

A CHRISTIAN, A JEW, AND A WOMAN WALK INTO A BAR:
EXPLORING THE NONRELIGIOUS ELEMENTS OF INTERFAITH WORK

By

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ABSTRACT

As conflicts surrounding the global Muslim community and other religious divisions continue to capture the attention of the media and public audiences, scholars and community practitioners increasingly extol the benefits of interfaith dialogue and action for developing interfaith peace. Yet very little research has been done to understand and evaluate the successes and challenges of this work. As outlined in the Introduction, much remains to be done to examine the challenges in interfaith work, particularly that it is made all the more difficult by the reality that interfaith participants are comprised of much more than just religious identities. Race, ethnicity, gender, personal social networks – these factors and others serve to further complicate the ability of persons to effectively come together in relationship. I examine these challenges in three papers through analyses of interview and survey data collected from interfaith organization participants, as well as interview and focus group data collected from research team members, ourselves an “interfaith” group. Building from Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, in Chapter II, I examine the ways in which a number of ecological factors influence the practice of research, broadening typically narrow views of researcher subjectivity to be more fully ecological. In Chapter III, I show how attention to a nonreligious identity such as gender may help us to better understand individuals’ experiences in interfaith spaces. In Chapter IV, I examine the mesosystemic factors impinging on the interfaith organizations that serve to both support and hinder the individual person’s participation in interfaith work. In the concluding chapter, I propose some future directions and recommendations for interfaith work. These analyses make important contributions to the extant interfaith and social–psychological literatures as well as to the work of interfaith practitioners and organizations seeking to make their work more adaptive and responsive to the needs of the particular persons and local contexts they serve.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During a Monday Night NFL football game on September 29, 2014, Kansas City Chiefs player Husain Abdullah intercepted a pass from New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady and ran the ball back for a touchdown (Dicker, 2014). Immediately upon scoring, Abdullah, a professing Muslim, dropped to his knees and bowed in prayer, a common ritual among Muslims. The game's referee, quite likely out of ignorance of the Muslim ritual of prayer, threw a penalty flag for excessive celebration, a penalty that otherwise is exempted for Christian players who similarly celebrate by acknowledging God (as with quarterback Tim Tebow's widely imitated knee-bow). The referee's actions sparked national public interest, as well as concern among many in the US Muslim population. Elsewhere – with the political maneuvering of the extreme Islamist faction ISIS and the ire of anti-Muslim public figures like comedian and television host Bill Maher – media attention has turned to the rise of “Islamophobia,” a widespread culture of prejudice and bigotry against Muslims perpetuated by, among other things, media portrayals of Islam as an inherently regressive and violent religion (Fisher, 2014). As interfaith scholars like Eck (2001) and Patel (2006) have noted, these two recent events help highlight two realities of the American religious landscape important for my purposes: (1) an increasing awareness of many Americans, even on the NFL stage, of the religious diversity by which they often are surrounded; and (2) religious diversity is quite often met with intolerance and, in some extreme cases, open conflict and violence. These realities also highlight, Eck and Patel have argued, the need for efforts to increase interfaith understanding, cooperation, and peace.

My own interest in exploring interfaith phenomena in the below papers, and my choice of the interfaith organization specifically as my point of theoretical and empirical departure, warrants brief consideration. First, my interest in interfaith phenomena can be explained both negatively and positively. The United States (US) has witnessed a startling rise in Islamophobic attitudes and interfaith¹ violence, including public protests against new Islamic centers in communities across the U.S., successful attempts to legislate against Islamic Sharia Law, media marketing campaigns warning against “radical” Islam, and religiously motivated shootings and homicides. Undergirding these more extreme manifestations of interfaith conflict are persistent, if more subtle, attitudes in the American public that favor Christian manifestations of religious life at the expense of the religious freedoms of those religious minorities who are viewed as “less American” and less desirable within American communities—Muslims, Mormons, Jews, Pagans, and Atheists, to name a few of the more prominent examples (Cohen, 2010; Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, 2006; Edgell & Tranby, 2010; Merino, 2010; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Importantly, these more general attitudes, while rarely erupting into national headline-grabbing confrontations, are often far from benign. The Sikh Coalition, for example, has lobbied for the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation to begin monitoring hate crimes targeting Sikhs (a religious community commonly mistaken, because of their outward dress and appearance, as Muslim

¹ Through the process of studying and collecting data in support of this dissertation, I have encountered a range of terms used to describe the very basic phenomenon of gathering together persons of different religious backgrounds for various purposes: interfaith, interreligious, and multifaith being among the most common. In some instances, these distinctions denote different modes of engaging in practice. For some, an “interfaith” gathering more intimately mingles religious traditions whereas a “multifaith” gathering emphasizes a healthy degree of separation and distance between traditions. In other instances, these distinctions denote more theoretical concerns. Some might argue that “interreligious” is a more appropriate term than “interfaith,” as not all religious traditions acknowledge “faith” as a meaningful concept and would therefore feel less comfortable organizing under such a title. Throughout this proposal, and in the dissertation, I will limit myself to describing these organizations and related phenomena as “interfaith.” I do this for two reasons: (1) oscillating between terms, or attempting to make sense out of and utilize the many different applications of these terms adopted by leaders and organizations, would simply be too cumbersome for me as the writer and for you as the reader; and (2) though terms like “interreligious” and “multifaith” are becoming more popular within certain circles, the overwhelming majority of persons and organizations encountered through this research still describe themselves as “interfaith.” Thus, using the term “interfaith” simply feels more consistent with the bulk of people currently doing this work “on the ground.”

and/or sympathetic to global terrorism), nearly 10% of whom have reported being the victim of a hate crime since the 9/11 terrorist attacks (The Sikh Coalition, 2013). Clearly, then, the American religious landscape is one that is for many people characterized by fear, intolerance, and even violence, and the importance of efforts to ameliorate interfaith strife cannot be overstated.

More positively, interfaith scholars and practitioners have noted the potential social benefits religious groups may offer when they pool their resources to collectively serve their local communities. Noted interfaith leader Eboo Patel (2006), for example, has argued (borrowing from Putnam's, 2000, conception of the religious community as a "storehouse" of social capital) that religious groups working across religious boundaries to serve their local community effectively "bridge and multiply" (p. 21) their social capital, rather than allowing that social capital to remain isolated in separate religious silos. Likewise, theologians Hans Küng (1993) and Paul Knitter (1998), among others, have made strides in formulating a global religious ethic from which various religious groups can work together toward common social and political goals. Interfaith work, then, offers a compelling model for more effectively organizing religious resources to address certain local, national, and global political and social issues.

Of course, there are many varied approaches to improving and harnessing interfaith relations locally and abroad, as Wuthnow (2005) and McCarthy (2007) have detailed. Interfaith work may take the form of political advocacy to protect the rights of religious minorities, sustained religious education programs in local community centers and forums, and short, sporadic collaborations between diverse religious communities on local social service needs or in celebration of certain religious holidays (McCarthy, 2007). While these activities, and many

others, are potentially effective in meaningful ways in improving and harnessing interfaith relations, I have chosen here the interfaith organization as my unit of analysis for several important reasons. First, in contrast to some of the above examples of interfaith work which are more sporadic and temporary in nature, the interfaith organization possesses a degree of stability and permanence and may therefore be preferable for lasting community impact, as well as for certain research and evaluative purposes.

Second, research on the larger interfaith movement remains relatively sparse, and a focus on the site of the interfaith organization may allow us to borrow concepts and theories from other related organizational phenomena, most notably the local congregation, the local civic organization, and networks or coalitions of local congregations and civic organizations (Roozen, McKinney, & Carroll, 1988; Speer et al., 1995; Speer et al., 2011; Warren, 2001; Wood, 2002). I hope I will be forgiven for making certain “leaps” in my analysis necessitated by the dearth of research on interfaith phenomena generally, as indeed unsubstantiated parallels must be drawn between religious congregations and civic organizations and the interfaith organization on which very little empirical research has been conducted. I agree with Patel’s analysis, for example, that interfaith organizations act as centers for developing bridging social capital (again borrowing from Putnam, 2000) and for effecting broader social change through the mobilization of that capital. Indeed, Nathan Todd (2012) has recently undertaken valuable research in this aspect of interfaith organizational work (what he calls “religious networking organizations”), and one hears in Pedersen’s (2004) description of local interfaith organizations clear parallels to the social capital literature typically applied to the bridging work of religious congregations and civic organizations:

It is in the local setting that members of different religious traditions can meet not just regularly and often but also over time, building enduring friendships and joining together

for the long term in ongoing partnerships and mutual education about the realities of their day-to-day lives and their deepest, most abiding concerns. This kind of continuity and depth promises more powerful and lasting results of interfaith work wherever it takes place. (p. 93)

These points serve to highlight, then, both a rationale for focusing on the interfaith organization in my analysis and the potential of the interfaith organization for playing a significant role in the larger interfaith movement².

Importantly, others have noted the significance of the interfaith organization for interfaith research and practice. Harvard University's Pluralism Project, for example, has undertaken the impressive task of cataloguing the United States' "Interfaith Infrastructure," whereby they seek to identify and detail interfaith organizations existing and operating within twenty cities across the U.S. (Project Pluralism Summary Report). Cataloguing and better understanding the networks of local interfaith organizations emerging in cities across the U.S., according to the Pluralism Project summary report, may provide us with insights into how these cities have effectively (or ineffectively) harnessed local interfaith organizations in improving interfaith relations. Similarly, Pedersen (2004) has highlighted the central role of local, national and international interfaith organizations in constituting and driving the global interfaith movement (though, he admits, the interfaith movement is comprised of much more than just organizations). The question remains for my purposes, however, precisely how we should think about and evaluate these organizations. Indeed, Brodeur (2005) and Patel (2012), among others, have issued calls for interfaith scholars and practitioners to develop clearer standards and methods for

² Here and throughout this paper I use "movement" to describe the network of organizations, initiatives, leaders, literature, and other resources organized under the common label of "interfaith." I do this not to suggest that there is an emerging "social movement" as understood in the social movements literature (Fuchs & Plass, 1999), but rather to remain faithful to the way in which interfaith scholars and practitioners themselves describe the interfaith network/movement.

evaluating the effectiveness of these organizations and improving organizational functioning and practice.

In thus seeking to better understand and evaluate the effectiveness of interfaith organizations, I proceed in the below dissertation from several central assumptions. First, one of the (if not *the*) primary goals of the larger interfaith movement, and the many organizations of which it is comprised, is to improve relations and build peace between persons representing a diversity of different religious traditions. Küng's (1998) assertion that there will be no world peace without peace between the religions is a famous expression of this general peace-building thrust within the interfaith movement. My interest, then, is primarily in interfaith organizations that seek to build relationships between persons representing diverse religious traditions, rather than in organizations that are only "coincidentally interfaith" and focus on other primary goals. Second, the most common method to building peace between the religions has been and continues to be dialogue or conversation, even with some interfaith practitioners beginning to seek out more action-based methods of peace-building (Patel, 2006; Pedersen, 2004). The success of the interfaith movement in building peace between persons of diverse religious backgrounds, then, is dependent at least in part on its ability to effectively foster dialogue or communication between these persons. Finally, a central assumption animating this dissertation is that there are many impediments to effective dialogue between persons beyond just their religious differences. Humans are complex creatures embedded within complex social, cultural, and political systems, and our processes of relating to one another are therefore correspondingly complex. To this end, in this dissertation I take up the task of exploring what I view to be a persistent challenge impeding interfaith organizational success in peace-building between religions, and what I view to be critical in better understanding and working with and within

these organizations – namely the reality that interfaith organizations are comprised of persons who differ in many more ways than just their religious identities (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality), and that these persons are situated within widely varying cultural, social, community, political, economic, and geographic contexts. In other words, interfaith organizational work is not just purely religious or theological; it is also fundamentally embodied and emplaced and is therefore endlessly complex.

Indeed, the very intentional, if playful, titling of my dissertation – “A Christian, a Jew, and a woman walk into a bar” – is a statement of these two challenges facing interfaith organizations. That a “woman” is accompanying the Christian and Jew reminds us that persons are not defined merely by categories of religious identification, but also by a number of other markers. That these persons are walking into a “bar” reminds us that the movement of these persons in and out of different spaces matters. Walking into a bar suggests a certain type of environment within which their interactions will take place, with accompanying behaviors and modes of relating to one another that would be different across other settings (e.g., home, a synagogue or a college campus). It also suggests these persons are moving *into* the bar *from* other spaces, whether it be work, home, or their own faith communities. These persons do not belong only to the bar, but to other behavior settings as well.

It is my hope, therefore, that this work will prove beneficial for interfaith scholars and organizational leaders who seek to develop programming and initiatives that are sensitive to the varied identities and needs of their participants and aware of the particular ecologies within which that work occurs. In doing so, they will be able to offer programming and initiatives that are more effective at engendering dialogue between persons different from one another in multiple ways and on multiple levels. This work also makes important contributions to the extant

interfaith and intergroup literatures by advancing a more nuanced understanding of individual identities within, and local contexts surrounding, interfaith work and by expanding the sparse empirical evidence of whether and how these identities and contexts truly matter for interfaith work.

Interfaith Work and Religious Identities

In the wake of the Boston Marathon bombing of 2013, and amid speculation about the Muslim identities of the bombing suspects, interfaith leader Eboo Patel (2013) reflected on the continuing value of interfaith work:

When interfaith cooperation is done well, it not only helps people from different faith and philosophical backgrounds get along, it creates space for the diverse identities within each of us to become mutually enriching rather than mutually exclusive. When interfaith events raise the question, what do I have in common with people of different religious and national identities, the natural internal dialogue that ensues is: What do my own diverse identities have in common with each other? (para. 4)

Here Patel rightly observes that individuals participating in interfaith work are in reality a multitude of (not necessarily religious) identities. He does not have space to sufficiently address the difficult implications of these reflections for the larger interfaith movement, particularly implications related to how organizations or initiatives explicitly ordered around the religious identities of their participants may practically begin to become ordered also (and in some cases primarily) around other nonreligious identities. How does a group successfully navigate difficult theological conversations or religious tensions while also remaining appropriately sensitive to racism or gendered power dynamics existing within that group, for example? How do such nonreligious dynamics manifest, and why do they matter? These issues around the significance of nonreligious identities within interfaith settings drive the three dissertation papers below.

In the processes of studying and implementing interfaith work, it may not occur to interfaith scholars and practitioners that much of the "stuff" out of which interfaith work is

produced is in no way religious, or has nothing to do with the "faith" of the persons of which interfaith organizations are comprised. Though one typically enters these spaces as a "Christian", or as a "Sikh", etc., and ostensibly seldom as anything else, members of interfaith organizations are more than just their religious identities. Indeed, individuals participating in these organizations also are gendered, racialized, sexualized, nationalized, economically influenced, and otherwise "enfleshed" (Vasquez, 2011) persons for whom "religion" is only one of many identifying and behaviorally determining traits.³ As complex as interfaith participants are, then, individuals' experiences within interfaith organizations can hardly be described as merely religious, merely theological, or merely perceptual (if we think of religion as a perceptual, cognitive phenomenon, see Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003). How do women experience these settings differently than men, or racial minorities differently than whites? This dissertation attempts to look beyond the explicitly religious identities and features within interfaith organizational settings to help determine what other diverse personal identities and extraneous factors are shaping persons' experiences within these settings and ultimately affecting the successes or failures of these organizations. I utilize several complementary theoretical lenses and methodological approaches to offer an empirical argument that the successes of interfaith work depend at least in part on interfaith practitioners and scholars having a more complex (not merely religious) view of both the individual participant and the organization's larger ecology.

Religious Congruence in the Study of Religion

In his presidential address at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Mark Chaves (2010) expressed concern over what he called the "religious congruence

³ These traits, of course, are not completely distinct but, perhaps more accurately, overlap with one another in important ways and are mutually shaping. My task, then, is to demonstrate how religious identity "overlaps" with these other dimensions of the person more than to propose these other dimensions as purely distinct from religious identity.

fallacy" among scholars of religion, or the tendency of these scholars to make three oft-faulty assumptions in designing and analyzing studies on religious phenomena: (1) a person's religious beliefs are always internally consistent; (2) religious and other behaviors always logically follow from those beliefs; and (3) religious beliefs and behaviors are consistent across different social settings and life domains. Typically, in social scientific research involving religious identity or belief, the "fallacy" is manifested as a broadly assumed correlation between religious identity, for example, and certain ethical behaviors (e.g., religious people are more generous), or any number of other associations or causal statements. The problem with such assumptions is that religion as a causal factor is triggered only in certain settings or in response to certain stimuli, rather than being constantly or consistently consequential. The result, Chaves argued, is that "decades of research devoted to proving that religiosity is consequential in ways that congruence implies has produced a confusing hodge-podge of mixed results. This should not be surprising. Mixed results are exactly what we should expect if religious incongruence is ubiquitous" (p. 5).

Importantly, Chaves' argument should not be taken to mean that religion does not matter, or that religious congruence is impossible. Rather, it is intended to challenge us to consider that religion matters *in certain settings or under certain conditions*, and that religious congruence can be achieved only through certain methods (in particular, Chaves noted sustained processes of internalization as critical for congruence). Other social scientists interested in effects associated with religion have answered Chaves' challenge, taking more seriously the situational and incongruent nature of religious phenomena at individual and even organizational levels of analysis (Galen, 2012; Hill & Vaidyanathan, 2011; Ronald, 2012; Wollschleger, 2012).

Of particular interest to my analyses, Read and Eagle (2011) have built from Chaves' argument to suggest one explanation for the "religious congruence fallacy" or mixed results in

religion-based research, namely that religious persons are, in fact, much more than their religious identities. In reality, these persons may inhabit any number of social identities at any given time, including gender, race, political orientation, and so on. Using both intersectionality theory (the theory of multiple and intersecting identities) and social identity theory (the person's natural tendency to self-identify with social groupings), they go on to show how persons' social attitudes and political behaviors are incongruent with religious and other identity markers. They concluded:

The religious congruence fallacy occurs when we privilege religion over other forms of identity in attempting to explain social behavior, when in reality, multiple identity categories interact with religion in daily life to produce highly variable, seemingly mixed outcomes ... our social structure creates situations wherein multiple group identities compete for supremacy, with different ones emerging more salient in different circumstances across the life course. (p. 130)

Thus the challenge for religion scholars is, first, that they recognize the inconsistencies inherent in religious identity, belief, and behavior and design their social analyses accordingly (as with Chaves, 2010). Moreover, religion scholars are also called to recognize and adjust to the inconsistencies attributed to the multiple identities possessed within individual persons at any given time.

Read (2014) has continued to follow this line of scholarship, more recently arguing that these problems of incongruence are not unique to scholars in the study of religion. Much more broadly, social scientists in any area of specialization may have a tendency to oversimplify phenomena by hanging behaviors or attitudes on single static markers of identity:

[T]he religious congruence fallacy could just as easily be called the racial congruence fallacy or the gender congruence fallacy or the immigrant congruence fallacy. I am a scholar of religion, of gender, and of ethnicity, and I could easily imagine committing the fallacy in any one of these arenas. The fallacy is not reserved for sociologists of religion; none of us is necessarily immune. (p. 46)

Though these widespread tendencies within the social sciences could be attributed to a number of factors, in her argument Read highlighted professional structures and expectations in the social sciences. Specialization in the field of sociology, for example, has divided scholars into sub-fields of interest (e.g., sociologists of religion, sociologists of gender) within which they adopt a narrow focus on their particular set of variables to help explain social phenomena. This trend also spills into the formation of specialized journals and academic appointments that further drive scholars into oversimplified renderings of human behavior.

Fundamental to this move away from oversimplified social analysis, and to my research, social psychologists have made notable contributions to our understandings of identity and of the formation and intersection of multiple identities within the individual person. Gordon Allport (1954/1979) has outlined the psychological formation of social groups, or groups that serve as reference points of social identity formation and belonging for the human individual. At the fundamental level of human needs and survival, the identification of the individual with certain social groups (and not others), and subsequent loyalty to those groups, provides the individual with certain “rewards.” As Allport noted:

Some psychologists say that the child is “rewarded” by virtue of his [sic] memberships, and that this reward creates the loyalty. That is to say, his family feeds and cares for him, he obtains pleasure from the gifts and attentions received from neighbors and compatriots. Hence he learns to love them. His loyalties are acquired on the basis of such rewards. (p. 29)

Through this internal system of rewards, the individual and the other individuals with whom they identify and belong form social “in-groups.” The in-group, as Allport has defined it, is a social group in which “all use the term *we* with the same essential significance” (p. 31), and can be defined across various markers of kinship, location, ethnicity, religion, nationality, civic activity, and other such social characteristics.

Importantly, social identities are not static, but rather can shift over time through personal experiences or in response to external forces, interactions, and social changes (Peek, 2005). Indeed, the groups with which one identifies, and the role the person plays within those groups, depend in part on the social structures within which the person lives, as well as on the social interactions the person has within those structures (Burke, Owens, Serpe, & Thoits, 2003; Howard, 2000; Turner, 1978). Further, owing to the foundational theoretical contributions of Stryker (1980), we can understand the multiple social identities existing within the same person to be ordered along a “salience hierarchy” – some social group identities become more primary than others depending on the person’s sense of commitment to that particular group identity and environmental factors that trigger or favor certain group identities and not others.

Political and social theorists, including black feminist Patricia Hill Collins (1990), have built upon theories of multiple social group identities to highlight the ways in which these multiple group identities “intersect” in the person to compound experiences of power and political and social oppression. In particular, these theorists have focused on the identity politics of black women as persons who experience not only oppressions related to gender, but also those related to race. Injustices arise, they have argued, when feminist attempts to describe and improve the lived experiences of women do so while holding up the experiences of white women specifically as normative for all women. As Crenshaw (1991) has noted:

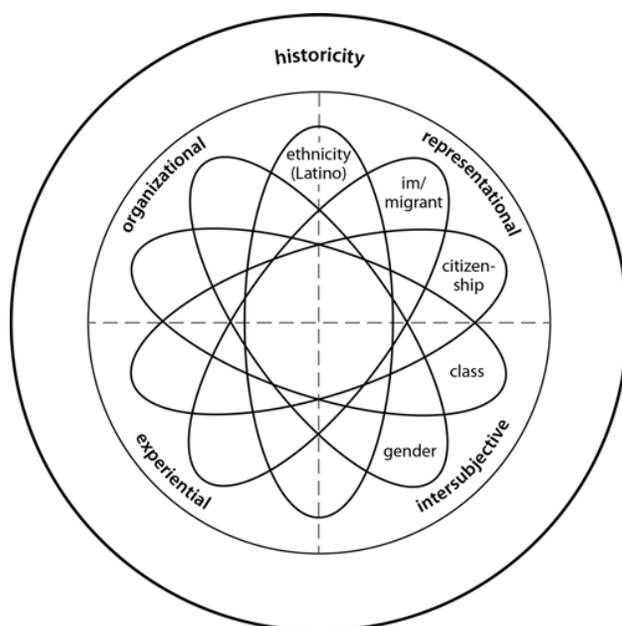
The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences. In the context of violence against women, this elision of difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class. (p. 1242)

The fundamental point I wish to glean from such notions of identity, identity salience, and intersectionality, then, is that one-dimensional interpretations of individual identity and behavior

as merely religious or merely gendered or merely racial not only fail to take into consideration what we know to be the very complex configurations of identities represented by individual persons, but they also threaten to do violence to the lived experiences of those persons. Framing this discussion in terms of interfaith work, understanding interfaith participants exclusively or primarily through their religious identities obscures the reality that these participants’ “experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). Further, it misses the possibility that women or racial minorities, for example, in interfaith settings are experiencing added layers of interpersonal tension or exclusion even in the midst of working toward religiously–based understanding and equality.

Anthias (2013) and Nuñez (2013) have further built on intersectionality theory to position these multiple identities within ecological processes that further shape individual behaviors and experiences. Illustrated in Figure 1.1 (Nuñez, 2013) below, a multilevel model of intersectionality allows us to consider not only the diversity of factors existing within the individual person (e.g., gender, ethnicity) but also to consider the diversity of factors external to the person that are no less critical for understanding that person. Specifically, in this dissertation

Figure 1.1. Nuñez (2013) multilevel intersectionality model.



I have an interest in examining both the intersecting identities of individual interfaith participants as well as what Nuñez (2013) has described as the “organizational” level phenomena, to include other areas of life outside the person’s immediate setting, including school, family, faith communities, and work. These areas of phenomena are consistent with what Bronfenbrenner (1979) has described as the mesosystemic level of human development and behavior and are a focal point of much of the below analyses.

Interfaith Work and the Congruence Fallacy

I take as a central assumption in the below analyses that interfaith practitioners and scholars, much like Chaves’ (2010) religion scholars more generally, are often guilty of committing the "religious congruence fallacy" in the ways I describe just above. I argue these scholars and practitioners often exclusively or at least primarily emphasize the role of religion, religious belief, and religious identity in interfaith settings, and expect outcomes in these settings to be correlated solely with religious identities and behaviors, often to the exclusion of other important identities and factors. Feminist theologian Jeannine Hill Fletcher (2005) has identified this tendency among religion and interfaith scholars:

[T]heologians and thinkers have constructed religious identity as a static feature shared among members of a community in distinction to nonmembers. In this way of thinking about religious identity, religions are viewed in their “specific difference.” That is, people of other faiths are first and foremost thought of as different from ourselves by virtue of the religious characteristic that sets them apart. (p. 83)

These simple distinctions between religious communities, Fletcher noted, have served the practical function of providing an “identity logic” by which persons are more easily organized into universal categories and by which interfaith encounters are more easily managed. More importantly for my purposes, these simple distinctions also do violence to the actual diversity that exists within religious communities. Fletcher has further argued on this point:

In favor of collective description, specific difference among the religions eliminates the internal differences of gender, economics, education, race, geographical and social locations within each religion. Subsuming particularities in proffering collectivity marginalizes and even erases the expressions of the powerless within the collective. (p. 84)

Thus, given their emphasis on general religious categorization in the interest of engendering contact between collective and bounded traditions, interfaith scholars and practitioners may miss the importance of other nonreligious identities and factors that help explain interfaith behaviors and outcomes. This proposed fallacy in interfaith scholarship and work could, I think, be further explained by several other factors.

First, interfaith scholarship and work historically have been grounded in cognitive notions of religion and, consequently, manifested through a dialogical modal tradition wherein one comes to understand and respect the religious traditions of others primarily by engaging in conversation with those others. In the tradition of scholars of religion William James (1902/1990) and Alfred North Whitehead (1926/1996), interfaith work and scholarship typically have located religious phenomena squarely in the mind of the individual. For James (1902/1990), religious activity was a perceptual activity in the mind of the individual, or as Whitehead famously noted, “Religion is what the individual does with his [sic] own solitariness” (p. 16) and “if you are never solitary, you are never religious” (p. 17). Interfaith work, according to this line of thinking of religion as primarily cognitive or perceptual, is a process of encountering other theologies or "cognitive structures" and forcing oneself to reconfigure one's own theology or cognitive structure (Bender & Cadge, 2006; Clooney, 2005; Eck, 1993; Moyaert, 2010; Reedijk, 2010). Cisneros (2011) and Clooney (2005), for example, have argued that the very goal of interfaith understanding, the primary aim of many interfaith gatherings, inevitably involves the

appropriation of the texts and values of the religious other into “the constellation of our sources of meaning” (Cisneros, 2011, p. 256). As Cisneros has suggested:

If [the religious values of the other] are not appropriated, they remain contingent items of speculation dependent on our understanding of the other’s interpretation of her own experience. Only when all questions about them are resolved ... can they be properly grasped in their integrality. (p. 256)

Interfaith dialogue, in this view, is the meeting of two (religious) brains surgically removed from their bodies and environs.

Historically, such notions of interfaith work as primarily cognitive have lent themselves to dialogical modes of structuring interfaith encounters. Pioneers of the modern interfaith movement – Leonard Swidler, Paul Knitter, and David Tracy – have organized their thinking and work on the subject of interfaith relations primarily around the practice of dialogue. Swidler’s *Dialogue Decalogue* is one prominent example of a mode of dialogical practice that has proven foundational for interfaith organizations across the world (McCarthy, 2007; Swidler, 1983). Knitter (1995, 1998) and Tracy (1990) have theorized multiple dimensions of interfaith dialogue – (1) religion as “art” that must speak to the heart of the person and move them emotionally; (2) religion as a rational set of propositions that must cohere logically in the mind of the individual; and (3) religion as practical social and ethical actions that should follow from one’s religious beliefs. These expressions of the dialogical tradition in interfaith work make sense given predominant notions of religion as cognitive activity – interfaith work is an intellectual solution for overcoming an intellectual problem. Of course, interfaith community service and political organizing and other non–dialogue–based approaches have also enjoyed a great deal of attention but, as Pedersen (2004) has observed, such approaches have historically been overshadowed by the much more common practice of interfaith dialogue.

Against this purely cognitive mode of understanding religion, Chaves (2010) has further pressed social scientists of religion to consider the ways in which religion and religious behavior are “situational,” or determined in part by environmental settings and other stimuli that exist outside the cognitive activities of the individual. Here Chaves’ view is sympathetic with recent developments in theological and religious studies that seek to rescue the study of religion from overly cognized models and situate religious belief and practice more appropriately within material bodies and spaces. In theology, Miller–McLemore (2013), for example, has argued for greater attention to an “embodied theology,” with a focus on the ways in which “biology and physicality shape human knowing” (p. 744), while Fulkerson (2007) has turned an eye not only to the body but to the physical spaces within which theology occurs, what she has termed a “worldly theology.” She has argued:

From overly cognitive and orthodox definitions of Christian faithfulness to concepts of practice that ignore the contribution of bodies and desire, prominent theological options risk overlooking both the worldly way that communities live out their faith and the worldly way that God is among us. (p. 6)

These scholars join a longer theological tradition examining the ways in which differently embodied persons imagine God and structure their religious belief (Eisland, 1994; Goldenberg, 1993; Moltmann–Wendal, 1995).

In religious studies, recent notable theoretical advancements by Thomas Tweed (2006) and Manuel Vásquez (2011) have sought to situate the study of religion within bodies and places. Tweed (2006) has offered a theory of religion as comprised not just of people and culture, but also of forms of “dwelling” that necessarily include physical spaces of body, home, community, and geographic terrain. Vásquez (2011) has set forth a “materialist” (and, somewhat paradoxically, non–reductionist) theory of religion in which religious practice and belief are seen as both constituting and being constituted by the person’s material environment. Religion here is

viewed as a complex and multi-layered interplay between social construction and certain “affordances” offered by the person’s cultural and physical environs, resulting in “religious emplacement” that is “ecological, corporeal, practical, and semiotic–cognitive” (p. 318). While such theories offer more usefully comprehensive lenses through which to view theology and religion, for my purposes here they also help bring into sharper relief the risks of an overly cognitive view of religion that I argue has plagued historically the interfaith movement – namely the tendency to obscure the embodied and emplaced dimensions of religion, thereby committing Chaves’ (2010) “fallacy” by limiting interfaith organizational work to the confines of the human religious mind.

Second, I also attribute the congruence fallacy in interfaith work and scholarship to the reality that “interfaith” as a discipline and field of work is, within the larger history of religious practice and studies, a relatively new frontier of work tempted to overstate the novelty and significance of its particular subjects and phenomena of interest. The American Academy of Religion, for example, only in 2012 formed a separate academic group for scholars interested in studying interfaith phenomena, finally signaling the field’s emergence as a very new but increasingly sought after field of work. More generally, I believe that interfaith scholars and practitioners have had to work to persuade others of the significance of their work, and even of religion generally. In his efforts to develop a global ethic for world peace Küng (1998) has asserted that there ultimately will be no peace between nations without peace between religions. He has further argued that global peace efforts can be stunted by the failure of politicians and diplomats to take seriously the contributions of religion (and, by extension, interfaith peace–building) toward these efforts:

[W]e are interested in the reason why religion, which so often proves ‘an intractable force which hardly addresses any of the normal instruments of state power, even foreign policy’, is so often ignored in politics and diplomacy ... One need not be religious to take religion – a real universal phenomenon, both diachronically and synchronically – seriously. (p. 120)

More recently, Eboo Patel, the face of contemporary interfaith work in the U.S., has been known for making strong appeals for public attention to religious intolerance and interfaith work, in some instances comparing the magnitude of that work to the racism and civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s (Patel, 2011). In his most recent work, *Sacred Ground*, Patel (2012) details the process by which he came to view religion as an issue of social justice on par with race, gender, and other issues. As a politically conscious college student, Patel had missed the significance of religion amid other more “popular” political concerns:

We were too busy reading critical race theory to pay attention to [religious conflict]. The problem of the color line blinded us to the coming challenge of the faith line. We even ignored the religious dimensions of obvious issues. We talked a lot about Cornel West the Black Panther, and not at all about Cornel West the black Baptist. We viewed the university’s mascot, Chief Illiniwek, as a racist symbol but knew almost nothing about the spiritual role that chiefs played in Native American religious culture. And for all our talk about the importance of identity, of the personal being political, of knowing one another’s stories, we knew almost nothing about each other’s religious lives. (p. 114)

Patel here betrays not only a belief in the significance of interfaith work, but also a belief that the significance of interfaith work, and of religion generally, is far from a given in the public mind and that the public must still be persuaded. Interfaith leader Rabbi Sarah Bassin (2012), writing recently for the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions, has expressed a similar concern:

As someone who grew up with a mixed religious background, the importance of interfaith was engrained in my Jewish identity. But my own experience blinded me to the experience of those for whom interfaith was not a self-evident good ... There will always be a core of people drawn to interfaith work for its more abstract ideals – people who need no convincing of interfaith’s inherent value. But our goal ought to include preaching beyond the choir. (para. 4)

I argue that the belief, manifested across the interfaith network, that the world still must be convinced of the value of religion and interfaith work could likely generate within these circles both an overstatement of the salience and primacy of religious identity within interfaith settings and a lack of awareness (or suppression) of multiple other nonreligious identities and factors.

