Dissonant Child:
Grassroots Interfaith in a Multicultural Canada

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

While Canada's increasing ethnic and racial diversity have received a great deal of attention in recent years, the pluralization of its religious makeup has been largely ignored. As a result, political and societal responses to religious diversity have been mixed. This study highlights one response to religious difference at the community level. Using qualitative research methods I highlight the ways in which Interfaith Grand River, a group of religiously diverse individuals in Kitchener-Waterloo Ontario, "build bridges" between local religious groups and the larger K-W community. I use the theories of Charles Taylor and Jurgen Habermas, among others, to locate IGR's dialogue-centred approach within larger discussions about the importance of recognizing religion and religious difference in the public sphere. I argue that interfaith practices are a "dissonant child" of multicultural policies, sharing an emphasis on inclusion while critiquing multiculturalism' blindness to religious issues. From this, I argue that faith-based diversity needs to be addressed not only in national policies, but also in communities through individual relationship building and dialogue.

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Dedication

While I can never fully thank them for the emotional, educational, financial, and every other kind of support they have provided, I can dedicate this thesis to my parents, Caroline and Bryan Lye. They always supported my decisions, school-related or otherwise; they pushed me to follow my educational path as far as I wanted to go; and they encouraged my love of reading despite the always-growing clutter of books. Mom, you have always been a persistently positive voice which has helped to keep me on track. Dad, I wish you could be here to see me finish, but I know you'd be proud to see me done.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The issue of religion's impact on the public sphere has a special resonance within Western societies since the events of September 11th 2001. Overnight, the North American public went from a state of being largely unaware of and indifferent to religious differences, to acutely hyper-aware of individuals who fell into particular faith categories, particularly Muslims. This awareness was fed by a frenzied media response, one which made the religious "Other" into an object of suspicion and potential danger. In response to this, Muslims and their sites of worship were attacked, their movement was scrutinized and unofficially restricted, and they endured a steady stream of hostile rhetoric from politicians and news outlets alike. Other religious groups who were misidentified as Muslims, including Hindus and Sikhs, were also subject to persecution. While this discrimination has faded in intensity in recent years, members of religious minority groups in America and Canada still face scrutiny and suspicion throughout their daily lives.

My goal in highlighting this now-familiar cultural landscape in which we find ourselves is not to make a list of the unequal treatment non-Christian faith groups have encountered since 9/11; many academics (for example Thobani 2007) have written extensively on this. Rather, the purpose of this thesis is to look at a particular and localized response to the challenges of living in a religiously diverse Canada post 9/11. The group I have studied, located in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, is called Interfaith Grand River (IGR), and it was founded immediately following the 9/11 attacks, in part to use the two avenues of community engagement and interfaith dialogue to address a series of attacks against religious minorities in the local community. Over the past decade, IGR has worked to promote conversation not only among its diverse memberships, but also between religious minority groups and the largely Christian majority (see interfaithgrandriver.org). To paraphrase Diana Eck (2002), one of IGR's primary

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goals is to "build bridges" between faith groups in order to create a more inclusive community. Laurie Pedersen defines interfaith as relations between different religious communities for the purpose of 1) engaging in constructive dialogue, 2) working towards a common goal, and 3) raising awareness about the plurality of religious expressions found in a society (Pedersen 2004: 77); IGR's emphasis on dialogue and public education about religious differences places them neatly within this definition. The group's clear focus on the K-W community was seen as one of its greatest strengths, as it allowed members (who were all lived in this area) to expertly address regionalized issues and develop long-term relationships with each other and with important members of the community.

While IGR is explicitly a localized organization, I argue it provides a valuable way of understanding of larger societal issues in Canada.. They represent a general model in which to approach diversity within communities, one that I believe has received little attention in both the academic and political arenas. Canada is both a highly diverse and theoretically open to addressing this diversity through national-level policies and practices. In 1971 "Bi and Bi" Commission made the argument that immigrants' cultural identities should be protected and promoted in order to make a society that "is based on fair play for all" (Biles and Ibrahim 2005: 163). This was followed by Prime Minister Trudeau enshrining multiculturalism in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 and then the Multicultural Act of 1988, which made explicit Canada's commitment to multicultural ideals and practices, a commitment which has provided a framework both for policies and for court decisions (Biles and Ibrahim 2005: 163). However, the support for religious diversity has in many cases been muted or largely nonexistent. As David Seljak argues, this stems from a blindness to religious issues on the part of both the Canadian white Christian majority, which has become more secular since the 1960's compared to

more recent immigrants, and by policy makers who are largely from this more secular demographic (Seljak 2009).

This thesis, which is heavily influenced by Seljak's work, which makes the argument that the Canadian government should formally recognize and support interfaith groups at the national level in order to draw on their expertise for policy creation and public education about religious diversity (Seljak 2009). While I agree with and support this idea of national-level interfaith groups, I argue that community-level interfaith work is just as important as national approaches to religious diversity. The title of this thesis, "dissonant child", addresses this idea of top-down versus group-up approaches; interfaith ideals and practices, as one respondent said, could not exist in a country that did not value and address cultural differences. At the same time, interfaith critiques multiculturalism's previously mentioned blindness to religious issues, and can potentially address these issues more effectively through emphasizing personal connections rather than impersonal policies. Thus, the central question which drove my research was: what is the meaningful significance of interfaith dialogue for creating intersubjective bridges among cultural communities in Canada? My answer? Small-scale interfaith groups like IGR represent a way to address religious differences face-to-face, something which larger-scale efforts like those proposed by Seljak cannot achieve.

In the spirit of embracing individual interaction as a virtue, my research was conducted in person using individual qualitative interviews combined with observation of, and participation in IGR's monthly meetings. Methodologically speaking I drew on a participant observation approach, emphasizing the need to adapt my framework of understanding based on what I observed and was told by my respondents. In terms of both method and theory I was heavily influenced by the concept of public sociology as explained in Michael Burawoy's ASA address,

in that my work is grounded in a dialogue with a particular public, "people who are themselves involved in conversation," resulting in "a double conversation" that attempts to blend established theory with the lived experiences of said public (Burawoy 2004: 7). As I explain further in my Methodology chapter, the goal of my research has been to be objective but not value-free. I personally support the work that IGR is doing, and I believe that religious difference needs to become more of a public issue in order to create a stronger, more inclusive society. With that being said I have taken pains to avoid, in Burawoy's words, the temptation in public sociology to "pander to and flatter [my] public," and I hope that my work presents IGR as a positive but not perfect organization.

Theoretically speaking, I draw upon a number of authors whose works allow me to frame two key issues which emerged from my research – the nature and value of dialogue, and the recognition of diverse religious identities. Jurgen Habermas and Charles Taylor in particular gave me the tools with which to understand and contexualize the work done by IGR within the framework of Canada's current religious landscape. Other authors offered substantive background on the larger interfaith movement (see for example Biles and Ibrahim 2005; Lamoureux-Scholes 2007; Pedersen 2004) of the ways in which policy makers and politicians engage or fail to engage with a religious diverse Canada. In short, the sociological literature I have chosen to draw upon has helped me both to frame IGR's dialogue-based approach to diversity, and to understand how the group's experiences can be translated into further action outside of the K-W community.

My thesis begins with a chapter that reviews the literature to which I referred briefly above, in order to frame the interrelated issues of Canadian multiculturalism and its critiques alongside a brief overview of religious diversity in Canada and a consideration of interfaith

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theories and practices. Methodology, my second chapter, outlines how I planned and carried out

my research strategy. In particular, I describe my reasons for selecting a qualitative approach,

give a brief overview of IGR's structure, describe my data collection process, and touch on ethics

considerations. In my data chapter, I break down the interviews and observations I collected on

IGR's members into discrete subsections based on specific themes and subthemes which emerged

from my raw research notes and transcripts. This allows me, in my discussion chapter, to link

these themes to relevant theories and observations from my literature chapter in order to explain

said themes and place them in a larger theoretical context. I also comment in this chapter on

some of the potential implications of IGR's work on national-level policy approaches. My

concluding chapter ends with some thoughts about the value of understanding religious diversity

in terms of both my central research question and larger questions about what it means to create a

"more just" society. With this overview in mind, I now turn to my literature chapter in order to

provide a framework for understanding the nature of Canadian diversity's relationship with

religion.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

To situate my experiences and data gathered during my time with Interfaith Grand River in relevant academic literature, I use a number of sources from different disciplines including philosophy, public policy, sociology, and religious studies. Drawing on these texts I emphasize the connections between Canadian multiculturalism and the role interfaith work has played in helping communities negotiate religious diversity.

To this end, my literature review focuses on three key areas. First I provide an overview of some of the ways in which multiculturalism has been conceptualized, as well as carried out through policy initiatives in Canada. Multiculturalism is a difficult term to define concisely; I explain it in this chapter using the work of scholars such as Will Kymlicka (2007) and Charles Taylor (1994). I also discuss alternative diversity management strategies; Quebec's interculturalism (Bouchard and Taylor 2006) provides a useful contrast to existing Canadian multicultural policies. In this vein, I examine some of the criticisms of multiculturalism put forth by both anti-racist scholars and, most importantly for my purposes, researchers who claim that Canadian multicultural practices fail to recognize religious identity and diversity.

Second, I provide an overview of religious diversity in Canada, including historical and political factors which have contributed to the current religious environment in the country. David Seljak's (2008) work is influential in this section. He argues that policy makers are largely ignorant of religious issues due to biases related to their ethnoreligious backgrounds. I also draw on a number of scholars, in particular Jurgen Habermas (in Finlayson 2005, with Ratzinger 2007) to frame the larger philosophical issue of what religion's role in a democratic civil society could (and should) be.

In the final section, I examine interfaith work as an alternative model for addressing religious diversity using a structured, yet grassroots approach. I start with an overview of the

relatively scarce literature on the movement, drawing in particular on the work of Diana Eck (2002). I then give an overview of interfaith work as it is currently implemented, particularly within the Canadian context, and end by commenting on IGR's interfaith literature, including a published work by one of my respondents.

Multiculturalism

Background

Before getting into more detail on the current status of multiculturalism in Canada, I want to highlight the connection between multiculturalism and interfaith as concepts. At their root, both concepts addressing diversity within a community or society, and both take the position that cultural difference is both a practical reality and potentially a source of strength for said community/society. The differences and relationship between interfaith and multiculturalism is a recurring theme in this thesis, but this shared approach to difference is something which should be kept in mind.

Throughout this section and this thesis in general, I use a three-part definition of multiculturalism (Biles and Ibrahim 2005: 163). In this understanding of the term. multiculturalism can be simultaneously a policy, an ideology, and a way to deconstruct existing understandings of diversity (Biles and Ibrahim 2005: 163). Paradoxically, this critique can include multicultural policies, which may be positioned as being within a plurality-affirming ideology, but which fall short of the ideal. These three categories can be thought of as operating cyclically among one another; a multicultural ideology may inspire policy and social changes, which will always fall short of the ideal the authors of said changes set out to achieve. These imperfect policies inspire critics to demand change to the existing policies and social circumstances of diversity in order to meet the ideals which inspired the changes, or which

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reflect new social perceptions of diversity. Accordingly, in this model the critics' engaged

dialogue creates a new conversation within the multicultural debate which may cause further

changes to diversity policies or interpretations thereof.

This model of multiculturalism, while complex, is useful in terms of comparing interfaith

work and Canada's multicultural framework. Interfaith work can only begin in a society,

particularly a multicultural one, where religious diversity is at least tolerated. At the same time,

interfaith in countries like Canada is also a critique of multiculturalism, for it criticall examines

ways in which existing policies and ideologies fail to substantively address religious differences.

To better understand interfaith work as the critical child of multiculturalism, I need to explain

some of the ways in which Canadian multicultural policies and practices have emerged and been

analyzed to date.

Multicultural Policies in Canada

Scholars such as Harry Hiller (2006) have located multiculturalism's birth in Canada in

the immigration reforms of the 1970s, a paradigm shift away from accepting primarily white,

Christian Europeans because they "fit best" with Canadian values of the time. Federally,

Canada's Multicultural Act was passed in 1988, but multiculturalism first appears as a significant

term in 1971, where Canada was declared to have "a policy of bilingualism within a

multicultural framework" (Hiller 2006: 214). This came from a government study, the

Biculturalism and Bilingualism Commission, which was tasked with understanding the nature of

Canadian society at that time (Hiller 2006: 214). With support from Prime Minister Trudeau,

the commission concluded that Canada was becoming a diverse nation, and thus the cultural

heritage of all citizens should be recognized. The 1988 Multicultural Act went one step further

by declaring that all Canadians had a right to preserve and celebrate their culture, to maintain

their differences rather than give them up in favour of assimilation into a mainstream Canadian culture (Hiller 2006: 214). Cultural pluralism, rather than a unified Canadian culture based on English values, was constructed as a new central value.

To understand this paradigm shift away from an assimilationist "melting-pot" approach to the new "mosaic" cultural model, it is necessary to examine at least briefly the history of immigration and immigration policy in Canada. Hiller argues a specific multicultural policy was a response to increasing numbers of, non-European immigrants coming to Canada and that the policy has continued to change in its interpretation as Canada's cultural and demographic reality has shifted (Hiller 2006: 217). Canada's original ethnic makeup was predominantly British, French, and Aboriginal, with only a small and minoritized collection of non-European settlers (Hiller 2006:217). The previously-mentioned non-European immigrant demographic shift both fed and was feeding a new discussion about who Canada should admit as citizens, and how newcomers' cultural backgrounds should be addressed. In theory, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's multicultural policy was supposed to create a new society with a unified set of values. Among the most important of these values was a commitment to and appreciation of cultural diversity. I turn below to a more detailed examination of the ideological backdrop of multiculturalism.

Multicultural Ideologies

Charles Taylor, in "The Politics of Recognition" (1994), addresses multiculturalism as a way for individuals to fulfill a fundamental need – to be recognized by other individuals as both important and distinct. If individuals are not recognized by others as such, they can suffer "real damage, real distortion" (Taylor 1994: 25). The idea of the "authentic self" he mentions is also relevant to discussions of multiculturalism; this "authenticity" comes for many individuals from

what they see as their "true" roots, their ethnocultural or religious heritage (Taylor 1994: 28). What this position leads to, on a larger scale, is the need to advocate for the equality of others if one is to recognize their differences as being as valid as one's own (Taylor 1994: 37). Taylor then states that a nation which endorses multiculturalism in any form must "recognize the equal value of other cultures, that we not only let them survive, but acknowledge their worth" (Taylor 1994: 64). What can be drawn from his position is the idea that multiculturalism as an ideological position within a given society must involve acceptance, not just tolerance, of cultural differences in order to facilitate the inclusion of minority group members into the larger societal culture.

Will Kymlicka (2007) expands on Taylor's arguments through his exploration of international multiculturalisms. Kymlicka argues for an understanding of the ideals of multiculturalism as a reaction to older forms of societal order when "unitary, homogeneous nation-states" were the norm (2007: 61). Each interpretation of multiculturalism addresses certain aspects of a past history within the nation in which it is enacted, and Canada is no different. To place Canada within this framework, Kymlicka points to a broad understanding of multiculturalism as comprised of three key points. First, it deliberately targets specific minority groups within a given society in order to deal with their particular difficulties in adapting to their new home, or to allow for cultural differences that make it difficult to simply pick up the host culture's ways (Kymlicka 2007: 77). Second, Kymlicka would argue with a simple reading of the previous Taylor example I gave, where multiculturalism is simply an issue of recognition. Instead, he states that multiculturalism in liberal democracies is also a pragmatic response to "issues of power and resources" between and among minority groups, the larger population, and the government which rules the society (2007: 80). Canada's most recent federal election is an

example of this; as I explain in a later chapter, the growing power and political recognition of the power of minority groups was tapped into by the Conservative Party in 2011, when they sought to cater to the social conservativism of some of those groups in order to draw minority/"immigrant" support away from their traditional home in the Liberal Party. The third element of multiculturalism Kymlicka addresses is the idea that it is a "nation-building strategy", typically designed in such a way as to include minority groups within the society in the power structure, at least in a superficial way, in order to achieve the broader goal of a diverse and cohesive society (2007: 83). While there are many critics of this third point, most would likely agree that this is at least a foundational idea in Canada's multicultural framework, even if it is not carried out in practice. I now expand on some of the ways in which various scholars have criticized multicultural policies from different perspectives and with different issues in mind.

Multicultural Critiques

One of the most evident criticisms that has emerged in the debate around multiculturalism is the charge that it does not, in fact, happily accommodate all minority cultures in Canada. In terms of ethnic and racial divisions within this country, oppression and discrimination based on ethnoracial identities exist despite the stated intentions of the Multicultural Act. Paul Bramadat, working with a definition of Canadian multiculturalism as both a policy and a tradition of pluralism, argues that many citizens of this country would claim that multiculturalism is as deeply ingrained in our culture as "hockey and universal health care" (Bramadat 2005: 10). However, members of minority groups still report experiencing oppression based in their membership in ways that the dominant ideology denies is possible (Bramadat 2005: 10). In other words, multiculturalism as a widespread tradition and ideology of

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plurality may actually work to cover up experiences of discrimination by framing Canadian society as broadly tolerant.

Other authors have argued that the reasons behind multiculturalism's formation in Canada were grounded in less than idealistic motivations. For example, Hiller describes one position taken by Quebecers in particular, according to which the Multicultural Act is a way of undermining Quebec uniqueness and sovereignty. By saying that all groups are unique and entitled to broad rights, the argument goes, Quebec's historical claims to independence and cultural uniqueness are essentially denied (2006: 217). This position also argues that despite the claims of equality made by government officials and supporters of the policy, multiculturalism still has a strongly Anglo-Western bias that quietly privileges the white, English majority while affording only token respect to cultural minority groups (Hiller 2006: 216). Hiller also that some Canadians feel multiculturalism goes too far in accommodating the demands of minority groups, resulting in an undermining of a central Canadian identity and thus making the country an "identity-less" society (Hiller 2006: 216).

To return to the previous argument that multiculturalism does not do enough to culturally defend minority groups, I turn to the writings of Sunera Thobani (2007), who takes a very oppositional, anti-racist stance towards multiculturalism on the basis that it upholds white privilege, and is a tool for repressing minority groups. One particular point she raises is the motivations for allowing minority groups, especially non-white, non-Western individuals, into Canada. Rather than seeing it done in the spirit of equality, Thobani states that this was done to attract skilled foreign labour to sectors in which Canada has a labour shortage that cannot be filled by whites (Thobani 2007: 146). She also takes the position that multiculturalism is an extension of Canadian state control over settled ethnic groups; such power is "a communalizing

power; that is, a power which constitutes communities as discrete racial, ethnic, and cultural groups existing within its territorial borders, yet outside the symbolic bounds of the nation" (Thobani 2007: 149). In short, Thobani argues that multicultural policies accentuate cultural differences between the white Christian majority and non-white newcomers in order to "mark" immigrants as outside of Canada's *real* cultural norms, which are European and hostile to outside values (Thobani 2007: 149).

Thobani thus sees multiculturalism as a form of "guilt relief" for members of the dominant Canadian culture, giving them a reason to deny the racist past of Canadian culture from such events as the Japanese internment camps of World War Two or the mistreatment of early Chinese Canadian migrants (Thobani 2007: 153). Multiculturalism allows members of the dominant Canadian culture (e.g. white, naturalized, English-speaking Canadians) to claim they are tolerant and equality-loving individuals, without having to make any real power concessions outside of becoming cultural tourists who see ethnic celebrations of culture as a form of entertainment (Thobani 2007: 160).

While Thobani argues that work points to major flaws within existing multicultural policies, in later sections I emphasize the ways in which multiculturalism can act as a critique of existing diversity strategies. Without going into further detail at this point, in my discussion chapter I argue that interfaith work is a critique of multiculturalism, while also acknowledging multicultural policies provide the cultural space necessary for interfaith to emerge.

I now turn to Will Kymlicka who, in his essay on "Disentangling the Debate" about Canadian multiculturalism, positions himself in relation to two specific arguments against multiculturalism. I mentioned previously that some believe the Multicultural Act, along with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, does too much to ensure that immigrants can retain

their own culture, resulting in scattered Canadian identity which fails to help newcomers acclimatize to and succeed in Canada (2007: 151). Kymlicka rebuts this critique by arguing that statistical evidence demonstrates that immigrants are actually integrating in a relatively smooth way to Canadian culture, due to many immigrants being "cherrypicked" for their skills and education through our points system of immigration, with only a minority being given citizenship for human rights or family-based reasons (2007: 150).

The second argument Kymlicka rebuts is that official multiculturalism has given too much power to the rights of religious minority groups. Religious minority groups in turn are seen as abusing the freedom they are given because they follow cultural practices from their own countries - forcing arranged marriages on their children, oppressing women or children - which go against Canadian ethical values (Kymlicka 2007: 140). Against this argument Kymlicka responds by reminding us first that the debate about the role of religion in democracies has been an ongoing process ever since the first liberal democracies emerged in the world (Kymlicka 2007: 141). Second, he states that court interpretation of multiculturalism fall under the broader laws which govern all citizens of Canada, regardless of their background or religious beliefs (Kymlicka 2007: 146). What this means is that multiculturalism is not a means of recourse for those who wish to practice cultural traditions which would violate Canadian law. In fact, it has been stated that freedom to practice one's religious beliefs is limited by the Canadian legal system, so acts which would violate those laws do not fall under the freedom of religion section of the Charter or the Multicultural Act (Kymlicka 2007: 147). He also suggests that critics of multiculturalism who take the position that extreme religious practices are safeguarded by the Charter often are not speaking in general terms, but are attacking specific religious groups for

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their own reasons – specifically, as an attack on practitioners of Islam following the events of September 11th (Kymlicka 2007: 149).

