and was unprepared to clearly articulate his perspectives related to his

religious identity. Now, if he was given another opportunity to participate in an interfaith dialogue, he would be better prepared to engage more actively, the way the Jewish students in this class did. "Next time, I would know what to express and what to expect" (*S14, Hindu*).

Beyond this interfaith dialogue experience, Parth did not seem interested in seeking out other outlets for organized interfaith dialogue. He did express additional comfort with the idea of talking about his religious identity – something that he had very little experience with prior to this class – but had no intentions of pursuing such conversations unless they happened organically. Given that he often felt left out and irrelevant in this class, his understanding of the benefit of interfaith dialogue was limited to seeing it as a "platform for communication" for those religious groups that have conflicts (*S14, Hindu*). Also, given that this particular IGD course did not explore ideas for collaboration and future action, this was not something Parth felt motivated to do.

Christian privilege was another concept that Parth did not learn very much about from this class. Based on his own experiences with discrimination, he understood that religious minorities suffer from misunderstanding, prejudice, and hatred, but beyond interpersonal acts of discrimination, his understanding of the systemic ways in which religious minorities are oppressed remains limited. Even though Christian privilege was never explicitly addressed in this class, he was able to infer that Christians were privileged socially based on the more general understanding of privilege he got when he took a gender themed IGD course earlier in the semester. However, because the holiday dialogue was the only discussion that directly

addressed a privilege that Christians have that non-Christians do not have (albeit, without actually verbalizing the word "privilege"), the federal holiday calendar was the only example he was able to provide of the structural oppression of religious minorities.

From the perspective of his classmates, Parth had very little impact on the course. Many of them admitted to not feeling a connection with him as they did with others in the group, but suggested that they had wanted to hear more from him. One of the questioning Christian students stated, "I wish [Parth] talked more. He was a minority religion and I wanted to understand his beliefs. If he would have talked more, it would have made the dialogue different" (*S6, Questioning Christian*). Despite this, several students recognized that because Parth was the only Hindu in the class, it was much more difficult for him to participate in the dialogues.

> He didn't have the power in numbers. I wanted [Parth] to speak up
> and say, "wait, you guys are talking about Merry Christmas and Happy
> Hanukkah, what about me? I'm walking around on a daily basis and I
> hear these things, I even hear this debate in this classroom, and it
> doesn't apply to me whatsoever." He probably felt very distant from it
> … but I can't blame him. Anyone who wasn't Jewish or Christian
> didn't have as much of a voice. (*S5, Catholic*)

Parth's experience highlights the struggle a student might have in an interfaith dialogue if he/she is the only one of his/her religious identity present in the group. Not only was he the only Hindu, he was the only individual who approached religion from a non-Abrahamic perspective – a perspective that is completely foreign to most

of his peers. Even the Muslim student, who was the only person from his religious identity in the group, shared that he felt a connection with his Christian and Jewish classmates based on a common sense of faith in God and religious scripture – a feeling that Parth did not have. This struggle led Parth to participate minimally and have very little impact on the class as a whole, and on his classmates individually. Despite that, he did gain from the class on a personal level. Not only did he hear, and accept, a new perspective on gay marriage (albeit, not an issue of religious identity oppression), he reported that his hesitation around discussing his religious identity decreased. If, in the future, he finds himself in a situation where religion is the topic of discussion, he is poised to contribute with greater ease and comfort.

Learning Outcomes

In my post dialogue interviews, I asked all of my participants to describe what they perceived to be the outcome of the class for them. The most common outcomes they discussed were: (a) an increase in their own awareness of the existence of other perspectives – not necessarily understanding those perspectives, but recognizing that they exist; (b) a heightened sense of self-awareness, and a clarification of their own beliefs; and (c) new outlooks on interfaith dialogue – both good and bad. In this section, I will elaborate on the outcomes of this particular IGD class, as described by my research participants, based on my inductive analysis of their reflection journals and their interviews with me. In chapter eight, I will reanalyze the outcomes of this class through the lens of IGD theory, using a more deductive approach. Accordingly, this section will not explicitly include references to the theoretical outcomes of IGD outlined in chapter three.

Increased Awareness of the Existence of Different Perspectives

Most of the students I interviewed from this class struggled to describe something specific they "learned" from the class. Instead, they used language like, "It just opened my eyes a lot and I think I learned a lot about different people" (*S9, Conservadox Jewish*), or "I learned that I haven't heard of everything, I learned that there are still experiences people have had that I don't know about, I learned that there is still so much more to learn" (*S8, Atheist Christian*). As the Muslim student explained, this heightened sense of awareness about the existence of different perspectives and experiences impacts everyday life in a slightly intangible way.

> It's not like a certain thing; just having this experience in general
>
> brought me to a bunch of different religious outlooks on life. So, now
>
> I go out in my day and I think about some of the things we discussed
>
> in the dialogue, and I think more about interfaith things now, like,
>
> what does that person's religion have to do with what he's doing?
>
> Stuff like that. (*S13, Muslim*)

While there were some who mentioned recognizing differences in perspective through more mild-tempered discussions (like the one about good and bad stereotypes), in large part, this came as a result of the dialogue sessions where there was disagreement, and even a bit of anger. Even though most students expressed feeling angry and/or offended during the holiday discussion, they all referenced that class as the most helpful in opening their eyes to another point of view. One of the Jewish students who was active in the holiday discussion stated, "We only had one class where it really got hot and heated. I feel like that was the most successful class

we had all semester, I just wish we had it earlier on and had more discussions like that because I feel like we got more out of that one I think" (*S9, Conservadox Jewish*). Another student, who was mostly silent during the holiday discussion also described how that particular dialogue was helpful for him.

> I didn't think holiday greetings were something worth spending all of our time together talking about. What's the big deal? It's just saying "Merry Christmas." I'm sitting in class thinking, "Why are we talking about this?" I was scared to speak up because I didn't want to trivialize an issue that I saw little importance in but others really felt emotionally connected to … I related it back to the class where we talked about the Jewish stereotype of being wealthy. This issue never emotionally affected me so I dismissed it as nothing. This was my ignorance … After hearing the Jewish people explain their experience I realized how wrong I was … I think my ignorance on this issue in this particular instance reflects a broader problem in a societal context. People tend to assume that an issue with little importance/emotional effect on them has the same effect (or lack thereof) on other people. (*S4, Methodist*)

Some students, like the Methodist student quoted above, developed a sense of sympathy or concern for their religious minority classmates and used the opportunity to reflect on the origins of their own perspectives. Others, however, were not as sympathetic.

One thing that I didn't realize was how strongly some people felt about

the usage of Happy Holidays as opposed to Merry Christmas because

of how it feels like that person is trying to impose Christianity on them

or that it makes them feel like Christians are not aware of other

religions … I can see that, but I had sort of an exasperated gut

emotional reaction to that, especially when [one of them] said it would

be better just not to say a Christmas greeting than to say one and

possibly offend someone … I mean, I don't feel offended if a person

was to wish me a Happy Hanukkah or anything else. (*S2, Christian*)

Yet, regardless of the lack of sympathy some students showed, they still credited the

more controversial dialogues to their realization that other viewpoints existed.

A common reaction from the non-Christian students, after realizing that some

of their Christian counterparts had an entirely different outlook on some of the

discussion topics, was a sense of hope that this dialogue might help broaden the

minds of the Christian students.

I was surprised to learn that many of the Christians never knew why

people say "Happy Holidays" rather than "Merry Christmas" but it

makes me happy that they now understand and some of them will

think twice before saying "Merry Christmas" to everyone they meet.

(*S10, Conservative Jewish*)

At the same time, many of the Christian students expressed hope that by sharing their

own perspectives, the non-Christian classmates would realize that, even though the

non-Christian students may feel offended by some of the things they say, it is not

their intention to offend. To be sure, a few of the non-Christian students were still offended by the opinions the Christian students shared. Similarly, a few of the Christian students maintained that the non-Christian students were being too over-dramatic about trivial issues like the holidays. Nevertheless, even though not all of the students left the class genuinely understanding all of their classmates, they all gained an increased awareness of the simple fact that other opinions exist that are, at times, drastically different from their own. Furthermore, because most students indicated that religion is something they typically do not talk about with their peers, for many of them, this was their first time hearing someone from a different religious identity talk about these particular issues.

Heightened Sense of Self-Awareness and Clarification of Beliefs

Another outcome of the class that many of my participants spoke about was a heightened sense of self-awareness and a clarification of their own opinions and/or beliefs. By going through the process of explaining their beliefs and, at times, defending them, they developed a better understanding of where they stood on a variety of topics. For some, the issues that were clarified for them were somewhat unexpected.

> When someone says something and you realize you disagree with it, it
> makes you more firmly establish your beliefs. So, for example, I've
> never considered myself to be super pro-gay, but when someone said
> that homosexuality is a sin and I saw my own reaction to that, I
> realized what my stance is. (*S11, Reform Jewish*)

For others, they were able to find clarification through the class on issues they had been struggling with for a while. Both of the students who described themselves as questioning and/or agnostic Christians, felt, at the end of the class, a greater sense of clarity on many of the questions or doubts about religion that they entered the class with. For example, one student, who shared at the beginning of the class that she was turned off by religion altogether, explained that she now realizes that there are elements of religion that she can appreciate. "I guess that's what I got out of this class, that I don't disagree with religion itself, I disagree with how man is using it and I don't want to be associated with that" (*S6, Questioning Christian*).

In addition to understanding their own beliefs and opinions better, several students expressed greater clarity on their religious identity in itself. One student who was initially reluctant to identify herself as Christian (because she lacked a belief in the things she thought made someone a Christian) recognized through the class that regardless of what she believes, she has a Christian religious identity. "I was raised with Christianity so even if I don't personally align with it, I was raised in that culture so I got the unintended consequences of it" (*S7, Questioning Christian*). Another student, who denied his Christian religious identity throughout the class, also began to recognize that even though his parents attempted to raise him without a religion – which was his reasoning for not identifying as a Christian – that his culturally Christian upbringing has influenced his life.

> I am privileged in that religion doesn't play a role in how people see
> me … My parents were both raised Christian … I don't think I could
> have made the choice to be Jewish. Not that my family wouldn't

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recognize that I made that choice, but they wouldn't necessarily

encourage it. (*S8, Atheist Christian*)

By comparing their own experiences with the experiences of others, these students

were able to see that while they once thought of themselves as separate from the

Christian majority, that they might be more connected with it than they originally

thought.

New Outlooks on Interfaith Dialogue

By and large, the students in this class explained that they genuinely had no

idea what to expect from this religion-themed IGD class. Some thought they might

get a lesson on the different religions of the world, others thought they would engage

in philosophical discussions about the existence (or not) of a higher power. However,

after completing this interfaith dialogue course, they all had new outlooks on what

interfaith dialogue is, what it should be, and/or whether or not it is worth engaging in.

Many of my participants had generally positive things to say about the

potential interfaith dialogue has to bridge differences between religious groups, and

some even expressed a desire to seek out other avenues for interfaith dialogue. For

instance, the Muslim student explained that because he enjoyed this experience, he is

more likely to attend future interfaith events held by his mosque.

I really enjoyed talking about my faith and learning about other faiths.

The whole exchange, I like it a lot. I've done it through our mosque

before. Like we would invite a church group to our mosque, or we

would go visit another place. Every Thanksgiving we do this thing

where we all visit a church, a mosque, and a synagogue and we all talk

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about our faith. But, time wise, I haven't gotten as involved as I'd like

to be … so if I heard about an interfaith event I would be more likely

to go now. (*S13, Muslim*)

Another student actually enjoyed the interfaith dialogue process so much that, during

the course of this class, he joined the leadership board of the Jewish-Muslim Alliance.

As a Christian, he is neither Jewish nor Muslim, but he was interested in dialoging

with both Jews and Muslims, so he felt this was a good fit for him.

Conversely, some students became more resistant to the idea of interfaith

dialogue after this class.

If I wanted to learn about other religions, I would prefer to read about

them on my own rather than listen to other people. I just don't think

[interfaith dialogue] is that productive. Even though it sounds like a

good idea… it's like communism, it's not that great in practice …

some people can ruin it for everyone else. (*S11, Reform Jewish*)

However, the most common view shared by my participants can be characterized as

increased interest, with a side of caution.

Now I'm more willing to go out and have these conversations [about

religion]. To be fair though, there are now times where I'm more

closed off to people who I think will just try to debate. I've begun to

read people more to feel out who's going to actually engage in a calm,

interesting discussion with me versus who's going to just try to win.

In the past I might have been more willing to engage in those

arguments, but I've had such a helpful experience in this class, that I

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don't want to color that experience by having more debates… I rather

have more discussions. (*S7, Questioning Christian*)

From this particular IGD course, which, out of the three cases in this study, is

the one that most closely followed IGD pedagogy, students gained (a) an increased

awareness of the existence of other perspectives; (b) a heightened sense of self-

awareness, and a clarification of their own beliefs; and (c) new outlooks on interfaith

dialogue. The next two cases, detailed in the subsequent chapters, are different in

many ways, but also highlight some similar issues. As I did with this chapter, the

next two chapters will describe the processes and outcomes of cases two and three,

but will not make comparisons to theoretical outcomes of IGD – a discussion saved

for chapter eight.

Chapter 6: Case Two, Interfaith Dialogue as Religious Studies

Admittedly, the amount of data I collected from case two, with regard to student journals and interviews specifically, was less than cases one and three. There are several reasons why this may be – most stemming from the disengaged dynamic of this class, which I will describe throughout this chapter. In brief, the atmosphere in this class was much less open or authentic than in the other cases, and the students seemed to be much less invested in the dialogues or their classmates. As a result, they may have been much less interested in spending their time with me after the class was over. In the other two cases, several of my participants expressed that they were eager to be interviewed by me and cared more about helping me with my research than about the $25 they would receive (three of them even refused to take the money) – that was not the case with this class. Moreover, the last dialogue session in this course took place right before spring break, unlike the other two cases that ended at the end of a semester. Thus, the students may have mentally let go of the class altogether by the time they got back to campus and got around to reading my email interview request. Nevertheless, my participation in the course, along with the seven students I interviewed, gave me tremendous insight and a wealth of data to pull from in my description and analysis of this case.

Introduction of Participants in Case Two

Case two comprises 13 student participants (all agreed to participate in the participant-observation portion of this study, and seven also participated in post-dialogue interviews): six Christians, four Jews, two Muslims, and one Jain/Hindu. Of

the six Christians, one described herself as a "follower of Jesus", and was described by her classmates as the "most religious" of the group, but she was extremely quiet and did not contribute much to the dialogues. One Christian participant identified as Presbyterian, three others as Catholic – all who described themselves as "non-practicing believers." The final participant I have included in the Christian group identified as Atheist in the class and was referred to as such by all students and both facilitators in the class. He claimed not to have any religious upbringing whatsoever, but his Christian extended family, his comfort and familiarity with Christian practices, and his culturally Christian worldview gives him a Christian religious identity – as I have argued in previous chapters.

Of the four Jewish participants, two identified as Orthodox, one as Reform, and one as Atheist. Of the two Orthodox Jewish participants, one was largely non-practicing (yet still identified as Orthodox because of her Orthodox upbringing) and the other was actively practicing and observant. The two Muslim participants both shared that they were struggling with their faith and questioning their beliefs, although one was much more attached to the traditions and practices of Islam than the other. The final participant was technically Jain (a religion very similar to Hinduism), but has practiced Hinduism throughout her life because her family did not have access to a Jain community or place of worship. Her story is detailed in greater depth later in this chapter because she, as the only non-Abrahamic student in this case, is my second nested case in this study.

Interestingly, neither of the facilitators in this case maintain the religious identity of their birth. The facilitator filling the dominant (i.e., Christian) facilitator

role, was actually born into a Buddhist family, but has since converted to Christianity. As she explained in her personal story, her third grade teacher offered to take all of his students to church with him. She, and a few other students accepted the offer, so every Sunday he picked them up at home and took them to a Christian service. Since then, she has been an active and practicing Christian, and Christianity continues to be a central part of her identity in her adult life. The other facilitator, who filled the non-dominant facilitator role, was born into a Catholic family and practiced Catholicism throughout her childhood. During college, she defined herself as an Atheist. Then, after college, she began practicing Buddhism, and has since gone through several rituals and has taken several vows to transition herself into Buddhism – she even changed her name to abandon the Christian name she was born with. She actively participates in her Buddhist community and identifies as a Buddhist, but also continues to define herself as an Atheist – a trait that is not incongruous with Buddhism.

The dynamic between the two facilitators in this case is important to note. The Christian facilitator was very knowledgeable about IGD, and even worked for the ECU's IGD program office for a few years. She had facilitated many IGDs in the past, including an IGD that was part of the large-scale Multiversity IGD study – the study that has produced much of the empirical literature on IGD currently available. Conversely, the Buddhist facilitator was new to IGD altogether. She participated in the facilitator training prior to the start of the semester, but this class was her first time facilitating (or even participating in) an IGD course. As such, the Christian facilitator seemed throughout the dialogue to be the "lead" facilitator, while the

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Buddhist facilitator followed her lead. On top of their differences in IGD knowledge

and experience, the Christian facilitator had a more authoritative personality overall,

and the Buddhist facilitator generally had a much softer approach to her interactions

with people. These differences between the two facilitators manifested themselves in

the class – for example, on one occasion when the Buddhist facilitator was explaining

an activity to the class, the Christian facilitator interrupted her to announce a change

of plans that she had seemingly decided on her own. While it was not my original

intention to pay such close attention to the facilitators, the dynamic between these two

facilitators made a clear impression on the class. For that reason, in this chapter's

profile of case two, the actions of the facilitators are discussed more often than in

chapters five and seven.

This Class is "Different"

From the beginning, the Christian facilitator in this class made it clear that this

class was "different." She explained to the students that she had been a facilitator in

many IGDs before, but that they were always either race or gender dialogues (two

identity categories for which she held oppressed/non-dominant identities). Normally,

as she said, IGDs aim to get students to understand power dynamics and identity

oppression, but that for this theme the group would simply be sharing about our

various belief systems. When describing her role in this religion-themed IGD, she

did not refer to her dominant Christian identity – rather, to her position as a person of

faith. Similarly, she referred to her cofacilitator as a secular person, not as a Buddhist

or as a person with an oppressed religious identity. This sentiment was repeated

throughout the class, including in the facilitator journal she wrote for the students to

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read. "Every dialogue has two facilitators who represent the two identity groups. I represent faith and [my co-facilitator] represents secular beliefs" (*F3, Christian*).

A further introduction of the class included an extremely thorough and time-consuming review of the course syllabus – much longer and more in depth than any other IGD I had participated in. Interestingly, the syllabus itself contradicted the Christian facilitator's description of the course.

> The purpose of this dialogue is not to debate, nor is it to educate others about your religious/spiritual/secular beliefs. Instead, the purpose is to use dialogue towards an understanding of self and others, and for addressing issues of privilege and social justice. (*Course Syllabus*)

The language above was not in the original syllabus template provided to all facilitators by the program coordinators. Rather, the facilitators from the previous class (case one of this study) added it. It seems the facilitators in this class may have borrowed the syllabus from the previous class without completely understanding it – despite reading it aloud to the group on the first day of class.

Day one of this class ended with the facilitators' personal stories – as is customary in all IGDs in order to demonstrate the kind of information students are asked to share in their own personal story the following week. However, the Christian facilitator's story took more time than anticipated and the Buddhist facilitator was unable to share. In her story, the Christian facilitator shared about her Buddhist family and her early introduction to Christianity (as I summarized above). She also shared that she currently attends a "Mega Church" (her own words) in the area, and disclosed the name of the church. The rest of her story described what she

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personally gets from her faith and her religious practice, and how she has made Christianity an important part of her life despite all of the demands on her time. Curiously, there was no mention of her privileged position as a Christian, which is typically expected of dominant identity facilitators in order to demonstrate recognition of privilege in front of other dominant identity students. When the Buddhist facilitator shared her personal story the following week, her story mimicked the Christian facilitator's story in that it described the progression of her religious identity from Christian to Buddhist and explained what her Buddhist practice means to her on a personal/spiritual level.

Struggling with Religion

In the second dialogue session, the students went around the room sharing their personal stories. Similar to the facilitators, all of their stories described the trajectory of their religious practice and/or personal beliefs – including the one student who described himself as Atheist, who used his story to describe his non-religious upbringing, his Christian extended family, and his reason for not believing in a higher power. Many of the stories also highlighted a personal struggle with religion, either questioning the teachings of their religious tradition, disputing with their family about religion, lamenting a lack of knowledge about their own religion, or wishing for stronger religious convictions than they currently have.

For example, one of the Catholic students shared an emotional story about not having a strong connection to her faith, and experiencing crippling fear that she would suffer for eternity in hell because of it. Several other students (across multiple religious identities) also expressed shame in not actively participating in regular

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religious rituals, and hope that they would be able to incorporate religion more prominently into their lives in the future. The Jain/Hindu student explained that despite feeling strongly connected to her religious identity, she finds it difficult to answer others' questions about her religion because she often does not know the right thing to say. Both of the Orthodox Jewish students voiced concern about their relationship with their parents – one because she is more adherent to religious laws than her parents, the other because she is less so. In short, the personal story activity became an opportunity for the group to vent some of their frustrations or difficulties with religion. Only one student's story lacked indication of struggle – the follower of Jesus.

Fear of Proselytism

For most students, their stories were met with compassion from the rest of the group. One student, however, got a question he did not expect. This student, a Muslim, took a brave step and opened up to the class about how sad he is that he does not have the kind of relationship with God that he would like to have. "I keep in touch with God, but we have a complicated relationship. I want to fall in love with him, but at this point, I just fear him" (*S26, Muslim*). In response to this, a Christian student suggested that he try Christianity; that he might like it better than Islam. In that moment, he casually bypassed the comment and moved on with his story. No one else in the class said anything about it either, so on the outside it may have seemed like a harmless comment, but it bothered the Muslim student on the inside. As he explained in his interview with me, he has had several encounters with people

trying to push Christianity on him, and in those moments, he becomes internally defensive about his religious identity.

> Not that I'm a staunch supporter of Islam or understand the philosophy
> and the teachings, that's not the point. Being a Muslim is a part of my
> cultural identity. Even though there are things that I don't like about it,
> there are things that I just can't give up; this is how I was brought up.
> I don't hate it that much that I would have to give it up. (*S26, Muslim*)

In fact, his memories of people trying to turn his own insecurities about his religion against him in an effort to convert him to Christianity have colored his view of Christians in general. Particularly when it happened with someone who he considered to be a friend. "I still feel angry about [the experience with my friend who tried to convert me] … that's my image of Christianity to be honest" (*S26, Muslim*). I could feel his genuine sadness over the situation.

Thinking that this story would have made great fodder for a dialogue about religious identity and power dynamics, I asked him why he chose not to share his experiences with, and feelings about, Christian proselytization in class. He responded, "There were so many Christian people, and I was kind of afraid of [the Christian facilitator]" (*S26, Muslim*). It turns out that after the Christian facilitator disclosed the name of her church to the group, he looked it up online and found the church's website. He discovered that her church promoted a literalist interpretation of the Bible, and that its mission statement emphasized the importance of each member of its congregation engaging in evangelism. As a result, he became weary of the Christian facilitator, and decided to hold back a bit throughout the course.

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As the syllabus indicates, dialogue sessions three and four are supposed to overtly explore the issue of privilege and oppression with regard to the appropriate religious identity of the IGD theme. In this case, the concept of Christian privilege seems to have eluded the class. For some, the term privilege was interpreted in a way that is inconsistent with the purpose of the class. For others, Christian privilege was denied altogether.

Misunderstanding Privilege

To start the third dialogue session, the facilitators led the class through the Circles of My Multicultural Self activity (as described in chapter five). However, they did not instruct the students to talk about their religious identities, so the majority of this activity was spent discussing students' self-selected "identities" such as, "friend," "poet," "engineering major," or "lover of life." Then, to initiate a dialogue about privilege, the Christian facilitator posed the question: "What privileges do you have or don't you have for religious identity or any one of your other identities?" (*F3, Christian*). The first person to respond was an Orthodox Jewish student who stated, "I feel privileged because I know a lot about my religion" (*S21, Orthodox Jewish*). She went on to explain that she realizes that not a lot of people grow up learning as much about their religion as she does, and for that she feels privileged. Other students who shared about "privilege" with regard to their religious identity also referred to things they liked about their religion, rather than using privilege in the way that the course text describes it – an unearned social

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benefit. Notably, the course readings assigned by the syllabus were never mentioned, either by the students or by the facilitators.

At one point, the Jain/Hindu student explained that she feels under-privileged when she tries to eat on campus because, as a vegetarian (a diet her religion encourages), she has very limited options that work with the meal plan she was required to purchase through her residence hall. Instead of seeing her experience as an example of institutionalized Christian privilege, the group attempt to solve her problem by recommending alternative options for her. One student immediately said, "You can always learn how to cook" (*S26, Muslim*) and the entire room, facilitators included, burst into laughter. Another student says, "The veggie wraps at the North Campus Diner are good" (*S18, Catholic*). Even the Buddhist facilitator chimed in by saying, "I've heard the co-op at the Student Union has good vegetarian options" (*F4, Buddhist*). As she explained to me in her post-dialogue interview, this moment was an indication to her that the group was not sensitive to her feelings as a religious minority, and led to her increased hesitation to share further experiences like this with them.

> I saw the facilitators laughing too when that happened. Like, I'm not
> trying to be an uptight person, but when I'm explaining a time when I
> feel under-privileged I don't think it's appropriate for someone to say
> a joke and then everyone laughs. Things like that made me feel like
> the atmosphere was, you know … not comfortable enough for me to
> open up. (*S27, Jain/Hindu*)

While the story the Jain/Hindu student told did reference privilege in the social/institutional context, it was not received as such by the rest of the group.

