Recognizing the Voice of the Other Peacemakers: Leadership Authenticity Narratives from Women Interfaith Organizational Leaders

Rashid Muhammad
St. John Fisher College

How has open access to Fisher Digital Publications benefited you?

Follow this and additional works at: https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_etd

Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Please note that the Recommended Citation provides general citation information and may not be appropriate for your discipline. To receive help in creating a citation based on your discipline, please visit http://libguides.sjfc.edu/citations.

This document is posted at https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_etd/193 and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at St. John Fisher College. For more information, please contact fisherpub@sjfc.edu.
Recognizing the Voice of the Other Peacemakers: Leadership Authenticity Narratives from Women Interfaith Organizational Leaders

Abstract
Since the events of September 11, 2001, interfaith leaders have gained attention by resolving religiously based conflicts. By developing initial qualitative narratives, the study began to satisfy the literature gap and examine, for further understanding, women interfaith organizational leaders’ experiences. The study’s design employed semi-structured interviews to stimulate authenticity-related accounts from seven women who are interfaith organizational leaders from the Rochester, NY and Finger Lakes region. Using authentic leadership theory and a purposive sample, the study examined women interfaith organizational leaders’ characteristics and acceptance as authentic leaders. The participants’ narratives yielded seven themes focused on women interfaith organizational leaders’ authenticity experiences. The study’s research also provided new knowledge and insights about a population that has been academically and socially underserved.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Education (EdD)

Department
Executive Leadership

First Supervisor
Mary Collins

Subject Categories
Education

This dissertation is available at Fisher Digital Publications: https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_etd/193
Recognizing the Voice of the Other Peacemakers: Leadership Authenticity Narratives

from

Women Interfaith Organizational Leaders

By

Rashid Muhammad

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Dr. Mary Collins

Committee Member

Dr. William Graf

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College

August 2014
Dedication

The path toward successfully completing a doctoral degree involves many caring and devoted people. I am deeply thankful to all the people who guided and supported me during my doctoral journey. Their wisdom, knowledge, and insights have truly broadened my horizons and opened new doors of intellectual curiosity, social-justice responsibility, and personal dedication.

I sincerely thank Dr. Mary Collins and Dr. William Graf for their scholarly guidance and patient pedagogical disposition during the dissertation development. Their professionalism and personal warmth were the foundation of my dissertation going from an abstraction, to a tangible idea, and finally into a completed document. I will forever fondly reminisce about our committee meetings where I learned so much about scholarship, research, and being a dedicated educator. I also sincerely thank Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason and Dr. Arlette Miller Smith who initiated my dissertation journey and infused my nascent ideas with a sense of spirituality and moral clarity.

My doctoral journey and personal development were greatly influenced by three scholars and practitioners who are exemplars of social-justice-centered leadership and community-focused educational excellence that I endeavor to emulate. In their personal behavior and professional actions, Dr. Marie Cianca, Dr. Arthur “Sam” Walton, and Ms. Kit Miller personify dedicated social-justice leaders who are building just and accepting societies where all people can live full and dignified lives. They believed in me and saw potential that I did not see. Each in their own way, they have special gifts for sincerely and generously teaching, inspiring, and valuing people.
The path of interfaith leadership and scholarship has been developed and opened to me by several dedicated and spiritually uplifting experts. The works and efforts of Dr. Rev. Allison Stokes, Dr. Maura O’Neill, Dr. Muhammad Shafiq, and Dr. Rauf Bawany underpin my interfaith interests and scholarship focus. Their scholarship and leadership embody what I hope to become.

The faculty, staff, and students at St. John Fisher College have been instrumental in my learning and development. I’m profoundly grateful to have learned many scholarly and personal lessons from Dr. Shannon Cleverley-Thompson, Dr. Jason Berman, Dr. Guillermo Montes, Dr. Diane Cooney-Miner, Dr. Michael Wischnowski, Dr. Peter Carpino, Dr. Marilyn Dollinger, and Dr. Deborah Pearce who have all been incredibly insightful, supportive, and gracious. Sincere thanks for the rich and meaningful life and educational lessons I learned from all of you. I also greatly thank Betsy Christiansen and Sharon Ryan for their unflagging help and technical insights in completing the program and the dissertation. Your helpful support will always be cherished.

Meeting and going through the doctoral journey with Cohort 7 will always hold a special place in my heart – It was a transformative experience learning and sharing with them. I thank each member of the cohort for their contributions, encouragement, friendship, and scholarship during our time together. In particular, I offer my utmost thanks for the beginnings of lifelong friendships formed with Team Unity. Rachel Kluth, Michelle Ryan, Tim Shafer, and Angelia Smith-Wilson are the friends who made the doctoral journey an enlightening reality and success. The study would have not been possible without the warm and open contributions of each participant. Their willingness
to share their personal narratives and views on interfaith leadership was profound. Each of their lives is a testament to the meaning of authentic interfaith leadership.

My doctoral journey is mostly a consequence of the loving people I’m privileged to call my friends and family. From them and for them, I live, I love, and I grow. Dr. Rodmon King, Dr. Sarah Berry, Dr. Alvin Spivey, and Dr. Holly Cicconi-Eggleston are my unwavering support and inspiration. Each of you has been a guiding light, friend, and scholarly mentor of immeasurable value. Judge Roy W. King and Mrs. Lucille A. King are the loving parents whose guidance and deep commitment to social justice shaped my life. This work is a product of your love and lives.

This dissertation, and all the efforts going into it, are dedicated to those closest to me. To my dear daughters, Aisha and Khadija, the love, kindness, and spiritual beauty that you show me continue as a force for good in our world. To my love, Monica, my wife of 25 years, best friend, and life companion, this work mirrors the deep love you have for all humanity and your family. Each day brings a new understanding of your love. May this work, and your support in it getting done, be a demonstration of our love and commitment to social justice. I thank and love you all.
Biographical Sketch

Rashid Muhammad is a retired United States Air Force officer and currently an aerospace business strategist and researcher at Exelis Corporation. Mr. Muhammad attended the University of Nebraska Omaha from 1990 to 1993 and graduated with a Bachelor of General Studies degree in 1993. He attended Webster University (at Bolling Air Force Base, D.C.) from 1999 to 2001 and graduated with a Master of Arts degree in 2001. He came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2012 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Mr. Muhammad pursued his research in Interfaith Organizational Leadership under the direction of Dr. Mary Collins and Dr. William Graf and received the Ed.D. degree in 2014.
Abstract

Since the events of September 11, 2001, interfaith leaders have gained attention by resolving religiously based conflicts. By developing initial qualitative narratives, the study began to satisfy the literature gap and examine, for further understanding, women interfaith organizational leaders’ experiences. The study’s design employed semi-structured interviews to stimulate authenticity-related accounts from seven women who are interfaith organizational leaders from the Rochester, NY and Finger Lakes region. Using authentic leadership theory and a purposive sample, the study examined women interfaith organizational leaders’ characteristics and acceptance as authentic leaders. The participants’ narratives yielded seven themes focused on women interfaith organizational leaders’ authenticity experiences. The study’s research also provided new knowledge and insights about a population that has been academically and socially underserved.
Table of Contents

Dedication ................................................................................................................................. iii

Biographical Sketch ........................................................................................................... vii

Abstract ............................................................................................................................ viii

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................. viii

List of Tables ...................................................................................................................... x

List of Figures ................................................................................................................... xii

Chapter 1: Introduction ....................................................................................................... 1

Problem Statement ........................................................................................................... 7

Theoretical Rationale ...................................................................................................... 14

Statement of Purpose ..................................................................................................... 20

Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 21

Significance of the Study ............................................................................................... 23

Definitions of Terms ....................................................................................................... 24

Chapter Summary .......................................................................................................... 27

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature .................................................................................. 30

Introduction and Purpose .............................................................................................. 30

Review of the Literature ............................................................................................... 31

Chapter Summary .......................................................................................................... 62

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology ....................................................................... 65

Introduction .................................................................................................................... 65
# List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.1</td>
<td>Literature Groups with Empirical Data Types and Quantity Included in the Review</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Theory Sources and A Priori Codes Used in the Data-Analysis Construct</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Pseudonyms, Designations, and Religious Affiliations of the Study’s Seven Participants</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Participants’ Areas of Narrative Concentration Demonstrated by Code Cluster Emphasis</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>Study Participant’s Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Thematic Focus Areas</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.1</td>
<td>Interfaith leadership nomothetic topology model</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.2</td>
<td>Nomothetic topology model in theory context</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Interfaith activities, organizations, and leadership endeavors have grown in prominence in the last 10 years. Academic focus and public attention paid to the nature of religious conflicts have increased in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy and other religiously based struggles. “People from differing religious backgrounds are killing one another all over the world – from Northern Ireland to South Asia, from the Middle East to Central Africa” (Patel & Hartman, 2009, p. 25). Yet in the midst of escalating religiously based violence, there have been hopeful developments in religious tolerance. Interfaith activities are essentially undertakings that increase understanding and are expanding in importance. In various manifestations across the world, interfaith efforts are notably realizing considerable growth in pluralistic societies such as the United States.

The inherent cultural and religious diversity in the United States has facilitated interfaith dialogue. Immigration and the American constitutional guarantees of religious freedom have created a complex cultural landscape with a range of religious traditions (Eck, 2007). The rich tapestry of American religious diversity and cultural foundations enable emergent interfaith activities. In tandem, sustained post-9/11 attention on religious conflicts has yielded several opportunities for interfaith activities, organizations, and leadership to emerge. Within religious settings, academic institutions, political dialogues, and ordinary exchanges, interfaith discussions are increasingly becoming part of the American milieu. As defined organizations, there are over 900 faith-based entities in the
United States that are specifically dedicated to interfaith endeavors (The Pluralism Project, 2006). The influence and reach of these interfaith organizations is growing as a product of increased interest in religious matters and dialogue. Ranging from informal gatherings to formal organizations, interfaith activities have leaders that are increasingly being recognized for their responsibilities and contributions.

Interfaith leaders, and the overall movement, have gained recognition, from many different perspectives and constituencies, as valuable mechanisms for achieving peace. Traditionally, interfaith leadership has found its raison d’etre in resolving conflicts (Puett, 2005). Interfaith leaders have customarily acted as arbiters of familiarization dialogues between different religious entities. Exemplified by the meeting at the 1893 Parliament of World’s Religions, interfaith leaders have tried to increase awareness and understanding among various religious traditions (Nordstrom, 2009). In contrast to the current manifestations of interfaith activities, the roots of interfaith endeavors have historically been exclusivist in nature. Globally, the modern interfaith concept emerged out of early 20th century Christian evangelization efforts (Kwok, 2012). Informal interactions between religious bodies and their adherents formed the preponderance of what was construed as interfaith activities. Early efforts to gain greater understanding of other people’s beliefs were, in reality, mostly rooted in intra-faith and interfaith proselytization. With evolving societal pluralism and norms, growing diversity would transform interfaith dynamics.

The nature of progressively diverse, post-colonial and post-World War II societies formed a backdrop for the interfaith movement to expand. In the United States, the predominantly Protestant population started to diversify as immigration policies changed. Following the 1965 Immigration Act, abolishment of national origin quotas opened the
way for an influx of new immigrants with diverse cultures and faiths into American society (Kwok, 2012). The unique cultural and religious diversity in American society was further enhanced with new sensibilities, notions, and practices. Interfaith activities, both colloquial and organized, were an outgrowth of the expanded religious pluralism. As they evolved, budding interfaith activities progressed from evangelist origins toward activities that genuinely sought to build understanding and collaboration across religions (Kwok, 2012; Patel, 2005). Interfaith activities and participants started to coalesce around more structured and sustained endeavors. Primarily in academic and religious circles, the notion and construct of interfaith leadership as a distinct responsibility emerged.

New interfaith institutions and competencies evolved in the United States in conjunction with the foundations of interfaith leadership becoming established. On a global basis, interfaith leaders have typically performed functions traditionally associated with interfaith activities (e.g., settling religiously based hostilities). For example, a Muslim Imam and an Evangelical Pastor used interfaith-dialogue approaches to help resolve Nigeria’s Yelwa-Nshar fighting, which was killing over 1,000 people per month (United States Institute of Peace, 2011). Comparatively, interfaith leaders in the United States have more nuanced challenges. An organizational exemplar displays the intricacies of the interfaith leadership paradigm that is germane to the American experience.

An early implementer of interfaith concepts, the University of Rochester (UR) Interfaith Chapel, integrated an interfaith entity into an academic institution. In 1970, when most religious facilities were faith specific, the UR Interfaith Chapel was built to intentionally facilitate interfaith dialogue (“UofR Religious Life,” 2012). The UR Chapel’s inaugural setting readily served the spiritual groups of its initial era. Paralleling
the transformation in American society, the University’s religious diversity also evolved. Currently, the UR Interfaith Chapel serves the needs of a diverse (10,000+) student body, faculty, staff, and nearby community. As the University progressed, the task of adapting to increased religious diversity was placed with the Chapel’s leadership.

The UR Interfaith Chapel Director serves as the organization’s spiritual and administrative leader. As a PhD theologian and ordained member of the clergy, she leads an eclectic mix of University staff, religious leaders from various religious denominations and their staffs, student volunteers, and several community faith organizations. As an administrator, the UR Chapel Director has responsibility for managing the Chapel’s staff, budget, and operations. She is also the UR Chapel’s primary interface to the University’s administrative and faculty leadership. Above all, the UR Chapel Director supports the faith communities’ activities and promotes interfaith understanding (“UofR Religious Life,” 2012). Characteristic of an American interfaith leader, the UR Chapel Director has to navigate and harmonize a broad range of religious practices and necessities.

The UR Interfaith Chapel Director’s leadership capabilities to facilitate dialogue and deal with a range of administrative needs exemplify the utility of interfaith leaders. As their influence increases, interfaith leaders’ theological training, leadership experiences, and conflict-resolution skills are being applied in other areas. Once seen as marginally relevant, interfaith leadership has moved from the edges of academia and religious practice into crucial problem-solving efforts (Sheetz-Willard, Faarland, Mays, & Illic, 2012). Success in conflict-resolution and organizational-leadership endeavors has given interfaith leaders more authority and visibility. The interfaith leader has become a respected participant and adviser in a broader array of leadership activities.
Prominent government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are noticing the talents interfaith leaders can provide to various endeavors. The Group of Eight (G8) leaders receive input from interfaith leaders on economic policy and political plans (Steiner, 2011). With expanded responsibilities, interfaith leaders’ fundamental competencies are being applied to relational outreach and structural processes (Neufeldt, 2011). Interfaith leaders’ strengths in resolving disagreements are being exercised as instruments to develop global political and economic strategies.

In the United States, interfaith leaders are increasingly participating in activities that leverage their acumen and experiences. The primary nature of interfaith leadership—building understanding, consensus and collaborative action—is suited for adaptation in the policy realm. The Obama Administration is using the White House Interfaith Service Challenge to improve domestic and global interfaith cooperation (Sapp, 2011). Within this program, interfaith leaders’ credibility and leadership are key instruments in creating viable government policies. “In the development arena, there is often no group better placed to deliver key messages than local religious leaders” (Hippie & Duff, 2010, p. 370). With their growing authority and credibility, interfaith leaders’ influence have invited more positive and negative attention from wide-ranging groups and concerns.

Although interfaith leaders are enjoying increased recognition and responsibility, there may be inherent and emergent difficulties in their endeavors. Inclusion is integral to interfaith fundamental philosophies and practices. “Interfaith organizations seek to bring together religiously diverse groups and individuals to build understanding and cooperation” (Patel, 2005, p. 17). Due to their intrinsic diversity, interfaith participants have varying perspectives and practices on the notion of inclusiveness. Wide-ranging
doctrinal dictates and praxis among and across religious traditions ensures different, and sometimes diametrically opposing, viewpoints on interfaith participation. Questions on leadership legitimacy are prevalent among the discussions around interfaith activities.

Diverse and evolving opinions on the nature of interfaith matters influence the manner in which interfaith leaders are perceived. Interfaith leaders’ evolving activities are complicated by the perspectives that interfaith insiders and outsiders have of their leadership authenticity. Their activities and outcomes are not necessarily viewed or received affirmatively. Although interfaith leaders are responsible for accomplishing positive things, like combatting religiously based violence, they are nonetheless perceived very differently by various constituencies and other religious traditions:

Attitudes, especially regarding religious others, are transformed from the old historical places of mistrust and fear that have generated centuries of polemical and apologetic forms of discourse at the heart of religious violence, to open spaces of self-discovery triggered by personal human encounters that lead to deep personal spiritual transformation and new levels of trust with others. (Brodeur, 2005, p. 43)

Some interfaith leaders’ positional legitimacy is questioned with the advent of increased power and authority. Different understandings, again, both positive and negative, are forming as interfaith leaders provide policy input, influence economic directives, and help shape political strategies (Steiner, 2011). As interfaith relations and functions change, these leaders face disparities in how they are accepted. With inherently diverse opinions and practices, interfaith leaders, communities, and undertakings face a key question: What constitutes an authentic interfaith leader?
Problem Statement

The interfaith movement’s rising geopolitical influence and potential to alleviate conflict necessitates inclusive participation across the spectrum of humanity. “Interfaith dialogue should work to offset core differences among faith groups and deal with values and beliefs that may justify exclusion of and prejudice against other people” (Abu-Nimer, 2002, p. 23). The mission of interfaith organizations is to bring people together, facilitate better understanding, and foster collaboration toward positive goals. But, the application of interfaith ideas has not necessarily allowed the fullest participation across the range of activities. Freire’s pedagogy observed that individual knowledge and perceptions are linked to cultural and historic reference points (Byrne, 2011). Freire’s premise was manifest in the views and issues concerning the authenticity of women’s interfaith leadership.

Interfaith leaders’ authority and legitimacy typically stem from association with a group or religious body that is actively engaged in ecumenical activities. Religions adjudicate leadership credentials according to their specific doctrines. Some religious traditions, Catholicism and Islam, for example, limit religious ordination to men. This does not mean that women from those, or like traditions, are excluded from interfaith participation. However, acceptance and authenticity concerns emerge when women interfaith leaders meet others interfaith participants who question their leadership legitimacy within their faith.

Beyond the questions of interfaith leadership-positional validity, women may also encounter issues of whether they are seen as capable, authentic interfaith leaders. Notably, women are absent from many interfaith leadership activities. O’Neill (1989)
developed a dissertation that confirmed the historical absence of women in many interfaith activities. Interfaith leadership opportunities and experiences may be influenced by authenticity or acceptability questions with women leaders. Because different religious traditions ascribe leadership authenticity in very different ways, women may or may not be accepted as leaders. This reality is an emergent and evident issue in the complex interfaith settings.

Women’s right to participate in interfaith activities is generally accepted. Yet, women often lack access to the interfaith power-brokering functions (Council of Europe, 2005). Several influential interfaith forums wrestle with women’s leadership issues. The Parliament of World Religions, a major interfaith gathering dating back to 1893, continues to be characterized by male power structures and the lack of women participants (O’Neill, 2007). This situation’s importance lies not because it is simply occurring. The meaning also resides in the symbolism and impact it has on women’s interfaith leadership experiences and perceptions of authenticity. “Women tend to have different experiences of their faiths due to their gender and the effects of sexism, thus it is logical to conclude that they must have different experiences of participating in interfaith work and the interfaith community” (Teague, 2011, p. 7). If interfaith leaders, supposedly dedicated to pluralistic discourse, can devalue women’s leadership, then why can’t everyone else?

Issues surrounding women’s interfaith leadership have been tied to religious fundamentalism and societal power dynamics. The struggle for ascendancy between fundamentalist and pluralist philosophies has negatively influenced interfaith activities (Eck, 2007). In some manifestations, fundamentalist thought has literal interpretations of
doctrine inclined toward exclusionary practices. Misguided fundamentalism’s penchant for chauvinism, demonization, and violence can be contrasted with interfaith endeavors’ envisioned tolerance and pluralism (Esack, 2002). Contrasted with interfaith endeavors, fundamentalist viewpoints and behaviors can be masquerading as religious conservatism.

As an idiosyncratic world view, fundamentalism does not equate to religiously conservative values that strive for observance of long-standing faith doctrines and traditions. However, some conservative interpreters offer that exclusivism within interfaith activity is necessary. While scholars, like Esack (2002), advocate for increased pluralism in interfaith activities, conservative scholars, like Boyd (2012), reject the suggestion of liberalism in interreligious dealings. Debatably, reasoning of this nature lends credence to the power-seeking and misogynistic philosophies that may hinder women’s interfaith leadership.

There are several opinions addressing some of the issues that women interfaith leaders face. Still, many of these arguments are inclined toward particular academic and advocacy views that have traditionally dominated dialogue on interfaith matters. Feminist scholars have produced persuasive theses outlining women’s broad-based concerns in the interfaith realm. Notably, these treatises do not directly address issues related to women’s leadership within the context of interfaith organizations. Gender-based stereotypes may impact the perception of women leaders and their leadership opportunities in interfaith organizations (Northouse, 2013). Understanding the experiences of women leaders within interfaith organizations presents important insight on the overall interfaith environment.