Thus the religious congruence fallacy among interfaith scholars and practitioners, and in particular the tendency to hold religious identity above other important identity markers that comprise the individual person, is a symptom of: (1) interfaith dialogical processes that favor a strictly cognitive, and therefore disembodied and displaced, view of religious phenomena; and (2) the need for a relatively new and ostensibly undervalued field of public work and scholarly research to overstate its unique particularities in order to make a place for itself in the public and academic consciousness. The result is, I have argued, that the field is often guilty of a tendency to overstate the importance of religious identity and subsequently miss or devalue other important identities and processes feeding into both religious conflict and interfaith work. Again, as Fletcher (2005) has stated, it is important to note that these are not benign oversights. Rather, they may have unanticipated detrimental effects on persons for whom other nonreligious identities are meaningful within interfaith settings.

Ursula King (1998, 2007), for example, has made notable contributions to the literature by highlighting the neglect of women generally, and the absence of women from leadership roles more specifically, in interfaith work. Women historically have been marginalized within individual religious traditions such as Christianity and Islam (Ahmed, 1993; Flinders, 2000;

Smith, 1979; Thistlethwaite, 2001), and this marginalization has ostensibly carried over into the sphere of interfaith work. King (1998, 2007) has argued that women historically have been excluded from positions of leadership and influence within interfaith circles, and that interfaith work has consequently been deprived of meaningful contributions from this important segment of the interfaith population. Ariarajah (2006) has extended King's work to highlight ways in which women may even understand and implement interfaith work differently than men. He has observed, for example, that women in interfaith work may tend to bond more quickly than men and may place more emphasis on sharing personal experiences and stories, and moreover that the larger interfaith movement is mostly unaware of these potential differences between men and women in their interfaith experiences and needs.

Thus, my task in the below papers to explore and describe whether and how nonreligious identities and processes also matter in interfaith settings is a deeply ethical one that is concerned with the equal and just treatment within the interfaith movement of persons representing a multitude of social roles and identities. Ultimately, if interfaith organizations and the larger interfaith movement are to be successful (however they may define “success”), they must do more than bring together people of diverse religious traditions. They must also learn how to do so in ways that are sensitive to the complexities of human identity and ecological embeddedness. They must be able to adapt to nonreligious needs and contexts that emerge within and converge on spaces that, though designed to be explicitly focused on religion, in many ways end up having nothing at all to do with religion.

I examine these important challenges in interfaith work through *three distinct dissertation papers*, each based upon their own sources of data and each building on both shared and unique theoretical lenses and literatures. In Paper One (Chapter II), I utilize Bronfenbrenner’s (1979)

ecological systems theory to advance a more fully ecological examination of researcher subjectivity, a topic of study that otherwise has been approached in ecologically limited ways. Drawing on data collected from interviews with research team members and from other research project artifacts, I show the influence of meso– and exo–systemic factors on research practice, both broadening the current scope of inquiry into researcher subjectivity and highlighting our research team’s own realization of the importance of nonreligious factors in better understanding interfaith phenomena.

In Paper Two (Chapter III), I use the nonreligious identity of gender as my analytic focus and provide empirical support for arguments advanced by interfaith scholars such as King (1998), Eck (1993), and McCarthy (2007) on the historical exclusion and marginalization of women within interfaith spaces. Using survey data collected from interfaith organization members across the US, I examine gender differences in survey items related to religiosity and interfaith organization participation. I also examine gender differences in reported organizational sense of community (and its four sub–scales), and seek to further explain these gender differences in sense of community through measures of interfaith and religious leadership.

In Paper Three (Chapter IV), I draw on qualitative case study data collected from five interfaith organizations to examine the supports and barriers that color individual participants’ involvement and experiences within interfaith spaces. Building once again from Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, I plumb the mesosystemic level of analysis in particular both to better understand the involvement and experiences of individuals within interfaith spaces and to consider the potential of the interfaith mesosystem for expanding the reach of interfaith work into other microsystems.

Finally, in the concluding section of this dissertation (Chapter V), I consider the future directions for research and action suggested by these analyses, as well as seek to further complicate the issues I examine throughout this dissertation. Given my focus in this dissertation *away* from the religious identities of interfaith participants, I conclude by considering what, if any, role religion still has to play in ongoing attempts to understand and evaluate interfaith work. I further conclude by proposing formative evaluation as a useful tool for interfaith scholars and practitioners who seek to develop interfaith efforts that are adaptive to both the diverse needs within interfaith spaces and the diverse ecologies that impinge upon those spaces.

CHAPTER II

ECOLOGICAL SUBJECTIVITY IN AN INTERFAITH RESEARCH TEAM

Researchers in the social sciences often take as a logical starting point for empirical investigation the methodological questions of precisely how one is to go about performing such investigations. Specifically, such methodological questions often involve processes of reflexivity, or the examination of the role of researcher subjectivity in the practice of designing and implementing research. To date, notable theoretical and empirical advances have been made on the subject of researcher subjectivity and the influence of this subjectivity on the research process, including work on researcher religious subjectivity, an important dimension of subjectivity for the present study (Breuer & Roth, 2003; Moloney, 2011; Riley, Schouten, & Cahill, 2003). Feminist scholarship in particular has sought to shed light on the biases and assumptions implicit in the practice of social scientific research and to challenge the patriarchal structures of inquiry (Mohanty, 2004; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992), drawing on a rich philosophical tradition including the works of Gadamer (1975), Heidegger (1927/1962), and Husserl (1936/1970).

While providing useful tools for examining the researcher's particular historical and social identities, the vast majority of this extant work on researcher subjectivity assumes a decidedly "one-dimensional" view of the researcher as defined by emotions, attitudes, or specific personal qualities – the "gendered researcher," the "religious researcher," and so on. It can also be observed, therefore, that such views of the researcher tend to be very individualistic, dependent on a narrow view just of the individual person as she or he moves in and out of

research spaces. Indeed, such work rarely ventures outside circumscribed observations of researcher histories, attitudes, emotions, and personal reactions to field experiences, among other related individual phenomena. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to broaden the extant researcher subjectivity literature by providing a more fully ecological examination of subjectivity. Through analysis of research team data – collected from interviews with research team members and from other research project artifacts – this study will illumine some of the ecological factors that influence research practice and that heretofore largely go unexamined in the subjectivity literature.

Vanderbilt University’s “Understanding Community Interfaith Initiatives” project, conducted from 2011 to 2014 and concerned with improving the work of interfaith organizations in the US, and of which I was an active member, serves as the focus of this analysis. As a research team comprised of three different religious identities, our team very early in the research design process became interested in the notion of being an "interfaith group studying other interfaith groups" and in understanding this dynamic reflexively. This notion opened us to a number of methodological questions – namely, how do our religious identities, and how does our group’s identity as “interfaith,” hinder and/or enrich our research practice, and in what ways might we ourselves experience the very interfaith processes that were the subject of our research. We soon began collecting internal research team data in an effort to address these methodological questions. It quickly became apparent, however, that our subjectivities as researchers are in fact quite complex and cannot be limited just to our religious identities. In line with Mark Chaves’ (2010) critique of social scientists of religion and their tendency often to analytically oversell the significance of religion, we ourselves were guilty of committing the “religious congruence fallacy” by overstating the significance and consistency of our religious

identities and obscuring the very real, concrete significance of other dimensions of our subjectivities. Further, we experienced our subjectivities as deeply embedded within complex ecologies, such that multiple layers of psychological and social processes have at least in part constituted our research practices. We were, indeed, an “interfaith group studying other interfaith groups,” but we were also much more than that.

Thus the contribution I make in this study is twofold. First, I more adequately consider the embeddedness of the researcher and research team within larger systems of psychological, organizational, and social processes, providing a more complex reflexive lens through which to view the researcher and research team as they engage in the practice of research. I show subjectivity in the practice of research as comprised not only of the individual researcher’s cognitive and emotional processes, or even just of the social interactions between researchers and team members and/or community partners (though further examination into these dynamics certainly is important), but also of institutional policies and structures, personal and community networks of communication and support, and larger social and cultural forces as they converge to form particularized and complex research behaviors. Second, these more complex subjectivities continually frustrated our persistent attempts to enter research team and data collection spaces as merely religious persons. Despite our team’s continued interest in our identity as an “interfaith group studying interfaith groups,” we were repeatedly reminded that our religious identities are quite often superseded by other nonreligious identities and factors we initially were not anticipating. Our reflexive process, then, provides a foundation for better understanding the complexities of interfaith groups and work more generally.

Ecological Systems Theory

The empirical work grounding this study is informed by the theoretical tradition of ecological psychology. Rooted in the work of Kurt Lewin, ecological systems theory as utilized in the psychological disciplines has emerged as a compelling framework for situating individual human behavior and development within larger contexts of interpersonal, organizational, community and social activity. In a very basic sense, ecological systems theory posits that human persons are in part products of their social and physical environments, even as they in–turn act as agents to help shape those environments. Lewin represented early formulations of these concepts. His *field theory*—a response to what he felt was the inadequacy of traditional psychological theories to account for the full breadth of human psychological phenomena and behavior—posited the now–famous assertion that human behavior is the function of the person and her or his environment (otherwise known as the person’s “life world”) (Marrow, 1969). Having worked closely with Lewin, Roger Barker (1968) and his Kansas school of ecological thought further advanced notions of the ecological development of the human person beyond a Lewinian fixation on the human individual and the individual’s own *perception* of her or his environment to the ecological environment itself and certain observable, objective features of that environment. In other words, whereas Lewin was concerned primarily with the human person’s perception of and response to her or his environment, Barker and colleagues adopted notions of the person’s environment as *coercive*, imposing certain physical, social, physiognomic, and other such constraints on the human person and her or his behavior, resulting in a system of preexisting and interdependent “behavior settings” through which human persons move and find their being. Notably, such an understanding of human development and behavior necessitated, for Barker and colleagues, the move of psychological research out of the scientific

laboratory of tightly controlled study conditions and into more naturalistic, “real–world” settings where the effects of the ecological environment on the human person could be observed and examined.

Consequently, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) further developed such approaches to ecological psychological research through his seminal work, *The ecology of human development*. Like Barker, Bronfenbrenner moved beyond a Lewinian understanding of the environment as located merely within the mind of the human person to consider more objective, preexisting features of a “coercive” environment. Bronfenbrenner challenged Barker’s methods of naturalistic observation, however, as too constrained, noting:

The understanding of human development demands more than the direct observation of behavior on the part of one or two persons in the same place; it requires examination of multi-person systems of interaction not limited to a single setting and must take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing the subject. (p. 21)

Bronfenbrenner here and in subsequent work effectively popularized notions of multiple *systems* of activity, each interacting with the others and in their own ways uniquely affecting the environmentally embedded human person. These systems included: (1) the microsystem, the immediate social environment or setting of the developing individual; (2) the mesosystem, the interrelations among two or more settings, or a system of microsystems; (3) the exosystem, settings that do not directly involve the developing individual as an active participant, but that still affect and are affected by the setting containing the developing individual; and (4) the macrosystem, the larger cultural, political, religious, or otherwise overarching systems that bind together, or create consistencies across, the other three systems. From this theory of systems, Bronfenbrenner posited his notion of *development–in–context*, or the notion that human development is environmentally situated across various levels and spheres of activity.

“Development never takes place in a vacuum; it is always embedded and expressed through behavior in a particular environmental context” (p. 27).

Lewin, Barker, and Bronfenbrenner’s contributions have been formative for a number of fields of psychological and social inquiry. Scholars and practitioners in fields such as applied social psychology and community psychology have increasingly adopted ecological systems theory in designing research studies and community programs and interventions as a means to more fully capture the environmentally situated human person and to arrive at more effective, meaningful social change (Foster–Fishman & Behrens, 2007; Saegert, Klitzman, Freudenberg, Cooperman–Mroczek, & Nassar, 2007; Sarason et al., 1966; Sarason, 1972; Trickett, 2009; Tseng, Chesir–Teran, Becker–Klein, Chan, Duran, Roberts, & Bardoliwalla, 2002; Tseng & Seidman, 2007). Ecological systems theory, importantly, has served the function of improving our understanding not only of social settings and systems, but also for knowing how best to change those settings and systems to achieve optimal human, organizational, and community development. As Foster–Fishman and Behrens (2007) have noted, the goal in community psychology of developing healthy social systems (or ecologies) necessitates disciplinary theories, methods, and practices that adequately address the complexity and dynamism of those very social systems. Tseng and Seidman (2007), for example, have developed a theoretical framework for understanding social settings as comprised of: (1) social processes (e.g., norms and relationships); (2) resources (e.g., human, physical, and economic resources); (3) and the organization of resources (e.g., social and physical structures of organization). Importantly, such frameworks, drawing heavily on ecological systems theory, are instructive for community psychologists and other professionals in designing their approaches to studying and intervening in social settings and systems.

The notion of ecological systems, while a helpful theoretical tool, has proved to be methodologically challenging for researchers seeking to simultaneously measure and analyze multifaceted and complex individual-, organization-, and community-level phenomena, often resulting in research that only purports to be ecological. As social psychologist Thomas Pettigrew (2006) has noted, addressing scholars in his field specifically:

Psychological social psychologists rarely combine levels of analysis in order to put individual and situational phenomena in their macro-contexts ... [W]e give frequent lip service to the importance of social context, but we usually mean only situational contexts and not institutional and societal contexts. (p. 615)

Social psychologists do not bear these challenges alone, as ecological aspirations have also frustrated scholars and practitioners in the field of community psychology. Community studies and interventions designed for multiple levels of implementation and evaluation are frequently measured only through individual-level outcomes (Nastasi & Hitchcock, 2009; Schensul, 2009; Seidman & Rappaport, 1986), for example. There are several issues inherent in efforts to implement and measure ecological frameworks that would help explain such difficulties. As Moos (1996) discussed, these issues may include conceptualizing and understanding environmental dynamics, and linking these dynamics to outcomes and monitoring processes.

These important limitations aside, ecological systems theory remains a compelling framework for conceptualizing social issues and processes, and heretofore-imperfect methods in practice should not negate the value of seeking to further develop effective ecological approaches to psychological and social inquiry. Indeed, as Kelly (2006) has argued, the much greater danger of theoretical reductionism, or of oversimplifying human phenomena, is allayed by the full scope and complexity afforded by ecological theory. Thus, in this study I explore the utility of *ecological subjectivity* as a lens for understanding the identity and role of the researcher in the practice of community research and action, and for understanding how the researcher

affects and is affected by the research process. Such a focus on the researcher as embedded or intertwined with their phenomena of interest is consistent with Altman and Rogoff's (1987) framing of "transactional research" in environmental (or ecological) psychology, an approach to research that views the researcher as an embedded aspect of that which they are studying. Such approaches, however, have yet to consider or fully develop an ecological rendering of the researcher his- or herself as a person whose behavior and "development" in research settings must be more ecologically understood. Specifically, then, I focus my analysis at the meso- and exo-systemic levels due both to the limited attention to these levels in the field of researcher subjectivity generally (as discussed in more detail below) as well as to the challenges of studying and analyzing those ecological levels commonly shared between research team members and not easily differentiated between researchers (e.g., the interfaith project "microsystem").

Research Questions

Guided by the above interests in (1) the embeddedness of the researcher's subjectivity within ecological systems and (2) the benefits of understanding this embeddedness for interfaith work, in the below analysis I answer the following research questions:

- (1) In what ways does the extant literature on reflexivity/researcher subjectivity both ecologically circumscribe and ecologically situate the identities and roles of researchers?
- (2) Building from an ecological systems framework, how does the researcher's position within meso- and exo-systems affect the design and implementation processes of social scientific research?
- (3) How does an ecological view of the researcher and research team improve our understanding of the religious congruence fallacy as manifested in interfaith work in particular?

Method

The data for this study were collected as part of the “Understanding Community Interfaith Initiatives” research project at Vanderbilt University. Early in the research process, it became evident that the religious composition of the research team—comprised primarily of a Catholic (Dokecki), a Methodist (McCormack), and a Muslim (Mohyuddin)—would be important for methodological consideration and a potentially rich source for individual and collective reflection. How might our individual religious identities, and the interaction between our identities in the team setting, impede or enrich our approach to examining interfaith organizations? Might we be able to engage in interfaith exercises as a team (e.g., dialogue, learning about each others’ traditions), and might such exercises not only be personally enriching, but also enable us to better understand similar activities and processes as practiced by the organizations we sought to study? These and other questions guided what became an intentional examination of our research team identities and interreligious dynamics and processes, an examination that entailed regular team meetings and dialogue, in-depth interviewing, a focus group, and personal journaling.

For the two-year duration of the design and implementation of the research project, the three core members of the research team held weekly meetings. These meetings included discussion of the research project—refinement of research questions, development of interview protocols, logistics of field work and data collection, and so on—and provided space for interreligious dialogue between research team members. This dialogue typically would be open-ended and would begin with the selection of a topic for discussion as proposed by any team member, possibly a hot-button social issue in that day’s news (e.g., gay marriage legislation) or a theological topic (e.g., life after death). Dialogue would then proceed with each team member

discussing that topic from the viewpoint of his or her own religious tradition (“What is the United Methodist Church’s position on gay marriage?”), with other team members following up with questions for clarification or deeper understanding. The stated purpose of these team conversations was twofold: (1) to engender greater interreligious understanding between team members and increase their knowledge of each others’ religious traditions; and (2) to allow team members to better understand the processes of dialogue and learning that were taking place in the organizations they were examining in the context of the research project. These team meetings typically lasted 90 minutes, with the bulk of that time devoted to team dialogue.

At the conclusion of the case study phase of the project (discussed below), the team members conducted/participated in a series of in-depth interviews and a focus group. For the in-depth interviews, I personally interviewed Principle Investigator Paul Dokecki and Vanderbilt colleague and occasional team participant Linda Isaacs, with each interview lasting approximately one hour. Additionally, Hasina Mohyuddin and I interviewed one another in an extended bi-directional interview lasting 90 minutes. The purpose of these interviews was to: (1) explore team members’ experiences within the research team, and specifically their experiences interacting with persons of other religious traditions and learning about those traditions; (2) examine members’ personal reflections on the intersection between the research project and their own religious identity; and (3) consider the ways in which members’ involvement in the project have affected their personal and professional lives. Structured in this way, the interview was designed to elicit both common and divergent experiences shared among the research team members across the meso- and exo-systemic ecological levels (e.g., common and different experiences with personal faith communities and family members).

Prior to these interviews, research team members participated in a focus group moderated by a Vanderbilt colleague who, other than moderating the focus group, had no involvement in the research project. An outside moderator was sought in order to allow each team member to fully engage as a participant in the focus group (rather than also expending energy as moderator), and the team intentionally sought a Vanderbilt colleague who had extensive previous experience moderating focus groups. This moderator was a doctoral candidate in the Vanderbilt University Community Research & Action program, with a background in research on family experiences within health and mental health care environments. She did not disclose her religious background or identity at the time of the focus group, to remain as neutral as possible during that data collection process. The three core members of the research team participated in the focus group, and were also joined by occasional team members Linda Isaacs (who identified as a non-affiliated spiritual seeker from a Christian upbringing) and Karl Jones (also from a Christian upbringing, and considering conversion to Islam). The purpose of the focus group was to provide adequate time and space for team members to learn more about each other's personal religious stories. Even though the regular team meetings (discussed above) provided time and space for dialogue on various social and religious topics, the core members of the research team felt that they still had not devoted sufficient time to hearing one another's personal religious narratives and desired an extended, focused focus group session in order to learn more about one another in this regard.

Additionally, Hasina Mohyuddin and I maintained personal journals throughout the research process, recording our reactions to and reflections on our experiences as the primary data collectors in the field conducting observations and interviews. We also recorded our personal experiences as we participated in local interfaith activities and groups external to the

case study research processes. Specifically, I spent a year facilitating an interfaith class for members of my church, a rich source of personal reflection, while Hasina participated in an interfaith text study group at another United Methodist congregation in the Middle Tennessee area. These journals, then, record our reflections not only on research processes, but also on the ways in which we engaged in interfaith work in our own personal lives. For Hasina’s journal, notes were made during each event or observation – the purpose of the event, the people present – and her personal reactions to the event were handwritten in a journal immediately following the event. For my journal, reflections were recorded in my computer word processor within 24–hours of the event or experience of interest. I did not record notes during the event/experience, in order to maximize my ability to act as a participant and even, in some cases, leader (as opposed to a “researcher”). My personal journal totals 90 pages of typed, double–spaced text.

Finally, more than 500 emails over a two–year period were exchanged between members of the research team. These emails included correspondence on project logistics (e.g., design, method, implementation), relevant articles and other reading materials, theoretical discussions, as well as discussion of ongoing day–to–day activities. Each of these emails were stored in a digital folder and subsequently combined into a single file for textual analysis. IRB approval and informed consent were obtained for all of the above–described data collection procedures.

Analysis

To address the first research question on the extant literature on researcher subjectivities and the presence or absence therein of ecological notions of subjectivity, I performed a thorough literature review using several Vanderbilt Library databases (ProQuest, PsychINFO, JSTOR), and using relevant key search terms or combination of terms, including primarily: subjectivity, reflexivity, objectivity, researcher subjectivity/reflexivity, researcher lenses. Relevant

manuscripts identified through these searches were examined for their content related to the following questions:

- How is the concept of “researcher subjectivity” defined?
- How is “researcher subjectivity” measured and analyzed? What data are used?
- What other ecological units (besides individual–level processes), if any, are utilized in defining and measuring “researcher subjectivity”?

Using this literature review, I drew conclusions on notions of researcher subjectivity as understood in the extant literature and open space for more ecological notions of researcher subjectivity.

To address the second question on how ecological processes directly affect research practice, I draw on the above–described data collected internally from our own research team: (1) team meeting notes; (2) research team interviews; (3) research team focus group; (4) field journals; and (5) research team email correspondence. Analysis of these data proceeded first as a team process of collectively reading team member interviews and field notes and engaging in discussion on general reactions to and reflections on these data. Instructions for team members for this stage of analysis were as follows:

1. Read through the complete transcript. For this initial reading, do not make notes and do not write in the margins of the transcript. Simply practice deep, focused reading, ensuring you have a solid understanding of the content of the interview. This reading should be done in one sitting, if possible, and should be uninterrupted.
2. Read through the complete transcript a second time. During this second reading, make notes in the margins of the transcript, highlighting important ideas (overarching theories or narratives) or categories (specific topics or terms) that jump out at you from the text. Attention should be paid to ideas/categories that you judge to be recurring and/or that appear to have some significance. This reading should be done in one sitting, if possible, and should be uninterrupted.
3. Read through the complete transcript a third and final time. During this third reading, focus less on in-depth reading of the transcript and more on the ideas and categories you

created in the margins during the second reading. Specifically, pay attention to the following:

- do certain ideas or categories occur more frequently than others?
- do different ideas or categories appear to be related to one another (e.g., categories and sub-categories, overlapping ideas)?
- do different ideas or categories appear to be contrasted with one another?
- what major interpretive themes appear to be emerging through these ideas and categories?

Though this early work primarily served the purpose of familiarizing the team with these data, this process also uncovered preliminary patterns and themes in the data that helped to guide the below analysis.

Following these processes of team reading and reflection, I engaged in a more in-depth process of template analysis (King, 2012; Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003), grouping our data according to the guiding questions of ecological subjectivities in the practice of research: what meso- and exo-level processes appear to be present in the practice of research, and how do they either support or hinder research design and implementation? Once the data were grouped according to these questions, patterns and themes within and between these groups were identified, and the meanings of these patterns and themes were analyzed and connected back to the guiding questions (Charmaz, 2006).

Finally, to address the third question on our own team's tendencies to fall victim to the "religious congruence fallacy," themes and stories were drawn out from the above data to illustrate specific instances in which research team members' notions of being an "interfaith group studying interfaith groups" were superseded by decidedly nonreligious identities and factors impinging on the processes of research design and implementation. The below analysis, then, enriches our current understanding of how, in very particular cases, the congruence fallacy is manifested not just as a methodological concern, but also as a concern for interfaith scholars and practitioners in particular.

Results

Researcher Subjectivity Literature

The value of examining researcher subjectivity in the context of research practice can be understood in several ways. Practically, researcher subjectivity has been discussed as being useful for establishing credibility in qualitative research in particular, where influences of researcher bias are more commonly suspected and a greater degree of transparency is needed or demanded (Appleton, 1995; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Nolan & Behi, 1995; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Ethically speaking, studies of researcher subjectivity have been utilized where certain researcher identities are at risk of negatively affecting the research subject/participant and/or researcher, particularly where potential power inequalities exist between researcher and research subject/participant, or where researcher identities are devalued and constrained by research and academic institutions (Claveria & Alonso, 2003; Jacob, 2006; Medicine, 2001; Rhee, 2013). Finally, consideration of researcher subjectivity may have important implications for how we understand the enterprise of research, the role of the researcher, and the knowledge ultimately generated out of the practice of research (Finlay, 2008).

I contend in this paper that the utility of researcher subjectivity as a tool for enriching research practice and contributing to our generation of knowledge goes only so far as the complexity of our conceptualizations of the researcher as a subject or person. Oversimplified conceptualizations of the researcher subsequently narrow the benefit of subjectivity research and, conversely, more broadened conceptualizations of the researcher enhance the usefulness of subjectivity to understanding and improving research practice. After a thorough review of the researcher subjectivity literature, I argue that conceptualizations of the researcher as a subject or person historically have been decidedly narrow – viewing the researcher as embodying a single

identity (e.g., gender, race, nationality) or, more typically and historically, viewing research practice as primarily a cognitive activity.

The latter point – research practice understood primarily as cognitive activity – is best understood in the context of foundational phenomenological discussions on the role of the researcher vis a vis their object or subject of study. Beginning with Husserl (1936/1970), we may trace discussions of the researcher’s position in the practice of research as partly determined by the pre-understandings and biases of the researcher. In Husserl’s view, the researcher’s approach to, and understanding of, their phenomenon of interest is colored by their prior ideas about that phenomenon. The researcher must, then, attempt to “bracket” these pre-understandings and view that phenomenon in its purest form, an approach that ostensibly sees the researcher as intellectually and emotionally detached from the practice of research. Husserl’s notion that one could effectively “bracket” their prejudices or pre-understandings has been critiqued by other phenomenologists, most notably Heidegger (1927/1962) and Gadamer (1975). Taking issue with the notion that one could remove oneself from one’s prejudices, Heidegger (1927/1962) instead argued that interpretation, or one’s subjective understanding of other objects, subjects, or phenomena, is always a reality of “being-in-the-world.” He observed on this point, “Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception” (p.191). We are always, according to Heidegger, engaged in hermeneutics informed by our “fore-conceptions” about those things which we encounter. Similarly, Gadamer (1975) argued that we are always encountering phenomena from a certain vantage point informed by our particular “horizons of meaning.” Importantly, both Heidegger and Gadamer diverged from Husserl in that they argued researchers can never fully escape these “horizons of meaning” (whereas Husserl would have us “bracket” them and

somehow remove them from the practice of research), but rather should learn to examine them and more fully understand their entanglement with the research process. As Gadamer (1975) wrote:

Remain open to the meaning of the other person or text ... This openness always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it. (p. 268)

What I wish to highlight in these discussions is the assumption that research involves the researcher bringing with her or him into the research setting their particular cognitive understandings of that setting. In these conceptualizations, the researcher is a disembodied arrangement of meanings and understandings that give shape to their practice of research.

Subsequent research and discussions of researcher subjectivity have similarly focused on the ideas and cognitive schemas of the researcher as most important for understanding the ways in which the researcher affects their research practice (Bott, 2010; Canagarajah, 1996; Claveria & Alonso, 2003; Finlay, 2008; Marcus, 1994; Peshkin, 2000; Taber, 2010; Tomkins, 2011). These studies may discuss the researcher's "ideas" in a general sense, as a subjective understanding of the ways in which the world works, or they may refer to specific theoretical or philosophical traditions that inform the researcher's interests in, and interpretation of, their phenomena of interest. Tomkins' (2011) observation, for example, that researchers bring with them into research practice "their own ideas, perspectives, and pre-conceptions of what the research is about and what results it ought to yield" (p. 228) seems to indicate several layers of cognitive activity that may inform researchers' practice.

Relatedly, as a form of cognitive activity, "emotion" has gained notice among researchers as an important facet of their experiences engaging in research practice (Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Breuer, 2000; Elliott, Ryan, & Hollway, 2012; Morris, 1999; Munkejord, 2009; Rivaux, Sohn,

Armour, & Bell, 2008; Tomkins, 2011; Widdowfield, 2000). Munkejord (2009), to illustrate, captures the spirit of this line of thought in subjectivity research:

Understanding emotions as relational expressions has allowed for the reconsideration of emotions in the research process, and emotional introspection and empathy are considered apt to reveal how the processing of information is influenced by emotional states. Furthermore, research has identified a clear link between emotions and decision-making. (pp. 155–156)

Here, the researcher's "decision-making" is richly informed by her or his own emotional state, an internalized cognitive activity through which the researcher responds to the immediate settings or persons involved in their research practice.

Notably, feminist scholarship has paved the way for moving beyond these more cognized models of subjectivity to consider also embodied notions of subjectivity, including notions of the researcher as gendered, sexualized, racialized, and other identity-based factors residing outside the mind of the researcher yet no less significant for determining research practice (Bereswill, 2008; Bott, 2010; Breuer, 2000; Jacob, 2006; Medicine, 2001; Morris, 1999; Nelson, 2005; Rhee, 2013; Riggs & Augoustinos, 2005; Taber, 2010; Twine, 2000; Williams, 1996). In these studies, the researcher embodies a specific type of identity that informs her or his understanding and interpretation of their data as well as their behaviors in the field and interactions with others. Jacob (2006), for example, noted, "How a researcher understands social and cultural power dynamics in the field, especially dynamics surrounding Indigenous identity and White privilege, will deeply affect how a researcher understands and approaches her or his work in the field" (p. 451). Here, though still trapped in notions of researcher "understanding," the study of researcher subjectivity is making an important shift away from over-cognized renderings of the researcher to consider also the variety of ways in which the researcher's cognitive activities are *embodied*.

Despite such movements out of the mind and into the body of the researcher, the extant literature on researcher subjectivity has largely failed to venture still further outside the body of the researcher and the immediate settings of research activity to consider the other larger ecological systems within which research practice takes place. There are several notable exceptions in which researchers have begun to make strides toward a more comprehensive, ecological conceptualization of the researcher. Adding further complexity to the identity of the researcher, studies by Bradbury–Jones (2007) and Mizzi (2010) have examined the multiple identities that may exist within the researcher across time and different settings. More ecologically, studies by Canagarajah (1996), Ganesh (2014), and Rhee (2013) have paid attention to the higher education institutional structures that inform research practice, while Roberts and McGinty (1995) and Taber (2010) have paid only brief notice to family and other personal factors that may help to shape research practice. These instances, though helpful, have failed to advance a compelling rationale and theoretical framework for broadening the scope of subjectivity to these other ecological factors.

The contribution of the remaining analysis, then, is to push notions of researcher subjectivity beyond the one–dimensional, ecologically limited notions of personhood that have come to comprise the bulk of the extant literature and to do so utilizing a theoretical framework that allows for consistent, systematic examination of researcher ecology. In some ways, this entails a more in–depth examination of the external social, cultural, and institutional factors that shape research practice that, to date, have received only limited or passing mention. In other ways, this entails a closer examination of the more mundane components of research practice that rarely receive mention at all – the cost of travel to and from research sites, research team email exchanges, and simple embodied factors like hunger. This move requires thinking of

research practice as something other than just high-level cognitive activity, but also as something that is embodied, economical, political, and utterly everyday. It is my hope that such a turn will not be viewed merely as an attempt to overcomplicate research practice and as an exercise in navel-gazing, but rather that it would be viewed as necessary for more fully understanding why researchers do the things we do, why we make the decisions we make, and what all of it means for the work we ultimately end up producing and the work we may continue to produce in the future.

Ecological Subjectivity

Turning now to an analysis of the qualitative data collected directly from our interfaith project research team – four interviews, one focus group, 570 emails exchanged between team members, and field notes maintained by another graduate student and myself – I consider the ways in which a more fully ecological understanding of research practice illumines the many factors that ultimately influence and help comprise researcher behaviors and choices. The picture that emerges of us as researchers is one that highlights the dependence of research on a host of factors beyond the supposed objective knowledge and abilities of the researcher as such. This is not to completely dismiss the final research product that emerges from such practice – in fact, I argue this ecological reflexivity only *improves* the final product by more extensively considering its dependencies and limitations. It is my hope, moreover, that this analysis highlights and enriches current understandings of the issue at the heart of my larger dissertation effort – namely that narrow analytic focus on categories such as “religious identity” obscures the myriad other ecological factors that warrant our attention right alongside whatever our primary analytic categories of interest are, whether religious identity or otherwise. We are complex individuals

embedded in complex and dynamic environments, and the practice of research certainly is no exception.