This provides an excellent segue to the role of religion in a multicultural Canada, an issue that David Seljak (2009) takes up in his essay on "Dialogue among the Religions in Canada." In this work, he makes several points about the role of religious discussion in the context of multicultural policy. Most relevant for this particular discussion is his critique of government officials and the interpretation of multicultural policy as a whole in terms of how they avoid discussing including religion in this framework (Seljak 2009). He notes the difficulty that some senior officials have had when they wish to bring religion into the discourse; it is only recently that Canadian Heritage has been willing to sponsor research on the interaction between faith communities and multiculturalism (Seljak 2009). Against this reluctance, Seljak argues that religion must be taken seriously as a cultural identity; as it stands, religion is a generally neglected subject, due to ignorance of religious issues and a fear of creating controversy on the part of the officials who both create and enforce the policy (Seljak 2009). Despite the guarantee of religious freedom and the right to celebrate one's faith background, the inclusion of religion in existing diversity strategies has thus far been muted. In order to expand upon this apparent indifference (or intentional avoidance) of religion in the public sphere it is necessary to briefly sketch the evolution of twentieth century understandings of faith and faith groups in Western societies, particularly within Canada.

Religious Diversity in Canada

Having presented some background on the current state of Canadian multiculturalism, I expand on the work of selected academics who have chosen to look at the role religion can or should play in this country's diversity model. In order to do so, I first turn to an overview of the

ways they have approached religion in the public sphere from a theoretical perspective. Doing

so will provide context for understanding Canada's current state of religious diversity: and from

this, I provide several examples of major issues affecting Canadian society stemming from

multicultural policy's imperfect engagement with religious life.

Theoretical Understandings of Religion in the Public Sphere

In this section, I look at three theorists whose works have, directly or indirectly,

influenced my understanding of religion's role in public life. I start by highlighting elements of

Peter Berger's Sacred Canopy (1990), particularly his ideas around religion's role as a meaning-

making institution in societies. Next I return to Charles Taylor (1971) for his explanation of the

connections between individual and group identities, and how this is useful in the context of

understanding religious membership. Finally, I use Jurgen Habermas' (2006) work on changing

perceptions of the secularization of Western societies, especially on how important the idea of

religious dialogue is within the public sphere. From these theorists I wish to not only show that

religion continues to play a central role in identity formation and societal-level culture, but also

to emphasize that the nature of religion's engagement with civil society is one which has been an

issue for a substantial period of time.

I begin with the work of Peter Berger (1990), who in The Sacred Canopy explains his

position on the socially constructed nature of reality, and how this affects religious life in

particular. Berger argues that as individuals we are irreparably bound to the societal culture we

occupy and it to us (Berger 1990: 3). Society is a "human product", in that we construct it, but

unlike our physical possessions it is not only affected by our actions, but also affects them

(Berger 1990: 3). To explain this "dialectical process" of creator and creation influencing one

another, Berger uses three "steps" which he calls "externalization," "objectivation," and "internalization" (Berger 1990: 4), which deserve further investigation.

Externalization is the process by which humanity creates both physical and cultural artifacts; something which Berger argues is inherently unique to our species and the defining factor of our existence (Berger 1990: 4). We create our cultural environments but are in a constant race to redefine ourselves and our culture, as social institutions rise and fall in constant instability (Berger 199: 5). Humanity thus must continually negotiate its relationship with the constructed societal culture which it inherits (Berger 1990:6).

The problem, argues Berger, is that these physical and cultural artifacts, once created, become outside of the immediate control of humanity, which cannot "simply be wished away" (Berger 1990: 9). Social institutions and culture are thus objectivated; they exist independently of humanity not as a simple social construction, but as an objective reality (Berger 1990: 9). Individuals may attempt to create their own interpretations of social artifacts, but they will meet with incomprehension or ridicule if they share these "incorrect" interpretations with others in a social setting (Berger 1990: 11). For example, one could decide to interpret gender as irrelevant to a childs' upbringing, but as has been seen recently by parents raising their child as a non-gendered individual, condemnation by society at large for this "incorrect" interpretation of gender, there are consequences to not engaging with agreed-upon meanings. Individuals are thus forced to confront societal expectations of their roles and actions within a society regardless of their wishes to change interpretations of social reality (Berger 1990: 11).

The final step Berger points to is internalization, whereby humanity takes back into itself the physical and social constructs made into objective reality by objectivation and thus becomes a product of society while also a producer (Berger 1990: 4). By absorbing the structures of the

externalized culture "the structures of this world come to determine the subjective structures of consciousness itself" (Berger 1990: 15). Berger emphasizes here the fundamental ways in which internalization changes the structure of individual meaning; it is not simply that people act out the roles society expects of them while being aware of their own internal reality. Rather, in most cases the internalized structures of the broader society *become* the reality (Berger 1990: 14). This internalization is taken up not simply by individuals, but rather collectively by a society or group culture (Berger 1990: 16). It is important to note, though, that this socialization process is not the molding of a passive mind, but rather the dialectical process spoken of previously where individuals engage in a conversation with the material they are internalizing and shape it in their own ways (Berger 1990: 18).

Berger's three-step process of understanding the social construction of reality is relevant to my study because it illustrates that social institutions, while not physically substantial per se, are objectively real and subjectively meaningful. Berger argues that religion, like all social institutions, represents an attempt by humans to impose meaning on an otherwise meaningless world (Berger 1990: 22). However, religion goes beyond what other objectivated social phenomenon (such as the state) provide in terms of meaning-making, because it professes to allow faithful to "know the unknowable", providing for them one explanation of such universal experiences as death, love, and "the sacred", or that which has "a quality of mysterious or awesome power" (Berger 1990: 25). The professed scope of religion's explanatory power has made "play a strategic part in the human enterprise of world-building", according to Berger (Berger 1990: 27). Through the many different ways in which religion has manifested itself as a social force within cultures, he argues that it has allowed us to "audacious[ly] attempt to conceive of the entire universe as humanly significant" (Berger 1990: 28).

This three-step process of understanding humanity's relationship with society is also useful for highlighting the dialogical nature of social institutions, including religion. Berger's model allows for an understanding of religious tradition as an external yet fluid social construction that is both meaningful and integral to believers' world views, yet like all social constructions are able to be interpreted and gradually changed through a dialectical process. Finally, he points to the importance of understanding these religious traditions as having their own "languages" where members share a common bond through experiences, signs, and other trappings of culture (Berger 1990: 20). To understand a society that is in the most literal sense multicultural, we need to understand that the institutions which shape those disparate cultures, including religion, are more than simple categories of difference. They are loaded with meaning and shape the viewpoints and actions of members in ways in which they may not even be aware.

Berger's work provides a general context for understanding the impact of religious traditions on believers and on culture as a whole. I turn to Charles Taylor once again to provide a framework for understanding the intersubjective nature of social experiences and the formation of multiple identities within and between groups. His work "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man" (1971) in particular is useful for conceptualizing cultural groups not simply as demographic clusters of individuals, but rather centres for collective consciousness and common reference points found in shared languages and ideas. Taylor first argues that the way in which we understand the social subject, particularly within a research setting, is both problematic and largely unquestioned (Taylor 1971: 5). He explores how this idea of the "subject" has come about in social research, especially within the "social sciences", which he takes umbrage with as a term to describe what sociologists, political scientists, religious studies academics, and so forth perform (Taylor 1971: 7). Taylor points to the need for certainty in traditional scientific inquiry,

the need for facts that are grounded in observable data, in order to make generalizations and serve as a foundation for hypotheses (Taylor 1971: 8). These empirical approaches to social science have resulted in the categorization of "the subject" into composite parts, as individuals, and then as group members; what Taylor argues is that this approach is "sterile" (Taylor 1971: 10). By dismissing interpretive approaches to understanding human subjects as "soft" in favour of recreating them as definitive sets of demographic data, we miss out on key elements of social life; human beings by their nature are interpretive beings, capable of creating, negotiating, and contesting meaning (Taylor 1971: 11). The concept of meaning is another issue Taylor links in with this discussion of the subject; he argues that, while meaning is a subjective and personal term, there is also such a thing as "group meaning", where people share common understandings of a particular event, object, or place (Taylor 1971: 12).

Further expanding this idea of group meaning, Taylor argues that there are inherent power relations in the creation of a dominant ideology; individuals and subgroups engage in a contestation with other groups over what means what, and those who have power are able to set the meanings they choose for a given idea (Taylor 1971: 12) - in essence, Taylor is referring to labeling theory. In addition, the meaning of something can only be determined if a group has encountered that cultural object; in particular, Taylor argues that engaging with another culture is the only way to begin to appreciate the meanings they place on certain ideas (Taylor 1971: 13). I have previously mentioned the stereotyping and discrimination against Muslims in North America following 9/11. Some of the media "analysis", particularly from more right-leaning media outlets, of "Islam" as a monolithic entity speaks to what Taylor is arguing here. A lack of experience and engagement with "real" Muslims led some commentators to understand and discuss Islam within an enclosed context of other commentators; within this space they created

an unnatural, radical, and unified understanding of what it means to be a Muslim that was largely

out of touch with the social reality. In this vein, Taylor argues that cultural meanings are bound

up in language, which reflects the shared experiences of that culture; in order to gain access to

meaning, one must begin to understand the language it is couched in (Taylor 1971: 14).

There was a distinct lack of understanding of Muslim cultural space; media

commentators were basing their portrayals of Muslims on their own solipsistic understandings of

what it means to be "Muslim" without moving from their metaphorical armchairs. There was the

potential for individuals within the media to come to an intersubjective understanding of the

Muslim worldview, but that opportunity was passed up in favour of reinforcing dominant ideals

about the monolithic nature of Islam, ignoring the complexity and multiplicity of meanings

associated with that religious identity [Hoodfar and McDonough 2005: 133-137].

What does this mean, then, for religion's role in the public sphere? Taylor's concept of

intersubjectivity allows us to understand that the perception of identity found in much empirical

social science research fails to account for the complex and intersubjective experiences of

individuals as they simultaneously exist within multiple collective sets of meanings, including

faith groups. Taylor's solution to the need to "break out" of the hermeneutic circle (Taylor 1971:

7) is similar in ways to Berger's understanding of humanity's dance with interpretation, in that

we constantly negotiate with our cultural texts as they negotiate with us (Berger 1990: 18).

Taylor argues that intersubectivity allows us this escape, by allowing us to contextualize our

cultural community within the larger set of communities and worldviews which exist (Taylor

1971: 8). Within this argument, the value of interfaith for understanding a diverse religious

landscape becomes apparent, in that it emphasizes that respondents must be willing to move

beyond a solipsistic understanding of their faith as *the* faith, into a world of multiple meanings and identities.

On this note I now turn to several works by Jurgen Habermas, who has written extensively on the value of discourse and dialogue in creating shared meaning, as well as on the value of religion and religious tolerance within a diverse society. Within my data and discussion chapters I discuss the value of interfaith dialogue as social action; to frame this discussion I turn to Habermas' seminal work on what he calls "communicative action (Habermas 2006, Douglas 2009).

The definition of communicative action found here will, by necessity, be brief and therefore lacking in the full richness of the author's extensive writings on the topic. With that being said, communicative action at its root can be understood as two or more subjects interacting through speech to "establish interpersonal relations" in order to "co-ordinate their actions" (Douglas 2009: 52). Central to the functioning of this model for communication is the recognition and intersubjective interpretation of "various validity claims of those who may hold different positions and views" (Douglas 2009: 52). Agreement under the communicative action model can be reached on a plan of action by "sharing common convictions" and by subjects maintaining a "self-critical attitude," where they are able to recognize that their worldview is but one of many (Douglas 2009: 53). The purpose of engaging in communicative action, according to Habermas, is not for one subject to "win" an argument, but rather through sustained and reflexive dialogue to reach an understanding (Douglas 2009: 54). Thus in this model "language functions as a medium of not only reaching understanding and transmitting cultural knowledge, but also as a means of socialization and social integration" (Douglas 2009: 54). According to Douglas, writing on its value as a model for interfaith dialogue, Habermas argues communicative

action has the potential to prevent citizens within isolated faith communities from becoming "isolated nomads acting on the basis of their own self-interest…using their subjective rights only as weapons against each other" (Douglas 2009: 55, Habermas 2006: 35).

What can be taken from this is an extension of the positions put forth by both Berger and Taylor arguing for an understanding of the intersubjective nature of group cultures and a willingness to engage in self-critical and self-reflexive behaviour in order to locate one's own cultural background and social institutions within a wider spectrum. In terms of the value of these approaches, and particularly communicative action's value for interfaith, they all demonstrate a general model for moving past a solipsistic understanding of the world and one's own cultural group into a world populated by many cultural groups and world views.

While I will return to Habermas' communicative action model in my discussion chapter, I focus now on his writings on the role of religion in the public sphere. Habermas began his career defending a staunchly pro-secular position, but in recent years has become dedicated to arguing for the recognition of religious tolerance as an indicator of the health of human rights in liberal democracies. In his work with Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, it is noted that Habermas has in recent years "demand[ed] that the secular society acquire a new understanding of religious convictions, which are something more and something other than mere relics of a past with which we are finished" (Habermas 2006: 11-12). Rather than treating religion as an untouchable subject, or one that is too value-laden to be discussed in a rational manner, I would reiterate the position I took in my Introduction. As a demographic element, it is obvious that religion is important to a great many Canadians, especially new Canadians (see Seljak 2009, Hiller 2006) and to assume that just because one says that we live in a secular society makes it so is deeply problematic on a social research front.

Habermas goes on to note that one of the reasons for the work he engaged in with Pope Benedict XVI is due to questions that have been asked for decades about the possibility of creating a truly "objective" form of liberal democracy that is not influenced by history or existing dominant culture (Habermas 2006: 21). He states that this critique of secular democracy assumes that "such a state is dependent on ethical traditions of a local nature" (Habermas 2006: 21). Within the Canadian context, I have noted the critique of multiculturalism that assumes the policy is not influenced by cultural factors, when in fact it has been crafted and maintained largely by white Protestant men who have unconsciously placed their own conceptions of what a "plural society" looks like on the face of our society (Seljak 2009). Similarly, to assume that multiculturalism should not involve religion because that would make it "biased" is to assume that it is not already biased towards a dominant Christian majority which has been in control of Canadian society since before Confederation.

The final argument I draw on from Habermas' work concerns how governments should approach the role of religion in the lives of their citizens. When talking about the impact of secularization, how it has emerged and what it has done in the context of creating social solidarity, Habermas concludes by stating that "it is in the interest of the constitutional state to deal carefully with the cultural sources that nourish its citizens' consciousness of norms and their solidarity. This awareness, which has become conservative, is reflected in the phrase 'postsecular society'" (Habermas 2006: 46). It is worth noting briefly that while it seems contradictory to argue that a plurality of faith positions can "encourage solidarity", and it is a point to which I return later in this thesis. Simply put, however, the argument has been made by other theorists that faith and participation in religious communities can help members, especially new citizens, to integrate into the society they find themselves by providing social supports,

family care, economic assistance, and more (see Biles and Ibrahim 2006). Moving on, Habermas goes on to note the survival, and indeed the growth of religious belief and participation in many faith communities despite the declaration of secularization and the death of religion, and urges a careful and reflexive dialogue between those who subscribe to religious beliefs, and those who follow a more secular path (Habermas 2006: 47).

Habermas in this work essentially explains why my research is relevant; if religion is in fact an important element of society, particularly Canadian society, then it needs to be addressed in a responsible way that does not exclude either believers or non-believers. Rather than taking a polemic approach, as both sides are more than capable of doing, what Habermas suggests is an approach to religion that treats it as an element of culture, relating also back to Taylor's examination of meaning and groups on this issue. If we are capable of having an ongoing negotiation of ethnic diversity in this country, albeit sometimes a heated one, then what is preventing us from bringing in religion as one more element of cultural heritage?

Canada`s Religious Diversity

While the ethnic and racial diversity in Canadian society is often touted, both in our national media and abroad as a sign of our "tolerant" culture, the religious diversity of Canadians is, like many issues relating to faith, only beginning to receive increased attention. According to Statistics Canada data from the 2001 census, Canada is home to a variety of faith groups which reflect significant shifts in religious identity since the 1960s. Quebec's Quiet Revolution in this period saw a dramatic shift from the nearly complete dominance of the Catholic Church in that province to a much more secular outlook today (Bramadat 2005: 5) While Christians still account for a clear majority in Canada with over 80% of the population self-identifying as members (Bramadat 2005: 3), the shift in the 1960s in Quebec, and general distaste in English

Canada for the aboriginal abuse scandals Protestant churches faced in the 1980s, has meant that statistics on identification do not necessarily reflect a strong Christian reality. Declining church attendance and increasing identification with a secular worldview among English and Quebec Canadians (Bramadat 2005: 6) stands in contrast to the growing number of members in non-Christian religious groups in Canada today. For example, the Muslim presence in Canada has grown from relatively insignificant numbers pre-1960 to close to 600,000 practitioners in 2001 (Beter 2005: 240). Similarly small Buddhist numbers, largely unaccounted for before Canada's changing immigration policy, have now risen to over 300,000 in 2001 (Beyer 2005: 237). Groups with a longer history in Canada, such as Sikhs and Hindus, saw explicitly discriminatory national policies aimed at them by Canadian governments in the early part of the 20th century (Biles and Ibrahim 164); they now boast numbers around the 300,000 mark as well (Beyer 2005: 235-236). What these numbers show is a decline in mainline Christian church participation by the English and French majority, combined with a new, much more religious immigrant population whose religious worldviews seem particularly confusing or unknowable to the Canadian cultural majority (Bramadat 2005: 5).

However, the importance of Canada's emergent religious diversity has been downplayed rather than promoted and discussed. Seljak's previously mentioned (2009) work on religion and multiculturalism provides one explanation for this; the rise of secularism among the white (formerly) Christian majority in Canada, and their overrepresentation within political and public service circles which has led to both ignorance and their ignoring of the importance of religious issues to newer Canadian cultural communities (Seljak 2009).

The work of Biles and Ibrahim (2005) has specifically focused on this issue in a policy context: what they argue backs up both my assertions and those of other theorists. They argue

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that there are four main reasons why religion has been excluded from Canadian diversity. First, a "misplaced belief in the need to maintain separation between church and state" [despite no legal/Constitutional reason to do so in Canada]; a "refusal to acknowledge Canada's Christian heritage" [in that many public institutions are foundationally based in some Christian values and biases]; fears that religious intolerance makes faith incompatible with "Canadian values" of tolerance; and a fear that "minority group" Canadians will use their faith to leverage concessions from the federal government if given the opportunity to do so (Biles and Ibrahim 2005: 166). The authors argue that because of these four reasons, members of minority faith communities are disadvantaged by largely invisible barriers to their participation, barriers that are framed as being secular and thus "equalizing," but which are in reality based in an implicit Christian bias (Biles and Ibrahim 2006: 155). Next, I discuss some examples of how this failure to address minority religious groups has played out in Canadian society and ways in which minority groups have responded to this exclusion.

Religious Challenges to Canadian Multiculturalism

The three examples I briefly cover in this section represent the changing nature of Canadian society since the relaxation of immigration laws in the 1970s. I argue they paint a picture of a culture where religious minority groups are either ignored, or exploited as a tool for political gain. These examples underscore the urgency of engaging in the kind of constructive, societal-level dialogue about faith discussed by scholars such as Lori Beaman and Jurgen Habermas, where religious differences can be honestly discussed without falling into the polemic debates which have occurred in some cases to date.

My first example concerns the Sikh community in Canada, a group which has faced repeated challenges and discrimination both institutionally and in the larger culture (Mahmood

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2005). Since their arrival in Canada in the late 19th century, Sikhs have faced consistent

stereotypes that their religion is one which promotes violence (Mahmood 2005). This

connection in the dominant Canadian imagination between Sikhs and violence was reinforced by

a controversy not between Sikhs, but on behalf of a Sikh student against a public board of

education. With the growth of "zero-tolerance" policies toward violence that call for automatic

punishments for anything seen as threatening, a young Sikh boy was suspended from school after

wearing his kirpan, or ceremonial dagger to school (Stoker 2007: 814). Explanations from the

boy's parents that the kirpan was not a weapon but rather a religious icon were ignored at the

local level, and resulted in a landmark trial where the question of religious meaning versus safety

was debated (Stoker 2007: 815). In the end, with a strong show of support from Sikh groups and

the community at large, the right of the boy to wear the kirpan, so long as it was altered so as to

be not useable as a weapon, was upheld (Stoker 2007: 819). Still, the event caused further public

scrutiny of the Sikh community, with some commentators complaining they wanted "special

treatment" (Stoker 2007: 829).

Sikhs have been unafraid to campaign for their religious freedom in a number of social

areas, including the right to wear a turban as an RCMP officer, and exemptions from motorcycle

laws which require helmets for the same reason (Mahmood 2005). This has earned them enmity

from some who see them as indicative of a problem with Canadian multiculturalism; they have

been portrayed as "unappreciative" of their citizenship, attempting to create a system where

minority groups are privileged over the white majority. The outcomes of the previously

mentioned legal challenges have highlighted that what Sikhs have been asking for is not special

status under the law (Stoker 2007). Rather, they have sought to have the law interpreted in a

manner which acknowledges their cultural differences as valid, and treats their right to religious

freedom and expression as an important part of their overall identity. In essence, as a community

Sikhs have asked for Canada's laws to be applied in an equitable rather than equal manner, with

the argument being that "equal" application of laws ignores the inherent European and Christian

biases found within Canada's legal system (see Thobani 2007).

My second example of the challenges religion brings to Canada's multicultural status quo

comes from Bouchard and Taylor (2008), who were commissioned by the Quebec provincial

government to research and prepare a report on the status of cultural minority groups in the

province, including religious and ethnic minorities. Through town hall meetings and in-depth

interviews with a varied assembly of Quebec citizens, both "pure laine" [ethnically Quebecois]

and otherwise, Bouchard and Taylor assembled a snapshot of how Quebec was adapting to

growing diversity and immigration.