The cultures, views, and personal experiences of the scholars tackling women’s interfaith issues inform their perspectives. Western feminist theologians have especially
focused on critical women’s interfaith topics such as sexuality and sociopolitical relations (Kwok, 2007). Like the broader field of religious studies, feminist theologians’ critiques have shaped many of the arguments concerning women’s interfaith leadership. Indeed, “Feminist Theology has proved to be a powerful tool in deconstructing theological concepts with enormous potential to effect change in the lives of women” (Rafferty, 2012, p. 191). Aspiring or current women-interfaith organizational leaders may not have a voice in the discussion on interfaith leadership. Their stories should be made known.

Women perform a variety of recognized and unofficial leadership functions in interfaith organizations. Within interfaith activities, leadership influence and relationship building occurs at various levels by people occupying formal and informal roles (Avolio, 2011). Beyond gender-specific concerns, there is a literature gap in the general understanding of how women lead and function within interfaith organizations. Social networks and identities that cross interfaith organizational constructs may affect how women lead and are perceived (Stringer, 2007). In that regard, issues with interfaith leadership authenticity may be influenced by organizational leadership functions.

In the United States, there are diverse and numerous interfaith organizations that provide wide-ranging leadership opportunities. From lay leaders in religious institutions to designated directors of formal interfaith bodies, women are essential participants in creating the interfaith vision. “Yet regardless of the level, one focus characterizes them all: interfaith dialogue is for mutual understanding and peacebuilding” (Shafiq & Abu-Nimer, 2011, p. 34). As women-interfaith leaders engage in this work, they may face the same gender-centered authenticity issues encountered by women in other religious
leadership endeavors. As representatives of their religions in different capacities, the authenticity of women interfaith leaders may not be understood or acknowledged.

Women in a range of leadership positions are integral to dialogue that is necessary for peacemaking. As the empirical literature proposes, sexism and other inequalities may preclude women and other marginalized groups from fully engaging in interfaith-leadership endeavors. The research on women’s interfaith leadership from feminist perspectives is emerging. Within these postulates, the arguments posit that there is a need for narrative literature revealing the stories of more women interfaith leaders. Women’s voices in many interfaith organizational settings have been marginalized (Kwok, 2012). Recognizing the voice of the other peacemakers involved in interfaith organizational leadership can fill a literature gap and allow these women’s narratives to be heard.

Developing insights on the perspectives and difficulties that women leaders of interfaith organizations face can inform the nascent topic literature. In broader religious leadership research, some studies have highlighted women’s experiences with official institutional positions (Thompson, 2013). Beyond general depictions, there is a need for narratives that illustrate a broader range of formal and informal women interfaith leaders’ experiences. “If we remember that the purpose of our dialogue is mutual understanding and not conversion, then we must return to the telling of personal stories” (O’Neill, 2007, p. 124). Telling these stories was the goal of the research in this dissertation.

Interfaith organizational leadership opportunities and experiences are affected by legitimacy concerns with women occupying leadership positions or having influence. Exploring this issue was the overarching objective for the proposed study. Hearing and understanding women interfaith leaders’ personal accounts was integral to researching
the subject. The epistemology of religious leadership has been enriched by developing oral histories of individuals’ experiences (Wuthnow, 2011). Compared broad-based oral histories, the narrative research in this study focused on investigating and analyzing women’s interfaith organizational leadership experiences.

Similar to oral historiographical inquiries, the research study attained data relative to the lived experiences of certain individuals. However, the study’s approach was methodologically differentiated by situating the elicited narrative data in a temporally bounded and socially defined construct (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). While oral histories seek to generally preserve past experiences, the research in this study explored dynamics in interfaith organizations (social paradigms) from the period preceding the 9/11 tragedy to early 2014 (chronological bounds). The participants’ narrative responses were elicited to specifically focus on the dynamics of interfaith organizational leadership.

Developing understanding on women’s experiences in interfaith organizations was undertaken to give voice to a group that have encountered challenges with acceptance as authentic leaders. By means of the women’s narratives, the study’s investigation had a specific framework and emphasis (Creswell, 2013; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Through storytelling, the women provided rich, descriptive, qualitative data that brought awareness, specificity, and life to the experience of being a leader in an active interfaith organization. Interfaith organizations are realizing increased influence. As peacemaking entities, interfaith organizations have considerable positive sway in many people’s lives. Seeing how leadership is ascribed within these organizations was noteworthy. Like oral history, storytelling is related to, but not analogous with, the study’s overall approach.
Storytelling can be an integral part of a broader narrative construct that has a delineated purpose. As the dissertation was designed to realize, “Research interviews give access to the manifold local narratives embodied in storytelling and they may themselves be reported in a narrative form” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 55). The women interfaith leaders that graciously consented to participate in the study presented stories on incidents, events, or individuals that became the foundation of their narratives. Stories typically include a plot, have a protagonist, and come to some sort of resolution (Denning, 2011). Storytelling’s inexact sketches are unlike the rich narratives in this research that concentrated on women interfaith organizational leaders’ authenticity.

Exploring leadership authenticity using narrative research offered new knowledge and specific insight on women’s interfaith leadership. By looking at informal and formal leaders, the study also revealed themes about the women leaders’ attributes and also the dynamics in some interfaith organizations. Narrative research methods, which inherently examine values, facilitate inclusion of personal histories, organizational contexts, and tenets of leadership authenticity into a credible study (Creswell, 2013; Sparrowe, 2005). Through stories that were woven into narratives, this study created qualitative empirical research data that addressed a gap in the literature on interfaith leadership and organizations.

The study’s research superseded wide-ranging articulation of women interfaith leaders’ lives and organizational experiences. By studying leadership authenticity issues, the research posited that women interfaith organizational leaders have some comparable leadership traits and analogous experiences. Exceptional authenticity is an attribute frequently associated with successful religious leadership (Smethers & Jenney, 2010).
Investigating the stories of women interfaith organizational leaders, which have formal or informal leadership positions, increased awareness and understanding of these issues. Narrative inquiry, alone, was not sufficient to develop the study’s empirical baseline. An attending theoretical lens was employed to strengthen the narrative strategy of inquiry.

Theoretical Rationale

The dissertation research developed understanding of women interfaith leaders’ experiences. By giving voice to their experiences, there can be greater understanding of women’s authenticity as interfaith organizational leaders. Paradigmatically situated in the qualitative domain, topic scholars (Eck, 2007; O’Neill, 2007; Patel & Hartman, 2009; Teague, 2011) have called for additional research that portrays women interfaith leaders’ lives. As the most suitable approach, narrative research methods were utilized to discover and analyze the study participants’ stories.

Developing women interfaith leaders’ biographical narratives illustrated examples of authenticity in interfaith organizational leadership. Use of narrative research methods in this study presented an axiological view of the individual participants’ interfaith experiences with leadership authenticity (Creswell, 2013). Illustrating and developing meaning about the women’s values, challenges, and insights provided descriptive data that was not represented in the current literature. Narrative methodology was the applicable research approach that was strengthened with a corresponding theoretical lens.

Structured qualitative narrative research, with a reinforcing theoretical lens, supported the development of the descriptive qualitative data. Authentic leadership theory (ALT) offered a compatible theoretical lens to examine the experiences of women leaders. Constructed on the foundation of transformational leadership, ALT deals with a
leader’s values and his or her impact on the leadership paradigm (Avolio, 2011).
Although recently formed, the theory presents empirical measures that deal with inherently subjective issues such as values and legitimacy. The theory considers the leaders’ antecedents, various leadership components, cultural diversity, and predicted outcomes. Understanding and quantifying leaders’ fidelity and internalized beliefs are the primary tenets of ALT, which were used to gauge the participants’ authenticity experiences. While interfaith is a subject of increasing interest to the public and academics, alike, defining authenticity in that context is a fundamentally idiosyncratic and complex undertaking.

The impetus for investigating leadership authenticity is grounded in present-day societal concerns for trustworthy and honest leaders. The originators of ALT encountered the challenge of delineating the theory’s substance and boundaries. Even so, researchers have effectively defined and honed the theory. Refinement of the authentic leadership construct started in earnest with discussions in 2002 between scholars Bruce Avolio and Bernard Bass (Avolio, 2011). While assessing transformational leadership theory, Avolio and Bass discovered that the leadership model does not substantively address the leader’s perceived authenticity (Northouse, 2013). Transformational leadership theory, which delineated elements of charisma, did not fully account for the leaders’ values and recognized relational sincerity with others.

Transformational leadership provides the theoretical foundation for ALT’s core principles that deal with interpersonal competencies. Predicated on trust and a display of values warranting trust, transformational leadership fundamentally involves the process of leaders interacting with followers (Avolio, 2011). By adding additional focus on the
leaders’ sincerity, ALT builds upon transformational leadership’s process of creating moral and motivational relations with adherents (Northouse, 2013). ALT leverages this focus to reveal what drives leaders’ views and behaviors.

Interfaith leaders have the inherent challenge of building relationships and credibility with their coreligionist constituents. Furthermore, they must also establish leadership legitimacy and capital with people outside their religious group. As women secure more interfaith leadership positions, their stereotyped inclinations toward transformational leadership qualities could serve as an advantage (Harvard Medical School Health, 2004). Building relational trust is germane to the interfaith realm. Transformational leaderships’ emphasis on influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration underscores ALT’s valued-driven focus (Northouse, 2013). Transformational leadership scholars’ efforts to expand upon leaders’ sincerity in action led to the study of authenticity. As a consequence, those scholars developed the initial construct and description of authentic leadership principles.

The early definitions of authentic leadership were expectedly broad, but they offered notions of what the theory included and its relationships to other models. In an initial characterization, authentic leadership was related to transformational leadership theory. ALT was differentiated by focusing on leaders’ deeply held personal values and beliefs (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004). Like transformational leadership, authentic leadership’s early definitions posited that follower development was affected by a leader’s behavior. Early definitions provide insight into the theory’s areas of emphasis and foundational parameters:
Authentic leadership was defined early on as a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008, p. 94)

Authentic leadership’s prototypical focus on ethics, in conjunction with the followers’ perceptions of a leader’s sincerity, genuineness, and internal motivations, demonstrates the theory’s uniqueness. ALT’s distinction as a relevant and distinct academic theory was apparent in other initial definitions of the construct.

The ideas first articulated for ALT needed clarification beyond the overarching concept. Avolio and Gardner (2005) developed core ALT concepts and observed that other forms of affirmative leadership could be sources for the authentic leadership model. They noted that “authentic leadership can incorporate transformational, charismatic, servant, spiritual, or other forms of positive leadership” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 329). Their thoughts opened the view and application of authentic leadership theory across a wider range of leadership approaches. By liberating the theory from transformational leadership, Avolio and Gardner (2005) also showed that authentic leadership has its own unique theoretical sources independent of other constructs.

As a recently developed concept, ALT focuses on leadership genuineness and legitimacy. These issues have been recently highlighted within society and academia. The theory provides a structured approach to study and derives meaning from complex facets of the interfaith paradigm. Working within and amongst different faith traditions,
interfaith leaders have to negotiate a myriad of doctrinal practices and sensitivities. In its core tenets, ALT offered an approach to conceptualize the context that women interfaith leaders work within and a structured means to help focus their narratives.

Another initial ALT definition examined the characteristics of successful leaders that were inclined to serve others. Authentic leaders were found to exemplify five traits: (a) clarity of purpose, (b) a strong sense of right and wrong, (c) trusting relationships with other people, (d) values-based actions, and (e) steadfast commitment to pursuits (George, 2003; Northouse, 2013). ALT’s core leadership precepts were strongly oriented toward a leader’s personal values and decision-making processes. Like George (2003), other leadership scholars developed key conceptual components that delineated the ALT hypothesis. By first attempting to predict leadership performance, the uniform components that eventually comprised ALT were developed (Avolio, 2011). The ALT concept was differentiated by its focus on the leaders’ values and principles.

ALT’s rudiments are germane to a narrative study of interfaith leaders’ personal values and philosophical views. With four elements that frame the concept’s structure and applicability, ALT is constructed on “self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 94). According to Northouse (2013), ALT’s self-awareness deals with the leaders’ individual perceptions and reflection on core values; internalized moral perspectives of self-regulating ethics that guide a leader’s behavior and decisions; balanced processing of information and the ability to objectively analyze other perspectives; and relational transparency of openness and honesty in portraying oneself.
Although a relevant theoretical lens, ALT’s limits with regard to women’s leadership and gender should be considered. ALT’s initial definitions offered sparse information regarding the impact of gender on authentic leadership. Given the advent of women in various leadership roles, taking gender into account was vital in forming a sound theory. Eagly (2005) observed that ALT was predicated on having experience in certain leadership capacities. While access to some positions is indispensable, it has been historically difficult for women to serve in many formal leadership roles. By not fully including followers’ perspectives, Eagly (2005) also showed that ALT’s emphasis on self-awareness was one-sided. Other critiques followed Eagly’s observations. Thoughts on gender issues in the authentic leadership concept were extended to additional areas. The scrutiny applied to gender and ALT served to stress other improvement openings.

Eagly’s (2005) ideas opened ALT to analysis on matters of power, privilege, and follower disposition. As an extension, Gardiner (2011) contended that an authenticity-based construct overlooks institutional biases, power inequities, and access to leadership opportunities. These arguments were instrumental in reshaping ALT to include relational elements beyond self-awareness. Through close examination, critics identified limitations in the theory and pushed for a more inclusive definition. Their efforts are reflected in the theory’s modified structure and applications.

Ongoing efforts to refine and measure ALT and the nature of its application suggest that the theory is viable. With regard to human experiences, Stringer (2007) contends that data alone cannot provide meaning or predict desired actions. ALT came about, in large part, to fill theory gaps related to leaders’ values and trustworthiness. Relevant to the proposed topic, ALT now has literature on cultural diversity and
measures that examine trust as it pertains to leaders’ authenticity (Hassan & Ahmed, 2011). As an enabler to this study, ALT is a credible and peer-reviewed theoretical lens that supports the researcher’s purpose and was instrumental in stimulating meaningful dialogue with the participants. By applying ALT, the study was able to investigate the participants’ experiences and acceptance as authentic interfaith organizational leaders.

**Statement of Purpose**

This research study discovered insights about, and increased awareness of, women interfaith organizational leaders’ experiences in regard to leadership authenticity. In general, there is a paucity of empirical literature concerning women’s interfaith activities. Specifically, there is a gap in the literature regarding women’s interfaith organizational leadership. Given the increased awareness of interfaith organizations and leadership, understanding the experiences and shared characteristics of women leaders in this area serves an academic purpose, and it is also socially noteworthy.

The preponderance of the relevant interfaith literature was written as a consequence of the September 11, 2001 (9/11) disaster. In the tragedy’s aftermath, there was increased scholarship and debate devoted to interfaith matters. As interfaith literature has evolved, some scholars have observed gender-related challenges. Although vital to gaining an appreciation for the topic, these peer-reviewed observations were mainly oriented toward advocacy/participatory views linked to an agenda (Creswell, 2009). The majority of the research directly related to women’s interfaith leadership is resident in dissertations and theses. There are books written by Kwok (2012), O’Neill (2007), and Stokes (2006) that inform the topic researched. The peer-reviewed articles and topic-
related texts’ idiosyncratic nature necessitated examination of the subject through empirical research methods.

The topic of women’s interfaith organizational leadership is subordinated in the literature. Because there is little empirical research on the subject, the study partially satisfied a literature gap while exploring authenticity issues. In the interfaith realm, “invisibility and exclusion of women, for wherever interreligious dialogue has developed, women seem to have had little part in it, at least at the official level” (King, 1998, p. 42). By developing themes of commonality, the study offered new knowledge on women interfaith organizational leaders’ shared traits. In doing so, the investigation also provided insights on a population that has been academically and socially underserved.

**Research Questions**

Determining if authenticity issues have an effect upon women’s agency and experiences in interfaith organizations was the raison d’être for exploring the women’s narratives. By focusing on organizational experiences, the study explored two research questions that leveraged the ALT core principles. Through the narratives, the study sought and found trustworthy qualitative evidence of women being recognized (and in some cases not being recognized) as authentic interfaith organizational leaders. As a corollary, there was also evidence that the women’s perceived authenticity was informed by shared leadership traits or organizational experiences. By detailing individual experiences, the narratives enabled empirical data development that provided experientially based narratives that addressed these issues (Creswell, 2013). ALT helped further delineate the study’s focus.
ALT’s tenets helped to form the research questions and enabled illustrations of women’s experiences with leadership authenticity in interfaith organizations. “ALT includes an in-depth focus on leader and follower self-awareness/regulation, positive psychological capital, and the moderating role of a positive organizational climate” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 329). There were two central research questions that formed the study’s basis:

1. Do women interfaith leaders share common authentic leadership traits and/or organizational experiences?
2. Is there evidence that women in formal and informal leadership roles are accepted as authentic interfaith organizational leaders?

The first question supported collection and analysis of data on who the women leaders were and how their values and behaviors impacted perceptions of them as leaders. The second question was constructed to discover the meaning of what is happening with women’s interfaith leadership and why it is of importance. ALT’s core principles aligned with the study’s qualitative narrative research approach, stated goals and intent, and overall methodological design.

The ALT tenets of self-awareness and relational transparency provided a structured way to evaluate how the participant women interfaith leaders saw themselves as leaders. Also, it supported comprehending how others perceive the leaders’ personal values and organizational leadership behaviors. The leaders’ ethics and sincerity in action were considered through the ALT percepts. While probing the leaders’ decision-making practices and relational behaviors, ALT’s notions of internalized moral perspective and balanced information processing offered an empirically based means to gauge the
participants’ leadership traits and organizational experiences. Applying ALT’s tenets supported using a narrative approach and developing a meaningful research study.

**Significance of the Study**

Across the diverse realm of interfaith activities and participants, there are wide-ranging opinions on what qualifies a person as an authentic interfaith leader. As an undertaking, interfaith affairs are essentially about diversity and inclusion. Interfaith leaders seek to build understanding and increase cooperation (Patel, 2005). Because they constitute half of humanity, women’s voices need to be a major part of interfaith conversations. However, a “problem in the current dialogue is that women are still largely under-represented at the table” (O’Neill, 2007, p. xiii). In some instances, there are marginalization issues that women interfaith leaders must address in organizational settings. This research study provided new data on the subject while also giving voice to women interfaith leaders.

In addition to the intended social-justice emphasis, the study has potential academic importance. The empirical literature on interfaith matters is still emerging and has several areas of interest, necessitating academic research. In the interfaith realm, there are sparse empirical data on women’s leadership and organizational leadership. Even in the broader field of religious studies, there are only a small number of studies that address authentic or transformational leadership research in faith communities (Sosik, Zhu, & Blair, 2011). This study offers research data on a compelling social-justice topic and an academic need.
Definitions of Terms

There are several terms related to the central research questions and overall study that are subject to varying contextual meanings and interpretations. For purposes of this study, the terminologies interfaith leader, interfaith organization, informal leader and formal leader, organizational experiences, and authentic leadership traits are defined according to how they were applied in the research. The terms’ definitions are consistent with the topic’s empirical literature and colloquial usage of the expressions. While widely understood and applied in religious circles and literature, defining the idea of interfaith dialogue was central to the study’s emphasis areas.

The concepts/terms of interfaith, interreligious, and religious pluralism are intertwined and share an extensive historic context. The modern interfaith concept was formed during the early twentieth century around Christian evangelization efforts (Kwok, 2012). As interfaith undertakings evolved, usage of the term became consistent in both academic and colloquial applications. Kwok (2012) suggested that the term interfaith was used for discussions between individual adherents of different faiths. In contrast, the term interreligious is typically used for interactions between religions. For practical purposes, the terms are used interchangeably. Relevant to this study, the term interfaith dialogue is illustrated by the following definition:

While people from different religious traditions engage with each other in a variety of ways, the term interfaith dialogue (or inter-religious dialogue) generally suggests a very specific type of engagement. As a 20th century development primarily in the West, interfaith dialogue involves more structured and formal conversations between representatives (usually religious scholars, clergy, and
institutional officials) from at least two clearly defined religious traditions with
the primary objective of mutual understanding rather than conversion. (Suomala,
2012, p. 360)

The constructs of an *interfaith leader* and an *interfaith organization* have roots in the
terminology of *interfaith dialogue*.

Understanding the definition of what it means to be an interfaith leader is
germane to the study’s focus. Legitimacy of interfaith leaders usually stems from ties
with an organization or religious body engaged in ecumenical activities. “An expanded
definition of religious leadership that includes activity that shapes others’ religious
experiences offers the opportunity to recognize leadership in unexpected places”
(Thompson, 2013, p. 663). In organizations, interfaith leaders apply unique capabilities
and experiences that differentiate their tasks from most religious leadership activities.