Mesosystemic factors. Over the course of the research project, we encountered several other microsystems overlapping with the research project microsystem that comprised the interfaith project’s mesosystem – systems outside the immediate research project setting within which research participants were also actively involved and which influenced the research process in a variety of ways. These other microsystems included families, friend and peer networks, Vanderbilt University settings, and faith communities, and ranged in nature of influence from supportive to conflicting. Illustrated in Table 2.1 below, the university peer network and research partners were among the most commonly encountered and discussed *supportive* microsystems outside the research microsystem. Looking first at the university peer network of which our research team members were a part, peer support most frequently was manifested through university faculty and graduate students contacting research team members

Table 2.1. Mesosystemic supports for research practice.

Support category	# of occurrences
University system	36
Peer network	27
Coursework	8
Research partners	16
Family	10
Faith community	5

with research articles, opportunities for research grant support, and other resources that would potentially aid the research team through the research process. Specifically, university peers contacted research team members about the following resources and opportunities in connection to the research project:

- North American Academy of Ecumenists Annual Essay Contest
- Overview report on the Muslim community in Nashville, TN
- NPR broadcast on *The myth of the Muslim tide*
- Call for papers in an Islam–focused academic journal
- George Lakoff article on religion and politics
- *Contemporary Organization Theory* book
- *New Directions in the Study of Prayer* grant opportunity with the Social Science Research Council
- Lecture materials on community–based participatory research
- Campus event on religious diversity
- Call for papers on *Theories of Radicalization of Muslims*
- NPR broadcast on the Council of American Islamic Relations
- *The Muslims are Coming* comedy show (x2)
- Chronicle of Higher Education article, *Where are all the Islamic terrorists?*
- Tennessean article, *Anti–Islam group finds fertile ground in Nashville*
- Journal article on religion and multi–level modeling
- Robert Putnam article on religion and diversity

In addition to providing these resources, university peers also assisted in survey development for the interfaith project survey, would frequently place newspaper articles in research team members' mailboxes that were relevant to the interfaith project, and would otherwise send congratulatory emails and/or express interest and support when project milestones (e.g., grant funding) were publicly announced to the team's university department.

Importantly, not all resources provided by university peers were significant to the development of the research project. Some resources shared by peers, like news about the *New Directions in the Study of Prayer* grant opportunity, certainly resulted in significant time and energy investments on the part of research team members (which, sadly, were wasted on an unsuccessful grant application). Others, like the *The Muslims are Coming* comedy show, were

dismissed and appeared to have little impact on the overall discussions and practices of the research team. Even more important than the ultimate content or utility of individual resources, across all of these university peer resources and contacts the research team members seemed to have developed what I call an *issue-based reputation* within our professional peer networks. Simply put, our research team members over time became known as the “interfaith people” within our peer networks, such that whenever an associated faculty member or student would encounter a resource even loosely related to the topic of interfaith work, that resource would then be forwarded on to or shared with at least one member of the research team. I contend that such a reputation, solidified within the team’s university department over time, helped to make the process of collecting resources in support of the research project more efficient and comprehensive, as peers collectively were able to provide much more resourcing for our team than we ever could have provided for ourselves.

Also occurring frequently in my analysis was the support the team appeared to be receiving from various research partners. This source of support may be unique to certain types of academic programs such as ours that place a premium on participatory research, though certainly our resulting project was not nearly as participatory as we had intended. Increasingly extolled by action researchers and psychologists, participatory research is a model of research that seeks to create space for the voices of others in the research process beyond just the researchers – community leaders, organization participants, and other non-researchers who may have a stake in the research process (Detweiler & Detweiler-Bedell, 2012; Gershon, 2009; Sagor, 2010; Sullivan & Kelly, 2001). Early on in the project our team had sought input from research partners on the particular directions they would want the project to go – specific questions they would want answered through the research and issues with which they were

concerned. Each of our partners, however, declined to participate in this early stage of project development, indicating more of a general interest in what we might find through our research. Despite this, throughout the project partners were still able to provide support in areas such as survey development (e.g., helping with survey question terminology), and survey dissemination. Like our university peer networks, several research partners also provided team members with articles and notices about local events in which the research team members may have had an interest.

While the interfaith project’s mesosystem often existed in support of research practice, as demonstrated above, the research team often encountered mesosystemic factors that served to disable or restrict research practice. Shown in Table 2.2 below, the most frequent occurrences of conflict with the research project mesosystem were related to research team families and to the Vanderbilt University systems of which team members were a part. Looking first at tensions between the family and research project microsystems, family was often encountered as a microsystem competing for research team member time and commitment. This was manifested

Table 2.2. Mesosystemic hindrances for research practice.

Hindrance category	# of occurrences
Family	25
University system	15
Peer network	3
Faith community	9
Scheduling	8
Research partners	2

in instances of attempting to carry out simple project-related tasks – emails highlight meetings that had to be rescheduled because of a child’s dentist appointment, for example, or project work that had to be put off because of a prior commitment made to a spouse – as well as in more challenging instances of questioning whether raising a family and being a full-time graduate student ultimately would be compatible. One research team member discussed this latter point in an interview, sharing her feelings of being torn between important research and commitments to family:

I feel like sometimes it’s just about wanting to do the right thing and what is the right thing and I mean ultimately your goal is to get it together and to think about, like, if I’m doing this what am I not doing kind of thing. I mean it’s kind of the tension between just our competing priorities you know and I absolutely think that this is very important work and I do think about that ... And especially my kids and my family, I don’t want to be so wrapped up in work that I’m missing kid stuff ... And I think that’s been a real, you know I’m a little bit torn.

Given the nature of the research project as one focusing on conflict between religious groups and interfaith efforts to resolve those conflicts, the tensions between the family and research project microsystems were in some cases related to the difficulty research team members had in reconciling the nature of the project to conservative family members and friends who had fundamental issues with the nature of the project. One research team member described this tension in this way:

So trying to open up about that this is what I’m interested in doing with conservative friends and family. My parents are conservative, Republican people and you know I’m ashamed to say that I’ve run into some issues as far as being involved with Muslims and building relationships with Muslims and that they’ve been a little, not skeptical, I mean they, they have never come out and said something just overtly negative or threatening, but maybe just wary and just not sure what to make of it ... And even so the Muslim Peace Building Conference, you know the pictures went up on Facebook and I was tagged in them and unfortunately my, one of my immediate reactions to that photo being put up on Facebook is you know everyone will see this and this is going to generate questions or people are going to come to me and you know – “what is this, what are you doing?”

Here the researcher is struggling with whether or not the family and research project microsystems are truly compatible, and whether or not involvement in one microsystem (family) allows them to be fully open and honest about their involvement in the other (research project). Another research team member similarly struggled with the more conservative values of her family and the perceived conflict between family and their involvement in the project:

Everybody's been pretty open, except, I don't know if I told you my father is very much not into interfaith ... He's glad I'm working with the Muslim community, he's glad I'm working on my PhD, but he kind of feels like interfaith work is kind of a way to get people away from Islam sometimes, and so he would rather I focus more on the community side ... My mom is you know yeah, that's important we need to be part of the community. But they're pretty conservative and so they are ... because they've seen me, and I wear hijabs and my sisters don't, and so I think they think that I practice more than my sisters and so they're more comfortable for me to do it.

As the above excerpts illustrate, there has been a felt tension in this project between the researchers' perceived relationships with and obligations to the family microsystem, on the one hand, and their involvement in a worthwhile, yet potentially controversial, research project on the other, such that the researchers often end up feeling "torn." We might speculate in what ways this would lead researchers to compromise in either sphere of life, concealing or being dishonest about certain aspects of their professional life with family members (e.g., hiding professional conferences from social media) or avoiding important avenues for research that would potentially create conflict with family.

Finally, the university microsystem as conflicting with the research project microsystem emerged as a frequent occurrence in our data, and in somewhat similar fashion to the family microsystem. Emails frequently highlighted instances when university-related obligations would cause a delay in a research meeting, or delay team members from completing certain research-related tasks (e.g., working on a grant proposal is delayed by end-of-semester grading). These, like family obligations, appear to be more subtly significant in their tendency to slow or delay

the research process, rather than outright restricting it. This highlights an important gap in the researcher subjectivity literature, and one that demands further attention beyond this study, namely the *chronological nature* of research practice or the ways in which time gives research an identity unique to a particular unfolding and structuring of time. Research practice unfolds over months and sometimes years, and one wonders how the persistent and seemingly mundane time delays through scheduling and other issues help to give a project its particular chronologically situated identity. What potential field observations were missed in a particular week, or how does the unfolding of time affect research participants and influence their particular interview responses and narratives? Here Dokecki's (1996) notions of generativity, and particularly his treatment of the "temporal" nature of human development, will be helpful for future research in framing discussions on whether and how research practice moves from the past, through the present, and into the future in very particular ways.

Further, as with the family microsystem, several research team members struggled with what they at times perceived to be a tension between their involvement in the research project microsystem and the university microsystem. Specifically, they wondered about the status of a religion-based research project, and their status as religious persons, within a university microsystem that in some ways seemed to them to be unfriendly to or in conflict with religion in general. In the excerpt below, one researcher wrestles with how they are perceived by others in their department, as a religious person and as a researcher interested in religion-based phenomena:

So when we did our focus group, our research team focus group, after we were done I struck up a conversation with [the focus group moderator] as we were leaving, and she told me that she was surprised to hear me talk about my history and my religious understanding. Going into it she had me pegged as some uber conservative, I think she thought I was a Catholic too ... But she had certain assumptions about who I was because she knew that I was interested in faith based research. So that kind of made me pause to think, like, people in the department do they perceive me in a certain way because I'm interested in that? ... I almost feel sometimes like I have to over compensate, like I have to reassure people you know I'm a religious person, this is what I'm interested in, but I'm safe, like you can talk to me, we can find a common ground and you know ... I almost have to like convince them that I'm cool.

Another researcher discussed the reality that due in part to their religious beliefs, they may actually *be* more conservative than their peers in the university system. This realization has led them to struggle with how much they can share with peers, particularly in conversations/issues where differences may potentially emerge:

But more of my conversations have not been about religion and so I haven't, except with our group. But I do sometimes feel like gosh I'm not sure I would share some of this information. I mean just, not that I wouldn't, but I'm not sure how I would probably emphasize.

This analysis, then, reveals certain features about the research project mesosystem that are important to the practice of research in several ways. As a support, the mesosystem provides important resources both from peers within the university system and from partners who move in and out of the research project at various stages of the project's life. As a source of conflict, however, other microsystems surrounding the research project can compete for researcher time and commitment and serve as a source of tension in values, such that researchers feel torn between their commitments to seemingly competing microsystems.

Exosystemic factors. While members of the research team have found ourselves directly involved in other microsystems that overlap with the research project microsystem, we also have found our research practice affected in positive and negative ways by other systems in which we are *not* directly involved and yet which are nonetheless critical for the development of the

research project microsystem, what Bronfenbrenner (1979) understood as the exosystem. Like the mesosystem, these exosystemic factors range from the supportive to the conflicting, and include factors like local and national media, external research funding institutions, and other academic institutions in which the research team is not directly involved.

Looking first at exosystemic supports for research practice, as shown in Table 2.3, by far the most frequently occurring exosystemic factor in our data are media – both local and national, and across a variety of platforms (e.g., online, print). As already indicated in the above section on mesosystemic factors, and peer systems in particular, the media became a source for our research team of current information and stories related to interfaith work. Even more importantly, however, the media became for us a resource through which we could find meaning and legitimacy for our work on the research project. Indeed, the very genesis of the interfaith research project can be traced to a CNN news article on the Murfreesboro Islamic Center conflict, shared via email in late August of 2010 between myself and project faculty director Paul Docecki. In an email dated August 30, 2010 at 11:48pm, I emailed Paul Docecki:

Table 2.3. Exosystemic supports for research practice.

Support category	# of occurrences
Media	87
Scholarship	54
Religious tradition	25
Funding sources	23

Some disturbing new developments in the mosque conflict here in TN.

[<article link>](#)

I think it's interesting, first of all, that this particular Muslim community has existed in Murfreesboro for 10 years (with some members living in the area for some 30 years) and that they themselves are surprised by this strong public reaction against their new building plans. Do we take this to mean that, up until now, they've managed to exist in Murfreesboro somewhat peacefully and without much in the way of public opposition?

Also interesting to me is the theory, stated near the end of the article, that all of this might have something to do with the fact that we're in an election year and that some of the candidates (Ron Ramsey in particular) have publicly voiced their opposition to the building project. Could there be some validity to this theory?

At any rate, these are tragic developments and I am certain there is much exploring that can be done here!

Here in this email message we see a new research project generated through the catalyst of a local and national media agenda that, at that time, was increasingly turning to focus on issues related to Islamophobia and religious diversity (Pew Research, 2011). Even before the project begins, we can see the role the media played even in informing the theoretical framework out of which the project developed.

Subsequently, through media sources like *The Tennessean* and *The New York Times*, research team members would frequently circulate the latest articles and news pieces related to interfaith conflict and work in the middle Tennessee area and across the world. Locally, this consisted of keeping up with events related to the Murfreesboro Islamic Center controversy, a controversy that involved years-long legal disputes and often violent outbursts targeting the Murfreesboro Muslim community. Through the local media in particular, our research team came to know and share articles featuring characters like the "bow tie man" (as we came to refer to him in our correspondences), an attorney leading the anti-Islam movement and known for wearing bow ties during his court appearances, and Eric Allen Bell, a documentary filmmaker

who publicly turned against the Murfreesboro Muslim community after once passionately supporting them. Nationally, we frequently shared articles from the *Times* related to the so-called “Ground Zero Mosque,” Florida pastor Terry Jones who made news threatening to burn copies of the Koran, as well as general commentary about issues related to religious diversity.

Also frequently occurring in our research team processes were Catholic-based media sources such as the *National Catholic Reporter* and the *Contending Modernities* blog out of Notre Dame, shared primarily through research team faculty member Paul Docecki, a devout Catholic whose own research has at times been focused on the Catholic Church specifically. Most typically, articles shared through these Catholic sources would include reflections from a Catholic theological or ethical perspective on religious diversity (such as “American identity and the challenge of Islam,” published on Dec. 12, 2010 in *Contending Modernities*), or news and/or reflections on Pope Francis and his public statements and gestures on religious diversity (such as “Pope writes to world’s Muslims at end of Ramadan, urges mutual respect” and “Muslim leader says pope is model of what religious leader should be,” published on Aug. 2 and Oct. 8, 2013, respectively, in the *National Catholic Reporter*).

These acts of sharing articles and news stories, from all members of the team, seldom were accompanied by commentary and seldom were explicitly and intentionally tied to research activities. In most instances, they were shared with an accompanying “Of interest” introductory line, and on some occasions would prompt a response from another team member commenting that they found the article interesting and/or helpful. That these media articles and news pieces were seldom explicitly tied to research activities beyond these brief communications may lead one to question their utility. I propose, however, that their utility has been more subtle yet no less

significant to the development of the research project microsystem. In the below interview excerpt, Paul Dokecki describes his media consumption habits, which I believe are relevant here:

I come in in the morning ... And I fire up *New York Times*, *New York Review of Books*, *America Magazine*, and *National Catholic Reporter*. And I see all, *America* is a Jesuit publication, *Commonweal* is published by laity in the Catholic church but it's always been a journal of Catholic opinion and thought. And the *New York Review of Books* ... So, when those four open up, I've always wanted my psychology to connect with the real world. I've always felt that to do justice to my community of psychology, I needed to be informed about public, political, economic, and social matters. So, it isn't that I keep up to date on current events, it's I know it's all part of a whole. So I read those four ... I'm learning stuff from each, latest take on things, et cetera, that just I use as part of, to keep me up to date as a community psychologist. That's the way I think about it. So, I read some scholarly stuff, those four things aren't particularly scholarly, but, you know, but they all kind of come together, and it's stuff that enriches my understanding of the world and I find it necessary to know those things in order to make sure that the stuff that I am reading that is more scholarly does connect with reality.

The above excerpt suggests several things about our research team's frequent sharing of media articles and news pieces. First, the act of frequently keeping in touch with current events in the media is an act that ties our research team to what we believe to be the values of the field of community psychology, the discipline undergirding our research team's university department. To be a community psychologist means to be informed on what is currently happening in the world, and certainly this includes being informed on current interfaith-related happenings. Second, the particular media sources referenced above – two secular, liberal, and well-respected sources, and two Catholic sources – may speak to the sources of information that matter to Paul and to the other research team members. That we frequently stay in touch with media sources that are well-respected and/or relevant to our religious identities (and, indeed, the other team members would share media resources from their respective religious traditions, though less frequently than Paul) adds meaning and legitimacy to the work we are doing as a research team. That “interfaith” matters to *Commonweal* (and, ostensibly, to Pope Francis), for example, may help to reinforce for devout Catholic Paul that it should also matter to him. That *The New York*

Times feels Islamophobia is important enough to warrant extensive coverage helped to reinforce for research team members that the interfaith project matters beyond our own personal interests.

Turning, finally, to exosystemic hindrances to research practice, the primary factor identified through our data as a hindrance was the university system, and specifically the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Vanderbilt University. While research team members were directly involved with the IRB, submitting materials and corresponding via email on questions related to the IRB submission process, research team members were not able to directly influence the timing, processes, and decisions reached by the IRB in relation to the interfaith project, and otherwise were not direct actors in the IRB microsystem. While there are ongoing debates as to the ultimate purpose and value of institutional review boards generally (Stark, 2011), my interest here in this analysis is in the ways in which the Vanderbilt IRB directly influenced the interfaith research team's practice and experiences within the research team microsystem.

Very early in the development of the interfaith research project, our research team was very concerned about adhering to IRB policies and not implementing any research activities that would be deemed as inappropriate by the IRB. Out of this sensitivity, we felt it necessary to contact the IRB and seek their guidance in how to proceed with research activities related to planning and data collection. The following correspondence to an IRB member (one of several), seeking guidance on how to proceed with data collection, illustrates the early involvement of the IRB in directing our team's research processes:

Hi, xxxxxxxx.

I wanted to just briefly touch base with you about a research project I'm developing along with my colleagues Paul Docecki and Hasina Mohyuddin in Peabody's Human and Organizational Development department. We thought it might be helpful to reach out to you and see if you have any suggestions or insights as we put together our IRB application.

Essentially, we will be aiming to look at several different interfaith organizations around the country, examining the various ways in which they form and negotiate collective identity – a case study approach – and our methods will primarily involve interviews, observations, and a survey instrument.

Our research will be participatory in nature, meaning a good deal of what we do will be guided by the specific concerns and needs of the organizations with which we are working, and that we will in some ways be building the plane as we fly. This being the case, our best sense of approaching the IRB approval process is to begin with a basic beginning framework for the initial application – starting with preliminary interviews and observations – and adding our survey instrument and other interview and observation possibilities as amendments as we go along and further develop them.

Does this strike you as the best way to go about doing this, from an IRB application perspective? Are you able to think of any other suggestions, concerns, or issues that we should be aware of as we begin the application process?

Any help you are able to provide at this stage would be much appreciated. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to working with you through the application process as it comes together!

In this excerpt, our team is interacting with and framing our research activities according to the IRB's structure for when and how research at our university should proceed. The IRB, here, emerges in our project as an external institution with which we must negotiate and which, one might infer from the above excerpt, is perceived to possess a certain degree of authority and power over the development of our research. Far from being a mere formality, such a structure in part determined the particular pacing of our project, when we could begin data collection, and when we could not. This reality is felt, for example, in our correspondences with a case study organization from whom we were seeking to (eventually) collect data. My own email correspondence suggests a long waiting period for beginning formal data collection with this particular organization:

Hi, xxxxxxxx.

It's good to hear from you, and it's good to receive this information about your meeting! Hopefully either Hasina and I can make it out for this meeting next week. I trust all has been going well and that the group continues to roll along nicely.

Two brief items of interest for you. (1) We should (hopefully) be nearing the end of the Institutional Review Board application process, meaning here in the next month or so (a long process, I know!) we should be able to start working with you in an official, formal capacity before too long. (2) I am in the process of applying for a few very small grants to help cover the costs of gas/mileage, necessary data analysis software, etc. I am including your name on these applications as my primary contact person for Women of Faith, just as a formality. I hope this is ok with you – please let me know if this is a concern for you and/or if someone else's name should be given instead.

Again, I hope all is well! We are still very much excited about working with you once we get all of these little formalities out of the way, and I hope your group still feels the same way.

Please don't hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

A subsequent email from the same case study organization indicates that IRB approval has been obtained, and it is only then that we begin the process of planning and scheduling meetings with the group to begin data collection. In these examples, and indeed throughout the preceding analysis, we can see the dependence of research practice on a range of factors that extend far beyond the individual researcher or research team. Our understanding of the particular timing at which a research project unfolds, and the particular “flavor” on which a research project takes, is enriched by this more fully ecological view of the researcher and research team.

“Interfaith group studying interfaith groups.” Finally, I now turn briefly to consider the implications of the above analysis for the more fully ecological understanding of interfaith work that is discussed in more detail in the two remaining dissertation papers. As mentioned earlier, soon after beginning this research project our team became fascinated with the notion of being an “interfaith” group ourselves, and the extent to which this fact would affect our research practice. Note the following email sent from me to the rest of the team early on in the project:

Hi, Paul and Hasina.

I was just reflecting on our research project, and a question came to mind that I wanted to run past both of you. It strikes me that the makeup of our research team (a Methodist, a Muslim, and a Catholic) and our activities thus far (exploring each others' faith traditions, asking questions, dialoguing) in many ways mirrors on a smaller scale the project we're developing on a much larger scale. So my question is, what precedent, theories, etc, are we aware of relative to this "embodied" approach to research?

I'm aware of work on reflective practices in research (journaling, etc) and the idea of building a research team with a diversity of social characteristics and with perspectives that reflect those of the community/individuals with which they're working, but what of research teams that themselves go through the very experiences, transformations, etc, that they are mapping onto the larger research project?

Either way, I think there is an interesting paper somewhere in there, just on our experiences and methods as a multi-faith research team. Any thoughts on this?

Mark

In this correspondence I betray my earlier tendencies to fall victim to Chaves' (2010) "religious congruence fallacy" in that I sought to attribute our behaviors and choices as a research team primarily to our unique identities as religious people. Of interest to me, at the time, were the ways in which our theologies and religious histories, and the interfaith mixture of our different identities, would provide us a unique window into interfaith phenomena.

However, over the course of the project I became increasingly more attuned to the nonreligious factors that were helping to shape my research behaviors and was soon convicted that I was oversimplifying my own identity as a researcher in addition to oversimplifying interfaith phenomena more generally. One instance of fieldwork in particular solidified this realization for me, captured in the following field notes detailing a visit to a campus interfaith event:

That night leading up to the interfaith panel was an interesting one for me. Financially, our family was in a very tight spot – our generous tax refund hadn't hit the bank account yet ... and I was still several days away from getting my monthly Vanderbilt stipend, and yet we were in the red – we had overdrawn our account and didn't have a penny to spend.

It was a situation we've been finding ourselves in more and more lately – our savings have been completely depleted by now, this far into my grad program, and my grad stipend isn't nearly enough to cover all the expenses that come with having three kids, a mortgage, etc. And, to top it all off, mom and dad are struggling themselves and can no longer act as a fall-back when our funds become depleted ... Knowing I couldn't afford to buy any food on campus yesterday, and knowing it was my long day at campus, I'd packed more food in the morning to take with me than I normally would have ... It turned out, much to my disappointment, that this wasn't near enough food for lunch and dinner for a grown man such as myself, so as the day wore on I found myself somewhat underfed yet “stuck” on campus and without a penny for more food or drink ... My only hope at this point was that the interfaith panel would provide some light snacks that I could load up on a plate ... I felt embarrassed and didn't quite feel up to chatting with the others ... It took me some time to feel comfortable mingling – everyone else here seems happy and fed and comfortable, I thought to myself. No one understands how difficult things have been for our family lately, how much we've been struggling.

Here, the mesosystem surrounding the research project microsystem made itself tangibly felt to me – in the financial challenges my family was facing at the time, and most concretely in my hungry body and my inability to focus fully on the task-at-hand through the distractions of embarrassment and social status. This particular occurrence would weigh heavily on me and would subsequently lead to a realization of the importance of looking beyond just the religious identity of persons involved in interfaith work to focus on other facets of their identity and of the social world within which they find their being.

Discussion

As detailed above, in the early stages of the research project, team members expressed in IRB applications, grant applications, and other project-related communications our interest in our identity as an “interfaith group studying interfaith groups.” It was our intent to examine the ways in which our individual and collective religious identities as researchers influenced the research process, and in-turn the ways in which the research process influenced or changed in any ways our religious identities. As the above analyses illustrate, we discovered over the course of our project the actual complexity of our identities as more than just religious persons, as well

as our embeddedness within ecological systems that did not necessarily relate to our religious identities or beliefs. In these ways we found ourselves, initially at least, falling into the assumptions and narrow analytic categories that leave researchers at risk of Chaves' (2010) congruence fallacy and Fletcher's (2005) interfaith "identity logic." In reality, our experiences as complex individuals challenged our narrow conceptions of who we were as a research team and of the particular phenomena that would come to influence our research process. This is illustrated most clearly in the above journal entry in which I wrestle with my family's financial challenges and how these challenges affected my data collection activities in the field.

Much more than just our religious identities, and our collective identity as an "interfaith group," we also found ourselves during the research process as spouses, parents, colleagues, media consumers, and university system participants, among other things. Recalling Chaves' (2010) challenge to social scientists of religion, ours was a process of learning to broaden our analytic lenses and categories to include phenomena that initially were not a part of our project conceptualization and design. Our religious identities were not the only explanatory variables for our choices, behaviors, and experiences as researchers, and the above analyses demonstrate the various ways in which this was indeed the case. Importantly, these realizations that unfolded over the course of the research project were directly connected to the interfaith phenomena that were the foci of our research project. If we ourselves, initially conceived of merely as religious persons engaging with one another and with the research field, were much more complex in our identities and experiences, then certainly this must be true as well for participants of interfaith organizational work. My own family's financial challenges, then, were not just an opportunity for me to reflect on the complexity of my own identity and experiences. They were also an opportunity for me to reflect on the possibility that interfaith involvement more generally is

characterized by such things as socio–economic status and family challenges, beyond the typical “logic” by which interfaith participants are defined. Thus the above analyses are important not just for better defining ourselves as researchers, but also for better defining the phenomena we as researchers are interested in studying and understanding.

In taking a more fully ecological view of the researcher, the above analyses make important contributions to the extant literature on researcher subjectivity in particular. As discussed in my earlier literature review, studies on researcher subjectivity have most typically adopted a narrow view of the individual researcher, removed from any ecological systems within which the researcher may find his or her self. These studies have made significant contributions in understanding the complex identities contained within the researcher – whether defined by gender, sexuality, religion, or other categories – yet the above analyses enrich these extant studies by situating the complex researcher identities within equally complex and dynamic meso– and exo–systemic environs. The end result, potentially, is that we come to take a view of the researcher as much more subjectively determined than previous studies have even allowed, a risky proposition in a professional field that in many ways still seeks to claim values of objectivity and put forth ostensibly rigorous, unbiased, and skilled research.

The implications of the above analyses, however, need not reflect negatively on the practice of complex, ecologically situated research. I argue there is benefit in knowing more fully the limitations of our research and naming more extensively those factors which allow any given research project to take on particular flavors and directions for inquiry. The particular media sources we used as a foundation and subsequent fodder for our research, for example, may suggest *other* important media sources that were *not* a regular resource for research team conversation and reflections but that warrant consideration for future learning and information–

gathering. The particular timing of our data collection activities, in part determined by processes associated with IRB approval and otherwise with scheduling and implementing daily research-related tasks, may suggest a certain “rhythm” and “season” at which our project unfolded and may further suggest that other rhythms and times of year could potentially yield different types of data. Certainly a field of study like interfaith work, comprised of religious groups that follow annual calendars and rhythms of religious practice (e.g., the season of Ramadan for Muslims, the season of Advent for Christians), should warrant close attention to the windows of time within which research design and data collection activities occur. Acknowledging these particularities of research practice, then, allows us to better understand what data we collected, and why we collected those particular data, more than they suggest weaknesses in a professional field of practice that somehow should be devoid of human subjectivity. Moreover, I argue that this sensitivity to ourselves and our own processes served to improve the quality of the research that ultimately was produced. Our increasing awareness of the complexities of our own identities as researchers attuned us to the complexities of interfaith engagement as well, sharpening our focus on dimensions of interfaith participation we otherwise may have overlooked. Our increasing awareness of the mesosystemic factors shaping our research practice, for example, led us to uncover important mesosystemic factors shaping interfaith organizational involvement, such as the support (or lack of support) received by the interfaith organization participant from their own personal faith community and/or their families and friends (detailed in Chapter IV below).

Finally, it is my belief that the above analyses may suggest important implications for policy and program development in university settings structured around the health and well-being of graduate students in particular. Whether dealing with tensions between school obligations and family obligations, or dealing with the financial challenges of living on a

graduate student budget, or even dealing with feelings of being an “outsider” in one’s own university community, graduate student issues such as those highlighted in the above analyses should be taken seriously by university administrators and faculty as opportunities to consider how university policy and programming does or does not adequately support the graduate students upon which so much of their research is built. Recent studies (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2006; Kernan, Bogart, & Wheat, 2011; Longfield, Romas, & Irwin, 2006) have noted issues related to mental health and personal relationships among graduate students and the effects of these issues on academic success. The above analyses may help to shed light on how this has come to be for some graduate students, particularly for those dealing with family– and finance–related anxiety and depression.

Ecological subjectivity, then, may also be a useful tool for research practitioners, whether faculty or graduate students, in better paying attention to their own lives and being better attuned to their own health and well–being as they attempt to go about the processes of research implementation and data collection. In doing so, researchers and university administrators will be better equipped to meet the challenges encountered by university staff and students and subsequently create university structures more conducive to healthy professional development and practice. How might the above data inform, for example, the development of a campus community and supports for religious graduate students seeking to find meaningful connections between their work and their personal religious lives? Or how might the above data speak to the need for more resources and supports for faculty and graduate students who have families and who are struggling to navigate their many personal and professional commitments? Ecological subjectivity, in these ways, may enrich the lives of those who practice it just as much as it enriches the research processes of which they are a part.

Strengths and Limitations

The above study has been strengthened in several ways by considerations and measures taken by the research team, worth mentioning here. First, and somewhat uncommon in the subjectivity literature, this study has utilized several different sources of data for examining subjectivity, enhancing our ability to understand our processes as a research team. Most conventionally, field notes were maintained to capture researcher experiences in the field and personal reflections on these experiences. Further, and less conventionally, these field notes were supplemented by interviews among research team members as well as by several hundred research team emails that were archived over the course of the years-long project. Achieving such triangulation is rare in subjectivity research and allows for greater confidence in the above observations made about our own particular research team processes.

Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory was woven throughout the entire life of the research project that serves as the basis of this study – from research design, to data collection, and finally to analysis. This allowed members of our team, and indeed allowed me in the above study, to exercise a heightened level of awareness of our own subjectivities at multiple levels of analysis and therefore to generate the volume and variety of data often needed to conduct more robust ecological or multi-level studies. This has enabled us to circumvent to some degree a critique often leveled against ecological research – that its ecological aspirations are not always followed through with ecologically minded data collection and/or analysis.

Several important limitations to the above study warrant brief mention as well, especially as they may suggest opportunities for future research. First, as with most qualitative research, the above study suffers from a very small sample size, examining research team processes of only one research team consisting of three core members. Though the multiple sources of data used in

the above study (field journals, interviews, email correspondences) are helpful in providing a rich in–depth look at the research team, future research will be helped by expanding the above examination to include other and more diverse researchers and research teams. Both graduate students focused upon in this study are married and have multiple young children, which explains the focus in their data on family obligations, for example. A more diverse sample of graduate students, including students with no family obligations, may help to uncover other important factors not encountered by the above two graduate students. Furthermore, the religious nature of both the research project and the research team provided a unique opportunity for examining researcher subjectivity – one may wonder to what extent the above analyses can be applied across different types of research projects and research members and teams.

The above analyses also suffer from a narrow focus only on the meso– and exo–systemic levels of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory model. My rationale for focusing only on these two levels is the observation that, by and large, the subjectivity literature has tended to miss phenomena located at these levels and generally has paid more sufficient attention to Bronfenbrenner’s other levels of analysis. I also felt, given the potentially expansive and all–encompassing nature of ecological analyses (Moos, 1996), that placing constraints around a potentially expansive analytic field would help in managing the data and preventing my analyses from becoming too “unruly” in attempting to examine too much. Still, my focus on these two specific levels of analyses raises the question of what important factors may have been missed in this study. How might attention to the macrosystemic level of phenomena, for example, have enriched the above discussions and helped to shed light on our interfaith research team processes? Future research in this area may need to contend with important decisions around

which level(s) of analysis to include or exclude and why, similar to what I have attempted to do here.