Their findings indicated several key points. First, the reason the report was

commissioned was to address a certain level of anxiety within the Quebec press and the public at

large over what was seen by Quebecois as unfair advantages given to immigrant groups

(Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 73). This anxiety had been exacerbated by a number of stories

circulated by the press, and capitalized upon by right-wing anti-immigrant party Action

Democratique Quebec (the ADQ) in order to garner support for their election campaign

(Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 93). The stories played to common racial and religious stereotypes,

suggesting for example that: Jews were profiting through raising food prices by forcing all food

to be kosher (Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 20); Muslims forced partygoers to stop dancing in

order to pray (Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 19); and Muslims were also forcing men to not stay

with their pregnant wives during Lamaze classes (Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 18). The report

suggested that these events were either fabricated or wildly overblown, but they indicated unease

with Quebec`s approach to diversity.  The authors conclusions were that the anxieties were ill-founded; "Quebec`s interculturalism project was working as intended" (Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 73).

Throughout their work, Bouchard and Taylor return to an explicitly stated function of interculturalism; to introduce minority group members to the dominant French culture in the province, to help them "assimilate", and to allow token elements of their own culture – but only those elements which do not call into question the secular, Francophone dominant culture's norms (Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 93). Interculturalism thus differs in a fundamental aspect from multiculturalism as a diversity program, due to the structures of the respective societies in which these policies operate. Multiculturalism works on the idea that Canadian (English) culture is the dominant force in our society; it approaches citizens from minority group backgrounds as coming from a position of less power than settled English Canadians, and seeks to mitigate that power imbalance by preserving their identity. To draw from Charles Taylor's work on identity and multiculturalism, all citizens must see their values and culture acknowledged and accepted in some way within the dominant culture in order to feel comfortable enough to fully engage with the society they are in – otherwise, they become disenfranchised, retreat into ethnic enclaves, and become "ghettoized" (Taylor 1994: 25).

Canadian multiculturalism works from the understanding the English Canada`s values are those of a majority in control of their own destiny, and that multicultural policies are necessary to provide room for minority cultures which would otherwise disappear. By contrast, Quebec's interculturalism comes from an understanding of French culture as "under siege" by the dominant English Canadian majority; in order to maintain a separate and distinct identity ("maitre chez nous" springs to mind as an example of Quebecois feelings on this issue),

Quebec's approach to diversity sees immigrants entering the province as a potentially undermining force, and their religious views as running counter to the interculturalist agenda of incorporating new arrivals into Quebecois culture (Bouchard and Taylor 2008). What this challenges is not only a unified ideal of Canadian multiculturalism, but also the idea that religious minority groups can find a safe place in Canadian society to practice their beliefs.

Stemming from this, my final example represents not so much a problem as an emerging and potentially promising development in the representation of religious minority groups, one that requires further investigation. In short, the political landscape in Canada has shifted dramatically in the last decade in terms of demographic party affiliations. While hard statistics are difficult to come by, there seem to be shifts in loyalty with regard to the allegiances of minority groups to the major federal political parties. As Joe Friesen reported in an investigation of ethnic voting patterns, the previous lockdown on minority groups that the federal Liberals have enjoyed since the 1970's has been replaced by uncertainty (Friesen 2010). The Liberals first gained widespread support from ethnoracial minority groups with the open immigration laws and formalization of multiculturalism as a policy under Pierre Trudeau in the 1970's and 1980's. During this time the Progressive Conservatives and Reform Party largely ignored the "immigrant vote", and in some cases were actively hostile to the idea of expanded immigration and integration over assimilation, catering to their white, conservative, ethnically English base (Friesen 2010). With the rise of the minority government status of the new Conservatives in 2005 under Stephen Harper, however, policy makers within the party recognized and actively began to seek out the votes of ethnoreligious minority groups (Friesen 2010).

The value that immigrant groups bring to the Conservative Party goes beyond simply increasing their vote share; in many new immigrant communities the Conservatives have found

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many shared ideological positions, especially on the topics of traditional family values and small government (Friesen and Ibbitson 2010). Harper gave the job of wooing minority groups through attending religious sites, festivals, and social clubs to a senior and important minister, Jason Kenney (Friesen and Ibbitson 2010). He and the Conservative party at large are aware of the strength of numbers, finances, and activism these immigrant groups can provide. Friesen argues that this represents little more than pandering, with no serious commitments to the integration or values of immigrants; Kenney has also made controversial statements about reducing immigrant numbers, and has made reference to some stereotypes about the ability of immigrant groups to effectively engage with Canadian culture (Friesen 2010). There does seem to be a serious crisis of identity within the federal Conservatives, with recognition of the value of the religious immigrant vote contrasting with older Conservative positions which argued for a more closed and assimilationist approach to immigrant engagement.

This focus on minority groups' religious values has paid obvious dividends for the Conservatives. With the Conservatives now holding a majority government following the May 2011 federal election, the predictions of journalists like Joe Friesen have proven prescient – the Liberals failed dismally in their attempt to maintain their immigrant voting base, and the Conservatives seem to have inherited their mantle, at least for the next four years. Only time will tell whether this election represented a significant breakthrough for religious minority groups in helping to "set the table", in the words of Biles and Ibrahim (2006), or if it simply shows the political acuity of Conservative strategists in identifying and pursuing a useful demographic.

In sum, these three examples of religious challenges to Canada's existing multicultural policies all require further academic and political attention to gain a clearer picture of the current

political status of minority religious groups is in this country. All three examples point to a need within Canadian society to constructively discuss religious differences, particularly those of minority faith groups, in order to lift the discussion out of its current, often polemical and stereotype-enforcing nature. By doing so, it undermines those who would seek to use religious differences as a vehicle for stirring hatred or discrimination in order to "make hay" politically. I turn now to a discussion of the existing literature on the interfaith movement in Canada, doing so not to present interfaith work as the only way to address this need for dialogue, but rather as one potential that seems to show promise.

Defining and Contextualizing the Interfaith Movement in Canada

Before getting into more detail about interfaith groups in Canada in particular, it is important to understand the concept of the interfaith movement in a general sense. To reiterate, interfaith refers to relations between different religious communities for the purpose of 1) engaging in constructive dialogue, 2) working towards a common goal, and 3) raising awareness about the plurality of religious expressions found in a society (Pedersen 2004: 77). These three elements of interfaith work are what define interfaith groups as interfaith; as Laurie Lamoureux Scholes explains, within Canadian society (and in other societies where interfaith work takes place) interfaith groups can range from "small informal 'home-study' circles, to specific outreach efforts by individual religious communities, to more formal, publicly identified interfaith organizations" (Lamoureux Scholes 2007: 6). To quote Diana Eck and return to her call for "energetic bridge-builders between [religious] communities" (Eck 2002: 335), interfaith groups can be seen to fill this role, as either proactive or reactive groups that are devoted to building connections between diverse belief systems in a pluralistic liberal democracy.

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Eck notes that these groups can emerge for several reasons: as initially private connections between individuals of different faiths who create a specific organization to formalize their involvement; as part of existing efforts at dialogue within formalized and bureaucratic religions (such as the Catholic-Jewish efforts at dialogue), or as responses to crises within or against specific religious communities (Eck 2002: 340). Eck gives the example of a series of anti-Semitic attacks on synagogues and Jewish shops in Billings, Montana, that resulted in an enormous display of solidarity from Christian churches and the Muslim population of the town which eventually led to a council, made in part to ensure that future incidents would be met with general condemnation, and to work towards reducing religious hate crimes overall (Eck 2002: 347).

While Eck looks exclusively at American examples of interfaith co-operation and dialogue, her work is useful in demonstrating some of the ways in which the interfaith movement can appear, especially in unlikely locations. Kusumita Pedersen's (2004) research on interfaith groups focuses on what these manifestations of interfaith dialogues look like in their various forms, specifically breaking them down into local, national, and international kinds of interfaith groups (Pedersen 2004: 80). On the local level, she identifies the multifaith/interfaith centre as a building block of the interfaith movement, a physical and social location where interested individuals and groups could meet to participate in dialogue and common projects (Pedersen 2004: 80). At a national level, she identifies series of networks that exist between interfaith organizations, faith community councils from specific backgrounds, and dedicated envoys from major organized religions (Pedersen 2004: 82). These networks bring groups together in order to sponsor conferences and voice concerns about large social issues such as racial inequality, hate crimes, poverty, or other related social justice issues (Pedersen 2004: 82). Finally, Pedersen

briefly touches on the idea of international interfaith groups, although she notes that for the most part, these groups are international more in name than in their actual sphere of operations (Pedersen 2004: 83). International interfaith organizations usually rely on well-known and well-respected religious leaders to reach across national borders and promote a global recognition of social issues; the Dalai Lama and the Pope are two well-known leaders involved in interfaith work (Pedersen 2004: 84). These organizations usually have two additional focuses in addition to touching on social issues: first, they seek to promote interfaith work to a world audience, and second, they assume that by involving leaders of major religious communities, those leaders can put additional influence on the communities they lead to become involved in interfaith dialogue (Pedersen 2004: 84).

One final issue Pedersen notes on this level of interfaith work is the goal of many members involved in these dialogues to create a "one-world" interfaith council, similar to the United Nations, where all of the world religions could have a voice (Pedersen 2004: 88). There are several problems with this approach: one is the difficulty in selecting who would represent each religion, considering that many religious communities are decentralized and thus lack one leader; another is the history between some religions might preclude their involvement in interfaithwork; finally, competition between interfaith groups to become "the" global interfaith organization have all thwarted this goal to date (Pedersen 2004: 88).

One additional problem that Laurie Lamoureux Scholes' (2007) work exposes vis-a-vis this "dream" is the often extremely dispersed and informal nature of much interfaith work, specifically within Canada. Much interfaith work is done as a secondary response by organizations that need a way to respond collectively to religious diversity within their populations, such as within prisons, hospitals, and the military (Lamoureux Scholes 2007: 8).

However, of particular interest to my research are the grassroots responses to religious diversity found in Canadian society, springing from the efforts of individuals and different faith groups (Lamoureux Scholes 2007: 9). These groups are usually informal, made up of members from different faith communities, and not necessarily the leaders of those communities, and they can be either informally structured conversations, or more formalized organizations that are named and have specific mandates (Lamoureux Scholes 2007: 10). The organization I investigated, Interfaith Grand River, falls under this latter category, as a group that is formally structured but composed of lay members and representatives of faiths who do not speak for their community in an official role (interfaithgrandriver.org). These organizations typically have as their mandate some kind of combination of building dialogue, creating networking opportunities between members of different faith groups, and encouraging social justice work (Lamoureux Scholes 2007: 10). In general, they can be seen as "another example of how Canada makes its mosaic work", in the words of Laurie Lamoureux Scholes (2007: 11).

To pursue this idea of interfaith as both a critic and child of Canadian multiculturalism, I return to a consideration of the work of David Seljak, who portrays interfaith groups as a potential way to include religion in multicultural policies and practices. He notes that the key element of these interfaith groups is not so much their explicit social justice goals, or even their ideas regarding the promotion of education and dialogue, but rather the interpersonal relationships and experiences that arise from becoming involved in these groups (2009). This experience of "the other" on an intimate level within the context of interfaith ideology, upon which rests the interfaith movement, can break down barriers between individuals and create lasting connections between both individuals and faith communities (2009).

The material presented here on interfaith work, particularly within Canada, is sparse. However, this speaks directly to the already mentioned problem that issues of religious difference receive little attention both in the national awareness and within academia, where it has only recently become more of a mainstream concern for those in the social sciences. The interfaith research provides a framework for my data chapter, where I outline major themes which emerged from my conversations with and observation of IGR's members related to their encounters with interfaith and Canadian diversity. First, however, I provide a breakdown of how I collected this data in my methodology chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Having reviewed the literature and theory which guides my research, I now turn to the methodologies I employed in structuring the collection of my data, the ethical considerations which informed the selection and implementation of my methods, and the ways in which my methodologies and theories have intertwined. In order to cover these topics, I first explain my reasons for selecting a qualitative, participant observation approach. I then give a brief description of the demographic and institutional details of Interfaith Grand River in terms of how they affected my selection of a methodology. Next, I give a brief overview of how my approach conformed to the demands of a qualitatively based approach to research in terms of respect for subjects. Finally, I explain the technical details of my data collection, including how I gained access to IGR, the instruments and processes of my interviewing and participant observation stage, and my responses to the demands of ethics.

Before I begin, however, I should make a point concerning the nature of this research project in terms of values and objectivity. My goal in pursuing this project has been to provide an overview of IGR as an organization in as honest a manner as possible; I have focused on outlining the processes which IGR follows in its operation, its history and the opinions of members as they were expressed to me. I have also attempted to show IGR, as stated in my Introduction, as an organization that has a positive impact on the community it is located in, yet one that is not without flaws and controversies. Thus, my goal has been to produce a piece that is as objective as I can make it, but not one which is value-free. I do believe in the mission statement which IGR espouses, and I believe that the organization is pursuing the ideals laid out in said statement admirably well, albeit always with room to improve – such are the nature of ideals. I feel it is important to note here both my commitment to objectively understanding IGR,

and the values which guided both my selection of this research project and have influenced my writing about and understanding of the organization.

With that being said, I now turn to an explanation of my reasons for selecting a qualitative methodology. In a very broad sense, I am defining qualitative research as concerned with the qualities of a particular group, their interpretations of themselves, their structure, their culture, and their roles (Berg 2009: 8). I am not interested in understanding IGR as a generalizable representative of some larger whole, such as of interfaith groups in Canada. What I am interested in is how IGR's construction and maintenance of itself represents one model for understanding interfaith work, much as interfaith work is one way of negotiating religious difference. My realization early on about the impossibility of making general claims about interfaith work from studying one group (Pedersen 2004) steered me towards taking a semi-structured, participant observation approach to my research. In addition, the nature of IGR's work, grounded as it is in complex social interactions between members and the larger Kitchener-Waterloo community, lends itself to an interview-based, observational research strategy.

It is necessary to give a brief descriptive overview of IGR here, with a more detailed to be found in my Data section. To summarize, Interfaith Grand River began meeting in September 2001, immediately in the aftermath of the World Trade Centre attacks (interfaithgrandriver.org). This unforeseeable event, coupled with the resulting increased scrutiny Muslims and other identifiable religious minorities experienced, shaped the group's approach to religious dialogue from their first meeting. IGR quickly expanded from a few founding members who largely knew one another through their work in interdenominational Christian relations (the Council of Churches) to a representation of most faith communities in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, with

some exceptions (interfaithgrandriver.org). Since September 2001 the group has officially met once per month for two hours, with one hour devoted to discussing faith perspectives on a given social issue, such as capital punishment or multiculturalism, and the second hour given to announcements and identifying and planning events members might be interested in.

IGR`s exact membership size is difficult to identify; based on my observations and members' comments, it seems to have approximately thirty or so members with varying levels of attendance, with up to several hundred more interested parties found on the email list. Representatives come from both the clergy and laity (although this divide shows a Christian bias, as many faith groups may lack the hierarchical structure of the Abrahamic religions). With some exceptions, members did not usually see themselves as "official representatives" of their faith groups. Instead, they portrayed themselves as individuals who hold faith positions which generally "marry up" with a given religious community, although again this varies widely by individual. In short, IGR's members believe that interfaith must combine dialogue and action, which are addressed in the two separate hours in their meetings. They see understanding one another, and their own faith perspectives, as inseparable from larger social action; this action generally has to do with having IGR act as one representative of the religious community in the K-W area – specifically a liberal, moderate position.

The interactions between members at meetings are just the official element of IGR's work – one member told me that the building of friendships and much of the decision-making process of the group happens unofficially in "parking lots, in coffee shops, and in one another's kitchens." [Respondent 2] For the purposes of my research, this is a weakness that I must acknowledge. My attendance at meetings and events, and my discussions with members in

interviews, gave me a particular kind of understanding of IGR, but it could never be a "complete picture" of how IGR works in more unofficial settings.

To return to my thought process in selecting an appropriate methodology to study interfaith's connection to multiculturalism: I considered using quantitative data to supplement the qualitative interviews and observational notes I knew would play a central role. However, the use of quantitative data to pursue this research agenda would have been limited by several factors which became clear the more I researched both IGR and the existing data on interfaith groups in Canada. The first and most basic issue was that there was no evident quantitative data on the interfaith movement in Canada. While Statistics Canada includes several religious affiliation indicators on their censuses, including the faith group [and sometimes denomination] one identifies with and a crude measure of faith [attendance], these have little bearing on my interest in the interpersonal relationships occurring within interfaith groups. Even in a theoretical situation where I would have had unlimited resources to conduct surveys, with the goal of creating generalizable research on interfaith work, I do not think that a survey method would have produced results that were anything more than shallow approximations of the kinds of complex interactions which interfaith work entails.

Having clarified my position against using a quantitative methodology, I should also explain some other, earlier methods which I considered and discarded during my initial brainstorming and early research with IGR. A cross-national comparative approach to interfaith groups was one option I considered, looking at IGR and contrasting it with other interfaith groups within Canada. However, I dismissed this approach for several reasons. First, recognizing that I faced time and scope constraints was a conclusion I came to early in the research process. Second, it was not readily apparent how I could gain access to other interfaith

groups and still focus on IGR with the amount of detail I felt the topic required. Finally, and

perhaps most importantly, the idea that there were readily apparent similarities with which I

could compare IGR to other interfaith groups were quickly dismissed through discussions with

IGR members about their other affiliations with interfaith groups and some preliminary research

of my own. Simply put, the term "interfaith" can be applied to a very wide range of activities

performed by a wide array of actors for a wide variety of reasons. For example, while IGR

operates as an independent entity primarily driven by clergy, other groups may have been created

with the idea of serving as advisors to governments, as one particular council in Toronto seems

to do. Others are created as initiatives of a specific religion or denomination, such as existing

Catholic-Jewish efforts at dialogue. Still others may be so intangible as to be difficult to trace

through research, existing only through networks of friends meeting in one another's houses.

What these differences, emphasized by Pedersen's admittedly broad overview of interfaith work

in Canada (2004), told me was that a comparative study would not seem to add anything

constructive for the kind of qualitative, "deep understanding" research I wished to do.

The final option I considered but rejected was interviewing members of congregations

who had individuals directly participating in IGR; in other words, people peripherally affected by

IGR's work. This option I took more seriously than the others, as it seemed to promise several

benefits: a way to measure IGR's influence within their localized environment, and in a broader

context to see if IGR's work was, to put it crudely, "doing anything." The reason that I

abandoned this potential source of research data related back to my growing commitment to the

ideals of "knowledge by interpretation"; I began my research on IGR with a strong interest on

interfaith as social policy, and all good policy requires some way to measure outcomes, even

directly. However, what I came to understand about IGR was that it was obviously not being

maintained as a way to influence government policy, at least not as a primary objective. Two

key points that members emphasized during my interviews with them affected this change. First,

IGR members did not seem themselves as representing a congregation or a faith group, but rather

themselves and their interpretation of a faith. Secondly, they admitted that many members of

their congregations were often largely unaware of their involvement with IGR, although they did

have programs in place designed to encourage different congregations to meet with one another

(more on that in my discussion chapter). Instead, they saw IGR as a project which not only made

other group members aware of their views, but made themselves more aware of their own views.

I was surprised by the parallels I saw in what these interviewees told me, and my own

understandings of research as a reflexive process. IGR called for a highly reflexive engagement

with other members, coming to a greater awareness of the idiosyncrasies of one's belief structure

as it is questioned by others. Several members made the same point to me in their interviews;

IGR had made them better members of their own faith groups by making them question, and thus

better understand their traditions. In turn, this disabused me of my policy-structured approach: I

understand that dialogue can in fact be action, to quote Habermas (in Finlayson 2005), and that

IGR represents a means that is an end unto itself to its members, rather than a process with

expected outcomes. Interviewing IGR members' congregations would not have served a purpose

with this understanding of their goals in mind; IGR's members are involved in many different

groups and identities, apart from their congregations while still maintaining their status as faith

members.

This background research, and my experiences with researching the organization, led me

to understand IGR as a unique way in which interfaith work is performed, insofar as all interfaith

work is unique. For my purposes, a qualitative participant observation approach focused on

gaining a "deep understanding" was ideally suited to IGR's combination of structured meetings and personal relationships, in that I focused on a few members and their relationships and experiences with both other members and larger ideas about diversity and religious expression.

In terms of sources used, the Interfaith Grand River website (interfaithgrandriver.org) was a vital resource. The members saw this site as the first public "face" of their organization, a way for the general public to understand their goals and engagement with the K-W community. When I began research on IGR, their site provided me with a number of different resources, including their mission statement, reports they had created on various interfaith issues, and a way to get in contact with the group via email. As a small group in a localized setting, the website was a way for IGR to make their presence known to the wider world outside of the personal, informal contacts which governed much of their interactions.

Another written source I referenced frequently straddles the line between being a theoretical resource and a primary document – Dr. Brice Balmer's "Meeting Our Multifaith Neighbours" (2006). While I have already talked about this work in some detail in my Literature section with regard to how it explains interfaith work, I should briefly note here the important function it played for me in expanding my early understanding of IGR. Having a piece of literature written by a member of IGR explicitly on, or at least paralleling, the topic I was researching presented a unique opportunity for me to see IGR represented as both an academic subject and as something in which the author has a personal investment. "Meeting Our Multifaith Neighbours" in many ways reads as a reflexive interpretation of one person's engagement with interfaith ideals (2006), and thus has particular value for my research.

The third written resource that impacted my understanding of IGR was the frequent emails sent out by the IGR webmaster to members, to which I subscribed. These emails detailed

events which IGR organized or took partin ; made note of significant events in the lives of

members or friends of the organization; or made reference to online articles which would be of

interest to members' interests. Being on this email list was very useful during the active stage in

my research in terms of finding relevant events IGR was hosting in order to attend, and as a

preserved record of events and interests it helped me to formulate a better understanding of

IGR's interests.

    While the written materials I have mentioned helped to shape my research of IGR

peripherally, my in-person contacts with IGR members resulted in the data which forms the basis

for my research. I briefly discuss the interview methods I used in one-on-one discussions with

IGR members, and the methods of note-taking I used during meetings, and my involvement with

the monthly meeting process beyond being an observer.