Within this study’s setting, an *interfaith leader* is considered to be a skilled
participant in interfaith dialogue interchanges and also a lead in *interfaith organizations*
and activities. When assessed in the proposed research’s context, “interfaith leadership
has three key components: framework, knowledgebase, and skill set” (Patel & Meyer,
2010, p. 17). As Patel and Meyer (2010) observe, interfaith leaders are educated and
skilled in the background of interactions between faiths, they possess in-depth knowledge
of the different religions that they encounter, and they have the capability to apply these
insights toward dialogue. Interfaith leaders, with their content knowledge, are also
regarded in this study to have *informal* and *formal* leadership roles in *interfaith
organizations*. 
The research focused on experiences of women interfaith leaders in formal leadership positions (e.g., hired, elected, appointed, etc., who possess professional credentials) and informal leadership roles (e.g., lay leaders, volunteers, staff, etc.) in community service organizations (e.g., nonprofits, religious bodies, or academic institutions) that are engaged in interfaith activities as part of the organizations’ primary charter, mission, or focus. The phrase interfaith organization, as applied in the planned study, can be further explained through an example. First organized in 1893, the Parliament of the World’s Religions is a body of religious leaders of different faith traditions that gathers to promote learning, mutual respect, and working toward peace (Francis, Robbins, & Cargas, 2010). The intentions and activities of this body typify the objectives of many interfaith groups and events.

The organizational experiences of interfaith leaders are represented within the research as the range of leadership activities that are relevant to promoting and achieving the organization’s interfaith mission and goals. More specifically, organizational experiences were understood to be the range of interactions that the participant women interfaith leaders had with people in their organizations and with others who participated in interfaith activities. For both informal and formal women interfaith leaders in this study, their narratives on organizational interactions revealed insights on social construction and corresponding leadership authorities/dynamics (Hall, 2007). Gaining an understanding into the women interfaith leaders’ organizational experiences presented illumination of their shared leadership characteristics.

The study investigated women interfaith organizational leaders’ authenticity traits in conjunction with their organizational experiences. Walumbwa et al. (2008) emphasized
considering a leader’s self-awareness, moral viewpoints, information processing, and relational transparency to gauge authenticity. For this research study, these characteristics were the primary defining authentic leadership traits employed to examine themes of commonality and evidence of acceptance. The nature of the authentic leadership traits were considered by examining the leaders’ purpose, values, relationships, self-discipline, and dedication in each area (George & Sims, 2007). The participants’ views on their traits and experiences formed the study’s core.

To study potential issues with women’s interfaith leadership authenticity, the study participants were purposefully selected for their interfaith and organizational experiences. By choosing leaders with extensive interfaith organizational experiences, the participants were included in the study because their qualifications presented valuable insight on the women’s interfaith leadership experiences (Vogt & Johnson, 2011). By using a purposeful sample with specific qualifications, the participants’ traits may be extendible to other formal and informal women interfaith organizational leaders. Assessing the leaders’ shared traits and individual experiences increased knowledge of leadership authenticity in the interfaith realm.

Chapter Summary

The increased visibility and influence of interfaith affairs, subsequent to the 9/11 tragedy, has spurred an upsurge of public awareness and academic research. In tandem with this dynamic, some studies on women’s interfaith leadership have been developed. Yet, there is a lack of empirical literature on women’s interfaith organizational experiences and personal narratives. This literature gap was partially satisfied with the research data from this study, which investigated women interfaith leaders’ experiences.
More precisely, the study depicted leadership authenticity matters in interfaith organizational settings.

Given the study’s focus and intent, a narrative research was an appropriate strategy of inquiry to research the subject. Through personal narratives, the study showed evidence of how women are being viewed as authentic interfaith organizational leaders. ALT, as a supplemental theoretical lens, facilitated understanding leadership authenticity as it is seen in interfaith realms. The study also considered the women’s leadership traits and organizational experiences for themes of commonality or intersection. The study’s focus and outcomes help satisfy an existing gap in the empirical literature on interfaith leadership.

The goal of this study was to research women interfaith organizational leaders’ traits, give voice to their experiences, and create empirical qualitative data that derives meaning from their narratives. In many interfaith organizational settings, women leaders may not be recognized as having the corresponding leadership authenticity as their male interfaith organizational leadership counterparts. Many religious leaders are perceived or assumed to have authentic leadership attributes and transformative visions (Mueller, 2012). The nascent empirical literature on interfaith leadership suggested that women leaders did not enjoy analogous affirmative perceptions as male interfaith leaders. Some scholars (Eck, 2007; Kwok, 2012; O’Neill, 1989, 1990, 2007; Teague, 2011) called for additional research on issues dealing with authenticity, legitimacy, and acceptance. To add empirical literature on this subject, this qualitative-based research study focused on developing narratives and understanding of some women interfaith leaders’ experiences.
Chapter 2 provides the antecedent rationale for investigating the research questions; establishes the structure for reviewing the relevant literature; and reviews a broad base of interfaith leadership-related literature including dissertations, theses, peer-reviewed articles, and books. Chapter 3 outlines the research context and specifies the research participants, data collection instruments, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents and offers analysis of the narrative data collected from the study’s seven participants. Chapter 5 offers an in-depth discussion on the findings; specifies the implications of the findings; delineates the study’s limitations; and concludes with recommendations for policy, practice, education, and leadership.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

Interfaith leaders are at the forefront of building dialogue to reduce global violence and tensions. The leaders of these efforts come from a variety of faith traditions and cultures. Hence, the range of interfaith leaders may have differing and conflicting perceptions of women interfaith leaders’ authenticity and acceptance. Increased attention on interfaith affairs spurred an upsurge in the related research. Yet, the literature on women’s interfaith leadership is relatively undeveloped.

This study focused on the experiences of women leaders that occupy formal and informal leadership positions in United States-based organizations that feature interfaith activities as a core part of their organizational charter. Through a narrative research approach, the study sought to understand if women with both formal and informal interfaith organizational leadership roles are accepted as authentic leaders. Initially, the study investigated narrative-derived data to determine if the participant-women, interfaith leaders had common leadership characteristics and shared organizational experiences. As an antecedent, the existing topic literature was assessed for evidence of these dynamics.

The proliferation of post-9/11 interfaith literature does not address issues about women’s interfaith leadership in detail. The topic of women’s interfaith organizational leadership is further subordinated in the literature. To gain further understanding of this subject, religious leadership data was used as a framework to contextualize and understand the topic literature. Of the subject literature that exists, a structured review
provided the historical context of women’s interfaith leadership literature. Thereafter, the review examined the existing literature related to women’s interfaith leadership. Due to the paucity of data, feminist, womanist, and religious leadership literature was included to frame the subject. The literature spanned from the 1989–2012 timeframe. Feminism, womanist theology, and religious leadership-related data were exceptions to the time period.

**Review of the Literature**

As a precursor to exploring the proposed research questions, a broad base of topic-related literature dissertations, theses, peer-reviewed articles, and books were reviewed for applicability. The relevant literature was organized into three different categories of: (a) women’s interfaith leadership, (b) feminist and womanist theologies, and (c) religious leadership. Each literature cluster provided insights into the planned research subject and also verified the paucity of related literature. The women’s interfaith leadership area had the preponderance of applicable literature.

The literature aiding the research of women’s interfaith organizational leadership principally came from dissertations and theses. Due to the subject’s nascence, the most applicable empirical data resided in emerging dissertations and theses that provided new knowledge. Although fairly ubiquitous, the topic area mentioned in peer-reviewed articles mostly offered opinions versus empirical qualitative research data. In the reviews, there were also references to opinion-based books by topic scholars. Kwok (2012), O’Neill (2007), and Stokes (2006) provided extended and well-sourced hypotheses on women’s interfaith leadership in their books. Even so, the experts’ books were mainly written as advocacy and participatory works to elucidate a specific viewpoint or agenda
(Creswell, 2009). As a result, the most objective literature was situated in the growing collection of subject dissertations and theses.

The supporting feminist, womanist, and religious leadership literature reinforced the core women’s religious leadership literature by adding context (mostly through mature peer-reviewed articles). Much of the topic literature was written from an admitted feminist theological position (Kwok, 2012; O’Neill, 1989, 1990, 2007; Teague, 2011). The womanist theology-related sources expanded upon the feminist literature by offering an ethnically distinctive outlook. The religious leadership literature gave well-known references on women’s leadership in specific religions or faith doctrines. The additional literature offered a complementary frame to the core research results.

A thorough review of over 200 books, articles, dissertations, and theses from verifiable research resources demonstrated that dissertations and theses were the most relevant empirical data sources. Of the 19 pieces of data selected for infusion in the review, five were dissertations and theses, and 10 were peer-reviewed articles. Four books (by scholars that made important contributions to the field) were included as an orientation to the subject questions. As a result of the works’ nature, a substantive portion of the literature review was focused on relevant dissertations and theses. The empirical literature from the feminist and religious leadership fields was used to corroborate the review construct.

The empirical data exploring women’s interfaith organizational leadership were included in the review, based on direct relevance and contextual significance. With intent of developing a narrative research study, each set of data had a core or clarifying role in the literature grouping. The literature in the women’s interfaith leadership category was
germane for investigating the authenticity and acceptance research question. The data related to the feminist and womanist theologies and religious leadership categories were employed to support examination of the leadership trait and organizational experience issues being researched. Although the amount and types of literature varied, the research results were paradigmatically found to be qualitative data.

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature Area</th>
<th>Source Type and Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s interfaith leadership</td>
<td>Four each: studies, articles, and books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism/womanist theology</td>
<td>One thesis and three peer-reviewed articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious leadership</td>
<td>Three peer-reviewed articles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The literature in the core and support categories predominantly used qualitative strategies of inquiry. Of the five studies cited, the women’s interfaith leadership literature had three qualitative dissertations and a thesis with one quantitative study. All of the articles were qualitatively based approaches. The feminist and womanist theologies and religious leadership literature cited one qualitative thesis and had no quantitative studies. Approximating the women’s interfaith leadership category, all of the support-area articles were qualitative-based literature and did not have any quantitative pieces. The literature review sections were planned for the research issues.

The core women’s interfaith leadership literature was further divided into subcategories to explore the authenticity and acceptance research question. The first
subcategories in this category evaluated literature focused on the primary area of research. The authenticity issue subcategory assessed a dissertation and texts by topic scholars that are vital literature in women’s interfaith leadership studies. Importantly, an analysis of this dissertation helped shape the proposed research’s focus. Following the authenticity issue subcategory, relevant peer-reviewed articles were considered.

Literature in the advocacy and position articles and empirical dissertations and theses subcategories of the women’s interfaith leadership literature area expanded upon the authenticity and acceptance issues. Analysis of the peer-reviewed articles showed the advocacy orientation of this literature type. In comparison, the dissertations and theses were mostly disposed toward qualitative empiricism. By establishing the foundation for further research, the empirical dissertations and theses subcategory literature influenced the research focus. The literature in the feminist and womanist theologies and religious leadership support groups were not subdivided like the women’s interfaith leadership data. The feminist and womanist theologies data supported a classification of women interfaith leaders’ traits. The religious leadership data also had insights on the women’s traits and practices. The women’s interfaith leadership data opened the review.

**Women’s interfaith leadership.** The literature in this category was grouped into three subcategories that addressed the primary research question on authenticity. By seeking evidence of women interfaith leaders’ acceptance and authenticity, the data evaluated in the authenticity issue subcategory assessed a pivotal dissertation and important topic texts. After these precursors, the core research topic was further explored by evaluating a series of peer-reviewed articles that formed and advocated positions on
the topic. After the peer-reviewed articles, the third subcategory includes dissertations and theses that concentrate on potential acceptance and authenticity issues.

**Authenticity issue.** The literature evaluation is grounded on an archetypal dissertation that explored women’s leadership authenticity issues during the interfaith “antebellum” (pre-9/11) period. O’Neill’s (1989) dissertation, which studied interfaith-realm gender issues, hypothesized that women were being marginalized and/or not included in interreligious (interfaith) dialogue. Subsequent books on the subject extended the notion that women’s participation and *legitimacy* in interfaith matters was problematic (O’Neill, 1990, 2007). The dissertation and texts, which had broad perspectives, presented additional research opportunities on women interfaith leaders.

By investigating questions of participation, early literature on women’s involvement in interfaith matters indirectly dealt with authenticity issues as well. O’Neill’s (1989) dissertation posited that interfaith dialogue was bifurcated along gender lines and hence was not pluralistic. The dissertation initially explored the issues of presence and perspective in interfaith dialogues. Next, the research probed universal and unique aspects of women’s interfaith dialogue including women’s shared feminist views (O’Neill, 1989). While pioneering, the dissertation did not explicitly address women’s interfaith leadership traits or experiences; nor did it directly deal with authenticity questions. As presciently noted: “This study is only a preliminary step to a dialogue . . .” (O’Neill, 1989, p. iv). But, the research approach set an important antecedent.

The academic and social importance of O’Neill’s (1989) work exists in the *identification* of interfaith gender questions. The dissertation’s central thesis described the problem of gender-based marginalization in interfaith dialogue. Although an
important problem was pinpointed, the dissertation did not explore how women interfaith leaders have faced those challenges. In essence, the structure of women’s interfaith authenticity issues was identified. Yet, there were no *authentic examples* of those issues being manifested in women interfaith leaders’ experiences. Later on, O’Neill (2007) reinforced the importance of incorporating personal narratives into the literature. The study closed part of that gap by examining women interfaith leaders’ experiences. O’Neill’s (1989) thesis hypothesis and conclusions are a bridge to further research.

The dissertation’s research question implicitly introduced difficulties regarding women’s interfaith authenticity. Exercising a grounded theory method and a feminist critique lens, the study questioned, “If interreligious dialogue is attempting to be inclusive, why have not women been included?” (O’Neill, 1989, p. iii). This main research question was indispensable in illustrating widely differing viewpoints on the authenticity and acceptance of women’s interfaith leadership. In essence, the dissertation found that women were not being included in substantive interfaith activities because they were not viewed as authentic religious leaders or accepted as participants.

The dissertation hypothesized that women interfaith participant’s personal narratives are essential to forming inclusive interfaith dialogue. O’Neill’s (1989) hermeneutic research showed that prior to 1977, the presence of women was not even mentioned in any of the major interfaith dialogue literature. By revealing their personal narratives, O’Neill (1989) advocated that women interfaith participants engender trust, clarify diverse perspectives, prevent misinterpretations, and discover common interests. The dissertation promoted using narratives to engender authentic acceptance of women interfaith leaders. This dissertation study commenced with that suggestion.
In addition to the topical approach, the structural content of O’Neill’s dissertation (1989) supports additional research efforts. The dissertation employed hermeneutics to assess universal feminism, religious liberation, and dialogue narratives related to interfaith issues. With this approach, O’Neill (1989) linked androcentric practices with the authenticity-related research questions that were pursued in the study. Though seminal, O’Neill’s work posed more research possibilities.

The arguments posited in O’Neill’s (1989) study were developed from broad hypotheses contained in established texts. Although well-reasoned, the study lacked the narrative data that is stated to be essential to understand women’s interfaith agencies. The dissertation’s strong suit existed in establishing an important issue. But O’Neill’s (1989) dissertation did not support the pinpointed issues with narrative evidence. Yet, ensuing books further studied the revealed authenticity issue.


The epistemological approaches often seen in women’s interfaith research are based on the ontology developed in O’Neill’s (1990) follow-on book. As an extension of the dissertation, the book probed the structure of interfaith dialogue. Besides theoretical views offered in the text, the ontology showed how gender roles may influence interfaith
dialogue (Stier, 1992). The book used grounded theory, value theory, and communications theory to create the ontological concept. The book had considerable analysis of feminist views in the interfaith realm (Kellenbach, 1991). Like the dissertation, the book had coherent arguments. Still, it also lacked narrative verification.

As an adjunct to the ontology presented in the first book, O’Neill’s (2007) second book addressed the ongoing paucity of women’s interfaith leadership and growing acrimony among interfaith factions. The book continued the focus on women’s interfaith authenticity issues. O’Neill (2007) contended that divisiveness in the interfaith realm is grounded in the differences of opinion on women’s authenticity as interfaith leaders. This book also offered insightful analysis on challenges with conflicting views and definitions within and across faith traditions. Similar to previous works, the latter book had sketches of women interfaith leaders’ experiences and called for comprehensive examination of women interfaith leaders’ personal stories. However, the rich and descriptive data obtained from specified narrative research was not encompassed in this book.

In aggregate, O’Neill (1989, 1990, 2007) developed the founding literature on women’s interfaith leadership authenticity. This study complimented and extended the core ideas posited in O’Neill’s dissertation and books. Successively in all three works, O’Neill articulated, “Why it is important for women’s interreligious dialogue to begin with personal stories?” (O’Neill, 2007, p. 109). The dissertation delivered a compelling argument for examining the structure and dynamics of interfaith activities. While the dissertation focuses on the epistemological aspects of women’s interfaith participation, the research in this study explored specific experiences of individual participants. As an extension of the dissertation, O’Neill’s (1990, 2007) two books matured the argument
that women’s narratives are an essential component of fostering interfaith dialogue that is actually pluralistic and inclusive. The books also recommended practical ways of approaching interfaith dialogue gender issues and making alterations to interfaith structures to promote inclusiveness (Powers, 2009). Expanding on the ideas in the books, the study increased understanding of women interfaith leaders’ experiences by way of narrative inquiry. Two additional topic books by Stokes (2006) and Kwok (2012) offered insights that influenced the study’s research focus and design.

The topic literature was matured and proliferated through exegesis offerings from additional subject experts. Following O’Neill’s (1989, 1990, 2007) literary offerings on women’s interfaith matters, Stokes (2006) and Kwok (2012) authored texts that expanded the subject literature. Like O’Neill (1989, 1990), Stokes (2006) advocated that personal narratives were a vital facet of interfaith dialogue. Similarly, Stokes (2006) addressed interfaith relations and activities through a feminist lens. Stokes (2006) advanced the idea of employing limited narratives of women interfaith leaders. These informative, yet colloquially styled biographical outlines offered insightful data. The books’ brief narratives were an exemplar and precursor of what was realized with broader research.

There is a common theme regarding authenticity that permeates the early writing about women’s interfaith leadership. Using short stories of women leaders in a variety of circumstances, Stokes (2006) interpreted how delegitimizing others’ religious affiliations underpins violence and strife:

If demonizing or objectifying the Other as subhuman is key to giving oneself permission to do violence and make war, then honoring and respecting the Other as an equal is key to rejecting war and making peace. Every religion recognizes
some form of the “Golden Rule.” To “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is to care for the Other as one equal to oneself. (Stokes, 2006, p. 84)

Stokes’s (2006) observation represented the questions of authenticity in the interfaith realm. Are others being accepted as equals? This question was addressed in this dissertation by developing evidence that women interfaith leaders are being accepted as authentic interfaith organizational leaders. Stokes (2006) built upon O’Neill’s (1989, 1990) groundwork literature by adding impetus to employing narratives and further researching interfaith authenticity. Also like O’Neill (1989, 1990), Stokes (2006) applied a feminist lens to assess women’s interfaith issues. The book supplemented the advocacy literature, but it did not contain the narrative depth that was planned for this research study.

Women’s interfaith leadership opportunities are affected by different doctrinal structures. The notion of conflict and more pluralistic perspectives became evident in the literature. Kwok (2012) expanded upon a different attribute of O’Neill’s (1989, 1990, 2007) hypotheses than did Stokes (2006). By investigating faith-based interfaith dialogues from a global perspective, Kwok (2012) added to the literature on gender-related interfaith issues. Kwok’s (2012) attention to philosophical topics (e.g., multiple religious identities) and historical context (e.g., orientalism) was an innovative addition to the gender-related interfaith literature. While addressing women interfaith participants’ marginalization, Kwok (2012) concluded that robust interfaith dialogue was the means to resolving global violence. Similar to the preponderance in other subject’s literature, thorough narrative research data and corresponding verifications were not presented.
Current and past geopolitical conflicts have informed global interfaith outlooks and activities. Kwok (2012) charted the lineage of previous interfaith encounters to present-day exchanges. Adding context to O’Neill’s (1989, 1990, 2007) and Stokes’s (2006) literature, Kwok (2012) revealed how divergent geopolitical/cultural views are mirrored in religious interactions. The book also stresses the notion that accepting others’ religious authenticity is the key to peace.

The dissertation and books served as the topic’s literary platform. However, the lack of supporting empirical data limited the literature’s application. Inclined toward advocacy, other works could have benefitted from qualitative research approaches. Using proven methods to explore the research questions would have been valuable. Relying on the texts as the sole basis of the analysis risked academic misapplication. “Any feminist or modernist interpretation of classical references to ritual female leadership risks emptying those references of any contextual framework and may lead to misunderstandings of both the purposes of, and the reasoning behind, such references” (Calderini, 2009, p. 7). Absent qualitative empiricism, the literature still generated attention on important issues. This dissertation addresses the identified research opportunity to develop understanding of women interfaith leaders’ experiences.