Aside from a handful of references to religion (summarized above), the majority of this dialogue about privilege actually centered on identities other than religion – i.e., race, gender, etc. Given that the initial question asked for examples of privilege for any of the students' identities, these comments were not seen as off-topic. Interestingly, when referencing race and gender identities, the term "privilege" was used to describe unearned social/institutional benefits, unlike the dialogue surrounding religious identity "privilege."

Denying Privilege

During the course of the third dialogue session, two Christian students made statements overtly denying their privileged position as Christians. Towards the end of the dialogue about privilege, one of the Christian students commented, "Technically I'm in the majority, but I don't feel privileged [as a Christian]" (*S19, Catholic*). No one responded to her statement and the conversation moved in a different direction. Shortly after, another Christian student explained that she, too, recognizes that Christians are the majority in the United States, but that the majority group is not always the privileged group. According to her, she feels un-privileged as a Christian because she often senses negativity from people regarding her Christianity. No one responded to her either, and the class period ended on that note. It is unclear how many other students were impacted by, or agreed with, these statements because no one acknowledged them. However, what is certain is that no one responded with alternative statements affirming the existence of Christian

privilege. So, for at least two students, the dialogue about privilege ended without recognition of Christian privilege. Furthermore, neither of these students responded to my request for a post-dialogue interview, so I am unable to speak about their understanding of Christian privilege after the course as a whole. From my observations of the remainder of the course, I can only assume that their perspectives did not change.

Concentrating on a Different Kind of Privilege

For the fourth class session, the class started with a Crosswalk activity – another common IGD activity where students line up on either side of the room, facilitators read a list of statements that indicate an oppressed social position, and students walk across the room if the statement applies to them. The activity is supposed to give the group a visual representation of those who are privileged and those who are not. In this case, the dialogue room was a somewhat awkwardly shaped room (long and narrow), so the students on one end of the room had difficulty seeing the students on the other end of the room and when/if anyone crossed at any given time. Also, the statements read by the facilitators during this activity did not relate to religious identity specifically. Rather, they covered a wide range of social identity categories. Even some of the students were curious about the lack of attention to religious identity, given that this was a religion-themed IGD class. "When we did [the Crosswalk activity] like four of the questions asked about race… I was like, we should be doing religion!" (*S16, Presbyterian*). Only one statement referenced religious identity, "I am expected to go to school/work on my religious holidays."

In the end, the Crosswalk statement that made the strongest impression on the group was one that referenced sexual identity. The Buddhist facilitator was the only person to cross the room when the statement was read, thereby revealing her queer/lesbian identity to the group. In the reflection period after the Crosswalk activity the conversation centered on students' reactions to the Buddhist facilitator's sexual identity disclosure. Generally, the group was positive and supportive, and thankful to her for sharing that part of her. This led to a discussion of heterosexual privilege and the oppression of the LGBTQ community in the United States. Again, the concepts of privilege and oppression used here were readily recognized as social/institutional benefits and disadvantages, unlike the previous week's brief dialogue on religious identity privilege.

Religion 101

When the students in this class brainstormed hot topic ideas earlier in the semester, the most popular request among the group was to learn more about others' religions. In response to that request, the rest of dialogue session four (after the Crosswalk activity and subsequent dialogue) was dedicated to an activity that I have never seen or read about in IGD before. Contrary to the syllabus, which clearly states that this class is not intended for educating each other about religious beliefs or practices, this activity did just that. Students were grouped by religious identity and each group was asked to explain their religion to the rest of the class, including a question and answer period where students from other religious identities were allowed to ask questions for the group/individual to answer.

The first group to volunteer was the Christian group (comprised of the five students who identified themselves as Christian – i.e., not the Atheist student who I have labeled Christian). The two Muslim students went second, followed by the four Jewish students. Next, the Atheist-Christian student volunteered to speak about Atheism. The Jewish-Atheist student, who also participated in the Jewish group, accompanied him. Lastly, the Jain/Hindu student represented herself.

Most of the information shared during this activity was very academic or historical, and had very little personal experience attached to it. Christian students talked about the Ten Commandments, the meaning of the trinity, and the rituals they perform in their weekly services. Jewish students explained Kosher laws (even though three out of four of the students in the Jewish group did follow Kosher laws), Orthodox dress code, and a couple of their major holidays. Muslim students described the Five Pillars of Islam, the rituals they perform during prayers, and their eating schedule during Ramadan. Atheist students rationalized science over religion. The Jain/Hindu student – who was given a much shorter amount of time than the other groups because the class period was ending – briefly summarized the concepts of karma and reincarnation. The topics covered were similar to what you might hear in a lecture for *Religion 101: Introduction to World Religions* at any given university.

In the Christian and Jewish groups, there was a noticeable tendency for students to turn to the most "religious" or most orthodox person in the group to give the "correct" explanation of their religion, or the "right" answers to the questions. This frustrated some of the more orthodox students.

I had to choose my words carefully and try not to overpower the other

Jewish students because I didn't want to make their views invalid or

make myself sound like a know-it-all. People tend to view the

Orthodox view as "right" so they tended to look at me for answers, but

there are different interpretations of Jewish law from [the way

Orthodox Jews interpret Jewish law], so I wanted to avoid it. (*S22,*

Orthodox Jewish)

It also took away from the less orthodox students' ability to share their own

perspectives and experiences. In essence, the group focused predominantly on trying

to understand religious dogma, rather than trying to understand each others' personal

approaches to religion or how each individual's religious identity impacted their lives.

Getting Personal

During the question and answer session, students began to share slightly more

personal feelings in response to their classmates' questions. For instance, when the

Muslim students were asked how they manage not to eat during the day for Ramadan,

one of them shared that although it may seem difficult to others, he looks forward to

Ramadan every year because it is the one time of year he feels most connected to his

faith. It was this informal exchange – in the question and answer session – that most

students indicated was the most helpful part of the dialogue to them, at least in terms

of learning about their peer's religious beliefs and practices (which, as I will describe

later, was the primary outcome for the students in this class).

One moment in particular that stood out to the students was an exchange

between an Orthodox Jewish student and the Atheist (Christian) student. In a

genuinely confused tone of voice, the Orthodox Jewish student asked the Atheist student, "What do you do when you're sad or worried and you need someone to talk to? Don't you feel lonely?" (*S17, Orthodox Jewish*). She went on to explain that she was comforted in times of need by the ability to pray and unload her problems to God, and that she simply did not understand how he could possibly cope without prayer. The Atheist student welcomed the question. "It helped me to better understand where [the Orthodox Jewish student's] faith comes from. It allowed me to hear her voice and see her thought process" (*S20, Atheist Christian*). He responded by saying that he talked through his problems with himself, and let go of things he could not control because he did not believe there was a higher power making decisions about his life anyway. Possibly for the first time, the students who did believe in a higher power began to understand the Atheist student(s) as well. "I thought his outlook on life was interesting. It was, like, the opposite side of the spectrum [from mine] … but it was interesting to compare and contrast" (*S25, Muslim*).

Defending a Lesser Understood Belief System

During the question and answer session for Jainism/Hinduism, the lone Jain/Hindu student got a couple of difficult questions, unlike the questions students from the other religious groups got. After she explained the concepts of karma and reincarnation (which are not entirely dissimilar from the concepts of divine judgment and life after death that are seen in other religious traditions), someone asked her if she thought poorly of disabled people because she believed they earned their disability by doing something bad in their last life. The Jain/Hindu student was

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visibly shaken, nervous, and unsure of what to say. She stumbled through her response, insisting that she did not look down upon disabled people and assuring the group that she did not personally believe in such direct cause-and-effect. Another student asked, "So do you believe that someone can be reborn as a dog?" (*S23, Reform Jewish*). Again, she struggled to provide a response that assuaged her classmate's fear of what sounds like a strange thing to believe, without having to reject her own religion.

Then, someone else brought up the caste system, "Do you know what caste you are?" (*S26, Muslim*). The Jain/Hindu student explained that she recently learned what caste her family is from, but that there are actually thousands of castes, not just the four categories of castes that most people know about. Someone else who did not know what the caste system was asked for an explanation of what they were talking about. At that point, the Atheist-Christian student jumped in and offered his own description of the caste system – leaving the Jain/Hindu student without the opportunity to speak for herself. Right around this time, the class period ended, and the conversation was cut off. The Jain/Hindu student seemed both relieved not to have to answer any more of her classmates' questions and frustrated that she never got the chance to fully explain her religion the way she thought she should.

> They were like, "oh, tell us about your religion." So, I was like, umm, I mean I just told them general stuff, but religion means something different to me than what you might learn in like a book. I'm more spiritual, I acknowledge God and I have a personal connection, but I didn't know how to teach that to the class and say that that's Hinduism.

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I don't know, I just felt a little time constrained, and everyone was just

waiting for me to talk … some religions just need more explaining.

(*S27, Jain/Hindu*)

Overall, the "Religion 101" activity was popular with most of the students in

the class because they thought it gave them what they wanted out of the class: an

education on religions they previously knew nothing, or very little, about. Some

students remarked that they wished every dialogue session could have been like that.

Others, however, were disappointed.

I think that the level of discussion was not very high, nor did I really

feel that the topic was inherently something that was part of the

purview of the course. I felt it put people on the spot more so than

really giving them the opportunity to express their own beliefs and

their own concepts of religion … I think that it's more important to

come up with ways to discuss and explain why an individual's thought

process is altered by religious beliefs. (*S16, Presbyterian*)

For better or for worse, this activity was the most memorable discussion for the

students in this class. For those who liked it, it gave them the exposure to other

religions that they were looking for. For those who did not like it, it exemplified what

they recognized was a larger societal difficulty with talking about religion on a more

critical level.

Analyzing Group Dynamics

According to the hot topic brainstorm, politics and the "separation of church

and state" was the second most requested dialogue topic. Therefore, the facilitators

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began the fifth class session by simply raising the question of religious influences on public policy and let the students take it in the direction they wished. After an entire course session, the only topics the students discussed were gay marriage and abortion. Moreover, over the course of this hot topic dialogue, there were no disagreements expressed. The unanimous opinion (at least amongst those who verbally participated in the dialogue) was that people should be allowed to believe anything they want, including the belief that homosexuality and/or abortion is a sin, but that public policy should be made with a consideration of civil rights, not religion.

Toward the end of the class session, as a reaction to this curiously harmonious dialogue, the facilitators commented on how surprised they were by the lack of controversy and asked the group to reflect on the group's dynamics. One student admitted that she thought people were holding back their opinions in an effort not to offend the Buddhist facilitator, whom they all knew was lesbian. Several other students chimed in with agreement. Then, another student explained that, until now, he had been holding back his gay identity out of fear that it would hinder people's ability to speak honestly about their religious beliefs, but assured the group that he did not want them to hold back.

There was an immediate shift of energy in the room after this forced group reflection. Students were suddenly smiling, sitting up in their chairs, and even commenting on how excited they were that they were finally going to start getting real with each other. Despite some of the discontent students felt internally over previous dialogue occurrences, none of these concerns had been voiced to the group, so there had been a false sense of agreement masking the students' disagreements –

and many of the students were well aware of it. One student had this to say about the previous dialogue, "We were doing Kumbayah … we never really got to talk about our differences" (*S16, Presbyterian*). Another student said,

> Looking back on last weeks dialogue I remember thinking that at the beginning of the dialogue everyone was just being polite. I thought that people were holding back their true feelings … I liked how [the facilitators] asked us to process our dialogue. Through this processing we discussed how we want everyone to be honest and open. After we had this discussion I felt like people began to say how they really felt.
>
> (*S23, Reform Jewish*)

The group seemed ready and eager to move on. There were high hopes that in the last two classes they would finally be able to have a frank discussion about something with deeper substance than their previous dialogues.

Attempting to Dialogue Online

The following week, instead of returning to the classroom to pick up on the upswing they ended on the week before, class was cancelled due to inclement weather. In an attempt to make up for it, the facilitators posted four questions on the class's online platform and asked students to pick one of them to respond to. The four questions listed were:

1. How comfortable are you with the courts ability to make decisions that affect citizens who don't share the same belief?

2. To what extent are your decisions and actions affected by your belief or disbelief in the afterlife?

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3. If you could pick a different religious/secular tradition to be raised in, what would it be and why?

4. How has your religion or others oppressed or discriminated against individuals and what can be done to change this? What role can you play in facilitating change?

Eleven students (out of 13 total in the class) completed the assignment. Nine chose to answer question #2, one chose question #1, and one chose question #3. Question #4, which is arguably the most relevant to the supposed purpose of IGD, was not mentioned by anyone. Answers to these questions were, on average, one paragraph in length, and spoke about the students' thoughts about the afterlife on a very surface level. Also, because students were not asked to read or respond to anyone of their classmates' responses, none of the students I spoke with read anything written by anyone else. In that sense, this "class" was not so much a dialogue as it was as a short answer assignment. For all intents and purposes, this online "dialogue" did not serve as a substitute for the missed dialogue session.

Out of Comfort Zone Experience

The next time the class met as a group was for the last dialogue session. At this point, the momentum that the group built at the end of week five had diminished. Also, given that as soon as this class was over the students would be on spring break and would likely never see one another again, there was very little motivation for them to use this class session to begin a serious dialogue.

In any case, the activity planned for this dialogue session was for the students to share their Out of Comfort Zone (OCZ) experiences. The OCZ assignment is an

assignment given to all IGD students, across all themes, at ECU. Students are grouped into pairs and asked them to put themselves in a situation that is out of their comfort zone with regard to the identity theme of their course. For the religion-themed IGD classes, students almost always attend a religious service from a religious tradition than their own. Sometimes, as an alternative, religious students will attend a meeting of the Atheist student organization on campus.

Many of the student pairs in this class chose to attend a service that another student in the class regularly attends. For example, two different pairs of Christian students attended a Jewish service with one of the Orthodox Jewish students in the class. Also, an Atheist-Christian student and a Jewish student attended a Christian service with one of the Christian students in the class. Other students attended religious services/meetings on campus for religious groups that were represented in the class (either Christian, Jewish, or Muslim). Only one pair (an Orthodox Jew and a Muslim) attended a religious service from a religious tradition that was not represented in class (Buddhism).

Fear of Offending Others

This trend impacted the sharing activity in two ways. First, during the sharing process, some students refrained from saying what they really wanted to say, out of fear of offending their peer who belonged to that particular religious organization or congregation. The Atheist-Christian student wrote in his OCZ journal that he was bothered and insulted by some of messages from the Pastor at the Christian service he attended. However, when he spoke about his OCZ experience in the class, he offered

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a very positive version of his story. During my interview with him, I asked him to explain why he chose not to share in class what he wrote in his journal.

> *Atheist-Christian Student*: It was because I didn't want to offend [my Christian classmate] who was a part of that group.
>
> *Me*: What would you have said in class if she wasn't there?
>
> *Atheist-Christian Student*: I would have torn it apart! But, in that instant I had to make a decision about whether or not I want to get into a whole big discussion about this where I would be the center of attention, and in that moment I decided not to. The thought in my mind was, "I don't want to offend all the Christians in the room and have them all jump down my throat." Also, because I was the only Atheist in the room I had to consider, do I really want to fight this battle on my own? (*S20, Atheist-Christian*)

Even students who attended services/meetings from organizations or congregations that none of their classmates directly belonged to shared that they were careful of the way they shared about their OCZ experience if there was a someone from that religious identity present in the group.

The Chance to Stick Up for Your Own Religion

The second way this trend impacted the sharing the OCZ experiences in the group was that, on several occasions, students interjected clarifying statements during their classmates OCZ stories. Several students, for whom their own religious organization or congregation (or even just their religious tradition in general) was the site of another student's OCZ experience, offered their own explanations of the rituals,

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symbols, or messages described by their classmates.

When a group of students (Jewish, Catholic, and Jain/Hindu) shared their observations of the Muslim prayer rituals, they tried to explain the series of standing, kneeling, and prostrating that occurs. In that moment, one of the Muslim students spoke up and explained the significance of the various positions – attempting to make it sound less arbitrary than what his classmates were describing. Similarly, when a Catholic student remarked how strange she thought it was that there was no Rabbi leading the Jewish prayer service she attended, one of the Jewish students offered her own perspective on how nice it is that one does not have to be an ordained religious leader to lead a prayer service.

An interaction like this happened for almost every OCZ story that was shared in the class. It was clear that some of the students were a bit uncomfortable hearing an etic (outsider) perspective on their religious tradition or rituals. Instead, they preferred to offer an emic (insider) perspective for the class to hear – a perspective that typically sounds more positive and well reasoned, rather than the exotic and potentially confusing perspective that someone from outside the religious tradition may have.

What About Unrepresented Religions?

While offering an emic perspective on your own religious tradition, in and of itself, may not be a such a bad thing, in this case, it may have disadvantaged one particular tradition – Buddhism. There was one pair of students (an Orthodox Jew and a Muslim) who attended a Buddhist service for their OCZ experience. Some of the observations they shared somewhat exoticized Buddhism – similar to the way the

etic perspectives from non-Muslims exoticized Muslim prayer postures, or the way

etic perspectives from non-Jews exocitized the concept of having a religious service

without an ordained religious leader. For example, the expression of discomfort they

both shared about the images they saw.

> One aspect that unnerved me was the multitude of statues and
>
> figurines both in the gompa (the sanctuary) and the lobby area. [My
>
> Muslim OCZ partner] and I both come from traditions that do not
>
> permit images of people in areas where we worship, so we both were
>
> wary of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. (*S22, Orthodox Jewish*)

Unlike the other OCZ stories shared previously, in this case there was no Buddhist

student to step in and provide an alternate (emic) perspective (the Buddhist facilitator

also did not say anything). Also, because there was no Buddhist student in the room

interjecting clarifying comments, it is possible that this pair of students may have felt

a bit more free to express their observances without fear of offending a peer. The

"weird" or "different" practices of the Buddhists may have been more readily shared,

and then more readily accepted as "true" by the group without someone to say

otherwise.

Abrahamic Connections

Many of the more positive OCZ experiences shared during this activity were

from students who described feeling a greater sense of comfort with another religious

tradition because of their realization that their own religion draws upon common

sources. Several students shared that they now recognized how closely aligned the

teachings, prophets, and overall spiritual heritage is between Judaism, Christianity,

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and Islam. One of the Christian students, for example, who attended a Jewish prayer service, commented to the group that, while she was initially tense about participating in a Jewish service, that she was put at ease when she realized that the stories in the Torah were stories that she was familiar with because they also appear in the Bible. Another student, a Muslim, shared that after getting a glimpse of Judaism through this experience, he now had a much greater interest in learning about Judaism because of its similarity to Islam. When, in my post-dialogue interview with him, I inquired about a possible interest in learning about religions other than Judaism he said, "No because [Judaism] is more tied with Islam" (*S25, Muslim*).

This activity, sharing OCZ experiences, took the entire two hours of the final dialogue session. In general, they came across as largely descriptive, with hardly any attention paid to an analysis of the way their experiences inform, and are shaped by, larger societal issues. Additionally, because it took so long to talk about each student's OCZ experience, the Action Planning/Alliance Building activity that the syllabus suggests for the last class did not happen. The class ended without much of a closing statement, or any "what now?" conversation. Everyone parted ways, eager for their spring break to begin.

Facilitator Journals

Before I move on to describe my second nested case – the Jain/Hindu student in this class – it is necessary that I describe one additional component of this class that I have not yet mentioned: facilitator journals. One of the facilitation processes built into the IGD program at ECU (there is no indication in the literature to suggest that it is done in other IGD programs), is the facilitator journal. For all the IGDs done

at ECU, both facilitators are supposed to write a reflection journal (just like the students are asked to do every week) in the fifth week of the course. These journals get sent to the students for feedback, the same way students send their weekly journals to the facilitators for feedback. Program coordinators encourage facilitators to use their journals to (a) demonstrate the kind of critical self-reflection students should be engaging in after each dialogue session, including recognition of one's own privilege/oppression; (b) comment on group dynamics and offer suggestions to students for how to get more out of their dialogue experience; and (c) raise issues that the group seems to be avoiding. In this case, that did not happen.

For starters, only the Christian facilitator wrote a journal. The Buddhist facilitator apologized to the group for not having the time to write a journal, and explained that she had several other obligations that prevented her from doing so. Thus, the students only got to read the reflections of the Christian facilitator – the dominant identity facilitator. They did not get the opportunity to read the perspectives of the non-dominant identity facilitator.

Furthermore, the Christian facilitator's journal lacked the kind of critical self-reflection or recognition of her privileged identity that is typically expected. Instead, she told a story about feeling targeted as a person of color, which also happened to be a story of her proselytizing her Christian faith.

> My last summer of college, my Presbyterian church sent me and
> another college student to Belgium. Sent to help the Belgian
> Evangelical Mission build churches in Belgium, I questioned why we
> needed to evangelize in a country that was largely Catholic. I was told

they were Roman Catholic and people needed to hear about Christ

Jesus the Redeemer and have a personal relationship with him. So that

summer, we traveled around Belgium in a trailer and set up "plein air"

open air concerts where we would give our testimonies, interspersed

with music and skits. I recall one time I was going to sing a

contemporary Christian song, and the leader asked if I could do a

Chinese fan dance instead. It bothered me then and now that I look

back it seemed that he wanted me to display an Asian stereotype

instead of the Asian American Christian that I am. (*F3, Christian*)

She also admitted that she did not know much of anything about other religions,

"Prior to this class, I knew nothing about Hindus, Muslims and Orthodox/Reformed

Jewish faiths and very little about Catholicism" (*F3, Christian*). Then, she went on to

describe what she called, "one of the most spiritual worship experiences I have

participated in."

In my church experience I have enjoyed having contemporary

Christian music in the services as opposed to hymns … We had a five

member contemporary band, and I was one of the vocalists,

instrumentalists, and two young associate pastors … People raised

their hands in adoration to God praising Him and worshiping Him. As

someone who was in the band, looking out at the congregation, I saw

worship in a raw and pure form. It was such an incredible sight to see

members, children, and band members coming together in a worship

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experience that had no lines of structure or privilege and was simply

adoration of God lifted up. (*F3, Christian*)

Curiously, she used the word privilege in this story, but clearly was not referring to

Christian privilege – which would have been appropriate given the topic of the IGD.

She ends her journal by saying, "Dialogue is many things to me. It is a time

that a group of individuals can come together, know each other personally, and come

to respect each other's differences" (*F3, Christian*). Also, she shared that she was

happy the group seemed to be succeeding in learning about, and genuinely accepting

one other. However, given that one of the Muslim students admitted to me that he

was afraid of her, and that the Jain/Hindu student sharing feeling upset and targeted

by the "Religion 101" activity, it seems that her assessment of the classroom

environment may not have been entirely accurate.

Nested Case 2: Kavita

As a Jain/Hindu, Kavita was the only student with a non-Abrahamic religious

identity in this class. I mentioned her a few times in the summary of the case

provided above, as she made several active attempts to raise issues important to her

during the dialogues. This section, however, is dedicated to a more in-depth analysis

of Kavita's experiences as a participant in this IGD.

Kavita is from a Jain family. However, she and her family also identify

themselves as Hindu and have practiced Hinduism ever since Kavita can remember.

Jainism is an ancient Indian religion that shares quite a bit in common with Buddhism

(in its ancient Indian form) and Hinduism (Long, 2009). Moreover, it has evolved

overtime in a Hindu dominant context, and thus, its similarities are so striking

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(especially at the lay-person level) that it is sometimes seen as simply a sect of Hinduism. In fact, in her introduction to the class Kavita said exactly that – that she is Jain, but that Jainsim is a type of Hinduism, and because there was no Jain community in her area when her parents immigrated to the U.S. from India, they adopted a Hindu practice instead.

During her personal story in the second dialogue session, Kavita explained her religion, and the meaning of her religion in her life, in very Christianized language. She said that she went to "church" every Sunday at her Hindu temple, prayed to Krishna when she needed guidance "you know, like you guys pray to Jesus," and wore an ॐ ("om" or "aum") pendant around her neck as a constant reminder of her faith, "the same way people wear cross pendants" (*S27, Jain/Hindu*). Beyond that, however, she shared that she did not actually know very much about the details of her religious traditions or her religious texts – something she felt a bit insecure about because of the difficulty she experienced when trying to explain/defend her religion to others. Kavita was particularly sensitive to this because of a challenging encounter she had in high school; her best friend, who was Muslim, tried to convert her to Islam by telling her that her religion was "leading her down the wrong path" (*S27, Jain/Hindu*). At the time (which to some extent to still true to this day), she did not know how to defend herself or rebut her friend's attempt to slander her religion. "I remember when she was trying to do that, I was just so shocked and confused … I was just throwing things at her – not literally, but in terms of words" (*S27, Jain/Hindu*).

For that reason, she was upset when the facilitators asked her to explain her religion in front of the class.

> That was really hard. I felt kind of singled out. In the beginning I told everyone that I don't know much about my religion and then the next class they were like, "oh, tell us about your religion" … I just felt it was kind of a little contradictory to what they said in the beginning about how they don't want to put people on the spot and make them feel bad or try to belittle anyone's religions, but I feel like during that class they may have done that … I just think it ended up being like, who knows more about their religion? (*S27, Jain/Hindu*)

She also noticed that the division of time during the "Religion 101" activity was representative of, or a manifestation of, Christian privilege, and was frustrated that she did not get an equal amount of time to discuss her religion(s). "I also noticed that my part of explaining was the shortest and the Christian part what the greatest, which definitely translates to real life, just because Christianity is the majority religion and a lot more people have discussions about it" (*S27, Jain/Hindu*).