    First, however, I provide a brief overview of the particular qualitative methodology I

selected to investigate IGR. As an element of ethnomethodology, participant observation is a

method in which a researcher gathers information for a case study not as a passive observer of

research subjects, but as an engaged participant in their social lives (Yin 2003: 94). This

participation can range from casual conversations with members of the group being studied, to

direct involvement and activity within the community (Yin 2003: 94). In my study of IGR I

attended their monthly meetings and recorded meeting notes, but I also spoke informally and

formally with members in different venues. I also prepared and gave a short presentation to the

group at a meeting to provide a topic for their conversation hour.

    Participant observation was thus the best approach available to me considering IGR's

composition, and my constraints of time, skill, and resources. It permitted me to take an

ethnographic approach to IGR in order to tell its story and the story of its members. This in turn

resulted in my being able to gather interviews, meeting notes, and primary literature (i.e. Dr. Balmer's book and the IGR website) and identify major themes related to interfaith and multiculturalism which emerged from them, as I will discuss in my data chapter. Focusing on a few individuals and a small organization over a period of time created a rich, detailed account of IGR's experiences with interfaith work, something which would not have occurred in a more generalizable, large-scale research project.

As previously mentioned, I selected a qualitative, interview-based approach focusing on individual members to gain a complex understanding of IGR's motivations and direction. I interviewed nine members, each from a different faith background, with different positions in those faith groups including both clergy and lay members. Prior to beginning my field work, I obtained ethics clearance from the University of Waterloo to work with human subjects. Since my members were adults and often leading members of their faith communities, potential harm to them resulting from my research was minimal. However, due to the personal and sensitive nature of the questions I asked them about their faith experiences, care was taken to respect their wishes and not identify them in discussions written in this thesis when anonymity was possible and preferred. In addition, the interviewees were given a document explaining the nature of my research and required them to sign in order to confirm their willing participation in my study (see Appendix B). Data gathered both from interviews and meeting notes were stored in a locked office, and electronic data (including transcribed interviews) were kept on a password-protected computer to which only I had access.

In order to gain access to IGR members, I initially made contact with Dr. Balmer, considered a founding member of IGR who, after a brief introductory session, allowed me to attend IGR's monthly meetings. As a gatekeeper, he also introduced me at the first meeting,

explained why I was there, and encouraged other members to contact me if they we interested in

being interviewed. His role as gatekeeper was pivotal in my data-gathering efforts, and his deep

knowledge of IGR, as one of the founding members, was a resource I would utilize throughout

the project. For my first interview I used a very broad schedule of questions, as I knew that my

research questions would transform as I became more engaged with the organization. My

original respondent suggested several other persons within IGR who they thought might be of

interest to me: I also selected interviewees based on my expanding knowledge of the

organization as I became more involved in their processes. After my first two interviews my

schedule became more solidified and detailed [see Appendix A], although I maintained a semi-

structured approach, based on a theoretical following of qualitative paradigms about the evolving

nature of field research.

My interviews were conducted in locations of the respondents' choosing and on dates

convenient for them, as without exception they are heavily involved in faith communities, non-

profit organizations, academic pursuits, and work. As an aside, in order to give them a degree of

confidentiality I refer to respondents only by number where possible; however, the small size of

IGR and the specificity of the group makes stronger approaches to confidentiality difficult. As

educated individuals often within positions of leadership within their communities, I treated my

respondents, both in the interviews and during my meeting observations, as well-informed

subjects who freely gave consent to my scrutiny.

The final source of IGR data comes from my field notes, including interpretations of

meetings and events in which I took part, just not as a passive observer, but rather as an

individual who was expected to engage with and give back to the community I was studying.

This was explicitly brought up to me by my gatekeeper. When I asked how I could repay the

privilege of being given access to meetings and individuals, I was told that students who had

studied IGR in previous years had given a short lecture on a topic relevant to interfaith dialogue

or diversity, and which would act as a spark for the hour-long discussion section of the monthly

meeting. Accordingly, I designed a 20-minute presentation on Quebec interculturalism in

relation to how it affected religious minority groups, contrasting it with Canadian

multiculturalism. On a personal note, not only did giving this presentation give me a feeling of

having compensated IGR's members for their time and consideration, it also led me to

discussions of interculturalism with IGR members who had professional academic interests in

this area, and led me to additional interviews.

The meeting notes which I took were based primarily on the discussion portions of the

monthly IGR meetings, which comprised one hour out of the two. In this hour, one member

would be responsible for preparing a short positional lecture on a topic which had been selected

for conversation. Typically they would address the issue in detail from the perspective of their

faith, and then other members would respond to this position with their own faith's viewpoints or

their own take on the issue (most often both). The notes I took, while rough, illustrated both the

diversity of faith positions within IGR, and the unique way in which interfaith dialogue affirms

difference without attempting to homogenize faiths or look only for similarities. The contents of

my meeting notes are investigated in more detail in my data and discussion chapters.

To summarize, my goal in this chapter has been to demonstrate the usefulness of a

qualitative, ethnographic, participant observation-based approach to IGR based on its

characteristics and the type of rich data I wished to gain from my respondents and observation

notes. My engagement with IGR as a community, and the time I spent with individual members,

allowed me to identify major themes relating both to interfaith work and Canadian

multiculturalism. To expand upon these themes I now turn to my data chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DATA

In this chapter I provide a detailed overview of my interviews with nine respondents from Interfaith Grand River (IGR) as a primary source of information. This is supplemented by my observations stemming from my involvement in the group as both an observer and participant in the group during monthly meetings and at external IGR functions. These interviews and observations took place over a period of some months, beginning with my initial contact with my gatekeeper in August 2009 and ending May 2010. This data thus represents a "snapshot" of the major concerns and activities of IGR and its members during this time.

The collected statements and observations are broken down into six central themes, each comprising of multiple subthemes which explain and expand upon the central category. I begin with a descriptive overview of IGR's origins, its roots in Christian ecumenism, and the structure to which it had evolved during my research. Next, I explain the faith backgrounds of my interview respondents with regard to their experiences with diversity, and some key elements of why they became involved with IGR. The third section focuses on a central issue that emerged from my discussions with respondents; the role IGR should play with regard to focusing on dialogue, social action, or a combination thereof. Section four examines IGR's status within the Kitchener-Waterloo community, and how that specificity affects its goals and interactions within the community. Finally I place IGR within a larger interfaith setting, both in terms of theories and practices and also its connections to and awareness of other interfaith efforts.

Section 1: History and Overview of IGR

I begin with an explanation of the history and structure of IGR, starting with local-level interactions in order to build toward more macro-, national-level issues which emerged from the data. The bulk of this section is drawn from "Meeting Our Multifaith Neighbours" by Brice Balmer, a senior member of IGR who was my gatekeeper and an interview respondent.

However, I also expand on some specific details of IGR's founding and updates to this 2003 work as provided by other respondents and the IGR website (interfaithgrandriver.org).

To start, it is necessary to understand the circumstances within the Kitchener-Waterloo area which preceded the formation of IGR. The demographic makeup of Kitchener-Waterloo has seen drastic changes since the introduction of more open immigration policies in Canada in the 1970's. Originally a very white, Christian area primarily settled by German immigrants, Kitchener-Waterloo has evolved from a small, somewhat rural pair of towns into conjoined cities with strong economic foundations in the technology sector. Two universities and a college have also changed the demographic makeup of this region, with students adding substantially both to its population and diversity. Even beyond the transient student population, however, K-W has seen a drastic rise in the ethnic and racial diversity of its permanent population. As Balmer (2003) explains, this has resulted in substantial increases to the non-Christian religious communities, with Christian congregations remaining relatively stable or declining in size (Balmer 2003: 82). The community's Muslim population in particular has expanded, going from just under 4000 Muslims in 1991 to an expected 22,000 in 2017, with more current figures unavailable (Balmer 2003: 82).

The growth of non-Christian populations in K-W in a relatively short period of time has not just changed the "flavour" of the community, it has brought with it some growing pains as well. Some of the longer-term Christian residents have resisted efforts by local institutions to "accommodate" diversity, an example of which will be covered later in this chapter. At this point it is sufficient to say that the key element of interest for my research in K-W was the recent and substantial expansion of K-W's diverse communities, as this change provided context for the creation of IGR.

The Christian response to K-W's new-found diversity was not entirely negative. Christians in the community had for years been participating in various ecumenical efforts, with the largest presence being the Council of Churches. This group acted as a locus for collective Christian discussion among denominations about theological differences, planning joint social action initiatives, and generally as a place where members could meet and get to know their fellow Christians from different backgrounds. However, it became apparent to some members that ecumenical efforts were not enough. As one of my respondents explained,

> K-W Council of Churches became aware that there was a larger conversation that needed to be had among people of faith, if for no other reason [than] Christians encounter so many other people of other faiths in the course of their day-to-day life. The face of K-W is no longer Christian, no longer white, no longer Native American or northern European and it behooves us to know why...K-W Council of Churches' major outreach at the time was a series of three   dinner meetings each year with a specific topic and speaker. We started off by doing a couple of meetings around immigration, what it's like to be an immigrant and how you find yourself fitting in or not fitting in, in K-W...A number of different people spoke and we had people for whom the experience was their own to speak on panels as well. And then we came up with the idea with having an interfaith dialogue. A series of interfaith dialogues. Christian and something else. So we set them up. There was Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Unitarian…[Respondent 6]

This recognition of the importance of the non-Christian population of K-W, and of the desire to identify and communicate with these populations, was the first step to the creation of IGR as a unified organization. Most of my respondents who were founding members of IGR started as members of the K-W Council of Churches. However, while IGR may have been first thought of by Christians, there was a concerted effort at its founding to limit Christian membership numbers to a minority so that non-Christian members would be better represented (Balmer 2003: 161).

As the feeling that an interfaith organization was needed in K-W grew in some quarters, key members of the Council of Churches who would go on to form IGR began to reach out to minority faith groups in the area using their personal connections and relationships. In

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particular, several of my respondents pointed to Brice Balmer as one of the central figures who made contacts. As one interviewee noted:

> The Council of Churches set up a dinner meeting where Brice Balmer and a Muslim scholar were going to talk over three points of similarity and difference between Islam and Christianity. And I was really impressed at how careful Brice was to stay on those three points ...the communication was really good ...And I ended up leaving the meeting very impressed. [Respondent 8]

Through a series of such interfaith talks, members of the Council of Churches established both a need for and interest in an interfaith presence in K-W. Those members of K-W faith communities with prior experience with interfaith work were also targeted. Members I interviewed noted that prior to 2001 there had been some form of interfaith work attempted in K-W, but that it had not survived. However, those who had experience with other interfaith efforts outside of the K-W area were contacted, as a respondent explains:

> ...We started it as part of an institute called Across Boundaries, which is now the sort of umbrella organization for Interfaith Grand River. But you know, I mean we did some other things as well. There was also an existing multi-faith feminist magazine...which we absorbed and published several issues of as well. And then Interfaith Grand River sort of came up around the same time...The initial discussions were held in the spring and summer of 2001 and, you know, I got a phone call from Brice Balmer sometime during that time, asking me if I...might be interested in this. And so he called me and asked if I would be interested ...this was sort of in the middle of the discussions that led to Across Boundaries, it seemed to make sense to also be involved in a local initiative of this kind and so I agreed to do that. [Respondent 8]

As local support grew for the idea of a local interfaith group during the summer of 2001, and more contacts were established, plans were made for a first meeting:

> In...the spring of 2001, Lorna and Brice and I...spent time thinking and coming up with a bunch of names from people of other faith traditions than Christian whom we thought might be interested in talking with each other and that's what we did. We invited them to a meeting at Catholic Family Counselling. Brice was doing some work there at the time so the space was free and we set it for the second Thursday of September 2001, which was two days after 9/11. By the grace of god or chance depending on how you believe in the world. [Respondent 6]

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The extraordinary coincidence of this timing, and resulting social changes not only to K-W but to North American culture, would shape the context of IGR's future. The immediate backlash against Muslims (see Hoodfar and MacDonough 2005), as well as the Hindu and Sikh populations in K-W, created a sense of urgency that gave IGR's first meeting a highly charged sense of importance. The structure for IGR's work was established from this initial discussion. The organization's name and mission statement were discussed and agreed upon, with the members agreeing that a clear voice for liberal faith was needed to speak out against faith-based hatred in the community. 9/11's impetus can be seen in the emphasis on openness and anti-discrimination within IGR's mission, taken from their website:

> We come together here with the following understanding of our common purpose:
> We are persons of different faith communities, spiritual traditions, cultures, races, colours and genders. Our differences are religious, linguistic, geographical, cultural and personal. It is precisely our differences that bring us together.
> From diverse backgrounds, we strive to live harmoniously as one community. We cultivate an environment of tolerance, understanding, respect, trust, mutual support, and ultimately love. We seek to develop and celebrate an awareness of our interdependence. On the basis of these principles, Interfaith Grand River brings the wisdom of our many traditions to bear on current issues affecting our community.
> (interfaithgrandriver.org)

The principles found in this mission statement have continued to guide IGR's work since it was written ten years ago. The structure of IGR's meetings which, as one respondent noted, grew "organically" from early conversations, also created unwritten guidelines which members have maintained. IGR meets once per month for two hours at the Catholic Family Counselling Centre (now Mosaic Family Counselling and Family Services) in Kitchener. The two-hour session is broken down into two parts, with the first set aside for discussion and dialogue organized around a central social or theological issue. Such issues have included the death penalty, sacred spaces, and multiculturalism; occasionally an external guest speaker has been

brought in to explain a topic outside of the group's expertise. Once the issue has been

introduced, members take turns responding to the issue through the lens of their faith perspective

and their personal understanding of the issue; this dialogue is meant to make members aware not

only of other positions on an issue, but also to make them clarify and explain their own

understanding of their faith's position.

The second hour of each meeting is reserved for discussion and planning of social action

within the K-W area. Individuals inform the group about events being held in the area which

may pertain to the interests of IGR, including their own social justice or educational initiatives.

Members will offer support, suggestions, or comments on the proposed event or action during

this time. Actions specifically initiated as part of an IGR initiative can take up a significant

portion of this hour.

This two-hour meeting is a time for members to network, self-educate, and plan their

efforts throughout the rest of the month. With the exception of a core group of members,

individuals representing faith groups have come and gone since IGR's inception, but the structure

and purpose of the group have remained relatively constant since the first meeting. As one

member I interviewed noted, IGR has become a much more noticeable presence in the K-W area

in the past decade:

> The reality is we are a child of the Council of Churches, a child in the fondest sense. And
> in the 7 - 10 years we have eclipsed our parent because the Council is only one part of the
> Christian spectrum and has to find new ways to sort of be relevant and IGR has kind of
> emerged as being more [than just Christian ecumenism]. [Respondent 4]

With this background in mind, I now turn to a more detailed examination of the dominant themes

which emerged during my research into IGR's structure and goals, starting with the ways in

which individual members were introduced to, and have engaged with, IGR as an organization.

Section 2: Faith Background and Personal Experiences with IGR

In this section, I focus my attention on some of the recurrent themes which emerged when I interviewed IGR members about their individual histories and faith practices. While each interviewee came from a different faith background, their experiences with religion showed some common threads – threads which influenced both their decision to join IGR as well as how they chose to participate.

Prior history of encountering religious diversity

One of the most common similarities among my respondents was that they had had prior encounters with religiously diverse communities or organizations. While some members found the satisfaction of interfaith work to be a surprise they uncovered when they encountered IGR, others had been involved with interfaith work for significant periods of time:

> I moved here in 2005. And right after I moved here I was looking for a local interfaith overarching group and that's how I found out about IGR. I was speaking at a forum and I met somebody from IGR and made a connection and got involved. For the last 20 years of my life, I've been actively involved in [inter]faith work in the United States. So, when I got here, it was a natural fit. [Respondent 5]

While this may seem to be an obvious observation, considering the diversity-centric nature of IGR's interfaith work, it raises several relevant issues which help to contextualize IGR's membership and goals. First, it suggests that exposure to diversity can help promote diversity-affirming values. As one member explained:

> I come from a pretty white bread WASP set of roots that are ecumenical. ..But I grew up in an area of Toronto that was primarily Roman Catholic and Jewish so I was the token Protestant, which was an interesting experience…. But my experience with multi-faith was shaped predominantly in the West because I was working with a downtown Vancouver hospital. It's diverse in a different way than central Canada is, most notably in its cultural and ethnic diversity. [Respondent 2]

This early exposure to a working diversity helped to provide an impetus for some members to pursue studies in religion:

> But at the same time, like I say, I've been in Anglican services. My mother was raised in the Ukrainian Orthodox, so I've been to some of those, not too many. And certainly the funerals are as long as any service. And I've taught comparative religion and the history of religion in my teaching career...The Church of Rome, I have a great deal of respect for and I have a great deal of appreciation [for it]. [Respondent 3]

The centrality of understanding faith, not just one's own but that of other religious traditions, was another dominant idea that emerged from my interviews. Several respondents remarked that they were religious "seekers," never quite satisfied by orthodoxy; they felt compelled not only to embrace their own faith but to test and strengthen it by looking to other religions. By their very act of engaging in a non-confrontational dialogue with those of other faiths members can be seen as followers of a liberal interpretation of religion. This sense of dissatisfaction, of wanting more and finding it through interfaith and/or ecumenical work, was something highlighted during my interview with a member (who was, it should be noted, a cleric):

> I became very interested and involved in inter-church dialogue and ecumenical work and found that very fulfilling and life-giving in a couple of rather difficult situations. My own church stuff wasn't going so well but the [work] outside of my church with other Christians helped keep me going. [Respondent 4]

It became clear during the interview process that while not all IGR members may have been aware of interfaith work prior to their involvement with the organization, their personal histories and predilections for learning more about the diversity of religious expression in the world mark them as belonging to a particular category of religious individual. IGR's members are not likely to identify with religious traditions seen as "evangelical" or "fundamentalist." I return to this

point later in my Analysis about the challenges of "representing" all faith groups in interfaith

efforts – something IGR members would agree is an impossible task.

Current role in faith group

IGR represents a wide array of individuals who serve different roles within their home

faith communities: clergy are certainly well-represented, but so too are the laity with significant

differences in attendance and involvement with their faith group. They range from those who are

fairly orthodox to those positioned largely outside of their faith group. With regard to the clergy

I interviewed, one of the key themes that emerged was that involvement with IGR was largely

self selected and self driven; that is, most were not expected by their congregation to attend

meetings as part of their duties. Without getting into detail, for the moment it is sufficient to

note that clergy members were more likely to take interfaith ideals from IGR meetings and bring

them to their congregation than vice versa. As one respondent explained:

> I feel I represent – fairly represent - the church for the information that I have and the
> understanding that I have. But definitely, on each issue, I come from a personal point of
> view… So, I kind of wear two hats.   [Respondent 4]

There was only one contradicting example of a cleric feeling a congregational obligation to

participate in IGR:

> ...As a Unitarian Minister I have a lot of choice around how I do this, but there was pretty
> much the expectation at my congregation that of course we sit at that table… And of
> course as Minister I would choose to do that if I could. [Respondent 7]

As this respondent explained in more detail, her faith group was uniquely oriented toward

interfaith efforts, as Unitarians hold an extremely diverse series of religious viewpoints; the

acceptance of diversity is a key element of their beliefs. The respondent in question had

inherited her position at IGR from the previous Unitarian minister who had been heavily

involved in the group until he moved from the K-W area. Again, this was an exception rather

than a rule for the clergy involved in the organization and if nothing else highlighted the diversity of reasons for participation.

Non-clergy members of IGR likewise shared a wide array of roles and positions within their religious communities. Some were heavily involved in their faith groups as administrative personnel, lay readers, or organizers, while others were not directly involved with a congregation. This independence, as one member noted, did differentiate them from IGR's clergy representatives:

> Yeah. Well, I don't have a congregation like others there, so I don't have the same pressures, or the same structure to support what I do. [Respondent 1]

That said, of those I interviewed who were not directly leading a congregation, several were involved in leadership roles in other organizations. For example, one interviewee was a nondenominational hospital chaplain; another member led a non-profit group. This is not to imply that IGR is comprised entirely of members in some form of leadership role, but most of those to whom I spoke did take an active role within the community in some capacity. The ramifications of this "active mindset", as it were, are discussed in a later section.

Status within IGR

While members may have been bound together by a shared history of encountering diversity, they differed in the roles they played within IGR and within their own faith communities. Their different outlooks on diversity work were shaped not only by their individual differences, but also by whether they considered themselves "insiders" or more external participants in IGR. Respondents also differed in outlook based on whether they considered themselves to be "representing" (a word frequently problematized by them during interviews) a congregation or to be representing themselves as individuals.

Most of those who defined themselves as IGR insiders had been involved in the organization since its founding in 2001. Organizationally, IGR is comprised of a general membership as well as a steering committee. This committee is an executive subgroup which meets outside of the normal periods of time to plan meeting discussion topics, formulate media responses for the organization, and generally direct actions and organizational directions, although it does not officially "represent" the group. Several founders sit on this committee as essentially permanent members, with other seats being taken by newer members who have shown consistent attendance and interest in membership.

The remaining IGR members vary widely in terms of their attendance and engagement. Some individuals participate through being on IGR's email list, and come to meetings only occasionally. Others attend more consistently, but choose for various reasons to not become involved with the executive. Reasons given for this by such members included lacking the time to be more involved; feeling as though they preferred not to be in a more representative role; and, finally, taking issue with the theoretical idea of having IGR "represented" as a homogeneous organization. One newer member in particular, a member of the clergy, explained why she did not feel as though she wanted to be involved with the steering committee process:

> ...One of my congregants that sits there in another capacity...has asked me as their Minister – because we wear different hats with each other at IGR versus the rest of our lives. But they've approached me as a Minister, challenging me around well, why don't you get in there and, you know, you could make a difference and – and it's like, no, because I've been there for two years and I've simply chosen my place there as a participant and useful as the woman with the title. And I've never said no to anything they've asked me to do. [Respondent 7]

The struggle within IGR to develop a framework for understanding how to organize members and achieve goals without becoming a "speaking for" instead of "speaking to" group is evident

here. One interviewee developed this idea further, pointing to the paradoxical

organized/independent member structure of the group:

> ...But I don't see my role in that group, for now and maybe ever, as being one of the movers and the shakers of the group. I think I bring a valuable voice but I'm quite content in this one area of my life not to be in charge. So I'm – and it's a curious space. It's not the space I normally inhabit in a group. But I think that it's appropriate for this group. [Respondent 7]

The insider/outsider binary label evident within any social organization is, of course, an

element of working within IGR. However, this binary is compounded by the various factors I

mentioned earlier, in particular some interviewees' resistance to the idea of IGR representing one

interest or position, which they felt was antithetical to IGR's larger goal of representing diverse

viewpoints.