Conclusion

The above analyses provide compelling evidence that the extant researcher subjectivity literature can be enriched by a more fully ecological view of the researcher not just as a complex individual with intersecting identities, but also as a person embedded within multiple ecological levels. Such an analysis is beneficial for several reasons. First, it allows us to better understand the biases and limitations of our own research and to better plan future research that can mitigate some of these limitations. If we have a better understanding of the particular persons and literatures that have informed our research design and data collection, we can better identify *other* sources of theoretical and empirical information. Second, it raises our level of sensitivity to the experiences and challenges of the individuals implementing research practice, and particularly the experiences and challenges of graduate students who are especially vulnerable to financial and other personal challenges. Better understanding the graduate student researcher may allow us to better develop graduate programming to help support students and improve the overall well-being of students as they make their way through their research and studies. Finally, and most importantly as the dissertation progresses to subsequent chapters, such an analytic approach can help to inform our approach to other social phenomena of interest. In highlighting the complex identities and environs of the researcher, we open up space for conversation about the complex identities and environs of other social actors as well. Specifically, we open up space for considering how the interfaith organization participant is far from just a religious person. Like the researcher, the interfaith participant may also find him or herself influenced by a range of factors beyond those that typically are the focus of interfaith scholarship and practice.

CHAPTER III

WOMEN AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN INTERFAITH ORGANIZATIONS

Interfaith scholar Diana Eck (1993) has shared the story about a disappointing experience at a high-profile international gathering of leaders from many of the world's religious traditions. As the leaders who comprised this gathering joined together for a "photo op" with the international media, Eck couldn't help but notice that all of the leaders gathered were men. This was a disappointing realization, Eck reflected, because the gathering had failed to give voice and embodied representation to the many contributions women have made to these religious traditions over the centuries. It was disappointing, too, because it was indicative of something other interfaith scholars have noted as a persistent problem in the interfaith movement, namely that religious representation in interfaith spaces is reserved only for those with privilege and power within the world's religious traditions, a group most typically comprised of men (King, 1998; McCarthy, 2007). Thus, even as the interfaith movement has celebrated its successes in gathering together people of diverse religious identities, it is continually dogged by the realization that diversity in religious identities is often achieved at the expense of diversity in other important facets of individual identity.

This preference of religious identity over other important facets of identity was manifested in my own early attempts to analyze the survey data that serve as the basis of the present study. Attempts to find meaningful patterns of survey responses defined by religious identities (Christian respondents compared to non-Christian respondents, Abrahamic respondents compared to non-Abrahamic respondents, and so on) failed to prove fruitful and ultimately required reflection on and consideration of the possibility that meaningful response

patterns could be found instead along nonreligious lines. This analytic failure was due to two primary factors: (1) Religious identities, even within the same tradition, often fail to follow a consistent, logical pattern (Chaves, 2010). For example, some might expect Christian respondents residing in a predominantly Christian nation to report higher perceived tolerance of their own religion within their communities, as in fact many of our Christian survey respondents did. Some Christian respondents, however, apparently perceived a lack of tolerance for Christians within their communities. (2) As the overarching theme of this dissertation suggests, response patterns and experiences within interfaith settings are quite often determined by decidedly nonreligious identities and factors.

The latter point – that nonreligious identities and factors often help determine personal experiences within interfaith settings and subsequent survey response patterns – serves as the focal point of this study. Specifically, in this study I consider gender as a key variable for examining and understanding interfaith participants’ responses to survey questions related to their perceptions of their interfaith organizations as well as their responses to critical organizational outcomes. Ultimately, I argue that such an analysis is helpful for suggesting important “blind spots” existing within interfaith organizations and initiatives, and that these “blind spots” represent both the risks of neglecting certain nonreligious identities and needs of interfaith participants as well as the opportunities for more intentionally structuring interfaith work around these identities and needs.

Women and Interfaith Work

Women have been central throughout the modern interfaith movement and have made strides to make their voices heard even at the earliest stages of this movement. Speaking at the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions, considered by most to be the first significant event in the

modern interfaith movement, the Reverend Antionette Brown Blackwell reflected on the role of women as religious leaders:

Women are need in the pulpit as imperatively and for the same reason that they are needed in the world – because they are women. Women have become – or when the ingrained habit of unconscious imitation has been superseded, they will become – indispensable to the religious evolution of the human race. (Eck, 1993, p. 29)

Yet, despite women's presence and uplifting words even in the formative years of the modern interfaith movement, that movement has more often than not excluded women from interfaith work and leadership or rendered them invisible and their voices unheard within that work. Eck (1993) has mourned the lost opportunities within an otherwise promising movement of religious pluralism, lamenting that too seldom have the separate spheres of feminist theology and pluralist theology found meaningful points of intersection.

Several interfaith scholars have made notable contributions to understanding the potential role of women in interfaith work, as well as to detailing their exclusion and marginalization within that work. Scholars such as King (1998, 2007), Eck (1993), McCarthy (2007), and Fletcher (2006), for example, have detailed the historic exclusion and persisting marginalization of women in interfaith work. King (1998) and Eck (1993) point to the patriarchal structures that historically have dominated most of the world's religions as an explanation for why women have struggled to find a place in the interfaith movement. In particular, they note the reality that women historically have been marginalized within most of the world's religions and that men historically have dominated the leadership and authority positions within these religions. This male dominance has not stayed within these religious traditions, but rather has spilled over into "official" representations of religious traditions in interfaith dialogue and work. Eck (1993) wrote:

I hear ... the voices of women within my own tradition who have never been given much narrative space in the history and theology of Christianity. Indeed, the voices of women have not been fully heard in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or Judaism either. Our voices have been suppressed in the texts and in the leadership of most of the world's religious traditions, though it is clear that women have done much to sustain the vibrance and vigor of these very traditions. So it is always with a profound sense of dissonance that I view the formalities of many world interfaith events, where the colorful male panoply of swamis, rabbis, bishops and metropolitans, monks and ministers line up together for a photograph of interfaith fellowship. (p. 17)

Neubauer (2005) has built on Eck's work to propose three primary obstacles restricting women's involvement and leadership in interfaith work, including women's lack of access to religious education and authority within their own personal religious traditions, and male-dominated communication patterns that color interfaith dialogue. In sum, such discussions portray an interfaith movement that has been dogged by historical structures and habits of male dominance and the marginalization of women, despite its laudable efforts to build bridges between persons defined along religious lines.

In addition to considering the historical exclusion of women from interfaith work, scholars have argued that the interfaith movement is deprived because of it and would benefit from greater inclusion of women and female voices. King (1998) has argued on this point:

Women's great invisibility, marginality and voicelessness in world religions are paralleled by the marginality and voicelessness of women in interreligious dialogue. If more women became more prominent and visible in such dialogue, this in turn might help to transform the oppressive patriarchal structures of religions and produce more compelling, more just and inclusive, but also more gender-aware religious worlds which would be more life-sustaining and life-enhancing for all peoples and the earth. (p. 52)

If the interfaith movement is to contribute something meaningful to global discussions about justice and ethics, King argued, it would do well to listen to the (in certain regards especially) more nuanced voices of women in issues of sexual justice, for example. As an illustration of this point, King has taken to task the "Declaration toward a global ethic," a product of the contemporary interfaith movement that has gained a great deal of traction among interfaith

leaders. This declaration, which condemns global patriarchy and demands gender equality, lacks “perceptive and detailed analysis ... enquiring into the religious norms and practices affecting the dynamics of gender construction” (p. 51). This illustration is indicative of King’s larger concern, namely that leaders in the interfaith movement recognize the distinctive features of the feminist voice and allow that voice to make meaningful contributions to that movement.

Ariarajah (2006) has extended King's work to highlight ways in which women may understand and implement interfaith work differently than men and further enrich that work. Noting in particular the distinctive features of dialogue among women, he observed: (1) women tended to bond quicker than men in interfaith work, specifically bonding around their common identities as women; (2) women understood and represented their religious traditions much less dogmatically, contrasted with the intellectual and dogmatic approach taken up by men; and (3) women were much more willing to share their personal stories, struggles, and experiences in relation to their religious traditions. Ariarajah’s observations are presented more anecdotally, of course, and are not supported by empirical research. One might wonder, as well, whether these observations risk slipping into an essentialist take on women’s behavior without sufficient attention to the social processes of gender role and behavior formation. His observations do, however, help introduce the likelihood that there are distinctive features of the social roles and group experiences and behaviors of women that may help in improving our structuring and implementation of interfaith organizational work.

Gender Development and Group Behavior

The extant developmental, group, and organizational literatures may suggest several broader explanations for these phenomena as they occur even beyond interfaith organizational settings. Considering first notions of human development, Jean Piaget (1960/1981), recognized

by many to be the preeminent figure in the formulation of “stage” theories of human development, devised a theory of cognitive development in which the human child over time develops different modes of thinking about and responding to their environment. Originating in his observations of the patterns of play exhibited by his own and other children, Piaget noted that children of differing ages tended to respond differently to certain games and take different approaches to solving problems (Batson et al., 1993). In other words, children of different ages appeared to display distinct modes of adapting to their physical and social environments, largely dependent upon their cognitive and physical growth. Other developmental theorists, from Kohlberg (1981; 1983) to Erikson (1959/1994), as well as religion–developmental theorists like Harms (1944), Elkind (1962; 1964a; 1964b; 1970), and Fowler (1981; 2004), have further built on Piaget’s foundational theories and extended them to consider the ways in which individuals develop religiously.

Such theories, however, suggest normative modes of development and social adjustment that eschew potentially meaningful developmental and social differences that exist between males and females. Most notably, Gilligan (1993) has argued that the developmental literature, by and large, has assumed as normative the processes of *male development*, eschewing the unique qualities of female identity and development and effectively fashioning “women out of a masculine cloth” (p. 6). Gilligan and others (Cait, 2004; Lyons, 1990; Surrey, 1991) have described the unique features of identity development in women, likely through processes of socialization, noting in particular the importance to women of interconnectedness and relationships. Thinking of religious development between genders more specifically, a number of scholars have made notable contributions to similar understandings of religious development in

women that stress certain relational dimensions of religiosity (Chan, Tsai, & Fuligni, 2014; Josselson, 1987; Parker, 2006; Reich, 1997).

Given the focus of this study on interfaith organizations, discussions of gender differences can be extended to consider differences in how men and women interact in group and organizational settings as well. Group and organizational theorists (Forsythe, 1999; Lumsden & Lumsden, 1993; Wood, Polek, & Aiken, 1985) have noted possible differences between men and women in group interaction and performance styles, with men seeming to prefer task-oriented styles and women preferring interpersonally oriented styles. Johnson, Connolly Gibbons, and Crits-Cristoph (2011), for example, have summarized the differences between men and women in counseling group behaviors:

[C]ompared with women, men tend to talk more, talk more to assert dominance (such as telling others what to do, offering suggestions or advice, and disagreeing with or criticizing others' contributions) and interrupt more to gain the floor. Women tend to disclose more and speak in a more affiliative manner, using behaviors such as praise, collaboration, active understanding, agreement, and expressing affection and support. (p. 39)

If men and women generally demonstrate different styles of engaging in group and organization behavior and performance, we may attribute these differences at least in part to processes of socialization that ascribe to men and women certain ways of being and of relating to others.

Eagly and Karau (1991) have interpreted this phenomenon through the lens of *gender role theory*, which posits that some societies historically have distributed men and women into particular familial and occupational roles that carry with them expectations for certain attributes and behaviors. Men and women subsequently act according to these expectations across various domains of social life, including group and organizational settings. Eagly and Karau observed:

Men are expected to possess high levels of agentic qualities, including being independent, masterful, assertive, and competent. Women are expected to possess high levels of communal attributes, including being friendly, unselfish, concerned with others, and emotionally expressive. (p. 686)

These observations appear consistent with Ariarajah's (2006) assertion, detailed above, that women in interfaith group settings appear to adopt behaviors and modes of organizing that stress relationship and community more so than their male counterparts. If true, however, this assertion has largely gone unexamined by, and insufficiently assimilated into the work of, interfaith scholars and practitioners.

To this end, in this second study I take up questions of whether and how nonreligious identities help explain participation and experiences within interfaith settings, with particular attention to the intersection of gender and interfaith organizational work. If interfaith work is not exclusively, or even always primarily, religious in nature – and if we may indeed argue for an embodied approach to understanding interfaith phenomena that more fully captures the varied lived experiences of interfaith participants – a better understanding of precisely how gender intersects with interfaith organizational work will prove beneficial for interfaith organizations and leaders seeking to develop interfaith programs and initiatives that are more deeply adaptive to the complex needs of the individuals with whom they work.

Research Questions

Guided by the above interests in (1) the role of nonreligious identities in interfaith work, and in the role of gender identities specifically, and (2) the possibility that women have been and continue to be marginalized within the interfaith movement, in the below analysis I answer the following research questions:

- 1) How do male and female interfaith organization participants differ in their responses to survey items related to religious beliefs, practices, and attitudes?

- 2) How do male and female interfaith organization participants differ in their responses to survey items related to interfaith organizational involvement and preferences, and interfaith organizational leadership?
- 3) Do male and female interfaith organization participants report different outcomes in “organizational sense of community,” controlling for organizational leadership role and clergy status?

Method

This study is based on data from a survey instrument designed and implemented through the “Understanding Community Interfaith Initiatives” project. The design of our survey instrument began through conversations between our three core team members about what items seemed important for inclusion on the survey. First and foremost, we acknowledged that this was a survey about organizations and members’ perceptions of and attitudes about these organizations, and that the survey should therefore maintain as primary items related to organizational participation, structure, activities, challenges, and type. These items were informed by the extensive amount of interviews and fieldwork conducted up to that point in the project, as the researchers were able to identify through the collection of these data and their observations issues and processes important to these organizations, as well as response options that were likely to be common across different organizational settings. These items were also informed by social and community psychology theories determined to be of significant interest to the research team, as with the survey’s Organizational Sense of Community scale (Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008) and items on extended social contact phenomena hypothesized to be critical influences on these organizations (Christ et al., 2010; Wright et al., 1997). Since another central aim of the project was to understand not only the organizations, but also the people joining and participating in these organizations, a significant portion of the survey was comprised of items focused on the individuals themselves, and specifically these individuals’

religious beliefs and attitudes. Particular interest in the individual items was paid to participants' attitudes and behaviors relative to religious others and religious diversity, with items informed either by existing General Social Survey items (for the purpose of being able to compare our sample to a national sample) and/or social psychology and contact theory.

In addition to serving the research team's interests, the survey was intended to focus on the issues and interests identified by our case study and national survey partners (detailed below). We viewed this practice as consistent with our disciplinary values of community-based participatory research, in which those persons traditionally thought of as research "subjects" take an active role in shaping the larger questions that drive the project in addition to helping craft the survey and other data collection instruments (Bergold, 2000; Fryer & Feather, 1994). In effect, we desired to conduct research not just *on* these individuals and organizations, but *with* them. We saw the value in this practice as being the potential both for more valid data and for research that was more practically useful to our community partners. In practice, however, our research partners declined our invitations to help shape our project and our research data collection instruments. Partners either indicated that they could not think of any questions or issues of interest or, most commonly, indicated that they were content to allow us to drive the project and were mostly interested in learning about what other interreligious organizations were doing. These partners indicated to us what they perceived to be a general absence (as far as they knew) of research in this particular area, and their excitement simply that work in this area was being done.

As the survey was to be administered exclusively online through Vanderbilt University's RedCap survey system, the survey needed to adhere to accepted standards of online survey length (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2008). The initial survey instrument contained over 200

items and was determined to be much longer than required for our target survey completion time of fifteen minutes or less. Subsequent revisions to the survey resulted in a final survey draft of just over 100 items, with cuts primarily made to individual–related survey items, allowing us to maintain the survey’s primary focus on organizational phenomena (see Appendix A). The final survey draft was tested first among the research team, to check for issues related to length, readability, item flow and logic, and face and content validity. Next, the survey was shared with a small number of Vanderbilt colleagues determined by the team to possess expertise in survey design, primarily for the purpose of reviewing and providing feedback on question and response design, and other issues related to flow and logic. Finally, the revised survey was piloted with a small sample of our case study partners and professional contacts with expertise in interreligious community and organization work, primarily for the purpose of reviewing and providing feedback on face and content validity.

The sample for the survey phase of our project included, first, the five case study organizations contacted through earlier phases of our project (described in more detail below). Second, we partnered with a national network of interreligious organizations – North American Interfaith Network (NAIN) – to disseminate our survey to a larger and more geographically diverse sample of organizations. Primarily functioning as a hub for connecting diverse interreligious organizations across the U.S., NAIN represents a group of approximately 62 interreligious organizations of various sizes and types, with the unifying group identity being these organizations’ central focus on gathering members from diverse religious traditions for various purposes.

For each of the organizations (case studies and NAIN–affiliated), a lead contact for the organization was emailed with a brief description (or reminder, for previously contacted case

study groups) of the research project and a web-link to the RedCap survey. In addition to inviting these lead contact individuals to complete the survey themselves, we requested that they forward the survey link to the other members of their organizations. The RedCap online survey included a “cover page” explaining the purpose of the project and any potential benefits and risks associated with completing the online survey, and instructions for contacting the researchers should there be a need to do so. Due to sensitivities among the NAIN Board of Directors about sharing contact information for their member organizations, as well as the potential for greater perceived authority and legitimacy, it was decided that the survey should be disseminated to NAIN member organizations directly from the NAIN president. Several reminder emails were sent to the group, followed by one additional email sent to each organization contact individually with a more personalized message. We received 124 survey responses, 99 of which were complete and usable for my analytic purposes here. Response rate was difficult to calculate. Our survey was completely anonymous and did not require IRB respondent consent, and we discovered NAIN’s list of 62 organizations to be relatively outdated, with some email contacts returning to us as invalid and other contacts responding that their organization was no longer in operation, making it difficult to determine precisely how many organizations we were reaching through the NAIN network.

Given these challenges in working with the NAIN network, and a response rate that was much lower than anticipated, our research team decided to perform manual online searches for other interfaith organizations and directly invite these organizations and their members to participate in our survey. These searches yielded an additional 150 organizations that were invited to participate in the survey, approximately 51 of which agreed to disseminate the survey to their members. Two reminder emails were sent to each of these 51 organizations, resulting in a

final total of 427 survey responses from both the original and extended samples of organizations, and 330 completed surveys for use in this analysis. As these organizations were located primarily through online searches, each of them had some minimum level of online presence (most typically a website or blog) that provided a description of the organization that would help to determine whether or not the organization would be invited to participate in the survey. Organizations were selected that indicated in their organizational mission or description a *primary* focus on improving interfaith relations, and those organizations for which interfaith relations was described as a *secondary* focus (to other primary foci such as political organizing or community service) were excluded. Organizations that were only “coincidentally” interfaith in composition, and not intentionally interfaith, were also excluded. IRB approval was obtained for all of the above-described data collection methods.

Analysis

The research questions for this study are addressed first through descriptive analysis of these survey data. Attention is paid to overall respondent demographics – which religious groups are represented, ethnicity, income, organization locations and types – as well as overall response patterns to primary items and scales of analytic interest for the above research questions (discussed in more detail just below). Next, I examine responses by gender, with attention to the similarities and differences in the ways in which male and female respondents report on their religious beliefs, practices, and attitudes, as well as on their experiences in relation to their primary interfaith organizations. Analysis includes attention to the following items/questions about respondents’ religiosity and experiences with their interfaith organizations:

- Describe your current primary religious identity, if any.
- Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?

- How important is religion in your life?
- Outside your primary interfaith organization, how much personal contact have you had with: (Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Mormons, Pagans/Wiccans, Atheists, Agnostics, Sikhs, Unitarian Universalists)
- All religions contain some truth about God/Are equally good ways of knowing about God/Basically teach the same thing.
- Prior to joining your interfaith organization, how long had you been involved in interfaith work of any type?
- Thinking of your primary interfaith organization, how long have you been involved with your interfaith organization?
- What is your role in your interfaith organization?
- How frequently do you participate in meetings, activities, and events hosted/sponsored by your interfaith organization?

To examine differences in survey items related to religiosity and interfaith organizational involvement (the first and second research questions above), I perform a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and test for statistically significant differences in religiosity and interfaith organization items (dependent variables) between males and females (independent variable).

Performing a MANOVA test allows me not only to examine male/female differences in individual survey items, but also to examine the interactions among those survey items. Analyses of these first two research questions is important for refuting or supporting theoretical notions (such as those proposed by Ariarajah, 2006, Neubauer, 2005, McCarthy, 2007, and Ursula King, 1998, 2007) that women (1) are marginalized within interfaith settings (and, if they are, to what extent) and (2) participate in interfaith work in different ways than their male counterparts. If, for instance, male respondents report more involvement in interfaith leadership positions and longer histories of involvement in interfaith work more generally, this could lend support to the argument that interfaith leadership has been relatively restrictive to the participation of women.

Next, I use gender as a binary variable for conducting an ANCOVA analysis comparing male and female respondents' reported organizational sense of community, controlling for leadership role with their interfaith organization and reported clergy role. Our organizational sense of community scale was based on McMillan and Chavis's (1986) concept of Psychological Sense of Community. We adapted Peterson, Speer, and McMillan's (2008) Brief Sense of Community scale to measure the degree to which participants feel they belong in their organization, their needs are met by their organization, they are bonded with others within their organization, and they are able to influence or have agency within their organization. Our hope in adapting this scale for our survey was that it would be a strong indicator of the degree to which members are connecting with their respective organizations, and that it may potentially reveal different degrees of connection between male and female respondents. A reliability analysis is reported on the Brief Sense of Community scale and four subscales (Membership, Bonding, Needs Fulfillment, and Agency) to show an acceptable level of internal consistency, and a normality test was performed to check for normal distribution.

It is important to note here, before proceeding further, what I do *not* intend to suggest through these analyses. Treating gender as a simple binary variable for analysis – male and female – may draw criticism that I am glossing over the variations that certainly exist within and across gender categories and that I am attempting to lump the identities and experiences of all women (and men) into one static category. Here I recall the foundational work of feminist scholars like Butler (1988) who remind us that “woman” is an historical idea and cultural performance rather than a natural, biological fact, and my hope is to hold that tension even as I proceed as I have detailed above. Unlike interfaith scholars such as Ariajarah (2006) and Neubauer (2005), I do not seek to claim that males and females naturally gravitate toward

different modes of communication and interrelation. Such conclusions should be reserved for a study more appropriately focused on gender performance (regardless of male or female identity), which I do not cover in the below analyses. More importantly, I also do not claim that all women in interfaith spaces experience exclusion and disempowerment equally. From black feminist scholars like Patricia Hill Collins (1990) we know that some women experience multiple and intersecting oppressions based upon different facets of their personhood. Indeed, buried within the below analyses are more complex realities of how different women experience interfaith settings differently, such that Arab Muslim women and Caucasian Jewish women and Black Protestant women may not participate in interfaith work in exactly the same ways or share in exactly the same experiences. These realities should be fruitful grounds for further inquiry building on the more basic premise I am establishing in the current study.

I *do* claim in this study, however, that the historical and continued exclusion and marginalization of women within interfaith settings lacks the nuance we would otherwise desire of our best scholarship precisely because it is partly based on long-standing social and religious structures that divide men and women through certain cultural understandings and social organizations, as well as by simple biological fact. In other words, the unequal treatment of women within these spaces proceeds without care for notions such as “gender performance” or “intersectionality” – rather, it indiscriminately lumps women (and men) together. As King (1998) has put it:

As much [interfaith] dialogue at the official level is carried out between ‘religious leaders’ – and such leaders are still by and large only male – it follows that women are excluded on the grounds of their sex. The official, visible representatives or ‘spokesmen’ of dialogue are literally always men, and thus men often find it difficult to listen to women in this context. (p. 44)

If “women” as a natural, biological group, then, experience totalizing inequality within the interfaith movement (in addition to other, intersecting forms of inequality), might a binary analysis be helpful in revealing such a phenomenon? Moreover, if the interfaith literature cited above, as well as interfaith practitioners campaigning for more space for “women” in the interfaith movement⁴, lack nuances in their understanding of gender, might the analysis I describe above and perform below either support their claims or push them to reconsider or complicate what they mean when they seek to define the experiences of “women” in interfaith work?

Results

First, I examined demographics of survey respondents to provide a picture of the survey sample as a whole and then compare demographics by gender to determine if there are noteworthy demographic differences between females and males that may help to explain organizational sense of community in my subsequent analyses. Illustrated first in Table 3.1 below, a demographic overview reveals an overall survey sample that is just under half Christian (43.6%, including Protestant Christian, Catholic, and Christian), majority female (60.4%), highly educated at the post–graduate level (61.6%), majority heterosexual (89.6%), White/Caucasian (85.7%), and middle aged (55.27). While there exist no exhaustive demographic studies of the US interfaith movement to which we may compare these demographics, the extant interfaith literature may provide several clues that, while a convenience sampling method was used for this survey and suggests caution in making generalizations, our sample may not be far off the mark from what is typically found within the interfaith movement.

⁴ Increasingly there are intentional efforts to promote interfaith dialogue among “women,” including the YWCA’s Women in Interfaith Dialogue, the Women’s Interfaith Conference, and local organizations like the Women’s Interfaith Institute in the Finger Lakes.

Table 3.1. Demographics, total survey sample.

Variable	N	% of total
Religious affiliation		
Protestant Christian	108	32.2
Jewish (Judaism)	51	15.2
Other	32	9.6
Catholic	29	8.7
Unitarian Universalist	28	8.4
Muslim (Islam)	25	7.5
Atheist (do not believe in God)	9	2.7
Christian	9	2.7
Mormon (Latter Day Saints)	8	2.4
Buddhist	7	2.1
Pagan/Wiccan...	7	2.1
Agnostic (not sure if there is God)	6	1.8
Hindu	5	1.5
Nothing in particular	4	1.2
Sikh	2	0.6
Orthodox (Greek, Russian)	1	0.3
Don't know	1	0.3
Total	332	100.0
Gender		
Female	197	60.4
Male	129	39.6
Total	326	100.0
Post-graduate education	205	61.6
Straight (sexual preference)	292	89.6
White	287	85.7
Mean age	55.27	–

Pedersen (2004) and McCarthy (2007) have indicated, first, that Christianity tends to predominate the US interfaith movement demographically. They attribute this, in part, to the interfaith movement's historical rootedness in the Christian ecumenical movement of the mid-20th century, as well as to the religious composition of the US as (though decreasingly) a Christian-majority nation. The lack of socio-economic and racial diversity of the sample may also be cause for concern though, again, not off the mark from what is typical. Indeed, McCarthy (2007) has noted the lack of representation in the interfaith movement not only of women, but also of poor and minority populations as well. In short, despite its emphasis on plurality and diversity, the interfaith movement has and continues to struggle with the full inclusion of many of the social groups the world's religions themselves have struggled to include, and this, sadly, is reflected in the demographics of our larger survey sample.

Turning now to a demographic comparison by gender, as shown in Table 3.2 below female and male respondents differed very little by various demographic characteristics. Using a

Table 3.2. Demographics by gender.

	Female (N=193)	Male (N=129)	Sig.
Age	54.90	55.31	0.850
Married	0.54	0.63	0.095
White	0.86	0.86	0.949
Clergy	0.19	0.48	<.001
Education (1=8 th grade or less, 7=Post-graduate)	6.30	6.46	0.133
US Born	0.91	0.86	0.142
Political Views (1=Conservative, 5=Liberal)	3.94	3.81	0.462
Sexual Preference (1=Heterosexual, 2=LGBT)	1.15	1.19	0.181
Income	\$85,226.94	\$91,473.53	0.492

simple independent samples *t*-test for significance, females and males were not significantly different in terms of age and annual income, though males reported slightly higher than females on both measures. Using Phi correlations to test for significant associations between gender and binary demographic variables (Dunlap, Brody, & Greer, 2000), females and males were not significantly different in terms of marital status, race–ethnicity, and US–born status, though females reported being married less frequently and were more likely to report being born in the US. Importantly, males were significantly more likely to report being a member of the clergy in their respective religious tradition ($\Phi = -.306, p < .001$). Recalling King (1998), Neubauer (2005), and McCarthy (2007) and their discussion on the historical exclusion of women from positions of authority within their own religious traditions, this significant difference may help explain other differences discussed below, particularly in terms of interfaith leadership and sense of community. Indeed, clergy status is mildly correlated with organizational sense of community ($r = .122$) and only slightly more correlated with the “Agency” sense of community subscale in particular ($r = .182$) and is therefore included as a covariate for sense of community in my ANCOVA model. Finally, Mann Whitney U tests were used to examine differences between females and males on ordinal demographic items. Females reported a slightly lower level of education, more liberal political views (with a value of “5” on the scale representing more liberal views, and a value of “1” representing more conservative views), and more traditional sexual preferences (with a value of “1” signifying a self–reported heterosexual identity), though none of these differences were significant. With the exception of clergy status, which is discussed in greater detail just below, female and male respondents indicated no significant demographic

differences which may explain response patterns to survey items on organizational participation, preferences, and sense of community.

The first two of my research questions for this paper – whether females and males differ on a range of measures related to their religiosity and their interfaith involvement – were examined together using a single test of multivariate analysis of variance (or MANOVA), an omnibus test allowing for the simultaneous testing of the effects of gender (independent variable) on a list of dependent variables. The following dependent measures were included in this MANOVA:

- Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?
- How important is religion in your life?
- Social contact scale (scored using reported social contact with a list of religious groups)
- Do you feel that greater understanding among the followers of diverse religious traditions is desirable?
- Do you feel that more cooperation among the leaders of the various religious traditions is desirable?
- All religions contain some truth about God.
- All religions are equally good ways of knowing about God.
- All religions basically teach the same thing.
- People should learn more about religions other than their own.
- Prior to joining your interfaith organization, how long had you been involved in interfaith work of any kind?
- Thinking of your primary interfaith organization, how long have you been a member of this organization?
- How long has your interfaith organization been in existence?
- How frequently do you participate in meetings, activities, and events through your interfaith organization?

The results of this MANOVA are critical for uncovering what gender differences related to religiosity and interfaith involvement may help us better understand the experiences of females and males as well as to determine if any additional variables may help to explain any gender differences in organizational sense of community described below.

Table 3.3. ANOVA tests, gender differences on individual dependent variables.

Variable	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial eta
Religious attendance	1	31.321	0.448	0.504	0.002
Religious importance	1	2.552	3.019	0.083	0.012
Social contact	1	0.039	0.107	0.744	0.000
Greater understanding	1	0.003	0.058	0.809	0.000
More cooperation	1	0.167	1.190	0.276	0.005
All contain some truth	1	0.009	0.011	0.915	0.000
All equally good ways	1	11.724	7.348	0.007	0.028
All teach same thing	1	11.780	7.666	0.006	0.029
People should learn more	1	0.479	0.904	0.343	0.003
Prior involvement	1	3.813	0.859	0.355	0.003
How long in organization	1	0.985	0.729	0.394	0.003
How long organization exist	1	0.212	0.222	0.638	0.001
How frequent participate	1	0.015	0.013	0.908	0.000

Results of the MANOVA showed there was no statistically significant difference in measures of religiosity and interfaith involvement based on gender, $F(13, 247) = 1.26, p = .236$; Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.938$, partial $\eta^2 = .062$. Shown in Table 3.3 above, post-hoc tests of gender effects on individual dependent variables (using univariate ANOVA tests), however, showed a statistically significant gender difference on whether the person agreed “All religions are equally good ways of knowing about God” ($F(1, 259) = 7.35; p = .007$; partial $\eta^2 = .028$) and “All religions basically teach the same thing” ($F(1, 259) = 7.67; p = .006$; partial $\eta^2 = .029$), with females rating both items higher than males. Neither of these items significantly correlates with organizational sense of community, so both were excluded from further analysis below. Taken together, this MANOVA test indicates that females and males do not differ in their religious and

interfaith lives in any meaningful and significant ways that should subsequently have a bearing on their interfaith experiences as reported through the organizational sense of community scale.

Before proceeding to an examination of gender differences in organizational sense of community, I briefly review the particular covariates that are included in the sense of community ANCOVA model. First, as stated above, I include reported clergy status as a covariate, as it is both significantly correlated with both sense of community and gender. Moreover, interfaith scholars have highlighted clergy status in particular as a potential explanation for the sometimes negative and disempowered experiences of women in interfaith settings, so this variable warrants closer examination (King, 1998; Neubauer, 2005). In addition to clergy status, this model also includes as a covariate the respondent's reported leadership role within the organization. If, as has been suggested in the literature review above, women historically have been excluded from positions of leadership within the interfaith movement, this could be reflected in our data and could potentially be a significant covariate in examining organizational sense of community.

For the leadership covariate, respondents were asked to indicate which of a list of roles

Table 3.4. Organization leadership role survey item.

What is your role in your interfaith organization (check all that apply)?

- Founder
 - President/Director/CEO
 - Other paid staff
 - Voluntary leader/facilitator
 - Board/committee member
 - Regular member
 - Non-member, occasionally attend
 - Other
 - Don't know
-

they assumed in their interfaith organization, with the option to select more than one role. Shown in Table 3.4 above, these options ranged from Founder and President/Director/CEO to Non-member/occasionally attend in terms of the person's status and authority within the organization. To create a "Leader" variable and analytically separate those with a primary leadership role from those without such a role, binary coding applied a "1" to any respondent who indicated being a Founder, President/Director/CEO, or Voluntary leader/facilitator and a "0" to anyone who did not select any of these three options and instead selected the remaining non-Leader roles. To examine gender differences in leadership roles, a Chi-Square test was performed with the gender variable and the Leader variable. Results of the Chi-Square test show a significant difference in leadership role between females and males, $X^2(1, N = 326) = 7.25, p = .007$, with 54.3% of males reporting a leadership role and only 39.1% of females reporting a leadership role. These results, coupled with the significant association between leadership role and reported sense of community ($r = .292, p < .001$) strongly recommend leadership role for inclusion as a covariate in the sense of community ANCOVA model.