Kavita entered this class with a well-formed understanding of social identity and privilege/oppression, in part because she had taken two other IGD classes in the past – one centered on socio-economic status, and another named "emergent theme" that covered privilege and oppression on a wide range of identities. As such, she was able to identify examples of Christian privilege, both through her life experiences and as they played out in this class.

Privilege really showed in the class, for sure, because the most time

was spent learning about Christianity, and they were very happy to

explain what Christianity was. It's interesting, even people of other

religions are so interested in what Christianity is all about, and I saw

that a lot in the class. (*S27, Jain/Hindu*)

She was curious, however, why Christian privilege was not a more central theme of

the class – since identity privilege had been such a strong part of her last two IGD

classes – and why the class seemed so reluctant to discuss religious identity based

social conflicts. Drawing on her own life experiences, she recognizes that prejudice

and misunderstanding between religious groups is deeply rooted, pervasive, and

largely ignored. It was exactly these experiences/issues she was hoping to talk about

in this class.

I was hoping that we would be able to talk about conflicts between

religion … Like, two of my best friends are Muslim, and I always ask

them, like, you know, "What kind of man are you allowed to marry?

Like, are you allowed to marry a Hindu?" and they're like, "No!" and

a lot of them really take offense if I accidentally call them Indian

instead of Pakistani, so something really deep is there that we don't

acknowledge. I'm just like, "oh, I'm sorry, I meant Pakistani" and

then we move on. It's not something we ever talk about in detail.

(*S27, Jain/Hindu*)

Given her participation in two previous IGD classes, she assumed that she

would be able to share her own experiences, compare them with her classmates'

experiences, and explore relevant social power dynamics that have influenced these experiences. However, she found that not to be the case in this class.

> In the other dialogues we definitely talked about privilege and about majority groups and minority groups … there was more disagreement, which I thought was really interesting because it really brought people's personal experiences to the front. I could have gotten some of that information [from the "Religion 101" activity] on my own from a book … but I think you learn a lot more when you hear peoples' experiences rather than just generalizing everything. In my other IGD classes, you couldn't really talk without giving your personal experiences because the facilitators would say, "that's good, but we want your personal experience," which I think is good, it makes you think about yourself, and that's the purpose of this class, to make you think more about yourself and others. (*S27, Jain/Hindu*)

On a couple of occasions, she tried to share some of her experiences in an effort to steer the dialogue into the direction of privilege/oppression, but she soon sensed that her classmates, and more importantly, the facilitators (the Christian facilitator in particular), were not as sensitive to larger social/structural issues as the facilitators in her other IGD classes were. For example, when she tried to share about her struggle to find food on campus appropriate for her religious dietary restrictions (as described in an earlier section) she noticed the facilitators laughing at what she perceived to be an inconsiderate joke by one of her classmates. In another dialogue, she described the time in high school when her Muslim friend tried to convert her,

and how powerless she felt in that moment, but no one acknowledged her comment and the conversation went in another direction. Moreover, she also sensed that the Christian facilitator did not know anything about her religion, or the way she is oppressed as a religious minority, and was overwhelmed with the thought of having to teach the group about her religion all by herself.

I just felt like I wasn't able to open up as much as I usually do in my other dialogues … I remember [the Christian facilitator] called my religion "Hindi" instead of "Hindu" and I tried to correct her, but I don't think she heard me. It's not the first time I have heard that, but it irks me every time because I take it as a sign of ignorance … I don't know, I felt, just because I was the only person representing Hinduism, maybe I would have felt more comfortable if someone else was Hindu, that way if no one else could relate to me, at least I could look at that person and feel assured. It would have been a totally different environment for me if there were more Hindus. (*S27, Jain/Hindu*)

When I asked Kavita what she learned from the class, she said, "I mean, I learned a lot about the different religions, but I'm not sure that's what I wanted to get out of it (*S27, Jain/Hindu*). She also gained an increased motivation to learn more about her own religion. "When I was put on the spot it definitely made me angry. So, that definitely drove me to be like, 'I need to learn more about my religion'" (*S27, Jain/Hindu*).

However, for Kavita, the most notable outcome of the class came from her OCZ experience, for which she attended a *jumu'ah* (Muslim prayer service) at the

musallah (Muslim prayer space) on campus. She chose this particular activity on purpose because although she is aware of the conflict between Hindus and Muslims, she has never understood why such conflict exists, and she wanted the opportunity to learn more about Islam for herself. "I don't even know what happened between Hindus and Muslims honestly … Like, it's there [the conflict], obviously, but I feel like I don't know about it because people just don't really talk about it or, like, acknowledge it" (*S27, Jain/Hindu*). In fact, she went to the *musallah* on two separate occasions (once without her partners for the assignment) because she wanted to learn even more.

What she got out of the experience was, first, an increased understanding of herself and the socialization she received throughout her life, by reflecting on her family's reaction to what she did.

> I definitely learned a lot about myself when I went there. I was very
> hesitant to even tell my parents about that. I told my mom, I didn't tell
> my grandma, I don't think she would have liked that very much. I
> don't know, I just learned a lot about myself and my family dynamic,
> and even what my family thinks, because I had to think about like, "oh,
> I don't think I can tell my family about this." (*S27, Jain/Hindu*)

She was also able to develop a heightened sense of appreciation for Muslim culture and for the difficulty and oppression Muslims face in our society. She met, and was able to speak to a couple of Muslim girls that were very nice to her, gave her a tour of the room, and answered her questions about their experience as Muslims on campus. Even though Kavita's two best friends are Muslim, she has never been able

to speak to them frankly about religion, so this was the first time that she got the chance to ask the questions she had.

> It was interesting to see the close bonds that they have with each other. Just by observing, I saw so many girls give each other hugs, say nice things to each other, and make room on the mat for each other so they can pray together. It was really inspiring and awesome to see how they stick together and take care of each other. I did ask myself if these girls were so close to each other because they felt like they needed to stick with each other to feel more comfortable on campus. Are they so close because they would feel alienated otherwise? I hope that is not the case but after what [they] told me about [their] experience wearing a hijab and being a Muslim, I am afraid it may be a possibility. (*S27, Jain/Hindu*)

Through stepping out of her comfort zone, and immersing herself in their world, she began to see life from their perspective, and became more sensitive to the kind of discrimination and oppression they face on a daily basis. This lesson, as Kavita explained, was much more valuable than what she learned in the dialogues themselves because, in addition to exposing her to something new, it challenged her to critically analyze herself and her own position in the system of religious identity socialization.

When I asked my other participants in this case about Kavita's impact on them, or on the class in general, most of them said that they did not learn anything from her. They said things like, "She didn't know too much about her faith, so I

wasn't able to learn too much from her" (*S20, Atheist-Christian*) or "I wanted to

know more about Hinduism, so I wish she said more" (*S25, Muslim*). Since many of

them perceived the class to be one where they taught each other about their religious

beliefs, rituals, or traditions, Kavita's contributions to the class were seen as

irrelevant and unhelpful.

Kavita's experience in this class brings forth several issues. First, that using

IGD as a world's religions course can disadvantage those students who are the only

representative of their religious identity and may not know as much about their

religion as others do. In a model of interfaith dialogue that is not as purposefully

designed to promote an understanding of social justice, this type of activity may be

considered appropriate, but in IGD it is not – and Kavita's experience demonstrates

why. Secondly, that when attempting to use interfaith dialogue as a means of

teaching others about different religions, students from lesser-understood religions

may need more time to explain themselves, their religion, and their experiences than

students from more commonly known religions; certainly less time than what is

allotted to students from more dominant religions is not enough. Although Kavita

tried to explain her religion using the kind of language and logic the Christian

dominant group would understand, she was unable to reference the common

Abrahamic roots that the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim students were able rely on.

This nested case also reiterates the point made in the first nested case (Parth), that

being the only person of your religious identity in an IGD can be extremely difficult,

and may prevent one from sharing the kind of information, and to the same degree, as

those who have other people from the same religious identity in the group to lean on

for understanding. Lastly, Kavita's story highlights how important it is for facilitators to show concern and compassion towards those students who are from oppressed identity groups.

Learning Outcomes

Overall, the participants in this case had very little to say about what they learned in this class – which is an outcome in itself that I will further analyze through cross-case analyses in chapter eight. Several of them simply described the class as "interesting" and "informative" but could not think of anything in particular they felt they got from it. One of the Muslim students nicely articulated what many of the students shared with me. He said, "It was informative, but it wasn't formative" and explained that the classes were interesting, but that he did not feel they necessarily impacted him very much (*S26, Muslim*). Interestingly, when I asked for a description of what they got out of the class, many of them answered the question by describing a general feeling towards the class, such as "I enjoyed it" (*S22, Orthodox Jewish*). However, with what little they did share with me, I found two trends in their responses. These trends included: (a) greater knowledge about religions other than their own, and (b) new perspectives on their own and other religions.

Greater Knowledge About Other Religions

The first, and certainly most prominent, outcome of this IGD that my participants discussed was an increased knowledge about other religions. In this context, "increased knowledge" simply means that they learned specific "facts" about other religions that they were not previously aware of. Such as, "One specific thing

about Judaism I remember is that there's no specific belief in heaven or hell" (*S25, Muslim*), or "It surprised me to learn about the diversity of beliefs between the different Jewish groups" (*S16, Presbyterian*), or "I learned that most Christian services are conducted in English, which is different from what I'm used to" (*S26, Muslim*), among others.

Specifically, most of them referred to the day of the "Religion 101" activity as the one dialogue session that led to this learning outcome. "Most of the things I remember the most from this class was from that day" (*S20, Atheist-Christian*). "I thought that one class where we all talked about our religions was the most interesting class" (*S25, Muslim*). Accordingly, most of what my participants said they learned was about either Christianity or Judaism – since those two religions were given the most time and attention during that particular activity.

New Perspectives on Own and Other Religions

Beyond learning simple facts about other religions, several of my participants also expressed having new perspectives about either their own or other religions as a result of this class – i.e., opinions that changed through the IGD process. Some of these changes in perspective were positive. For instance, one of my Christian participants admitted (in my interview with him – not in front of the entire group) feeling some prejudice against Muslims based on media bias and his own limited interactions with Muslim individuals. However, after the class was over, he shared feeling slightly (not entirely) more comfortable around Muslims. While what he says here is still extremely offensive, he does express a slight reduction in his fear of Muslims and Islam in general.

I learned how to look at a large group of people and then narrow that down to an individual and see that even if the large group may be a problem for you, individuals aren't. It was a real learning experience where it went from, "I don't really know what Muslims are doing and why everyone has to wear a mask," to, "oh, they're not really being complete and utter evil cobra commanders." It became, "oh, its a personal choice. If you went to a mosque, we won't shoot you and cut you up and put you in a dumpster." (*S16, Presbyterian*)

Other changes in perspective were not as positive. For example, the Reform Jewish student shared feeling and increased dislike for her religion after listening to one of the Orthodox Jewish students speak about the religious laws she adheres to. "I never realized how much I disliked my own religion when I heard [one of the Orthodox Jewish students] talk about all the things she can't do" (*S23, Reform Jewish*).

These changes in perspective came, almost exclusively, from the dialogue sessions themselves. In this class, most students admitted to not reading any of the reading assignments. Also, the facilitators in this class did not give the students any prompting questions for their journals, and (possibly as a result) the students reported that the journaling process was more of a burden than a helpful reflecting process. Furthermore, students reported that the comments they received on their journals from the facilitators were minimal and did not encourage further reflection. Thus, the in-class dialogues served as the primary learning process for this case.

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Chapter 7: Case Three, Interfaith Dialogue as a Philosophical Debate

The class represented here in case three was unlike the classes in cases one and two in many ways. Most noticeably, the ratio between students who self-identified as "believers" (i.e., those who believe in the existence of a higher power) and those who did not was drastically different – in this class there were only five students who described themselves as believers[23], as opposed to all but one in the first two cases. Also, there were a few students in the class that were actively seeking answers to their spiritual curiosities and sought to use this class as a means of attaining clarity for their questions. Thus, the dynamic of the class, and the issues about which the majority of the students wanted to discuss, centered on a philosophical debate – as described in chapter two (Hick, 1993) – rather than the type of interfaith dialogue endorsed by IGD pedagogy. Nevertheless, this case, and the experiences of the students in this class, had some interesting outcomes and raises some interesting questions about the use of IGD for interfaith dialogue.

Introduction of Participants in Case Three

Case three comprises 12 student participants (all agreed to participate in the participant-observation portion of this study, and ten also participated in post-dialogue interviews): six Christians, three Jews, one Muslim, one Hindu, and one Buddhist. Of the six Christians, one was Evangelical, two were Methodist, one was Catholic, and one was Agnostic. The four practicing Christians (i.e., all of them

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[23] Throughout this class, both students and facilitators used the term "believers" to refer to the five students (four Christians and one Jew) who asserted a belief in God. For that reason, I will use the term in my description of this case here.

minus the Agnostic student) voiced fairly strong religious convictions and all maintained active roles in their respective churches and/or campus-based religious student organizations. The Agnostic Christian student was raised Catholic, but began questioning his faith and exploring different religious traditions while in high school. He expressed a particular interest in Buddhism, but, more than anything, he explained that he did not like having unanswered questions about God and religion. "I would like to be able to believe in something bigger than myself; I just need to figure out what it is" (*S32, Questioning Catholic*).

Of the three Jewish participants, only one described herself as "religious." She identified as Conservative, actively participated in the Jewish community on campus, and was proud of her Jewish religion and culture. The other two Jewish students described themselves as culturally Jewish, but did not ascribe to Jewish beliefs associated with a higher power. One of them detailed a very specific belief in what he called a "metaphysical connection" between all living things that was "very important to recognize" (*S35, Spiritual Jewish*). He admitted that what some people refer to as God, he refers to as the metaphysical connection, yet aligned himself with the Atheist/non-believer students throughout the class. The third Jewish student simply defined herself as Atheist, and was quite adamant about her belief that a higher power did not exist.

The Muslim participant also described himself as Atheist, and was also adamantly so, but explained that his entire family was extremely religious and that none of them knew that he was even questioning his faith. The Hindu student presented herself as Agnostic and/or Atheist in the class, and was regarded as such by

the rest of the group, but at times still referred to herself as a Hindu. She was extremely vocal about her desire to use this class to help her figure out what she believes and to work out some of the issues she has with her religion. The participant I label Buddhist here, actually claimed not to be Buddhist at all – he defined himself as Atheist, and was very confident and comfortable with that label. However, having been raised in a Buddhist family, practicing Buddhism for the majority of his life, his religious identity is clearly Buddhist. Later in this chapter, I will further detail the backgrounds of both the Hindu and the Buddhist student, as they represent my final two nested cases in this study.

The facilitators in this case were both very experienced and had been involved with this IGD program for many years. They had both facilitated the religion theme (as well as other themes) in the past; so, this was not their first time doing so. Both facilitators also had a Christian religious identity. The facilitator filling the dominant identity role was an ordained and practicing Reverend in the Presbyterian tradition (she was also a facilitator in case one). The facilitator filling the non-dominant identity role was raised an Evangelical – and was an active member of an Evangelical church through college – but is currently a practicing Quaker. He also defines himself as Agnostic – which the program coordinators determined qualifies him to fill the non-dominant identity role. Interestingly, the Quaker facilitator served as the dominant identity (i.e., Christian) facilitator the last time he facilitated a religion-themed IGD.

Committing to an Honest Exchange of Perspectives

In the first class session of this case, the facilitators walked the group through the standard first-day-of-class activities: introduce your name and major, explain the class and the difference between dialogue and debate, review the syllabus, discuss hopes and fears for the class, and create a list of ground rules or "community agreements" – most of what happened here was very similar to what I have described for the first class session in cases one and two. The unique aspect of this case's first dialogue came out during the discussion about what students' hopes and fears for the class. Similar to the other classes I have described, students in this class expressed a desire to (a) have open and honest conversations about religion – a topic they do not get to speak much about in their public lives; (b) feel the freedom to say what they want to say without holding back out of fear of offending their classmates; and (c) learn more about religions other than their own. However, in this class, the students also mentioned a couple of things that students in cases one and two did not mention.

First, as I mentioned above, several students explained that, through the class, they were hoping to hear their classmates perspectives on issues surrounding religion, God, and life-after-death in order to come to new and improved conclusions of their own about such topics. Some expressed more confusion and desperation, as in the Questioning Christian who explained that he just wanted to know the "right" thing to believe. Others, seemed more comfortable with their beliefs or their unanswered questions, but at the same time eager to evolve their own belief systems based on what others had to say. "I do not see myself giving up Methodism or Christianity … rather I am looking forward to growing with these questions and struggles I have and

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have faith that God will see me through to the glorious future He has planned for me"
(*S30, Methodist*).

Secondly, most of the students also predicted that stubbornness – their own included – would get in the way of potentially fruitful dialogue. A few Atheist and Agnostic students confessed their own tendency to dismiss the opinions of others and resolved to more carefully consider their classmates perspectives. Some of the believers also admitted to easily becoming defensive about their religious beliefs and that, although it would be difficult for them, they hoped to let their guards down in order for a more genuine exchange of perspectives to take place.

Overall, after the first class session, there was a feeling of mutual respect and interest that made everyone hopeful that the class would be just as intriguing, engaging, and thought provoking as they all hoped. Excitement was definitely in the air – even the facilitators were excited. After the students left, the Presbyterian facilitator (referencing case one, for which she was also a facilitator) commented that she felt really good about this class and that, based on how the first class session went, she thought this course would dialogue at a much deeper and more sophisticated level than her IGD the previous semester.

Defining Beliefs Uniquely

As I have described in the last two chapters, the second session of IGD is typically reserved for a Personal Stories activity where students take turns sharing their life experiences as a member of their social identity category relevant to the class. In religion-themed dialogues, naturally, students are asked to share about their religious identity and how that has impacted their lives and their social interactions.

Usually, this activity takes the majority of the second dialogue session (i.e., almost two full hours). However, in this case, the Personal Stories activity spanned the bulk of both the second and the third classes. Six students shared their personal story during the second class, and six more students shared during the third class. On average, students spoke about themselves for ten minutes, and then answered questions from the group for another ten minutes.

The other cases in this study, and other IGDs I have participated in, have also allowed students to ask questions after someone shares their personal story, but in general they either forgo that opportunity, or ask very surface level, yes-or-no type questions. In other words, the question and answer portion of the Personal Story activity is usually very brief. In this case, though, students asked several dialogue-provoking questions, which extended the overall length of the activity. Moreover, the facilitators in this case did not strictly enforce a time limit on personal stories or on questions, as the facilitators in cases one and two did.

Several of the students in this case – both believers and non-believers – used their personal stories to explain their religious tradition, and then described their own unique approach to their faith, separate from the mainstream version of their religion that their peers may be familiar with. For instance, both of the Methodist students – who were both engineering majors and are roommates – made sure to explain to the class how they interpreted the Bible in a way that allowed them to also believe in the fundamentals of biological science. Two other Christian students even explained that, although they are dedicated to their Christian beliefs and church, they do not like

to label themselves as "religious" because of the assumptions people make when they hear that word.

> I do feel strongly in my beliefs as a Catholic, but I feel more strongly in my own spiritual relationship with God. Many times Catholics are criticized for their very black and white value system. I know I am judged very often when I say that I am Roman Catholic. I immediately get asked my views on issues such as abortion and gay marriage. (*S31, Catholic*)

Instead, they referred to themselves as spiritual, and make sure that others know about their individualized perspective on God, faith, and all things related to their religious identity.

Other students, spent time describing the cultural elements of the religions they were raised with, but then asserting that their actual beliefs about divinity did not align with those traditions. Two of the Jewish students explained that they embraced their Jewish label, but do not believe in God – at least not in the Abrahamic sense (i.e., God as the Holy Father). One of them described her appreciation for the beauty of nature and science in place of a belief in a higher power; another (as I mentioned previously) explained that his version of a higher power is the metaphysical connection between all living things. The Muslim and the Hindu student were both less comfortable embracing their religious identity because they did not believe in many (or any) of the teachings or traditions of their respective religions, but both admitted that there were elements of their religious identity that were engrained in them. The Muslim student, for example, who was staunchly Atheist, explained that

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even when he was not around his family, he still followed some of the dietary restrictions his religion placed on him. "For some reason, I still avoid pork. I don't know why, maybe it's psychological, but I can't bring myself to eat pork" (*S37, Atheist Muslim*).

The "True" Meaning of Religion

During the students' conversations about their own unique religious beliefs, and the questions that followed, there was quite a discussion about the "true" meaning of religion, or the "best" way to follow a religion. For one Christian student, her reasoning for wanting to be labeled as "spiritual" rather than "religious" was that too many people who call themselves religious are not "true" Christians in the way that she interprets Christianity (i.e., they do not try hard enough to live their lives as Jesus would). Another Christian student explained that doing community service was "better than just going to church and sitting in a pew" (*S29, Methodist*).

Similarly, some of the Agnostic and/or Atheist students expressed that one of their primary objections to their religion (or any religion) was that most people did not truly incorporate the values of the religion into their lives. The Hindu student, for instance, complained that while in India, she saw incongruence between the supposed teachings of Hinduism and the way in which the religion was practiced – something that makes her not want to be associated with Hinduism altogether.

> I noticed beggars outside temples, and the temples themselves
> decorated and adorned beyond a necessity. While simplicity is
> apparently a virtue in Hinduism, man's ego produces a display of
> ostentation; however, when people forego a chance to donate to an

orphanage in order to donate to a temple, there is something

fundamentally wrong with the faith. (*S39, Questioning Hindu*)

Likewise, one of the Jewish students explained that his movement away from

Judaism started when he noticed the Rabbi at his synagogue berating people in his

congregation. This kind of behavior, he said, did not match with the Jewish teachings

he learned while studying the Torah in preparation for his Bar Mitzvah.

Challenging Questions

While most of the dialogue between the students during the Personal Stories

activity was philosophical in nature, some of the questions posed were particularly

challenging and led to quite a bit of self-reflection. The question that was most

impactful for the group (according to their journals and the post-dialogue interviews)

was when an Orthodox Jewish student (who only attended the second class session,

and then dropped the class) stated that she did not think that morality was possible

without religion and then asked an Atheist Jewish student to explain where love came

from if it is not created by God. This made a lot of people uncomfortable, but it also

gave them a reason to reflect on what their answer to that question would be. What

their answers to that question were is not necessarily of importance to this study.

However, what is relevant is that a number of them pointed to this moment as a time

that helped them grow in their understanding of their own spiritual perspectives.

Another such moment was when a Jewish student asked a Christian student to

explain the difference between God and Jesus. When the Christian student did his

best to explain his own interpretation of God and Jesus, the Jewish student exclaimed,

"That sounds an awful lot like polytheism to me!" (*S35, Spiritual Jewish*). This

remark, which may have been somewhat frank and insensitive, actually became

another opportunity for the students to dialogue about what/who they believe God (or

their own version of a higher power) is and/or should be.

While the various questions and answers that followed each personal story

may have, at times, led to tangential conversations, several students appreciated the

process. Although the topics were not easy to talk about, it forced them to reflect in a

way that they do not often get to do.

> It is a very helpful growing experience to be questioned about why you
>
> believe what you do. I think talking about my faith really helps me
>
> find myself in my beliefs and has made me grow as a person. I look at
>
> this experience like a clam and a pearl; you need pressure to create that
>
> masterpiece. And being questioned really brought that out of me. (*S28,*
>
> *Christian*)

My participants also explained that spending so much time on the Personal Stories

activity, and having the chance to dialogue after each story the way they did, helped

them get to know their classmates really well. At the end of the third dialogue

session, the group was still very enthusiastic about the class and their future

dialogues.

Determining Appropriate Hot Topics

For the last 15 minutes of the third dialogue session, the facilitators led the

group through a brainstorm to select hot topics for the subsequent dialogues.

Notably, the Quaker facilitator started off the brainstorm by explaining what was a

"good" hot topic and what was not. He explained that hot topic dialogues should

raise differences in opinion/perspective, and thus the group should not select

something that would garner unanimous agreement. Also, he stated that students

should be able to offer personal experiences when discussing hot topics, meaning that

hot topic dialogues should not be purely hypothetical. With those guidelines in mind,

the students threw out their ideas for potential hot topics. Among the ideas offered by

the students in this case were: science vs. religion, tradition vs. modernity, religion

and politics, life-after-death, literalism vs. symbolism, and women's role(s) in

religion.

At one point, one student suggested that the group spend a day teaching each

other about their various religions. Immediately, both facilitators stepped in to clarify

why that was not a good idea. The Quaker facilitator explained that this was not a

Religion 101 class and that we should avoid putting each other on the spot by

expecting everyone to be experts on their religion. The Presbyterian facilitator then

offered to provide additional readings that could help explain the world's religions if

anyone wanted to do their own research. She also suggested that instead of asking

others to teach the group about their religion, we should ask them to talk about their

own experiences of how their religion has impacted them in various situations

throughout their lives.

Another student excitedly suggested that the group talk about aliens –

specifically, how people's faith would be impacted if aliens landed on Earth. The

Quaker facilitator reminded him that such a conversation would be purely

hypothetical and no one would be able to share personal experiences. Nevertheless,

he persisted, attempting to find alternative ways to describe the same idea, hoping

that the facilitators would finally agree. As a compromise, they listed "aliens" as a

sub-topic under science vs. religion. Throughout the class, even when it was not

necessarily related to the ongoing dialogue, this student brought up topic of aliens

several times, mostly as a challenge to those who believed in God. Typically,

however, the facilitators were able to help transition the alien dialogues into

philosophical debates about other things.