*Advocacy and position articles.* The academic and public interest in interfaith matters hastened after the 9/11 tragedy. Attention on the topic became manifest in peer-reviewed articles and journalistic punditry. By extension, issues surrounding women’s interfaith leadership gained interest as well. Subsequent to O’Neill’s treatises on the topic, peer-reviewed articles addressing the subject started being developed to either support advocacy efforts or articulate specific perspectives.
The advocacy-related articles promoted interfaith as an overall endeavor and extended the core arguments related to women’s interfaith leadership. Remaining in the qualitative realm, the peer-reviewed articles were located in a variety of refereed journals. Mainly centered on spiritual affairs, the journals included the fields of theology, civics, religious education, law and religion, conflict resolution, religious commentary, and the scientific study of religion. The articles utilized sound approaches and analysis. Yet, the articles did not fully use qualitative empirical processes. However, the articles did offer perspectives that constructed more understanding of issues in the field of the study.

The advocacy-aligned articles advanced views ranging from promotion of interfaith ideas in the aftermath of 9/11 to narrative accounts of interfaith experiences. The qualitative interviews in the narrative articles were constructed to develop understanding of people’s lives from their own views (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The articles’ epoch spanned from 2002 through 2012. The early, advocacy-based articles buoyed the findings in O’Neill’s (1989) dissertation and books, which expounded the argument that women’s interfaith leadership issues were being overlooked (O’Neill, 1990). The middle set of articles analyzed organizational concerns related to interfaith leadership. The later set of advocacy articles probed the worldwide and geopolitical aspects of interfaith activities and inclusion. Collectively, the advocacy-related articles facilitated continued discussions on women in interfaith activities. Repeatedly, similar methods were used to develop the articles’ concepts. Across the literature, participatory and dialogical outlooks were reflected.

The importance of women’s interfaith participation and leadership was advocated in two peer-reviewed articles. From these works, gender and interfaith-related issues
regarding racism, ethnic prejudice (Esack, 2002), and inclusive interfaith organizational activities (Patel, 2005) were articulated through opinion-based methods. Mostly, dialogical questions and analysis were posed to create awareness of women’s involvement in interfaith affairs and related issues. The parallels between chauvinism and xenophobia in interfaith affairs were emphasized in an early article by Esack (2002). Esack (2002) described ties between religious bigotry and the plight of women interfaith leaders. Calling on earlier work, Esack (1997, 2003) connected the concept of authenticity to religious pluralism and just societies. The article employed ethnographic references and limited narratives to strengthen its arguments on interfaith authenticity challenges.

Similar to the study of women’s interfaith authenticity issues, Esack (2002) explored the discrimination that different ethnic groups have experienced in an interfaith context. The article cited several historical examples of minority populations being abused because of their different ethnicity and religion. As a parallel to O’Neill’s work (1989, 1990), Esack (2002) aptly tackled authenticity issues by explaining how the perceived religious legitimacy of dominant groups has led to the oppression of other groups. As O’Neill (1990) used feminism as a lens to highlight interfaith issues, Esack (2002) used race and ethnicity to underscore observations of turbulence in interfaith activities.

The use of personal narratives gives life and clarity of example to hypothetical problems and complex circumstances. Esack (2002) made use of exemplars from his own experiences to demonstrate the dangers and consequences of demonizing and reducing others’ religious authenticity. By extrapolating a personal vignette, the article viscerally
and powerfully contends the need for interfaith tolerance at a societal level. Esack’s (2002) limited application of personal accounts illustrated how additional interfaith-related narratives have enriched and advanced the subject literature.

Women interfaith leaders’ personal narratives are germane to the broader context of interfaith activities. Understanding how different groups are accepted and perceived as legitimate participants provided knowledge of how interfaith endeavors function. Like the overall construct, interfaith organizations “seek to bring together religiously diverse groups and individuals to build understanding and cooperation” (Patel, 2005, p. 17). The research study concentrated on women interfaith organizational leaders’ experiences in their respective settings. As an opening to this specific topic, Patel’s (2005) analysis of interfaith dynamics probed leadership authenticity issues in an organizational context.


The article employed limited narratives in a manner consistent with other early interfaith literature. Patel (2005) addressed interfaith authenticity and acceptance issues by representing the complex interactions among individuals and faith traditions in interfaith affairs. The brief stories in the article presented opportunities for further research on interfaith authenticity. Inclined toward addressing inequities, Patel (2005)
gave examples of some groups’ marginalization and disenfranchisement in interfaith matters. Use of an advocacy and participatory approach matched the methods used in previous literature (Esack, 2002; Kwok, 2012; O’Neill, 1989, 1990, 2007; Stokes, 2006). In agreement, these paralleling works presented a robust advocacy issue. Although the articles contained some narrative data, the arguments could be supported by further empirical research. With increasing interest in the subject, more articles investigated interfaith organizational environments.

Researchers started to notice the increasing global scope of interfaith activities. Articles began offering new perspectives on interfaith activities’ growing influence. Relatedly, some scholars addressed women’s participation and leadership questions in the context of these emergent activities. In this area, there were explicit discussions of women’s leadership roles in interfaith organizations (Council of Europe, 2005). As interfaith organizational dynamics and challenges with interfaith dialogue started to gain societal attention, gender issues correspondingly came into focus.

The enlarged scope and influence of interfaith activities, in turn, prompted concerns with interfaith gender roles and participation. Beyond simple advocacy, the Council of Europe’s (2005) extended commentary report posited that women were being excluded from interfaith leadership and power brokering. Of importance, this report was one of the first attempts to fully incorporate empirical evidence to support claims that women interfaith participants were being marginalized. Inclusion of policy framework approaches that both exacerbated and resolved women’s interfaith concerns was an enhancement from the advocacy-based methods applied in other subject literature.
The report employed a qualitative approach by using focus groups and limited narratives to develop data. With an objective structure, the report comprehensively investigated the gender imbalance in interfaith participation and priorities for women’s involvement (Council of Europe, 2005). The report’s emphasis on the nature of the issues and underlying causes of problems with women’s participation in interfaith dialogue was comparable with other topic literature. Differing from the advocacy-centered literature, the report contained specific recommendations to address authenticity and acceptance difficulties with women interfaith participants (Council of Europe, 2005). The fact that the report was issued from a governmental organization instead of an academic scholar was noteworthy as well. As the flourishing interfaith movement’s influence increased, prominent governmental leaders and non-governmental organizations began to notice interfaith activities, organizations, and leaders.

International religiously based peacemaking and interfaith dialogue efforts increased in scope after the 9/11 tragedy. The global paradigm shift toward transnational engagement has supplanting previous modes of outright hostility and aggression (Swidler, 2012). Traditionally seen as dialogue facilitators, interfaith leaders were now seen as valued assets that could shape policy and command attention. In an era of increasing globalization, the world’s different religions and cultures have come into much greater contact (Fletcher, 2008). The functions and capabilities of interfaith organizations have transformed in order to keep pace with the needs of the current global environment.

Government leaders, global policy brokers, and business interests are all using interfaith leaders’ influence and access to large groups of people. Brodeur’s (2005) article summarized the prominent organizations that became concerned with interfaith matters.
The article demonstrated why organizations, such as the White House, United Nations, the World Bank, and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s Interfaith Institute have all initiated interfaith initiatives. Consistent with earlier works, the article was advocacy based and suggested a vision for interfaith activities. In contrast to other topic literature, Brodeur’s (2005) article inclined toward empirical methods by offering conclusions and resolutions for the gender-related concerns raised in the other literature. One of Brodeur’s (2005) solutions, which called for inclusive interfaith organizational structures, is rooted in the mutual acceptance of others’ religious authenticity. Demonstrated in these examples, interfaith organizations’ importance had become manifest in the literature.

The interfaith literature peer-reviewed articles helped construct the academic exploration of women’s interfaith leadership. But beyond advocacy, the research required further empirical literature to better define and gain insights into the topic. The peer-reviewed articles provided consistent and coherent arguments on women’s interfaith leadership that were are not always expressed through empirically robust methods. Likewise, the boundaries encompassing interfaith affairs were not clearly defined. Much of the nascent work in that area was initiated in dissertations and theses.

**Empirical dissertations and theses.** During the late-1980s, O’Neill’s (1989) dissertation presented the emerging issue of women’s participation in interfaith affairs. As the topic matured, dissertations and theses became academic instruments utilized to research and advocate women’s interfaith leadership issues. By using known empirical methods, dissertations and theses researched specific issues and supplied granular results. In these research analyses, two main problem sets were investigated.
The state of literature related to women’s interfaith leadership was undergoing maturation from opinion-based advocacy to empirically based research. Three studies presented exemplars of this transformation and greater focus on interfaith-specific issues. One dissertation examined dialogue intersections and impacts to the interfaith leadership paradigm. Another research study delved into the influences in various interfaith settings and experiences. Recognized qualitative strategies of inquiry were employed in both analyses. Principally, these dialogue-related studies used comparative devices and case studies. A third study utilized interviews to gain understanding into women interfaith participants’ experiences. These studies typified the growth in the topic literature.

Emergent researchers considered questions surrounding interfaith dialogue dynamics and women’s leadership in these environments. Overall, the literature emphasized the central issue of women’s acceptance and authenticity as interfaith leaders. Brecht’s (2010) wide-ranging analysis assessed the epistemology of interfaith dialogue by concentrating on women’s experiences. In a similar timeframe, Anderson (2010) investigated interfaith dialogue paradigms by analyzing the potential influence of hegemonic patriarchy on women’s interfaith experiences. Comparatively, Teague’s (2011) thesis distinctively focused on actual women’s interfaith experiences versus the examination of structural constructs in Brecht’s (2010) and Anderson’s (2010) dissertations. As an exemplar and antecedent to this dissertation, Teague (2011) exercised a qualitative narrative methodology to offer insights. Each of the studies distinctively returned to the core issue of women’s interfaith leadership authenticity.

In an exhaustive study, historical analysis was used to evaluate soteriology (salvation-related theological doctrines) in interfaith dialogue. Brecht’s (2010)
dissertation studied the epistemology of interfaith dialogue and religious debate. The study contrasted religious diversity reviews in epistemic disagreement models (McKim, 1990) with current epistemological models (Feldman, 2006). Besides the dialogue analysis, the study informally monitored discourse norms at women’s interfaith meetings. Brecht’s (2010) research uniquely blended narrative data with concept analysis.

The study juxtaposed investigation of religious diversity epistemology, soteriological (salvation) doctrines with women interfaith leaders’ lived experiences. The result was Brecht’s (2010) reasoning in beliefs model (virtuous doxastic practices) that illustrated interdependence between women interfaith leaders and communities. The comprehensive research study had two initial sections that defined religious diversity and analyzed religious disagreement epistemologies. As O’Neill (1989, 1990) posited the need for women’s interreligious dialogue, the third section of Brecht’s (2010) dissertation offered a case study that observed dynamics at a women’s interfaith dialogue group. The study’s fourth through seventh sections considered contemporary epistemological models and presented Brecht’s (2010) “Virtuous Doxastic Practice Model” (which assessed the use of beliefs and values).

The study, which revealed Brecht’s (2010) impressive scholarship and thorough analysis, was grounded on a probing research question. The dissertation investigation asked, “What can women’s experiences in an interreligious dialogue community tell me, as a theorist, about the shaping of beliefs in an interreligious context?” (Brecht, 2010, p. 3). Although the dissertation’s substance was weighted on the doxastic model, the driving question was about the women interfaith participants’ narratives. With the model and analysis, Brecht (2010) made a distinctive contribution to women’s interfaith literature.
The case study on women’s interfaith events yielded empirical data for the model. Brecht’s (2010) study additionally exhibited that personal narratives can provide understanding and enriched knowledge.

Effective dialogue is essential in interfaith endeavors. Ostensibly, the raison d’être for interfaith interactions is to improve understanding among religious traditions and build genuine relationships between the participants. Dissertations and theses concerning women’s interfaith activities explored how women interfaith leaders exercised dialogue and how dialogue impacted the leaders. Anderson’s (2010) historiographical dissertation outlined the post-WWII background of interfaith dialogue. Similar to other studies within the field, liberation and feminist theologies were exercised as lenses to view women’s interfaith leadership and help understand the associated questions.

Preceding studies on women’s interfaith leadership alluded to the need for diverse views of experiences and issues. Anderson (2010) purposefully applied a feminist perspective to assess interfaith dialogue and evaluate its evolution toward dialogical (diverse) tendencies. The study posed three research questions that reflected upon the participants’ acceptance, common experiences, and philosophical orientation in the interfaith realm. Anderson’s (2010) straightforward approach to the intersection of feminism, religious doctrine, and interfaith dialogue was novel and decisive. The study’s incendiary statements posited that women were clearly marginalized in interfaith affairs.

Given the subject’s nature and content, applying a feminist lens to analyze women’s interfaith literature is fitting and expected. The preponderance of the topic literature has been written from that viewpoint. That reality also may present the literature as being activist orotundity versus objective scholarship. Anderson’s (2010)
study might have presupposed causation and conclusions by opening with a provocative statement, “Women share this common history and experience of the colonization of minds and bodies because masculinized religious agendas define their world without their input” (Anderson, 2010, p. 1). Notwithstanding, the unabashed advocatory approach to the subject did offer very clear structure and ideas. Anderson (2010) concluded that feminist interreligious dialogical activism is an important influencer of interfaith dialogue. Qualitative empirical data to support or refute that premise, which was central to the dissertation, would have been useful.

A study examining interfaith leadership, dialogue, and group dynamics in narrative design followed the historiographical studies. Teague’s (2011) thesis was a literary milestone that added narrative data and directly correlated the topic with feminist theological ideas. As an interpretive framework, feminist research approaches focus on various women’s situations and the outlining context (Creswell, 2013). In the study, Teague (2011) interviewed four women interfaith leaders to gain understanding of their perspectives on authenticity and acceptance. Applying a feminist critique viewpoint, the study made use of phenomenological analysis to assess women’s interfaith agency.

Although inclined toward empiricism versus advocacy, the study nonetheless admitted using predisposed concepts in its research. The thesis opens with, “I am a feminist . . . and both my questions and my data analysis reflect my own approaches to these questions” (Teague, 2011, p. 1). The study used a feminist lens to understand women’s interfaith participation accounts. The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method was applied to conduct two, 90-minute interviews with four women interfaith participants (Teague, 2011). In trying to understand the participants’ opinions,
Teague’s (2011) study concluded that there are negative differences in how men and women experience interfaith activities and settings.

Early topic articles and dissertations suggested that narratives play an important role in researching women’s interfaith leadership and experiences. Like O’Neill’s (1989) work, Teague (2011) encouraged use of narratives and proceeded to empirically employ them in research. Most importantly, the study demonstrated that the subject was situated in broader academic constructs. Teague’s (2011) use of narrative inquiry was an example of what could be achieved in a more exhaustive doctoral dissertation. Researching the narratives of women interfaith leaders to ascertain commonality of experiences and traits requires additional academic depth and structure. Considering interfaith authenticity and acceptance in an organizational context also required moving beyond a feminist outlook. Although not specifically concentrated in that area, feminist theologies and religious leadership constructs influenced the study’s research on women’s interfaith leadership.

**Feminist and womanist theologies.** Feminist theology has a significant presence in the discussion on women’s interfaith leadership. Like the broader religious field, empirical literature from feminist theology helped by offering perspective and context to interfaith affairs. Clearly, the empirical literature in these topic areas is more plentiful and mature than the interfaith-related literature. Thus, scholars used feminist theological literature to put together arguments related to women interfaith leaders.

Feminist theology assisted scholars with contextualizing the views presented on interfaith leadership. As posited, much of the women’s interfaith-related literature was developed by way of case studies, hermeneutics, historiographical analyses, and phenomenological inquiries. For context, Kwok’s (2007) critical and hermeneutic
analysis of theological anthropology texts and feminist social practices provided a perspective on women’s participation in interfaith activities. The article outlined the development of feminist critique vis-à-vis nation/state evolution. Also, the junctures with women’s religious leadership were exhibited in the commentary (Kwok, 2007). The article called for an expanded interfaith epistemology that embraces women from various religious traditions and cultural backgrounds.

In the article, Kwok (2007) examined the historical results of women’s religious and feminist leadership and emergent opportunities to engage in interfaith endeavors. “Through feminist social practices, theologians can work to strengthen solidarity among women across national, racial, economic and religious boundaries” (Kwok, 2007, p. 141). The article made important observations on the different authenticity perspectives among women interfaith leaders. Kwok (2007) demonstrated the distinctions in objectives and perceived authenticity between white feminist theologians and those of womanists and other women of color interfaith leaders. Feminist theological thought and many interfaith activities, which originated in the West, were imbued with particular cultural and ethnic views (Kwok, 2007). By framing these differences and dissonances, the article uncovered a critical issue that may impact perceptions of women interfaith leaders. This research study added new knowledge regarding these matters.

Women interfaith leaders have a broad diversity of opinions, just as there is considerable diversity in their respective faiths. In the interfaith literature, western feminist scholars have been the vanguard in tackling issues with women’s participation in interfaith matters. Self-proclaimed feminists, such as O’Neill (1990), Kwok (2007), and Teague (2011), have advanced the emerging topic scholarship. Also, they highlighted that
there are few diverse opinions in the topic literature. Accordingly, other women’s philosophical views were applied in this research to study the topic from a different view.

Womanism is an example of divergent religious thought and leadership by women in search of a voice that articulates their unique concerns. Womanist philosophy was developed by African American women in response to exclusionist worries with feminism. Womanist scholars problematized and critiqued what was perceived as the narrow theological and social views of feminists (Harris, 2007). Not simply a reaction to feminism, womanism presented a holistic construct for women of color to enact their religious sensibilities and a method to address pressing communal problems.

Womanism is purportedly a construct where egalitarianism is germane to its core values. Nonetheless, questions of religious diversity within womanism’s philosophical outlook and constituency were raised. Harris (2007) created a hermeneutically based study that considered identity and religious diversity within the womanist concept. The article’s analysis pointed to inconsistencies with stated womanist goals and the apparent lack of religious diversity in womanist adherents. Harris (2007) studied the literature of prominent Black womanist scholars and compared them with the texts of Black humanist commentators. The analysis highlighted a point with relevance of interfaith diversity. By stressing ties to humanist thinking, the article explored “the problematic assumption that a womanist perspective is synonymous with a Christian perspective” (Harris, 2007, p. 397). The notion of religious diversity in womanism had wider bearing. By scrutinizing religious diversity issues, works within womanist literature had relevance as a perspective for women’s interfaith leadership authenticity.
Studying women interfaith leaders’ narratives to understand if they had common traits and shared experiences was one of the research goals of this dissertation. Feminist and womanist literature was extrapolated and applied to questions in the interfaith realm. An application of womanist ideas by a non-African-American woman exhibited the potential of shared experiences and characteristics among women religious leaders and how narrative research helped unearth heretofore unrealized knowledge.

In a self-narrative thesis, Frame (2012), a Caucasian Canadian woman, demonstrated the historical roots and wider application of the African-American womanist liberation concepts. The researcher’s historiographical analysis of womanism segued to an evaluation of the challenges related to advocating womanist theology to diverse audiences (Frame, 2012). While fascinating in its own right, the research connected to women’s interfaith organizational leadership through its conclusions. Frame’s (2012) thesis found that womanist concepts are relevant beyond the expected audience. Ostensibly viewed as an outsider, Frame’s (2012) perceived etic experience was nonetheless authentically lived.

The study offered a view into how an emic philosophy (womanism) was adopted by an etic practitioner (a Caucasian Canadian woman) through shared experiences and traits (women’s religious leadership). Frame’s (2012) narrative described an epiphany of experiencing otherness based on personal attributes and a subsequent journey to discover womanist theology. The thesis’ specific questions and conclusions centered on the etic application of emic thinking. In the study, Frame (2012) also suggested that authenticity can be found in commonly held experiences and characteristics versus participants’ physiological attributes. The study’s research question was based on an authenticity
issue. “Is it possible for a white woman to preach womanist theology to a white congregation?” (Frame, 2012, p. 5). Through a narrative framework, the study explored this question and provided an exemplar to study women’s interfaith leaders’ shared experiences and characteristics. The thesis examined authenticity in an organizational context while overcoming and defying conventional diversity perspectives.

As diversity questions in feminist and womanist theology evolved, explicit references to interfaith matters began to appear in the literature. Recent literature has challenged assumptions about feminist and womanist theology and interfaith affairs. In one such instance, feminist and womanist theologies were critically assessed for their interfaith inclusiveness. The global multiplicity of women’s religious tradition and values questioned feminist theology’s professed universality. Like previous topic literature, the question of women’s authenticity and acceptance was again present.