In preliminary testing, I was intending to use both frequency of participation and agreement with organizational preferences as covariates in the ANCOVA model, as both variables are significantly associated with organizational sense of community ($r = .443$ and $r = .166$, respectively). Neither of these variables, however, significantly differed between genders, and so they were ultimately excluded as covariates in the below ANCOVA model. Among all of the variables examined above, then, clergy status and organizational leadership role have emerged as the only two variables that – theoretically and empirically – make sense for inclusion in the sense of community ANCOVA model to which I now turn.

For this study Organizational Sense of Community (SOC) was identified as a key construct in determining the quality of the experiences individuals are having within their interfaith organizations. A long-time outcome and predictor of interest in the field of Community Psychology in particular, SOC has been used as a measure to determine the individual's connection to a community or organization along several psychological dimensions. As described in Table 3.5, we used for this survey Peterson, Speer, and McMillan's (2008) operationalization of McMillan and Chavis's (1986) sense of community framework, as their Brief Sense of Community scale. Respondents were asked to respond to two survey items measuring each of the four SOC dimensions detailed above. Our interest in using the SOC scale with interfaith organizational members was two-fold: (1) we argue SOC is a compelling indicator of whether members are connecting with the organization and with other members, a central goal of the interfaith organizational movement; and (2) we suspected some organizational

Table 3.5. Brief sense of community scale.

Needs Fulfillment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can get what I need in this interfaith organization. • This interfaith organization helps me fulfill my needs.
<hr/>	
Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel like a member of this interfaith organization. • I belong in this interfaith organization.
<hr/>	
Agency/Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have a say about what goes on in this interfaith organization. • People in this interfaith organization are good at influencing each another.
<hr/>	
Connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel connected to this interfaith organization. • I have a good bond with others in this interfaith organization.

members may report connecting with their organization more so than others, and that these differences could be explained in part by certain religious and/or demographic characteristics.

Reliability tests were performed for the Brief Sense of Community scale and each of the above-detailed subscales, to test the internal consistency of these measures. Shown in Table 3.6 below, each of the 5 scales analyzed showed acceptable levels of internal consistency, with the Cronbach's Alpha for the Brief Sense of Community scale being particularly excellent, the Cronbach's Alpha for the Needs Fulfillment, Membership, and Connectedness scales being good, and the Cronbach's Alpha for the Agency/Influence scale being the lowest but still within an acceptable range (Kline, 2000). Normality tests on the Sense of Community scale and each of its four subscales showed that all five scales were significantly skewed for non-normal distributions (the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality for each scale showed a significance of $p < .001$). With "most researchers" finding the ANCOVA test in particular to be robust to violations of normality (Harwell & Serlin, 1988; Olejnik & Algina, 1984; Rheinheimer & Penfield, 2001), I determined to proceed with the analysis as planned.

Summarized in Table 3.7 on the following page, mean scores by gender for our SOC scale and each of its four subscales are reportedly higher for males than for females. These mean

Table 3.6. Reliability analysis, brief sense of community and subscales.

Scale	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Sense of Community	8	0.932
Needs Fulfillment	2	0.857
Membership	2	0.866
Agency/Influence	2	0.601
Connectedness	2	0.831

Table 3.7. MANOVA, sense of community mean scores by sex.

	FEMALE	Mean	SD	N
Sense of Community	Male	4.3272	0.69318	129
	Female	4.181	0.7836	195
	Total	4.2392	0.75124	324
Needs Fulfillment	Male	4.1628	0.77601	129
	Female	3.9641	0.96924	195
	Total	4.0432	0.90131	324
Agency/Influence	Male	4.2597	0.75286	129
	Female	4.0641	0.84325	195
	Total	4.142	0.81295	324
Connectedness	Male	4.4109	0.78424	129
	Female	4.3103	0.81696	195
	Total	4.3503	0.80438	324
Membership	Male	4.469	0.80222	129
	Female	4.3897	0.81822	195
	Total	4.4213	0.81157	324

score differences are particularly pronounced for the Brief Sense of Community scale and the Needs Fulfillment and Agency/Influence subscales, with only slight mean differences in the Connectedness and Membership subscales. Significance testing using a multivariate general linear model (MANOVA) shows a gender difference in sense of community approaching but not quite reaching significance, $F(5, 318) = 2.09, p = .066$; Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.968$, partial $\eta^2 = .032$. Shown in Table 3.8 on the following page, post-hoc analysis of each of the scales does, however, show significant differences between females and males in the Agency/Influence subscale, dealing with the degree to which the person feels they are able to influence their

organization. Differences in the Sense of Community scale and Needs Fulfillment subscale are approaching though not quite achieving significance, and the Connectedness and Membership subscales are clearly non-significant. At first blush, then, it appears women in interfaith organizations are significantly (or near significantly) less likely than men to feel they have agency within those organizations, less likely to feel their needs are being met in those organizations, and overall report a lower sense of community in relation to those organizations. But how might a more robust ANCOVA model, with the inclusion of the important covariates of clergy status and organizational leadership role, modify this emerging picture?

Illustrated in Table 3.9 on the following page, with the inclusion of the clergy status and leadership role covariates for a comparison of gender differences in sense of community and each of its subscales, gender differences are no longer significant (or even approaching significance) for any of the five scales. Of note, on the Agency/Influence subscale, for which gender differences previously were significant, gender shows a marked change to non-significance ($p=.337$) with the inclusion of the covariates. Similarly, the overall Sense of Community scale and Needs Fulfillment subscale, for which gender differences previously were

Table 3.8. MANOVA, sense of community by sex.

Source	Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
FEMALE	Sense of Community	1.662	1	1.662	2.962	0.086
	Needs Fulfillment	3.065	1	3.065	3.806	0.052
	Agency/Influence	2.97	1	2.97	4.543	0.034
	Connectedness	0.786	1	0.786	1.215	0.271
	Membership	0.488	1	0.488	0.74	0.390

Table 3.9. ANCOVA results, sense of community and subscales.

Variable	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial eta
SENSE OF COMMUNITY	1, 320	–	2.143	0.144	–
Leader	1	12.540	23.993	0.000	0.070
Clergy member	1	0.838	1.602	0.206	0.005
Female	1	0.278	0.532	0.466	0.002
NEEDS FULFILLMENT	1, 320	–	4.445	0.036	–
Leader	1	10.862	13.981	0.000	0.042
Clergy member	1	0.081	0.105	0.746	0.000
Female	1	1.837	2.365	0.125	0.007
AGENCY/INFLUENCE	1, 320	–	2.808	0.095	–
Leader	1	9.230	14.947	0.000	0.045
Clergy member	1	3.365	5.449	0.020	0.017
Female	1	0.571	0.924	0.337	0.003
CONNECTEDNESS	1, 319	–	0.492	0.484	–
Leader	1	15.788	26.552	0.000	0.077
Clergy member	1	1.828	3.075	0.080	0.010
Female	1	0.009	0.016	0.900	0.000
MEMBERSHIP	1, 320	–	0.234	0.629	–
Leader	1	14.652	23.594	0.000	0.069
Clergy member	1	0.544	0.875	0.350	0.003
Female	1	0.000	0.001	0.980	0.000

approaching significance, are now not nearly approaching significance. Looking at each of the covariates, results show, first, that across each of the five scales the leadership role covariate is highly significant ($p < .001$). Whether or not they report having a leadership role within their interfaith organization, then, appears to be critical for understanding women's reported sense of community (and its four dimensions) in relation to their interfaith organization. Overall, reported clergy status appears to be a less significant covariate than leadership role for gender differences in reported sense of community and its subscales. Clergy status does, however, attain significance as a covariate on the Agency/Influence subscale ($F(1, 318) = 5.45; p = .020$; partial $\eta^2 = .017$) and approaches significance on the Connectedness subscale ($F(1, 317) = 3.08; p = .080$; partial $\eta^2 = .010$). Clergy status, then, though not as significant a covariate as leadership role still warrants notice in helping to understand gender differences in reported sense of community, and differences in its subscales in particular.

Discussion

Ursula King (1998, 2007) has made notable theoretical contributions to our understanding of women's experiences in interfaith settings, and the challenges associated with those experiences, including historic exclusion from positions of leadership and authority. The above analyses provide compelling empirical evidence in support of King's and others' assertions, showing that the overwhelming majority of leaders in our sample of interfaith organizations and participants are indeed male. Importantly, one's position within the organization as a leader is a significant covariate for gender differences in organizational sense of community and helps to explain the lower reported sense of community among a female population ostensibly excluded from positions of leadership. Moreover, the above analyses moderately confirm claims by King (1998), Neubauer (2005), and Eck (1993) that individuals'

authority within their own religious traditions (e.g., role as clergy or other important religious leader) has implications for their participation and experiences in interfaith settings and, most importantly, that this authority is unevenly distributed between men and women. Again recalling Neubauer's (2005) theoretical model highlighting three obstacles to women's participation in interfaith work, it has been suggested that lack of access to religious education and authority within the person's own religious tradition (such as that enjoyed especially among religious clergy and leadership) has diminished the experiences of and disempowered women participating in interfaith work. Eck (1993) and King (1998), as well, have observed the linkages between the historical dominance of men in leadership among the world's religions and the transfer of that dominance into the interfaith movement. That our female survey respondents were far less likely to report having been a member of the clergy within their religious tradition, and that this variable is a significant covariate for the person's reported feelings of influence and agency within their interfaith organization, provides compelling empirical support for such claims.

These findings, then, suggest the need for interfaith organizations, and for the interfaith movement more generally, to be more sensitive and adaptive to those nonreligious identities and needs existing within their participant populations. The inability of the interfaith organization to adapt to particular intersecting identities of participants, the above findings would suggest, may diminish the extent to which those participants are able to feel connected to and exercise agency within the organization. If a primary overarching goal of the larger interfaith movement is to bond together individuals from diverse religious backgrounds, the above analysis demonstrates that these efforts are hampered by other nonreligious factors that are salient enough within the individual to effectively diminish community-building processes. Historically, interfaith scholars and practitioners have noted dialogical processes, for example, that may get in the way of

interreligious bonding. Swidler's (1983) influential *Dialogue Decalogue* appears focused on matters of relating to others *religiously*, with guidelines concerned with properly expressing one's own religious views and respecting the religious views of others. Missing from these guidelines are strategies for addressing gendered power dynamics, for example, or for addressing racial tensions that are undergirding religious conflict. Indeed, the interfaith movement has historically been ill-equipped for addressing nonreligious dynamics, as focused as it has been on addressing just one facet of the individual person's identity.

With the findings associated with the respondent's clergy status, and the marked difference between females and males on this particular item in terms of their perceived agency within the organization, the above analyses further indicate the ongoing need for interfaith practitioners and scholars to consider issues of authority within their spaces. The question of who in interfaith dialogue, for example, is permitted to speak with authority on behalf of their religious tradition is one that historically has not adequately been addressed, because in many ways it still has not been adequately addressed within the religions themselves. To the extent that the world's religions continue to wrestle with issues of authority, the modern interfaith movement will as well. This leads one to wonder, then, if and how the authority linkages between religions and the interfaith movement – or the fact that religious leaders and clergy tend to be the “official” voices in interfaith circles as well – may effectively be diminished to allow for greater space in interfaith work for more “unofficial” voices to be heard. If authority in one's own religious tradition is no longer a prerequisite for being able to speak authoritatively about one's own religious (and nonreligious) experiences and being, what might that contribute to the modern interfaith movement's ability to open its spaces to voices that previously have struggled to be heard?

Finally, and returning once more to Chaves' (2010) argument – and Read and Eagle's (2011) extension of Chaves' work to include an emphasis on multiple identities – we can see that the above findings further lend support to recent and ongoing discussions as to the precise role and nature of religious identity and when, where, and whether that identity matters. My own early attempts to analyze these survey data by grouping respondents together in arbitrary religious categories (Abrahamic and non–Abrahamic, as I had done in one early iteration) were frustrated by the reality that, in some regards at least, respondents were not reporting on their experiences from an exclusively religious standpoint. They also were responding as progressives (to draw from Yukich and Braunstein's, 2014, recent study on interfaith organizations), as white educated Americans and, of course, as men or women. As Read and Eagle (2011) have observed, these other identities rightly compete for our attention as explanations for human behavior, even within interfaith settings where religious identities are ostensibly so salient. Importantly, I wish to avoid here the further risk of committing a “gender congruence fallacy” (to use Read's, 2014, terminology) by discarding everything religious and replacing it with everything gendered. While gender has proven helpful for at least partly explaining some survey response patterns, I would not intend to suggest that gender could by extension help to partly explain all other survey response patterns. In fact, as shown in the above analyses, gender mattered very little to other survey items beyond those items examined most primarily. The challenge, then, for researchers in analyzing such data as well as for interfaith practitioners, is to be as precise as possible in understanding in what ways factors like religion or gender matter and in what ways they do not.

Strengths and Limitations

The above study has been strengthened in several ways worth briefly mentioning here. First, unlike other survey studies of interfaith organizations (most notably, Harvard's Pluralism

Project, which included surveys of organizations in multiple cities across the US), this study does not report on data collected only from leaders, administrators, or other primary contact persons within each interfaith organization (what in congregational research is referred to as “elite surveys,” Stausberg & Engler, 2013). In addition to collecting data from organization leaders and administrators, we also were able to collect data from “regular” members of these organizations, allowing us to examine a wider and more diverse range of experiences and perceptions within these organizations. Second, through professional contacts made by research team members over the course of the study – most notably with Harvard’s Pluralism Project, the North American Interfaith Network (NAIN), and Religions for Peace, USA – we were able to gain access to a larger and more nationally distributed network of interfaith organizations than we would have been able to access through our own knowledge and searching, significantly broadening and diversifying the net of potential respondent organizations and individuals.

Several limitations to the above study are worth noting, however, as they may suggest fruitful avenues for future research into issues related to identity and interfaith work. First, and most importantly, future research should seek to move the above findings and discussion beyond the simple female–male binary I have presented. While this limitation does not invalidate this study, as religious and social exclusion and oppression work at multiple levels of simplicity and complexity, it is critical to elucidate whether and how lack of agency, for example, is distributed unevenly within the female interfaith population and whether and how such lack of agency is experienced differently by different women. Our survey sample was very limited in other demographic categories that would have made such an analysis possible – race–ethnicity, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and nationality – and did not allow for an analysis on other important nonreligious identities beyond gender. Indeed, as described earlier, our sample was

overwhelmingly white, heterosexual, and educated. Gender was in fact the only primary and nonreligious identity marker that was somewhat evenly distributed and would allow for group analyses. This study, then, leaves unanswered questions related to other important nonreligious identities. Do racial–ethnic minorities, for example, have unique experiences in interfaith settings regardless of religious identity? Moreover, and further building on theories of intersectional identities, do these other nonreligious identities intersect with gender or with one another in ways that are meaningful for the individual’s experiences of interfaith work? Further and more complex analysis will help in uncovering these important unanswered questions.

Such further analysis will require larger and more diverse sample sizes of interfaith organization participants than we were able to secure in this study and after considerable work in locating and reaching out to organizations. A larger and more diverse number of respondents would improve the ability to generalize findings beyond my limited ability to generalize from the present study and the convenience sampling method used for this study. It is difficult to arrive at a reliable estimate for exactly how many individuals are currently participating in the larger interfaith movement (Pedersen, 2004), and this may in part be due to the often–transient nature of interfaith involvement and the degree to which we have witnessed in our project interfaith organizations rise and fall over short periods of time. These factors also make it difficult to track down individuals to participate in a survey, which leaves one to wonder if successfully tracking down a larger and more diverse number of interfaith participants than we were able to manage for this present study is an effort that requires considerably more resources than to which we had access. These challenges may indeed reveal important information about interfaith work generally, but for immediate survey purposes we found it at times to be a frustrating process.

Also challenging during several stages of the project, as noted in the “Methods” section above, our aspirations at the outset of the project to make our processes fully participatory were frustrated by what we encountered as an unwillingness across most study participants to help shape our research questions, for example. Instead, most participants indicated that they were interested in interfaith research more generally and otherwise did not wish to suggest additional research questions or help determine the direction of the project. This could potentially have limited the relevance of our particular research questions to interests and concerns of interfaith practitioners “on the ground” and may highlight a need for further discussion among researchers in fields such as community psychology that highly value participatory research. Closer examination of our team’s approach to inviting participation may reveal ineffective methods that could have been improved through different or alternative approaches to inviting participation. In particular, a research project such as ours that is originated from within the research team itself can be contrasted with other research projects that are originated from within their participating communities or organizations and for which obtaining that community or organization’s active participation may be easier. Research teams such as ours that originate their projects must work harder to gain trust and obtain participation from their communities or organizations of interest.

Finally, the above analyses will be enriched by subsequent qualitative research to examine more in–depth the experiences and perceptions of women involved in interfaith work. It may prove helpful, for example, to further elucidate the organizational structures and processes that seemingly exclude women from important leadership roles within their organizations, as well as to arrive at a more in–depth understanding of whether and how women experience this ostensible exclusion from interfaith leadership. This more in–depth examination may help to uncover specific and localized practices that can help explain the above findings, and could

potentially suggest promising models for practice that could aid interfaith practitioners in addressing these issues.

Conclusion

The above analyses provide compelling evidence that the nonreligious identities inhabited by interfaith participants do in fact matter, and that they matter in ways that could be detrimental to individuals' experiences in interfaith settings to the extent that such settings exclude and/or delegitimize persons based on those nonreligious identities. Women historically have been excluded from important positions of leadership within the interfaith movement as well as within their own traditions (King, 1998; McCarthy, 2007), and the above analysis indicates that this is in fact still the case for a small sample of interfaith organization participants. Such a finding is of critical importance for an interfaith movement that, although engaged in efforts to generate understanding between religious traditions, need not adopt the authority structures of those traditions. The reality that the Catholic Church does not ordain women, for example, should not subsequently restrict Catholic women from being able to authoritatively represent their tradition within interfaith spaces. And yet this often may be the case. Interfaith practitioners and organizational leaders, then, would do well to broaden their view of interfaith participants beyond being merely religious to consider other individual factors that are affecting the quality and nature of the person's interfaith experience. In so doing, interfaith organizations and interfaith work more generally will be better suited to meet more diverse nonreligious needs existing within the populations they serve.

CHAPTER IV

INTERFAITH ORGANIZATIONS AND MESOSYSTEMIC CONTEXTS

The work of interfaith scholars and practitioners often is focused at the level of the individual and the individual's encounters with others of different religious traditions, and this is understandably so. Efforts to better structure interfaith dialogue, for example, focus on best practices in facilitating communication and on behavioral guidelines appropriate for group settings comprised of diverse people. The interfaith movement is, at its most basic level, among other things the encounter between two persons of different religious traditions. Increasingly, however, interfaith scholars and practitioners are aware that such encounters do not take place in a vacuum, but rather take place in particular communities with particular histories and particular political and economic qualities, and they take place between people with particular personal lives made up of particular other people and particular other institutions. Moreover, these other "particulars" of the basic interfaith encounter actually do matter in profound ways for how that encounter takes shape and for whether that encounter ultimately is successful (however "success" happens to be measured). It is to some of these other "particulars" that I turn in this study in order to better understand the experiences individuals have as they enter into interfaith spaces. In doing so, I refuse the tendency to divorce interfaith work from its local ecologies, advancing instead a more fully ecological rendering of the interfaith encounter.

Using interview and field observation data from five interfaith organization case studies, in this study I utilize Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory to extend analyses of interfaith phenomena beyond the identities of individual persons to consider the other ecological factors that either impede or support the participation of those individuals in interfaith

organizational work. Specifically, I focus my analysis on the mesosystemic level of Bronfenbrenner’s framework to examine the overlapping spheres of life these individuals “bring with” them into interfaith settings that can either enable their participation in that work or hinder their ability to fully engage in that work. I show how paying closer attention to the microsystems orbiting interfaith organizations – families, work, faith communities⁵ – is critical for understanding the challenges and successes these organizations encounter. Beyond providing this more complex, ecological rendering of interfaith organizational participation, I also explore mesosystemic systems as potentially beneficial for thinking about ways of extending the work of interfaith organizations beyond their immediate organizational settings.⁶ Framing interfaith work as a mode of social contact between different religious traditions, social psychologists have critiqued such work as highly self-selecting; interfaith participants are already tolerant of people of other religious traditions to some extent prior to entering those spaces (Binder et al., 2009). Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) notions of intersetting communication and knowledge and the social psychological theory of extended social contact may allow us to see whether and how interfaith participants carry their work out into other spheres of life, effectively broadening the reach of interfaith social contact to others who may not already be predisposed to greater religious tolerance.

⁵ Here I argue the faith community acts not as a religious group that may support or discourage interfaith work on religious grounds (e.g., theological disagreement with interfaith work). Rather, I present it as one of several social spheres of which the person is a member and which, like other social spheres, regulates the person’s involvement in certain other spheres for social, political, and other “profane” reasons.

⁶ One critique of ecological systems theory is its expansiveness, considering all the many levels of psychological and social phenomena it seeks to include. My focus here on the mesosystem, and exclusion of other systems, allows for a more manageable approach to my analysis. Further, I argue the mesosystem in particular offers promising avenues of inquiry and practice for interfaith scholars and practitioners.

Ecology of Interfaith Organization Participation

With this study I am extending the very recent and impressive work of Yukich and Braunstein (2014) in examining the ecologies within which interfaith encounters take place. In their work, Yukich and Braunstein adapt Odum's (1971) notion of the "edge effect," or those zones in the environment where different types of ecologies intersect, to develop what they term "edge practices" and "edge spaces" through which interfaith exchanges take place. Most importantly for my purposes, they hypothesize, "We ... expect variation in the outcomes of interfaith encounters depending on the characteristics of the settings and the group styles that dominate them" (p. 793). In particular, they are interested in the relationships participants in this work have with other institutions outside the immediate interfaith setting, most typically including local congregations and faith-based political organizations. Several of the conclusions in this study are notable in light of my present interests, namely that variations in ecological settings do appear to affect outcomes of interfaith exchanges and that individuals' membership in other institutions outside the interfaith setting are an important dimension of this phenomenon. I devote much of the below analysis to extending these conclusions.

While Yukich and Braunstein's (2014) work is useful for advancing discussions on interfaith ecologies, I seek here to directly answer their call for further "exploration of forms of internal and external variation" (p. 806) of interfaith organizations and address through my analysis several important limitations in their work. First, I argue their study is focused primarily on political advocacy and social movement work, and not necessarily on interfaith relations per se. Thus, I build on and challenge their assertion that "one of the most widespread forms of interreligious interaction occurs through the work of interfaith political coalitions" and broaden their scope to include a focus on intentional efforts of interfaith dialogue and relationship-

building, a primary (if not *the* primary) focus of the modern interfaith movement. Second, their rendering of the interfaith ecology is comprised almost entirely of other institutions, namely the local congregation. While the local congregation is certainly an important feature of the interfaith ecology, and one to which I turn in my own analysis, I explore also a more fully ecological rendering of the interfaith organization, to include interfaith participant families, work environments, school, and social networks. Finally, and to “tip my hand” on an important feature of my analysis below, I wish to push their work to more adequately consider the distinctions between the different types of faith communities of which interfaith participants are a part (e.g., immigrant faith communities) and the implications of these differences for interfaith participation and experiences. To accomplish these tasks, I draw once more on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, to which I now turn.

Bronfenbrenner’s Mesosystems

In his foundational work on ecological systems theory, already described in greater detail above, Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined the mesosystem as that which “comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates” (p. 25). For example, for a developing child – Bronfenbrenner’s primary area of research – the transition from the family microsystem into the school microsystem creates a bi-directional linkage between microsystems, forming a mesosystem. The microsystems within a mesosystem influence one another as, to use one example, the child’s relationship with their parents may influence their relationship with their teacher and their behaviors at school. For members of interfaith organizations, this may include relationships with family members, co-workers, or religious leaders existing outside the immediate context of the interfaith organization which still indirectly affect the functioning of that organization. Spouses, for example, may partly determine

whether and how an individual participates in an organization, depending on their level of agreement with and support of that participation.

Indeed, relationships between microsystems may take either a negative form or a positive form, depending on the compatibility of the activities and role demands particular to those settings. When parents are invested in the child's education, helping with their studies and participating in important school functions, Bronfenbrenner would suggest the home and school microsystems are compatible and create a mesosystem within which the child can develop and flourish. Conversely, when microsystems are incompatible it may create a mesosystem within which the person struggles to develop in healthy ways. Bronfenbrenner has used the example of the part-time working mother:

[M]others from two-parent families who hold part-time jobs find themselves in a difficult role conflict; the husbands continue to act as if their wives were functioning as full time mothers, while employers often treat them as if they were full time employees. The mothers experience the resulting frustration as impairing their effectiveness as parents, their performance on the job, and their development as human beings. (p. 212)

Likewise, interfaith participants who experience incompatibility between the interfaith organization and other microsystems – home, work, faith community – may experience some difficulties or anxieties in their participation, whereas participants with compatible microsystems may be freer to participate and flourish in interfaith settings.

Bronfenbrenner's discussion of "inter-setting communications" and "inter-setting knowledge and attitudes" is germane as well to the present discussion. Bronfenbrenner describes inter-setting communications as "messages transmitted from one setting to the other with the express intent of providing specific information to persons in the other setting" (p. 210). These communications take various forms (e.g., verbal, written) and can be bi- or unidirectional. For the developing child, we might think of messages from the child about what is occurring at

school, which may or may not shape the parents' understanding of the child's teacher or school. For interfaith participants, we might wonder whether and to what extent they are sharing with persons in other microsystems (e.g., spouses, coworkers) what is occurring in their interfaith work and whether this sharing shapes those other persons' understanding not only of interfaith work, but of the other religious traditions which they are encountering only indirectly through these communications.

Closely tied to intersetting communications, intersetting knowledge and attitudes is understood by Bronfenbrenner as "information or experience that exists in one setting about the other" (p. 210). He further hypothesized that the developmental potential of settings is optimal when "valid information, advice, and experience relevant to one setting are made available, on a continuing basis, to the other" (p. 217). The nature of intersetting knowledge may vary depending on the information existing in one setting about another. Parents may form a positive opinion about the child's teacher if the child provides positive information about that teacher. Likewise, a person may form a positive opinion about another religious tradition if their spouse provides positive information about that religious tradition from their interfaith setting experiences. The content and nature of intersetting knowledge and attitudes may subsequently lead to supportive or conflicting relationships between microsystems.

I utilize these mesosystemic phenomena as lenses for my analysis of interfaith organizational work for several reasons. First, attention to mesosystemic processes occurring around the interfaith organization enriches our understanding of why participants experience these settings as they do. Do tensions between the interfaith organization and other microsystems weaken, or potentially even eliminate, the person's involvement in that organization? More positively, does the supportive nature of certain other microsystems enable greater and more

meaningful participation in interfaith organizations? We may find in some instances that the extent and nature of a person's involvement in interfaith work speaks less to their own personal interests and qualities and more to the supportive or conflicting nature of other microsystems of which they are an active part. A better understanding of this could potentially help interfaith organizations in meeting the particular needs and concerns of their participating members.

Second, I argue that attention to the mesosystem within which the interfaith organization is situated opens up opportunities for intersetting communications that provide information to persons not directly participating in that organization. The role of organization members as actors in other external microsystems may suggest avenues for extending the work of the organization as these members go out into the community sharing their interfaith experiences and knowledge with family members, co-workers, and faith community members, for example. I speculate, then, that intersetting communications amounting to "interfaith evangelism" effectively serve to spread the work of the interfaith organization outward into its surrounding ecology.

Extended Social Contact and Interfaith Work

Here Bronfenbrenner's concepts of intersetting communications and knowledge find connections with the social psychology literature on contact and prejudice. Social psychologist Gordon Allport (1954/1979), with his Contact Hypothesis, suggested that increased social contact between seemingly opposed social groups would lead to more positive feelings and acceptance between those groups, effectively reducing manifestations of prejudice and conflict existing between those groups. Specifically, from this basic premise Allport devised four necessary conditions for social contact between members of different groups to be truly effective in reducing prejudice: (1) the groups must share an equal status relationship; (2) they must be

working together toward common goals or objectives; (3) there must be potential for friendships to develop between group members; and (4) social contact must be supported and encouraged by an appropriate institutional authority or law. Allport thus concluded:

Prejudice ... may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports (i.e., by law, custom or local atmosphere), and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups. (p. 281)

This general conclusion has been confirmed consistently through decades of social contact studies (Hodson, 2011). Indeed, Pettigrew and Tropp (2011), in their recent meta-analysis of contact theory, located more than 500 studies that in various ways confirmed the efficacy of social contact in reducing prejudice between groups marked by characteristics ranging from age to ethnicity to nationality to sexuality.

Concerning intergroup relations and contact between religious groups specifically, numerous studies have explored the benefits of social contact in reducing prejudice between various religious groups. These studies have examined contact between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland (Knox & Hughes, 1995; Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004; Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2009), Muslims and Jews in Israel (Knox & Hughes, 1995; Maoz, 2002), Muslims and Hindus in India (Tausch, Hewstone, & Roy, 2009), and Christians and Muslims (Hutchison & Rosenthal, 2011; Hyun Jung, 2012). Tam et al. (2009), for example, concluded in their study on relations between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland that increased direct and indirect contact between groups stood as a promising method through which interfaith relations could be improved and trust between groups could be restored, while Maoz (2002) evaluated the effectiveness of interfaith contact programs involving Jews and Arabs

living in Israel, finding that these programs had varied success depending upon frequency of contact and the age of program participants.

Despite this promising research, Allport's Contact Hypothesis has not been without its critics. Research has raised the possibility that, rather than contact reducing prejudice, prejudice reduces contact (Binder et al., 2009; Eller & Abrams, 2004; Levin et al., 2003). In other words, those persons who seek out contact with other groups may not be all that prejudiced to begin with. Binder et al. (2009) have labeled this the "prejudice effect," noting:

More prejudiced people are unlikely to seek opportunities for contact with outgroup members and, indeed, may actively avoid them. Moreover, if prejudiced people cannot avoid contact altogether, then they can try to keep it at a rather superficial level, thus rendering it ineffective. In other words, prior prejudice can determine whether optimal conditions for contact are fulfilled or unfulfilled. (p. 844)

Others have noted the challenges for interfaith groups and organizations in attracting diversity that is representative of the general religious populations, and in attracting participation from more exclusivist groups in particular (Iannacone, 1994; Merino, 2010; Trinitapoli, 2007).

Recent variations of Allport's Contact Hypothesis appear to offer fruitful avenues for rethinking the facilitation of social contact in future intergroup studies and interventions that may help address some of these critiques. Of particular interest to my analysis, *extended contact theory* suggests that indirect contact with out-group members (e.g., knowing another in-group member who is friends with an out-group member) can be beneficial in improving intergroup relations. Wright et al. (1997) found through an experimental design consisting of a sample of college students from a California university that friendships between other in-group members and out-group members significantly reduced prejudice. Christ et al. (2010) similarly found that, although direct contact remained the most effective mechanism through which to reduce prejudice, longitudinal data suggested positive effects from extended contact as well, particularly

among individuals living in segregated areas and with little or no direct contact with out-group members. These processes of extended contact, and their potential benefits for intergroup relations, help support Bronfenbrenner's notions of intersetting communication and knowledge. While there remains the possibility of self-selection (persons with prejudiced or unsupportive social networks outside the interfaith organization), these intersetting exchanges in some instances may prove helpful to interfaith organizations that tend to attract persons already sold over to the value of interfaith work and struggle to reach persons less predisposed to that work.

Research Questions

Guided by the above concerns over (1) the embeddedness of interfaith organizations within ecological mesosystems and (2) the potential utility of these mesosystems for broadening the scope of interfaith work, in the below analysis I answer the following research questions:

- 1) In what ways is interfaith organization participation supported by compatible microsystems to which members belong?
- 2) In what ways is interfaith organization participation hindered by incompatible microsystems to which members belong?
- 3) What, if any, intersetting communications are taking place between interfaith organizations and other microsystems, and do these communications enable extended contact processes?

Answers to these research questions are critical for interfaith scholars and practitioners seeking not only to better understand interfaith work, but also to further improve upon that work.

Method

This study is based primarily on interview data collected through the "Understand Community Interfaith Initiatives" project, and secondarily supplemented through field note data and organizational documentation collected from five case study organizations. Though this study represents the final paper in this dissertation's series of three, the data for this study were

collected during the earliest phases of our project. In initially seeking to respond as action researchers to recent religious conflict in our own community, our core team members decided to begin with a set of organizational case studies focusing on work already being implemented by those interested in building interreligious relationships and/or improving social conditions for religious minorities. It was our hope to engage in in-depth examination of interreligious organizational phenomena and to uncover common challenges and promising practices that could then be shared with and utilized by a larger network of interreligious scholars and practitioners.