Believers vs. Non-Believers

For the fourth dialogue session in this case the facilitators asked the students

to split themselves in two groups: those who believed in a higher power and those

who did not (notice they did not say those who believed in God). Those who

believed in a higher power were asked to follow the Presbyterian facilitator outside,

those who did not were asked to stay inside with the Quaker facilitator. The five

believers (four Christians and one Jew) popped up and went outside without

hesitation. A few other students, however, were visibly torn and expressed confusion

about which room they most appropriately fit into. Ultimately, no one else joined the

believer group outside – inside there were seven students total: two Christians, two

Jews, one Muslim, one Hindu, and one Buddhist. I stayed with the non-believer

group since both of my nested cases were there. Having carefully presented myself to

the group as somewhere between believer and non-believer, I had the freedom to

choose.

The process of having to decide between the believer and non-believer

categories was especially difficult for two Christian students, one of them who had

even gotten up and walked toward the door before turning around and re-joining the

non-believer group. However, these students both described how being forced to choose between the two groups helped them realize something about themselves: that they did not want to have to choose, and that they were actually more comfortable with the gray area between the two groups than they originally thought.

> The time when we were forced to choose a side was helpful because I never really thought about how tough it was to pick a side, so that kind of led me to come to terms with the fact that I don't fit in with either area [*believers or non-believers*] … So, the activity that made me pick, made me realize I don't want to pick. (*S33, Questioning Catholic*)

The decision making process used by these students to determine which group they ultimately joined on that day demonstrated their use of an Abrahamic yardstick to measure their own faith. Both of the questioning Christian students who stayed with in the non-believer group made it clear, on several occasions, that they did believe in a higher power. Yet, because they did not believe in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic version of a higher power, they decided they did not belong with the believers.

> I mean, I am a "believer" [*air quotes used by participant during interview*] but I didn't feel like I fit with any of the people that were in the believer group. They all had a particular belief, and there wasn't any room for self-exploration of other religions to see if I believe this or that because they had committed to a specific religion. So, I more fit in with the non-believers because there were other people in there that I knew were more Agnostic, so I figured I fit in there better. (*S33, Questioning Catholic*)

The Spiritual Jewish student, who did not even hesitate to decide that he belonged in the non-believer group, also expressed a similar sentiment; that his higher power, the metaphysical connection, was not God-like enough for him to fit in with the other believers.

Once the groups were settled, each facilitator instructed their respective groups to devise a list of stereotypes about both their own group and the other group. After doing so, the two groups were reunited in the room to compare the four lists: (1) believers' list of stereotypes about believers, (2) believers' list of stereotypes about non-believers, (3) non-believers' list of stereotypes about non-believers, and (4) non-believers' list of stereotypes about believers. To their surprise, there was more overlap than they expected. Stereotypes such as stubborn, judgmental, aggressive, and pushy appeared on all four lists. The group also noticed that both groups labeled themselves more negatively than they labeled the opposing group, which led them to conclude that no matter what you believe, you are sensitive to the negative stereotypes about your particular brand of faith.

> It seems like both groups tend to feel like they are treated as though
> they are looked down upon with condemnation and are also
> untrustworthy due to the actions of a very few minority that taint the
> reputation of the rest. I think that both believers and non believers
> would tend to think of this as unfair and frustrating since they do not
> identify with those minorities within their group for the most part,
> which is why both groups complained about that stereotype being used
> on themselves but not on the other group. (*S30, Methodist*)

Both believers and non-believers expressed empathy for the other group, and affirmed to one another that they would refrain from stereotyping in the future.

While the students saw the activity as a whole in a very positive and beneficial light, students from the believer group shared that it accentuated their perceived minority status. The ratio of believers to non-believers in this class (5:7) was evidence to the believers that secular/non-religious worldviews are dominant in our society and, even more so, on this university's campus – despite ECU's demographic data clearly showing that Atheists/Agnostics are a small minority of the student body (see Figure 4). When the Quaker facilitator asked the group to reflect on which perspective (believer or non-believer) was more prevalent at this school, the entire class agreed that, in a science-heavy environment such as this, those who believe in a higher power have less of a voice than those who do not.

> When the question was asked who we thought had a more difficult
> time on campus between believers and non-believers I remember
> thinking that I definitely thought that believers did … When everyone,
> believers and non-believers alike, agreed that believers have it worse
> on campus I felt affirmed because it does seem like I have to deal with
> stereotypes on campus that no one else does. (*S30, Methodist*)

On that note, the class ended, yet again, with a sense of commonality and positivity.

Science vs. Religion

For the fifth dialogue session in this case, the facilitators introduced the day's hot topic, science vs. religion, and told the group that the direction of the dialogue was entirely up to them. As promised, the facilitators stayed silent for over 30

minutes to let the students talk about anything they wanted to talk about. While there were a range of topics raised (aliens, cloning, stem cell research, genetically modified foods, etc.) the tone of the dialogue quickly turned into a debate between the believers and the non-believers. Throughout the debate, the more adamantly Atheist students controlled the conversation and continuously attempted to poke holes in the religious students' beliefs. Correspondingly, the religious students took a defensive stance. The two Methodist students did their best to explain that religion and science can work in harmony.

> I believe that God created the universe through the use of science so advances in our understanding of science only makes me more amazed at His sovereignty. I tried to show that Science and Religion need not be always pitted against each other … as a Christian Engineer this is a topic that hits close to home for me. (*S30, Methodist*)

However, some of the other believers shut down altogether. The only Jewish student in the believer group (who did not speak for the vast majority of the class) shared her frustrations with me:

> I just didn't agree with [the Atheist students'] explanation of science, so I kind of just shut down because I do believe in a higher power. I just didn't want to listen to it … if we had approached the reasons behind our motivations for wanting to talk about those topics it would have been helpful for one group not dominating [the conversation]. (*S34, Conservative Jewish*)

About halfway through the class period, the facilitators stepped in and asked the group to reflect on the dialogue thus far and analyze the group dynamics that unfolded. Most of the non-believers raved about how interesting the conversation was and how much they were enjoying it. The believers, on the other hand, described it as irritating, unfocused, and unfair. In an attempt to enable a more balanced dialogue, the facilitators then guided the students back through the science vs. religion hot topic, interrupting whenever they deemed necessary. As much as they tried, however, the Atheist students continued to overpower the discussion with their interrogation of the religious students' beliefs. The class session ended with noticeable tension in the room. As the students shuffled out of the classroom, the casual banter between the students that typically occurs at this time did not. It was clear that several of the students were no longer feeling good about the class.

Should We Talk About Christian Privilege?

After the science vs. religion dialogue, when all the students had left the room, I packed my bag and prepared to leave. Before I left, the facilitators began to debrief that day's class, as they did after each session. Aside from their comments about how the science vs. religion dialogue went, they began talking about what next steps they should take for the remaining two sessions. The Presbyterian facilitator remarked that they had not yet covered Christian privilege despite their obligation to do so, but that it would be difficult to demonstrate that concept in this class since the imbalance of power seemed to favor the non-believing students. The Quaker facilitator seemed surprised to hear that there was an expectation that they cover Christian privilege and did not offer an opinion one way or another about what they should do. They

attempted to include me in their conversation – since I knew both of them before I started this research, they were both very comfortable and casual with me – but I refrained from making any suggestions due to my role as a researcher. I left the classroom that day still unaware of their intentions for the next two class sessions.

The following week, when we all reconvened for the sixth dialogue session of the course, the facilitators began with an Opinion Spectrum activity (described in chapters five and six). It was clear from the statements they chose to read that this activity was an attempt to "cover" Christian privilege, yet, as with case one, the word privilege was never named outright. They read six statements altogether, including:

1. I can travel without others assuming that I put them at risk because of my religious/secular/other identity

2. I feel comfortable sharing my religious/secular/other identity at a political event

3. I feel comfortable sharing my religious/secular/other identity in this class

During the activity, they instructed the students not to speak or ask each other questions about where they fell on the Opinion Spectrum. Moreover, after the activity was over, they informed the students that in order to ensure enough time for the next activity they had planned, they would be unable to reflect on or discuss the results of the Opinion Spectrum.

As a result, many of the students did not recognize that activity intended to demonstrate Christian privilege. In several of my post-dialogue interviews – both with Christians and non-Christians – when I asked about their understanding of

Christian privilege, I was met with confusion or a blank stare. Some of my

participants said things like, "What do you mean by that?" (*S31, Catholic*) or, "What

are you referring to?" (*S38, Atheist Buddhist*). Others, who were aware of Christian

privilege before this class, responded to my question by pointing out that we did not

actually speak about that in the class. It may have been hinted at with the Opinion

Spectrum activity, but it was certainly not discussed.

Recognizing the Gray Area

For the remainder of the sixth dialogue session, the facilitators guided the

students through what everyone referred to as the "Triple Fishbowl" – it was a classic

Caucus/Fishbowl activity (as described in chapter five), but there were three groups

instead of two. To start, students were asked to select one of three groups for

themselves: (1) religious, (2) secular, and (3) other. The "religious" group was led by

the Presbyterian facilitator and included the same five students who joined the

"believers" group during the fourth dialogue session – four Christians and one Jew.

The "secular" group, comprised four students – one Jew, one Hindu, one Muslim, and

one Buddhist – and did not have a facilitator to lead them (they were given a list of

questions to discuss on their own). Lastly, the "other" group was led by the Quaker

facilitator and included two students – both questioning Christians – and myself[24].

There were three questions posed to each group:

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[24] While I wanted to join the "secular" group in order to spend more time with my
two nested cases, all my efforts to present myself as someone who straddled the fence
between believer and non-believer made it difficult for me to join the secular group
and still feel as if I was participating in the IGD authentically. Instead, I simply made
a point of asking all the students in the secular group detailed questions about this
particular activity when I interviewed them after the course was over.

1. Do you feel like you are being heard in this class?

2. Is this similar or different to how you feel outside of class?

3. How do you form your morality?

However, none of the groups successfully discussed all three questions.

In the "religious" group, the students spent the majority of their small-group time discussing the first question, and venting to each other about feeling attacked by the non-believers. It was a relief for them to be able to talk about those feelings with peers who they knew would understand them.

> I came into the class very stressed … I was not looking forward to
> defending my faith for two more hours. However, I was very excited
> to be divided into our caucuses. I feel very comfortable in our group
> of religious people. I think that I felt comfortable because I know that
> I don't need to defend what I believe. (*S29, Methodist*)

The Presbyterian facilitator encouraged them to tell the non-believers exactly how they felt because, as she said, it would make the dialogue most honest.

In the "other" group, the students primarily discussed how happy they were to have a group that represented the gray area they found themselves in. According to them, both in the class and outside of the class, they typically do not feel like they are taken seriously when they try to explain their ambiguous spiritual beliefs. Having such a group validated their uncertainty about religion and God, and confirmed to them that it was a legitimate place to be – whether they saw it as temporary or not.

Left to their own devises, the "secular" group began by talking about morality, but ended up having a very tangential conversation about aliens, politics, and a variety of other things fairly unrelated to the supposed topic of the activity.

> We kind of just talked about random things. I mean, we talked about the [assigned questions] for like five minutes, and then we talked about random crazy things … That's why we were kind of confused when we came back to the class and did that discussion thing. (*S38, Atheist Buddhist*)

They did, however, enjoy this time because they were able to explore their philosophical musings with others who were actually interested in engaging with them on that level.

Being Honest

Once the three mini-caucuses were over, it was time to reunite as a large group. The secular group was put into the "fishbowl" first, and spoke (mostly off-the-cuff) about morality – where they get their own morality, where they think morality in general should come from, etc. The "other" group went next and spoke, again, about not wanting to be forced to see everything in black and white, and about seeking validation for their "gray" beliefs. Lastly, the religious group entered the fishbowl, and voiced their frustration about feeling attacked by the rest of the class. Additionally, one of the Christian students admitted to the rest of the students that she actually was not listening to the secular students when they spoke and she was generally uninterested in their arguments or their perspectives on religion.

The secular group went first, and I honestly did not listen very much.

> They mostly spoke about where they thought morality came from and
> I was uninterested in what they were saying. I felt I might get
> frustrated if I got too involved in listening, so I decided to close myself
> off. (*S31, Catholic*)

Two other students – one Christian and one Jew – seconded her confession, admitting that they, too, did not care to engage in the secular students' conversation.

To their surprise, most of the secular students took their comments very well, and actually apologized for the way they behaved in the previous class. Some of them even expressed appreciation to the religious students for pointing out their aggressive dialogue style. The Hindu student described her reaction to that incident by explaining that she was, in a way, envious of those students and wished that she were as secure in her beliefs as they were.

> The 'religious' people said they were always on the defensive, and had
> the burden of proof, or that the 'non-believers' were shooting holes in
> their argument. I felt pretty guilty hearing this, because I have been
> really enjoying this class, but felt that I might be taking away from
> their having a good experience by putting them on the defensive …
> When [one of the Christian students] said that she was comfortable
> enough to not even care what the non-religious people had to say, I
> really respected her thought process. I think that made me think more
> critically of my own. (*S39, Questioning Hindu*)

Other secular students also shared that they now realized that their line of questioning was not actually resulting in anything productive – certainly not the philosophical

discourse they were looking for – and wished that they had approached the dialogue differently.

For both believers and non-believers, this moment – the brutally honest confession, followed by a sincere apology – marked a transition in the dynamic of the dialogue and a return to the group cohesiveness they all felt for the first half of the class. The Christian student who made the initial confession felt particularly validated by the whole exchange.

> The climate of the room changed drastically once everyone got the
> chance to get how they were feeling off their chest … I'm one of those
> people who wears their heart on their sleeve and I just have to express
> my emotions, so just getting that out and letting the class know about
> my frustrations helped … I felt heard and understood, and as we talked
> it out I understood the secular and other group. (*S31, Catholic*)

Some even attributed the success of this particular activity to the addition of the third group – the "others" – claiming that, with a wider range of perspectives, there was less of a polarizing effect.

We're All in The Gray

Once the group was on good terms again, they were able to move on in their dialogue, addressing similar questions/disagreements that they previously shared, but with a renewed sense of respect for one another. The metaphor of "black and white" (i.e., having clearly defined beliefs in either God or science) vs. "gray" (i.e., being unsure and/or somewhere in the middle) emerged as the group talked about the extent to which they can know the truth about things they cannot see. Those who had

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previously taken a hard stance against the existence of God began to backtrack and admit that without definitive proof, they do not actually know whether or not a higher power exists. Likewise, some who had previously asserted a firm belief in God admitted that they, too, could never know the absolute Truth. As one Christian student said, "Part of faith, to me, is not having all of the answers" (Eric).

The students from the "other" group were elated; they were no longer the only ones in the group who seemed so unsure. After spending a majority of the class in opposing groups – believers vs. non-believers; religious vs. secular vs. other – they all looked a little more critically at their own beliefs. They recognized that, actually, even if many of them wanted things to be black and white, they were are all in a gray area.

The Cultural Aspects of Religion

The Triple Fishbowl activity ended on a positive note, but the dialogue at the end – the one in which they all realized their common "grayness" – ended abruptly due to the time. So, at the beginning of the final dialogue session, the facilitators opened the floor for any additional questions they wanted to ask each other. The questions were largely philosophical in nature, as the majority of the dialogues in this case were, but they did lead the students to an exploration of the cultural aspects of their religion.

One of the first questions came from the Atheist Jewish student who asked the religious students if they ever worried about their religion being wrong. Both of the Methodist students responded affirmatively; one explained that he constantly struggled with the idea that his non-Christian friends were not "saved." This led into

an extended dialogue about the purpose of religion in one's life and whether or not there is any one religion that is "right." As was the case in previous dialogues, the majority of the questioning came from the non-believers. This time, however, the questions were phrased in less aggressive or accusatory language, and the believers did not seem to mind. In fact, some of them actually enjoyed the questioning and the opportunity it gave them to reflect on themselves – much like the questioning that occurred in the second and third dialogue sessions that the students enjoyed so much. As one of the Christian students told me, the more difficult the question, the more he challenged himself and the more clarity he was able to get about his spiritual perspective.

> The most difficult question that I was asked, by far, was something along the lines of: "If you feel your connection to God, why does it make a difference if you're Jewish, Muslim, or Christian?" I stalled because I didn't have an answer. Does it matter? Why am I right, or even, am I right that my religion is the only true religion? And if not, should it matter if I continue [to do community service] anyway? … Even if my religion is wrong, I will still find comfort and growth in completing service with my church friends. (*S29, Methodist*)

In questioning why people follow one religion or another, the students (even the Atheist students) began to recognize how much their religious identity is impacted by the family, community, and culture they were raised in. This was then emphasized when the students took turns sharing about their Out of Comfort Zone experience, commenting further on their observations of a religious tradition unfamiliar to them.

For example, when a Christian student described his visit to a Hindu temple, he shared with the class his own internal reflection process when he realized how similar Hinduism is to his own religion.

> On the surface, the differences between my religion and Hinduism are astounding. The language is different, the deity is different, and the culture surrounding it is different. But, we all have the same goal: to do good. The similarities [I noticed between Hinduism and Christianity] drive me back to a question, if all religions are essentially the same, why is mine the one true religion? … Would I have grown up Hindu if my parents were Hindu? (*S29, Methodist*)

The group continued in this fashion until the time ran out and the course came to a close. While not all the students actively participated in this portion of the dialogue, the body language and facial expressions of all the students definitely indicated that they all felt positively about the way the dialogue ended up. When it was time to leave, the students thanked the facilitators, and each other, for the experience and said goodbye to the group as if they were all old friends.

Nested Case 3: Meenu

Meenu was the only Hindu student in the class. However, she actively distanced herself from her religious identity throughout the class and participated primarily as a non-believer. In this section, I will provide a more detailed description of Meenu's background, her experience in the class, and the outcomes she describes for herself in both her journals and her post-dialogue interview with me.

Meenu was born in India, in a Hindu family, and lived there until she was 13 years old. In her junior year of high school, a few years after she immigrated to the United States, she got an assignment from her English teacher that caused her to question her faith for the first time. Her assignment was to do a report on one of the books in the Bible. In order to understand what she was reading more thoroughly, she did her own research on Christianity. When she realized that Christianity seemed to her like "just a bunch of superstitions," she began to think that Hinduism was the same way (*S39, Questioning Hindu*). Moreover, around this time, she heard a story about a village in India where a woman's supposed bad behavior was blamed for the lack of rain, and her hands were tied as a punishment. This story has stuck with Meenu and angers her to this day. To her, this indicates the injustice and antiquity of Hinduism, and makes her reluctant to associate herself with the religion altogether. "When a culture binds the hands of village women in a drought as 'punishment' for upsetting the Gods while the men roam free, it is an injustice to follow this religion" (*S39, Questioning Hindu*).

Interestingly, while she is quick to blame all of Hinduism for the actions of a few individuals in one particular village, she is very sensitive to the way that all of Islam is slandered for the actions of the extremist minority. "I get defensive when people start talking about Islam just because I think it's such a misunderstood religion. They've just gotten this reputation of extreme violence because of one small denomination, and that's tarnishing the entire community" (*S39, Questioning Hindu*). Meenu has several Muslim friends and, according to her, negative statements about Islam greatly offend her; but negative statements about Hinduism do not.

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When she first introduced herself to the group in this IGD, she defined herself as "Atheist, I think" (*S39, Questioning Hindu*), and explained that one of the reasons she decided to enroll in this class was because she was angry at her religion and she wanted a place to release that anger. However, throughout the course, she refers to herself as both a Hindu and an Atheist (although never at the same time) almost interchangeably. In her interview with me, she openly admitted that for the purposes of the class, she tried even harder to disassociate with Hinduism than she typically does so that she did not have to be the spokesperson for the religion. She explained that Hinduism is so completely different from the Abrahamic religions that she did not want to be responsible for explaining it all on her own. "I wish we had another person who identified themselves as Hindu in the class because then we'd be able to talk so much more about it. 'Cause, like, the belief is totally different from the Judeo-Christian idea [of what religion is]" (*S39, Questioning Hindu*). She also explained that without another Hindu in the group, she was not able to critically analyze Hinduism the way she wanted to.

> I really feel the lack of religious diversity in this class. Hinduism is so
> very different from the Judeo-Christian beliefs, and so I am still at
> odds with how I view it. Sometimes, when I talk to a friend who
> highly values his Hindu faith, I realize that our outlook on everything
> is pretty much the same, and yet he considers himself a Hindu and I
> consider myself an Atheist. So is it only the rituals we follow that
> define our spiritual identity? (*S39, Questioning Hindu*)

It was questions such as this that she was hoping to discuss but never got the chance to.

During the dialogues, she aligned herself with the non-believers and the secular students, and often argued for the need to use logic and science in validating spiritual beliefs. As a result, her peers did not see her as a Hindu. Instead, they perceived her as an Atheist or Agnostic with very adamant opinions about logic and science. Throughout the class, she was one of the more vocal students on the non-believer side of the spectrum. However, on more than one occasion, she told her religious classmates that she admired their faith and wished that she did not have the speculations about her religion that she did.

Despite not being able to dialogue with other Hindus, Meenu thoroughly enjoyed this class, and felt that she succeeded, in part, to relinquish some of the anger she felt about religion. At the start of the class, she expressed the opinion that all religion was oppressive, corrupt, and outdated. However, at the end of the class, she was more accepting of the idea that religion could actually be a positive influence in some people's lives.

> Hearing different people sharing their respective stories helped me
> realize that I had forced my perception of religion onto the concept of
> what religion was. In doing so, I realized that I had denied the very
> real opportunity for religion to mean something more than rituals
> executed because of social pressure. While I still do not think religion
> is for me, I have come to appreciate what it means to other people …
> When I came in I didn't see why people needed religion … but when

people started talking about how religion itself was like an individual

experience for them, I guess I'm sort of, like, more okay with it now.

(*S39, Questioning Hindu*)

In addition to becoming more accepting of others' religious beliefs and

practices, she was also able to come away from the class starting to feel slightly better

about her own religion. "I find myself slowly making my peace with religion, and

accepting flaws in society as just that" (*S39, Questioning Hindu*). She still expressed

strong negative opinions about the antiquity of Hindu "superstitions," but she did

seem to be allowing herself to explore the elements of Hinduism that she could

appreciate. This class certainly did not provide Meenu with the clarity and the

answers she was hoping for, but she grew in her own spiritual, analytical, and

intellectual journey, which made her very happy.

Nested Case 4: Ross

Ross was the only Buddhist student in his class – and the only student with a

Buddhist religious identity in this study as a whole. However, as I mentioned

previously, he denied having a Buddhist identity entirely. In this section, I will

explain why I label him as Buddhist, and will describe his experience and perceived

outcomes in this IGD class.

Ross was raised in a Buddhist family. Buddhism, loosely defined, is a

spiritual tradition that follows the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama – the original

Buddha (Suzuki, 2004). Many strands of Buddhism have developed since the life and

death of Siddhartha Gautama – most of which are non-theistic and non-exclusivist. In

other words, generally speaking, belief in a higher power is not an essential

component of Buddhism. Coincidentally, on the day of the last dialogue session in this case, the most famous Buddhist in today's society, the Dalai Lama, spoke on our campus. In his speech he clearly stated that he does not believe in God, in any form, but that his religion and his spirituality is the most important thing in his life. Buddhism, then, is an approach to religion that comes from a completely different worldview than the Abrahamic traditions. Yet, Ross seems to use a Christian/Abrahamic yardstick to measure religiousness – leading him to reject the Buddhist label for himself, and even hesitate to apply it to his parents.

Ross grew up in a rural community on the East Coast of the United States. His family was the only non-Christian family in a town of about 1000 residents. He explained that the church in his town was the pillar of the community, and that all of his friends from the school and the neighborhood were "heavily devoted Christians" (*S38, Atheist Buddhist*). His home, on the other hand, was "decorated with mini statues of Buddha, religious pictures, incenses, and had a room on the 2nd floor dedicated to Buddha" (*S38, Atheist Buddhist*). He also told me that because there was no Buddhist temple in his town, his family would sometimes drive over an hour to attend services at the nearest Buddhist temple. Still, when he describes his parents' religious identity, he uses quotations in order to diminish the seriousness of their religious practice.

My parents are "Buddhists." I purposely put this term in quotes
because my family has never really regularly practiced religious
activities and my parents do not really go out of their way to practice
religion … When they pray, they have an incense stick and they sit in

front of the statue and pray. It would only be like once a day for like a

few minutes … it wasn't really something I objected to, so I just did it

with them. (*S38, Atheist Buddhist*)

Then, when he describes his own religious identity, he rejects the Buddhist label

altogether.

I mean I share some of the same beliefs as Buddhism, like peace and

caring for each other, but I wouldn't consider myself Buddhist … I do

not believe in a spiritual higher power or God. I don't pray when I

want something specific to happen. I don't regularly go to church or

read any religious texts such as the Bible. (*S38, Atheist Buddhist*)

Interestingly, however, he did share that several years ago, when his mother was

suffering from major illness, he turned to prayer. Aside from that period of time, he

says that if he does pray with his family, that he is simply going through the motions

for the sake of his parents.

Ross and I spoke quite a bit about the way he understands his religious

identity and the role of religion in his life. One point that he brought to my attention

was particularly intriguing. He explained that those who grow up in a community

where they receive similar messages about religion both in and outside the home are

much more likely, in his opinion, to develop a stronger connection to their religion.

In his case, however, he practiced Buddhism at home, but saw everyone around him

practicing Christianity. This disconnect between home life and public life, for him,

led to questioning the validity of both religions, and ultimately, to letting go of

religion completely. Now, he says that he looks at the world in a very scientific

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manner and does not need religion to help him understand his life or the things around him.