Development of womanist theology portended the diversification of feminist theological philosophies. Ruether’s (2012) critique outlined the historical evolution of feminist theology and its increasingly diverse manifestations. Relevant to this study’s research, the article defined the evolving expressions of feminist theology in women’s interfaith leadership. Beyond working within their own faith traditions, Ruether (2012) remarked how feminist theologians are creating new literature in an interfaith context. The emergent feminist theology literature offered different and authentic feminist positions based on the women’s varying ethnicities, cultures, and religions.

The article noted the women’s different perspectives on what may or may not be a shared experience. Ruether (2012) drew attention to how minority feminists rejected the ideas advanced by middle-class American women that their views were a common voice
and represented shared experiences among the world’s women. In the evolving feminist theology, diverse women were articulating their authenticity and unique experiences as they saw it. Ruether’s (2012) phenomenological study of feminist diversity used limited narrative examples of feminist theology leaders’ contributions. Yet, the research did not delve into the depth of how these women’s lived experiences shaped their feminist views. The article, similar to earlier literature on women’s interfaith leadership, called attention to challenges that women face in the theological sphere. By studying a purposive sample of women interfaith leaders, this study presented an exemplar of how actual women interfaith leaders experienced authenticity and acceptance within organizations.

**Women and religious leadership.** The literature associated with women’s interfaith leadership primarily focused on issues between religious or faith boundaries. Comparatively, the research centered on religious leadership is germane to issues that fall within specific religions or faith doctrines. Two religious traditions, Catholicism and Islam, have robust interfaith activities. Also, these faiths preclude women from some formal leadership positions. The literature in this area supported researching how formal and informal women interfaith leaders make contributions.

Catholicism and Islam have canonical doctrines and religious dictates that are inherently conservative. For purposes of comparative research, there was relevant exemplar literature on the evolution of women’s leadership issues within these faiths. As scholars created the literature on women’s interfaith leadership, the mature research from the religious leadership was applicable. An article by Gramick (2001) described how Catholic leadership is New Testament based and how women Catholic leaders observe it. The historiographical analysis first established the context and then discussed a Catholic
leadership model. The article challenged use of rigid leadership styles that seemingly run counter to biblical declarations. Contemporary women Catholic leaders’ characteristics were compared to the leadership model. Lastly, the study analyzed Catholic women’s collaborative and informal leadership styles and feminist connections.

In the analysis, Gramick’s (2001) article elaborated on many points relevant to woman’s interfaith leadership. Notions of women leaders’ inclinations toward participative leadership styles were discussed in context of the Catholic community’s transformation. By exploring the Second Vatican Council’s (Vatican II) impact, Gramick (2001) posited that the Council encouraged a less-authoritarian environment and thus facilitated increased women’s participation in religious leadership activities. The articles concluded that the Catholic Church’s more global, dynamic, and flexible worldview helped enable interfaith activities. Gramick (2001) also posited that perceptions of all Catholic women as having consensus on traditional doctrines did not reflect the actual diverse perspectives among adherents.

Another study added depth to Gramick’s (2001) high-level historiographical analysis. Ecklund (2006) incorporated impacts of organizational context on women’s religious leadership. Compared to Brodeur’s (2005) analysis of interfaith organizational settings, the article studied the dynamics of women leaders’ encounters in Catholic parish environments. In particular, the research suggested there were two distinct sets of parish cultures within American Catholic Church settings.

Previous studies (Winter, Lummis, & Stokes, 1994) examined contemporary changes regarding women’s leadership in the Catholic Church. In comparison, Ecklund’s (2006) work filled a gap in the research by studying the changes in parishes compared to
the international Church setting. The study’s methodology included interviews with church members and leaders from six different parishes. There were also observations of religious services in the same locales. Of the survey respondents, 32 were women leaders in formal positions and regular church attendees. The other six respondents were priests and men in formal leadership roles. The interview questions focused on women’s leadership roles and respondents’ views on how those roles aligned with Church doctrine and teachings. Using a grounded theory approach to data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the data from the 45-minute interviews portrayed two distinct church cultures. The progressive culture inclined to welcoming formal women leaders. This finding aligned with the progressive worldview. Conversely, the other parishes ascribed to more traditional interpretations and saw informal women leaders as a necessity of conditions (e.g., priest shortages) versus a desired state. Ecklund’s (2006) study can be applied to the diverse views in interfaith affairs.

The methods, data, and results of Ecklund’s (2006) study can help understand informally observed dynamics regarding women’s leadership in interfaith activities. Within and amongst different faith traditions, traditionalists, moderates, and progressives have diverse perspectives. The literature on women’s interfaith leadership is immature and does not have the scholarly breadth or rigor of other academic fields. Even so, there was other literature that helped address questions of women’s religious leadership.

Scholars are also addressing women’s leadership issues in the Islamic realm. Global geopolitical situations have drawn attention to issues with women’s leadership in Islamic affairs. In many cases, questions on women leaders’ authenticity in Islam are openly debated. Calderini (2009) put forward a historiographical analysis of arguments
on women’s leadership presented by medieval Muslim scholars. Presented with rich historical context, the study aligned centuries of scholarship and religious doctrine with contemporary issues faced by many Muslim women leaders.

In the article, Calderini’s (2009) exegesis contemplated and contextualized the medieval Muslim scholars’ arguments for and (much less) against women’s Islamic religious leadership. The study synthesized extensive data into six points of consideration that specifically concentrated on the canonical legitimacy and acceptance of women’s leadership of religious rituals. By analyzing historical precedent, social customs, legal consensus, scriptural evidence, modesty, and purity, the article framed ongoing disagreements over the permissibility of certain Muslim women leaders’ leadership actions (Calderini, 2009). The article used scholarly evidence to deconstruct polemically extreme positions on the issue and demonstrated the authenticity of women’s Islamic religious leadership.

Beyond specific analysis and conclusions, the article exemplified broader authenticity issues with women’s religious and interfaith leadership. Calderini (2009) used empirical research methods to show that women’s interfaith leadership matters can benefit from thorough academic examination. Although not a narrative-based study, the article represented the arguments used in favor of and against women’s religious leadership authenticity by studying an abridged account of Muslim activist Amina Wadud’s leadership of mixed congregation services. The research needs became clear when Calderini’s (2009) analysis was juxtaposed with this study’s research questions. Prior research mostly investigated women’s religious leadership difficulties within a
specific religion. This research study discovered knowledge on analogous questions across religions.

**Methodological approaches.** The literature related to women’s interfaith leadership is overwhelmingly situated in the qualitative paradigm. Fundamentally seeking to develop meaning and insights, the literature leveraged the gamut of qualitative inquiry methods. Indeed, “Those undertaking qualitative studies have a baffling number of choices of approaches” (Creswell, 2013, p. 7). Conversely, the methodological frameworks applied in the five dissertations and theses used in this study were inclined toward feminist and social constructivist views. This paradigmatic consistency in the literature suggested academic rigor and reliability. However, it may also demonstrate limitations within the literature.

The nascent state of the literature may have accounted for the preponderance of the early works having an advocacy orientation. The axiological assumptions of some researchers were shown in their dissertations and theses (Teague, 2011; see also O’Neill, 1989). Yet, the literature’s eclectic state posed difficulties in gauging the philosophical means (e.g., ontological vs. epistemological). Markedly, the topic was theology based, but it has relevance in, and drew upon, literature from a variety of disciplines.

The literature came from an assortment of journalistic sources. In the women’s interfaith leadership category, three of the four articles came from theology journals. The other article came from a government human rights organization’s published reports. The feminist section had three articles located within feminist-theology and political-theology journals. The three articles from the religious leadership area originated from journals based in theology, sociology, and religious studies areas.
The studies dealt with the subjective topic of women’s interfaith leadership authenticity. Nevertheless, it was not enough to simply convey the philosophical hypotheses related to the topic (Creswell, 2013). There was limited use of narrative evidence to support the arguments posed in the literature. The inquiry strategies and methodological approaches used in developing the research studies and peer-reviewed articles did not exercise the range of qualitative methods. This dissertation bridged a research gap by adding new knowledge on an emerging topic area.

**Chapter Summary**

Exploring the major social processes related to women’s interfaith leadership was a multi-faceted endeavor. Early topic scholars, such as O’Neill (1989), put forth the question of women’s participation and authenticity in the interfaith realm. In succession, other researchers advocated the importance of this topic in advocacy-related articles. However, there were gaps in the empirical literature related to the nature of the problems and specific women interfaith leaders’ narratives.

**Research gaps.** The subject matter literature presented perspectives primarily through an advocacy lens. In presenting credible arguments, these views could be better supported with data that describe the traits and experiences of the leaders being researched. Subject scholars, such as O’Neill (1989) and Stokes (2006), have advocated the need for more women interfaith leaders’ narratives. This dissertation was a narrative research study, which provided more in-depth understanding of women interfaith leaders’ authenticity experiences, to satisfy a gap in the subject literature.

**Recommendations.** The empirical literature gap was undertaken with a research study that explored a focused population (e.g., women interfaith leaders in the Greater
Rochester, NY and Finger Lakes region) emphasizing the leaders’ traits and narrative experiences. To focus on questions related to the leaders’ acceptance and traits, there were leadership theories that helped investigate the narrative gaps.

Issues related to leadership authenticity are recurring themes in the literature related to women interfaith leaders. Authentic leadership theory (ALT) is a leadership postulate that evaluates leaders’ self-awareness, values, objectivity, and relational openness (Northouse, 2013). Notably, culturally diverse data were used to develop the ALT structure (Walumbwa et al., 2008). By leveraging ALT, along with feminist and womanist theology and religious leadership literature, this study used a differentiating theoretical lens to research women interfaith leaders’ traits and experiences. This qualitative empirical research study addressed the subject’s idiosyncratic difficulties.

Research from a variety of fields provided the basis for the literature review. Through the auspices of certifiable research databases, an assortment of data sources were used to obtain books, peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, and theses related to the subject. Research linked to comparative religious studies and interfaith marriage issues was excluded to focus on women’s leadership. The interdisciplinary review yielded data centered on women’s interfaith leadership. In the advocacy-leaning topic research, themes related to participation and authenticity emerged.

The peer-reviewed articles on the nascent subject primarily offered backing for women’s leadership in interfaith activities. Subsequent to 9/11, the increasing interfaith-related literature was replete with opinion and position-inflected works. However, there was a gap in qualitative and quantitative empirical studies that addressed topic questions. Particularly, there was an absence of empirical data defining the traits and experiences of
women’s interfaith leaders. Also, there was a gap in the literature of narratives showing
evidence of women interfaith leaders’ authenticity. The research highlighted questions on
interfaith women’s leadership that were empirically addressed in dissertations and theses.
Issues dealing with authenticity—problems with legitimacy acceptance—were
hypothesized and explored. Several researchers (Eck, 2007; Kwok, 2012; O’Neill, 2007;
Teague, 2011) advocated for more diversity in the literature. This study is empirically
based research focusing on the nature of, and the narrative gaps in, this important topic.

This research study on women interfaith organizational leaders gave voice to their
experiences and produced empirical qualitative literature that developed meaning from
the participants’ narratives. The increasing empirical literature on interfaith matters
indicates that women leaders may not enjoy similar acceptance as male leaders.
Questions concerning leadership authenticity, and issues with legitimacy and acceptance,
were recommended for further research. This study’s research investigated these issues
and researched themes of commonality in experience and characteristics of women
interfaith organizational leaders.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

Religious violence and inter-societal conflicts are stark realities of the post-9/11 world. In an interfaith context, religious leaders are combatting violence and also influencing geopolitical decision making (Brodeur, 2005). As interfaith organizations and activities gain more influence, there are varying views on what qualifies a person as an authentic interfaith leader. By doctrine or practice, several faith traditions exclude women from formal leadership positions. There is a gap in the literature investigating women’s interfaith leadership and their acceptance as authentic interfaith organizational leaders. Additional qualitative research analyzing this subject may reveal new insights.

The study investigated women interfaith leaders’ traits and organizational experiences. By developing empirical data, the research provides further knowledge to determine if shared leadership traits and similar organizational experiences are occurring. Through narrative research, the women’s accounts revealed insights on their interfaith leadership experiences. “Narrative identity thus is not simply the recounting of the temporal sequence of events in one’s life, one thing after another” (Sparrowe, 2005, p. 427). The study provided voice to the participants’ experiences while developing some initial qualitative empirical research data.

Employing a narrative approach was the best research technique to discover and convey women interfaith organizational leaders’ stories. The study’s context and setting were developed as an integral component of the research approach. Also, the participant
types used in the study and the rationale for selecting those types are rationalized. There is an explanation of why a purposeful sampling strategy was used with the qualitative narrative research approach (Creswell, 2013). There is also a discussion of how the research instruments fit within the study’s design. Finally, the project’s timelines, interview protocol, protection measures, and data-analysis construct are described.

**Research Context**

The research study was focused on formal and informal organizational leaders actively engaged in interfaith activities and dialogue as part of their organizations’ charter, programming, and primary focus. Three types of interfaith groups were included in the research because they typified interfaith organizations in the United States. Using empirically based criteria that supported the study’s focus, organizations involved in interfaith pursuits were selected. In the Rochester, NY and Finger Lakes region, there are several organizations with settings and missions that were suitable for interfaith research.

Three criteria were used to help select the organizational settings to research women interfaith leaders. First, the candidate organizations were located in the greater Rochester, NY and Finger Lakes region. The geographic locale was chosen because of Rochester’s and the Finger Lakes region’s roles as a locus of national and international interfaith activities. Second, the organizations’ interfaith charters and activities encouraged understanding among different faith traditions (Kwok, 2012). A group’s connection to interfaith activities does not necessarily equate to positive intent or inclusive actions. Organizations chosen for the study were aligned with an interfaith dialogue intention of affirmative relations. Third, the groups had differentiated structures and missions and also had women functioning as key organizational leaders. Using the
criteria and insights from interfaith topic scholars and practitioners, the study’s venues were located in diverse organizational situations to present different perspectives.

The organizational settings that the different leaders came from included an interfaith institute, a nonprofit community education and advocacy organization, a university-student interfaith group, a religious community relations organization, a local church parish, an interfaith coalition-building organization, and an interfaith dialogue group. Each organizational environment offered a different framework to understand interfaith leadership. As a 501(c)(3) organization, the nonprofit setting offered insights about interfaith community advocacy endeavors. The religious social and humanitarian services agency represented perspectives from a particular religious community engaged in interfaith activities. The interfaith student group from a large university, which has proactive interfaith programming, presented a view of a diverse and dynamic interfaith organization. Together, these organizations exemplified the diverse environments needed to research and derive further insights on women’s interfaith organizational leadership.

Research Participants

Similar to the organizational setting selection, the study’s research participants were selected based on empirically based criteria that supported the research focus. The study’s approach exercised a purposive sample to facilitate investigating the research issues. Qualitative narrative studies, contrasted with representative sampling used in postpositivist research, rely on designated sites and participants to deliberately inform the research (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participant criteria took into account the study’s focus on women interfaith leaders’ characteristics and experiences.
Together with the criteria, the participants were selected using guidance obtained from conversations with PhD topic experts, practitioners, and faculty. The purposive sample was based on seven women interfaith leaders. Using narrative research facilitated exploring the detailed life experiences of a specific set of participants (Creswell, 2013). The depth required to examine the study’s research questions was achieved by obtaining qualitative narrative data and insights from the respective research participants. With detailed qualitative information, the study’s qualitative narrative research approach generated transferable knowledge about women interfaith leaders’ organizational leadership experiences (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Using a narrative strategy of inquiry necessitated a limited sample size. Perceived limitations in the study’s purposive sample were offset by the benefits gained in depth of understanding and generalizability of the qualitative empirical data. The participants’ narrative accounts also addressed a gap in the empirical literature on women interfaith organizational leaders.

First and foremost, the study’s participants were purposefully selected for their interfaith organizational leadership experiences. In order to examine the leaders’ traits and the authenticity-related questions, the participants all had extensive interfaith experiences that were generalizable to other interfaith organizational leadership contexts (Vogt & Johnson, 2011). In addition to the experiential variety, the participants were also chosen for their religious and cultural diversity. A diverse set of participants facilitated deeper insights into how different religious traditions and cultures perceive and accept the authenticity of women’s interfaith organizational leadership.

The research investigated the leaders’ interfaith narratives preponderantly from the January 1999 to January 2014 timeframe. By focusing on this epoch, the women
interfaith leaders’ narratives provided insights on interfaith organizational leadership in the period shortly before and subsequent to the 9/11 tragedy. In alignment with the study’s timeframe, the participants agreed to share narratives related to the research questions (Coder, 2011; Creswell, 2013). The study criteria sought participants with an academic degree(s) and/or graduate-level training with at least 15-20+ years of interfaith leadership experience. These particular criteria were developed to garner participants with enough experiential depth to facilitate research of their traits and authenticity views.

In the international context, many interfaith leaders come from geographic locations that are predominated by a particular and/or majority religious tradition. The research study was situated in the greater Rochester, NY and Finger Lakes region. These areas enjoy considerable religious diversity across faith groups, within specific faith traditions and in interfaith leadership undertakings. The participants selected from the suggested organizations offered insights on women interfaith organizational leaders’ authenticity. Generalizability, a concept not commonly applied to qualitative research studies, was relevant to the study’s design (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The data obtained on women interfaith leaders’ common traits and experiences has broader relevance and meaning. The purposive sample supported investigation of the generalizable questions.

Interviewing women interfaith leaders who align with the aforementioned criterion yielded valuable data. The participants’ experiences and attributes coincided with other leaders that “share similar mindsets regarding the pluralistic framework within which they live out their beliefs” (O’Neill, 2007, p. 4). Although not fitting all the criteria, each participant exhibited some facets of the desired religious diversity, organizational leadership, and personal experiential qualifications.
Instruments Used in Data Collection

The study used two instruments to develop the research data. The supporting instrument, detailed in the data collection procedures, recorded the participants’ demographic information. The primary instrument was based on semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. With the researcher leading the exchanges, the interviews elicited data related to the research questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The primary instrument had four opened-ended questions grounded in ALT.

ALT was constructed on four elements that framed the concept’s structure and applicability. The interview questions used ALT’s factors of “self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency” (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008, p. 94). These facets were used to explore the research questions on traits, experiences, authenticity, and acceptance. Northouse (2013) notes that self-awareness deals with leaders’ insights on their core values. Internalized moral perspectives are the self-regulating ethics guiding leaders’ decisions; balanced information processing is the ability to objectively analyze other people’s views; and a relational transparency is the leaders’ honest portrayal of themselves. ALT provided a credible theoretical lens to research women’s interfaith leadership.

The interview questions had three stages, which were augmented by supplemental questions as needed. Using Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2009) approach, the interviews began with a self-awareness question. Next, two values and objectivity-related questions were presented. Finally, a relational-transparency question was asked. The interview stages aligned with the research questions investigating women interfaith organizational
leaders’ shared traits, organizational experiences, and evidence that formal and informal women interfaith leaders are accepted as authentic interfaith organizational leaders. ALT introduces an academic basis to research the extant literature related to women’s interfaith leadership.

The primary instrument’s introductory question gauged the participants’ leadership self-awareness. This question was posed to elicit descriptions of participants’ life experiences related to interfaith leadership (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The first question asked was: What are your personal experiences and thoughts about characteristics pertaining to interfaith leadership? Concerning self-awareness, this question provoked reflections on individual values and identity (Northouse, 2013). Successive questions continued to explore and develop data on these ideas.

Expanding understanding of leadership values was the objective of the follow-on questions. Determining what internal values and beliefs guide the participants’ actions helped illustrate their leadership authenticity (Avolio, 2011). The question on internalized moral perspectives inquired: How has your decision-making style and personal values informed your interfaith leadership?

To broaden understanding of the initial responses, another values-related question was presented to detect any complexities (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This question asked: When there was a perspective that conflicted with your values, how did you handle that situation? Balanced processing of information also denoted the leaders’ abilities to foster and sustain relationships.

Relational transparency is central to understanding the issues connected with women’s interfaith leadership. Being able to relate with, and effectively influence,
various constituencies is a key interfaith leadership competency. By probing relational transparency in the interviews, the participants responded with insights on women’s authenticity in the interfaith realm (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Northouse, 2013). The relational question queried: How have your relationships influenced being viewed and accepted as an authentic interfaith leader?

Each question was fashioned to facilitate gaining knowledge of common traits, organizational experiences, and evidence of authenticity acceptance. The interview questions were effectively applied to develop an understanding of the leaders’ perspectives and answer the study’s research questions.

The primary instrument’s questions were complemented with supplementary questions to further explore the narratives. Specifying and direct questions, which led to more descriptive data and fuller dimensional responses, augmented the primary interview instrument (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). By anticipating the interviews’ trajectories, opened-ended, supplementary questions helped develop nuanced participant responses.