IGR's unusual theoretical position is compounded by some members' opposition to the

idea of "speaking for" their faith background. Most were uncomfortable with expressly framing

their personal views on an issue as the "Catholic position" or "Muslim position" on that issue.

There was a strong emphasis among my respondents that, at least in an ideal sense, individuals

represented themselves and their personal interpretation of their faith perspective. This is

interesting for several reasons. First, it demonstrates the higher-level theoretical reasoning which

has become engrained in IGR's organizational structure, i.e. having an approach to faith which at

least acknowledges multiple positions on the "Truth." It also highlights the different reasons

which compelled IGR members to become involved with the organization. Even those who were

members of the clergy or involved in administrative roles within their congregation expressed

this sentiment, often in surprisingly frank ways:

> ...It's not that I represent the Roman Catholics there, I represent [____] and I'm a Roman Catholic. So you get a flavour of what Roman Catholic is by talking to [____]. You do

not see the whole church. Nobody, not even the Pope, can speak for the whole church. [Respondent 6]

Members were not afraid, either in their interviews or at the monthly meetings, to express their own interpretations of their faith with passion and conviction, not as *the* way in which faith could be understood, but rather as *their* way. As members noted and I observed, monthly discussions on issues through faith perspectives could get quite heated, but the debates seemed to work within a framework that emphasized respect for different ideas while still allowing individuals to retain their ideals. There seemed to be a shared recognition of the wide variety of factors which affects one's faith perspective:

> I think most of us who are in IGR, from my understanding, represent ourselves and not necessarily the organizations we come from. Most of us are like that but there are a few that come there as representatives of their churches or their synagogues or their mosques. But I, myself, don't, you know. I have founded a social service organization and I represent myself and, I guess, the organization that I've founded. But mine is a very personal interest, but for others it's more of an organizational involvement. [Respondent 5]

What I gained from these discussions and my observations on individuality within IGR was an understanding of how the organization attempts to link ideas about respecting diverse opinions with a concrete ideological framework that guides debates and members' understanding of their role within the group. In some ways, it may appear as though emphasizing the intersubjective nature of any given member's understanding of their faith background would undermine any claim by IGR to "represent" faith traditions found in K-W. However, this position still allows IGR to have a voice – as one among many – and it also emphasizes that members are individuals speaking *from* a tradition, rather than making them responsible for their faith group as a whole. As the previous respondent noted, that is not possible – and much of the work that IGR does seems to focus on the idea of humanizing one's faith neighbours rather than

categorizing them simply as a member of a monolithic faith group. The idea of members

representing themselves rather than their faith group can act as a powerful tool, one which allows

members to speak their minds without being held responsible for representing an entire group.

Personal ties/friendships stemming from IGR involvement

Members placed a very high value on the friendships they cultivated with other members

during their time with IGR. Even those individuals who had theoretical or ideological issues

with some element of IGR's structure or purpose agreed that, if nothing else, being in the group

created friendships that they otherwise would not have made. As one respondent put it:

> I have great connections. I've made some wonderful friends. Gotten to know some
> really amazing people. And obviously, you know, you'll find that connection with a
> person who thinks alike... and who feels the same. Especially some of the women and
> some men. So I find that, very much – we have some great friendships that have come
> out of IGR. [Respondent 3]

Understanding IGR as a grassroots approach to religious diversity means understanding the

potential power of individuals to engage with and positively change their local communities by

getting to know their neighbours. Another of my interview respondents explained how

personally valuable it was to them to encounter this kind of diversity first-hand:

> I started going to the monthly meetings and I have been going ever since and I look
> forward to them. I have met some incredibly fine people. I have watched some sharing
> go on there that is – is really – well, it's really encouraging that there are people in the
> community that are that thoughtful and...brave enough, I guess, to share very deeply-held,
> personal things...We never sat down and worked out the rules of engagement…It just
> happened. And as a result of that, the sharing has been really, really honest and
> thoughtful. [Respondent 4]

The spontaneous and organic nature of discussion mentioned here directly parallels calls by

theorists such as Lori Beaman (2009) to engage in "open, honest debate" within communities

about local religious issues. The "honest" and "thoughtful" kind of sharing mentioned by this

respondent can be thought of as an ideal outcome of grassroots diversity work, and contrasts with

more wide-ranging but less personally meaningful top-down approaches to diversity management through policies and laws.

The final point on this issue is the long-term commitment to IGR's goals which has resulted from the friendships made within the organization. There was an expectation among several members that IGR's work, and their friendships, would continue to play a role in K-W's religious landscape for the foreseeable future. One interviewee stated that

> ...[T]hey have changed me and I think I have changed them and we're discovering this stuff together and, you know, it's all good. Yeah. There have been some very personal relationships formed there and I expect them to continue, at some level, and grow and change. [Respondent 3]

The complex and ever-changing issues that frame religious diversity cannot ever be said to be "solved" in a complete way; it is difficult to imagine a time where the need to discuss, debate, and act upon diversity will be considered obsolete. Thus, the importance of long-term bonds of friendship which can reinforce and bind members of diversity-centred groups like IGR should not be underestimated.

Section 3: Dialogue versus Action, Dialogue as Action

The previous section focused on individual member experiences with diversity-related activities and with IGR as an organization. Their experiences not only shaped members' understandings of the organization, but also the organization's structure. This section focuses on an especially important debate/theme regarding what IGR as an organization *should* be doing, according to competing claims by members. These three positions can roughly be understood as "action over dialogue," "dialogue over action," and "dialogue/action codependence."

Action over dialogue

The values espoused by those members who fell within the "pro-action" camp stemmed primarily from their understanding that their work was community-focused. These members understood IGR to be an organization located within the K-W community, and one which had a duty to promote positive social change by engaging with K-W's faith groups and the general population.

In our interviews I frequently sensed a frustration with what they saw as too much of an emphasis on dialoguing about interfaith issues with little attempt to reach out to the broader society. They were of the opinion that talking alone could not promote social change, as one member argued:

> ...There will be some difficulties because not everybody sees IGR as an organization that should be involved in the doing part you know? Many of the folks are content with feel good talk. I'm not. [Respondent 5]

When I discussed some of the dialogue-centric activities to which IGR has committed within the K-W community, specifically around raising awareness of interfaith issues, the member in question agreed that this was an important form of outreach. However, they asked

> Is having a conference about issues of diversity going to change anything about bringing multiculturalism in a society? But that's the easy way out, you know? [Respondent 5]

While those who were more "pro-action" understood that some discussion was necessary, they also felt that IGR's almost exclusive focus on dialogue limited their ability to promote social change in the K-W area. Their impatience stemmed also from that fact that IGR is a largely inward-looking organization. There was also a sense that IGR was beginning to shift toward a more community-oriented stance, but that the transition was not an easy one:

> I'm a talker, but I'm also a doer. So, I think I bring the doing aspect to my work, in whatever work I get involved. And I've tried to do that at IGR and I think it's that doing

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that has suddenly, in a way – is beginning to redefine the role of IGR and that's a struggle that we are still, you know, going through and I think it's going to redefine IGR as an organization and its structure as an organization. [Respondent 7]

Likewise, the "pro-action" members suggested that wholly dialogue-driven approach to interfaith allowed some conflict-averse members to avoid addressing real structural issues that, in their words, required courage to confront in K-W's society:

When you really have to match what you say with what you do, it's tough. It's really tough because, you know, if you are a white person and you are standing up for an issue, whatever that issue might be, you're going to have six other or ten other whites against you who are not quite there yet, even in theory. You know? So, there's that fear of reprisal and very few people are brave enough to speak up. The other thing that I think holds people back is this nicey-nicey culture of politeness. You know? You don't have to be impolite to be active but you do have to take a stand. [Respondent 5]

The "nicey-nicey" approach to diversity, as the member in question put it, lies at the heart of the action versus dialogue debate in some ways. Within the confines of IGR's discussion group and network of friendships, members largely feel free and comfortable to express their faith and opinions. Pro-action members interviewed suggested that this comfortable atmosphere created a false sense of accomplishment, where like-minded liberal religionists were free to "preach to the converted", to borrow a phrase. The above member, and others of a like mind, emphasized that in their external experiences with diversity, interfaith work within the larger society was messy, complicated, and often required uncomfortable conversations when confronting discriminatory words or actions. IGR's perceived movement toward larger social action met with this group's approval. However, as explained in the next section, it met with resistance from other members who saw IGR's overall goals as rooted not in social change but building networks.

Dialogue over action

The "pro-dialogue" members that I interviewed and observed during IGR's meetings have a different understanding of where the organization should head. They see IGR's primary goal as

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the development of dialogue and friendships among members. In other words, they place less

emphasis on, even resist the idea that IGR has a responsibility to promote social change within

the K-W community.

> We've been doing a little more business-type stuff over the last little while, which - in
> part because of the Gideon thing and all that makes a certain amount of sense, but there's
> always a temptation with any group to get into programming. Because that's how we, you
> know, we justify ourselves a little bit. Simply just sitting around talking doesn't count as
> a good use of time. It's sort of the mentality among us in this part of the world. Have to
> do something. Have to accomplish something. And IGR maintaining that first hour as
> no, we're not going to do that. We're going to talk. You know, talking together is doing
> something. Listening to each other is doing something. Sometimes it's more important to
> do that than other kinds of programming things. [Respondent 4]

The member quoted above promoted the idea that "talking can be doing," and stressed

the idea that without a strong organizational base, established through meaningful dialogue

between members, IGR cannot survive as a group. In contrast with the comments made by pro-

action respondents, pro-dialogue interviewees stressed the need to create a comfortable

environment where members could speak their minds without fear of repercussion or

persecution. The idea of the equality and similarity of different viewpoints was emphasized; as

one respondent said, "spiritual talk is spiritual talk on some level, no matter, you know, what

your different traditions are."

When real difference manifests itself, i.e. when a different outlook directly conflicts with

the moral values of a member, the pro-dialogue members highlighted the value of "making

room" for said difference to be negotiated:

> This one [IGR] was – was very much outside my comfort zone for a while. I heard some
> stories that made my ears curdle and really stirred things up inside of me. But the people
> were very welcoming and gave me time to wrestle with some of that stuff.
> [Respondent 3]

What the pro-dialogue respondents made clear was that they did not believe that IGR was inherently meant to be a group that has a direct social responsibility to the K-W community. They believed that

> the primary focus of the group is to enable the dialogue and unless the dialogue is continuing, any amount of doing you're doing is going to – it's going to fall apart eventually because you're not in dialogue anymore. [Respondent 9]

In essence, they felt IGR's independence from the larger community was an asset. It acted as a kind of safe haven for meetings and discussions that could not necessarily take place outside the group. For members of "majority" religions in particular, it served as a way to be introduced to religious of which they would otherwise be not aware.

Even those who were "pro-action" saw the value that dialogue could have in terms of education and awareness-raising. My point in highlighting these contrasting positions is not to take a side but rather to give a sense of the kinds of discussions that played out in IGR during my research period.

A third position taken by some members of IGR placed equal value on both the dialogue and action elements of interfaith work. This seems to be the direction in which IGR is headed.

Dialogue and Action as codependent

For a third group of memebrs, taking action over dialogue, or vice versa, would lead to IGR's eventual decline. Members who saw equal value in both social action and dialogue emphasized that to "take a position" within this binary was to subscribe to a false either/or, for the line between the two is in fact unclear and arbitrary. Those who took a "middle" position argued that an interfaith initiative fundamentally needs a combination of the two not only to survive, but to grow and develop power within the community.

One of the primary ideas advanced by those who held this position was that open and honest debate is necessary to inform, structure, and ground social action. They stressed the importance of creating a socially strong group in order to create the possibility of institutional action:

> [IGR Member] had some cautions for us right off the top. He said he'd been involved in multi-faith dialogues several times before and most of them had foundered on the cost of doing. And varying energy levels around varying topics and just the group fell apart because it became something that needed to be done and people just - I can't bother, I can't do it. So he cautioned us to be really, really attentive to the being part of the group. To be very determined and intentional about being together, whether or not anything got done or not. And we've tried. [Respondent 9]

From the view of those who held this position, the inseparability of action and dialogue within interfaith work had to be rooted in the idea that the group in question has enough social cohesion and interest to remain together. Group members must know enough about each other's positions on relevant issues to be able to reach enough of a consensus to act:

> Well, for me I think we have to have both [action and dialogue] and it's not an either/or kind of thing. And in fact somebody said it fairly well, that we have this hour of dialogue which in some ways draws us together and we understand each other. And if we don't have that understanding of who everybody is, where they come from and what might be the issues, then you don't have a – you don't have a base for the action. [Respondent 8]

If dialogue gives the group a common base from which to operate, then social projects within a community were seen to give IGR direction and purpose, a framework within which to structure itself and a source of additional material and reason to dialogue. One of IGR's initial actions as an interfaith group was to help design and implement a multifaith prayer room for a local K-W hospital. The chaplain of that hospital (also an IGR member) explained how this project influenced IGR's early direction:

> And I dare say we had a project. I mean, not to overstate the sanctuary, but it gave us something to work on right off the bat. And I think there's something valuable in that.

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And it's basically a claim. And we had one sort of stroke of a project. We redefined what had been defining the sacred space of the hospital. [Respondent 2]

Some members noted on this account that in addition to the value that projects like the multifaith prayer room provided to IGR, they also provided an opportunity to "give back" to the K-W community. Even many of those who placed a strong value on the personal value of their engagement with IGR, and emphasized the educational role IGR could play in introducing members to issues regarding religious diversity, saw a need for IGR to be publicly involved with the K-W community:

> ...Definitely there's always an active side to it. You meditate to make yourself strong and understand, but then you go forward, because you're part of humanity. "Public service is the rent you pay for the space you occupy." And I always thought that too. We're here, we're blessed, especially in this community. So, we better appreciate that and we better make some contributions to justify the space we're taking up here.

While I have mentioned debates within IGR around issues of whether or not the group can be said to "speak for" individual members, there seemed to be a general recognition that having IGR act as a public voice for liberal faith positions was generally a positive thing, and one that fell within its mandate:

> On the other hand, I think that if we don't have that dialogue part and that sort of community building part among ourselves, it's – I mean, these things like responding to the Gideon Bible controversy or responding to the attacks on the Mosque in Waterloo and – or in Guelph. I mean, I think we must be able to do that. I mean, we need to have that sort of sense of community and trust that comes through dialogue. I think it stands also, and I found this especially working on Compass, I mean it comes through sort of working together on a shared project. [Respondent 8]

As a whole, members of IGR saw themselves as serving a larger public good through both their dialogue with each other and the community at large and with their action-oriented goals. There was a strong shared understanding that IGR was formed to confront specific social ills which had manifested themselves within the K-W area, primarily faith-based prejudice and

discrimination against minority faith group members. One means of doing this was "giving voice" to minority group members who would not otherwise be heard within a public forum.. It was generally agreed that IGR was moving toward becoming more socially engaged through media releases, public talks, and social justice projects, regardless of whether or not an individual member saw that as a positive development. As I will expand upon in the discussion chapter, this commitment to public speech mirrors Habermas' theories of communicative action which were referenced in the literature chapter.

Sections 4 and 5 focus on how this emphasis - creating a social justice role for IGR within the K-W community - translated into changes within the local area, and how as an ideal type it could be seen to reflect on a larger Canadian position with faith-based diversity, especially with regard to existing multicultural policies. To this end I now turn to a discussion of IGR's role as a local organization based on specific ideological stances taken by individual members and the group as a whole.

Section 4: IGR's Localized Status in Kitchener-Waterloo

Throughout the time I spent with IGR and its members, either individually or in meetings, I was continually made aware of different positions members took on IGR's role, goals, and motivations. The emphasis placed on individuals representing themselves and not their faiths certainly reinforced the idea that IGR's goal was to address and celebrate differences, rather than necessarily focus on commonalities and uniformity. While members embraced the idea of multiple and varied identities within the group, all members saw themselves as part of the Kitchener-Waterloo community. This emphasis on local issues, and the commitment to the K-W community by members, was made clear both implicitly and explicitly – most obviously in Interfaith Grand River's very name. The one thing members shared was a geographic and

sociocultural location, as argued by a member when asked about the possibility of "taking IGR global":

> Q. [Would you support] IGR branches?
> A. No. And that's exactly where you don't want to go. That's exactly, because it's Interfaith Grand River. So it's got to be Interfaith Speed River and Interfaith Thames, whatever. It was interesting. You should talk to Steve about – maybe you've read his watershed thing on the website. Go find the watershed piece on the website because finding a name for ourselves was a huge task and if you notice, we've come up with two adjectives and no noun, because we couldn't find a noun that worked that we were comfortable with. There was no consensus around the noun but the adjectives were Interfaith because that's what were about and Grand River, because that's where we're located. [Respondent 6]

With this position in mind, I cover some of the ways in which this commitment to a specific social location played out in practice and in theory.

IGR as point of contact for liberal religion in K-W

One of the first things I was made aware of during my initial meetings with my gatekeeper was that IGR was intended to act as a voice for faith groups in the K-W area. It also quickly became apparent that IGR made no claims to represent *all* faith groups and positions in the K-W area. Rather, it represented a liberal, moderate subset of members who saw value in interfaith efforts. On occasion IGR was called to play a more oppositional role in contrast to fundamentalist or evangelical religious groups in the K-W region. A recent example is the "Gideon Bible controversy."

To describe this event in brief: within the local elementary public school system an effort was made by a conservative Christian group to distribute Bibles to all schoolchildren. These Bibles were abridged editions which contained additional commentary by the Gideon Society, and portrayed a socially conservative interpretation of the Christian message. A non-Christian member of IGR who happened to have children to whom Bibles were distributed became very

concerned about the apparently proselytory nature of this handout. The IGR member made IGR aware of the event and likewise complained to the K-W school board. IGR entered the discussion in opposition of the handout, engaged in a public discussion (through newspaper, radio, and local television interviews), and generally attempted to raise awareness and combat a backlash by some parents and community members who saw opposition to the Bible handout as indicative of unwelcome social and demographic changes within the K-W area, appealing to K-W's original Christian heritage as justification.

The controversy helped to heighten IGR's public profile and to spur them to further engagement within the public sphere. This event helped to define IGR's role as a voice for a liberal faith position, with Christian members also expressing concern about what the event represented for the local community:

> And we're raising a whole generation – which has been a real concern of IGR, which is why they wanted to be available to the schools not in a proslelytizing way to say the least, but it's fantastic to watch the reluctance of the School Board when you go and raise something like the Gideons as if it's harmless. And I'm not saying the Gideons are harmful, I don't mean that, but they are really underestimating the – what they're not doing here for kids. [Respondent 4]

During discussions with these Christian IGR members, they expressed a deep concern not just for other faiths being excluded from the school system, but also for what they saw as a misrepresentation by conservative Christians of a falsely monolithic religion, that is, an ignorance for the diversity of positions within the category of "Christian."

Of course, within a group that values diversity, there will be dissenting opinions, and IGR's role in the Gideon debate caused some serious concerns to be raised. One concern in particular was that IGR was overstepping its bounds. No longer just a public resource for local faith diversity, it had become a partisan group with a social action agenda:

Now I find the – the current position we're moving into about becoming a public – well, I called it a think tank at one meeting. That to me still fits as a – we're sort of a resource for these things. But having to take positions on public issues, that is getting a little stickier. Because it's more precise and you're certainly in the middle of a very controversial thing that's happening. [Respondent 3]

While this critique was acknowledged by other members of the group, the dominant opinion seemed to be in favour of moving IGR further toward becoming a more active player in the K-W community. Part of that development, some members argued, needed to come from an increase in membership and public awareness of IGR's existence:

I'm hoping that we can facilitate further conversations. And I see some of that coming but at this point they aren't happening – I would like us to be able to reach a broader public than I currently do with my email list. So I can conceive of there being sort of layers of membership, if you like. Layers of connectedness. People who come and talk once a month. [Respondent 6]

This move toward a broader connection with the larger K-W community ties back to a feeling among some members, as mentioned in a prior section, that IGR has an obligation to be a good "local citizen". To do this required greater public awareness of IGR's interfaith efforts. Some saw IGR's position on the Gideon controversy as a stepping stone to further action, and as a way to combat a perception that conservative religious groups, particularly evangelical Christians, set the parameters of the faith conversation in the area. Christian and non-Christian IGR members expressed this feeling of being looked down upon, or having betrayed their own faith, by engaging in interfaith work.

And it's [IGR] not for [just] anybody. The current pastor of the church where I used to work wouldn't be caught dead coming to something like that. And there's lots of other people of all faith stripes who don't. Don't subscribe to the kind of dialogue that happens in th[is] group. They would find it offensive or threatening. One of those two or maybe both. [Respondent 9]

This oppositional attitude toward other faith groups was something that IGR members saw as a key problem within the K-W community, particularly among certain Christian elements. They

viewed this refusal to engage with non-Christian members of the community as one of the

central causes of discriminatory talk and action in Kitchener-Waterloo, and thus as a major

hurdle to a more diversity-affirming society.