In the class, he hardly spoke at all about his family or his Buddhist upbringing; he participated entirely as an Atheist. During his personal story at the beginning of the class he mentioned, with hesitation, that his parents were Buddhist – but that was the first and last thing he ever said in front of his classmates about Buddhism. As such, no one in the class saw him as a Buddhist. He did disclose more about the Buddhism he grew up with in his reflection journals, so the facilitators were aware of his religious identity. However, they still related to him as an Atheist, not as a Buddhist, in the classroom. Furthermore, he was one of the less vocal students in the class. Thus, his classmates were not greatly impacted by him, his religious identity, or his perspectives and life experiences as a religious minority.

As for Ross' own experiences in this IGD, he seemed, in large part, not to take the class very seriously at all. He enrolled in the class because it was the most conveniently timed option for him to satisfy one of the requirements for his minor. He did not express any particular interest in the topic of religion, nor did he engage actively in any aspect of the class: the dialogues, the readings, or the journals. The only thing Ross claims that he got out of this class was a stronger belief that there is no higher power.

> It kind of strengthened my own beliefs to be honest. Like, I never just
> sit down and think about religion for an hour, and every class I would
> sit down and think about religion for two hours. So, yeah, I mean the
> more I thought about it, the argument for religion just doesn't go along

in my head. The more we talked about it, the more uncertain religion

felt. So, that's what I learned. (*S38, Atheist Buddhist*)

One could argue, however, that Ross also gained exposure to new perspectives simply

by listening to his classmates' dialogues each week. While that is likely true, he

expressed very little interest or concern in the perspectives of his classmates, and I am

not confident that he will remember anything about the class in a year's time.

Learning Outcomes

In this case, there were several themes in the way my participants described

their own perceived learning outcomes from the class. First, many found a common

ground with those who they previously thought were very different from them.

Secondly, most of my participants described an increased comfort with idea of

interfaith dialogue as a result of this class. Lastly, nearly all of them claimed to have

found more clarity on their religious beliefs or on religion in general.

Finding a Common Ground

By far the most common outcome my participants told me they got from this

IGD experience was that they found a common ground with people who had

different, even opposing, belief systems from their own. This was especially true for

those students who entered the class with strong beliefs – either religious or secular.

For instance, the Christian student who, in the sixth dialogue session, admitted to the

class that she did not care to listen to the secular students' perspectives was actually

the participant who showed the most excitement about her newfound commonality

with her classmates.

I reached a better understanding of other faiths as well as secular

beliefs and Atheists. I think before, not that I stereotyped, but I kind

of had different thoughts about [Atheists], and now I feel like … I

guess I just feel like I have more of a common ground. I feel like I

don't separate myself from them as much. I have a lot of Jewish

friends, and I always feel that talking about religion is uncomfortable

because we don't share that common ground, but now I feel like I

would be able to reach that common ground, or make there be a

common ground. (*S31, Catholic*)

For one of the questioning students, finding common ground with the Atheist and/or

secular students helped him feel more comfortable allowing himself to consider such

a label for his own beliefs.

I came in the class like, I have faith in God, but I was kind of

questioning. Before this class I thought Atheists were really pushy and

annoying, but the people in the class were really nice so it made me a

little more comfortable identifying with that. (*S32, Questioning

Catholic*)

Some of the Atheist students also expressed finding common ground with the

believers. For instance, the Muslim student explained that he entered this class

wanting to prove all the religious students wrong, and show them the error in their

thinking. Instead, he learned to see, and even agree with, some of the perspectives his

religious classmates had to offer.

[One of the Christian students] made a comment about how science

has also caused devastation, its not just religion. So, she reminded me

to be more humble about science. The things she said are definitely

going to stick with me, especially when it comes to speaking with

people with the same beliefs as her in the future. I think now I can

understand why people would distrust science … I think I finally

understood why people stay on the side of religion. (*S37, Atheist*

Muslim)

Most of the students reached this common understanding through the

dialogues themselves, but some of them also thought the Out of Comfort Zone

assignment was helpful in their realization process. The Christian student who visited

a Hindu temple for this OCZ assignment said that the experience was integral to his

growth and what he ultimately got out of the class.

I feel like I've grown as a person, just accepting other peoples'

different religious values and differences. I don't really feel like I've

grown in my faith or as a Christian at all because none of their

opinions really influenced me at all, but I do feel that the OCZ

experience in particular was good for me because I was able to talk to

people and see more how similar everybody really is in the end. I

grew in a way that I can see others as equals regardless of their

religious background. (*S29, Methodist*)

Many of my participants explained that they had very little exposure to other religious

traditions, and hardly ever spoke about religion with anyone outside of their own

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religious group. In that way, this class became one of their first opportunities to witness a different religious service (through the OCZ experience) or listen to the reasoning of someone who did not believe the same thing they did. While there were rough patches in the process, the structure and the guidance that the facilitators offered helped them get back on track with a calm and respectful exchange of ideas.

Increased Comfort with Interfaith Dialogue

Stemming from their limited exposure to, and interaction with people with other belief systems, many of my participants entered the class feeling extremely hesitant about the interfaith dialogue process. However, being forced to talk to others in a class like this boosted their confidence in their ability to speak coherently and articulately about religion – which many of them said is typically very difficult for them.

> I just feel like I've become more comfortable talking about other religions. Like I shared in dialogue, I went to Catholic school my whole life, I grew up in a bubble, so it's just very different for me to actually have conversations with people of other religions and non-religious people. I just feel like I can carry the dialogue with me now, and I can have this kind of dialogue with other people now. (*S31, Catholic*)

Furthermore, once they became more comfortable with the process, many of them realized that they actually enjoyed hearing other people's perspectives. Even one of the Christian students, who was easily the most devout in her literalist biblical beliefs

and, at the outset, the most disinterested in acknowledging any contradictory points of view, said that she ended up enjoying the dialogue process.

> I think I'm learning to listen to others better and actually find
>
> enjoyment in what they are saying … I also found that I like hearing
>
> others views because I never have the opportunity to hear these types
>
> of comments because I don't have a lot of friends that have different
>
> views from mine. (*S28, Christian*)

Engaging in the type of philosophical challenge that this particular interfaith dialogue provided was intellectually stimulating for several of the students. Several of my participants who initially struggled to answer my question about what they got out of the class simply said things like, "I just loved hearing things from people in the class … they said some really cool shit" (*S37, Atheist Muslim*), or "We just addressed really interesting things that I never thought of before" (*S33, Questioning Catholic*). It was precisely for that reason – the philosophical and intellectual stimulation they got – that they said, in the end, that they were now interested in having more interfaith dialogue experiences in the future.

Moreover, not only were they more interested in participating in interfaith dialogue, they were more confident in their ability to engage in that type of dialogue in a more productive fashion. Many of my participants explained that the class taught them how to listen in a situation where all they wanted to do was plan their rebuttal. Also, through hearing a wide variety of perspectives from their classmates, my participants felt a decreased tendency to make assumptions about others in a dialogue situation and, accordingly, an increased tendency to hear out their dialogue-mates.

The Hindu student, for example, who admitted having a certain set of assumptions about religious people, said that after this experience, she is now less likely to make the same assumptions when interacting with religious people. "I've seen different perspectives now, so next time I would be less inclined to put a tag on that person before I got to know them" (*S39, Questioning Hindu*).

Greater Clarity on Religion and Religious Beliefs

Nearly all of my participants in this case felt a greater sense of clarity about their own beliefs and/or about their feelings towards religion in general. The religious students, for instance, were affirmed in their religious beliefs. As this Christian student explains, "It is a very helpful growing experience to be questioned about why you believe what you do; most of the time it has been reassuring to me and my faith" (*S28, Christian*). They usually attributed this to those students who were most different from them.

> [The Atheist students] were most helpful to me because they were
> challenging my thoughts. They brought up points that I had never
> thought of before, that were interesting to me and made me want to
> think more about them. Their perspectives were most different from
> mine, so I appreciated them the most. (*S30, Methodist*)

The Atheist students similarly expressed more firmly established views at the end of the class, but also shared feeling greater clarity on the issue of religion as a whole. In particular, they learned to see that people are socialized into certain religious or spiritual worldviews and, for that reason, were able to feel less critical about others' beliefs.

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Those students who were questioning their religion and/or their beliefs developed a more sophisticated understanding of their own beliefs and became more comfortable with the fact that they did not have, and may not ever have, the answers to some of life's most difficult questions.

> I more learned about how I identify, or what things I agree with and what I don't agree with when it comes to things I usually don't think about … So, I believe in a higher power, but I don't necessarily think it's some man on a cloud, and I don't think I'm going to know ever and I'm okay with that. (*S33, Questioning Catholic*)

Simply having the chance to talk through topics that they do not typically get to discuss helped them form more solid opinions. Also, seeing other people who are also questioning and/or struggling with their faith showed them that they were not alone.

Chapter 8: Cross-Case and Theoretical Analyses

The previous three chapters presented the descriptive findings of the three cases in this study and discussed my participants' self-reported learning outcomes unique to each individual case. In this chapter, I will explain the overall themes that emerged through my analysis of the entire corpus of data collected for this study. Moreover, I will apply the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that I constructed in chapters one, two, and three in my description of the thematic findings. In other words, while chapters five, six, and seven primarily answered my first research question (what are students' experiences in interfaith IGD?) and my third research question (how do students from non-Abrahamic religious identities uniquely experience interfaith IGD?), this chapter seeks to address all three research questions by including an evaluation of my data in light of my second research question (how do these students' experiences align with IGD theory?).

First, I will offer five issues raised by this multiple case study that warrant particular attention: (1) participants' expectations and motivations for interfaith dialogue; (2) participants' understanding of religious identity; (3) participants' understanding of Christian privilege; (4) the impact of the second largest group on the direction of the dialogue; and (5) the impact of the facilitators. In my exploration of these issues, I will reference the theoretical and philosophical concepts I put forth in the first three chapters of this dissertation in order to make sense of my data. Next, I will use the IGD theoretical framework in particular as a means of interpreting the outcomes of this research. In doing so, I will re-analyze the findings of this study in terms of the three theoretical outcomes of IGD: (1) greater awareness of identity

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oppression and social inequalities, (2) development of cross-group communication skills and relationships, and (3) increased intergroup cooperation for addressing social justice issues.

Expectations and Motivations for Interfaith Dialogue

As I described in chapter two, there are many different ways that one may interpret interfaith dialogue, and many different goals or expectations one may have for participating in an interfaith dialogue. Theologians and philosophers (such as, Heim, 1992; Hick, 1993; Huang, 1995; and Panikkar, 1978/1999) offer several versions of what interfaith dialogue can or should be, but most agree that one's approach to interfaith dialogue largely impacts the experience and the results of the dialogue process. According to IGD theory and pedagogy, interfaith dialogue is a purposeful examination of the inequality that exists between religious identity groups, and seeks to increase students' awareness of such injustice and enable them to work towards social justice (Zúñiga et al., 2007). However, for the vast majority of my participants, their understanding of the purpose of interfaith dialogue (even after the course was over) did not match what IGD pedagogy suggests. Instead, most of them saw their interfaith dialogue experience either as an opportunity to learn more about the world's major religions, or a place to refine their own beliefs by comparing them to others.

To clarify a bit, nearly all of my participants explained that their motivations for taking this class was purely because it was either a required class for their degree program, or it was a convenient class that would satisfy one of their general education requirements. Only a few of them took the class out of sheer interest in the topic.

However, most of them purposefully chose to register for the religion-themed dialogue over several differently themed IGD classes they could have chosen. Thus, my description of their motivations and expectations in this section refers primarily to their selection of this theme over other IGD themes, not to their selection of this class altogether.

The most prominent desire and/or expectation my participants stated for their interfaith dialogue experience was to learn more about other religions, as they would in an introduction to world's religions course – or, "Religion 101" as I have called it in previous chapters. They explained that they had not had many, if any, opportunities in their lives to learn about other religions, but were curious nonetheless. In essence, they recognized their religious illiteracy – the phenomenon Eck (2001) and Prothero (2008) claim is detrimental to our society – and sought to address it. Yet, ECU does not have a religion department where students can turn for this type of learning experience – which several of my participants lamented – so they came to this class hoping for the kind of class they would get from an academic department of religious studies. Participants in all cases expressed the desire for this type of interfaith dialogue, however, only for the participants in case two was this expectation somewhat met. Thus, some of my participants finished their IGD course with a sense that they had failed to reach their desired outcome. In other words, their expectations for the interfaith dialogue impacted their perception of the success of the course in the end.

The second most common motivation and/or expectation my participants shared for enrolling in this class was to gain greater clarity on their own beliefs by

engaging in a philosophical discussion about Truth and divinity with those who believe differently than they do. Again, my participants expressed great interest in these kinds of conversations, but noted that they very rarely, if ever, were able to engage in them because they felt it was socially inappropriate to talk about religion or spirituality with others. Thus, they saw this as a unique opportunity to be with a group of people where everyone knew that the expectation was for them to talk about religion. This type of dialogue is frequently referenced by theologians and philosophers (such as, Hick, 1993; and Panikkar, 1978/1999) as "true" interfaith dialogue, and is one of the more common types of interfaith dialogue that takes place in community settings. Participants of mine from various religious identities, across all three cases, acknowledged that they were hoping for this version of interfaith dialogue, yet only those in cases one and three claim to have succeeded in clarifying their beliefs in this way.

A very small number of my participants also seem to have used the interfaith dialogue experience in the way that Abbott (2013) and Huang (1995) warn us about – for spreading the message of their own religious tradition (or belief system) and seeking converts in the process. Some of these participants were avowed Atheists and wanted to use the dialogue to show the religious students the error in their beliefs. Others were Christians who did what they could to show their classmates the Truth and the glory of Jesus and Christianity. The Atheist participants that admitted to this goal at the outset changed their minds about this during the class. As they began to better understand their religious classmates, their interest in proving them wrong diminished. As for the Christian participants, although I cannot be sure that any of

them intentionally entered the IGD course with this purpose in mind, a couple of them did take opportunities as they presented themselves to steer their peers towards Christianity. One of them, as I described in chapter five, made an overt appeal to his classmate to return to the church. Another (not previously mentioned) used more covert tactics, and admitted that her evangelism training had taught her to "plant the seed" and bring people into Christianity in a less "pushy" fashion (*S28, Christian*). Even one of the facilitators (in case two) approached her role as a facilitator in a way that raises doubts about her intentions for potentially seeking converts. While this was by no means a widespread theme among my participants, it is important to note that it did take place. It is precisely this type of behavior that causes some individuals to express fear or hesitation regarding participation in interfaith dialogue – as discussed in chapter two.

Interestingly, another comment I heard from several of my participants regarding their motivations for selecting interfaith dialogue (over another IGD theme) had to do with their assumptions about the nature of race and/or gender dialogues. Several White Christian male participants explained that they did not want to take a race or gender dialogue because they thought that White people and men, respectively, would be attacked in those classes, and they did not want to be in a situation where they were seen as an oppressor. For instance, one White Christian male student explained that he heard rumors about the race and gender IGD courses that confirmed his suspicions.

> I heard horror stories about White males in the other dialogues from
> other people in my minor. They said that in the race one they bash on

White people the whole time, and in the male/female one they bash on

men the whole time, so I wanted to avoid that. (*S30, Methodist*)

Yet, these White Christian males, like the one quoted above, did not consider that

Christians, as a dominant/oppressor group with regard to religious identity, would be

put in a comparable position.

In a similar vein, participants from a wide range of identities (with regard to

race and gender) told me that they were drawn to the religion-themed IGD because it

was a mystery to them. While they knew what to expect in a race or gender dialogue

(i.e., power imbalance between White people and People of Color or men and

women), they truly had no idea what to expect out of a religion dialogue. In other

words, the assumption of a discussion about power imbalances between Christians

and non-Christians was not something that the vast majority of my participants

anticipated or even fathomed. It is possible, then, given the assertion that one's

approach to interfaith dialogue impacts the experience and the outcomes (Huang,

1995; Panikkar, 1978/1999), that this led to a lack of time and attention spent on that

topic in all three of the cases in this study. What is clear, however, is that my

participants did not understand religious identity in the same way that they

understood race and gender identities – which, in itself, was a reoccurring theme

throughout this research.

Misunderstanding Religious Identity

In chapter one I raised the point that among scholars who write about social

identity development and power dynamics, religious identity in particular is largely

overlooked. For those who do talk about it, there does not seem to be a consensus on

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what language to use when referring to individuals' religious/spiritual selves, how to define one's religious identity, or what constitutes religious identity based privilege and oppression. In that light, it comes as no surprise that my participants in this study were also unclear about the concept of religious identity. Nearly all of them conflated religious identity with a specific set of beliefs – i.e., that religious identity is a choice that can be easily changed at any time. Most of them, even non-Christians, also used a Christian/Abrahamic yardstick when measuring religiousness and religious identity, which caused them to overlook some of the ways in which some minority religious groups are marginalized in our Christian dominant society.

Belief vs. Culture

The vast majority of my participants in this study interpreted religious identity as a set of beliefs, and overlooked the socio-cultural elements of religion. Understanding religious identity in this way, made it possible for some of them to present themselves as Atheist or Agnostic because they did not believe in God, despite being raised in a religious family or community. Moreover, because the dialogues in all three cases focused more on religious beliefs than religious identity, the students were not forced to reflect on their own religious socialization. As a result, socio-political power dynamics between dominant and subordinate religious groups was largely glossed over. Most prominently in case three, many of the subordinate religious identities that were present in the room (Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist) did not get any attention because those particular students chose to identify themselves according to their beliefs rather than their religious identity.

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For the non-Christian students, a flat out denial of their religious culture was somewhat difficult. After all, coming from a minority religious group, the differences in their religious culture (as opposed to the dominant Christian religious culture) was more obvious, and therefore harder to deny. Aside from the Buddhist student in case three, all the non-Christian Atheists or Agnostics at least mentioned their cultural religious identity as an influence in their life, albeit one that they attempted to distance themselves from. The Atheist/Agnostic Christian students, on the other hand, had a more difficult time recognizing the cultural religious influences on their lives and worldviews because of how normalized Christian culture is in the United States. This, however, was not addressed overtly in any of the three cases in this study, so it was not something that my participants (neither believers nor non-believers) got out of their IGD experience. Yet, this is precisely the type of lesson IGD seeks to teach students – that identity is socially constructed, and that dominant identities are normalized, while minority identities are seen as different.

Religious Identity Is a Personal Choice

Stemming from their understanding of religious identity as a set of beliefs rather than a culture, the majority of my participants claimed that religious identity is a personal choice. As one student stated, "race and gender are things that you can't change about yourself, but the religion one is your own belief, you can always change that, but you can't change your race, so it's kinda different" (*S6, Questioning Christian*). This aspect of religious identity, the perception that it is a personal choice, made the students in this study particularly sensitive to the negative stereotypes about their religious group, because they felt it reflected on their own

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personal decisions. For that reason, when describing their religious identities, my participants in this study preferred to define themselves, and their beliefs, uniquely. Accordingly, many of the dialogues were centered primarily on explaining each other's individualized perspectives on spirituality and exchanging philosophical opinions about life, death, and the existence of a higher power. For instance, in the common IGD activity, Personal Stories, students are typically asked to describe how they have experienced life as a member of their relevant social identity category. However, in all three cases of this study, students used the Personal Stories activity to help their classmates understand exactly what they do believe and what they do not believe. In case three, the group spent an entire two days (out of only seven total class sessions) clarifying their beliefs and sharing their opinions about religion. My participants explained that this was necessary for them to do, because, unlike race or gender, it is often difficult to know someone's religion simply by looking at them. Moreover, once they made their religious identity known to their classmates, they felt a greater need to go beyond their overarching religious identity label to explain the nuances of their own beliefs – which they said was not the case for identities like race or gender.

> With gender, you're either a man or a woman, or transgender, or
> queer. But, with religion, you have to say what religion you are, then
> your denomination, then if there's a sub-group you have to explain
> that, then you have to go over how religious you are, and then you can
> go from there. (*S4, Methodist*)

In identifying themselves uniquely, some of my participants (even some of the religiously adherent individuals) attempted to distance themselves from their own religious identity because they did not want to be associated with some of the negative connotations attached to their religion. The Hindu student who claimed not to be Hindu because she disagreed with some of the practices that were associated with the religion is one example of this. Additionally, there were at least two Christian students who, even though they regularly attended Christian rituals, claimed that they were not religious because they did not want people to perceive them as blindly following the institutionalized Christian church. It is interesting to note that, when attempting to reject the negative stereotype of their religion, they chose to detach themselves from the group altogether, instead of simply demonstrating that those stereotypes do not apply to them – something that is not really an option for an identity like race. Their perception that religion was a fluid identity selected by personal choice made this possible.

Thinking of religious identity as a set of beliefs made purely by personal choice does not take into account the impact of one's family and community environment that socializes them into a particular identity. Scholars such as Beverly Tatum (2010) have written at length about the way that individuals are socialized into various identity groups, including religion, starting at birth, through the messages they receive throughout their lives – both obvious and subliminal. These messages impact the way individuals see themselves and the way they are seen by others. However, when it comes to religious identity, many of my participants in this study

did not see it this way. The potential fluidity of religious beliefs, to them, made religion a unique case.

Measuring Religious Identity with a Christian/Abrahamic Yardstick

One last point I would like to make about the way the students in this study understood religious identity, was the way they used a Christian and/or Abrahamic yardstick when measuring religious identity. For starters, the language that was used throughout the dialogues was oriented toward Christianity. Christian students would describe other religious traditions using their own language – i.e., "church" to describe all houses of worship, or "bible" to refer to all religious texts – but the non-Christian students often did that as well. This was particularly the case for the non-Abrahamic students, who seemed much less confident that their Christian peers would understand what they were talking about unless they used Christian language. Ross, for example, explained that his parents attended "Buddhist church" (*S38, Atheist Buddhist*), and Parth repeatedly assured his classmates that he did not "worship idols" (*S14, Hindu*).

The most striking example of this, however, came from Kavita, who, when put on the spot to talk about her religion used words like church, bible, priest, and Jesus to carefully draw comparisons between her religious practice and that of the Christians. She did this because she wanted them to be able to understand, and "didn't want Hinduism to be swept under a rug" because the Christians could not relate to it (*S27, Jain/Hindu*). Yet, after reflecting on that experience, she regretted not talking about the things that she thought were important about her religion. Instead of talking about how her ॐ pendant was just like the Christian students' cross

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pendants, she realized she should have used the opportunity to talk about how different Hinduism is from the Abrahamic religions.

> [The Abrahamic perspective] is such a stark contrast to Hinduism. In Hinduism we acknowledge all of the gods, Jesus, Allah, etc., as being a real God. We believe that there are multiple paths to God and each individual can choose the path that most suits their lifestyle. So, I think that everyone is a Hindu but has chosen a different path. Essentially, a person may be Hindu but pray to Jesus because that is the path they chose to get to God. I wish I would have talked about that, especially because people don't learn about Hinduism in school, or when they do the textbooks are usually totally wrong. (*S27, Jain/Hindu*)

However, because the language being used by the rest of the group was Christianized, she adopted that language in order to assimilate to the group, rather than describing herself in a way that was more authentic to her religion.

Beyond the more obvious use of Christianized language, the extent to which a religious tradition was even considered a religion was based entirely on a Judeo-Christian-Islamic paradigm. I observed this mindset from students with both Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic religious identities. For instance, one Christian student made the claim that Buddhism is not actually a religion: "Like, Buddhism, I don't even call that a religion, it's a lifestyle. Some people see the Buddha as a deity, but that's not the real Buddhism, it's more about a lifestyle and a spirituality" (*S20, Atheist-Christian*). He used his own culturally Christian perspective to determine that Buddhism, a religion that 7.1% of the world's population adheres to, is not a religion

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(Pew, 2012 December). The fact that many Buddhists see the Buddha as a historical figure and not a god means that Buddhism is not a religion, when measured against an Abrahamic yardstick. Moreover, he asserts that those who do view the Buddha as a divine entity are not practicing "real" Buddhism, as if to outright reject those Buddhists' religious tradition and identity.

Another example of this phenomenon came from Ross, the only participant in this study with a Buddhist religious identity. As I explained in my description of him, he expressed hesitation about labeling his parents as Buddhist because they did not attend a Buddhist temple regularly. Growing up in a small Christian community, he saw everyone around him going to church on Sundays. Thus, because his parents simply practiced their rituals in their home and only attend a Buddhist temple intermittently, their religiousness did not measure up to what he saw the Christian version of "religious" was in his community.

The use of a Christian/Abrahamic yardstick to measure all religions put those from non-Abrahamic identities at a disadvantage during the dialogues. Because the majority of the students in each dialogue approached their understanding of religion from a Judeo-Christian-Islamic perspective, those with non-Abrahamic religious identities were faced with a group that did not understand the basic foundation of their worldview. For example, Meenu, the Questioning Hindu student in case three, decided not to present herself as a Hindu in the class because she knew that she was coming from a religious tradition that was, "totally different from the Judeo-Christian idea [of what religion is]" and did not want to deal with having to explain herself (*S39, Questioning Hindu*). This calls into question whether or not Allport's (1954)

equal status condition for positive intergroup contact, that IGD pedagogy claims to uphold, was actually met. As I explained in chapter two, Wagner and Machleit (1986) found that mastery of the same language is necessary for all participants in a contact situation to truly have equal status. Therefore, participants in this study who were from non-Christian and/or non-Abrahamic religious traditions may have had a lower status in these classes because they were expected to fit their religious identity into a Christian/Abrahamic mold. Given that the majority of the dialogues in this study used Christianized language to talk about religion and religious identity, the Christians were not faced with adapting to language and terminology that was inauthentic to their religion, the way that other students were.