Like the organizational- and participant-selection processes, the supplemental questions were developed with the benefit of a topic expert’s advice. The mind, heart, or gut may be triggered when different questions are posed (J. Sobala, personal communication, January 19, 2014). The primary instrument questions were fundamentally focused on prompting intellectual responses (or those from the mind). The additional questions were inclined toward understanding the participants’ emotive views of the research issues. By seeking narrative examples, these questions helped clarify the participants’ viewpoints.
During the interviews, four supplementary questions were used to illuminate points of interest. The first supplementary question expanded on leadership participation: How would you characterize the nature and continuity of your interfaith leadership experiences?

The values and objectivity question was amplified with an inquiry: What is an example of how you motivated people in an interfaith setting to move forward on a humanitarian initiative?

Diversity is germane to interfaith endeavors. To encourage sharing on adjudicating differences, the participants were asked: How are you mindful of philosophical differences, and how do you identify shared values?

To facilitate understanding of acceptance and authenticity issues, interviewees were questioned about their gender-related interfaith experiences: What have been your experiences leading gender-specific and gender-integrated interfaith activities?

The added questions were used as stated and were modified to facilitate the interview flow and the participants’ responses. These supplementary questions supported the study’s data collection and analysis design.

Procedures Used for Data Collection and Analysis

The study’s research questions were applied by using detailed procedures that outlined and implemented the research’s progression, an interview protocol, participant confidentially methods, and a data-analysis model. To facilitate alignment with increased interfaith activities, the study’s epoch ranged from early-1999 to early-2014. This was a period of increased attention on interfaith matters. By chronologically relating the data,
known events were correlated to the participant’s narrative experiences (Creswell, 2013). Conducting the narrative-focused interviews was the study’s major activity.

Action plan and timeline. The designed procedural timeline started with the interviews and concluded with the data-analysis activities. The interview protocol included the primary and secondary instruments (see Appendix). Employing an adaptation of Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2009) techniques, the interviews commenced with recording the participants’ demographic data. This information was captured to facilitate analysis and understanding of the narratives.

The secondary instrument’s demographic elements consisted of: Participant Identifier; Title(s); Timeframe and Location of Interfaith Activities; Current and Former Interfaith Organizations; Academic Degree(s), Training and Professional Credentials; Religious and Cultural Affiliation(s). As a supplementary tool, the supporting instrument data included important participant characteristics and background data that disclosed insights during the data analysis.

After the supporting instrument was completed, the primary instrument of interview questions were posed to the participants. Working from a social constructivist framework, the researcher explored and developed the participants’ remarks using the interview questions (Creswell, 2009). During portions of some interviews, there were pauses that allowed the participants to reflect and further expand upon their thoughts. The interviews were closed by the thanking of the participants for supporting the study (Creswell, 2013). The straightforward interview protocol enabled the collection of valuable narrative data.
The semi-structured interviews with the participants commenced in early March of 2014 and were completed in late April of 2014. Using an organized yet flexible approach, the interview schedule allotted time for the participants to reflect and engage in follow-up discussions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Concurrent with the interview timetable, the iterative data-analysis arrangement (e.g., data collection, management, and assessment activities) also commenced in early March of 2014. Each interview lasted approximately one hour in length. Once the interview schedule began, the data was simultaneously organized and correlated. In parallel, the data were also transcribed and coded beginning in early March of 2014.

Monitoring plan and project documentation. Informed consent and confidentiality measures were completed prior to each interview. To foster further trust and promote meaningful interviews, the researcher worked directly with the participants to explain and complete informed consent forms (Creswell, 2013). Confidentiality procedures played an important role in obtaining consent. Explanation of the study’s purpose, procedures, negligible risks, use of results, and voluntary participation conditions were outlined in a written consent document (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Other protection measures and research practices, such as the Institutional Review Board (IRB), were also explained. The personal aspects of consent and confidentiality were achieved by ensuring data protection and adhering to sound interview procedures.

Due to the confidential nature of the participants’ work, the study data was cooperatively reviewed. “Extending trust engenders reciprocity, so that when we trust others, they become more likely to behave in a trustworthy manner and to trust us in return” (Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006, p. 998). The interviews were recorded
and augmented by written notes. The interview data is securely stored with the researchers’ dissertation materials until a period deemed no longer necessary by the IRB. To facilitate confidentiality and ease, the interviews were conducted in locations that each participant chose for their comfort and convenience.

The study’s design and personal trust facilitated confidentiality and open dialogue. Rich, descriptive-qualitative narrative data was obtained by establishing trust and cooperative interaction with the participants. During data organization and analysis, the interview outcomes were only shared with the respective interviewees, a professional transcriptionist (approved by the college), and the dissertation committee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Prior to the study being finalized, the participants retained their rights to review and change their data and omit desired portions from release. Robust privacy and reciprocity practices supported gathering insightful data and obtaining understanding.

The data-analysis approach was flexible, supported confidentiality, and helped derive insights on the participants’ experiences. Bounded by the study’s parameters (e.g., a small purposeful sample), the data-analysis construct leveraged Creswell’s (2013) data-analysis spiral method. This method supported iterative data categorization and analysis.

The data were arranged and analyzed using an iterative five-step process that included “organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them” (Creswell, 2013, p. 179). Subsequent to the participant interviews, the first data-analysis step consisted of organizing, transcribing, and electronically filing the recorded data and field notes. The data were then read, noted, and reflected upon to form initial impressions in the second analysis step (Creswell, 2013). Through an opening review, the
second step generated the tentative analytical themes that emerged from the data. The initial thematic patterns helped guide the in-depth data coding and analysis by providing an outline of the narrative outcomes.

During the third data-analysis step, the data was inductively coded using the directed-content analysis methodology. “The goal of a directed approach to content analysis is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). The study’s data-analysis coding process followed Hsieh and Shannon’s (2005) directed-content analysis approach, which consisted of (a) selecting a relevant existing theory as a theoretical lens, (b) identifying key concepts and coding categories, (c) developing a theory-based code definition for each category, (d) reading the transcripts for initial impressions, (e) rereading and applying the a priori codes to the transcripts, and (f) developing themes based on the coding outcomes. Using ALT as a known theoretical framework, an initial set of codes was constructed to help categorize and analyze the raw qualitative narratives.

The study’s initial a priori codes were an amalgam of the ALT facets (Walumbwa et al., 2008) and ALT traits (George, 2003) that yielded five relevant data-analysis codes (see Table 3.1). ALT’s components of “self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 94) were the foundation of the study’s preliminary a priori codes. Along with the ALT components, the study’s data-analysis coding scheme incorporated George’s (2003) five authentic leadership traits that include (a) clarity of purpose, (b) a strong sense of right and wrong, (c) trusting relationships, (d) values-based actions, and (e) steadfast
commitment to pursuits. The codes were revised to include more relevant groups as the study’s directed-content analysis arrangement evolved with successive iterative reviews.

The study’s coding arrangement enjoyed one modification and two additions after the first coding iteration. The early data review suggested adding a code to document the authentic leadership-related “positive psychological states that accompany optimal self-esteem and psychological well-being, such as confidence, optimism, hope, and resilience” (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005, p. 345). Another code type was included to expand upon observations in the narratives related to moral reasoning. This code was used to note the participants’ stages of moral development and decision making that transcended conflicts and motivating of groups toward shared objectives (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977; Northouse, 2013). A final code was added to note critical life events that the participants recalled as integral to their interfaith leadership traits and/or experiences (Northouse, 2013; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). As an integrated coding procedure, the ALT-related conventions facilitated orientation and stratification of qualitative narrative data. Applying, revisiting, and refining the a priori codes throughout the third data-analysis step preceded interpreting and evaluating the narrative data for themes, insights, and meaning. Table 3.1 illustrates the study’s ALT components, ALT traits and a priori code structure.
Table 3.1

*Theory Sources and A Priori Codes Used in the Data-Analysis Construct*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALT Component</th>
<th>ALT Trait</th>
<th>A Priori Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
<td>Clarity of Purpose</td>
<td>SAC (Initial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Moral Perspective</td>
<td>Sense of Right and Wrong</td>
<td>IMP (Initial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balanced Information Processing</td>
<td></td>
<td>BPI (Initial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Transparency</td>
<td>Trusting Relationships</td>
<td>RTT (Initial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Psychological Attributes</td>
<td>Values-Based Actions</td>
<td>VBA (Modified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Moral Reasoning</td>
<td>Commitment to Pursuits</td>
<td>HMR (Added)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Life Events</td>
<td></td>
<td>CLE (Added)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes were abstracted from the narrative data in concert with the iterative coding in the third data-analysis step. By classifying the coded narrative data clusters, the respective narrative insights and dimensions were organized with the preliminary themes developed in the second analysis step. By strengthening the initial categories, the coded groupings of narrative insights established the general themes that emerged from the data. The themes, first noted in the second analysis step and made concrete in the third analysis step, formed the basis of the data interpretation and gained meaning from the narratives.

The coded and interpreted narratives data were translated into visual depictions during the fourth analysis step. Two tables were created to illustrate the participants’ responses by code-structure clusters and thematic groupings. The code-structure cluster table demonstrated the individual participants’ areas of narrative concentration. The
corresponding thematic grouping table presented each participant’s primary, secondary, and tertiary thematic focus areas. In addition to the two tables, a numbered list was created to portray and describe the combined themes that came forward from the coding and analysis. The data representation facilitated interpreting the correlated narrative data.

The findings and initial conclusions were developed by comparing, analyzing, and pondering the data. In the fifth analysis step, the researcher took the coding results and resulting salient themes to create an integrated point of view (Creswell, 2013; Madison, 2005). The participants’ narratives were related to specific events and patterns in order to develop descriptive insights. Using thematic abstraction, the researcher figuratively travelled through the data to develop integrated meaning of the narratives (Creswell, 2013; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Ensuring the data validity was also part of this step.

The researcher maintained a constructivist disposition toward the participants’ narratives and potential outcomes throughout the iterative data coding and analysis steps. By bracketing personal experiences and biases, the researcher guarded against potential etic bias on the research issues (Pine, 2012). To ensure additional objectivity and accuracy of the participants’ views, the researcher validated the data by triangulating the themes and confirming the initial outcomes through member checking with the study’s participants (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In doing so, the study’s data collection and analysis procedures supported creating conclusions and realizing the research objectives.

Once the narrative themes and initial outcomes were established and interpreted, the researcher contacted each of the study participants to conduct a member check. The themes that emerged for each individual participant were “subjected to the scrutiny of the
persons that provided the information, . . . to obtain confirmation that the report captured the data as constructed by the informants, or to correct, amend, or extend it” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236). During the member checks, the researcher discussed the individual themes that emerged from each participant’s interview and the meaning that was being assigned to that data. After these collaborative follow-up talks, the participants gave their concurrence on the study findings and the researcher’s interpretation of their narratives.

The member checks were conducted by informal telephone consultations with the study participants. The phone-call-based discussions with each participant lasted from 25 to 35 minutes. The status of the dissertation findings, the developing themes, and the participants’ reactions and feedback were discussed during the calls. Also, the intended positioning of the participant’s data and interview in the dissertation was conveyed. The informal member checks with the participants resulted in the following outcomes for each participant: (a) she was offered the opportunity to assess intentionality—check what the participant intended when she presented certain input and narrative themes, (b) she was afforded an occasion to correct and/or modify errors and challenge any perceived misinterpretations by the researcher, (c) she was provided with an opportunity to come forward with any additional information relative to the study that was not captured in the initial interview, and (d) she confirmed her concurrence with the researcher’s interpretation of her narrative input and the interpreted themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through this follow-up process, the data accuracy and the study’s overall credibility was corroborated.
Summary

The increased attention on interfaith activities has spurred an upsurge in related research. Still, the literature on women’s interfaith organizational leadership remains relatively immature. Developing narrative research helped close this empirical literature gap. Given the subject’s idiosyncratic nature, a narrative research approach was the best-suited strategy of inquiry to examine the subject. With a focused and purposive sample, the research explored women interfaith organizational leaders’ narratives (Creswell, 2013). By applying ALT’s measures to the research, the narratives were constructed and assessed to gain more understanding on women leaders’ authenticity in interfaith affairs.

Narrative research provided a credible and structured method of acquiring the interview data. Using a qualitative approach, the study provided a means to understand the participants’ experiences and views (Calabrese, 2009). Built upon a foundation of trust, the study’s confidential style allowed for open dialogue. The participants’ narratives, characteristics, and experiences represented the larger population of women interfaith organizational leaders in the United States. The study’s timeframe and focus aligned with ground-breaking developments and important events in the interfaith realm.

Subsequent to review and approval, the research study timeline actions began with the implementation of the data collection and analysis plans. The first step involved coordinating the interview sessions with the participants (in early March 2014). Concurrently, the confidentiality and interview protocol procedures were reviewed, refined, and finalized. After the interviews began in early March 2014, the data was organized, transcribed, and prepared for spiral analysis. The data-analysis activities began in late March 2014. Using ALT-based codes, the research data was iteratively coded,
interpreted, and revisited (through early May 2014). The data-analysis process was
organized to develop the empirical data that formed the basis of the results in Chapter 4 and the conclusions articulated in Chapter 5. The study’s data-analysis-process approach employed a known research method with a trustworthy, theoretical lens to form a baseline of empirical qualitative data on women’s interfaith organizational leadership.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to research and develop understanding of women interfaith leaders’ shared traits and organizational experiences. By developing qualitative narratives, the dissertation contributes to the nascent baseline of knowledge on women’s interfaith organizational leadership. Interfaith leaders fulfill a critical role in addressing religiously based conflicts in several global contexts. The United States, with societal pluralism, has religious diversity that offers a unique setting to witness close and active interfaith relations (Patel & Hartman, 2009). Over 900 faith-based entities in the United States are dedicated to shaping the interfaith milieu (The Pluralism Project, 2006). Yet, there is limited research regarding interfaith organizational leaders. In particular, the experiences and characteristics of women interfaith leaders have not been widely noted.

The topic of women’s interfaith organizational leadership is subordinated in the literature. Because there is little empirical research on the subject, the research helps to fill a literature gap and provides a voice for this potentially underserved community. The study’s design employed semi-structured interviews to stimulate authenticity-related narrative accounts from seven women who are interfaith organizational leaders from the Rochester, NY and Finger Lakes region. Using authentic leadership theory as a focusing lens, the study investigated what is transpiring with women’s organizational interfaith leadership, who the women organizational interfaith leaders are, and how their values impact their leadership. By studying narratives, the study developed experientially based
empirical data to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Investigating if authenticity issues had an impact upon women interfaith leaders’ experiences was the study’s principal focus and purpose.

**Study focus and design.** The study was structured using the tenets of ALT and designed to investigate two matters regarding women’s interfaith leadership. Applying a narrative strategy of inquiry, the research established qualitative evidence pertaining to women being recognized (or not) as authentic interfaith organizational leaders. Through the research questions, the study also examined the topic of women’s interfaith leadership authenticity being informed (or not) by common attributes or organizational experiences.

**Research questions.** Two research questions established the study’s design by informing the data-collection instruments, interview protocol, and data-analysis model:

1. Do women interfaith leaders share common authentic leadership traits and/or organizational experiences?
2. Is there evidence that women in formal and informal leadership roles are accepted as authentic interfaith organizational leaders?

The study design used two instruments to develop the qualitative narrative research data. The supporting instrument documented the participants’ demographic information. The primary instrument, centered on semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, used four ALT-based interview questions to elicit the narrative data. Employing an adaptation of Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2009) technique, the interviews began with a self-awareness question, it was followed by two questions related to values, and the final question was a link to objectivity.
Analysis procedures. The study’s data-analysis model was constructed on a spiral analysis method and directed content analysis processes. The data-analysis approach used Creswell’s (2013) iterative five-step methodology to organize, assess, code, represent, and interpret that narrative data and field notes. After being structured and evaluated, the data were inductively coded using directed-content analysis. The study’s data-analysis coding scheme consisted of five initial a priori codes based on the ALT facets (Walumbwa et al., 2008) and ALT traits (George, 2003). Following Hsieh and Shannon’s (2005) content-analysis methodology, the preliminary a priori codes were modified while the narrative transcripts were read and themes were developed from the data. A sixth code relating to authentic leadership-related affirmative behaviors was added along with a seventh code to represent moral reasoning/actions that go beyond personal pursuits. Together, the seven a priori codes were employed to categorize and analyze the qualitative narrative data within the context of ALT’s theoretical framework.

In the next steps of the study’s data-analysis construct, themes were developed from the participants’ narrative input in conjunction with the iterative coding process. Overall themes emerged from the data that had been categorized into coded clusters. These preliminary themes established the foundation of the data-analysis activity, which yielded insights on the narrative data. The coded narratives data were also translated into graphical representations to exhibit narrative responses by code clusters and thematic groups. Two tables were created to illustrate the participants’ narrative concentration and their primary, secondary, and tertiary areas of thematic emphasis. To further demonstrate the participants’ responses, a numbered list, combining the overall themes, was created.
The study’s initial findings and conclusions were validated by triangulating the emergent themes and corroborating the preliminary results with the study’s participants (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study’s data-analysis construct and analytic procedures produced credible and richly descriptive qualitative empirical data to analyze.

**Demographic profile.** There are relatively few, but well-known, women interfaith organizational leaders in the study’s geographic locale; therefore, the participants were assigned a pseudonym in alignment with the informed consent and confidentiality procedures. Applying commonly used, but fictitious, names for each participant’s pseudonym might have engendered unnecessary confusion with actual people in the interfaith realm. For clarity, the study used the pseudonyms “Participant A” through “Participant G” to denote the research’s different participants while honoring their confidentiality. In addition to the pseudonyms, Table 4.1 shows some of the comparative data recorded in the secondary instrument’s demographic data, and it outlines the participants’ vocations and backgrounds.

As noted, interfaith participants have differing personal views and practices, which aligned with the endeavor’s inherent diversity. The study’s participants reflected their diversity in the interfaith realm.
In contrast to their diverse religious and professional occupations, the participants had several shared or analogous leadership and demographic characteristics. As a cohort, the participants had similarities in their social identities including their primary statuses of gender, education, class, ability, and sexuality (Ferber, Jimenez, Herrera, & Samuels, 2009). As individual people, the participants were further differentiated by their primary statuses related to race/ethnicity and age. With regard to their interfaith organizational leadership experiences, following list includes the participants’ common characteristics or primary statues related to interfaith organizational leadership authenticity and experiences:

- Gender: All of the study participants were women, and each indicated that her gender influenced her perceived leadership authenticity and life experiences.
• Education: Five of the seven participants have college degrees. Of those, four have advanced degrees. The other two participants have professional training.

• Class: Through ascription and achievement, all of the participants enjoyed a lower- to upper-middle-class socioeconomic status and lifestyle (Allen, 2004).

• Ability: None of the participants claimed any disabilities that informed their experiences (Ferber, Jimenez, Herrera, & Samuels, 2009; Wendell, 1996).

• Sexuality: This primary status was not explicitly explored in this study. With one exception, none of the participants mentioned sexuality in their narratives.

The participants were distinguished from each other in the following identity categories:

• Race/Ethnicity: Six of the seven study participants were Caucasian and of European descent. One participant was from the Indo-Pakistani ethnic group.

• Age: The seven participants varied greatly in age range. One participant was in her early 20s, three were in their 40s and 50s, and three were in their 70s.

The study’s diverse and purposive sample facilitated investigating the research issues. The participants’ diverse backgrounds, interfaith organizational experiences, religious and cultural affiliations, and professional and academic credentials offered a rich blend of perspectives and insights. As illustrated in the individual narrative findings, the participants’ diverse responses supported the study’s intent of offering naturalistically generalizable accounts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants’ demographic traits, leadership authenticity characteristics, and specific narratives broadly symbolize women interfaith organizational leaders’ experiences in the United States. The narrative data and insights gained from the participants’ input were linked into seven generalizable themes.
Findings

The study participants presented their narrative reflections during the course of the semi-structured interviews. Through the aforementioned analysis procedures, the prominent ideas in the narrative data were identified and transformed into seven themes that created an integrated narrative perspective (Creswell, 2013; Madison, 2005). The seven integrated themes represent the participants’ primary, secondary, and tertiary areas of focus in their narrative responses. Although ostensibly focused on authentic leadership traits and organizational experiences, the interviews elicited a rich vein of narrative data.

Each participant offered in-depth and thoughtful perspectives while responding to the interview questions. The directed-content-coding analysis illustrated the complexity and depth of the participant’s views regarding interfaith leadership and organizational experiences. Although specific to each individual participant, the epiphanies emerging from the individual narratives had similarity in their fundamental elements and topical foci. Jointly, the participants’ narratives informed understanding of interfaith leadership.