Our final sample of case studies—gathered through a process of convenience sampling, which took into consideration geographic location, researcher time and resources for travel and data collection, and issues of access—consisted of five organizations representing diverse community settings, organizational structures and goals, and member demographics. These case studies include:

Women of Faith (WOF), Murfreesboro, TN

The first case contacted for participation in our project, WOF is a small local grassroots organization formed in response to recent controversy surrounding the construction of a new Islamic Center in Murfreesboro. Consisting of approximately 15 regular members (with occasional participation by an additional 10–15 members), WOF seeks to build interreligious understanding and peace in the Murfreesboro community primarily through dialogue on various theological and social issues, and less frequently through community service projects. As the name suggests, WOF's membership is comprised solely of women, and a number of the dialogue topics and community service projects are designed to appeal to the female demographic (e.g., dialogue on women's issues in marriage and sexuality, community service for female inmates).

Member religious groups include Protestant Christianity, Christian Science, Islam, Paganism, and Atheism. A defining characteristic of the WOF organizational process is its emphasis on consensus. All major organizational decisions—from the name of the organization to its monthly activities and discussion topics—are made through group consensus.

Interfaith Mission Service (IMS), Huntsville, AL

IMS was discovered through my work on another paper in which I was developing an ecological model for interfaith organizational work. IMS struck me as an interesting and unique model for interreligious work with its emphasis on the role of local congregations. IMS labels itself a “cooperative of congregations,” meaning it is comprised of approximately 30 local congregations in the Huntsville area (rather than individuals or a single organization) who contribute leadership, strategic planning, volunteers, and other resources to make the work of IMS possible. IMS primarily focuses on community service and organizing opportunities in the Huntsville area (e.g., food pantries and medical transportation), with secondary work in interreligious education and dialogue. Having served the Huntsville community for more than 40 years, the organization now finds itself struggling to maintain organizational identity in the face of a diversifying religious landscape (with recent conflict over whether or not to welcome Pagans as members) and increasing competition from new community organizations seeking to serve similar community needs.

Vanderbilt University Interfaith Council (IC), Nashville, TN

IC is a student-led organization housed within the Office of Religious Life at Vanderbilt University. Experiencing impressive growth and increasing campus visibility over the last several years under the leadership of its dynamic Muslim student president, IC’s activities are planned and facilitated by a cabinet of student officers (President, VP, Treasurer, Secretary) and

almost exclusively consist of interreligious education and dialogue involving approximately 20–25 student participants each week. The group also hosts several campus–wide events throughout the year, including special speakers (Eboo Patel was a recent guest speaker) and their annual Interfaith Soccer Tournament. Student leaders and participants represent a wide variety of traditions, including Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and Buddhism. Recent controversy at Vanderbilt over whether student organizations should be allowed to discriminate against certain groups in electing organization leaders has led some IC members to leave the group in response to what they perceived as the neutral stance on this issue of the Office of Religious Life.

Haven Interfaith Parents (HIP), Fort Wayne, IN

HIP was formed several years ago by a religion instructor at a private Christian middle school in the Fort Wayne area, where the group also holds the majority of its meetings. In response to the increasing religious diversity of the private school and the questions raised by non–Christian parents who were concerned over what the school’s religious curriculum might be teaching their children, the teacher convened a small invitation–only group of approximately 12 parents to meet on a regular basis and learn about one another’s traditions through structured dialogue on various theological topics. In addition to their dialogue meetings, the group also coordinates community education events and speaker panels based on interreligious themes, and the teacher maintains a blog for discussing the group’s activities and various issues and articles related to interreligious work. Recently, the teacher/facilitator of the group has decided to label HIP as a “multi–faith” group rather than an “interfaith” group, and to orient the group’s identity and activities around this label. The term “interfaith,” in her view, signifies a blending together of traditions, whereas the term “multi–faith” signifies a healthier respect for the important

differences between traditions and the need to keep them distinct from one another (the phrase “convicted civility” encapsulates this idea for her).

Sons & Daughters of Abraham (SDA), Sewanee, TN

SDA was formed several years ago by the adult leaders of a Christian and a Muslim youth group in the Middle Tennessee area. Like WOF, recent conflicts in Middle Tennessee (as well as nationally), primarily between a Christian majority and a Muslim minority, served as the impetus behind forming SDA. The adult leaders, with the support of their youth, determined it would be important for youth from the two religious groups to gather on a regular basis and engage with one another in dialogue around various religious and social issues, in addition to serving together on community service projects and attending social functions together (e.g., a youth “lock-in”).

For each of these case studies, initial contact was made with the organization’s leader via email, in which we explained the basic purpose of our research project and expressed our interest in working with their organization as a case study. After we received a positive response (only one contacted organization declined to participate), we then scheduled a time to meet or speak over the phone to explain our project and our intentions in more detail and to receive written consent from our contacts for their participation. It should be noted that, in future research (or in subsequent analyses of these data), community-level differences between these organizations will be a worthwhile line of investigation. Though my analyses below focus more at the mesosystemic level, and on the influence of certain external microsystems, other analyses may consider more fully the ways in which particular community settings, as well as particular demographic and denominational/religious configurations, may influence interfaith participation and organizational outcomes.

Our primary methods of data collection for our case studies were interviews and field observations. Over the course of one year of data collection we conducted 33 interviews across our five case studies. This includes 15 interviews with IMS, 9 interviews with WOF, 6 interviews with the IC, and 2 interviews each with HIP and SDA. Our higher number of interviews with Interfaith Mission Service can be explained by several factors. First, of our five case studies it is by far the largest with over 30 participating congregations and multiple individuals representing most of these congregations, providing us with a much larger pool of interviewees. Second, it is also the only of our five case studies to be supported by a full-time administrative staff person, who proved instrumental in coordinating interviews and site visits. Our other case studies, by comparison, were comprised of and operated by volunteers with other full-time jobs and/or responsibilities, which made it more challenging to coordinate and schedule interviews. Our limited interviews with HIP were the result of the sudden divorce and departure of the group's founder and leader, and the disintegration of the group shortly thereafter, and our 2 interviews with SDA were conducted with the group's two adult leaders. We did not seek IRB approval to interview the youth members of this group and therefore did not include interviews with them in this study.

We used the same interview protocol (Appendix B) across all 33 interviews. This protocol was developed in accordance with our team's interests in studying these organizations using an ecological systems framework. Questions were designed to address the following phenomena:

- The histories and identities of the individuals themselves, their background and current religious beliefs and practices
- The individuals' histories and experiences with their organizations

- The individuals' relationships with others in the organizations and with others outside the organizations (family, friends, co-workers)
- The histories and current realities of the organizations, as well as their structures and practices
- The relationships of the organizations with other organizations (other interfaith groups in the community, other religious organizations, non-profits)
- The relationship of the organizations to their larger communities, or the larger social contexts within which the organizations function

Most of our interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. Each of them was audio recorded, and the researchers took detailed notes as the interviews were being conducted to safeguard against recording device failure.

Field observations consisted of researcher presence at (and, in most cases, participation in) organization community events, meetings, and other important activities. In selecting activities for observation, the research team paid special attention to activities that were viewed as typical, or representing what "normal life" might look like for that organization. This helped ensure observations would not be based only on special or one-off activities that were atypical, potentially skewing the researcher's perceptions of that organization. Activities were also selected that, even if less typical or normal, held some special meaning or significance to that organization and were critical in understanding that organization's history and identity. This could be, for example, an annual event for which the organization is "known" locally and that represents a significant investment of the organization's time and capital.

Early team conversations were concerned with defining appropriate levels and modes of researcher participation in these settings. One researcher in particular, Hasina, rather quickly became intimately involved with ongoing meetings and activities with WOF, which caused her to question whether and to what degree she should become involved as someone acting as both a

participant and a researcher. Participation was viewed as of critical importance for getting to know and understand these organizations, drawing on community psychology's high valuation of participation (Fryer & Feather, 1994) and epistemological notions of embodied participation as an important method for generating knowledge (Burns, 2006; Del Busso, 2007). It was also determined, however, that participation to the point of influencing these organizations' processes for decision-making and development (attempting to influence members to take a certain course of action, for example) would not be advisable for the goal of understanding these organizations as they "naturally" exist and function. Field observation notes and personal reflections were recorded in researcher and were composed immediately following, rather than during, organizational activities. This was done to ensure the researchers' ability to be more fully aware of and involved in organizational activities without having to also take notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). IRB approval and, when necessary, informed consent were obtained for all of the above-described data collection activities. Interview participants were informed that their identity would not be revealed in any reporting of their data and, where necessary, the below reporting of findings uses pseudonyms for each of the participants.

Analysis

With 33 interviews collected, in addition to researcher field notes and journals, practical and methodological consideration has been given to which, and how, data would be analyzed. It was decided that a "selective transcription" process would be utilized for my analysis, meaning that only a sub-sample of the interviews would be chosen for full textual transcription, with the remaining interviews analyzed through audio and field notes and subsequently transcribed only in theoretically significant sections (Fasick, 2001; Gilbert, 1993; Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). This was done for several reasons. First, this decision made sense for our team given the limited

resources (in terms of research team support, time, and finances) we had at our disposal for transcription of all of our interviews. Indeed, verbatim transcription demands a significant amount of time and resources, and researchers often encounter difficulties in supporting this work (Britten, 1995). Second, the rigor with which we approached our data collection was such that textual transcription seemed to us to be less of a necessity than it might be in other research conditions. In addition to audio recording each of our interviews, we also recorded detailed notes during each of the interviews, noting verbatim quotes and summarizing key interview points, as well as maintaining detailed journals reflecting back on each of the interviews. We view these multiple modes of capturing interview data as vital pieces to learning about our subjects, each with their own strengths, more than just formalities in the interview process that are rendered obsolete by textual transcription (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006).

Finally, the decision to use “selective transcription” is one that allows our team to experiment with multiple methods of analyzing and interpreting these data, and to avoid the risk of limiting our approach to the data to a singular method. Goble et al. (2012) and Roberts and Wilson (2002) have argued, for example, that the increasing use of computer software to analyze textual qualitative data, while convenient and helpful in some regards, also alters the researcher’s approach to and understanding of those data. The convenience of computers may, for instance, inadvertently cause the researcher to speed up their reading of a transcribed text, or cause them to miss the emotions and inflections one notices in listening to, rather than simply reading, an interview. The critical point here is that different modes for approaching an interview for analysis may yield different reactions or interpretations from the researcher. Or, as Goble et al. (2012) observed, through our use of new research technologies we become functions of them. The use of *all* sources of data – transcriptions, audio recordings, field notes and journals – in the

process of interview analysis may help to eliminate the risk for such bias in understanding our subjects and interpreting their interviews.

My analysis of these interview and field note data proceeded first through team meetings in which we read, listened to, and discussed our reactions to a small sub-sample of the interviews and notes. Instructions for team members for this stage of analysis were as follows:

1. Read through the complete transcript. For this initial reading, do not make notes and do not write in the margins of the transcript. Simply practice deep, focused reading, ensuring you have a solid understanding of the content of the interview. This reading should be done in one sitting, if possible, and should be uninterrupted.
2. Read through the complete transcript a second time. During this second reading, make notes in the margins of the transcript, highlighting important ideas (overarching theories or narratives) or categories (specific topics or terms) that jump out at you from the text. Attention should be paid to ideas/categories that you judge to be recurring and/or that appear to have some significance. This reading should be done in one sitting, if possible, and should be uninterrupted.
3. Read through the complete transcript a third and final time. During this third reading, focus less on in-depth reading of the transcript and more on the ideas and categories you created in the margins during the second reading. Specifically, pay attention to the following:
 - do certain ideas or categories occur more frequently than others?
 - do different ideas or categories appear to be related to one another (e.g., categories and sub-categories, overlapping ideas)?
 - do different ideas or categories appear to be contrasted with one another?
 - what major interpretive themes appear to be emerging through these ideas and categories?

These meetings helped not only to begin to familiarize us with the data, but also to uncover preliminary patterns and themes useful in subsequent stages of analysis.

Following this process, I engaged in a more in-depth deductive template analysis of these data, grouping the data according to the guiding questions and theoretical frameworks for this particular paper (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; King, 2012). Specifically, textual, audio, and field note data addressing the mesosystemic impediments and supports of interfaith work and the intersetting communications emerging from that work were

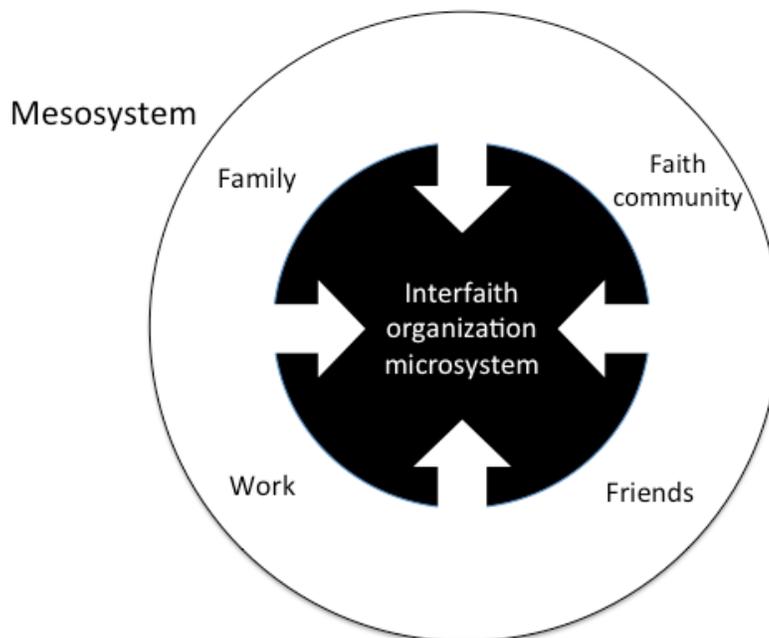
selected and examined for emerging patterns and themes. These patterns and themes were organized into meaningful categories and sub-categories, and further analyzed for meanings, connections, counter examples, and interpretations relevant to the study's guiding questions. As the below results demonstrate, this analytic process has provided a clearer view of the mesosystemic influences on interfaith organizations and potentially opened space for conversation about how these organizations can utilize these influences to further extend the benefits of interfaith contact.

Results

Mesosystemic Supports

First, in my analysis I sought to identify those instances in which other microsystems outside the interfaith organization microsystem helped to enable the individual person's interfaith involvement, or otherwise seemed to positively enrich that person's experience of interfaith work. Depicted in Figure 4.1 below, this analytic approach assumes that a network of

Figure 4.1. Mesosystemic influences on interfaith organization participation.



other microsystems exists outside the interfaith organization that directly affects the individual's experiences within that organization. The individual is directly involved in these other microsystems (e.g., family, faith community, work) and is in relationship with other individuals who comprise these other microsystems, as a husband, mother, church member, employee, and so on. Depending on the particular nature of these other microsystems, and of the relationships that exist within these other microsystems, the individual interfaith organization participant may feel supported in their interfaith involvement by their mesosystem, and in some instances their interfaith involvement may even originate through this mesosystem.

Summarized in Table 4.1 below, of the supports identified through our interviews with organizational leaders and members, the person's own faith community (e.g., church, temple, mosque) was most frequently discussed as an important source of support for interfaith organizational involvement. For some interviewees, the support from their faith community was illustrated in the willingness of other faith community members to be involved in the interfaith

Table 4.1. Frequency of mesosystemic support categories.

Support category	# of occurrences
Faith community	29
Family (e.g., children, spouse)	23
Friends	13
Work	11
School	6
Community organizations	3

organization's special events and other activities. One woman, a deacon at an Episcopal church and a member of Interfaith Mission Service, detailed the impressive involvement of her own congregation in interfaith work, as that work has appeared to have caught on within the congregation itself, outside the formal operations of the interfaith organization:

At Nativity, because of my role there as a deacon I am able to talk a little bit more about [Interfaith Mission Service], our outreach funds go to help IMS with Food Line and all of our programs basically. And so, as a member, Nativity contributes \$500 a year to IMS ... actually \$750 a year I think ... and is a big sponsor of the annual dinner, um, and that's one of our fundraising events. But I also have people who even now come up to me and say "I'd like to help with IMS," and so I'm working right now to get some more volunteers – Food Line, to answer the phone, I'm talking to some people about that, there's several people who are very interested in interfaith matters and have been part of the teams, the Encountering Islamophobia program and that sort of thing. So, gradually I think the congregation is coming around ... and we've had Sunday school classes, two of them, two different series on interfaith. One was IMS's series, but one the folks put together themselves that a group wanted to hear a Bible study group, wanted to know more about women in Islam, so I pulled together a group of women and had a series of, several weeks of conversation about that. So my own congregation I think is pretty engaged.

Another interviewee, a member of the Women of Faith group, similarly shared the recent involvement of her faith community in interfaith events:

My husband and I and some of the congregants from our church also attended the picnic that the Islamic community had this summer prior to the court hearing. So we went to show our support at that time as well ... [The congregants] enjoyed it. They were really glad to have the opportunity to show their support.

For other interviewees, their faith community demonstrated support for their interfaith work less through actions and direct involvement in interfaith work themselves, and more through enthusiastic approval and encouragement. One of the founders of the Sons & Daughters of Abraham group relayed the story of the moment when she made the announcement to her congregation that she was planning on starting an interfaith group. The moment not only solidified for her the support of her congregation, but it also created the opportunity to get connected to the Muslim woman who would end up being her partner in the endeavor:

And so on Sunday morning we have announcement time. So I just stood up and I said, you know, this is my idea and this is what I'd like to do and I am hoping that this congregation will be supportive. And so people just broke into just applause. So I knew that I had that piece. That afternoon, I got a phone call from a retired priest named Joe Porter who had been very involved in interfaith work in the Memphis area and he had moved to Sewanee and he said, "I know someone you need to meet." And he told me Sabina's name.

Illustrative of a number of interviewees who discussed faith communities that were "proud" of them or that otherwise demonstrated approval of their interfaith involvement, another member of the Women of Faith group, a member of a Unitarian Universalist church, discussed the moment in which another member of her church expressed her approval for her interfaith involvement. Here, the person's own faith community is helping to give legitimacy to the interfaith work in which the person is involved:

One of the women at church who doesn't come to this group said, and I hadn't really thought about it this way, but she said you are doing great social justice work and I'm like, I belong to an organization and this is not social justice and she said yes it is because you're taking a stand in the community for religious freedom, and I hadn't really thought about it that way. So ... it made me feel good. I mean it made me feel like I was doing something important when I really hadn't thought about this, it made me think about this group in a different way, it really is something important. It's taking a stand in a way that a lot of people don't and in a way that's needed.

Still for other interviewees, the faith community was discussed as the impetus behind their decision to join their interfaith organization. In some cases the person saw another church member was involved and decided to become involved as well, or in several other cases a faith community leader or member directly approached the person about joining.

In these instances, and in all of the instances described above, the person's own faith community outside the interfaith organization emerges as an influential factor for the person's involvement in that organization and, in some ways, for the ultimate success of that organization. Whether providing resources for organization operations and special events (finances, volunteers, or otherwise), expressing approval for the legitimacy of interfaith work, or serving as

a conduit for recruiting new interfaith participants, faith communities warrant attention as important microsystems in the ecology of the interfaith organization. Here I find further support for the conclusions of Yukich and Braunstein (2014), namely that other institutions in the interfaith organization's immediate ecology may serve to enhance the positive outcomes of that organization. Further, however, a critical finding in my analysis is that, while the above points appear to be true for *some* interfaith participants, they are far from true for all participants. Indeed, some faith communities appear to be far less supportive of interfaith work and, as I show in a later section below, this appears to be particularly true of faith communities comprised of immigrant and/or ethnic minority populations. It is my observation from my analyses that the extent to which a faith community is generally supportive of interfaith involvement is the extent to which the members comprising that community generally enjoy a degree of stability within their larger community.

Another important source of mesosystemic support for interviewees was their families – spouses, children, siblings – and friends, two groups comprising their social networks outside the interfaith organization. Contrasted with the faith community support described above, however, the support of family and friends was most often described as a *passive acceptance* – family and friends were aware of the person's interfaith involvement, but beyond this awareness and casual acceptance showed little to no interest in further discussing or being involved in interfaith matters. The following comments, by a Christian member of the Women of Faith group, help to illustrate this passive acceptance of interfaith involvement in one's family and friend microsystems:

I do talk about it with them, and they do come to the annual banquet. They're interested in that ... I sell them tickets actually. Because that is one of our big fundraisers and we always have terrific people come and speak ... So yes, it's easy to get people to come to the banquet and I do that. It's a little less easy to get them engaged unless they have a

heart for that, to get them engaged in hands–on interfaith work ... A good half of my close friends are not regular attenders at a church, I think they just don't see the need for it yet, for interfaith work. It's not a big deal, and they certainly aren't opposed to it, I think they find it a curiosity that I'm doing this in some ways. And if I sit down and actually talk to them, especially the ones that are part of congregations, they understand and appreciate and are all for it but are just busy. You know it's just the time, especially those with college age kids and school children, they just have a thousand things on their plates.

Important, yet subtle, in these types of comments about family and friends is the *absence of conflict* over the person's involvement in interfaith work. While family and friends are seldom described as actively involved in interfaith work or even openly expressing their approval of interfaith work, as with faith communities, they are described as being “onboard” with the general underlying ethos of interfaith work. This acceptance and absence of conflict is illustrated by a Hindu woman participating in Interfaith Mission Service:

My husband will sit on Sunday mornings and listen to the Christian radio, the evangelical shows. Hindus are very laid back about listening to other faith groups, and sharing. *I'm fortunate that he thinks the same way that I do, otherwise I would see that as a conflict, so he has no problem with me being involved in IMS activities.* He's not hands–on as much as I do, but he will come along with me if I volunteer my time. I'm more actively involved. [emphasis mine]

Other interviewees help to illustrate my observation that family and friends generally were viewed as being “onboard” with the idea of interfaith, even if they themselves were not directly involved in interfaith work of any sort. One member of the Women of Faith speculates that her friends, though not currently involved in interfaith work, are the sorts of people who would be involved if they could be:

Friends, yeah, friends know and I think have good reactions to it. Most of my friends are fairly open and accepting people and if they had a group close to where they live they would, they're the sort of people that would join this ... I have some friends in Nashville and if this group was in Nashville they would go, for example.

Another member of Women of Faith described her husband as someone who, though not involved in interfaith work, was even more naturally suited and inclined to interfaith work than she is:

My husband has a very strong background, he's been studying religion pretty much all his life. He's been a member of almost every Christian denomination you can think of at one time or another. But he's also studied the Eastern philosophies and he attended a self-realization fellowship for a number of years, which is one of the Eastern traditions. We both meditate on a regular basis, meditation is one of the things we teach at Unity in order to connect with the divinity within you ... He's kind of envious because he can't go [to my interfaith group]. We talk about the general topics and what came up, what the different points of view were. He's very interested to hear what was going on and what people were thinking. He probably knows more about interfaith and other religions than I do because he's been a lifelong student of religion.

Family and friends, then, if not directly involved in or directly supporting interfaith work, are viewed by the person as at least consistent with the underlying principles and interests that animate interfaith work – an openness to others, an interest in religions, and so on. In these ways, family and friends as microsystems that overlap with the interfaith organization microsystem at a minimum to not create mesosystemic tensions or conflicts within the individual person that may make it difficult for them to be involved in interfaith work. This observation – that the person's own social networks tend to be consistent with the underlying principles of interfaith work – is further discussed below as I consider the potential, or lack of potential, for extended social contact in the interfaith participant's broader mesosystem.

Mesosystemic Hindrances

Even as the microsystems surrounding the interfaith organization provide certain supports that enable and/or enrich the individual's involvement in interfaith work, these same microsystems in some instances may have the opposite effect on the interfaith participant. The nature of certain other microsystems, and the nature of the relationships within these other microsystems, in various ways restrict the person's involvement in interfaith work and/or

diminish the quality of that involvement. Importantly, hindrances to interfaith work were discussed far less frequently than supports, with the exception of the faith community, as summarized in Table 4.2 below. When microsystems like family, friends, and work were discussed, for example, it was far more frequently in a positive light. When work *was* discussed as a hindrance, for example, it was discussed as an obligation that competed with interfaith work for time and commitment, rather than as a negative influence or source of conflict or antagonism. This is illustrated by the following comments by a pastor member of Interfaith Mission Service who is transitioning out of a leadership role with the organization:

Really I'm kinda glad to be transitioning out of this capacity. You know my work as a pastor is just all-consuming of my life, you know I wake up every Monday morning with this realization – "I gotta prepare another sermon. I just finished one yesterday and I gotta do another one." It's a very time-demanding profession, so I want to be able to refocus on that. I'm gonna stay involved in IMS, but I'm glad to be giving up this leadership role.

The most frequently discussed hindrance, and that which tended to take on more of a negative, restrictive tone, more so than the others at least, was the person's own faith community outside the interfaith organization.

Table 4.2. Frequency of mesosystemic hindrance categories.

Hindrance category	# of occurrences
Faith community	23
Family (e.g., children, spouse)	8
Work	4
Friends	3
School	1

As shown in the above section detailing mesosystemic supports, the person's faith community was often described as a source of support with resources, approval/legitimacy, and new member recruitment. This was most often the case, however, when the interviewee was a native-born American, white, and/or did not belong to a minority-religion faith community. Particularly among Muslim and/or persons representing immigrant populations, the faith community was often described as a source of mesosystemic tension – an instance when the interfaith organization microsystem did not align with or was in conflict with the aims or purposes of the faith community microsystem. Indeed, of the 23 instances when the faith community was discussed as a “hindrance” to interfaith work, 18 (78%) were described by an interviewee who was a member of a minority and/or largely immigrant faith community.

One interviewee is a long-time member of the Huntsville, Alabama Hindu community, and a member of Interfaith Mission Service. She described the Huntsville Hindu community as heavily comprised of recent immigrant families, a fact which she points to as an explanation for why she is currently the only member of the Hindu community interested and active in interfaith activities:

We do have a Hindu temple. It's kind of distant and it started about 10-15 years ago. Earlier than that we didn't have a temple here. So when we came to this country we had to adapt to the fact that we didn't have a place of worship. But in our religion we don't need a temple to go to, we don't need a place to go to every week. Every home has a prayer room, a shrine, so we do our worshipping and prayer offering in the home. So to be a good Hindu you don't have to go to the temple ... Then they started a temple here, but I have some issue, let's put it that way, because they're not as open-minded as I am. Their priorities are different. They seem to believe in, you know we have idol worship in our religion, so they seem to be focusing on the idols and the rituals and teaching that as a message to the next generation, whereas I feel we are in this country and this community and we need to expand and get beyond that and try to see what we can do as part of this community, and I don't see that thinking happening much. So when I'm here I represent myself, I tell them I cannot bring the congregation to you because I'm not a leader of the congregation. The leader of the congregation is not as much of a believer in the interfaith. When you talk to them, in theory they'll agree with me but in practice, like on the Day of Service, I'll ask them can you please show up with 50 volunteers, it doesn't happen ... I

don't see them being proactive about engaging themselves as community members ... We have not had a place of worship in this community for the longest time, so they're still taking baby steps and we cannot compare them to a church that has been there for 150 years. They're still trying to get themselves established. So their focus is on raising funds, building the temple, making sure people come and attend ... I'm not saying that's the wrong thing, because their focus is on okay we need to put all our energy and focus into this. I cannot find fault with that but I happen to think a little more of the big picture thing. So the focus is different.

A Muslim member of Interfaith Mission Service, a Christian convert to Islam who was born and raised in America, expressed similar frustrations in getting her smaller Muslim community actively involved in interfaith work:

As an American it's very important for people to understand and know who we are and reach out to them and I've found so many people that, you know, it's not really that important. "We do what we do, they do what they do, there's really no need to." ... Adults don't seem to ... if it's your faith, what you believe, you're not really concerned about what people are asking, you know, why, just like I'm sure in a church people are not concerned with why people think they have become Christian or why they are, but for me it was very important and there were very few people ... I think it's "This is what we do, this is our faith and we don't necessarily have to become involved," you know. It's a smaller community and people do tend to focus on their smaller community rather than the larger community. I'm not sure why, because I don't think I would be that way if I went to, my husband's family's in Jordan, and I think if I were there I don't think that I would be that way, so I'm not really sure if that is just our community or if that's something that is seen across the country.

In contrast to the earlier comments by the Episcopalian woman who was overwhelmed by offers from faith community members to help out with various interfaith initiatives, these individuals describe feelings of frustration in getting other members involved, a responsibility that to them sometimes feels like "a full-time job," and leaves them with the reality that, if they want their particular tradition represented in an interfaith gathering, the burden often will fall exclusively to them.

These representatives of minority religions in particular, and perhaps especially members of Muslim faith communities, feel a special obligation to represent their tradition to others as a way of dispelling harmful myths about their tradition and clarifying for others exactly what it is

for which their tradition stands. One Muslim participant of Women of Faith explained – “You feel like you are representing your religion. You are the ambassador of Islam. You try to do your best during these meetings.” A Muslim participant of Interfaith Council at Vanderbilt explained that the Muslim students are often the first to speak out during dialogues on topics especially sensitive to Muslims, like the role of women or religious violence, because they may feel more of a need to defend their religion against public perceptions. The Christian convert to Islam in Huntsville, AL explained her sense of duty in representing Islam in this way:

Any time they needed someone to speak on behalf of Islam, they would give me a call. I think I got pushed into it because I'm American. It's easier for people sometimes to take it from an American. And sometimes our community just wants a little more of an American face, depending on what is going on around 9/11 ... Because I was willing to. Like, you don't see interfaith as such an important part, unfortunately, on behalf of some Muslims. And probably in the church as well, not everyone is interested in interfaith, so it falls on certain individuals. The ones who feel like this is important. And of course because I am American, and because I've seen both sides, I know both sides, it was important to me ... For people to know, especially after 9/11, for people to know, um, I've been Muslim for so long and I don't know any people who do what happened on 9/11. And I guess that was the biggest thing, the question for our community was why do you do that, why do Muslims do that, and that was always my message, my message was that's not what we do.

The reluctance of some minority faith communities generally to become involved in interfaith work, then, may lead to situations in which those communities are underrepresented in interfaith work. Further, the representation of these faith communities may fall onto certain individuals who take up as their special responsibility to ensure that their tradition is sufficiently and accurately understood among others in the larger community.

But what more can we understand about why these faith communities refuse or give only limited support to the interfaith organizations of which certain of their members are a part? Certainly the above comments help shed some light on this phenomenon – that some smaller minority faith communities are more concerned about and focused on establishing their own

communities rather than reaching out to their larger surrounding community. Additionally, however, some interviewees indicated that minority faith communities may generally harbor some suspicion about or concern over interfaith encounters as threatening to take away members or sully the cultural and religious traditions they are seeking to pass down to their children. One of the leaders of the Sons & Daughters of Abraham group discussed concerns from Muslim parents over their kids' involvement in interfaith work:

Before the very first hiking event we had, somebody, one of the [women] emailed me that their kids were going to go and she emailed me back. I don't know they are old enough, are they educated enough about their own religion to do interfaith, and that's the ideal. A lot of time when you do adult interfaith, yeah, everyone gets together. The rabbis and imams, usually people who know the religion and they discuss, but the kids it's not about knowing everything, but asking the question and being asked so that now you're thinking about your own religion. So there's, you know, always some underlying fear like they're going to go and the Christian's going to tell them how great Christianity is.

The president of Vanderbilt's Interfaith Council event expressed similar concerns from his family during his initial months doing interfaith work:

Family back home likes [interfaith], think it's a good push. The very first time, they said make sure you keep to your beliefs. You're going to hear about a lot of different things, try to hang on to what you believe. My mosque doesn't know about the interfaith. We were the first family at our mosque to go to prom. Some people there, when I was going to Vanderbilt, were saying stuff like "make sure when you're in college you stick with Muslims and only Muslims." I was like no. This guy was talking about how if you stick with non-Muslims they'll lead you astray and lead you to the hell fire ... Those people, I tell them, but I don't argue with them.

The Christian convert to Islam in Huntsville speculated that some in her Muslim community may share similar feelings about interfaith work, particularly as that work is viewed as a predominantly Christian activity:

I think maybe what people think of it as "They are trying to convert us, because maybe we're the minority." And so they look at it as these are mostly Christians and maybe there's some conversion issues, but it's not what interfaith is about, so ... I've heard that comment before, that you know ... And I don't know if that's true for everyone, or if they just don't have time.

For minority faith communities, then, direct involvement in interfaith work and indirect support of members' involvement in interfaith work raises certain concerns over preserving cultural and religious identities and traditions with which faith communities comprised of non-minority groups necessarily do not need to contend.