Difficulty Grasping the Concept of Christian Privilege

Understanding the concept of Christian privilege was also difficult for many of my participants in this study, likely stemming from their misunderstanding of religious identity. During my post-dialogue interviews, only a few participants were able to articulate what Christian privilege is, what forms it takes in our society, and how it is perpetuated. Intergroup Dialogue pedagogy is designed to teach students about socially constructed identities and the injustices created and maintained by those with more powerful (i.e., privileged) identities. However, because most of the students did not see religious identity as a socially constructed identity in the first place, recognizing the privilege and oppression associated with religious identity was not easy, and for many of them, that recognition did not occur. Moreover, because Christian privilege was not an explicit part of any of the three IGD classes analyzed here, it is hardly a surprise that this was not something the students learned.

Due to the syllabus template given to all IGD facilitators by the program coordinators – which includes mandatory readings about identity, socialization, and privilege/oppression – one might assume that all students who take an IGD class are at least exposed to these ideas. However, most of my participants admitted to me that they did not do any of the readings. Many (not all) of the students in case one did the readings because they were given journal prompts by the facilitators that specifically asked them to tie the readings into the dialogue activities. Despite that, because the readings were never directly discussed in the class, the students were on their own to make sense of the readings. In cases two and three, on the other hand, students did not receive journal prompts asking about the readings, nor were the readings ever brought up during the dialogues – giving the students even less motivation to do them. Yet, even for those who did the readings, the lack of attention to Christian privilege in particular made many of the students see the readings as "irrelevant to our dialogue" (*S4, Methodist*). Instead of discussing privilege/oppression as it pertains to religion, the readings covered privilege and oppression pertaining primarily to race and gender, which, as one White male student explained, seemed off-topic to them.

> [The readings] were kind of interesting, like, the one about identity. I
> never thought about privilege before, like how being White makes me
> kind of privileged, being a male makes me kind of privileged. That
> sort of made me think. They weren't really helpful though when it
> came to the class. (*S32, Questioning Catholic*)

Left to their own devises, many of the students did not make the connection between White privilege or male privilege and Christian privilege.

While in general I think it is fair to say that the majority of my participants did not learn about Christian privilege at all, there are two exceptions to this. First, several of the students in case one did come away with an understanding of Christian privilege as a result of the "Happy Holidays" vs. "Merry Christmas" dialogue, as I described in chapter five. However, for many of them, this understanding remained at a very surface level. When I asked the students in case one to tell me what they learned about Christian privilege, only a few of them (including the non-Christians) could name a single example of Christian privilege other than federal and school holiday schedules.

Secondly, several students who had previously learned about privilege (most through the lens of race and/or gender) – either from a differently themed IGD or a course in an entirely separate department – were able to recognize certain aspects of their religion-themed IGD class that hinted at privilege and oppression in terms of religious identity. Even they, however, pointed out that it was not a central theme of the class as it had been in their other classes. "I think we scratched privilege in this [class] … The gender [IGD class] went head on with privilege, and it came directly from the stereotype activity, but we didn't do that in this one" (*S37, Atheist Muslim*). Many of them shared that they wished we had talked more about Christian privilege because it was something they were curious about, but did not fully understand. For instance, when I asked one student to tell me what he learned about Christian privilege, he responded, "Nothing, because that didn't happen, you know that didn't happen. I tried to bring it up. I struggle with that. I didn't like that we didn't isolate it to religion. We talked about it as a White/male/Christian thing" (*S16,*

Presbyterian). These students may have come away from the class understanding that Christian privilege exists, but because there was no dedicated time in any of the classes to specifically discuss it, many of them did not get as sophisticated an understanding of Christian privilege as they do of White and/or male privilege.

A common interpretation of religious identity based privilege that I heard from many of my participants was that it is localized. For instance, several students explained that while non-Christians may be oppressed in Christian dominant areas, that the opposite is true in more cosmopolitan areas of the country. "Like, in the Bible Belt, you're going to have a different dynamic of who has privilege versus in the Northeast or in the middle of a city" (*S30, Methodist*). Many of the non-Christians even claimed that they did not face religious oppression because they grew up in communities where their minority religion was well represented. I heard several comments similar to, "The only thing I can think of that I'm not privileged is the major holidays and to me it's not that big of a deal. I grew up in a strong Jewish community, so I've never felt a lack of privilege" (*S23, Reform Jewish*).

This interpretation of Christian privilege largely conflates religious oppression with interpersonal discrimination – i.e., if you have never experienced overt discrimination that you were aware of, you are not oppressed. One Muslim student blatantly stated that because he has never faced religiously motivated bigotry in his own life, he does not think that Muslims are oppressed. "I mean, maybe Muslims are a little less privileged just because of the whole stereotype of Muslims and terrorism, but it doesn't really affect me at all, so I don't see how I'm less privileged than anyone else" (*S25, Muslim*). Peggy McIntosh (1998) pointed out, however, that

people are often socialized to believe that oppression and bigotry are only found in "individual acts of meanness," but that the "invisible systems conferring unsought social dominance" of one group over another is far more prevalent and detrimental to marginalized groups (p. 151). Thus, understanding Christian privilege in this way – that it is largely interpersonal and depends on community context – disregards the most important aspects of religious oppression. This denial of one's own oppression is also indicative of the phenomenon that Freire (1968/2000) describes – that oppressed people's are often blind to their own oppression because they are socialized to believe that their position in society is so completely normal.

Another common opinion I heard from my participants was that religious oppression does not exist in this country because our constitution guarantees freedom of religion.

> In America, we have religious freedom codified in the law, so people
> of different religions, yes, they're in the minority, but they weren't
> treated as poorly as racial minorities or as women were in our history,
> so there's not a lot of difference in terms of social status. So, religion
> isn't as correlated with discrimination as gender or race. (*S30,*
> *Methodist*)

These students often compared the situation here in the United States to countries with less, or no, religious freedom in order to make the point that religious minorities do not experience oppression in our society.

> I mean, everyone in the class sounds like they had a pretty good
> childhood. They never had to face death because of persecution for

their beliefs. Even me, I've never gone through any crazy

circumstances, like, living in the Middle East or something like that.

So, we're all privileged. (*S38, Atheist Buddhist*)

While they do have a point that religious minorities in the United States experience

less violent and overt government sanctioned oppression than in many countries

around the world, it does not negate the violence, discrimination, and oppression that

religious minority individuals and groups do face in this country. As Galtung (1996)

and other peace education scholars remind us, invisible forms of institutional

oppression, when they go unchecked, lay the foundations for war and violent conflict,

and are, therefore, also extremely important to recognize, understand, and address.

Some participants in this study claimed that religion and privilege did not

relate to one another. "I don't think religion has anything to do with privilege" (*S28,*

Christian). One Muslim participant expressed particular confusion about this topic.

"I mean, how is someone not privileged? I don't see how that's possible. It's not like

there's oppression of religion" (*S25, Muslim*). Others flat out denied that Christians

were privileged at all. Instead, they saw Atheist and non-religious individuals as

having the most privilege in our society. For instance, one Christian student – who

had a very sophisticated understanding of White privilege, and made several remarks

throughout her interfaith IGD course about how she is oppressed as a Black woman –

did not make the connection when it came to religious identity.

When it comes to religion, I do not think the privilege/underprivileged

system applies because all religions face some form of oppression.

The general non-religious, let's say Atheists, are more privileged,

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because they get to decide, "We don't want God or anything religious in the schools." And then, check, it's done for them. And, like, the Bible definitely talks about the rod and the child … we're not abusing them or anything, it's just what God instructs us to do, but we're not allowed to hit children because it's considered child abuse. So, in that sense I think that Atheists are more privileged. (*S3, Christian*)

The students who held this perspective – that Atheists are most privileged and that Christians are oppressed – were all Christian, although certainly not all Christians shared this view.

As this section indicates, the students I interviewed for this study presented a wide variety of perspectives on, and interpretations of, Christian privilege. Undoubtedly, there was no consensus reached about the existence (or not) of Christian privilege in any of the three IGDs analyzed here. The overall issue of privilege and oppression as it pertains to religious identity remained quite unclear to my participants, even after their courses were complete. To demonstrate just how much incongruity there was amongst the students in this study, I compiled a graph (see Figure 6) charting their responses to one of the questions (actually more like an activity) I asked in my post-dialogue interviews. I gave them a piece of paper with the numbers ten through zero on the side, intended to represent the spectrum of religious privilege – ten being the most privileged, zero being the least (see Figures 5a/b for examples). Then, I asked them to list religious groups next to the numbers in whatever order they thought best represented the spectrum of religious identity privilege and oppression. I did not require that they include any specific set of

religious identities, nor did I prohibit any of their responses that were not actually

identities (i.e., confident people).

Figure 5: Privilege Perception Interview Activity

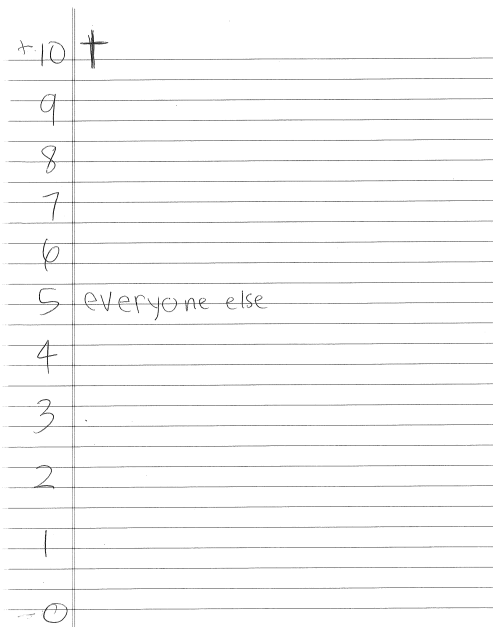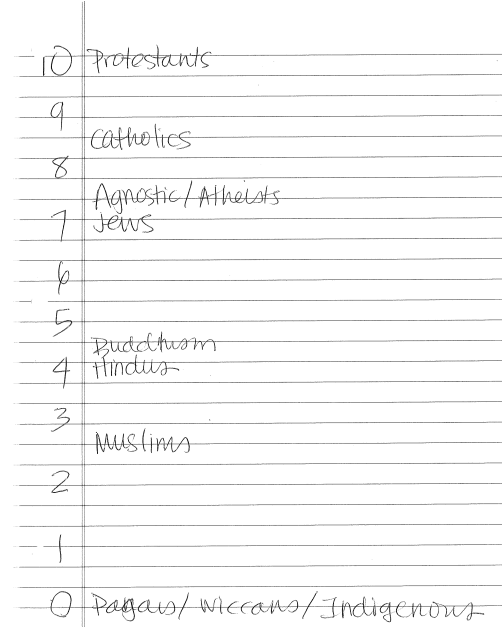Figure 5a   Figure 5b

As a result, not all of my participants used the same groups or labels in their

responses. The graph, therefore, does not equally represent the students' perspectives

on all religious identity groups. My goal in asking this question was simply to get an

idea of what they thought about religious identity privilege. Ultimately, then, the

intention of this graph is not to make any definitive or conclusive statements about

the reality of religious identity privilege and oppression. Indeed, that is beyond the

scope of this dissertation. However, it is interesting to note just how varied the

responses are, as an indication of the lack of consistency in what the students did, or

did not, learn about Christian privilege in this religion-themed IGD course.

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# Figure 6: Privilege Perception Chart
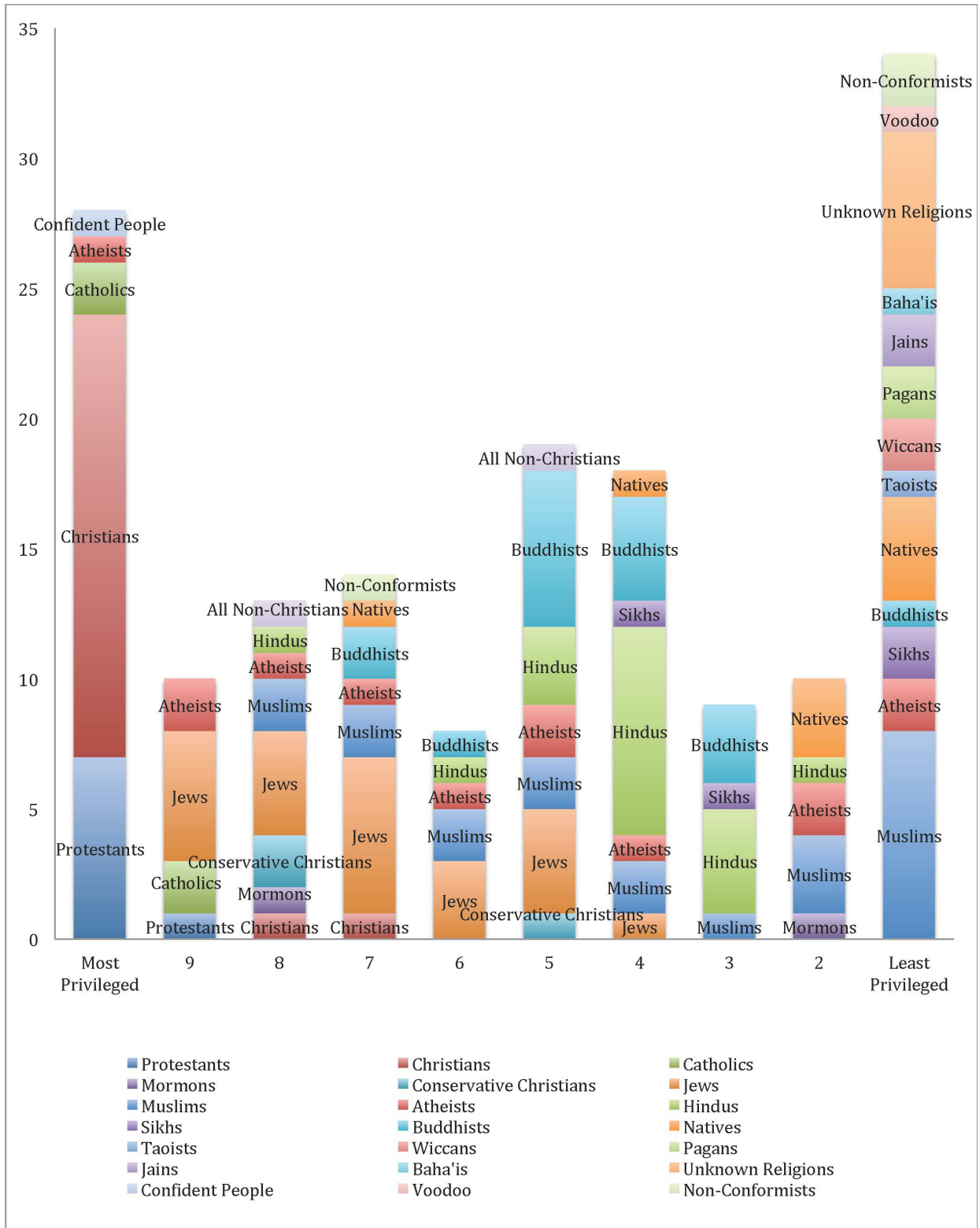
To make this graph, I simply counted the number of participant responses corresponding to a given group label in each point value category (10-0). For convenience, I combined responses for the "1" and "0" category, but in reality most of my participants lumped those two numbers together during this activity anyway. A quick analysis of the graph shows that Christians definitely appear most often in the "most privilege" category, but are spread across categories ten through two (including all types and denominations of Christianity represented on the chart). Jews span from categories nine to four, Muslims from eight to one/zero, and Atheists all the way from most to least privileged. Hindus, Buddhists, and other non-Abrahamic and/or smaller religious identity groups are also scattered across the spectrum.

A more simplified presentation of this data may indicate a generalized view of the spectrum of religious identity privilege held by my participants. In Figure 7 below, I charted the weighted averages of my participants' responses to this interview activity, along with the range of their responses (highest to lowest for each given religious identity group). For the sake of space and brevity, I left out non-identity labels (e.g., "confident people" or "non-conformists"), I included all denominations of Christianity into one category, and I collapsed many of the religious groups that were mentioned only once or twice into a category labeled "other." It is difficult to comment on the extent to which these responses align with theoretical or conceptual discourse pertaining to religious identity privilege/oppression due to the lack of literature on this topic. However, the wide range of responses within each identity

category does remain a striking reminder that many of my participants are still

unclear about this concept.

Figure 7: Privilege Perception Chart with Weighted Averages
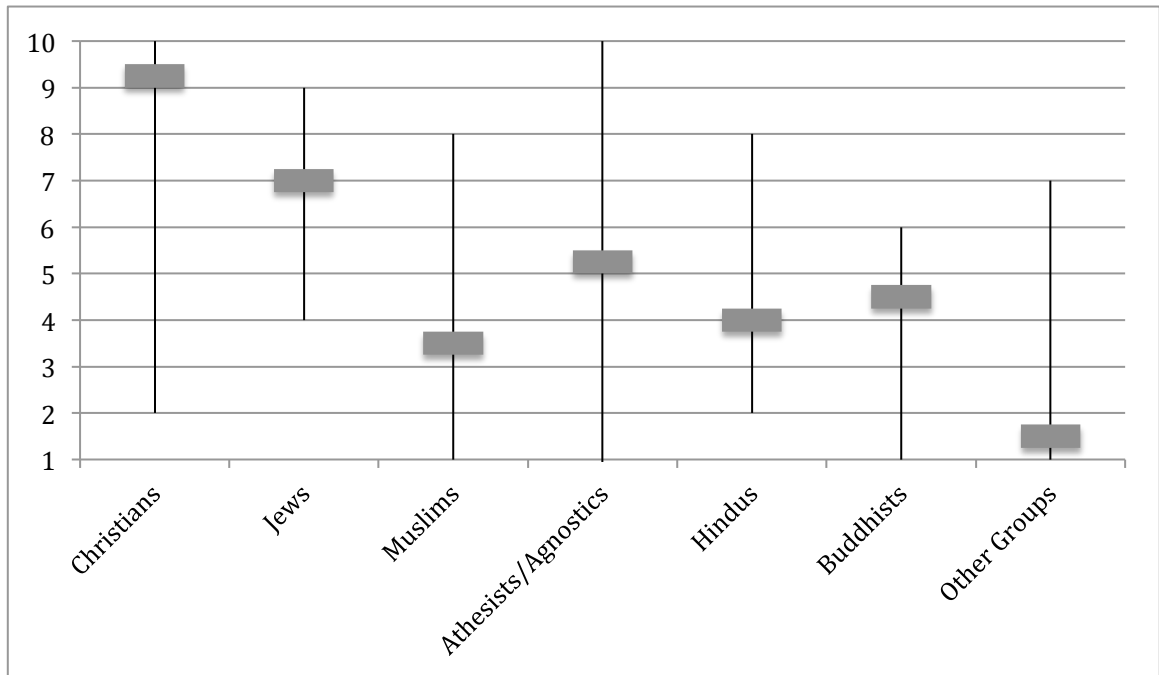
In essence, these two charts seek to illustrate that the concepts of Christian

privilege and religious oppression are highly complex, and for many are quite

unclear. As I described in chapter one, this is an issue that is also fairly under-

developed amongst scholars – indicated by both the lack of literature on this topic,

and the lack of consensus from those who have written about it. Thus, it is difficult to

make comparisons to previous literature when judging the "rightness" or "wrongness"

of these responses. Dessel et al. (2013) suggest that dialogues about religion may not

be as successful in raising awareness of privilege as other types of identity dialogue.

This study, when considered against the body of literature that affirms the success of

race and gender IGDs in raising awareness of White and male privilege, certainly

contributes to the point Dessel and her colleagues raise about this particular identity theme.

The Impact of the Second Largest Group

One of the most immediately obvious trends I noticed across the three cases in this study was how impactful the second largest group of students was to the direction and outcomes of each interfaith dialogue experience. I use the generic term "group" here instead of "religious identity group" because in case three, the non-believer students served as the most impactful group – which I will explain in this section. Whereas the largest group in each class (i.e., Christians) remained constant, the second largest group in cases one and two was the Jewish students, and in case three was the non-believer students (not including the students in the "other" group). I found that the second largest group of students had a much greater influence on the dialogue than the largest group of students, and certainly more influence than those "groups" with only one or two individuals.

In cases one and two, there were four Jewish participants each, and only two and three other religious minority students respectively. Judaism is the largest minority religion represented at ECU – 24% of the student body as of 2009 – so it seems natural that Judaism would be well represented in these interfaith dialogue courses as well. The result of that, however, is that these two IGD courses felt like Christian-Jewish dialogues to many of the students. The dialogue topics, the examples used when making points about differences in perspective (i.e. Hanukkah vs. Christmas), and even the Out of Comfort Zone experiences students chose to do,

were all heavily influenced by the number of Jewish students in the classes, and the large Jewish presence on campus.

For the Jewish students, having a stronger representation of Jews in their courses was extremely helpful. Students with different levels of adherence to, and interpretation of, Jewish law allowed the diversity within Judaism to become apparent to the rest of the group. Also, because no one Jewish student was ever the only Jew in the class, they felt comfortable – at least more comfortable than the other minority religious students – speaking up because they knew they had classmates that would understand where they were coming from. Other students, however, expressed some disappointment about the Christian-Jewish dynamic of the class. For some of them, it meant not being able to learn about some of the other minority religions they were interested in learning about. "I really wanted to learn more about the minority religions. I felt like the class was a Catholic vs. Jewish dynamic" (*S5, Catholic*). For others – the non-Jewish religious minority students in particular – it meant not having their own perspectives heard as much, and feeling drowned out by the Jewish students. "There was a second majority with the Jewish population there, so it felt like me and [the Hindu student], we were the uber[25] minorities, so we were heard even less" (*S13, Muslim*).

This "uber minority" status (as the Muslim student quoted above put it) made these students feel like they did not have much power to impact the group. When I asked them (as I did all of my participants) how they thought they impacted the

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[25] The term "uber" (a German word meaning, "super") is used here to indicate that the Muslim and Hindu students were extreme minorities, when compared with the Jewish students who were more well-represented minorities.

group, most of them revealed that they perceived their own impact on the group to be either very small or completely non-existent. For instance, in my interview with Kavita from case two, I asked her how she thought the class would have been different if she was not there. She responded, "Honestly, I don't think it would have been that different because I don't think I made that big of an impact on the class. Maybe they just might have gotten more time to talk about Christianity or Islam or Judaism" (*S27, Jain/Hindu*). For her, not only did being the only Jain/Hindu student in the class make her hesitant to open up about her religious identity, it made her feel unheard and misunderstood as well.

Case three had an entirely different dynamic, which was also impacted by the second largest group in the class. Whereas cases one and two were dominated by Christian-Jewish dialogue topics, case three centered on a debate between believers and non-believers. In this case, those students who were the only individual from their religious identity group in the class (i.e., the Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist students) presented themselves as non-believers in the class, and, in that sense, were actually part of the second majority group that influenced the direction of the dialogue. The one Jewish student who was a believer (as opposed to the other two Jewish students in that class who aligned themselves with the non-believers), then, became the "uber minority" in the sense that she was the only non-Christian who was a believer. Throughout the debate between the believers and the non-believers, the beliefs that were the primary target of discussion were Christian beliefs; thus, leaving this particular Jewish student in a situation where her beliefs, practices, and experiences as a Jew did not play a role in the conversation. Similar to the "uber

minorities" in cases one and two, she did not speak very much throughout the course, and did not perceive herself as being very influential to the group. While technically, she was not the only person of her identity group in the class, she did not have the type of support that one typically gets when there are other members of their identity group present. Given that the dialogue in case three did not actually involve religious identity – it was primarily a discussion about religious beliefs – having other Jews in the group did not help her.

According to the design of IGD pedagogy, however, the focus of the dialogue should always be students' identities (not their beliefs). A key element of that design is that students are carefully selected according to their relevant social identity, "with each of the social identity groups participating in the dialogue ideally represented equally" (Zúñiga et al., 2003, p. 9). Nevertheless, for the purposes of enrollment, "identity groups" typically gets translated as dominant and non-dominant. Meaning that, in a race themed IGD, program coordinators would enroll an equal number of White and non-White participants. Likewise, religion-themed IGDs typically consist of an equal number of Christian and non-Christian students. This feature of IGD is intended to maintain equal status for all participants in the group, as Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis suggests (Maxwell, Nagda, & Thompson, 2011; Zúñiga et al., 2007). Yet, when interpreted in this way, some students actually end up being the only person of their identity group in the dialogue. Across all three cases, there were six students – two Hindus, one Jain/Hindu, two Muslims, and one Buddhist – who were the only person of their religious identity group in their IGD course. According to Chesler, Wilson, and Malani (1993) individuals who are the only members of their

identity in a dialogue situation, are made to feel like a spokesperson for their entire

identity group – something that IGD explicitly seeks to prevent (Zúñiga et al., 2007).

In IGD themes where there are a larger number of possible identity groups,

preventing the spokesperson phenomenon, and achieving equal status among all

participants, may be a bit more difficult, as this research shows.

The Impact of the Facilitators

The final issue I would like to raise from my own inductive analysis of this

study relates to the facilitators' impact on the students' dialogue experience. Despite

IGD's detailed pedagogical design and requisite four-step process, in practice, the

people who are responsible for facilitating that process have a great deal of autonomy.

Thus, the implementation of IGD depends considerably on those who are actually

executing the pedagogy. Beyond any level of impact that the students themselves, or

the identity breakdown among them, may have on the direction of the dialogues, the

individual facilitators influence the IGD process. Three things in particular stand out:

(1) facilitators' own self-awareness, (2) facilitators' understanding of IGD pedagogy,

and (3) the dynamic between cofacilitators.