Summary of findings. The focus, strength, and categorization of the participants’ responses were developed through application of the a priori codes structure (see Table 3.1). The ALT-based code analysis facilitated characterization of the participants’ narrative responses into one of seven categories that included: (a) self-awareness (SAC), (b) internal moral perspective (IMP), (c) balanced information processing (BPI), (d) relational transparency (RTT), (e) values-based actions (VBA), (f) higher moral reasoning (HMR), and (g) critical life events (CLE). The initial analysis from the coding reflected a strong concentration in the RTT, VBA, BPI, and SAC categories. The IMP category had fewer occurrences in the participants’ input. The HMR and CLE categories,
likewise, had much less prevalence among the responses. However, a lower number of links to the HMR and CLE categories was expected due to the specific areas of emphasis.

The quantified results, although useful in orienting the directed-content analysis, were not the focus of the study. To derive meaning from the participants’ experiences “the construction of realities must depend on some form of consensual language” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 71). To that end, the rich narrative input was further characterized by supplementing the quantified results with a qualitatively based interpretation of the data. Using an ALT-grounded approach, the researcher gained understanding of the narratives by assigning a color-coded scheme to depict the unquantifiable and nuanced aspects of the participants’ responses. The quantified count of the coded responses was augmented with three color categories including: (a) green for a strong and frequent response, (b) yellow for a moderate and consistent response, and (c) red for a weaker and infrequent response. In conjunction with the field notes, the color-coded and quantified data were further interpreted to develop the integrated themes and individual participant analyses.
The more seasoned women interfaith organizational leaders put forward more reflective and thoughtful insights related to the context and broader significance of their lived experiences when compared to their less-practiced colleagues. As indicated in the color-coded data, the more experienced and mature participants’ accounts generally gravitated toward code categories related to heuristic nuances and contemplation of their lived experiences (see Table 4.2). Participants, at the beginning or midpoint of their interfaith leadership experiences, tended to offer narrative insights that aligned with their individual identities and values (Kinsler, 2014). The coded data also presented the foundation for exploring the research through the ALT concept. Characterizing the participants’ responses in the different code categories lent insight on their view of authentic leadership. Importantly, the color-coded data were translated into themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>SAC</th>
<th>IMP</th>
<th>BPI</th>
<th>RTT</th>
<th>VBA</th>
<th>HMR</th>
<th>CLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant A</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant B</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant D</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant E</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant F</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant G</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seven distinct themes emerged from the participants’ answers to the interview questions. After orienting the data and gaining insight through the coding process, the clear and interrelated themes emerged from the narrative data. The seven themes encompassed: (a) caring activism, (b) gender equality, (c) moral exclusivity, (d) open perspectives, (e) relational focus, (f) social identity, and (g) spiritual maturity. The breadth of each participant’s narrative responses was aligned into primary, secondary, and tertiary themes, which were derived from the coded data. With one exception, moral exclusivity, each participant had themes that were broadly reflected in the other participants’ stories (see Table 4.3). The thematic continuity was realized through the iterative data analysis and linking the participants’ narrative input to the research questions and the ALT construct.

Table 4.3

*Study Participant’s Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Thematic Focus Areas*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Theme 1</th>
<th>Theme 2</th>
<th>Theme 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant A</td>
<td>Social Identity</td>
<td>Gender Equality</td>
<td>Spiritual Maturity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant B</td>
<td>Caring Activism</td>
<td>Open Perspectives</td>
<td>Relational Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C</td>
<td>Open Perspectives</td>
<td>Relational Focus</td>
<td>Caring Activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant D</td>
<td>Social Identity</td>
<td>Moral Exclusivity</td>
<td>Gender Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant E</td>
<td>Spiritual Maturity</td>
<td>Caring Activism</td>
<td>Relational Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant F</td>
<td>Relational Focus</td>
<td>Spiritual Maturity</td>
<td>Caring Activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant G</td>
<td>Caring Activism</td>
<td>Open Perspectives</td>
<td>Spiritual Maturity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The narrative data emerging from the interviews illustrated generalizable themes that agreed with the participants’ specific experiences. However, the detailed and distinct individual narratives also revealed considerations that were germane to each participant. These reflections are discussed in the individual participant analyses. The preponderance of the participants’ observations were exhibited in the following seven foremost themes:

- **Theme 1: Caring Activism** emphasized the women interfaith leaders’ values-based social-justice efforts and leadership activities across various endeavors.
- **Theme 2: Gender Equality** focused on the women’s personal experiences with gender-related issues within the interfaith organizational leadership realm.
- **Theme 3: Moral Exclusivity** highlighted specific instances of pejoratively oriented opinions of ethical superiority in relationship to other beliefs/faiths.
- **Theme 4: Open Perspectives** stressed the importance of interfaith leaders having an informed, welcoming, and perceptive disposition to others’ views.
- **Theme 5: Relational Focus** emphasized the criticality of cultivating genuine, sustained, and trust-based relations with people in different faith communities.
- **Theme 6: Social Identity** focused on the individuals’ personal and specific faith-community identities and their perceptions of themselves within those contexts.
- **Theme 7: Spiritual Maturity** demonstrated the experiential wisdom and reflective contemplation of the women regarding their lived experiences.

The narrative themes represented areas of commonality in analogous experience and/or mutual perspectives. The integrated themes are the narrative bridge from the interview
questions to the research questions and conclusions. Developing an understanding of the individual participant’s input was key to arriving at a generalizable thematic construct.

Individual participant analyses. The participants’ responses to the interview questions formed the basis of the themes, which were derived from the data analysis. By providing detailed and reflective input, their individual narratives offered insight into interactions, connections, and specific settings that are linked to interfaith organizational leadership activities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013). The narrative input presented the lived experiences of women organizational interfaith leaders at a time when interfaith activities are playing increasingly important roles in society. Along with the substance of their narratives, the participant analyses explored what the participants offered and how they told their stories (Riessman, 2008). Each narrative encompasses a unique, yet interrelated, offering of life.

The narrative highlights and thematic reflections for each of the participants are presented in chronological order of the respective interviews. Using direct quotes from their narrative input, the findings are constructed to provide a view of the participants’ observations and reflections on their interfaith organizational leadership experiences. Each participant’s narrative features are framed by the researcher’s findings relative to their input. The participants’ quotes extracted from the interview transcripts are depicted in indented paragraphs. Some quotations were truncated and joined with other passages to offer continuity in thought and to reduce inclusion of peripheral and/or identifying information. The parenthetical citations denote the specific transcript and reference line.

The selected quotations are metaphorical signposts of the participants’ interfaith organizational leadership journeys. The quoted narratives present a three-dimensional
view of the participants’ experiences by noting facets of their narratives that are “personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). As the narratives are described, the participants’ experiences, perspectives, and thematic outcomes are compared to each other. The researcher’s comments that intersect with the participants’ narrative quotes are a precursor to the integrated narrative topology presented in the Implications of Findings section of Chapter 5. The researcher’s remarks, which develop the participant’s input into three-dimensional findings, do not draw conclusions or prejudice later analysis of the narrative reflections. By comparing the participants’ reflections, the observations in the findings illustrate differences, similarities, and epiphanies related to the participants’ characteristics, experiences, and acceptance as authentic interfaith organizational leaders.

**Participant A.** An accomplished interfaith organizational leader, Participant A, is in her early-70s and is currently serving as a founding director of an interfaith institute. Her robust participation in a variety of interfaith organizations and activities exemplified the important contributions that women leaders are making in the interfaith arena:

I’m currently active in the Council for the Parliament of World Religions based in Chicago, and they have a program called Ambassadors for the Council whose purpose is to make known the Parliament’s work, and I’m on the advisory committee of the ambassadors, so that’s an interfaith group I’m actively involved in right now . . . . (Interview A: 24-28)

Her long-tenured background as an interfaith organizational leader was an integral part of her narrative. Her personal interfaith leadership history also intersected with events that
were communicated in her narrative as critical life experiences. “I’m founding director of the Women’s Interfaith Institute . . . .” (Interview A: 12). In addition to that particular interfaith organization, Participant A’s cooperative interfaith organizational leadership efforts led to the establishment of a predecessor Women’s Interfaith Institute in a neighboring state. She has been instrumental in the initial formation, sustainment, and collaborative leadership of the Women’s Interfaith Institute to which she currently lends her expertise: “So that, for more than 20 years, I’ve been founding director of this organization” (Interview A: 16-17). Her background as an interfaith organizational leader also extends to the higher-education setting. She was director of an interfaith chapel at a large university for four years and has experience as a college and university chaplain:

In my role as a college chaplain, or as a university chaplain, I was responsible, paid by the institution to be responsible, for religious life, so that essentially was interfaith work. I was a Christian minister but needed to be very aware that the needs of other faith groups were being met or adequately addressed . . . . So, since 1982, that’s the kind of work I’ve been doing. (Interview A: 28-32, 33)

Participant A’s extensive interfaith involvement and leadership activities are grounded in her extensive education. As evidenced in her narrative input, her academic qualifications underpinned opportunities to serve as an interfaith leader in several capacities. She has the professional credentials and breadth of experience to be deemed a scholar and expert on interfaith organizations and activities. Participant A’s educational background led to her ministerial ordination, interfaith leadership background, and religious identification. In the mid-1960s, Participant A received her Bachelor’s degree from a renowned university located in the mid-Atlantic region. During the interview, she
fondly recalled a celebratory milestone of receiving her first college degree: “that was in 1964, this year is the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary, and I’ve been interested in going back to my reunion . . . . (Interview A: 36-37). Receiving a Bachelor’s degree was only the beginning of Participant A’s extensive education. She continued her education, which was largely focused in theological and divinity studies, at two distinguished universities. In the early 1980s, she received a Master of Divinity degree and a PhD degree from an Ivy League university. In the late 1990s, she received another advanced degree from a different Ivy League university:

a THM they call it, Master of Theology degree . . . . So that’s my degree work, and I was ordained in the United Church of Christ and had served there for about 31 years when I retired, although I have since then switched denominations, and I no longer identify with the United Church of Christ. I’m a Unitarian Universalist, but without a credential in that church, just a person involved . . . . (Interview A: 41-46)

While discussing Participant A’s demographic information in regard to ethnicity and cultural affiliations, she revealed a deeply personal, critical life event that underpinned her clarity of purpose, values-based actions, and interfaith leadership narrative:

I don’t think so much in terms of ethnicity, but my marriage to a man who was a homosexual or a bi-sexual certainly influences my cultural attitudes. That’s in my mind very wrapped up in my interfaith work; it’s an issue of inclusion. So it’s not an ethnic inclusion so much as a gender-identity inclusion. (Interview A: 55-58)

By exemplifying her internal moral perspective on this issue, Participant A’s narrative became a reflection of her strong self-awareness and predilection of being inclusive:
To me, a key is a desire to be inclusive and to work across the boundaries that normally divide us. And, for me, that personal experience began in high school. My senior year of high school, we had an American field-service student, an AFS exchange student, live with my family, who was from Malaysia who was Muslim. So that was in 1959, 1960, and I learned about Ramadan and the Hajj and all of that as a very much, pretty much, young person . . . . And that was the beginning of my real awareness of a global world of difference and wanting to negotiate that. So I think the effort to embrace difference, celebrate difference, is really important to me as an interfaith leader and pretty much defines what I’m all about as an interfaith leader. (Interview A: 67-72)

The open-minded perspectives that Participant A demonstrated in her initial interview statements were indicative of a similar theme found in all of the participants interviews. All interviews emphasized, to varying degrees, that an open perspective is germane to interfaith organizational leadership. Participant A mentioned a desire to work across boundaries also illustrated the importance that all of the participants placed on relational transparency and trusting relationships to interfaith organizational leadership.

Participant A also framed her narrative experiences by commenting on the nature of her social location and positionality relative to the broader society (Ferber, Jimenez, Herrera, & Samuels, 2009). While from a socially advantaged position regarding factors like class and education, her broader life-long and interfaith leadership experiences were greatly influenced by gender-related exclusionary practices and systemic discrimination:

I have an extremely elitist educational background and opportunity. Very privileged, and I grew up in economic privilege in Fairfield, Connecticut. And so
it would be amazing for someone to look at my life and say, “What do you mean exclusion?” But, its gender exclusion. (Interview A: 78-22)

Participant A’s experiences with exclusion in the interfaith realm stem back to her time as a newly ordained minister in 1981. Although educated at Ivy League schools and perceived as highly capable, Participant A could not secure an opportunity as a minister in a local church. These experiences informed her interfaith leadership views and narrative:

It was the stained-glass ceiling, and it was very clear to me, and people said if I had been a male, there would have been absolutely no issue. But, people wouldn’t even interview me, committees wouldn’t interview me. I have a file box full of rejections for the places I interviewed that bothered to reply, others didn’t even answer. (Interview A: 85-89)

This critical life experience was an underlying premise in Participant A’s preponderant narrative themes related to social identity and gender equality. Her self-awareness and valued-based actions, spurred by her internalized moral perspective or strong sense of right and wrong, are the primary areas of focus in her narrative. It was gender-related exclusionary practices that helped stimulate Participant A’s involvement with interfaith organizations in a leadership capacity:

So the beginning of the Women’s Interfaith Institute in 1992 was partly addressing women’s exclusion from religious or spiritual leadership. So that was a guiding factor in wanting to bring women of different faith traditions together. Women who could not be ordained . . . . To lift up the ministry that they were doing and to be inclusive. (Interview A: 89-92)
The juxtaposition of Participant A’s life experiences to gender-based inequalities, personal relationships, and social positionality formed her unique framework on interfaith leadership. Her interfaith leadership integrates narrative themes of social identity, advocacy of gender equality, and an enlightened sense of spiritual maturity. Her critical life-event exemplars brought these three themes together into a compelling narrative on the importance of interfaith organizational leadership in the context of Participant A’s life:

I go back to the experience of my marriage and a man who had addiction problems because of the internalized homophobia. He could not accept who he was and the pain, his pain, and the pain that caused our family; again it became an issue of exclusion. And to see the cultural shifts in our country today, where back in the 60s, when we met and married, the notion of gay marriage was just quite unthinkable. So to see where we’ve come culturally is just totally amazing and wonderful, but it’s a key to all of my work, which is wanting justice . . . this is what I feel I’m all about. (Interview A: 94-102)

Participant A’s social identity as a devoted woman interfaith organizational leader is an expression of her clarity of purpose, values-based actions, and internalized moral perspectives. Similarly, her narrative was an intersection of personal experiences addressing inequalities and discrimination in the context of interfaith leadership. She demonstrated her overarching thoughts on inclusiveness being fundamental to the interfaith milieu, while she reflected on the nature of her experiences: “when I think of my interfaith leadership, it includes and embraces a cultural and ethnic diversity” (Interview A: 109-111). In conjunction with diversity, Participant A offered a well-
defined inclusion of gender identity as a fundamental part of interfaith leadership social identity: “It’s very important to me and gender identity inclusion has been key to a broad understanding of what interfaith is” (Interview A: 113-114).

Participant A goes on to reiterate the centrality of the concept of inclusiveness to her values-based actions. The evolution of her personal religious affiliation was aligned with the importance of diversity in different dimensions of the interfaith environment:

It accounts for my shift to Unitarian Universalism, because they celebrate diversity, that’s what they’re all about, including not only people of different religious faith traditions within a congregation but people who have none, who are humanists or atheists, and they’re included. (Interview A: 119-122)

Participant A’s broad interpretation of inclusiveness for all people was demonstrated in her actions as an interfaith organizational leader. Beyond stating philosophical views and personal values, she exercised her values-based beliefs as an interfaith leader:

A freshmen and sophomore student came to me and wanted to have their group, new formed group, that was of atheists and agnostics and humanists, come and have a home in the chapel trying to advocate that for them with clergy leaders who thought they had no business in the chapel was part of what I was about. (Interview A: 125-129)

She further articulated an inclusive style of values-based leadership that aligned with the social identity and gender equality themes. While doing so, she also used gender-related social identity to articulate an interesting aspect of interfaith organizational inclusiveness:

The leadership style would be the absolute flipside of patriarchy where you have an authoritarian figure who is leading. I want to lead by consensus, very feminist
or womanist style, seeing it in a circle, hearing from everybody, trying to reach consensus. It’s before we move forward, it’s time consuming, and it can be inefficient. I’ve done a lot of study of this, and I realize the difficulties of it, and it’s why I think in our Women’s Interfaith Institute, we have come to a decision fairly recently that we want men on our board. We need both because, in my experience, men are often wanting more to get to the point or to make a decision, and finding that balance is important, and when it’s all women, we could can get lost and it can take too long to get things done in my personal experience.

(Interview A: 138-148)

Participant A’s sense of inclusiveness being germane to interfaith leadership was also balanced with spiritual maturity. Complementing her observations on gender-based inclusion, she noted the importance of shared values being part of interfaith activities:

I’m 71 years old, and at this later time in my life, I’ve decided that I want to put my energies with people who share my values . . . . I’m old enough that I don’t want to spend my time trying to convince people this is important. (Interview A: 198-200, 206-208)

The narrative’s consistent refrain of inclusiveness was again established when Participant A linked her spiritual maturity reflection on shared values with the social identity and gender equality ideas: “in my experience, some people who were doing interfaith and doing it well, are not necessarily interested in involving women as spiritual leaders, and so that’s a social-justice component of interfaith work that, to me, is important” (Interview A: 229-232). She notes the importance of gender in interfaith leadership and organizational dynamics: “The interfaith world is still pretty much male led . . . . So
working at the Women’s Interfaith Institute does feel different to me when you have 
women working together and sharing . . . but, as I noted in conversation with my 
colleagues in ministry, it’s slow, there’s still that stained-glass ceiling.” (Interview A: 
269, 278-280, 316-317)

While noting the gender inequities in the interfaith realm, Participant A offered an 
observation on the values-based actions she’s taken as an interfaith leader. Once again, 
she linked the spiritual maturity, social identity, and gender equality themes in an idea:

So our mission is, and this is relevant to your question, women supporting women 
of diverse faiths and generating leadership, scholarship, and service, and so 
scholarship is a key component . . . it’s leadership, scholarship, service, so that’s 
why the word institute is in our title, Women’s Interfaith Institute, it’s intended to 
suggest, and when you see the building books, books, books, yeah, that’s partly 
what we’re about is the scholarship part . . . we’re much more the leadership and 
scholarship . . . it’s a different kind of service, maybe the service in promoting 
women’s leadership. (Interview A: 358-361, 365-366)

Participant A’s emphasis on scholarship as a vital part of interfaith leadership aligned 
with her clarity of purpose and self-awareness. Her focus on scholarship also described a 
trait that she felt was important to being an effective interfaith organizational leader:

One last thing on the scholarship, I trained at Yale for nine years, they thought I 
was throwing away my education when I didn’t go into academia, and I 
deliberately wanted to be a bridge between the academic world and the active 
world and particularly ministry. So that’s how I’ve conceived it, trying to bring 
my scholarship to the general public. (Interview A: 529-533)
Participant A’s clarity of purpose in serving as an interfaith leader was evident in her narrative. As part of her social identity, interfaith leadership experiences reflected her personal and values-based journey in working toward gender equality and acceptance. Her reflections on open-mindedness, inclusiveness, and promoting scholarship offered examples of spiritual maturity in interfaith leadership attributes. Participant A’s narrative revealed a scholarly, seasoned approach to her organizational experiences as an interfaith leader. Her dedication and passion for inclusiveness was evident in her extensive career.

The interview with Participant A was conducted in her home located in a central New York, Finger Lakes region town. The historical background of the region regarding the women’s rights movement provided an interesting context for the discussion on interfaith leadership. Participant A was keenly aware of the symbolism of the Women’s Interfaith Institute being located in an area with rich civil rights and women’s rights traditions. She also recognized the importance of continuity in interfaith organizational leadership efforts as part of the broader historical civil rights efforts:

When I think, and when you talk about this area, Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s home is part of the park service, and so it’s a mile or two from the chapel that they reconstructed. She essentially was the author of the Declaration of Sentiments in 1848. She was, this was her first entrée into public life, and when she got up to speak they couldn’t hear her, speak up, speak up, she was so timid. She wrote a paper for 1893, but at that point she wasn’t getting around . . . so Susan B. Anthony read Stanton’s paper at the 1893 Parliament. So you had that span of 45 years where she was the young person starting out in this Women’s Equality Movement, and it was toward the close of her public life at the end. So it’s natural
to lift her up in Seneca Falls as an interfaith, multi-faith person. (Interview A: 473-489)

Although personally acquainted with the researcher, Participant A’s warm welcome and openness during the interview were impressive to the researcher and spouse (present during the interview). Her clarity of purpose and *spiritual maturity* on interfaith inclusiveness were manifest during the interview. By opening her home and heart to the researcher, she brought the values in her story to life. In a similar warm and open way, Participant B also expressed narrative experiences that were highly focused on her relationship skills.