A recent study by Min (2010) may further help shed light on this phenomenon. Through his comparative study on Korean evangelicals and Indian Hindus, Min sought to uncover whether and in what ways immigrants to the US maintain their homeland cultural and ethnic traditions through the vehicle of their faith communities. In the case of Indian Hindus in particular, their religious tradition is considered the indigenous religion in their homeland and as such is infused with much of the local culture of that homeland (what Calvillo and Bailey, 2015, have likened to processes of inculturation, or the comingling of religious practice with local culture). Continued practice of that religion in the US, then, becomes a way of preserving their cultural practices and ethnic identity and of passing that identity down through subsequent generations. Hinduism, for Indian Hindus immigrated to the US, becomes a bridge to their homeland culture and, as with the interviewees described above, may contribute to their hesitation to participate in interfaith work and (they may worry, whether reasonably or not) risk losing or "burning" that bridge to their homeland. Importantly for the individual interfaith participant, these difficulties entangled with their faith community and their homeland culture and ethnic identity may have real implications for their ongoing participation in interfaith work. While these faith communities do not restrict members from participating and do not actively oppose interfaith work, their lack of involvement and lack of resourcing for these efforts certainly stand in stark contrast to other faith communities that appear to be much more supportive of interfaith work, potentially leaving individual representatives of the faith

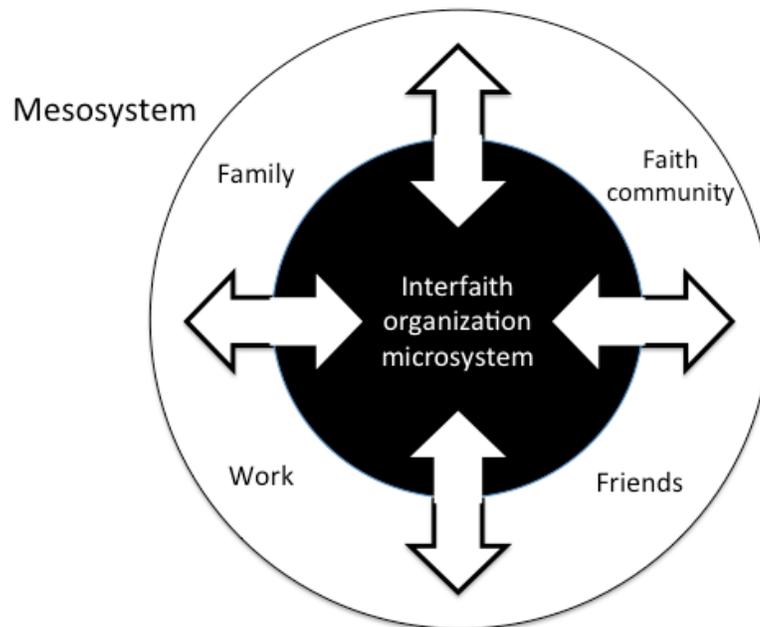
community to bear much of the burden of interfaith involvement and “public relations” for their community. Indeed, several of these individuals expressed a degree of exhaustion over carrying this burden often completely on their own.

Extended Social Contact

As Figure 4.1 illustrated earlier, and as the above data demonstrated, certain microsystems surrounding the interfaith organization microsystem – particularly the person’s family, friends, and faith community – often play important roles in either supporting or hindering the person’s involvement in and experiences within that interfaith organization. In this view, factors external to the organization are indirectly affecting interfaith work through the individual person exposed to those factors in other areas of their life. In this final analytic section, I build on this model to suggest a bi-directional view of the interfaith organization mesosystem in which these external factors not only influence interfaith organizational work, but are in turn themselves influenced by that work. Spouses, for example, do not just exert influence on the individual’s participation in the interfaith organization. Spouses themselves can be influenced and even changed in very meaningful ways through the individual’s participation, even though these spouses never step foot in an interfaith organization themselves.

Discussed in more detail earlier, for this analysis I rely on extended social contact theory, which asserts that a person may experience social contact with another social group and develop warmer feelings toward that group indirectly through another person who has had direct contact with that social group (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). Illustrated in Figure 4.2 on the following, this view of the interfaith organization allows for bi-directional exchanges between the interfaith organization and its surrounding mesosystem. Here I make meaningful connections to

Figure 4.2. Interfaith organization influences on mesosystem.



Bronfenbrenner's (1979) notion of "inter-setting communications" in which important information exchanges occur between microsystems and potentially affect attitudes and behaviors within those microsystems. Importantly, the possibility of these exchanges from the interfaith organization outward into its surrounding ecology presents interfaith scholars and practitioners a way of expanding their understanding of interfaith work and the efficacy of that work against, for example, criticisms that claim interfaith groups only reach their immediate participants, most of whom are already open to and accepting of religious diversity (Patel, 2012).

First, I acknowledge up front the limitations of extended social contact theory for interfaith organization participants. It is rare for those actively involved in interfaith work to have larger family and social networks where a greater exposure to religious diversity and greater open-mindedness are needed. As already discussed in the above section on mesosystemic supports, most interviewees described their family and friends as generally being onboard with,

and supportive of, the idea of interfaith work, even if they themselves are not actively involved in interfaith work. Indeed, given documented tendencies to self-select into likeminded social networks (Bishop, 2008), and recalling Wuthnow's (1988) treatment of America's restructuring along "liberal" and "conservative" lines of association, it is not surprising to find that individuals generally choose to be around people they view to be as "open" or "liberal" as they are. Several interviewees highlighted this particular point. One member of Interfaith Mission Service indicated that the vast majority of her friends were of a particular political leaning:

I really don't have any [friends] who argue [about interfaith work] ... I could probably predict about 90% of my friends voted in a particular way, so it's not that they oppose, um, equality and all of those things they're very much in favor of. I think they just, um, I don't know what it is.

An atheist member of Women of Faith described in much greater detail the social network of which she is a part, and the individuals she tends to invite to interfaith activities:

I pretty much invite anybody who I think will be alright with Pagans and lesbians. If I think they're good with that, I'll invite them. Cause really, some people have trouble with Muslims, but clearly I don't tend to come across those people, unless it's at school where, you know, you don't really get to choose your associates. But, yeah, I happen to be active with the Democrats, with the local Democrats, and the Democrats happen to be pretty open-minded and liberal, I find. And so I know within my circle of acquaintances I know people who are Baptist, I know people who go to the Church of Christ, I know people who are Methodist, and Presbyterians, and if they're Democrats they're pretty much alright with anything ... I have friends who are also Agnostic, and I know quite a few UU's from when I used to go there. I know people who are from Church of Christ, I went to a Christmas party last night with some friends who are in a Church of Christ. They happen to be very liberal and open-minded and not at all what I anticipated Church of Christ members to be. Pretty much anybody who supports universal health care – we can be buddies. I know people who go to First Baptist Church and they respect other religions, they believe in freedom of religion ... Anybody that I talk to more than to say "hello" is someone that I'm willing to be open with.

First, both of the above comments support the notion that active members of an interfaith organization who would think of themselves as being "liberal" would choose to associate with other individuals who are liberal as well. Second, the latter comment in particular suggests a

self-selection tendency in interfaith work, that those who are invited to join interfaith organizations are to some degree already onboard with the undergirding values of interfaith work and therefore arguably the persons least in need of exposure to religious diversity. Both of these points serve to temper expectations for the potential usefulness of extended social contact for interfaith organizations, particularly given the degree of self-selection surrounding the social lives of participants.

Admitting these limitations, we did encounter over the course of this study a number of instances and stories that would suggest meaningful extended social contact *is* occurring through these organizations, especially among family, co-workers, and faith community members – those areas of life where it is often more difficult for individuals to pick-and-choose their associates based on certain desired qualities or values (as they are more freely able to do with friends, for instance). The Women of Faith members, for example, are carrying out their interfaith work in a community particularly concerned about the Muslim population, with recent community conflict and protests over the construction of a new Islamic center. Several Women of Faith members described a curiosity in their larger community about Islam, and the opportunities to speak to others about their interfaith experiences with the Muslim women in their group. One member commented:

I get a lot of questions mostly about Islam and paganism because those are just two religions that I guess people think they don't know much about or they're not sure what they are or whatever. But people seem kind of fascinated by it like what do you do, I mean they seem interested. I get a lot of questions about what do you do and you know what are these people like and those people like and you know so there's been some curiosity about it.

Another member of Women of Faith, a Christian Scientist and co-founding member of the group, described opportunities to defend Muslim women in particular to others in the larger community who may have suspicions or questions about Islam:

I've discussed it at church and a few of the other women from our church come and I've discussed it with my other family members, you know and just really come to the Muslim women, their defense, you know. Because I find that people will just make comments that they've heard on the news or whatever and don't really know Muslim people ... It was a church member and they were talking about converting and you know, that was really [the Muslims'] intent maybe even you know, with associating with us and I explained about Christian conversions and missionary work and all that, but I also said no one has ever talked to me about conversion. They all come from a point of being respectful of each of our faiths. So I have not experienced that at all. You know, we're all respectful of each other's faiths, and I don't know if I convinced the person, but I said I haven't experienced it ... they were quiet. They didn't argue with me anymore so obviously they must have felt like, oh, okay well.

This same Women of Faith member described having similar conversations with her mother in which she relays information about Muslims and answers questions her mother may have about Islam. In this member's view, these conversations have provided her mother with important information about Muslims and "certainly has opened her eyes."

Members of other organizations in our study shared similar opportunities they've had to take interfaith conversations into other areas of their life and help to clear up misconceptions others may have about certain religious groups. The founder of Indiana's Haven Interfaith Parents group made observations about this phenomenon in a recent blog post:

The second theme I heard was that being in the group made us more comfortable and confident to talk about spiritual and religious topics with people outside the group. Someone said that prior to being in the group she didn't talk about religious or spiritual topics with someone from another faith for fear of offending them. Being a member of HIP has taught her how to ask questions about someone's faith. The group also expressed the confidence that has developed to address inaccuracies about other faiths. This was expressed by Muslims who hear negative comments about Christians and it was expressed by Christians who hear negative comments about Muslims. The group conveyed that being able to talk about spiritual and religious topics with others has deepened and enriched their lives.

The above comments, then, provide examples of instances in which interfaith participants *do* find themselves in social situations outside the interfaith organization where they may encounter individuals who are not as open-minded as they themselves are, or who may lack important

information about a particular religious group. Indeed, interfaith participants may not always be able to choose those with whom they associate, and in these cases there do appear to be opportunities for extended social contact effects. Even in those cases where the individual is able to choose those with whom they associate, there is no guarantee that these persons will always agree on certain values, including religious diversity and interfaith work. One interviewee in particular, a co-founding member of Interfaith Mission Service, shared his experiences in doing interfaith work with his wife, a conservative Christian who was very wary of becoming involved in interfaith work.

John met his second wife, Suzanne, during a difficult period in his life when he was struggling with anxiety and depression. As he tells it, Suzanne acted as a calming force in his life right when he needed it – she showed him love and compassion at a time in his life when he couldn't find it anywhere else, and she helped to bring him out of a very dark period. With this as the foundation for their relationship, John and Suzanne moved very quickly over a period of several months to engagement and marriage. Given the speed at which they moved into their relationship, even after marriage they found there were certain areas of each other's lives that were unfamiliar to them and about which they needed to learn. John's passion for and involvement in interfaith work was one such area of life about which Suzanne had to learn only gradually, and it came as somewhat of a shock to her more conservative Christian sensibilities. John discussed the process of introducing Suzanne to the interfaith work of which he is a part, including her very first visit to the Huntsville Islamic Center the same day of my interview with John:

Suzanne was somewhat guarded about the interfaith work. She was very proud of what I had done, but to be close to it, she didn't know what I expected of her to suddenly join me in interfaith events. Where some of them she might not be as comfortable being present for, this morning, I didn't know if she'd go into the Mosque. Which you know, I

left to her, but she did it, but her commitment to Christ did not stay at the door and she's very understanding ... [This is] pretty new to her, new to her in general understanding. She went to Vanderbilt Divinity School for a year and a half. So she studied some and she's somewhat aware of these things, but early on we talked about this because she says, "John you're not asking me, I know, to compromise." I said gosh no, well that's what draws me in, but you will be in situations with me where I will be doing interfaith work and I will not close the prayer each time. Or I will speak of the common ground of the faiths very strongly, but I will, every time that I do an interfaith program, my goal by the end of this is to let people know that I am deeply committed to Christ and this is my tradition. I won't force that, but I will make, because I can, it's who I am ... So she's come to respect it and learn a lot and she's found her own stereotypes. Particularly the Muslim. She's uncovered, she said, "I didn't know that. That's fascinating." Even this morning, so she's broadened, but has challenged me a couple times, my Interfaith language ... because she's my wife. She can do this.

Here John describes the gradual process of "extending" interfaith work to someone who otherwise would not participate in interfaith work out of her own interest. For John and Suzanne, it was a process of reassuring Suzanne that participating in interfaith work did not mean having to compromise on personal beliefs, as well as a process of giving Suzanne the space to ask questions and challenge John on his own interfaith practices. The morning of John's interview I observed as Suzanne stepped foot in an Islamic Center for the first time and was finally and tearfully introduced to John's Muslim friend of many years. It was an emotional moment for both John and Suzanne, and a testament to the possibility that interfaith work can find its way indirectly through the interfaith mesosystem even to those who would otherwise try to avoid it.

Discussion

In his discussion on mesosystemic analyses, Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted in particular the potential that exists for either consistency or inconsistency between microsystems that connect through the mesosystem. In human development terms, and in Bronfenbrenner's initial interest in child development especially, developmental problems arise when the child faces inconsistencies as they move between microsystems. If the child's parents devalue education and do not invest in the child's learning, for example, the child's development within the school

microsystem and other related microsystems will suffer. Conversely, the child attains optimal development when microsystems work together consistently as a mesosystem, as when the child's parents reinforce the lessons and values of the education the child is receiving in the school microsystem. These consistencies between microsystems generally place less stress on the individual as they develop and allow for greater feelings of health and well-being.

While it is difficult in some respects to translate developmental concepts and processes to interfaith work – in what ways is an adult in an interfaith organization “developing” in the ways Bronfenbrenner theoretically conceived? – the above analyses reinforce Bronfenbrenner's theory and make it clear that consistencies between the interfaith microsystem and other microsystems allows for more positive interfaith experiences for participants, while inconsistencies between the interfaith microsystem and other microsystems may result in more stressful or otherwise less optimal experiences for the participant. When the interfaith organization mesosystem is functioning consistently, participants have access to important resources from their faith community, for example, that help enable the implementation of interfaith work. They also receive positive messages of moral support from friends, family members, and other faith community members that at times may help give them a sense that the work they are doing is meaningful and important. On the other hand, when the interfaith organization mesosystem is functioning inconsistently, participants may feel overextended if they receive little or no resourcing from other faith community members, for example, or they may feel pulled in different and opposing directions if other microsystems are competing with the interfaith organization for their time and commitment.

These observations highlight for interfaith organizations important questions related to the frequency and nature of individuals' participation or lack of participation in organizational

events and activities. If minority faith community members in particular evidence limited or inconsistent participation in organization activities, the above analyses would suggest that this is sometimes true at least in part because these individuals are experiencing inconsistencies between the interfaith organization and other microsystems within their larger mesosystem. More specifically, interfaith participants who are members of faith communities largely comprised of immigrant families must contend with their own community's needs for preserving identities tied to their homeland. Conversely, organizations may observe in more engaged participants a greater degree of consistency in their interfaith mesosystem and therefore more opportunities for resourcing and support for both that individual and the larger interfaith organization.

One wonders with the above analyses, then, whether and how interfaith organizations can take into consideration the mesosystemic resources that may or may not be available to organizational members. Should organizations and other interfaith leaders develop, for example, resources to aid participants in navigating difficult conversations with unsupportive friends, family members, and other faith community members? Or, more importantly, should these organizations and leaders work to develop resources and strategies for adjusting interfaith activities and events to the needs and concerns of minority/immigrant faith communities, as highlighted in the above analyses? The Women of Faith organization examined in our study, for example, at its outset adopted a model of decision-making that gave preference to the expressed needs and concerns of local Muslim community members that were the target of public protests and conflict. Strategies for addressing that public conflict were not implemented without the approval of the group's Muslim participants, and indeed many of the group's ideas and strategies were never pursued or implemented because of this decision-making structure. In that same spirit, how might interfaith organizational work proceed differently if organizational structures

and processes were balanced to give priority to minority/immigrant faith community needs, not just with particular political strategies (as with the Women of Faith group), but also and especially with the broader aims and foundational values of the larger interfaith movement? For example, is the very act of dialogue itself – a long-standing practice in the interfaith movement – fundamentally threatening and/or unhelpful to certain minority/immigrant faith communities, and what other types of activities might be viewed as less threatening and more helpful to these communities?

Finally, the above analyses provide a compelling argument that interfaith organizations must actively engage with the realities that the scope of their work extends beyond only those who are most immediately involved in their activities. Indeed, consistent with extended social contact theory, we have found that interfaith organization participants are not just interfaith participants – they are also spouses, parents, friends, co-workers, and a number of other social roles, each of which holds the potential for intersetting communications (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that provide useful information externally to those not at all involved in interfaith work. It is not clear from our data precisely what interfaith organizations are doing to equip participants for effective communications with others outside their organization, and in fact several interviewees expressed their frustrations in feeling that they have not been able to effectively communicate with others about their interfaith experiences. If there are opportunities for intersetting communications, and some participants feel ill-equipped to engage in these communications, it may suggest room for organizations to be more intentional in developing resources and training participants to be effective communicators and to take advantage of opportunities to tell others about their interfaith work and/or act as ambassadors for the religiously diverse groups they have encountered through that work.

These analyses, then, give language to the phenomenon Patel (2012) has sought to describe in which members of the interfaith movement, self-selecting as they are, intentionally move beyond their interfaith circles and begin “preaching” to other “choirs” or social networks to which they have access and that may not be as exposed to religious diversity. This, I argue, is the great potential found in applying an ecological model to interfaith organizations, and in focusing on the mesosystemic level of analysis in particular. The interfaith movement, because of its highly self-selecting nature, cannot effectively improve interfaith relations internally and through spinning its own wheels. It is through broadening its scope to consider its surrounding resources and leverage points that it can begin to make a compelling case for its effectiveness in preaching the message of religious diversity and relations to those who most need to hear it and are least likely to hear it through traditional methods.

Strengths and Limitations

The above study has been strengthened in several ways that warrant brief mention here. As with most qualitative studies, which tend to be limited by smaller sample sizes, our research team sought to mitigate generalizability issues by achieving diversity both between and within our case study organizations. The organizations we chose to focus on in our study represent a wide variety of community contexts and organizational models, from communities experiencing open (and often violent) religious conflict to communities characterized by uncommon religious cooperation, and from long-standing organizations with complex operating structures to grass-roots organizations just recently formed and still “finding their way.” Similarly, we sought to conduct interviews within each organization with individuals representing diversity on a number of levels, attempting where we could to interview individuals from a variety of religious traditions and with a variety of positions and perspectives within their particular organization.

This diversity represented in our sample, then, enables us to have greater confidence in the common themes I was able to uncover across a range of contexts and individuals.

Several limitations to the above study warrant brief mention, however, and are suggestive of further research efforts. First, much of the above analyses focused on the distinctions between the supports offered (or not offered) by minority faith communities compared to those offered by other faith communities. Future research into these organizations will benefit from sampling more heavily from minority faith community members than we have done in this study, to arrive at a larger and more diverse sample of minority faith community perspectives. As with most qualitative studies, our ability to generalize from the above data is limited by a smaller sample size, and this certainly would be aided by larger samples of minority faith community members in future studies.

Second, our above observations on the opportunities for, and ultimate potential of, extended social contact are based largely on the perceptions of those immediately involved in interfaith work, rather than on those who ostensibly are benefitting from that extended social contact. Asking interviewees to comment on the changes in attitude or knowledge they *perceive* to be occurring in others opens us to the risk that these individuals may not fully understand the experiences of those others on which they are reporting. Future research, then, will benefit from a more direct focus not only on the interfaith participants themselves, but also on the spouses, friends, family members, co-workers, etc., who potentially are benefitting indirectly from the participants' interfaith involvement.

Conclusion

The above analysis suggests an expanded view of the interfaith organization that takes into consideration external factors that influence the individual's participation in interfaith

organizational work, and that are themselves in–turn influenced by that individual’s participation. Such an analysis enriches current understandings of the interfaith organization and may shed light on certain challenges commonly highlighted in discussions about interfaith work – in particular, such an analysis may provide a compelling opportunity for interfaith practitioners and scholars to think of their work as extending beyond the persons most immediately involved in interfaith work. Those persons also have friends, family members, co–workers, and faith community members not involved in interfaith work but who may stand to benefit even more from intersetting communications about diverse religious groups. This analysis, then, puts meat on the bones of what Patel (2012) has suggested is an effective work–around to the interfaith movement’s self–selection problem. As he suggests, interfaith groups may indeed be “preaching to the choir,” in that they most immediately reach only those persons who are already onboard with the idea of interfaith work. But each of those choir members has their own choirs, or other microsystems, where they could preach to others who need to hear the interfaith message.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In sum, the papers presented above provide compelling evidence for the value in paying closer attention to the nonreligious elements out of which interfaith work is partly comprised. In particular, the multifaceted identities of interfaith participants and the ecologies within which interfaith organizations function challenge scholars and practitioners to more fully understand and engage with the complexities of their work. I have argued that, in so doing, interfaith work benefits in several important ways. First, recalling Fletcher's (2005) feminist theological push against "identity logic," a fuller appreciation of the diversity that exists *within* religious communities, and the imbalances that may grow out of that diversity (e.g., underrepresentation of women in positions of leadership and authority), will help ensure that *all* voices are heard and needs are met around the interfaith table. The inclusive tone of the interfaith movement can be deceiving, as exclusion may occur even in those spaces. Second, aided by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and supported by Yukich and Braunstein (2014), I have shown that environments are important factors for understanding the supports and hindrances to interfaith work, as well as for understanding fruitful avenues for extending that work.

These analyses suggest a more adaptive and dynamic approach to developing and implementing interfaith organizational work, one that is both more attuned to and more willing to be molded to diverse individual needs within the organization and more responsive to the immediate environs within which the organization exists. I propose this adaptive approach in contrast to what I have found to be more typical in the larger interfaith movement, the adoption of prescriptive approaches that seek to impose a set of "best practices" or that argue for the

universal merits of one model of interfaith work over others (see Swidler's *Dialogue Decalogue*, 1983, or Patel's interfaith community service movement, 2006). I further elaborate on this point in concluding sections below. First, however, I consider the limitations of the above research and suggest fruitful directions for future research.

Limitations and Future Directions

It should be noted first that an analysis of complex and multiple identities within interfaith settings, in order to be appropriately comprehensive, should involve consideration of much more than just gender as I have done in the second paper. The nature of our survey sample, which reflected very little diversity in terms of other key demographics⁷, limited my analysis to studying gender as the key nonreligious variable for understanding interfaith experiences and outcomes, but it very well may be far from the only nonreligious variable that warrants investigation. It will be fruitful to further explore how religious identity in interfaith settings intersects with other variables like minority racial status and foreign nationality, for example. How does religion function as means for resisting a dominant Western US culture among foreign-born participants – for example, Ozyurt's (2013) study on Muslim immigrant women's integration into US society – and how might this impede bridge-building between interfaith participants? Likewise, how do racial-ethnic minorities experience interfaith work, particularly in light of persisting discrimination at those points where religious identity and racial-ethnic minority status converge? The US Congress, for example, in 1996 passed the Church Arson Prevention Act in response to a spate of arsons primarily targeting African American churches (US Department of Justice, 2010), and often times acts of violence targeting one religious group

⁷ This is less a critique of our survey sample and more a critique of the interfaith population in general, which has been criticized for a lack of diversity in other social categories beyond just gender, including race-ethnicity and class (McCarthy, 2007). Whether a more diverse survey sample is achievable in future studies depends on the further diversification of the interfaith movement as well as intentional oversampling in key demographics.

or another depend on the racial and/or cultural identity of the victim as in the case of, for example, an Arab wearing certain garments that demarcate them from other groups in the US. There exists a complex array of elements within religious discrimination and conflict, and it is unclear from the above research whether and how these other elements act as either supports or impediments in interfaith work.

Second, the above analyses leave open space for considering what role religion still *does* play in our approaches to studying and understanding interfaith organizational work. Like Chaves (2010), my intent in highlighting and exploring the “congruence fallacy” within interfaith work is not to suggest that religion does not matter and does not warrant our attention, but rather merely to make space for other considerations that are much more typically neglected in such work. I contend that more precisely describing the nonreligious elements of interfaith work forces us also to consider more precisely the defined role(s) of religion in this work. In other words, if religion is not “everything” within these spaces, then it must be certain things and not others, a realization that challenges us to delineate very specific functions for religion in interfaith work. To begin this conversation, I would suggest two broad areas of study as potentially fruitful grounds for further delineating the functions of religion within interfaith spaces: (1) religion as a cognitive structure shaped through processes of accommodation and assimilation; and (2) religion as ethical foundation or justification for interfaith work.

Religion as Cognition

While I eschew notions of religion as exclusively cognitive in nature, I maintain that interfaith scholars and practitioners may stand to benefit from extant discussions on religion in the psychological and cognitive science literatures. Early psychological observations of religion were undertaken from assumptions about religion as almost strictly a cognitive or perceptual

process. William James (1902/1990) spoke in his seminal *The Varieties of Religious Experience* of personal religion (which is distinct from and precedes institutional religion) as a “man’s [sic] total reaction upon life” (p. 39) in which gods and other divine realities are merely objects to be conceived in the mind of the human individual. Such conceptual processes, for James, are fundamentally individual, as he noted:

Religion ... shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men [sic] *in their solitude*, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine. (p. 36, emphasis mine)

Several decades later, philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1926/1996) expressed similar sentiments about the fundamentally isolated nature of religious life, famously suggesting, “Religion is what the individual does with his [sic] own solitariness” (p. 16) and “if you are never solitary, you are never religious” (p. 17). Foundational to Whitehead’s notion of religiosity is the philosophical position that nature and all phenomena existing outside the human individual are in a way actualized through the cognitive activities of that individual. The individual, in other words, imposes values, structures, and order onto the universe around them, including concepts of God or the divine. While external phenomena certainly impose limits and order (e.g., humans cannot walk through walls), their ultimate purposes and values reside in the human mind. As Whitehead (1926/1996) explained:

The conduct of external life is conditioned by environment, but it receives its final quality, on which its worth depends, from the internal life which is the self–realization of existence. Religion is the art and the theory of the internal life of man [sic], so far as it depends on the man himself and on what is permanent in the nature of things. (p. 16)

James and Whitehead both stand at the foundation of constructivist philosophies of individual and social religious life—as further picked up and expanded by such thinkers as Merleau–Ponty (1962) and Berger and Luckmann (1966)—that argue for human individual agency in the construction of the social realities around them, including divine or religious

realities. Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis (1993) have built on this philosophical tradition in their discussion of “cognitive structures” and the religion of the individual. In their view, the human mind possesses certain cognitive capacities through which the individual classifies and differentiates life experiences and effectively constructs, or creates, their life reality. Importantly, far from static, these cognitive processes in the human mind are flexible and creative, and respond to such external stimuli as new information (as with, to connect to my main purposes in this project, the encounter of the foreign ideas of the religious “other”) or personal crises. The human mind responds to these stimuli and crises either by modifying an existing cognitive structure or creating an entirely new cognitive structure that can incorporate new information or solve the cognitive dilemma presented by personal crises.

Connecting this more directly to interfaith work, scholars have speculated that, as individuals encounter religious others in the context of an interfaith setting, they actively reshape their own religious identity in response to that religious other (Bender & Cadge, 2006; Clooney, 2005; Moyaert, 2010; Reedijk, 2010). Eck’s words, for example, on her own personal experiences with these processes are apropos:

The give and take of dialogue among people of religious faith must inevitably raise questions for our own faith. These are the questions that should shape our theological thinking. When I read the Bhagavad Gita, I cannot isolate the understandings and questions that have emerged from that scripture in a separate file of my mind and go about my spiritual business as a Christian as if I had never read it. If I have been touched, challenged, or changed by the Bhagavad Gita, I must deal with that remarkable fact. If I find the Gita to be a comfort in moments of loss or grief or difficult ethical choices, which I do, I must make sense of that fact when I think about my Christian faith. (p. 20)

These cognitive processes of accommodation and assimilation in the religious identities of interfaith participants, then, may represent fruitful ground for further investigation in seeking to better understand how religion operates in and responds to interfaith work.

Religion as Ethics

Religion may also function as an ethical framework out of which interfaith participants feel compelled to act or build relationship. Some interfaith groups and organizations—such as Interfaith Power & Light, a national interreligious network focused on alleviating global warming—are driven by an emerging global awareness and a universal ethical mandate that cuts across religious groups and demands the mutual cooperation of these groups (Knitter, 1995; Küng, 1998; Küng & Kuschel, 2004; Lai, 2011). This approach to global interfaith action is an outgrowth of interfaith forums, such as the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 and the Parliament of World Religions in 1993, that stress both a commonality across the world’s religious traditions and a shared interest in working to address the world’s various problems and social issues (McCarthy, 2007; Pedersen, 2004). Indeed, Hans Küng’s (1998, 2004) “global religious ethic,” drafted in concert with the 1993 Parliament of World Religions, is arguably the most widely recognized articulation of this ethically driven approach to interfaith work.

Küng, first, has argued that in modern times, and with the emergence of the phenomenon of globalization in particular, we are increasingly faced with the threat of the “clash of civilizations,” played out through social, political, military, and economic conflicts at both local and global scales. He then noted the unique position of religion within these global and local crises, as a source of conflict (given the presence of “dogmatism” and fundamental disagreements between religious groups) and as a source of peace. Specifically, religion serves for many as a sort of moral framework, and may further serve as a source of moral agreement out of which common ethical actions are determined. In light of this global crisis, and the unique positioning of the world’s religions in helping to address this crisis, Küng outlines four broad ethical statements with which most of the world’s religions can agree and, for my purposes here,

which may serve in some cases as the ethical foundation for the work of interfaith organizations. Specifically, Kung has identified the following ethical directives for interfaith work, ostensibly based out of the common teachings of the world's religions:

- (1) Commitment to a culture of non–violence and respect for life (e.g., you should not kill, nor use violence as a means to resolving conflict)
- (2) Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order (e.g., you should not steal, concern for the poor and for the economic common good)
- (3) Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness (e.g., you should not lie or deceive, cultivate truthfulness)
- (4) Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women (e.g., sexual equality, condemn sexual exploitation and discrimination)

Küng's "global ethic" has subsequently served to provide an ethical structure through which interfaith groups and organizations understand and carry out their work in the local community.

Beyond functioning as a mandate for global community action, religion as ethics may also serve as a foundation for dialogue between religious traditions. Tracy (1990), for example, has provided a model of three different dimensions of interfaith dialogue, looking at the emotive, cognitive, and ethical–political dimensions of religiosity. First, he suggested, religion must make sense to the individual on an emotional level. Like art, religion must speak to the "heart" of the person and move them. Second, religion must seem rational, or must cohere in the mind of the individual as a logical set of propositions or beliefs. Finally, there is the "ethical–political" dimension of religion, or the practical social and ethical implications of one's religious belief. The first two dimensions of religion, Knitter (1995, 1998) has argued, are most challenging as sites of interfaith dialogue in the group or organizational setting, while the third, the ethical–political, is the most promising site for interfaith dialogue. Members of different religions can generally agree on common areas of ethical and social concern (e.g., poverty, war) and can build

on these areas of commonality as a site for meaningful dialogue that could potentially lead to further dialogue in Tracy's first two dimensions of religion.

Ingeborg Gabriel (2010) has arrived at a similar conclusion through her typology of interfaith dialogue. Among three distinct forms of dialogue—(1) Dialogue of Life, or the everyday, practical dialogue surrounding “doing life” together; (2) Dialogue on Religious Experience and Theology; and (3) Dialogue on Ethics and Law—it is the third form of dialogue, that on ethics and the good and just, that offers the most potential for fruitful interfaith dialogue. Like Knitter, Gabriel views ethics as “practical” in nature and therefore generally common across different religious groups. On this point she argued:

Religions differ much less in the ethical and legal praxis they prescribe than in their belief-systems. Their overlapping consensus in ethics is thus much greater than the one in their theological insights pertaining to the nature of God or the divine. (p. 19)

Though it is unclear from Gabriel's analysis whether her “Dialogue of Life” offers similar access to common ground between religious traditions (and if not, *why*), her and Knitter's (1995, 1998) emphasis on commonality in ethical matters is noteworthy for considering how we might better understand interfaith work as an acting out of ethical mandates expressed within diverse religious traditions.

In sum, then, moving forward from the above analyses may require a return to considerations of what role religion still does play within interfaith settings, though with attention to specific functions of religious belief, attitudes, and behaviors, and with continued resistance to historical tendencies within the interfaith movement to privilege religion above other factors. The religious identity of the researcher, for example, may still be an important factor in the understanding and analyses of interfaith phenomena, but how and to what extent the personal religion of the researcher influences research practice warrants more discussion than I

am able to provide here. Likewise, the particularities around when, how, and to what extent religious identity, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors shape and are shaped by interfaith work warrants further investigation and discussion.