Facilitators' Own Self-Awareness

First, the level to which the facilitators understand their own identity/identities

determines the extent to which they are able to fulfill their role as a facilitator. As

Maxwell, Chesler, and Nagda (2011) point out, facilitators must continually engage in

critical self-reflection on their own identities in order to be effective facilitators in the

way IGD pedagogy expects them to be. In IGD, one facilitator in each course is

intended to have a dominant identity (relevant to the theme, of course) and the other is intended to have a non-dominant identity. According to IGD scholars, this is necessary in order to ensure that all students are supported appropriately through the dialogue experience.

> The dialogic approach to working across differences calls for a partnership in facilitation – that is, cofacilitation – in which two facilitators reflect the identities of the social identity groups engaged in the dialogue. In this way, all participants have access to someone who has a social identity similar to their own, someone who has knowledge of their group's experiences, struggles, and hopes and who can empathize with the learning edges that come up in intensive cross-group engagement. (Zúñiga et al., 2007, pp. 40-41)

In their respective roles (as dominant identity facilitator and non-dominant identity facilitator), facilitators are expected to be "aware and knowledgeable about their own multiple social identities" (Zúñiga et al., 2007, p. 55) and to "understand and be sensitive to the impact of their social identity-group memberships on themselves, their cofacilitation relationship on others in the group, and vice-versa" (p. 42).

In essence, the dominant identity facilitator is responsible for understanding their own privileged identity and the power they may have in the group, and to demonstrate that critical self-awareness as an example for the students in the course. The non-dominant identity facilitator, on the other hand, is equally responsible for understanding the system of privilege/oppression related to the IGD theme and to demonstrate their own critical self-awareness for the group. Thus, if IGD facilitators

do not understand their relevant identities and the ways in which they are privileged and/or oppressed as a result of those identities, it is difficult for them to facilitate in the manner expected in IGD. Zúñiga et al. (2007) assert that "facilitators must have conceptual and empirical knowledge about the nature of prejudice, discrimination, and institutionalized privilege and oppression" (p. 42). Without this knowledge, properly guiding a social justice oriented dialogue process simply does not work.

Case two of this study provided an excellent example of this. The dominant identity (i.e., Christian) facilitator did not indicate to the group (or to me in any of my personal communication with her) that she understood the nature of privilege and oppression as it pertains to religious identity. In that way, she did not fulfill her role as a dominant identity facilitator. As I mentioned previously, this particular facilitator had several years of experience working with this IGD program and facilitating dialogue courses – including one that was included in the Multiversity study that has produced a majority of the existing empirical literature about IGD. She was also extremely knowledgeable in her own right about the nature of privilege and oppression more generally (especially as they relate to race and gender) given that her own doctoral dissertation and personal research agenda focused on this topic. Despite this knowledge, she still interpreted the religion-themed dialogue as "different" from other IGD themes, and guided the students in case two through a sharing of religious traditions and beliefs rather than a dialogue about social identity and social justice. The non-dominant identity facilitator in case two (the Buddhist facilitator) also did not fulfill her role as a non-dominant identity facilitator in that she did not use her religious identity, or her awareness of the oppression that non-Christians face, in her

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approach to facilitation. Rather, her other oppressed identities – her sexual identity in particular – became more central to the weekly dialogues.

Cases one and three offer an alternate example. Although Christian privilege was not explicitly raised as a topic of discussion in either case, the facilitators hinted at the existence of Christian hegemony with a few of their activities and probing questions. The dominant identity facilitator (who was the same in both cases) was sensitive to her own privilege as a Christian, and, on several occasions, spoke up on behalf of the non-Christian students and asked the Christian students to reflect on where their own perspectives and experiences were coming from. While less overt than IGD pedagogy suggests, her attempt to recognize her own privilege in the group and be an ally to the non-Christian students certainly impacted the tone of the classes for the better. Whereas in case two, where at least three non-Christian students admitted to feeling scared of and/or misunderstood by the Christian facilitator, the non-Christian students in cases one and three felt confident in the Christian facilitator's intentions to support them.

Similarly, the non-dominant identity facilitators in cases one and three (although, neither of them truly had a non-Christian religious identity) used their position as Agnostic non-believers to provide examples of their own experiences existing in a Christian dominant society throughout the course. They also encouraged non-Christian and non-believer students to share their perspectives when they seemed to be holding back, they posed their own questions to the group raising alternative points of view, and they initiated activities that intended to raise the issue of Christian privilege. Albeit, much of this was done in an extremely subtle way, so much so that

many of the students did not realize it. Given that both of them were raised Christian, and thus did not have a non-Christian religious identity, there was a limited extent to which they could truly understand the minority religious students' "experiences, struggles, and hopes," or "empathize with the learning edges that come up in intensive cross-group engagement" as Zúñiga et al. (2007, p. 41) say non-dominant identity facilitators should be able to do. Nevertheless, the non-dominant identity facilitators' awareness of the social-institutional power structure related to religious identity did show in that they were attentive to the voices of the non-Christian and non-believer students.

Facilitators' Understanding of IGD Pedagogy

The second issue that impacts the facilitators' ability to fulfill their responsibilities is the extent to which they understand IGD pedagogy itself. IGD facilitators go through training in order to learn about the pedagogy and how to implement it. However, not all will grasp it in the same way. Facilitator training is not uniform across IGD programs – unlike the pedagogical process, which is assumed to be uniformly implemented. Some programs will hold overnight retreats, others will require their facilitators to complete a semester-long course; the length and type of these trainings varies widely (Maxwell, et al., 2011). At ECU, facilitators attend two full-day workshops prior to the start of each semester. These trainings cover IGD pedagogy, theoretical foundations, desired outcomes, and potential processes. Yet, despite the great deal of effort put forth by program coordinators and facilitator trainers, there still remains the possibility that some facilitators will not fully understand IGD in the way they are intended to. For instance, the Quaker facilitator

in case three had many years of experience and a fairly thorough understanding of IGD theory and pedagogy. However, he expressed surprise to hear that he and his cofacilitator were expected to explicitly cover Christian privilege in their class – an important element of the social justice approach to dialogue that IGD literature espouses.

An outcome of this research that is more surprising, however, is the possibility that facilitators may not understand IGD in the same way across all possible identity themes. As the Christian facilitator in case two demonstrated, one can be extremely well versed in IGD theory and pedagogy (and the social justice orientation upon which IGD rests) in terms of race and gender, yet completely misunderstand IGD in terms of religion. This misunderstanding of the pedagogy on her part resulted in the entire class shifting off-course, in the direction of a more informative or democratic type of interfaith dialogue rather than a social identity and social justice oriented one. Facilitator training workshops tend to cover the pedagogy in more general terms, instead of reiterating the pedagogy again and again for each new identity theme. Furthermore, because a majority of the literature on IGD (both theoretical and empirical) emphasizes race and/or gender, these identities do tend to receive the most time and attention during training sessions. Case two of this study provides an example of what can happen if an IGD facilitator lacks an identity-specific understanding of the pedagogy.

Conversely, if a facilitator does have an understanding of the pedagogy, and the purposes of IGD, they are able to influence the direction of the dialogue towards the experiential, social identity based, social justice oriented dialogue that IGD is

meant to be. For example, students in all three cases of this study shared a desire to learn about their classmates' religions in a "Religion 101" format. However, the facilitators in case three openly and assertively stopped the group from going down that path by explaining that IGD was not meant to be an *Introduction to World Religions* course. Moreover, the Christian facilitator in cases one and three had the foresight to add a paragraph in the syllabus explicitly stating (as I also quoted in chapter six),

> The purpose of this dialogue is not to debate, nor is it to educate others
> about your religious/spiritual/secular beliefs. Instead, the purpose is to
> use dialogue towards an understanding of self and others, and for
> addressing issues of privilege and social justice. (*Course Syllabus*)

From experience, she knew that students in religion-themed IGD courses tend to want or expect an education about other religions, and this was her attempt to steer them away from that tendency.

Another way in which facilitators' lack of understanding of IGD pedagogy can be a detriment to the class is when the facilitators do not interfere in the dialogue when they should. According to Zúñiga et al. (2007),

> A social justice approach to dialogue involves the facilitators in
> contextualizing individual and group processes in larger systems of
> oppression and privilege … When interaction in the group reflects
> larger sociopolitical processes (for example, men or other members of
> privileged social groups dominating the dialogue session or women or
> members of oppressed groups retreating into silence or erupting in

anger), the facilitators need to illuminate it constructively. (p. 40)

If a pair of facilitators were to overlook this type of group dynamic (one that mirrors larger societal power imbalances) they not only miss the opportunity to illustrate how privilege and power manifest in social situations, they also reinforce those sociopolitical processes that keep marginalized groups marginalized.

This is exactly what happened in case two. The majority of the time in each dialogue was spent discussing the Christian students beliefs, practices, and perspectives, leaving less time for the non-Christian groups – particularly Kavita who was the lone Jain/Hindu student in the group. The group also asked questions of Kavita in a much more critical and condescending way than any other student or religious group experienced. However, the facilitators failed to point out this unequal sharing of time and imbalanced questioning as an example of Christian privilege. Their failure to do so left Kavita, and a couple of other minority religious students, feeling slighted by the facilitators and, in Kavita's case, the entire experience.

Dynamic Between Cofacilitators

Another issue relating to the facilitators that impacts the IGD process is the dynamic that plays out between the two cofacilitators in the course. Maxwell, Chesler, and Nagda (2011) explain that the relationship between dominant and non-dominant identity facilitators may have a tendency to replicate target/agent power structures, even among experienced and self-reflective facilitators. Thus, they must attend to their various identities when negotiating their work and their collaboration as cofacilitators. Without careful consideration of their relative identities, it may be

possible that they exhibit implicit acceptance of the power imbalance between target (i.e., non-dominant) and agent (i.e., dominant) groups.

Yet again, this brings us back to case two. The Christian facilitator in case two was definitely the more authoritative of the two, and the Buddhist facilitator obviously took a backseat when it came to making decisions and leading activities. Granted, this was likely because the Christian facilitator was much more experienced with, and knowledgeable about, IGD. However, it was clear from their in-class interaction, that they had not effectively negotiated or considered the power difference in their religious identities as a cofacilitation team. The Buddhist facilitator, who was interrupted several times throughout the class by the Christian facilitator, did not speak up in the class as much as she felt she should have. When I spoke with her after the course was over (separately from her Christian cofacilitator), she explained that because it was her first time facilitating an IGD course, and because she knew the Christian facilitator was very experienced, she deferred to the Christian facilitator nearly every step of the way. She even admitted to me that she noticed the Christian facilitator did not recognize her own privilege, but decided not to say anything because she was "new" and did not want to rock the boat. In essence, if the power dynamic between these two facilitators had been more effectively managed, it is possible that the Buddhist facilitator would have been more vocal about pointing out the Christian facilitator's privilege and the need to address that issue with the group.

The relationship between first time facilitators and more experienced facilitators does not always have to be so one sided. In case one, the Christian

facilitator was also very experienced and the Agnostic facilitator was new. However, the power imbalance I observed between the facilitators in case two was not an issue in case one. These facilitators shared the responsibility of leading activities, making announcements, and deciding on strategy mid-dialogue. They respected each other, and presented themselves as equals in the class. Their positive relationship not only modeled a balanced dominant-to-non-dominant relationship, it also made the environment in the class much more comfortable.

By comparison, the dynamic between the facilitators in case three felt less comfortable. Both facilitators had a great deal of experience with IGD, and both seemed to have strong opinions about how to conduct the course. As a result, the students sometimes received mixed messages about the dialogue process. For instance, some weeks the students received a journal prompt (i.e., a list of questions to guide their reflection process), but for others they were not given a prompt and were told that it was better for them to write a more free-flowing journal about whatever came to mind. On another instance, the facilitators disagreed (in class, in front of the students) about the guidelines of an icebreaker activity. Thus, the students were given two options for how to participate in the icebreaker activity – option one being the preference of one facilitator, option two being the preference of the other – and the activity failed to make the point that it intended to make because of the lack of congruence. For this pair of facilitators, there were clearly some discrepancies in the way they each envisioned the process and the outcomes of the dialogue, which may have hindered their ability to guide the students through the IGD process effectively.

As these three cases demonstrate, the dynamic between IGD cofacilitators is important, and is something that impacts the students' experience. The three pairs of facilitators represented in this study had varying levels of IGD understanding and experience, and varying levels of self-awareness. Thus, it is difficult to pinpoint any one quality of their relationship that may ultimately hurt or benefit the IGD process. Instead, I simply raise these three issues – facilitator self-awareness, facilitator understanding of IGD, and cofacilitator dynamics – as facilitator-related factors that impacted my participants' experience in this study.

Outcomes Pertaining to IGD Theory

When evaluating the outcomes of my three cases more generally, it truly depends on the approach one takes to interfaith dialogue itself. As I outlined in chapter two, there are many different processes and goals for interfaith dialogue. The understanding one has of what interfaith dialogue should be, inevitably colors the interpretation of "success" or "failure" of an interfaith dialogue. Peace education scholars (i.e., Galtung, 1996; Harris and Morrison, 2003) posit that learning about other religions and increasing understanding of others' beliefs is a step in the direction of increased harmony and decreased hatred between conflicting religious groups. Thus, if we were to judge the experiences and outcomes of the participants in this study through this lens, than we might say that the type of interfaith dialogue that took place in these three cases was successful. However, this study looks at interfaith dialogue in the social justice oriented terms that IGD outlines. Thus, while my intent was to inductively analyze the experience of my participants in the sections above, naturally, I interpreted much of my data through the lens of an IGD practitioner.

However, I did purposefully seek out processes, experiences, and outcomes of this type of interfaith dialogue that fell outside of what is currently highlighted in IGD literature. In this section, I look more closely at the outcomes of these three cases in light of the three specific goals of IGD that have been advanced by IGD scholars and supported by existing empirical studies on the topic.

The three goals, and three corresponding theoretical outcomes, of IGD are: (1) to increase students' awareness and understanding social justice issues pertaining particularly to social identity based privilege and oppression; (2) improve students' cross-group communication skills and thereby deepen their cross-group relationships; and (3) develop students' ability and commitment to intergroup cooperation for addressing social identity based social justice issues (Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013; Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007). The second research question that guided this study, sought to understand how the outcomes in this religion-themed IGD course aligned with existing theoretical outcomes based on studies involving primarily race and gender IGD courses. Thus, this section specifically addresses that question. While there is no simple yes or no response to the question of whether my participants did or did not meet these three theoretical outcomes, I will use this section to describe the ways in which they did and the ways in which they did not learn or achieve what existing theory says they should have.

Increased Awareness of Identity Oppression and Social Injustice

The first stated goal of IGD is to increase students' awareness of identity oppression and social injustice. However, as Christian privilege, oppression of religious minorities, and religious identity-based social injustice were not central foci

in any of the three cases analyzed here (at least not in an overt way, as is typically

expected in IGD), it is difficult to say that this was actually an outcome my

participants achieved. As I explained earlier in this chapter, the concepts of religious

identity and Christian privilege were misunderstood by many of my participants (and

at least one facilitator) – at least when compared to the way that IGD and other social

justice literature uses the terms identity and privilege. As a result, the type of

awareness that most of my participants did receive was different than the type of

awareness described by IGD theory.

Case one most closely adhered to IGD's social justice approach to dialogue

with the discussion about holiday greetings. However, because there was no direct

attempt to link holiday greetings to larger socio-political systems of oppression, most

of the students in that class did not gain a deeper understanding of Christian privilege

beyond the holiday issue. In case two, the students discussed religious identity in

terms of ritual practice and historical tradition, but attempts by religious minority

students to raise the issue of Christian privilege were largely ignored. Case three

treated religious identity as an issue of personal belief and became a debate about the

existence of a higher power, rather than a dialogue about religious identity injustice.

Interestingly, in cases one and two, a hot topic dialogue that had the potential

to discuss religious oppression became a discussion about another type of identity

oppression. Students in both cases chose "religion and politics" as a "hot topic"

issue, but in both cases this transformed into a discussion about gay marriage and the

oppression of sexual minorities. Rather than raising issues that squarely aligned with

religious oppression – e.g., the use of public funds to support Christian creationist

curricula in schools (Dolan, 2014; Kirk, 2014) or the Christian politicians who control

the representation of various religions in history textbooks (McKinley, 2010) – their

dialogue highlighted the use of religious beliefs to legitimize LGBT oppression.

Certainly, the oppression of sexual minorities is an important issue, but it does not fit

with the supposed theme of the course: religious identity-based social injustice.

Similarly, discussions about stereotypes in cases one and two also diverged into a

conversation about race and racism – also an important issue, but also not the topic of

this particular IGD course.

It seems that when it comes to this first goal of IGD – increasing students'

awareness of identity oppression and social injustice – that there may be a tendency to

defer to other identity related topics that the students were already familiar with, such

as gay marriage or racism. Alternatively, as in case three, identity and social justice

issues may be overlooked entirely in favor of a more philosophical discussion about

students' fundamental curiosities about divinity and spirituality. A discussion about

personal beliefs, such as this, keeps the dialogue on a personal and intellectual level,

and does not lend itself to larger conversations about socio-political institutions, as

IGD intends.

There were a handful of participants in this study, however, who did increase

their awareness of religious identity based privilege and oppression. For instance,

there was one Christian student in case one who genuinely read and carefully

considered the way the reading assignments related to religious identity (the only one

of my participants to do so). There were also a handful of students who had taken

previous IGD classes and came to this religion-themed IGD class with an already

developed an understanding of identity privilege and oppression. Some of these students (certainly not all) were able to translate religious identity into what they previously learned about privilege and oppression in terms of race, gender, socio-economic status, or sexuality. Yet, for those students who did not already understand social identity based privilege and oppression (save for the one Christian student from case one I mentioned earlier), an awareness of religious identity oppression and social injustice was not an outcome of the class for them.

Improved Cross-Group Communication Skills and Relationships

The second goal, and theoretical outcome, of IGD is an improved ability to communicate across lines of difference (religious difference, in this case) and, by doing so, building deeper cross-group relationships. Most of my participants across all three cases of this study agreed that this IGD experience made them more comfortable with the idea of future interfaith dialogue and confident in their ability to effectively engage in such a dialogue. For many of them, this was the first time ever speaking about religion with people outside of their families or their respective religious communities. Prior to this class, they saw religion as a taboo conversation topic, and thus were at once both fearful and curious about interfaith dialogue. However, by virtue of having this experience under their belts, they became less afraid to speak about religion with others in the future. The IGD class helped them get an idea of what to expect out of an interfaith dialogue (at least the type of interfaith dialogue they had in their respective course), gave them the chance to practice how they might present themselves and their questions in an interfaith dialogue situation, and afforded them the opportunity to breakdown some of their

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stereotypes about other groups of people – which, in turn, made them more open to the idea of communicating with people from these groups.

Not surprisingly, the way my participants expressed their improved communication skills corresponded with the way their class was conducted. Several of my participants in case one, for instance, talked about how they learned to look for the deeper meaning behind someone's opinions or perspectives in order to better understand where their feelings are coming from. In case two, participants expressed an increased understanding of how they should talk about their own religion, when trying to explain it to others. Then, in case three, most of my participants asserted a new-found perspective on how to look for common ground with others in an interfaith dialogue situation, rather than approach it in either an offensive or defensive manner.

Of course, not all of my participants felt this way. As I explained in chapter five, some of the students ended the class feeling even more hesitant about interfaith dialogue than they were before – i.e., less confident in their ability to effectively communicate with people from other religious groups, and less eager to establish cross-group relationships. Those who thought their feelings were ignored and their perspectives were misunderstood developed a stronger aversion to interfaith dialogue. This was true for Kavita in case two as well. Throughout her class, she felt targeted and overlooked, and she blamed herself for not knowing enough about her religion to effectively communicate her beliefs and traditions. As simple as it may sound, those who had a positive overall experience in the class felt affirmed in their cross-group communication skills and embraced the lessons they learned about how to engage in

interfaith dialogue. Conversely, those who did not have a good experience in the class felt defeated, and were much less likely to think that they learned anything about how to better communicate or build relationships with people from other religious groups.

Increased Capacity and Motivation for Social Justice Action

The third theoretical outcome of IGD is that students will develop an increased capacity, commitment, and motivation for intergroup cooperation addressing social injustice. While this goal may seem somewhat vague, and measuring the extent to which students achieve this goal may seem a bit difficult, my participants' responses to my inquiry about their capacity and motivation for social justice action revealed some interesting insight into their understanding of the relationship between religious identity and social justice. The MIGR study that has produced much of the literature that supports IGD's success in achieving this goal has operationalized "social justice action" as either self-directed behaviors (e.g, avoiding the use of stereotypes or educating yourself about other groups), other-directed behaviors (e.g., speaking up when others use derogatory comments), and intergroup collaboration (e.g., joining organizations that promote diversity or participating in campaigns that address social injustice) – as noted in their survey measures (Gurin et al., 2013). Accordingly, I offered these specific examples to my participants in my interviews with them in order to ascertain their self-perceived growth in this area.

Several students across all three cases agreed that this experience made them more interested in learning about other religions and more likely to challenge their own assumptions about other religions. Some of them also commented that after

recognizing the inaccuracies of some of their own ingrained stereotypes, they planned

to share that knowledge with their friends and family. In other words, their capacity

and motivation for self-directed and other-directed behaviors was increased. Only

one participant (from case one) expressed sincere intention to participate in

intergroup collaboration as a result of the class. This student, as I mentioned in

chapter five, joined a religious diversity oriented organization before his IGD class

even ended.

> For my the OCZ experience I went to the weekend of Twinning (a
>
> Jewish-Muslim partner learning weekend) and it ended up being very
>
> interesting, but it didn't satisfy everything I wanted to know so I
>
> joined the Jewish-Muslim Alliance, I'm on their Board now. So, had I
>
> not come to this class I wouldn't have gotten that opportunity. So, this
>
> class will lead to more learning. I also met some cool friends. (*S8,*
>
> *Atheist Christian*)

The class, through the OCZ assignment, presented an opportunity for him to engage

in this type of intergroup cooperation, and he took it. While others suggested (in a

somewhat cavalier fashion) that they might be interested in future intergroup

collaboration, their potential for doing so had more to do with opportunity than with

their own internal motivation. A common response I heard from my participants was

something like, "If I had the opportunity, yeah, but I wouldn't go out of my way to do

it" (*S10, Conservative Jewish*).

Other participants, however, explained that the class did not motivate them to

behave any differently than they did before, particularly because there was no

discussion in the class about how one might go about changing their behaviors. As one student said, "We didn't talk about social justice. I guess it's important that people aren't discriminated against for their religion, but that desire hasn't been increased because of this class" (*S30, Methodist*). For these students, because their class remained on the level of personal beliefs and opinions, rather than linking individual experiences to larger social trends as IGD is supposed to do, they did not develop the capacity for other-directed behaviors or intergroup collaboration. "I didn't learn any of the issues. So, like, I don't feel the need to advocate for Islam because I didn't learn anything about Islam or the issues that Muslims face. I only learned about people's opinions" (*S33, Questioning Catholic*). Without an overt discussion about personal and interpersonal behaviors that advance social justice, these students simply saw their IGD course as an interesting experience where they got to exchange beliefs and opinions with others. Yeakley (2011) asserts that students' learning in their IGD courses depends largely upon the extent to which they are truly challenged to understand how others' perspectives are shaped by their social identities – and for many of my participants, that did not happen here.

On the other end of the spectrum, a few of my participants actually ended their IGD course with a negative view of social justice action and/or intergroup collaboration. For some of them, it was a previously held belief that was not changed by the class. One Christian student, for example, explained that promoting religious diversity would contradict his own religious convictions. "Honestly, I wouldn't go out and try to help talk about Islam with other people because I'm not Muslim, I'm Christian. So, I feel like it's on the minorities to do stuff" (*S2, Christian*). Another

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student asserted that not only does he have no intentions of changing his behavior, he is hesitant about the idea of religious equality altogether.

> I actually have a very large problem with social justice in general …
> like with religious equality; we need to consider that before we just go
> along with it. Like, I don't want Sharia law in America, but that's
> where we're headed because they're gaining a majority. (*S16,*
> *Presbyterian*)

For other participants of mine, it was the IGD experience itself that negatively impacted their perspectives on intergroup collaboration. Such as the Jewish student in case one who was upset by the Christian students in her class for not considering her feelings. She was even less open to interfaith dialogue and even more affirmed in her belief that Christians were closed-minded after her IGD experience. Her interactions with her Christian classmates, whom she perceived to be closed-minded, turned her off from interfaith collaboration and made her even more uncomfortable around Christians than she was before. As Yeakley (1998) pointed out, when students observe unlikable characteristics or behaviors in their dialogue mates, they may come away from the IGD with intensified stereotypes and prejudices, especially if they do not get to address these characteristics through the dialogue – and that is precisely what happened for some of these students.

Another response I got when I asked my participants about this particular IGD goal was that when it comes to religion and religious identity, social justice action simply does not make sense. Surprisingly, this type of response came mostly from students who had a fairly good understanding of the concept of social justice more

generally (i.e., in terms of race, gender, and other more commonly discussed identities). Many of them also made comparisons to race as a way of explaining why religion and social justice do not make sense together.

> Because the class itself didn't bring [social justice] up, I'm not sure that was something I got out of the class. I could see how you could get that out of the race class, but because religion tends to be much more of a community-based thing, I think it's more difficult. I don't really know how social justice could really even relate to religion.
> (*S22, Orthodox Jewish*)

It seems as if their perception of religious identity as something that is purely an individual choice (rather than a cultural identity one is socialized into from birth), made it difficult for them to understand why advocacy for religious minorities is needed.