Key role for IGR: to speak out against local faith-based discrimination

Some IGR's members positioned themselves against this perceived background of anti-

diversity sentiment. They felt they had duty to speak out against and oppose by their actions

faith-based discrimination in K-W on all levels, from bigoted comments to acts of violence

against minority faith members and religious sites. One member spoke out against what they

saw as the Christian-centric perspective of some of the longer-term members of the K-W

community:

> I think we live in a very small town and all of this is very new to them. And there is
> tremendous resistance to change and people want to maintain the old order of things.
> And many are very surprised that Canada is not a Christian country. They keep touting
> that it is a Christian country and we need to remind them that your preamble states
> otherwise and that, you know, your Constitution says you are a multicultural country.
> [Respondent 9]

While an element of the local population was seen to have a problem with religious diversity,

there was also a concern with addressing other expressions of religious discrimination between

and among K-W's religious minorities. This was often triggered by disputes between groups

who are in conflict on a larger, more global level:

> …the one issue we did have [that] was very serious, several years ago, was when that
> commentator got the Islamic representative to say that every Israeli was a legitimate
> target. I think three or four years ago. And we had, at the time, a young rabbi in our
> group, who - he's since gone back to Israel. But he had been in a café that had been
> bombed. He had escaped injury himself but he was that close to it. And, he – that remark
> really just – he just couldn't accommodate that remark. And we had - we have, as you
> see, Islamic representatives in our midst as well. And that put a lot of stress on us for
> several months there to get that sorted out. [Respondent 6]

Due in part to IGR's increased visibility within the K-W community, members increasingly were called upon to act as representatives of interfaith values in groups and events outside of IGR's control, a role that was welcomed by members who participated:

> As one of the Christian members, they thought it was important that, you know, Christian members be involved in that discussion and I ended up writing an article for the paper because of that. And I – yesterday, I don't know if you saw the paper or heard about it, there was a grassroots Muslim women's group that pulled together a bit of an event at the City Hall – the Kitchener City Hall last night, about the niqab and Bill 94 in Quebec. And they ended up asking me to be one of the interfaith responders to the presentation… [Respondent 4]

IGR's growing role as a source of interfaith expertise within the K-W region and, by extension, as a vocal opponent of religious discrimination, was thus seen as a significant advancement for the group by many members in terms of developing their identity and fulfilling a duty to be a positive influence in the community.

Recognition by members of IGR's role as a local "grassroots" approach to diversity

To return to this section's original emphasis on IGR's local nature, I should note that several members spoke to me about the benefits of being a group with a sense of place. In their view it is important not to overstep their bounds, to remain within the community they occupy and understand. One in particular explicitly talked about IGR as a "grassroots" organization, one that sought to work within a predefined boundary in order to achieve micro-level, but understandable change:

> In communities, it has to happen at grassroots level. The change, really, I believe from the - has to come from below. At the same time, to accommodate, promote true diversity or true multiculturalism in Canada, there needs to be top down involvement. Not just on paper but in true reality. [Respondent 9]

This awareness of, but stepping back from national-level diversity issues is a topic I return to in the discussion chapter, but for the moment I want to underline the idea that at least some

members within the group saw themselves as working within a larger framework of promoting

and supporting a diverse society. This awareness seemed to be a major motivation for those

members who saw IGR's role as one of promoting both dialogue and action within the

community.

> Being a think tank is useful if the things you're thinking about are having a benefit in the community. If we just meditate and contemplate and keep it all within ourselves, we're benefiting, but that's the end of the benefit. That's the personal benefit. I do think we definitely have a place to be a resource in the community, and a source. [Respondent 9]

At the same time, members regarded strong intra-IGR relationships as relevant, in part because

the bonds they shared had a more personal impact.:

> …It's really obvious that we have a relationship with one another. That's a powerful representation to people. And because we've sat at that table together and talked and laughed and had fellowship, here's a genuine bond between many of us that grows over time, so that there's not a falseness of okay, so send me someone – you know, we need a diverse panel, let's find someone who can wear X, Y and Z. [Respondent 7]

In the end, the members of this "faction" within IGR emphasized the relevance of both

dialogue and action in the local community. They argued that between the micro-level personal

connections and the macro-level ideas of national multiculturalism and global interfaith efforts

there exists a meso-level of community engagement that constituted a highly effective way to

approach diversity-building exercises. They regarded IGR as an effective grassroots community

group because it had a focus large enough to have a social impact, yet remained sufficiently

contained that members were located in and aware of the local community. As members in a

grassroots organization they understand themselves as local experts making decisions about a

community about which they have an intimate knowledge of. Even more importantly, they have

a personal stake in defending their community. The perception of IGR as a grassroots

organization is thus a vital element not only of what it is, but of how it operates and what direction it should take.

Section 5: IGR's Interfaith Ties and Practices

The strength of IGR's local ties with Kitchener-Waterloo's faith communities is a major asset for the organization in terms of promoting its ideals. But what of the ideals themselves? As I will explain in the following section, IGR is an organization firmly rooted in interfaith ideals and aware of the larger interfaith context in which it exists.

Aware of, but independent from other interfaith organizations

During the course of my research I became aware of other, peripheral connections between IGR and other interfaith organizations. Their connections are maintained primarily by certain longer-serving core members gained through years of working in diversity-related fields. Several members had been involved with other interfaith groups in other cities or countries during their careers. There was a recognition that other cities in Ontario, particularly Toronto, had interfaith organizations working in some capacity with ideals similar to those espoused by IGR.

However, this familiarity did not translate into wanting to expand IGR's role or connect with other local-based initiatives. The local community focus discussed in the previous section remained firmly in place when it came to other interfaith efforts. One member explained his resistance to larger interfaith-based connections in different terms:

> I think maintaining independence is very important, although IGR for financial reasons, for the few hundred dollars that we get in donations, has now an alliance with Across Boundaries, which is a larger multi-faith institute. But it's a temporary arrangement and I would like it to stay temporary because I think the independence of Interfaith Grand River is extremely important and should be valued that way. I don't think that we necessarily have to be part of any bureaucracy because as soon as you become part of an institutionalized bureaucracy you are going to be dictated by their norms which takes

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away a lot of independence of thought, expression and doing. [Respondent 8]

This conviction, conveyed in different words by other members with whom I spoke, pointed to what was perceived as one of IGR's strengths – the freedom to respond to faith-based issues in K-W without feeling external pressure to conform. Most members were adamant that their individual voices were vital in maintaining IGR's strength through a diversity-based approach to interfaith work. While this caused some problems when trying to build a group voice as mentioned above, members saw IGR's independence as a group to be an important part of the organization's interfaith ideology.

Explicit use of interfaith theories and terminology

One of the first discussions with my IGR gatekeeper concerned the nature of interfaith work, and the natural variance in understandings of it that I saw manifested in interfaith literature. According to him, great deal of thought and discussion had gone into every element of IGR's stated goals and ideological positioning, especially when it came to naming the group:

> Well, I guess I harken back to when they were choosing the name for the organization. And the word they spent the most time on was multi-faith or interfaith. So it's not just a collection of diversity, but there's an interaction, as I understand the word. [Respondent 2]

There was an explicit recognition of interfaith values from IGR's largely informal beginning, and one of the most important values being promoted was that IGR was meant to be a source for "real discussion, real debate" (Beaman 2009) as opposed to simply being a showcase for local diversity.

Another important interfaith value espoused by IGR was the idea that the group should be a "safe haven" for discussion between members, a place to explore and explain one's faith without the vitriol and attempts to convert sometimes found between faith groups:

One of the great things about IGR – and like I said I haven't had a lot of experience with other groups. I know there have been other interfaith groups that have formed out there. And who have nowhere near the staying power that IGR has. And I think, in part, that's because of the ground rules that were laid out right at the beginning. This is not, not, not a place for – a Christian word would be evangelism or proselytising. Trying to make – you know, show them the error of their ways. I mean, I've got enough errors in my ways, thank you very much. Nor is it a – an attempt to form one, sort of, grand theology, which will encompass all the traditions. [Respondent 3]

The point made by this member points to a question found in my review of interfaith literature – is it possible to accurately reflect the diversity of opinions which form the very nature of an interfaith group like IGR without falling into the trap of relativism? Taken another way, avoidance of this "grand theology" where all religions are the same is vital; IGR's mission in part is to discuss religious differences, not resolve them or unify them. This "middle road" between absolutism and relativism is thus the one that IGR's members attempt to navigate.

This leads to a final interfaith ideal that IGR members referred to; the idea that the group is best served not by members necessarily seeking a compromise in their faiths, but rather by their commitment to use their encounters with diversity to strengthen their own positions for the betterment of all. As one member argued:

Again, I don't put my [faith] aside when I step into that room. They don't want me to. They want me to bring that because they recognize – you know, we need each other, for heaven sakes. I need them to be the best Muslims, Hindus, Neo-Pagans that they can be, just like they need me to be the best [person of faith] I can be. And we can discover that we can – that we can discover we have a bunch of things in common, in spite of the differences. And we can also discover that we can live with each other with our differences. Not even in spite of them. With them. And that's pretty radical in this polarized world. [Respondent 3]

Members, therefore, not only see themselves either implicitly or explicitly referencing interfaith values, but also see these values in the context of a larger problem within Canadian society, and indeed in all societies. IGR can be understood, then, as a localized example of interfaith values at work, values which are seen to be important not only in Kitchener-Waterloo, but around the

world. Members thus connected their individual dialogue and shared action to a larger interfaith framework.

Aware of larger context of diversity, IGR's role in larger society

From this awareness of a globalized interfaith initiative members recognized that there was a distinct lack of organization and consistency in how interfaith has been approached to date. I previously noted that members rejected a homogeneous "one size fits all" model for interfaith; nevertheless, members did see the value in publicizing IGR's success in part so that newly fledged interfaith groups could have a sense of what worked and what did not. There was also a sense that making a wide array of organizations and institutions aware of the power of interfaith group work would perhaps encourage other communities to emulate K-W's relative success in this field. For example, one member who was closely involved in IGR's efforts to create an interfaith room at a local hospital commented on the value other hospitals saw in IGR's engagement:

> IGR was the crucible of that conversation and we talked to other hospitals in other parts of the province and to some extent they are very envious that we have kind of an advisory group that takes ownership. [Respondent 2]

The Grand River Hospital outcome was seen as one concrete example of the power of interfaith work that could be broadcast through IGR publicity efforts. Some members saw IGR as a maturing interfaith effort which should, as part of "giving back" to the wider community, be "building bridges" not only in K-W but also to other locales which expressed interest in developing interfaith initiatives. Even within the K-W community members recognized the need for more grassroots, faith-based diversity building:

> So I would hope that as IGR develops those outreach pieces can happen. People who want to start the community dialogue in their own neighbourhood. So a similar thing to

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what IGR does, let's do that in my community centre, in my kid's school, whatever, so that I can meet my multi-faith neighbour. [Respondent 6]

There was a hope expressed by some respondents that with an investment of time and energy, IGR could help promote interfaith values far beyond the confines of the local community:

You know, I would like to see something happen where we start to work with, you know, with interfaith groups all over Canada, or at least all over Ontario. [Respondent 9]

On the subject of promoting interfaith within and beyond K-W, opinions in IGR were as diverse as the faith positions represented. However, one constant was the idea that the more voices there were discussing interfaith issues, the better. There was a recognition that interfaith as a movement is still in its infancy, and that there was a great deal of room available in K-W, Canada, and the world for more interfaith groups to develop themselves and interfaith ideals overall.

Value of localized "grassroots" interfaith work

I want to briefly reinforce here the value that members placed on the localized nature of IGR's interfaith work, and the way in which this commitment to grassroots-level social action was tied to an understanding of interfaith theory as explicitly rooted in the community. For example, one respondent expressed her appreciation for IGR's emergent role as a source of specialized and location-specific knowledge on religious issues in the K-W community:

...It's quite interesting [that] the media recognized our presence and, you know, ask for a statement from the – sort of, wisdom from the leaders of the community - religious leaders of the community. I'm not a religious leader, I'm just a layperson, but they were looking for something coming from our group that has diverse religious leaders, you know, getting together. [Respondent 2]

Since IGR's founding, the group has promoted public discussions, and members have engaged with the general public in the K-W area through various channels. What emerged during my research was a recognition by the public of this expertise, with the result that IGR's members

were increasingly being approached by the media and other various groups to act as commentators or consultants. Members believed that this new-found recognition of IGR's interfaith expertise was amplified by the fact that members were not only familiar with interfaith, but were members of, and in a sense experts in, the local K-W community. They felt this made them uniquely qualified to talk about community-specific faith issues.

Alongside this new-found sense of expertise came expressions of caution. Some members were worried that local recognition and encouragement to become more involved in local issues would cause IGR to lose its grassroots status. It would be undermined, they felt, by an inclination to have the group become more formalized and hierarchical. In other words, they were afraid that members would lose their individual voices in the rush to create a united organizational voice that would presume to comment on local issues:

> I'm concerned that IGR become – not become a voice of any one. Or, in fact, any group. To date, aside from that one response, there have been very few IGR says. There have been many more my name's [_____] and I belong to IGR and I say....And I think, really, if you buy into the notion of big, then you need IGR to say things. But if you're willing to understand that big happens because of many littles, then the other is just as valuable. [Respondent 6]

Some members noted a tension in terms of IGR's grassroots status: they wished to use IGR's members' unique talents to serve the K-W community, while at the same time preserving the micro- interactions between members that made IGR strong. Members endorsed the idea that "big happens because of many littles" - larger social change was dependent on the actions of individuals and small groups working within the closed cultures of localized communities.

Hope for larger interfaith role in Canada

The final theme concerns the hope expressed by some members that interfaith values would grow, through the actions of groups like IGR, into a full-fledged alternative approach to

handling faith-based diversity in Canadian society. I mentioned above the conflict between the

members who supported this approach and those who wanted IGR to remain more inward-

looking. However, it is important to recognize that those members who favoured social action

were not only aware of a larger set of interfaith theories which guided their interactions, but also

of interfaith as an international movement with specific potential implications for Canadian

society. My methodology chapter noted that members of IGR were self-aware research subjects,

difficult to classify as "vulnerable" and well-educated. Many served in positions of authority

within their faith groups or within the community. In general, they were actively helpful in

identifying literature on diversity issues and interfaith efforts. This highlights interviewees'

awareness of the status of Canadian interfaith efforts, an awareness evident in this respondent's

comments:

> We have maybe, if you look it up on the internet [a] site on the internet that showed the
> different interfaith organizations, who they were around – less than 50. So, you know,
> there's a sense in which Interfaith Grand River is paving the way. The Interfaith Social
> Systems Reform Coalition, which I am a part of, is also on that list. Toronto Area
> Interfaith Coalition, which started many – I mean, it started maybe four or five years ago.
> They're on the list. But you think of how is it that we have only a couple per province in
> Canada? And you know, some of them have very specific things to do, like the Ontario
> Multi-Faith Council is supervising chaplains in hospitals and stuff like that.
> [Respondent 8]

The fragmentary nature of interfaith work becomes evident here, something other scholars of

Canadian interfaith have noted (see Lamoureux-Scholes 2007). Members such as the one quoted

directly above, who are connected to multiple interfaith initiatives, expressed their dissatisfaction

the situation.

> ...So it's not a – I mean there is some interfaith discussion that goes on there [Ontario
> Multi-Faith Council] but it's very focused, whereas Toronto Area Interfaith, Interfaith
> Grand River, you know, some of us have a larger focus. But at this point we don't have a
> national group like the Interfaith Network of United Kingdom, to – begin to focus us. I
> think that's probably another step. [Respondent 9]

What should be emphasized here is that the member in question was not saying that IGR should expand to have a more national mandate, a direction that some of the more anti-action members of IGR would oppose. Rather, the interviewee wanted to see a proliferation of interfaith groups at the local level, with a national interfaith organization to potentially act as a focal point and promoter for interfaith ideals, ideals starting in from grassroots community-centred groups. Members who took this position saw the expansion and professionalization of interfaith groups like IGR as a natural and necessary progression if larger interfaith goals, namely promoting faith-based diversity and combating discrimination, were to be achieved.

> There's something in there [IGR's charter] about challenging expressions of intolerance in the community and you know, I think both in the case of the Gideon Bible controversy and in the case of the attack on the Mosque and the Gurdwara, we felt that these were expressions of intolerance in the community and they needed to be challenged. And so – I mean, I don't see that as a departure for IGR, as sort of taking up an aspect – more taking up an aspect of its mandate that maybe had not been as fully developed in the past. [Respondent 4]

This quote shows the impetus for social action that not only propelled pro-action members to become more involved in the K-W community, but also structured their understanding that there is a need for more macro-level action in Canadian society.

I argue that any line drawn between IGR's problems as it is attempts to manage diverse faith groups and the Canadian federal government's problems in doing the same is arbitrary. Local problems have roots in national and international troubles, and national troubles reflect international problems at the same time they constitute an agglomeration of local issues. To promote diversity in K-W is to do so in the larger national context; in order to understand local problems you need a deeper historical view of the root causes of those problems. Members understood that no social issue occurs in a vacuum; this translated into a recognition that change

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comes both from grassroots-level approaches and national-level policies enacted by governments and institutions. Efforts by individual members of interfaith groups creates community-level change, and communities impact the national context, which in turn influences how individuals see themselves and the communities in which they find themselves.

I want to emphasize one theme in particular before beginning my analysis chapter. Simply put, as both an ideal and as a lived experience interfaith is by its very nature highly subjective. This subjectivity is generally seen as strength. Members' steadfast unwillingness to create a single understanding of interfaith, or indeed a single understanding of anything relating to faith, is firmly grounded in the view that homogeneity is a false construct – it does not exist - and a simplification of real experiences in religious life. That said, during my time with IGR members I noted great tension among some of them as they tried to maintain this diversity while also struggling to achieve the organization's goals of promoting diversity and combating discrimination based on faith. It is on a middle ground - focusing on a common goal while maintaining the voices of all - that IGR rested while struggling to understand its future. In the discussion chapter I highlight how this struggle mirrors larger issues at play within Canadian society, and I portray IGR as one way of understanding how to incorporate religious diversity into Canada's existing multicultural model.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Throughout the previous chapters I have explained IGR's role within the K-W community as an interfaith group, and to provide background on the current state of religious diversity in Canadian society. My goal has been to understand what, if any potential significance IGR has for religious inclusivity in Canada's multicultural climate. In this chapter I argue that IGR does have an impact, or at least potential impact, if it is understood as a "boiler plate" for interfaith organization, one which presents an alternative model to handling religious diversity at the community level, in contrast to existing multicultural policies which are top-down and (by necessity) generalized to fit the widest possible audience. I believe that IGR's emphasis on dialogue and relationship-building between individuals and religious groups deserves greater attention from policy-makers, local governments, and the public eye in general.

In order to make this case, I briefly connect the five sub-themes which emerged from my data chapter with ideas from my literature chapter. This allows me to draw generalizations about IGR from the specifics that I encountered as a researcher. I discuss in greater detail the ramifications for official Canadian multiculturalism that interfaith work presents in its current incarnation. I then present some of the ways that I think interfaith has relevance for existing diversity management strategies. I conclude with some thoughts on what IGR's work represents for theoretical concerns about the interpretive nature of identity in a diverse society, and for religion's role in the public sphere.

IGR's History, Multiculturalism's Influence

IGR originated in the ecumenical efforts of the K-W Council of Churches. Indeed, from many of the original members of IGR began their work in religious diversity (Balmer 2006). While this particular organization was vital in the creation of IGR, many members stressed that one had to look at the "bigger picture" of IGR's location in Canada to get a more complete story.

Respondents pointed first to the demographically diverse nature of Canadian society as a reason for the foundation of IGR. They noted that there is a higher demand for diversity work in ethnoculturally diverse nations than there is in more culturally homogeneous ones. Likewise, K-W's changed status - from a primarily white and Christian community to an ethnically and religiously diverse one - was also cited as a reason for IGR's creation. This shift has its basis (in part) in Canada's relaxed immigration policies beginning in the 1970's (Hiller 2006).

But there was more than demography involved, however. Members thought that part of what set the stage for the founding of IGR was a pre-existing "cultural allowance" for discussing issues of multiculturalism and diversity. As Balmer notes, there is a feeling in Canada when one talks with neighbours from other nations that differences of culture (such as food, clothing, etc.) are acceptable topics. In fact, a large part of Canada's approach to multiculturalism revolves around a celebration of these differences through festivals and so on (Bramadat 2005: 10). But, as I noted in my literature chapter, critics of official multiculturalism take issue with this narrow focus; these differences are seen as shallow, inoffensive displays that do not reflect a "deeper" understanding of what it means to be from a particular culture (Thobani 2007). As Balmer notes such openness to relatively innocuous, superficial differences must be accompanied by a tolerance of more basic and significant differences, religion foremost among them. He claims that too many Canadians are not open or flexible about understanding faith because "North American culture teaches us that it is unacceptable to talk about religion" (Balmer 2006: 17). His argument, and the argument that other members of IGR make, is that multiculturalism seems to have at least a reasonable handle on discussing elements of culture, but religion has been left out because it is highly personal, and thus has the potential to cause social friction. As another member put it,

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I think one of the things that we really try to work hard at is - there's the multicultural centre downtown which works on multicultural issues and cultural ethnic issues, and different ones of our group would have had a relationship with the multicultural centre. On the other hand, we're the multi-faith, interfaith organization. We're not – sometimes I think we ought to cooperate more but on the other hand we really need to distinguish. And so Canada has worked hard on multiculturalism. Multi-faith, well, that's still a different issue and I don't think we're as far along on that issue as we are on the multicultural issue. [Respondent 9]

Some of the members I spoke with saw a clear delineation between "multiculturalism" and "multi-faith/ "interfaith" work, as can be seen in this quote. While their position makes sense considering the aforementioned reluctance to discuss religious issues, I would argue that there is an appeal within both to a larger ideology of difference. There certainly is a difference between elements of ethnic culture (dress, mores) and religious beliefs, with religion arguably being held to a higher level of "reverence" than more basic cultural differences.