Recommendations – Adaptive Interfaith Work

If, as the above papers have demonstrated, interfaith work is much more than the religiosity of participants, and if that work intersects with (and is partly constituted by) multiple other nonreligious identities and environmental factors, interfaith scholars and practitioners may indeed benefit from approaches to interfaith work that are dynamic and adaptive to different and shifting individual needs and contexts. Though the interfaith movement historically has proscribed certain forms or modes of interfaith engagement over others (e.g., community service v. dialogue, multifait v. interfaith), in practice we may find that different forms of interfaith work are effective with some participants and in some settings, and ineffective with other participants and in other settings. To illustrate, Ariarajah (2006) has suggested that the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue often is contextually determined, and specifically that dialogue should be considered a preventive measure rather than as an intervention in moments of real religious conflict or crisis. He wrote:

Attempting to promote dialogue or intercommunal, interfaith harmony during or soon after a conflict, though it has its own limited value, is a frustrating exercise. Communities by now are deeply polarized, confused and uncertain about who can be trusted ... Efforts to bring about peace and reconciliation do have their legitimate place in such situations, but they call for different methods and skills. Dialogue is not so much about attempting to resolve immediate conflicts, but about building a “community of conversation,” a “community of heart and mind” across racial, ethnic and religious barriers where people learn to see differences among them not as threatening but as “natural” and “normal.” (pp. 13–14)

Ariarajah here demands of interfaith scholars and practitioners that their efforts be fundamentally adaptive, or that they allow the particular form and work of a given interfaith organization be at

least in part determined by the circumstances within which that organization is operating. He further noted:

A generalized treatment of the subject of social conflicts does not do justice to many actual situations. The specific response appropriate to any given situation cannot be predetermined or prescribed. Each community must make its own response in its given situation, bearing in mind that it is as important to build up and rally the forces of good as it is to resist evil. (pp. 23–24)

In times of peace, interfaith dialogue as prevention may very well be an appropriate and fruitful endeavor. At other times, however, dialogue will ultimately be insufficient. In either case, interfaith work should be viewed as a deliberate, long-term, and contextually grounded process.

I would add, too, given the above analyses on gender as a meaningful analytic category in interfaith research, that organizations be responsive not just to the demands of their particular contexts, but also to the particular identities and needs (including nonreligious identities and needs) of the individuals participating in that work. Methods of interfaith work that prove effective for one particular constellation of individuals may not prove quite as effective for a different constellation of individuals. As previously discussed (Ariarajah, 2006; King, 1998, 2007), and as highlighted in the above analyses, some women may respond differently to interfaith work than some of their male counterparts. Further, the relative exclusion of women from religious and interfaith authority and leadership may impoverish the interfaith movement by depriving it of meaningful contributions stemming from feminist traditions. Tetlow (2005) has described the potential contributions of feminism to interfaith dialogue in this way:

Feminism brings a critical approach to theological categories such as exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. They take no account of gender or other variables and, if presented as being comprehensive, they appear to be androcentric. In so far as interreligious dialogue has been predominantly a Christian initiative, both locally in Britain and globally, it is not surprising that the hierarchical and patriarchal nature of Christianity has had its influence on both the process and the categories. Feminist theology has its roots in liberation theology and here the emphasis on personal transformation brings a relevant dimension to dialogue – how many have testified to

being transformed spiritually by their encounter with a person of another faith?
Transformation lies at the heart of the dialogue experience.

Again, such a need for recognizing diverse identities and needs within interfaith spaces, and a willingness to critique traditional modes of interfaith dialogue and engagement, calls for approaches to interfaith work that are flexible and adaptive in nature and may force the interfaith movement to question current prevailing assumptions and values.

Against Prescriptive Interfaith Work

These observations lead me to suggest that the field of interfaith work and scholarship generally move away from silver-bullet and prescriptive approaches to developing interfaith programs and initiatives – or at least reconsider how these approaches are packaged and presented and whether they allow for adaptation to shifting needs and contexts. Interfaith practitioners and scholars have already begun the task of critiquing prescriptive approaches to interfaith work. Swidler’s *Dialogue Decalogue*, arguably the most widely adopted model for structuring interfaith dialogue, has undergone significant revisions in recent years in an attempt to arrive at a method for dialogue that appreciates shifting cultural and technological contexts and individual needs. For example, Sheetz–Willard et al. (2012), Swidler’s colleagues at the Dialogue Institute at Temple University, have offered several compelling critiques of the *Decalogue* and of the dialogical process more generally, including:

- (1) the Western nature of the term “religion” and of the very process of liberal dialogue, potentially as problematic for non–Western groups and traditions;
- (2) the proselytization inherent in the interfaith dialogic endeavor, namely that conservative, exclusivist groups necessarily “convert” to liberal, pluralistic religious values in order to participate;
- (3) the problematic notion that one individual in an interfaith setting could adequately represent an entire religio–cultural system or group, and all the diversity and complexity therein; and

(4) the potential for elitism in interfaith work, or the overrepresentation of scholars, liberals, leaders, and the wealthy, and the underrepresentation of non-academics, conservatives, laypersons, and the poor.

Moreover, Sheetz–Willard et al. (2012) have sought to “update” Swidler’s *Decalogue*, including changing the word “commandment” to “principle” to prevent it from identifying too exclusively with the Judeo–Christian tradition, and creating condensed “sound bite” versions of each of the ten principles for easier consumption and use in electronic social media. Relatedly, others such as Illman (2011) have sought to move interfaith dialogue more into a 21st century context beyond the face–to–face encounter and consider the new dialogical possibilities offered by such mediums as the internet and social media. These new technologies as sites for dialogue, it is suggested, have the potential to eliminate interpersonal power differentials that may exist in face–to–face encounters, as well as open up dialogical opportunities on a more global scale.

It is also worth considering, given what I argue is a need for adaptability within the interfaith movement, whether and how calls for “universality” and “global ethics” among interfaith leaders can be effectively implemented. With values of commonality and universality historically driving much of the interfaith movement, in other words, is there room still for the capability to adapt to local and unique individual and contextual needs? A supporter of “universality” in much of his work, interfaith scholar Knitter (1995) has advocated for global ecological justice, noting in particular the cross–cultural (or cross–religious, as it were) nature of environmental concerns:

Precisely because human and ecological suffering is both *universal* and *immediate* it can serve all religious persons as a common context and criterion for assessing religious truth claims. In its universality, human and ecological suffering confronts and affects us all; in its immediacy it has a raw reality and challenge that is somehow beyond our differing interpretations of it ... The stark image of a child starving because of poverty or of a lake polluted because of chemical dumping has an immediacy that breaks through our differing interpretations of it. It stares us in the face and questions us before we can fully understand or interpret it. It is this questioning face of the suffering that enables religions

to face and question each other and come to joint assessments of truth. (p. 127)

In similar fashion, Küng (1998, 2004) has noted the emergence of global awareness, and the concomitant heightened potential for cross-cultural conflict, as justification for establishing a global ethical consensus among the world's religions out of which religious groups may engage in concerted ethical social and political actions.

These global perspectives on interfaith engagement are not without their critics, however, especially as concerns over local adaptability have arisen. Küng has been challenged on his global interfaith ethic, for example, with some critics voicing concern that a focus on the universal ignores local or particular manifestations or understandings of religiosity and represents distinctly Western conceptions of religion (Bouma, 2011; Hedges, 2008; Pedersen, 2004). In ignoring local diversity and striving for collective, universally accepted values, Pedersen (2004) has argued, global interfaith efforts ultimately become too generic and unhelpful:

Officially representative gatherings on the international level tend to issue vacuous, nonspecific, and nonbinding statements declaring in general terms that peace is good, poverty is bad, we must save the environment, children are the future, we need to work together, and the like. (p. 89)

Beyond such practical concerns, Beyer (1997) has noted that religious globalism threatens culturally situated religious particularisms, potentially exposing and threatening religious identities and absolutisms as mere local, cultural constructions within a larger global religious environment. Moreover, he has noted, such globalism may represent a distinctly *Western* phenomenon, amounting to a Western imperialist challenge to particular local religious cultures. Bouma's (2011) argument against this universalism agrees with Beyer, as he noted, "[S]eemingly objective criteria are only found within a given framework to which some, but not all persons or groups are already committed" (p. 107). As Fish (1999) has noted, in other words,

liberal projects of “pluralism” or “consensus,” though claiming universality and impartiality (and though ethically laudable, even), themselves are acting on certain values (i.e. liberalism) that are not universally accepted and must therefore rely on processes of exclusion and coercion.

Moyaert (2010) has drawn upon philosopher Paul Ricoeur and his notion of *little ethics* to carve out a middle path between K ung’s universalism and the particularism of his critics. While Ricoeur has stated his unease with K ung’s global position, namely that it ignores local diversity, he still finds utility in striving toward the idea of a universal, global ethic. Moyaert summarized Ricoeur’s position:

The tension between the universal and the particular can never be solved, and conflicts will always persist. Instead of striving for moral consensus, Ricoeur argues for an ethic of fragile compromises. He claims that the notion of ‘universality in context,’ ‘potential universality,’ or ‘inchoate universal’ best accounts for such an ethic of compromise. (p. 450)

Specifically, Ricoeur’s notion of *practical wisdom* is offered as a constructive way forward, in which “the formal rule [or universal ethic] needs to be translated into concrete situations” (Moyaert, 2010, p. 457) informed by particular cultural and religious contexts. Brodeur (2005) and Gilman (2003) have similarly offered suggestions representing this “third position.” Gilman (2003), for example, has proposed the concept of “compassion” as grounds for both particular religiosity and universal interfaith norms of human experience. Specifically, he argued that experiences of compassion in particular settings open up the possibility of participating in universal norms of compassion. He wrote:

In order to share more fully and faithfully in the common, universally accessible feelings of compassion, such as fear, awe, mercy, just anger, love, and so on, a person must participate more fully and faithfully in the distinctive beliefs and practices of one’s local, tribal community. (p. 274)

In thus striving to carve out a middle path between local diversity and universality, we can arrive at specific practices and approaches to interfaith work that strive to find agreement on common

values and goals without glossing over important differences that emerge out of multiple individual needs and local contexts. To this end, I turn now to consider practices of self-reflection and formative evaluation that may aid interfaith organizations in becoming more appropriately adaptive.

Adaptation Through Reflexivity and Formative Evaluation

The ability of organizations to effectively adapt to internal needs and external contexts depends at least in part on organizational practices around reflexivity and ongoing evaluation. Considering first practices of reflexivity, Lichterman (2005) has provided an examination of congregational reflexivity that we may consider useful in interfaith organizational settings as well. For Lichterman, there are important distinctions between different forms of reflection in organizational settings: (1) personal reflection, wherein organization members exercise vulnerability by sharing personal stories with one another around race and culture, for instance, or what Lichterman describes as “confession and penitent soul-searching” (p. 260); and (2) social reflexivity, wherein the organization develops a greater awareness of their organizational contexts as they “reflect on, articulate their place in the wider social world” (p. 261). Both practices are essential for organizations in building meaningful relationships both internally and externally, and both speak to what I am suggesting here as the need for interfaith organizations to develop their awareness of and adaptability to both individual participant needs internally and their larger contexts externally.

Other scholars in the field of congregational studies have made similarly helpful observations on internal and external reflective processes within organizations. Dudley and Ammerman (2002), for example, have argued that adaptive congregations are those congregations that are willing and able to be self-critical and curious about their own internal

processes and capabilities, as well as to be more aware of what is happening in the world around them. This may include organizational efforts to gather information internally related to such factors as leadership and decision-making practices and internal resources and capabilities, as well as information externally related to community demographics, other community institutions, and important resources or opportunities for collaboration that may exist outside the organization. Of course, among interfaith organizations there is a range of different organizational goals and purposes that may color these internal and external reflective processes. Interfaith organizations focused on community outreach and service will benefit more from community-oriented information gathering, whereas more inward, dialogically focused organizations may find processes of personal reflection or internal information gathering more beneficial. In both instances, a greater awareness of and reflection on the largely nonreligious factors undergirding and surrounding interfaith work can only serve to enrich that work and enhance its effectiveness.

Closely related to these processes of reflection, the extant organizational and program literature (including congregational studies) has delineated between different forms of organization and program evaluation that may allow interfaith organizations to effectively adapt to internal needs and external demands and opportunities (Carroll, 1998; Dudley & Ammerman, 2002; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004; Wholey, Hatry, & Newcomer, 2010). In particular, I suggest *formative evaluation* (implementation assessment or process evaluation in some sources) as a type of evaluation that could benefit interfaith organizations in seeking to better understand internal processes and dynamics and the external factors that influence those processes and dynamics. Nightingale and Rossman (2010), for example, propose implementation assessments as effective means for understanding “the internal dynamics and structure of a program” as well

as “the organizational context in which the program operates” (p. 329). Internally, this may involve gathering information about authority structures, decision-making processes, and the experiences and perspectives of individuals in different areas and levels of the organization. Externally, information gathering may include a focus on demographic, economic, social and political trends.

In the field of congregational studies, Dudley (1998) has proposed “process assessment” as a method for evaluating the effectiveness of communications within and between groups in the congregation, as well as to better understand the diversity of individual personalities and needs within the congregation (through the use of personality assessment tools such as the Myers-Briggs test). Likewise, Carroll (1998) proposed formative evaluation as particularly useful for congregations seeking to evaluate the effectiveness of their programming. His CIPP model of formative evaluation includes a focus on: (1) context, to include awareness of relevant characteristics of organizational members (gender, race, etc.) and characteristics of the organizational setting that may support or hinder organizational functioning; and (2) process, to include an awareness of the physical setting within which programming is delivered, as well as interpersonal dynamics between participants and the influence of these dynamics on achieving organizational goals.

Through the use of formative evaluation, as with organizational practices of personal and social reflection, the interfaith organization may gain access to tools that will allow it to more deeply understand and effectively address the issues outlined in the above analyses. In more intentionally examining the diverse characteristics and needs represented by its membership, and the interpersonal dynamics existing between individual participants, the interfaith organization may successfully uncover power imbalances between racial-ethnic minority and majority

members, for example, that were previously masked by an “identity logic” (Fletcher, 2005) that sought to lump diverse persons under single religious categories. Such a realization of actual diversity within religious groups may open the organization to consider a restructuring and rebalancing of organizational authority, or to consider programming that speaks to a diversity of interests. In seeking a greater awareness of surrounding settings (e.g., family, work, and faith community settings, as with the above analyses), the interfaith organization may more fully understand hindrances members are facing in participating in the organization, as well as come to understand more fully the supports and opportunities for collaboration that may exist in their surrounding environs. In these ways, interfaith organizations will become more adaptive and, ultimately, better achieve their goals in meeting diverse needs within diverse contexts.

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APPENDIX A

Interfaith Organizations Survey

Confidential

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Interfaith Organizations Survey

This survey is part of a Vanderbilt University study on interfaith organizations.

The purpose of this study is to understand how interfaith organizations form and develop, and to understand the experiences of individuals within these organizations. Through this research, we hope to understand how interfaith organizations work with individuals from differing faith backgrounds. We would also like to help these organizations be more effective and improve how they work with their surrounding communities. You have received a link to this survey because you are a member of an interfaith organization.

This survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Possible risks that may result from participation in this study:

Religion is a very personal and sensitive matter to many individuals. As such, you may feel uncomfortable sharing private religious beliefs and commitments. Additionally, you may be concerned about how the information you provide will be shared with the public. For these reasons, participation in this study is entirely voluntary and anonymous, and you may refuse to answer any questions or withdraw at any time if you become uncomfortable with your participation.

Benefits that might result from this study:

It is our hope that this research may add to existing knowledge about interfaith organizations. We hope to identify practices and issues in interfaith organizations that may improve future interfaith organizational and community efforts.

Payment for participation:

There will be no payment for your participation in this study.

What happens if you withdraw from survey participation:

If you withdraw from the survey, we may delete any information you did provide from our database. In addition, any information you provided may not be included in any reports, publications, or presentations connected to this study.

Contact Information.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Mark M. McCormack at 615-429-2917, Hasina Mohyuddin at 615-594-1507, or Paul R. Docecki, at 615-322-8418.

For more information about your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact the Vanderbilt University IRB Office at (615) 322-2918 or toll free at (866) 224-8273.

- 1) Describe your current primary religious identity, if any:
- Protestant Christian
 - Catholic
 - Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, LDS)
 - Orthodox (Greek, Russian, or some other orthodox church)
 - Jewish (Judaism)
 - Muslim (Islam)
 - Buddhist
 - Hindu
 - Sikh
 - Pagan/Wiccan/Heathen/Reconstructionist (Greek, Roman, Celtic, or other)
 - Atheist (do not believe in God)
 - Agnostic (not sure if there is a God)
 - Nothing in particular
 - Christian
 - Unitarian Universalist
 - Other
 - Don't know
- 2) Please provide the name of your specific denomination/sect/group within your religious tradition (if no specific denomination/sect/group, simply type "none" in the text box).
- _____

- 3) As a child, were you raised in a religious tradition?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
- 4) In what religion were you raised?
- Protestant Christian
 - Catholic
 - Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, LDS)
 - Orthodox (Greek, Russian, or some other orthodox church)
 - Jewish (Judaism)
 - Muslim (Islam)
 - Buddhist
 - Hindu
 - Sikh
 - Pagan/Wiccan/Heathen/Reconstructionist (Greek, Roman, Celtic, or other)
 - Atheist (do not believe in God)
 - Agnostic (not sure if there is a God)
 - Christian
 - Unitarian Universalist
 - Other
- 5) Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?
- More than once a week
 - Once a week
 - Once or twice a month
 - A few times a year
 - Only on religious holidays
 - Seldom
 - Don't know
- 6) How important is religion in your life?
- Very important
 - Somewhat important
 - Only a little important
 - Not at all important
 - No opinion either way
- 7) In general, how much do you agree with the conservative Christian movement?
- Completely agree
 - Mostly agree
 - Mostly disagree
 - Completely disagree
 - No opinion either way
- 8) In general, how much do you agree with the liberal or progressive religious movement?
- Completely agree
 - Mostly agree
 - Mostly disagree
 - Completely disagree
 - No opinion either way
- 9) Which of the following groups would you welcome as a stronger presence in the United States in the next few years (check all that apply)?
- Muslims
 - Hindus
 - Buddhists
 - Jews
 - Christians
 - Mormons
 - Pagans
 - Atheists
 - None of the above
 - All of the above
 - Don't know

Outside your primary interfaith organization, how much personal contact have you had with:

	A great deal	A fair amount	Only a little	Almost none	None	Don't know
10) Muslims	<input type="checkbox"/>					
11) Hindus	<input type="checkbox"/>					
12) Buddhists	<input type="checkbox"/>					
13) Christians	<input type="checkbox"/>					
14) Jews	<input type="checkbox"/>					
15) Mormons	<input type="checkbox"/>					
16) Pagans/Wiccans	<input type="checkbox"/>					
17) Atheists	<input type="checkbox"/>					
18) Agnostics	<input type="checkbox"/>					
19) Sikhs	<input type="checkbox"/>					
20) Unitarian Universalists	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Have your contacts with the following groups been mostly pleasant, mixed, or mostly unpleasant:

	Mostly pleasant	Mixed	Mostly unpleasant	Don't know
21) Muslims	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22) Hindus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23) Buddhists	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24) Christians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25) Jews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26) Mormons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27) Pagans/Wiccans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28) Atheists	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29) Agnostics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30) Sikhs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31) Unitarian Universalists	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

32) Do you feel that greater understanding among the followers of different religions is ...

- Very desirable
- Somewhat desirable
- Somewhat undesirable
- Very undesirable
- No opinion either way

33) Do you feel that more cooperation among the leaders of the various religions in the United States is ...

- Very desirable
- Somewhat desirable
- Somewhat undesirable
- Very undesirable
- No opinion either way

34) I feel I have some familiarity with the basic teachings of the following religions (check all that apply):

- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism
- Buddhism
- Mormonism
- Paganism
- None of these

How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Completely agree	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree	No opinion either way
35) All religions contain some truth about God.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
36) All religions are equally good ways of knowing about God.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
37) All religions basically teach the same thing.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
38) People should learn more about religions other than their own.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
39) In general, my local community is open and accepting of people in MY religious tradition.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
40) In general, my local community is open and accepting of people of ALL religious traditions.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
41) In general, elected officials in my local community are open and accepting of people of ALL religious traditions.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
42) In general, public spaces in my local community (e.g. hospitals, stores, community agencies) are open and accepting of people of ALL religious traditions.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
43) In general, schools in my local community are open and accepting of people of ALL religious traditions.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
44) In general, my local community is religiously diverse.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
45) There is recent evidence in my local community of religious intolerance or conflict.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

In this section, we'll be asking you questions about your PRIMARY interfaith organization. If you are a member of multiple interfaith groups or organizations, for the following questions we ask that you think about the interfaith group or organization to which you devote the MAJORITY of your time.

- 46) What is the location of your interfaith organization (city, state)? _____
- 47) Prior to joining your interfaith organization, how long had you been involved in interfaith work of any type?
- 48) Prior to joining your interfaith organization, what types of interfaith work had you been involved in (check all that apply)?
- 49) Thinking of your primary interfaith organization, how long have you been involved with your interfaith organization?
- 50) How long has your interfaith organization been in existence?
- 51) What is your role in your interfaith organization (check all that apply)?
- 52) How frequently do you participate in meetings, activities, and events hosted/sponsored by your interfaith organization?
- Not at all
 Less than one year
 One to two years
 Three to five years
 Six to ten years
 More than ten years
 Don't know
- Ecumenical programs
 "Abrahamic faith" programs
 Interfaith dialogue
 Interfaith community service programs
 Interfaith political action or organizing
 Interfaith community education or outreach on religious diversity
 Other
 Don't know
- Less than one year
 One to two years
 Three to five years
 Six to ten years
 More than ten years
 Don't know
- Less than one year
 One to two years
 Three to five years
 Six to ten years
 More than ten years
 Don't know
- Founder
 President/Director/CEO
 Other paid staff
 Voluntary leader/facilitator
 Board/committee member
 Regular member
 Non-member, occasionally attend
 Other
 Don't know
- More than once a week
 Once a week
 Once or twice a month
 Several times a year
 Seldom
 Never
 Don't know

- 53) Why did you first decide to join your interfaith organization (check all that apply)?
- Religious conflict in my community
 - National/international events involving religion
 - Intellectual curiosity
 - Desire for spiritual exploration/growth
 - Invited by someone
 - Personal history with other religions or diversity
 - Opportunities for community service
 - Opportunities for political action
 - Opportunities for social connection/friendship
 - Encouraged by my personal religious community
 - Work-related responsibilities (e.g. clergy)
 - Educating others about my religious tradition
 - Opportunities for evangelization
 - Other
 - Don't know
- 54) In what types of activities and events is your interfaith organization involved (check all that apply)?
- Group dialogue on religious or theological topics
 - Group dialogue on political topics
 - Group dialogue on social issues (poverty, health care, etc.)
 - Group dialogue on moral issues (homosexuality, abortion, etc.)
 - Community service
 - Political action or organizing
 - Community education or outreach on religious diversity
 - Speaker/panel forums
 - Social events (meals, sports, etc.)
 - Other
 - Don't know
- 55) Of the activities and events you selected, which would you say is the primary focus of your interfaith organization (select only one)?
- Group dialogue on religious or theological topics
 - Group dialogue on political topics
 - Group dialogue on social issues (poverty, health care, etc.)
 - Group dialogue on moral issues (homosexuality, abortion, etc.)
 - Community service
 - Political action or organizing
 - Community education or outreach on religious diversity
 - Speaker/panel forums
 - Social events (meals, sports, etc.)
 - Other
 - Don't know
- 56) Of the activities and events you selected, which would you say is most meaningful to you personally (select only one)?
- Group dialogue on religious or theological topics
 - Group dialogue on political topics
 - Group dialogue on social issues (poverty, health care, etc.)
 - Group dialogue on moral issues (homosexuality, abortion, etc.)
 - Community service
 - Political action or organizing
 - Community education or outreach on religious diversity
 - Speaker/panel forums
 - Social events (meals, sports, etc.)
 - Other
 - Don't know
- 57) How successful would you say your organization has been at implementing group dialogue on religious or theological topics?
- Very successful
 - Somewhat successful
 - Somewhat unsuccessful
 - Very unsuccessful
 - No opinion either way

- 58) How successful would you say your organization has been at implementing group dialogue on political topics?
- Very successful
 Somewhat successful
 Somewhat unsuccessful
 Very unsuccessful
 No opinion either way
- 59) How successful would you say your organization has been at implementing group dialogue on social issues (poverty, health care, etc.)?
- Very successful
 Somewhat successful
 Somewhat unsuccessful
 Very unsuccessful
 No opinion either way
- 60) How successful would you say your organization has been at implementing group dialogue on moral issues (homosexuality, abortion, etc.)?
- Very successful
 Somewhat successful
 Somewhat unsuccessful
 Very unsuccessful
 No opinion either way
- 61) How successful would you say your organization has been at implementing community service?
- Very successful
 Somewhat successful
 Somewhat unsuccessful
 Very unsuccessful
 No opinion either way
- 62) How successful would you say your organization has been at implementing political action or organizing?
- Very successful
 Somewhat successful
 Somewhat unsuccessful
 Very unsuccessful
 No opinion either way
- 63) How successful would you say your organization has been at implementing community education or outreach on religious diversity?
- Very successful
 Somewhat successful
 Somewhat unsuccessful
 Very unsuccessful
 No opinion either way
- 64) How successful would you say your organization has been at implementing speaker/panel forums?
- Very successful
 Somewhat successful
 Somewhat unsuccessful
 Very unsuccessful
 No opinion either way
- 65) How successful would you say your organization has been at implementing social events (meals, sports, etc.)?
- Very successful
 Somewhat successful
 Somewhat unsuccessful
 Very unsuccessful
 No opinion either way
- 66) What are the most common challenges your interfaith organization has encountered in implementing the above activities and events (check all that apply)?
- Recruiting new members
 Recruiting younger members
 Recruiting minority religious groups
 Recruiting religious groups less open to interfaith
 Funding/finances
 Busy schedules, scheduling meetings/events
 Choosing themes or topics for meetings/events
 Attracting attendance for meetings/events
 Lack of community support
 Lack of leadership or staff
 Lack of volunteers
 Competition with other similar local organizations
 Conflict/disagreement between participating religious groups
 Don't know
- 67) What suggestions would you have for your interfaith organization in improving implementation of the above activities and events?

68) What additional activities and events would you like to see your interfaith organization implement in the future?

69) Which of the following organizational types best describes your interfaith organization?

-
- Independent/grassroots organization (non-incorporated entity)
 - Non-profit/NGO (incorporated entity)
 - Congregation/Denomination-based organization
 - School/college-based organization
 - Other
 - Don't know

How much do you agree with the following statements about your PRIMARY interfaith organization?

	Completely agree	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree	No opinion either way
70) I can get what I need in this interfaith organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
71) I feel like a member of this interfaith organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
72) I have a say about what goes on in this interfaith organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
73) I feel connected to this interfaith organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
74) This interfaith organization helps me fulfill my needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
75) I belong in this interfaith organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
76) People in this interfaith organization are good at influencing each another.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
77) I have a good bond with others in this interfaith organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
78) Which of the following religious groups are actively represented in your interfaith organization (meaning at least one representative of this religious group attends 50% or more of your organization's activities and events)? Check all that apply.	<input type="checkbox"/> Protestant Christian <input type="checkbox"/> Roman Catholic <input type="checkbox"/> Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, LDS) <input type="checkbox"/> Orthodox (Greek, Russian, or some other orthodox church) <input type="checkbox"/> Jewish (Judaism) <input type="checkbox"/> Muslim (Islam) <input type="checkbox"/> Buddhist <input type="checkbox"/> Hindu <input type="checkbox"/> Sikh <input type="checkbox"/> Pagan/Wiccan <input type="checkbox"/> Atheist (do not believe in God) <input type="checkbox"/> Agnostic (not sure if there is a God) <input type="checkbox"/> Unitarian Universalist <input type="checkbox"/> Other				
79) Which of the following best describes the composition of your interfaith organization in terms of sex?	<input type="checkbox"/> All male <input type="checkbox"/> Majority male (more than 50%) <input type="checkbox"/> All female <input type="checkbox"/> Majority female (more than 50%) <input type="checkbox"/> Evenly mixed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know				
80) If you had to estimate, what would you say is the average age of the members in your interfaith organization (in years)?	_____				
81) I FREQUENTLY discuss the experiences I have in my interfaith organization with the following people (check all that apply):	<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse/partner <input type="checkbox"/> Child/children <input type="checkbox"/> Extended family <input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Co-workers <input type="checkbox"/> Members of my personal faith community <input type="checkbox"/> None of these				

- 82) The following people have developed a more positive opinion about another religious group as a result of these discussions (check all that apply):
- Spouse/partner
 - Child/children
 - Extended family
 - Friends
 - Co-workers
 - Members of my personal faith community
 - Don't know
- 83) I have invited the following people to meetings or events hosted/sponsored by my interfaith organization (check all that apply):
- Spouse/partner
 - Child/children
 - Extended family
 - Friends
 - Co-workers
 - Members of my personal faith community
 - None of these
- 84) The following people have attended an activity or event hosted/sponsored by my interfaith organization because I invited them (check all that apply):
- Spouse/partner
 - Child/children
 - Extended family
 - Friends
 - Co-workers
 - Members of my personal faith community
 - Don't know/Refused
- 85) What is your age (in years)?
- _____
- 86) What is your sex?
- Male
 - Female
 - Transgendered
 - Other
- 87) Are you currently married, living with a partner, divorced, separated, widowed, or never been married?
- Married
 - Living with a partner
 - Divorced
 - Separated
 - Widowed
 - Never been married
- 88) Last year, that is in 2012, what was your total household income from all sources before taxes?
- _____
- 89) Which of the following best describes your race or ethnicity (choose all that apply)?
- White/Caucasian
 - Black/African American
 - Hispanic/Latino
 - Asian/Asian American
 - Arab/Arab American
 - American Indian/Native American
 - Pacific Islander
 - Some other race
 - Don't know
- 90) Thinking of your employment status, are you currently:
- Employed for wages
 - Self-employed
 - Out of work and looking for work
 - Out of work but not currently looking for work
 - A homemaker
 - A student
 - Retired
 - Unable to work
 - Other
 - Don't know

- 91) Please describe your work:
- Employee of a for-profit company or business or of an individual, for wages, salary, or commissions
 - Employee of a not-for-profit, tax-exempt, or charitable organization
 - Local government employee (city, county, etc.)
 - State government employee
 - Federal government employee
 - Self-employed in own not-incorporated business, professional practice, or farm
 - Self-employed in own incorporated business, professional practice, or farm
 - Working without pay in family business or farm
 - Other
 - Don't know
- 92) Have you ever been a member of the clergy within your religious community, including now (for example: pastor, imam, priest, cantor, deacon)?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
- 93) How much of your interfaith work is associated with your responsibilities as clergy?
- All of my interfaith work
 - Some of my interfaith work
 - Only a little of my interfaith work
 - None of my interfaith work
 - Don't know
- 94) What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- 8th grade or less
 - High school incomplete (Grades 9-11)
 - High school graduate (Grade 12 or GED certificate)
 - Technical, trade, or vocational school after high school
 - Some college, associate degree, no 4-year degree
 - College graduate (B.S., B.A., or other 4-year degree)
 - Post-graduate or professional schooling after college (toward a master's degree, PhD; law or medical school)
- 95) Were you born in the United States?
- Yes, born in the U.S.
 - No, born in another country
 - Other U.S. territories (includes Guam, Samoa, U.S. Virgin Islands)
 - Don't know
- 96) In what country were you born? _____
- 97) How old were you when you first moved to the United States? _____
- 98) Were one or both of your parents born in another country?
- Mother
 - Father
 - Both
 - Neither
 - Don't know
- 99) In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?
- Republican
 - Democrat
 - Independent
 - No preference
 - Other party
 - Don't know
- 100) In general, describe your political views:
- Very conservative
 - Conservative
 - Moderate
 - Liberal
 - Very liberal
 - Don't know

101) Describe your sexual preference:

- Straight
- Gay or lesbian
- Bisexual
- Other
- Don't know

102) We appreciate your time in completing this survey. The information you provided will be invaluable for better understanding interfaith organizations and the work they are doing in their communities. For future research on interfaith organizations, are there questions or topics you think would be important to explore that were not included in the above survey?

APPENDIX B

General Interview Protocol

- Please give a brief history of your personal spiritual journey.
Suggested Probes
 - Were you raised in a particular religious tradition? If so, what were your experiences within that tradition?
 - Describe any significant changes you have experienced in your spiritual journey.
 - What is your current spiritual understanding and religious identity?

- Describe your current spiritual/religious involvement.
Suggested Probes
 - Are you currently a member of a religious organization or congregation?
 - What is your level of involvement with that organization?
 - Besides this interfaith group and your local organization/congregation, are you currently involved in any other religious organizations or groups?

- Describe your involvement with your interfaith group.
Suggested Probes
 - Why did you first join this group?
 - How involved are you currently in group meetings and activities?
 - Describe your experiences with this group so far.
 - Is your own personal social network aware of and supportive of your involvement in this group?

- Describe your interfaith group's relationship with the larger community.
Suggested Probes
 - In what ways is your group involved in the larger community?
 - Would you describe your group's relationship with the larger community as mostly positive or mostly negative, and why?
 - In what ways have recent or past events in the larger community directly shaped your group's identity, purpose and activities?
 - In what ways have recent or past national or international events directly shaped your group's identity, purpose and activities?

- Describe your interfaith group's relationship with other local organizations.
Suggested Probes
 - Has your group developed any relationships with other local, *non-faith-based* organizations or entities?
 - Has your group developed any relationships with other local *faith-based* organizations or entities?

- Do you feel that any local organizations, non-faith-based or faith-based, oppose, or don't support, your group's work?