> In terms of social justice, there's not much for our class to talk about. If some religion has low privilege, I really don't care; I'm not a part of that religion. It's not like they're in need of my help, whereas, like, poor people or something, it's going to help them live. Like, you made that choice to be that religion. I guess that's why it's different. People do get judged pretty hard on their race, so there's a lot of research done on both race and gender discrimination. Religion is a choice, but you can't change your race. (*S32, Questioning Catholic*)

Still others – again, those who clearly understood social justice activism in terms of race and gender – conflated religious identity based advocacy and activism with

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proselytization. Some were supportive of such behaviors: "I'm planning to go on a mission trip next year, so I already do that kind of stuff" (*S28, Christian*). Others were less so: "In terms of religious activism, I think it's hard to do that and also promote social justice because sometimes those two conflict" (*S4, Methodist*). When I tried to clarify the meaning of social justice for religious minorities using examples from the MIGR survey, I got responses like, "I mean, I guess that makes sense, but not really" (*S28, Christian*). These students (all Christians) saw the promotion of religious diversity as a direct contradiction to what they thought was one of the core tenets of their religion – evangelism.

What is interesting to note here is that the concept of social justice action, promoting diversity, and/or advocating for equal treatment for minorities was more difficult for many of my participants to understand when it came to religious identity than for other identities. Furthermore, the lack of overt attention to the topic of social injustice and systemic oppression, made it all the more difficult for them to comprehend why behavior change and intergroup collaboration is necessary. The uniqueness of religious identity, and the fundamental misunderstanding of religious identity by most of my participants, impacted their understanding of religious identity-based social justice, and thereby their ability to achieve this third goal of IGD.

In fact, the uniqueness of religious identity, and the differences in the way my participants understood religious identity when compared to identities like race and gender, was a common thread throughout this study. Given that much of the research and literature on IGD is based on race and gender dialogues alone, and that almost

none of it is about religious identity, the ability to adequately understand a religion-themed IGD using existing IGD theory can be difficult. As I detailed in chapter two, there are several ways one might interpret or approach interfaith dialogue, and if one seeks to conduct an interfaith dialogue using the social justice approach that IGD promotes, it is necessary to clearly outline the intentions and goals using the language of religion and religious identity. Simply using language pertaining to race and gender, and attempting to apply it to an interfaith dialogue, leaves too much potential for the salient details to be lost in translation. Accordingly, this study has several implications for theory, research, and practice related to IGD, interfaith dialogue more generally, and the larger conversation about student identity and diversity initiatives in higher education. The following chapter will outline those implications, and will offer several avenues for future research that this project has uncovered.

Chapter 9: Implications and Conclusions

As one of the first research studies to explore the use of IGD to dialogue about religion, religious identity, and religious privilege/oppression in the higher education context, this dissertation offers several important contributions to theory, research, and practice. Beyond IGD, the findings of this study have implications for fields such as critical identity studies, student affairs, and social justice. Moreover, although the type of interfaith dialogue featured here was very specific to IGD pedagogy, the description of the process and the students' experiences may be of use to those attempting interfaith dialogue in other contexts as well.

Implications for Theory

To frame this study, I drew from theories from a range of fields – Intergroup Dialogue, student affairs, critical identity studies, religious studies, and social justice education. As such, I will comment here how my findings impact these various bodies of knowledge and literature.

Theoretical Outcomes of Intergroup Dialogue

First and foremost, this study is grounded in, and seeks to expand upon, existing theoretical outcomes of IGD pedagogy. As I have stated previously, to this point, IGD research has been heavily weighted towards race (with a secondary emphasis on gender), race relations, racial oppression, and White privilege. Accordingly, theoretical outcomes of IGD have been developed using data primarily from race and gender dialogues. Yet, IGD scholars continue to suggest that such outcomes apply to IGD about all social identity categories.

While there was certainly some overlap between the theoretical outcomes of IGD and the learning outcomes that my participants in this study described to me, there were also some important differences. For one, most of them did not learn about the socio-structural system of oppression that religious minorities face in this country – the first, and arguably the most fundamental, theoretical outcome of the overtly social justice oriented IGD pedagogy. Admittedly, this likely has a lot to do with the lack of direct attention given to Christian privilege and religious oppression in each of the three cases presented here. Nevertheless, the failure of all three religion-themed IGD courses to address religious identity based socio-structural injustice the way IGD theory and pedagogy says it should, does seem to indicate a potential difference with this particular identity theme that current literature does not speak to.

Secondly, the vast majority of my participants did not experience any increased interest, motivation, or knowledge about future intergroup cooperation for addressing religious identity based socio-structural injustice (as the third theoretical outcome of IGD suggests). For some, this had to do with the lack of awareness about religious oppression that I described above. For others, this came from their misunderstanding of the concept of religion as a social identity. Still others asserted that advocacy for religious minorities contradicted their own religious obligations. Clearly, the responses of my participants demonstrate that, when it comes to religious identity, there are a number of ways in which students may interpret the concept of social justice action. Thus, it may not always be the case that they develop an increased capacity for addressing religious identity based social justice issues in the

way that IGD theory indicates, especially when it is not make explicit in the IGD process.

Instead, when I asked my participants to describe their own perceived learning outcomes, they described (a) an increased exposure to personal opinions and belief systems they were not previously aware of, (b) more knowledge about other religious traditions, and (c) greater clarity on their own spiritual beliefs. While sharing personal opinions and perspectives is certainly an ascribed element of IGD, the cases analyzed here lacked the process of sharing how individuals' *experiences* as a member of their religious identity relates to larger normative social, historical, and political patterns. Moreover, IGD pedagogy explicitly rejects the notion that IGD should be used as a place for students to teach their peers about their identity group (Zúñiga et al., 2007). Lastly, some may argue that achieving greater clarity on one's spiritual beliefs, but according to IGD theory, students are expected to gain an increased understanding of their relevant social identity, and one's personal spiritual beliefs certainly do not constitute their religious identity.

One finding from this study that does have important implications for current IGD theory is the way the second largest group impacted the direction of the dialogue, and how minority students with less representation in the course felt irrelevant, misunderstood, and alone as a result. Existing IGD theory suggests that an equal balance between dominant and non-dominant identity students assures that non-dominant identity students do not feel outnumbered. However, that was not the case in this study, as there were several students who admitted feeling left out of the loop because no one else in the room shared their religious identity, even if there was an

equal number of Christians and non-Christians. So, this should make us question, do students in race and gender IGDs feel similarly marginalized if they are the only person of their identity? Are the experiences of a Native American IGD participant overlooked if the rest of the group is comprised of only White and Black participants? Are the experiences of a gender queer or transgender IGD participant overlooked if the rest of the group is comprised of only cis gendered participants? What is the fair and just way to proceed if in fact these participants are being overlooked? Would it be better to select only two identities when defining an IGD theme? Some of my participants in case one said that their class felt like a Christian-Jewish dialogue. Would it have been better if it were limited to those two identity groups alone in order to prevent the experience that the Muslim and the Hindu student had in that class? Is it better to more evenly balance the identity breakdown to make sure all possible identities are equally represented? Is that even possible? A couple of my Christian participants in case three used the believer to non-believer ratio (5:7) to argue that religious people's perspectives are oppressed. How might a facilitator effectively make a point about privilege and oppression if dominant identity students are actually outnumbered by the various groups of non-dominant identity students? It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to attempt an answer to any of those questions, but simply raising these questions certainly complicates current IGD theory.

Unfortunately, I am unable to make any conjectures about what my participants would have learned had their IGD courses adhered more closely to the social justice nature of IGD pedagogy. It is possible that the three theoretical goals current literature describes would have better applied to these cases. However, what

this research does highlight is the potential for implementation of religion-themed IGD to manifest in ways that vary greatly from the pedagogy as it is intended to be, even by facilitators who are considered extremely knowledgeable about IGD, who have been trained extensively, and who have even contributed to existing IGD research through participation in the MIGR study. If religion-themed IGD is missing IGD's social justice target in a well-established IGD program like the one at ECU, it is surely possible that it is happening elsewhere too.

Critical Religious Identity Studies

Beyond theory related specifically to IGD pedagogy, the outcomes of this research highlight the need for a larger, more sophisticated body of conceptual and theoretical literature looking at religious identity from the same critical perspective that exist for other identities. My findings here indicate that both students and facilitators seem to have difficulty applying broader conversations about identity, privilege, and oppression to religious identity. For that reason, we can no longer assume that discussions about these important issues will make sense for all social identities if/when they are only presented using the language of a select few identity categories. Clearly, the differentiation between religious identity and personal belief needs to be explained in more certain and explicit terms, and the current and historical state of religious identity oppression needs to be more widely critiqued. Scholars in the field of religious studies (e.g., Eck, 2001, 2007; Prothero, 2008, 2010) have made great strides in documenting the traditions, practices, and experiences of religious minorities in the United States, but have not gone so far as to link their research with concepts like identity socialization, Christian privilege, and socio-

structural oppression that social scientists use. Conversely, scholars in fields like

sociology, social justice, and critical identity studies continue to work hard at raising

important issues related to privilege and oppression when it comes to identities like

race, gender, and sexuality. However, religious identity tends to get overlooked in

these discussions, despite being an integral element of culture. As I reviewed in

chapter one, there is a small group of scholars who are beginning to write about

Christian privilege, but their (our) message has yet to be sufficiently heard among the

larger body of critical identity literature. This dissertation, in part, represents a call

for a stronger, more clearly articulated body of theoretical and philosophical literature

on religious identity, Christian privilege, and all of the related social justice issues.

Student Affairs and Interfaith Relations in Higher Education

Chapter one also reviewed existing literature relating to students' religious

identities when it comes to student affairs and student programming at colleges and

universities around the country. To date, much of this literature lacks a critical social

justice orientation. For instance, as Small (2011) pointed out, student development

literature applies Christian identity frames to theories about the development of

students' spiritual identities regardless of what religious background they come from.

Moreover, the scholarly discourse that does acknowledge students' varied religious

identities and the need for interfaith relations in higher education (such as, Patel &

Brodeur, 2006; Kazanjian & Laurence, 2007) does not address issues like Christian

privilege or proselytism that serve to marginalize members of smaller religious

groups. The present research points out the gap in this literature and demonstrates the

need for expanded and more comprehensive theories on how to effectively support

religious minority students on college campuses.

Implications for Future Research

As is typical of qualitative research, this study produced more questions than

answers – questions that are important to consider and are in need of further attention.

In this section I will offer a number of areas for future research that would serve to

fill some of the gaps in theory I described in the previous section.

Intergroup Dialogue Research

The most important area for future research needed about IGD is more theme

specific research. This study looks at religion specifically, and found that, in practice,

when discussing religious identity, sticking to IGD pedagogy can be a lot more

complicated than theoretical literature seems to suggest. The findings I discuss here

uncover several challenges with regard to religion-themed IGD that current theory

does not address. Thus, future research is needed to determine (a) if the challenges

that I observed in this study are happening elsewhere in other IGD programs, (b) what

additional challenges and/or unique qualities of the religion-themed IGD may be

impacting students' experiences and learning outcomes, and (c) what processes may

be taken to make it easier for facilitators to adhere to IGD pedagogy more closely

when in a religion-themed course. Another research agenda that might serve to

strengthen IGD theory with regard to religious identity is to explore why students

have such a hard time understanding religion as a social identity. My participants in

this study seemed to suggest that the fluidity of religious identity makes it different

than the other IGD course topics. However, identities such as socio-economic status and size are also (arguably) fluid in some instances. So what really is it about religious identity that students (or people in general) struggle to understand?

Furthermore, because the three cases in this study played out so much differently than existing descriptive literature on IGD suggests, it is important that we not assume all themes of IGD necessarily unfold in the same way. Dialogues about identities such as gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, ability, national origin, size, age, etc. all need to be looked at in more depth separately from race-themed IGDs altogether. Are there certain identity topics for which IGD theory needs to be altered? Are there certain identity topics for which IGD pedagogical process needs to be altered? What are the unique challenges and/or qualities of each type of identity dialogue? Researchers, facilitators, program coordinators, and students would all benefit from this type of research because it would allow for more well informed IGD practice overall.

As this study showed, the facilitators – their understanding of IGD pedagogy, their critical self-awareness, and their relationships with each other – all impacted the students' experience. Future research should explore the impact of the facilitators more deeply. Does their religious identity impact the students' experience of the class – particularly the religious minority students? In this study, cases one and three both had two facilitators with Christian religious identities (although with varying belief systems). Is it more beneficial to the students if there is one facilitator with a truly non-Christian religious identity? Does it matter what religious identity the non-Christian facilitator has? Do non-Abrahamic students feel more included and

understood if there is a non-Abrahamic facilitator? How would that impact

Abrahamic religious minority students? What about facilitator training? As it stands,

there is very little literature that makes recommendations about how to conduct

facilitator training. What training processes prepare facilitators to more effectively

facilitate religion-themed IGD (or any of the lesser understood themes for that

matter)? To be sure, there is a wealth of information yet to be clearly understood

about facilitators and their impact on students.

This study also demonstrated how student religious identity breakdown

impacts the dialogue experience. As I discussed above, there are a number of

unanswered questions about what might be the best way, or ways, to balance student

identities in an IGD course. Future research should seek to answer some of these

questions and help us better understand how to proceed without further marginalizing

anyone, or leaving anyone out altogether. In doing so, future researchers should also

seek out opportunities to include students from religious identities that are not

represented in this study, in an attempt to reach a more well-rounded understanding of

the procedures and outcomes of IGD when lesser-known religious groups are

included.

Other Needed Areas of Research

In addition to future research on IGD specifically, the outcomes of this study

point to some potential areas for future research outside the IGD pedagogy. First,

given that the participants with lesser-known and lesser-represented religious

identities felt excluded and overlooked in their IGD course, to what extent to students

from lesser-known and lesser-represented religious identities experience campus life

in general? Granted, there are studies such as Interfaith Youth Core's (IFYC)

Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey (discussed in chapter one), but there

has yet to be very much available literature attending specifically to the voices of

religious minority students and making recommendations for how to make them feel

more included in the campus community.

Furthermore, how are religious minority students reacting to some of the

efforts that seem to attempt interfaith inclusion and/or engagement, yet still ignore

certain smaller religious identity groups and/or their concerns? As I mentioned in

chapter one, IFYC's growing campus interfaith service movement promotes the

rhetoric of inclusion and interfaith harmony, yet may make religious minority

students simply feel as if is an attempt to assuage them without really addressing their

oppression. Is that so? What would be a better approach to campus based

programming for inter-religious understanding? Some campus interfaith initiatives

are actually more blatant about leaving out certain religious groups, yet still guise

themselves as "inclusive." For instance, a couple of years ago, the on-campus chapel

at ECU sent out a campus wide email blast for Jewish, Christian, and Muslim

contributors to their multifaith Tree of Life art project. While efforts like these do

indicate a step in the right direction, in terms of including and showing appreciation

for Jews and Muslims, my own immediate reaction when I saw it was to feel slighted

and unappreciated. Are other religious minority students feeling this way too? Do

certain efforts to be inclusive simply serve to further exclude certain people? How

can administrators and faculty manage to be sensitive to all groups? The campus

holiday schedule is also heavily debated at many higher education institutions – with

respect to the consideration of various religious holidays – so what is the most practical course of action to take in an attempt to honor and appreciate all religious groups? How might increased inclusion of some religious minority holidays affect those from religious groups that are left out? Recently, the Mayor of New York City declared Eid-al-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha (two Muslim holy days) as K-12 public school holidays (they already close for Rosh Hashanna and Christmas), while simultaneously rejecting a request to close schools on the Hindu festival of Diwali (Durkin, 2014). Understandably, Hindus around the country are upset. What about Buddhists, Sikhs, Baha'is, and others who are also left out? Certainly, this is an area that could use some empirical attention.

A final area for future research rises out of the most prevalent theme of this study's findings – the misunderstanding of religious identity. Given that so many students (and facilitators) seem to struggle with the concept of religion as a social identity rather than a set of personal beliefs, further exploration of why that is seems necessary. Such research can contribute to a stronger theoretical discourse on the complex nature of religious identity, as I call for in this dissertation. In order to more effectively teach students about the way that we are socialized into a religion just like we are socialized into our other identities, we first need to understand what is difficult about it in the first place. Surely, this sounds like a tall order, but it is a necessary path of research to pursue considering the obvious struggle, by both Christians and non-Christians, to understand religious identity and religious oppression in this country.

An important element of this dissertation is the potential for it to serve as a resource for people around the country (or the world) practicing IGD, interfaith dialogue, or other kinds of interfaith initiatives in higher education. While research and theory are certainly important, it is my opinion that scholarship should also be accessible and beneficial to those who engage in "on the ground" work about which academic literature speaks. This section seeks to do just that. It offers a series of recommendations to practitioners based on the findings of the study presented here.

Intergroup Dialogue Programs

For IGD program coordinators, facilitators, and other administrative staff involved with IGD, my first recommendation is to ensure that facilitator training includes identity specific language for all social identities your program offers IGDs about. It is not safe to assume that facilitators who are scheduled to facilitate a dialogue about religion will understand what they are expected to do, if the goals, theories, and processes or IGD are only discussed in terms of race and gender. Brief side notes encompassing many different identity categories are not enough. There should be dedicated time to discuss privilege, oppression, and social justice issues for each identity so that facilitators are aware of the direction in which they should be encouraging their dialogue groups.

Program coordinators should also ensure – through interviews, informal conversations, or another method entirely – that facilitators are aware of, and acknowledge their various privileged/oppressed identities, *especially* the one that is

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most relevant to the IGD they will be facilitating. For many people, it is more difficult to fully understand their privileged identities – as McIntosh (1998) and others point out – to these are particularly important to discuss with facilitators before hand. Case two of this study showed us that even when an IGD facilitator is extremely well versed in their own oppression for their non-dominant identities, they may still be completely unaware of the privilege that comes with their dominant identities. To be sure, it is not necessary for all potential facilitators to have a highly sophisticated understanding of the theoretical discourse accompanying each one of their myriad identities. However, it is crucial that they at least acknowledge the power structures related to their identities and show a desire to further explore these topics through the training sessions or through the IGDs themselves.

Relatedly, the roles and responsibilities of the dominant identity facilitator and the non-dominant identity facilitator in any given IGD should be made explicitly clear during facilitator trainings. Facilitators should understand that due to social positioning of their relevant identity, certain questions, statements, or requests have the potential to be either more effective or more damaging coming from either the dominant identity facilitator or the non-dominant identity facilitator. Learning how to manage the power dynamic between dominant and non-dominant identity facilitators in this way should be an integral component of IGD training.

On the topic of facilitator identity, I would recommend that, for religion-themed IGD's, the non-dominant identity facilitators have truly non-Christian identities. While the findings from this study do not necessarily point to the benefit of non-Christian facilitators over Agnostic/Atheist Christian facilitators (in the non-

dominant identity facilitator role), it was interesting for me to notice that in two out of three of my cases individuals with Christian identities filled the non-dominant identity facilitator role. I understand that finding willing and qualified facilitators with the appropriate identities is an extremely difficult thing to do. However, in order to truly follow the pedagogical recommendations outlined by Zúñiga et al. (2007), it is important to do so. A facilitator with a non-Christian religious identity will have a much stronger ability to understand, empathize, protect, and connect with religious minority students than an Agnostic or Atheist Christian facilitator.

In a similar vein, students' religious identities should be carefully considered. When collecting students' self-reported identities during the enrollment process, questions about religious identity should be sure to ask about upbringing and family background. Simply inquiring about a student's current set of spiritual beliefs does not adequately indicate all of the social, cultural, and historical implications of their religious identity. Likewise, using Agnostic and/or Atheist students to fill non-dominant identity seats in an IGD course without knowing the context of their religious upbringing may ultimately imbalance the group towards Christianity. In other words, if three out of seven (in a class of 14) non-dominant identity student seats are filled with Agnostics or Atheists that are culturally Christian, the group now has only four students who grew up as religious minorities. This also may be quite difficult to do, as program coordinators do not have full control over which students sign up to participate in IGD. Thus, recruitment and partnerships with various student groups across campus is essential. Moreover, "incentives" like offering credit(s), having the course satisfy a degree requirement, or even making it a

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mandatory course can boost enrollment and give program coordinators more to work with.

One last thing I will mention is that the way IGD courses are titled may be of particular importance when advertising it in the school's course catalogue. In this study, I explained that ECU chose to title their religion-themed IGD course "interfaith/secular" in an effort to make students who do not believe in a higher power feel welcomed and included. However, I discovered through my research that because of the course's title, most of the students I spoke to indicated that they expected the dialogue to be between "interfaith" people and "secular" people – i.e., a philosophical dialogue about divinity, much like case three of this study. Some of the other IGD courses at ECU have titles that name the dominant and non-dominant identities to be discussed in the class – "People of Color/White People" or "LGBT/Heterosexual" – which may make it more clear to students (and facilitators) that the course seeks to explicitly analyze the power difference between the two groups. I brought this concern to the program coordinators, and they explained that at the time when they were deciding on a name for the class, it did not seem as if the campus community would react favorably to a class named "Christian/non-Christian." However, they agreed with my assessment and have begun the process of determining a new, more appropriate name for the religion-themed IGD course.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education Centers

The IGD program featured in this study was run out of a university office for diversity and inclusion – as many IGD programs are. Offices, centers, departments, and other administrative initiatives aimed at improving the level of multicultural

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understanding, engagement, and sensitivity on college campuses are growing around the country. Whereas the findings of this dissertation speak to religious identity, privilege, and oppression more generally, and shed light on the experiences of minority religious students when discussing such topics, there are certainly implications other types of campus diversity initiatives beyond IGD programs alone.

As I discussed in chapter one, the campus based multicultural movement that took hold in the 1990s focused primarily on improving race relations and diminishing racism. Since then, many of these types of initiatives have expanded to target other types of identity oppression as well. Yet, few of them actively incorporate religious oppression into their programming efforts – despite religion being an integral component of culture. What the findings of this study demonstrate is that religious identity, Christian privilege, and religious oppression are still largely misunderstood and unacknowledged. Thus, it is incumbent upon university offices for diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism to begin addressing this form of identity oppression in a real and substantial way. Efforts such as social justice oriented interfaith dialogue (i.e., what is supposed to happen through IGD), religious minority ally workshops for both students and staff/faculty, or increased support for faculty who would like to include accurate and culturally sensitive curricula about minority religious groups in their courses would all be great first steps to take.

Current campus based interfaith initiatives do not critically address religious oppression, as I have previously stated. Offices for diversity, inclusion, and multicultural education should advocate for interfaith efforts that are more overtly intended to address religious identity based social injustice. Too often, the term

"interfaith dialogue" is used as a catchall phrase for any type of interfaith

programming. Eboo Patel, for instance, gave a presentation at the *American Academy*

of Religion in 2012 where he said that his organization, IFYC, was promoting

interfaith dialogue on college campuses. Excitedly, I contacted him after the

conference to inquire about their interfaith dialogue efforts. I assumed this was a new

initiative since their model, as I knew it, focused on interfaith service, not dialogue.

He responded to me with a link to IFYC's website that simply described the interfaith

service programs they have throughout the country. The misuse of the term interfaith

dialogue in this way should not confuse staff and administrators on campus who are

oriented toward social justice (as I presume/hope the staff in these diversity and

inclusion offices are). Instead, they should be encouraging a deeper level of

engagement and should attempt to inspire more critical interfaith dialogue among the

campus community.

Interfaith Dialogue Outside the US Higher Education Context

For those conducting interfaith dialogues outside the context of US higher

education – maybe in a community space or in a post-conflict region – surely the

findings of this study do not speak directly to that type of work. However, they do

point out some interesting things to consider when designing or implementing

interfaith dialogues of any kind. Most importantly, they demonstrate the importance

of attending to those who may represent smaller groups involved in the community or

conflict. They also warn practitioners of interfaith dialogue that proselytism can

occur during an interfaith dialogue encounter, and that measures should be taken to

prevent such behavior. Lastly, they point to the need to ensure that the language (i.e.,

type of vocabulary) used throughout the dialogue should not cater to one religious group over another. On a more general level, it is my hope that the descriptive nature of chapters five, six, and seven offer helpful examples of the type of conversations, challenges, and successes that may unfold during an interfaith dialogue experience.

Conclusions

This dissertation sought to bring attention to an issue that is currently overlooked by many scholars, administrators, and social justice advocates, especially in the realm of higher education here in the United States: Christian privilege and the oppression of religious minorities. While interfaith initiatives are gaining in popularity on campuses around the country, most of these programs fail to address the deeply rooted and institutionalized marginalization that religious minorities experience as a result of the overarching Christian hegemony in our society. Presented here was a multiple case study of three interfaith dialogue courses at East Coast University that followed the Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) pedagogy. IGD pedagogy overtly promotes a social justice agenda, and thus, offers a promising approach to raising awareness of Christian privilege and religious oppression. However, as the findings of this research indicate, Christian privilege and religious identity are difficult concepts for both students and dialogue facilitators to accurately understand, making it challenging to implement the pedagogy as it is designed. Interestingly, this was the case even for students and facilitators who had an extremely sophisticated understanding of privilege and oppression for other social identities. Other findings demonstrate the tendency for lesser-known and lesser-represented religious identity groups to be marginalized by the dialogue process,

despite the specific pedagogical design which seeks to prevent such power

imbalances within the dialogue group. Implications of this research include (a) the

need to further advance theoretical discourse related to Christian privilege and

religious identity, (b) the importance of expanding educational initiatives seeking to

promote awareness and understanding of these issues, and (c) the obligation for

interfaith dialogue practitioners, faculty, and other higher education professionals to

be more sensitive to the experiences of students with minority religious identities.

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