Habermas' later work on the importance of understanding religion in the public sphere is relevant here in understanding the historical value of religious tolerance not only for religious groups, but as a "pacemaker for cultural rights" (Habermas 2006: 196). By that, he means that since the early days of liberal democracies the treatment of religious minority groups has been an important indicator of the growth of rights for citizens, culminating in the growth of human rights in the twentieth century (Habermas 2006: 197). He notes the duality of rights and responsibilities inherent within the freedom of religion contained in documents such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms: new citizens from different cultural/religious backgrounds are accorded the right to practice their faith and to be unaffected by others practicing their faith (Habermas 2006: 204). This also means they have a responsibility to accept the primacy of the state's authority in being set above their own religious authority in order to ensure peace and the coexistence of multiple worldviews – this limitation of freedom is

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necessary, particularly the limitation on violent acts and acts which would break the legal codes which are (ideally) applied equally (Habermas 2006: 205).

That said, he argues that this freedom of faith is vital to the creation of an equal society. To him, inequality based on group affiliation has two consequences. First, it violates the concept of "distributive justice," where citizens have "the same opportunities to make use of rights and liberties to achieve their own life goals" (Habermas 2006: 204). Second, it denies them full membership in the society, which "disregards, marginalizes and excludes" them simply based on "their membership in a group considered to be 'inferior'" (Habermas 2006: 204). [This obviously echoes the claims of Taylor with regards to the importance of multicultural recognition of identity, a point I return to shortly]. Returning to Habermas' theory of communicative action, he argues in this context that because group (religious) identity plays a vital role in socialization, recognition of the rights of a religious group is vital in understanding the real "legal person," as we form our identities collectively in an intersubjective rather than solipsistic manner (Habermas 2006: 204). Worded another way, Habermas is arguing here from Taylor's intersubjective position on individual and group identities existing simultaneously, based on members' continual dialogue and engagement with their cultural environment. To Habermas, then, cultural rights *are* individual rights, as cultural is foundational to individual identity (Habermas 2006: 205). For believers, religion is inseparable from their cultural worldviews; to use Berger's line of understanding of the social construction of reality, religion's externality to individual consciousness makes it no less objectively real or subjectively meaningful (Berger 1990: 4).

My point in clarifying the ways in which religious and ethnic cultural differences vary and share commonalities is to underline the ways in which interfaith and multiculturalism

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intersect. As ideals, both aim to create societies where the cultural differences of minority groups are accepted by the larger society.

IGR's foundation in the week following 9/11 was grounded in a sense of urgency, in terms of coming to grips with attacks in the community on Muslims and religious groups who were mistaken for Muslims. It sought to incorporate members of the targeted religious groups, as well as members of the dominant Christian majority, in order to create a show of solidarity with those being singled out for harassment. IGR was certainly not alone in doing so. As Diana Eck explains in her book, across North America in the weeks and months following 9/11, members of Christian groups in communities where Muslims were being attacked were attempting to shield them from further attacks and make amends for the actions of the larger community (Eck 2002). While this may be heartwarming, the larger issue I want to point to here is the motivations and methods of these actions by the dominant group. There was, and is, a shared understanding of cultural difference evident here, with recognition that the "right" thing to do is to protect a vulnerable minority population by showing solidarity. This understanding of difference, while obviously not shared by all members of the majority, is one which reflects a cultural shift in North America towards normalizing and even embracing differences, an attitude still in its infancy but recognized by some members of the population as an ideal.

With regard to multiculturalism and interfaith, then, the cultural underpinnings of the creation of a group such as IGR can be linked to larger shifts in North American societies toward "cultural accommodation" and beyond. Canada's multicultural policies, as recognized by IGR's members, have obviously not resulted in a society fully welcoming of cultural differences, and as they emphasized the existing multicultural culture is not welcoming of religious discussion. But when seen in a larger perspective, official Canadian multicultural policies have shifted the

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discourse around differences in some fundamental ways, so that groups like IGR have a space to grow. Thus the emergence of IGR and a larger interfaith movement in Canada can be seen as both a critique of multiculturalism's shortcomings and a child of the existing policies. This circular theme of interfaith as a dissonant child of multiculturalism is something I return to later in the chapter with regard to the impact of interfaith's critique on existing multicultural models.

IGR's Members: Many Voices Joined Together

For the moment, however, the focus is on contextualizing the individual experiences of IGR's members in terms of the themes that emerged in from the data chapter, and how those themes relate to larger theoretical discussions about identities and the value of localized experience. I once again draw on the work of Charles Taylor and Jurgen Habermas to contextualize my research results.

One of the primary themes that developed around individual members' experiences with religion was the complicated nature of their religious identities within IGR. As previously stated, I began my research thinking that IGR was an organization made up of individuals who expressly represented a local faith group in the K-W area. From my interviews and IGR's mission statement (interfaithgrandriver.org), however, this was quickly shown to not be the case. Individuals do identify as members of a particular faith tradition, but they largely serve in IGR in an unofficial capacity. Even those who serve as members of the clergy primarily do so by their individual choice, as opposed to being "elected" to represent their congregation. The individuals I interviewed were also very clear in stating that their religious viewpoints were intersubjective in nature – there was a definite shared understanding of the position that there are many interpretations of any given faith, with every individual understanding their membership differently, and that the worldviews of other members from other faiths were worthy of respect

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and understanding. Taylor's (1971) argument about the necessity of group membership as intersubjective became increasingly relevant as my interviews progressed.

My initial doubt about IGR's relevance outside of the K-W region changed over time, as I began to feel that the decentralized nature of IGR members' involvement was more a strength than a weakness. I was concerned about IGR's relevance to the K-W community, but as I worked with individuals and began to understand their histories of engaging with faith, it became apparent that they, like every member of society, have memberships in many groups. Even more than that, they are individuals with complex motivations who contest and negotiate with different meanings within groups; no individual claims group membership and passively subscribes to all of the dominant ideas/positions taken by that group.

The model of discussion and interaction that I saw while working with IGR seemed to justify the positions on the centrality of dialogue taken by Berger, Taylor, and Habermas, as discussed in my literature chapter. IGR's members had made the first critical step of looking reflexively at their own religious worldview and realizing that they did not exist in a solipsistic vacuum, where their religious perspective was the only one worthy of respect (Douglas 2009: 57). Having recognized the intersubjectivity of the community in which they found themselves, I would argue IGR's members have taken on a hermeneutic project of sorts in Interfaith Grand River, as have I through this research project. Through their monthly meetings and more informal connections they are attempting to come to an understanding of how other members of other faith communities negotiate meaning and see the world. This is accomplished through the tool of language, specifically non-argumentative (if sometimes heated) dialogue, which bears remarkable (in my view) resemblance to the communicative action model Habermas proposes (Douglas 2009: 52).

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By dialoguing about religious difference and planning social action projects within the K-W community, IGR's members are negotiating with one another not to solve which religious tradition is correct, but rather to use interfaith dialogue as a means-oriented process of self-reflection and revealed understanding. In the spirit of the "dialogue as action" model promoted by some members, interfaith work also reaches out to the K-W community by promoting discussion of religious differences and a recognition of the need for respect for religious traditions outside of the dominant Christian worldview. Finally, in the communicative action model language can be seen to function as a means of socialization and social integration (Douglas 2009: 54). For minority faith group members, IGR also acts as a bridge to the larger K-W community, potentially creating a path for the "full membership" which Habermas argues is vital for members who are treated unequally based on their group affiliation (Habermas 2006: 204). In my view IGR thus follows not only Habermas' communicative action model (which I return to below) but also his calls for the recognition of religious tolerance and freedom of religion, by utilizing a reflexive and non-combative approach to dialogue and by working to promote the inclusion and acceptance of minority religious groups in the K-W area.

So what then is the value of an interfaith organization that is a gathering of members representing their own faith experiences, as opposed to claiming to represent all Muslims, or Jews, or Christians? To answer this question I need to address Taylor's claim about individuals possessing a multiplicity of identities (1994). In fact, IGR's emphasis on location in its organizational title is the key to understanding the relevance of multiple identities. IGR's members come from many faith backgrounds, and through interviewing them I came to understand their faith experiences varied widely. Some had been exposed at an early age to religious diversity, while others had come into contact with other faiths only through IGR. What

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members shared was a common support for the acceptance of religious pluralism and equity, and their residence and interest in the Kitchener-Waterloo community. As described in my data chapter, when IGR was first founded and members were deciding on a name, they chose to emphasize that they were embedded in the K-W area, and since their founding that has been their central focus. When senior members were asked if they planned to "grow" IGR, to franchise it, they were emphatic that they were focused only on the K-W community, although they were willing to provide a "boiler plate" manual for groups in other communities to help them grow their own interfaith organization.

The reason for this emphasis on K-W was simple – members argued that the work they did was specific to the community in which they were located. Kitchener-Waterloo was seen as a city with unique circumstances and issues that needed to be understood from the inside if changes were to be made. The value of IGR's K-W targeted approach is based on the individuals that comprise it. IGR's members had lived in the area for varying amounts of time, but all shared a familiarity with K-W's religious landscape that could not be matched by an outsider. Through my interviews and going to some public functions that IGR promoted and participated in, I saw the informal connections and networks that members held within K-W with individuals who could be thought of as "pillars of the community." School board trustees, public health officials, police services members, and politicians of all levels of government within the city were at least aware of IGR's existence within the community, and that IGR could serve as a potential "expert resource" on religious issues.

As a local institution within K-W, IGR has influence within the community that comes from individual members' intimate knowledge of K-W's religious landscape and from their personal ties to important institutions and individuals within the city. Through its work to build

public understanding of religious pluralism by sponsoring public talks and engaging with local media, IGR has developed an important role in the community over its ten-year history. This growing role is thanks to, not in spite of, members' multiple identities and sources of involvement with the community, and it means that IGR is a "custom fit" organization in terms of understanding and working toward improving K-W's relationship with religious diversity. In the next section I discuss the ways in which IGR's localized status and "bottom-up" grassroots structure make it a specialized, yet potentially translatable example of how religious diversity work can be performed.

IGR as a Grassroots, Localized Ideal Type Organization

I previously explained the benefits of IGR being a localized organization. Here I emphasize some of the general ways in which grassroots interfaith work can be useful in terms of its applications as a "boiler plate" model for understanding interfaith work within other communities outside of K-W.

To understand the work that IGR does in this light, I need to explain the current cultural context in which it operates. 21st century North America has seen a resurgence of religiously based intolerance, particularly towards Muslims and individuals or groups which the majority confuses with Muslims, due of course in large part to the September 11th attacks and the ensuing decade of wars between America and largely Muslim nations (Hoodfar and MacDonough 2005: 133, 137-138). As I have explained in an earlier chapter, IGR first met just a few days after the attacks, and already they were confronting "retaliatory" strikes against mosques and temples in the K-W community (Balmer 2006). Across North America similar attacks were being carried out against Muslims, as well as Hindus and Sikhs, as a great deal of confusion and fear over additional attacks on America by "Islamic extremists" persisted. As Diana Eck explains, these

attacks on members of minority faith groups were not limited to post-9/11 America, but were certainly exacerbated after it (Eck 2002: 294). The visibility of Muslims within cities and towns was high, with mosques in some cases requiring police protection and Muslim women who wore head coverings afraid to leave their homes (Eck 2002: 296).

This heightened level of Islamophobia post-9/11has received a great deal of media coverage and discussion within academic circles. Canada has certainly not been immune to this rise in hostility; beyond the localized events within Kitchener-Waterloo, communities across this country have responded in different ways to a perceived threat from religious "Others" (identifiable non-Christians). Individual attacks on minority faith group members, particularly Muslims, have been high for the past decade (McDonough and Hoodfar 2005: 138). Discriminatory comments against and ostracizing Muslims and others, while much harder to measure, are reported to be much more prevalent (McDonough and Hoodfar 2005: 138). While individual actions have made headlines, the structural responses by some local governments to a perceived encroachment of Muslim values on "Canadian" cultural values are more of a cause for concern. I discussed the report by Bouchard and Taylor (2008) in my literature chapter that focused on Quebec's interculturalism project to promote French language and values while helping immigrants assimilate into Quebec's culture. In this report, the authors mentioned a number of different instances which suggested some citizens in Quebec's French ethnic majority were deeply uncomfortable with what they saw as a Muslim minority demanding unreasonable concessions for their beliefs (Bouchard and Taylor 2008). The backlash against this "unreasonable accommodation" was what sparked the Bouchard and Taylor Commission's work (Bouchard and Taylor 2008).

Despite the authors' conclusions and assurances that interculturalism was working and that Muslims and other minority faith groups were integrating well into Quebec's culture, communities such as Herouxville took matters into their own hands. In 2007, to much national controversy, the city published a values guide for new immigrants that spelled out, among other things, the wrongness of killing spouses or children, imposing religious values by force, and the equality of men and women in Canadian society (Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 15). This values guide, despite the criticism it received, has also been used in Quebec by the city of Gatineau, which published a pamphlet which largely repeated what had been stated in Herouxville. As one commentator complained, it "treats immigrants like they came out of a cave" (Peritz 2011). While there has been a great deal of outcry about these guides from other Canadian sources, I cite these examples of "institutional discrimination" to make clear the fact that an anti-Muslim, and anti-Other bias is alive and well within communities across Canada, and exists beyond what is sometimes dismissed as the individual prejudices of a few members of a community.

This context of discrimination against non-Christian faiths in modern North American societies is deeply worrying to those who see religious diversity as a potential strength for communities rather than a weakness or a threat. However, those who occupy this pro-diversity position have taken steps to combat discrimination in a variety of ways. Eck (2002) describes some of the responses by Christian groups in American cities and towns to attacks on their non-Christian neighbours immediately following 9/11 – responses which helped, in her opinion, to not simply "make up" for vandalism and assaults, but also make a statement to the community that non-Christians were valued neighbours, and attacks on them or their property were unacceptable (Eck 2002: 332). In one example Eck provides, a Buddhist temple in Rockford, Illinois was vandalized and threatened with violence; the minister of a local Methodist church

gathered his congregation and held a press release with the Buddhists, declaring "Christians welcome Buddhists" and emphasizing that the Buddhists were members of the community (Eck 2002: 341). As a result of this united front, and the actions of members of the Christian majority, a clear message was sent – and the Buddhists became involved in the Rockford Interfaith Council (Eck 2002: 341).

Engaging the media with a public message of interfaith acceptance can, as Eck has argued, produce a positive message in the case of serious challenges to the status of minority faith groups in a community. When the issue is not a direct threat of or instance of aggressive action, and more centred around the denial or abuse of rights for minority faith group members, however, a more nuanced approach is required. At a lecture she gave on religious freedoms in Canada, Lori Beaman (2009) argued that there are two different ways to tackle religious rights issues. One laid out in the Bouchard and Taylor Commission (2008) steers away from challenging rights abuses by having concerned parties discuss potential resolutions (Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 52). They argue this avoids the often-negative media scrutiny such cases attract, with ensuing headlines referring to "reasonable accommodation run amok" (Beaman 2009). However, Beaman notes that court challenges are sometimes necessary when facing more a impersonal and systemic denial of rights (Beaman 2009). Beaman notes that both approaches are appropriate in different contexts; e.g. legal challenges are sometimes necessary to help enshrine minority group rights against the "tyranny of the majority" (Beaman 2009). However, in cases of individual-level encounters with discriminatory practices, she notes that simply having open lines of communication, and a willingness to communicate, can resolve an issue before it becomes an issue.

The next section focuses on the value of communication through the use of interfaith dialogue as a means both to educate and to take public stances against discriminatory practices. Recourse to legal action is one option available to discriminated-against parties, and is necessary to build minority group rights into the legal canon. However while the mechanisms to pursue a legal recourse exist in both our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and appeals to the Canadian judiciary, there is a lack of emphasis in our society on attempting to solve issues of religious freedoms through dialogue and open communication, especially at the community level where problems often emerge. I turn now to the reasons why groups like IGR are uniquely suited to act as mediators and spokespeople for such a dialogical approach.

The Value of Religious Dialogue in the Public Sphere

In my data chapter, I reported that a tension emerged among some members over what was portrayed as a central factor in deciding IGR's continued survival – some wanted to expand IGR's role in the community through social action, others to focus on encouraging interreligious dialogue between members and within the general public forum. Still others were members of a third faction who favoured a combination of social action with an emphasis on dialogue, on the principle that the action/dialogue divide was an arbitrary one. I examine this argument through the works of several theorists, including Habermas and Taylor, in order to demonstrate the potential social impact that interreligious dialogue can create within a community culture. As an organization with a strong emphasis on creating opportunities for both personal and public discussion about religious issues, IGR is a prime example of how religious dialogue can be promoted and placed in the public sphere.

To recap the action versus dialogue debate within IGR: members who argued that IGR was not taking enough "action" thought that the organization was in danger of becoming shut off

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from the larger K-W community. They saw much of IGR's "work" as being "feel good talk" [Respondent 5] rather than taking action to right social wrongs. Conversely, members who thought IGR should focus more on dialogue than action were worried that the group's focus was becoming diluted by focusing on"do good action", and that ignoring dialogue would mean IGR's cohesion would dissipate and the group would "fade away." The synthesis of these two positions, taken by other members, was that IGR's strength lay in both spirited internal discussions as well as advancing IGR's position within the K-W community through promoting talks on religious issues and being involved with social action. They key difference I saw in this third position, one that links with some of the theorists I have mentioned previously, was that "talk" was seen in a more complex and active light than those who argued it was largely self-serving for IGR's members. "Dialogue" was seen as a vital form of social action, one which created relationships between members, and between IGR and the larger community. Members I spoke with who supported this seemed to have a broad definition of discourse. However, dialogue was seen as constructive speech and a form of debate which had as an end goal not a decision about the "rightness" or "wrongness" of a religious truth claim, but rather a process by which one uncovered one's fellow discussants' positions on issues, as well as further developing one's own position through exposure to other worldviews.

This form of dialogue as an interpretive action, one which "focuses on the journey as the destination," bears a great deal in common with Jurgen Habermas' understanding of social discourse. As explained by Finlayson (2005), Habermas defines discourse as "communication about communication" which is performed in order to "reflect upon the disrupted consensus in the context of action" (Finlayson 2005: 41). Habermas' understanding of discourse as a way to reach "rationally motivated consensus" in order to return to the "context of action" (Finlayson

2005: 41) seems potentially problematic, however, considering what I have just argued about the nature of IGR's interfaith dialogue as unburdened by efforts to reach consensus. Certainly the goal at a monthly meeting of the organization was not to rationally argue about which religious viewpoint was "right," with all members converting when consensus was reached! The strict admonition against proselytizing during meetings shows this interpretation of consensus-building to be antithetical to the interfaith model they followed.

However, I argue that this Habermasian model of discourse does apply if one goes beyond the surface and examines the overall goals of IGR in its mission statement. At its heart, the organization seeks to "develop and celebrate an awareness of [member] interdependence" in order to "live harmoniously as one community," and does so through cultivat[ing] an environment of tolerance, understanding, respect, trust, mutual respect and ultimately love" (Balmer 2006: 177). In short, the group is arguing that respect and acceptance of religious differences are vital to the creation and maintenance of a healthy community. Having sat through a number of IGR's meetings, and having seen the sometimes heated discussions with members over different faith positions on social and moral issues, I would argue that these discussions *are*, in Habermas' terms, efforts to reach a "rationally motivated consensus" in order to "return to the context of action" (Finlayson 2005: 41). The consensus being sought is not on particular religious *values*, but on the *methods* by which religious differences can be navigated in order to create a community that is unified without being homogeneous. Put another way, members' discourses do not result in consensus on a viewpoint, but rather consensus that there are multiple viewpoints which are worthy of respect, if not agreement.

Habermas emphasizes that discourse is not simply "language" or "speech," but rather a highly structured form of communication with specific rules to which all discussants must agree

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(Finlayson 2005: 43). Of particular interest to me are the rules he identifies about norms that "immunize the process of discourse against coercion, repression, and inequality" (Finlayson 2005: 43). These rules, verbatim, are as follows:

1. Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in the discourse.
2.   a) Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatsoever.
        b) Everyone is allowed to introduce any question whatsoever into the discourse.
        c) Everyone is allowed to express [their] attitudes, desires, and needs.
        1. No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising their rights as laid down in 1 and 2 above. (Finlayson 2005: 43)

The similarities between this set of rules and the interfaith dialogue guidelines that have emerged from IGR's years of discussions are significant. During the hour of discussion, members are all expected to contribute to the discourse; they are always encouraged to speak their minds; and there is an assumed rule that discussants cannot directly tell another member they are wrong, connected to the idea of preventing the prevention of other members expressing their views.

Focusing on creating an inclusive environment in this manner has helped to allow minority group members to feel included within IGR, although as with any social project such as IGR there is always room for improvement. As referenced in my data chapter, some members noted that they felt at times excluded from IGR's decision-making process, which was centred in the members of the steering committee. As a group consisting of Christians and non-Christians, some Christian members also felt peripherally engaged due to their being outside of the more long-term members' decision-making processes.

However, the structure of IGR when considered as an ideal does present a model for inclusiveness that allows for all members to be engaged in the organization on a more or less equal basis. For example, having an informal norm about Christians being in the minority numerically at meetings (Balmer 2006: 162) demonstrates an awareness of external cultural

power relations, and emphasizing the need for Christian members to focus on listening to minority faith group experiences (Balmer 2006: 163) underscores the ways in which interfaith work is meant to even out existing inequalities between religions. Because of rules like these, interfaith efforts like IGR are at least reaching towards an ideal put forward by Charles Taylor (1994); having members of minority groups see their participation in a community as valued is an important step toward improving their ability to engage with said community (Taylor 1994: 25).

I argue that dialoguing with other faiths serves three purposes in particular within a group; it educates others about your own faith position, it educates yourself about other faiths, and it allows you, if you are in a minority religious group, to potentially see your own beliefs respected and reflected in the community you live in. In Taylor's words, both your own "authentic self" and those of other discussants ["authentic self" being an identity grounded in a cultural/religious heritage] (Taylor 1994: 28) are revealed through engaging in Habermasian discourse/interfaith dialogue. I connect this kind of engagement to my oft-requoted call from Lori Beaman for "real discussion, real debate" on religious issues in the public sphere as a path to her ideal "deep equality," where "real differences" can be openly and honestly discussed without devolving into stereotyping and political attacks, particularly on minority/"outsider" faith groups (Beaman 2009).

My final point in this section comes once again from Habermas, going back to his work with Cardinal Ratzinger, the current Catholic Pope (2006). He argues it has become increasingly evident that religion's impact in Western cultures, long thought to be fading, has in fact grown, albeit in different communities and different ways than during the mid-twentieth century (Habermas 2006: 12). For countries which assumed that religious identities are no longer

relevant, the shock of realizing that "secular society" is really a "post-secular society" (Habermas 2006: 46) has left governments struggling to renegotiate their understanding of and relationship with faith groups. As David Seljak argues, Canadian officials have been slow to understand the complex ways in which religion impacts the lives of Canadians, particularly new Canadians from minority religious groups, and it is only recently that religious identity and membership has been targeted as an issue to study (Seljak 2009).

Both Seljak and Habermas agree that the way forward on religious issues is to better understand them; in Habermas' view, that understanding can only come from sustained dialogues between religious [especially minority] groups and the dominant Christian or post-Christian society (Habermas 2006: 47). As a formerly pro-secularist theorist, it is telling that Habermas notes the growth and permanence of religious viewpoints within communities and cultures that have been indifferent at best, and sometimes hostile, to religious expression, particularly non-Christian expressions of faith (Habermas 2006: 47). I argue that his call for dialogue is one that has been answered at the grassroots level by groups like IGR, groups operating within a larger interfaith framework that have emerged from discussions between religious communities. In the next section, I show that IGR's work at the local level represents one example of interfaith dialogue as a viable strategy for engaging with religious diversity, and how it is both a product of existing multicultural policies and a critique of how religion has been dealt with thus far in the public sphere.

Interfaith and Multiculturalism Revisited: Potential Outcomes for Negotiating Diversity

In this final section I have several goals: to link IGR to larger interfaith theories and practices; to return to the connections between interfaith and multiculturalism in light of my research data; and to suggest ways in which the experiences and outcomes of IGR can be applied

to a larger Canadian context. Above all, I want to answer the original research question which

drove my investigation of IGR: what is the meaningful significance of interfaith dialogue for

creating intersubjective bridges between cultural communities in Canada?   By contextualizing

IGR's localized work within a larger interfaith and Canadian multicultural framework, an answer

will become apparent.

Briefly, I want to make explicit here the connections between the work that IGR does

within the K-W community and the interfaith theory and ideology which drives it, and which has

been shown to manifest within other Canadian communities and across much of the rest of the

world. In my literature chapter, I defined and contextualized the interfaith movement in Canada,

a movement with relatively little attention paid to it by academia to date. The works I mentioned

by Lamoureux Scholes (2007) and Pedersen (2004) represent some of the few academic

assessments of interfaith's status in this country to date. These authors paint a picture of the

interfaith community in Canada as disorganized, and largely created in response to local and

institutional needs for centralized dialogue and social action on religious issues. Interfaith Grand

River certainly fits within this model of a locally-targeted, dialogue- and social-action-driven

organization (interfaithgrandriver.org). Pedersen's definition of interfaith as comprised of three

parts is mirrored by IGR's emphasis on constructive dialogue, working towards common goals,

and pursuing a shared understanding of religious diversity (Pedersen 2004: 77;

interfaithgrandriver.org). On this note, Seljak's argument that the key achievement of interfaith

work in Canada is the creation of relationships between members of different faith groups

(Seljak 2009) was confirmed during my interviews with IGR's members, who emphasized the

value of the friendships and connections they had made during their time with the organization.

Overall, the model which emerged from my research on IGR pointed to a group that is grounded in a grassroots, localized approach to community-building, while simultaneously drawing on larger ideological positions found in both major world religions represented at the meeting table, and in a stable interfaith tradition which provided the terminology and theoretical framework that members operated under. Thus I argue IGR represents one concrete and long-term model for performing interfaith dialogue and action at the community level. Again, IGR can be thought of as one potential "boiler-plate" model for performing interfaith work in communities outside of the K-W region.

So if IGR represents one way of performing interfaith work in Canada, what relevance does this have to my research question? What is the meaningful significance of interfaith in terms of inclusivity in Canada? In previous chapters I have outlined existing attempts to create an inclusive society in this country, particularly through the policy/ideology/demographic reality that is Canadian multiculturalism (Biles and Ibrahim 2005: 163), and through responses by various critics of the multicultural model from within academia (Thobani 2007) and larger cultural responses such as Quebec's interculturalism model for acculturating new citizens (Bouchard and Taylor 2008). The key issue in multiculturalism that I have attempted to highlight throughout this paper is its weakness in understanding and responding to the religious diversity which is both related to, and separate from, other forms of cultural diversity. The deeply rooted and integral value of faith to the faithful transcends other differences (Balmer 2006: 174), and thus requires a different approach to differences of faith outside of the top-down and relatively impersonal process by which Canadian multiculturalism is enacted. Interfaith work as practised by IGR is the opposite this top-down model, allowing individual members of

communities to meet, understand, and discuss religious diversity and to act on their localized and expert knowledge of the communities they inhabit.

To answer my research question, IGR's interfaith model represents both a critique of and an alternative to existing efforts to promote inclusivity in Canada by focusing on the particular demands of faith differences, and fulfilling those needs at the community level. As I began to understand the arguments of both Diana Eck (2002) and Lori Beaman (2009), it became apparent to me that responses to religious difference and discrimination are often muted or non-existent, and that much more attention is needed on this issue. Individual acts of discrimination or misunderstandings of difference were allowed, through inaction, to become national-level controversies that have helped to feed a sense of mistrust of religious communities, particularly minority communities, whose members have become "Othered" by their membership. Eck highlighted local efforts by members of dominant faith groups to stand with and behind minority faith groups in their communities, demonstrating that the efforts of individuals to combat discrimination are what is required to "build bridges" between faith groups and the societies in which they find themselves (Eck 2002: 335). Lori Beaman's call for "open, honest debate" within communities about religious differences (2009) ties in with what Eck is arguing for; both want to see issues of religious difference openly and honestly discussed in public forums, giving a voice to more liberal and moderate religionists who are often overshadowed by the rhetoric of more fundamentalist groups, and by media and political interests who seek to "make hay" with delicate issues of religious diversity.

To conclude this section, I want to return to the work of Seljak (2009) and Biles and Ibrahim (2005), who address potential ways to include religion in public policy discussions and outcomes. Seljak's position paper on the ways in which interfaith groups could be incorporated

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into the existing Canadian diversity management model helped to inspire my original research. In his work, he was arguing for formalized government recognition of, and support for, interfaith groups in Canada. This model is already used by governments in the UK and Australia, who sponsor interfaith meetings and use them for policy consultations and efforts to educate the public on religious diversity (Seljak 2009). While I support this idea of government-mandated interfaith work, my experiences with IGR have demonstrated that independent and localized faith-based diversity work has certain advantages that a national-level government-sponsored approach would lack. These advantages include: the ability to respond quickly and precisely to localized instances of faith-based discrimination; an expert understanding of and connection with the unique circumstances found within any community culture; and independence from government sponsorship allowing freedom from external political influences in order to take stances on issues outside of commonly accepted government practices. As one of my respondents noted when I brought up the idea of IGR becoming a government agency, the group valued it's financial and political separation from any group or institution. Members were and are free to engage in the "open, honest debate" about religion that Beaman (2009) advocates without worrying about censure, something my respondent saw as vital for the creation of meaningful, strong relationships between individuals and member communities. Because of this, I agree with Seljak's position on the issue of interfaith work having significant utility for government policy outcomes (Seljak 2009), but I think there is a need for independent and localized interfaith work within specific communities also.

Finally, Biles and Ibrahim's article on the more general exclusion of religion from Canada's multicultural model is a work that I returned to many times throughout my research as a template for understanding my research question. Their argument that religion has remained

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"off of policy makers' radars" due to a "lack of community pressure" for them to engage with the issue (Biles and Ibrahim 2005: 166) rings true when one considers the relatively recent recognition in social science research that the secularization thesis is, much like post-colonial theory, "an empty grave." Their suggestions for integrating religion into current diversity strategies parallel the stated goals of IGR and interfaith literature more generally. They argue that three specific goals must be met for religion to be introduced into Canada's diversity models. First, religious diversity must be brought into public discussion in a way which allows minority faith groups to be able to defend themselves against stereotyping and fear-mongering. Second, the public must be educated on different religious practices to delegitimate the fear of "Other" [the outcome of such fear being evident, to give an example, in the community actions of Herouxville and Gatineau]. And third, the legal protections on Canadian rights and freedoms through the Charter must be emphasized in terms of how they limit religious expression, i.e. promoting diverse faith practices does not circumvent the Criminal Code or other rights shared by all Canadians (Biles and Ibrahim 2005: 169).

The metaphor of Canada as a dinner party where guests should have the right to become hosts and help set the menu (Biles and Ibrahim 2005: 169) is a stirring one, and an apt description of a typical IGR meeting during the time I spent with the organization. As I was struggling to frame and understand the ways in which IGR could be contextualized within the larger Canadian framework of diversity, I came to recognize the value of micro-level interactions between individuals of different backgrounds as potentially just as important as a government policy being implemented or a Member of Parliament making a speech. We need to acknowledge that for acceptance of faith-based diversity to grow, not only institutional understandings of religious difference need to change. Individuals within communities must

help take the first step and reach out to their neighbours, to join their voices together in discussion and dialogue and debate in order to create a larger society where faith differences are recognized and accepted, rather than ignored or demonized. And in the spirit of an engaged public sociology, I argue that fighting for religious inclusivity and "open, honest" discussions of faith are vital if we are to attain a more just multicultural Canadian society.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

During the three years in which I have worked on this project, a great deal of change has occurred in Canadian society, changes which as are complex and not easily classifiable as "positive" or "negative" when it comes to promoting the inclusion and acceptance of religious minorities in this country. A minority Conservative government at the federal level has gained majority status, and begun to enact a series of changes to Canada's culture in order to shape the country in its preferred image. Only time can tell how this will affect perceptions of religion, particularly non-Christian religion. As noted in my literature chapter, the last federal election saw an unprecedented focus on religious minority groups by Conservative strategists, who saw familiar moral and economic ideological stances among some minority groups and arguably used that connection to win major victories in previously Liberal-dominated ridings. The era of the Liberal Party of Canada being the default "immigrant's party" is past. The inclusion of minority religious groups in the Conservative Party, traditionally the home of Christian evangelicals and occasionally anti-immigrant sentiments, should prove interesting.

I end my work by noting the current political climate because I want to highlight the ways in which change, especially unpredictable change, in social attitudes and political action can affect the overall climate of Canadian culture. In essence, the work of IGR and the Canadian interfaith movement as a whole is an attempt to change existing perceptions of minority religious groups as outsiders, as groups whose moral values are not in line with those of the Canadian majority. Some might see interfaith work as potentially, and problematically, relativistic, but it is simplistic to think that the only outcome of talking about religious diversity is to achieve consensus on issues. Throughout my time with IGR and its members I did not see relativism, nor did I see essentialism. Members held to their own positions and views, but were able to at least see that other stances were possible and to respect those differences without necessarily

agreeing. More than one individual I spoke with emphasized that their own faith was renewed from their discussions with others from different backgrounds. It was this confidence in one's own moral standing that impacted me most on a personal level; it made me think that the root of religious fear and intolerance in this country and others was a lack of understanding both of the Other and of oneself.

As I approach the end of this project, I think it apt to ask the question which all research should answer – so what? Of what value is interfaith and religious inclusivity in Canada for sociology and for society? My answer is that promoting inclusivity leads toward a more just society, one which welcomes all members not in spite of, but because of their differences. IGR can be seen to fit within this ideal through its promotion of inclusion and acceptance of a plurality of religious worldviews, rejecting on the one hand the position taken by secular theorists who argue religion is purely a private matter, and on the other fundamentalist religionists who see their worldview as the only correct worldview. Interfaith work follows a middle path between these two extremes, acknowledging the worth of religious freedoms for all citizens, including the non-religious, while also rejecting a total religious relativism that in the end devalues the importance of faith to the identities and socialization of believers.

I do not need to give a history lesson on the outcomes of religious intolerance for societies, to point to the Crusades, or pogroms against Jews, to the imperialist era or to the Holocaust, in order to make my point. Thinking of religious intolerance in this way, as a historical oddity that has passed, is to give dangerous credence to the idea that this is behind us. The outcome of 9/11 for Muslims both in North America and in the Middle East is still very alive and very real. Beyond these kinds of major world events, the subtler kinds of discrimination religious minority groups encounter harms not only members of minority

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communities, but the larger national culture, through loss of economic opportunity, outcomes of

social exclusion on health, weakening of community ties, and on suicide rates and depression

(see for example Biles and Ibrahim 2005: 167). These are losses for Canada as a whole when we

fail as a society to fully appreciate and utilize the value of different outlooks on culture and

community. These are differences which could help us grow closer to the ever-elusive "just

society" of Pierre Trudeau, who sought to open Canada to all ethnicities and religions by

changing both its policies and culture. This is what I think of when the value of inclusivity is

questioned; it impacts us at every level of our society, from the national level to our daily

interactions with one another. I hope that by having provided one small and local example of

how interfaith ideals have been enacted, I can add to the growing discussion and recognition of

the value of religious difference, and the need to honestly and openly engage one another in

dialogue about how the lack of recognition impacts Canadian society.

Appendices

<u>Appendix A: Thesis Interview Schedule</u>

[Read] Hello, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project for my masters of sociology thesis. To briefly summarize the goals of this study, I am interested in discussing with you your participation with Interfaith Grand River, as well as some of the relevant details about yourself concerning your religious background and experiences with this organization. Your responses will be included in a final report that is on the topic of interfaith groups in Canada and the role of religion in our society.   Please feel free to expand as much as you want on your answers to the questions I will ask you, and not hesitate to bring up in discussion any topic you think would be relevant to your experiences at IGR or your personal religious experience. You are under no obligation to answer any of these questions, and you can stop this interview at any time. Your confidentiality is ensured, and you will be identified by pseudonym in the final report. Now, if you're ready, can we begin?

First of all, can you tell me what religious group you currently identify with, if any?

Have you held the same religious beliefs you currently hold for your entire life, or have you been involved in other faith communities? [If other, ask "what made you change your beliefs?"]

Before your involvement with IGR, what were your experiences with people with different religious beliefs, if any?

How did you first hear about IGR?

What was your initial impression of the organization when you heard about it?

What reasons did you have for joining IGR?

How involved are you with the activities of IGR, in your own opinion?

What activities sponsored by IGR have you taken part in during your membership?

In a broad sense, and please expand on this as much or as little as you like, do you feel your involvement with IGR has been positive or negative? Why or why not?

Do you talk about or attempt to involve members of your home faith community (by this, I mean members of your church/mosque/temple/other religious community) with IGR or with other interfaith organizations? Why or why not?

What are your experiences or understanding of other interfaith groups, or the interfaith movement in a general sense, if any?

What are some positive contributions IGR can make to the Tricity area, or beyond, in your opinion?

In a general sense, do you see the work that you are doing with IGR as connected to ideas of equality or diversity? If so, in what ways?

Is there anything else you would like to add about IGR, the interfaith movement as a whole, or any other related issues you can think of?

<u>**Appendix B – Information and Consent Letter**</u>

University of Waterloo

Date

Dear *(insert participant's name):*

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Sociology at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor Kieran Bonner. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

The role of religion in modern Canadian society has become an issue of increasing importance in both academic and public debate in recent years. Some have argued that commonsense understandings of Canada as a "secular society", where religion should have no formal public role, are outdated and need to be rethought. However, there is currently no dominant way of discussing religion in a public venue. Due to the ethnically and religiously diverse nature of Canadian society, I believe that a means to bring different faith groups together for constructive dialogue is necessary to create a more tolerant and pluralistic country.

The purpose of this study stems from this belief: I wish to understand what Interfaith Grand River's goals are in terms of performing interfaith work, and how it seeks to meet those goals. I also want to understand the personal motivations of members of IGR for joining this organization, how they understand the work that they do, and the potential benefits they hope their interfaith work does. There is a scarcity of information in academic writing about the interfaith movement as a whole; I wish to focus on IGR as one specific example of how interfaith work is done, and more importantly, how individuals within this group see both themselves and this organization in a broader context. I am requesting your participation in this study because, as a member of Interfaith Grand River, you have unique and important observations about the organization to share. Your personal experiences with religion and religious plurality would be very useful for me in terms of understanding individual narratives and histories in localized Canadian religious life.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately one hour in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study – a pseudonym will be used if you are quoted in the finished paper.. Data collected during this study will be retained for one year in a locked office in the Department of Sociology at the University of Waterloo. Only

researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 519-746-8949 or by email at mlye@uwaterloo.ca. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Kieran Bonner at 519-888-4567 ext. 28242 or email kmbonner@uwaterloo.ca.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes of this office at 519-888-4567 Ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca.

I hope that the results of my study will be beneficial for Interfaith Grand River in understanding the motivations for potential members to join.   In a larger theoretical context, I hope to demonstrate the role of IGR as a localized example of larger debates going on within Canadian society around the role of religion in public discourse, and how group identities are being represented.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Matthew Lye

Appendix C – Recruitment Email

Dear [insert potential participant name here]:

My name is Matthew Lye, and I am a Masters Candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Waterloo. I am contacting you in order to request your participation in an ongoing research project that I am running as a part of the completion of my degree. Under the direction of my supervisor Dr. Kieran Bonner (kmbonner@uwaterloo.ca), I am conducting a case study of Interfaith Grand River and its members.

The purpose of this study, in short, is to understand the function and goals of IGR in terms of performing interfaith work and encouraging dialogue between faith groups. I am especially interested in personal narratives from members of this organization, specifically their history of religious involvement and experiences with religious plurality, as well as their involvement with the organization itself. I have contacted you because your involvement with IGR, and your own religious history, would provide unique and important insights into how interfaith group members view both themselves and the work that they do.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; if you would be interested in becoming involved with my study, I will forward you a more complete information and consent form that explains the study and the process of involvement in more detail. However, I would emphasize here that your participation would be entirely confidential, and you would be free to withdraw from involvement at any time.

Involvement would require no more than an hour of your time, and would be at a date and location of your choosing. You would not be required to answer any interview questions that you do not wish to; in fact, the methodological nature of this project emphasizes that the direction the interview takes is based on your interests and experiences, rather than sticking to a predetermined set of questions. With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded; all recordings will be stored in secure locations.

Thank you very much for your time, and if you have any questions or concerns that you would like addressed, please feel free to respond to this email or to phone me at the number listed below.

Matthew Lye
University of Waterloo
Department of Sociology
Email: mlye@uwaterloo.ca

Appendix D – Feedback Form

University Of Waterloo
Department of Sociology
[Date]

Dear [Insert name of participant]:

I would like to thank you for your participation in my research project. To reiterate, the purpose of this study is to understand the goals of Interfaith Grand River, and ways of achieving those goals, as well as to gain insight into the personal experiences with religion and religious diversity of its members. In a larger context, this understanding of IGR and its members will provide grounded, localized material for understanding issues of religion's role in Canadian society, and the ways in which group identities and rights can be represented in this country.

Please remember that all data I have obtained from you for this project will remain confidential. Once I have finished gathering material for my research, I plan on disseminating it through a Master's thesis project, and potentially through seminars, presentations, conferences, and/or journal articles. If you wish to receive a copy of the finished research report, or if you have any questions or concerns about any part of the research you have taken part in, please do not hesitate to contact me through either email or phone at the number/email listed below. I will be more than happy to answer any questions you might have, and to either email or mail you a copy of the report when it is complete. The expected completion date of this project is April 2010.

As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes in the Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567, Ext. 36005, or by email at: ssykes@uwaterloo.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Kieran Bonner from the Department of Sociology, at 519-888-4567, Ext. 28242, or by email at kmbonner@uwaterloo.ca.

Thank you once more for your participation,

Matthew Lye, Masters Candidate
University of Waterloo
Department of Sociology
mlye@uwaterloo.ca

Appendix E – Gatekeeper Recruitment Email

Dear [insert gatekeeper name here]:

My name is Matthew Lye, and I am a Masters Candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Waterloo. I am contacting you in order to request your participation in an ongoing research project that I am running as a part of the completion of my degree. Under the direction of my supervisor Dr. Kieran Bonner (kmbonner@uwaterloo.ca), I hope that I can conduct a case study of Interfaith Grand River and its members. You are the first member that I have contacted about this study, and I would be very grateful if you would consider contacting me so that we could talk about my proposed research in more detail.

The purpose of this study, in short, is to understand the function and goals of IGR in terms of performing interfaith work and encouraging dialogue between faith groups. I am especially interested in personal narratives from members of this organization, specifically their history of religious involvement and experiences with religious plurality, as well as their involvement with the organization itself. I have contacted you specifically as my primary contact because of your unique knowledge of and position within the organization.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; if you would be interested in becoming involved with my study, I will forward you a more complete information and consent form that explains the study and the process of involvement in more detail, and again, I would greatly appreciate a chance to engage with you in a discussion about my research at your leisure. However, participation is of course entirely voluntary.

Involvement would require no more than an hour of your time, and would be at a date and location of your choosing. You would not be required to answer any interview questions that you do not wish to; in fact, the methodological nature of this project emphasizes that the direction the interview takes is based on your interests and experiences, rather than sticking to a predetermined set of questions. With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded; all recordings will be stored in secure locations.

Additionally, if you are willing to participate in this study, I would be very appreciative if you could forward a letter of introduction to the other members of IGR at some point in the near future. The letter is an open request by me for interview volunteers, very similar to the email I am sending you now.

Thank you very much for your time, and if you have any questions or concerns that you would like addressed, please feel free to respond to this email or to phone me at the number listed below.

Matthew Lye
University of Waterloo
Department of Sociology
Email: mlye@uwaterloo.ca

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