**Participant B.** A community organizer and organizational director, Participant B’s interfaith leadership experiences are rooted in her nonviolence activism. In her early 50s, she is the director of a nonviolence institute that is involved in community actions at the local, national, and international levels. Her interfaith leadership contributions are visible across a broad base of community organizational activities and personal relationships. Like Participant A, she has very robust experiences in a variety of interfaith undertakings that span a variety of focus areas and geographical settings:

I served as the director for an organization . . . five years prior to being at the Institute here . . . . I served for seven years as a board member for the International Center for Nonviolent Communication. For the last three years, as board president, and so that is an international organization that basically supports the teaching of a process called nonviolent communication around the world. And that is a process that’s utilized by many faith communities in different parts of the
world for kind of helping people to embody some of their spiritual values in terms of, especially in terms of, intercommunication. (Interview B: 13-14, 22-28)

Along with her organizational roles, Participant B has also functioned as a nonviolence consultant for activities in several international locales including Europe, South America, and Asia. Her rich experiences are grounded in her relational capacity and balanced perspectives. Interfaith values were lived and reflected in a core part of her personal life:

I’ve been married for 23 years, and it was an interfaith marriage, and so at that time, I was a practicing Catholic . . . and my husband was a very engaged member at the . . . Zen Center. So we were with both and participated in interfaith kinds of things . . . . (Interview B: 36-37, 38-39)

Participant B characterized her interfaith perspectives and personal values by illustrating her participation in and understanding of different religious experiences. Her narrative demonstrated ongoing interactions and contacts with different religious traditions. Her personal religious sensibilities were fundamentally described in an interfaith context:

I most identify as what I called a small “b” Buddhist . . . the idea is, especially in relation to suffering in Buddhism, has made a tremendous amount of sense for me in my search for understanding and compassion . . . . So, in some official way, I may actually be considered to be an excommunicative Catholic right now . . . I also attend services at . . . Methodist Church, and I still engage with services at time with the . . . Zen Center. (Interview B: 45-46, 47-49, 51-52, 58-59)

Her open-mindedness on personal religious views extended to her balanced outlook and open perspective on interfaith organizational leadership characteristics and experiences:
Openness is a quality that I have noticed and appreciated for people, who are engaged with interfaith work, and curiosity about other traditions and wanting to have a different connection to your own faith by understanding other people’s. So I’d say openness and curiosity would be two of the qualities that I would both appreciate and want to cultivate in myself and notice in other people that are engaged with interfaith. (Interview B: 91-96)

Similar to Participant A, Participant B conveyed a principal philosophy of inclusiveness that was the foundation for the themes and views in her interfaith leadership narrative:

I would certainly think of openness. you know, just in terms of like some of the interfaith study groups and people coming together learning things or just some of the opportunities that I’ve had for some of the interfaith events that we’ve held . . . I think the openness is on a lot of levels, it’s definitely an intellectual openness, and I think most of the people that really feel drawn to interfaith, it’s also interpersonal openness, too, just really savoring being around people that are not the same, don’t think that, don’t necessarily have the same background even though you may share values of other kinds. (Interview B: 101-104, 107-111)

Participant B highlighted an inclusiveness-related issue occurring in the interfaith realm. The lack of diversity among interfaith participants is a topic specifically addressed in the extant interfaith empirical literature (Kwok, 2012; Patel, 2005). Participant B’s views on the subject from a lived, interfaith-leadership experience outlined the nature of the issue:

I would like to think that it was in my very limited experience up here in Rochester, New York that it was getting a lot more open and a lot more like diverse. But I don’t really see it so much yet in the adult community . . . . When I
think about more, even recent interfaith events that I’ve been to, I don’t notice a diminishing of people’s openness. But I’m still, I would like to be, see it being more radical in terms of embracing, especially because we have a religious group that is being actively persecuted in this country right now, and I don’t see as much action on that in the interfaith perspective. And it may just be because I’m not as engaged with it as I could be, but I’m not especially impressed by the sense of openness. I feel like there’s [sic] some people that have felt that way for a long time and they find a home in interfaith groups. But, it doesn’t seem to me necessarily growing, and it doesn’t seem to be as radical as it needs to be given our current circumstances in this country. (Interview B: 124-126, 130-139)

Her sense of balanced information processing lies beneath the caring activism, open perspective, and relational focus themes prevalent in her narrative. Participant B’s clarity of purpose is reflected in her values-based self-awareness on different perspectives:

One of my core beliefs that I feel fairly satisfied with my ability to live it, is that I don’t ever, ever hold the whole truth on anything. So for me, that has come in part from studying other people’s faiths as kind of a really deep sense of humility and a strong wish to remove my own. The blinders that I know I wear, and that I’m not so worried that other people need to have the whole truth either, that I don’t expect perfection in anybody, but I think we’ve all just got a piece of it and that, for me, has felt very connected to the interfaith work . . . . I think, as a leader to be really hanging on with both hands to understand that I’m not the only, that my version of the truth is not the only one in the room right now and that both of ours together is [sic] needed in order to even begin to have a clue. I think that’s been
deeply influenced by studies from other faith practices and traditions. (Interview B: 153-159, 164-167)

Participant B’s *open perspective* and *relational focus* further exemplified her focus on balanced perspectives, being self-aware, and empathy for other’s predicaments. Her reflection on interpersonal interactions presented an insightful example of leadership in an interfaith organizational context. Her manner of tackling group dynamics is noted:

One thing that matters a lot to me is trying to make sure that you hear from the voices that are the ones that are not so quick to speak up. So, I’m always really interested in soliciting the ideas of everyone but especially asking the people who are the quietest to step up and sometimes the ones who are very easy to articulate their ideas to step back. I think both are needed in groups, and I feel really relaxed about asking that to happen now because I truly know that it’s a gift. And even the people that I’m asking to step back, I feel pretty relaxed now about being able to say that in a way that isn’t going to stimulate a sense of shaming that I’m talking too much, which is something a lot of people carry, but really they’ll take it as a gift of thank you, I don’t want to dominate them. (Interview B: 177-187)

Facilitating an open space for all people to participate and express themselves is germane to interfaith activities. Participant B’s sensitivity to others’ thoughts, feelings, behavior, perspectives, and awareness of context was part of the narrative focus displayed in her decision-making and leadership attributes. Her narrative offers a specific example:

I remember sitting in a meeting years ago that was mostly dominated by Europeans and North Americans, and there was one person from the global south who was in the room from Sri Lanka, and I think we had been speaking like
almost eight hours in this meeting, and he never said a word. I was watching him, watching him, watching him, and I wasn’t a facilitator, and at that time, I was younger, and I didn’t feel as bold and as empowered. I mean, now I would never have sat in that room for as many hours and watched him not speak and not spoken up about it myself. Now you know, but then I was, I was one of the junior people in this room, etc., etc., and so finally, I just said I can’t stand it anymore . . . For me, it’s really important to be, as a leader, to be extremely mindful of rank and privilege and to use it as medicine, and I think it’s critical. (Interview B: 188-197, 203-204)

Through this vignette, she demonstrated the fundamentals of the *caring activism* that is the forte of her interfaith organizational leadership narrative. When dealing with conflict, Participant B also emphasized *relational focus* to identify shared values or shared concerns to help navigate conflicts based in philosophical and interpersonal differences:

The people who are prochoice in the community don’t like that we have any relationship with this prolife group, and the prolife group thinks that we’re falling down on the job of nonviolence by not coming out in a way that they would like us to come out against legalized abortion . . . . I think we’re exactly in the right place, everyone is a little mad at us. But, one thing that doesn’t come out is that we’ve had some . . . . We had a training that had prolife and prochoice people in it at the Institute, and they all were surprised that they were in the room together and that they lived to tell the tale, because as people on that side of it are so divisive, you know. (Interview B: 233-237, 238-241, 244-247)
The *relational focus* in Participant B’s narrative offered insights on the traits of interfaith leadership and the importance of having an *open perspective*. She, likewise, embodied *caring activism* in her reflection on accepting others’ authentic viewpoints:

One thing that I feel strongly about, as you know, people don’t change because they’re being shamed, they change because they’re listened to in a way that they’ve never experienced before, and most people I think are hungrier to be heard than they are to be agreed with . . . there’s a genuine, I think, like real attitude of respect for all people’s opinions whether we agree with them at the Institute or not, it doesn’t matter. I mean we’re not there to be the arbiter of other people’s choices and values. What we are is [sic] to try to like explore together, how do we enhance our shared humanity? (Interview B: 259-263, 264-268)

As an interfaith organizational leader, Participant B has exercised her *relational focus* and *open perspective* with many different types of people in a variety of formal and informal contexts. Beyond organized, interfaith activities and group constructs, she lived the traits she exemplified in other settings to engender *caring activism* with individuals:

So that’s one of the reasons why I celebrate the format of our, you know, of the interfaith dinners that we do and other activities because it’s very conversational based, you know, one-on-one, nobody sits out everyone is engaged, and for me, that’s when real change happens is when people are listening and wrestling with each other’s experiences. I remember the interfaith dinner last year . . . having some young men who were college students, who were born in the Middle East, and they were talking about how hard it was for them when they came here to this
country, they had been socialized not to look adults in the eyes, especially women
because it was rude. Then they went to high school, and even grade school, and
they were chastised by teachers for being rude for not looking at them when they
spoke to them, and these kids were just caught on the horns of the dilemma . . . I
said, because I actually really want you to be comfortable, it’s okay with me if
you don’t look at me when you talk to me, and it was just this great, and in a way
that wasn’t specifically, you know, that’s not really related but back to that
collapsing sometimes of religion and culture . . . you know, there’s struggles to, I
just, I mean I felt like I learned a real lot, and so I like it when there’s
opportunities to go more than skin deep, you know. (Interview B: 291-296, 296-
302, 204-308, 309-311)

While reflecting on her experiences of being accepted as an interfaith leader,
Participant B drew a connection to interfaith leadership and the nonviolence awareness
movement. Like Participant A, the linkage Participant B established placed present-day
interfaith leadership activities in a broader historical and organizational framework:

For me, the whole interfaith thing, it just really comes out of the practice of
nonviolence . . . comparing the life of King, whose nonviolence practice was
firmly rooted in Christianity, with Khan, whose extraordinary nonviolence was
utterly rooted in Islam, and both of them utterly inspired by Gandhi who was a
devout Hindu . . . . I don’t really wrap my mind so much around the label of being
like someone as an interfaith leader so much. But, I do wrap my mind a lot around
being someone who’s trying to, like, live into nonviolence, and to me, that just
cuts across all of those traditions so beautifully. So I don’t really worry about
acceptance from a lot of the status quo, I mean, my interest is in trying to figure out how we can serve the people who have the least among us . . . nonviolence means more than acceptance by other people in the community. (Interview B: 329-330, 331-334, 335-340, 358)

For Participant B, her reflections on the traits and acceptance of interfaith organizational leaders centered on perceived authenticity being tied to the essence of practice. She goes on to comment on the role of gender with regard to her interfaith leadership experiences:

It (gender) has played out very much in some of the interracial work that I do, and most of the race work that I’m involved with, here, is women-based, which is very powerful and really interesting to me . . . it was a sense that if women couldn’t figure out how to have each other’s backs in this world, then where were we going to be? So it was a decision, and it seems to be like, any time, even somebody brings up the notion of including someone of your gender, it’s quickly defeated. I think women seem to be kind of hungry sometimes to be in women-only spaces to be able to really speak deeply and honestly if they can, I mean I think it’s a struggle for people, still, ‘cause of their own stuff . . . some of the most honest spaces in our women-only mixed-race groups deliberately trying to figure out how do we, like, really work on being authentic and healing our own pain in relation to race in this country. (Interview B: 381-383, 390-396, 401-403)

In her narrative, Participant B demonstrated how broader social-justice activities are an integral part of her values-based themes of caring activism, open perspective, and relational focus. The idea of openness and inclusiveness underscored all of her narrative reflections. Participant B models these concepts in her actions and leadership philosophy:
That’s really creating a safe space that somebody actually deeply trusts that they can be themselves and not be judged for it. So, for me, I’d say probably that the most critical thing I’m usually keeping an eye on a situation is, you know, is the situation building trust between or among people or is it reducing trust. That’s probably the thing I try to keep an eye on more than anything else, and I guess openness is one of the ways in which you can, it’s an indicator whether trust seems to be around or not in a room . . . there’s so much harshness in the world, you know, and most of it is inside of our own heads, and then we just attribute it out, and I think one of the things that I do bring is, and I’m pretty good at, like, helping people who genuinely feel like it’s okay to be me, you know, with all my wonderful idiosyncrasies. (Interview B: 417-423, 431-434)

Participant B extended her thoughts on leadership philosophy by framing her narrative in a historical context and then tying it back to her self-awareness as an interfaith leader:

There’s a really great quote from Emerson who talked about that every mind is different, and the more it’s allowed to unfold, the more pronounced the difference, and I love to create spaces in which people feel safe to unfold . . . and there’s this beautiful quote from Howard Thurman about that, too, that I just was reading . . . he was speaking about how he really, really trusts that he can never truly fully be himself until you are truly fully yourself, and that until then we’re all losing. And I feel that spoke to me with a lot of the truth of who I want to be, you know, whether it’s an interracial setting, intercultural setting, interfaith setting. (Interview B: 435-437, 439-440, 441-445)
Already placed in a historical context, Participant B’s interview reached an interesting conclusion when she contextualized her interfaith leadership experiences and the overall interfaith leadership endeavor in an even broader social-justice and societal perspective:

We haven’t even talked about socioeconomics, which underlies so much of this . . . we all live right here in this community, and there’s this incredibly diverse experience in terms of how our financial situation is . . . race is somewhat conflated with that in this community because of our pattern of hyper segregation . . . one of the spaces that I often feel like I have to work the hardest to be thoughtful and more than in any other . . . I’m really interested and really deeply respectful of the challenges of socioeconomic diversity, and how do you deal with that? But, for me, working in a genuinely poor neighborhood has been a radicalizing experience. I mean, sort of spiritually radicalizing, as far as like living with people, you know, living within my daytime hours, living with, and being based in a neighborhood where there’s bullet holes from someone getting shot that day. (Interview B: 445-446, 459-460, 461-462, 463-464, 514-517, 524-526)

The narrative conclusion placed emphasis on Participant B’s view of interfaith leadership as part of a broader social-justice construct. The theme that emerged from her reflections, caring activism, open perspective, and relational focus, illustrate her interfaith leadership.

The Participant B interview was accomplished at the researcher’s home (with his spouse present in the residence). The researcher and Participant B are well-acquainted by being close colleagues, co-participants in several interfaith activities, and friends. The researcher maintained objectivity by working from a social constructivist framework and
using the established interview protocol. As a benefit, the researcher and Participant B’s familiarity as friend and colleagues facilitated openness and candor during the interview.

Participant B offered an experiential observation on an interfaith organizational leadership characteristic regarding the development of youth and continuity in leadership. In comparison to Participant A’s scholarship continuity, Participant B focused on training the next generation of post-9/11 interfaith leaders and social-justice advocates:

I love in [sic] the youth communities commitment to this work, which is, you know, part of why we sponsor the events that we do at the university . . . one of the ideas in [sic] that we’re really focused on sharing with high school and college-age youth especially . . . if we do a good job of taking care of relationships and inspiring high school and college-age youth to really get interested in nonviolence for themselves, that’s what I’m here to do. (Interview B: 126-128, 270-271, 364-366)

Participant B’s work to develop youth leaders was exhibited in Participant C’s narrative.

Participant C. As a result of leading several youth interfaith groups and activities, Participant C has been recognized as a notable interfaith organizational leader at a young age. In her early 20s, she has presided over successful high school and college interfaith organizations. She has also been involved in national-level interfaith youth and leadership training efforts. Consistent with Participants A and B, she is actively engaged in a variety of activities that focus on different interfaith organizational leadership facets:

I’m the president of the Student’s Association for Interfaith Cooperation at the University . . . . It’s an interfaith student organization. Previously, I have been on the organizing committee for Global Citizenship Conference . . . I’ve also been
heading different groups that have been dealing with collaborations with different youth groups in the area, so youth groups of different faiths. I’ve also been involved in fielding interfaith visits from different youth groups from churches or local synagogues to the Islamic Center . . . more relevant to my interfaith work, I’ve attended some leadership institutes in the past. One, this past summer in New York City, the Interfaith Youth Corp Leadership Institute . . . . And I also attended the Interfaith Understanding Conference. (Interview C: 11-18, 27-29, 33)

Participant C’s energetic and optimistic interfaith organizational leadership is a result of mentoring with experienced women interfaith organizational leaders such as Participant B. Her positive leadership disposition was reflected in her response to questions about her demographic background and perspectives on interfaith leadership characteristics:

So, I’m Pakistani, and I’m a Muslim . . . . I think the main thing is openness and that’s in a lot of different aspects, I think, because one aspect would be openness to learn about other people’s beliefs and hear other people’s ideas, even if they’re conflicting with your own personal beliefs, since interfaith is all about letting people have a space where they can express their identities to the fullest. I think another is also an openness to realize that other people might not necessarily be comfortable with certain activities or just kind of an openness to meet people where they are; since there are so many people with different faiths involved, just recognizing that different people have a different comfort level in certain things . . . . Also, just keeping a positive attitude and trying to encourage people, especially when we’re working with students who have so many other commitments, I think
it’s really important to be able to energize people and kind of help people feel passionate about it and realize the importance. (Interview C: 50, 59-67, 73-77)

The principal idea was established at the outset of Participant C’s narrative input. Like Participants A and B, the idea of inclusiveness and having an *open perspective* was a key theme in Participant C’s narrative. She offered thorough and thoughtful views of interfaith organizational leadership though she had less experience because of her age:

figuring out ways to have a lot of people who are enthusiastic about this. So having this sort of vision to continue it in the future so that it’s not just like short-term but also long-term goals as well . . . since interfaith is all about bringing different people together, a big part of that is having different people who are actually enthusiastic about doing this organizing process or involved in this organizing process, and I think that’s a really crucial aspect to having a sense of continuity . . . you know that there have been times where people were enthusiastic about a group. But, then those people graduated and there weren’t really people to take their place, and so those efforts kind of fall apart, and so in order to make sure that that doesn’t happen, we really have to have a sense of continuity. (Interview C: 92-94, 110-114, 119-123)

Participant C integrated *open perspective* and *relational focus* themes to illustrate her own experiences with the importance of continuity in interfaith leadership paradigms. She deftly related structural continuity with sensitivity and awareness of others’ views. Her maturity and insightfulness on this matter rivaled and complemented the reflections of women interfaith organizational leaders with considerably more leadership experience:
I think everyone sees diversity around us, and I think, especially on a college campus, you see people who look different, you see people who worship different, or might be involved in rituals that you might not understand . . . .

Because if we don’t have this continuity in interfaith work, then those differences just kind of slip into the back of people’s minds, as things that are there, but not necessarily things that they’re willing to go the step further and actually explore. So I think that’s kind of where interfaith work takes a place, because I think people are aware of these differences, but interfaith work allows them to directly engage in conversations about them. (Interview C: 129-132, 135-141)

Her thoughts on interfaith experiences were extended to her reflections on personal values. She extended an example of how her values informed her interfaith leadership decision making within the context of having an open perspective and relational focus as a leader:

One thing that I always try to keep in mind is that, because we’re dealing with people from different religious backgrounds, . . . . I, like, have to remind myself that my perspective might not be the perspective that everyone is seeing it from, because people are coming at it from different backgrounds, and so really making sure that I’m hearing what others are saying and taking that into account as well and that it’s a group decision . . . . I really have to help people be more aware of my values and the values of people who might not share the same opinions as well . . . my decision-making style is collaborative, and I think that’s something that I’ve particularly been working on this year, because I think, I mean, I’m a person who kind of tends to take on a lot of things myself and then do them, but
this year I’ve really been trying to make sure that everyone feels involved and included by delegating more of the responsibilities. (Interview C: 148-149, 170-172, 193-201)

Participant C’s open perspective was further linked to how she adjudicates and resolves conflicts with others that have divergent views from her personal and leadership values:

I’m definitely a firm believer in letting people, or giving people, space to express their opinions, because I think everyone is entitled to their opinion and to express that opinion . . . . So not necessarily formatting our discussion in a way that is imposing a certain perspective but just leaving space for people to share their own beliefs, because I think that when we create, or when we organize, interfaith events or programs, we really want to make sure it’s just a space where people can discuss certain issues, and that it’s okay if people have an opinion that not necessarily everyone agrees with . . . when we approach it with that kind of attitude, it can be really enriching. (Interview C: 212-214, 220-225, 236-237)

The open perspective and relational focus Participant C identified regarding leadership continuity, personal values, and interpersonal conflict is also manifest in her caring activism. She uses shared beliefs to motivate people to engage in interfaith action:

even though we see some differences in rituals or certain beliefs, I think there are a lot of shared values, like just caring for humanity, and so we try to bring that out, especially with things like community-service events where people from different faiths can come together, because every faith, at some point or another, talks about service and caring for other people, and so it’s things like that that can really help people see that there are a lot of commonalities . . . we’ll talk about
things that people might not agree on, but we do it in an environment where people are still coming together, so things like a shared meal or something that people can share, where even though they might have different beliefs, we’re kind of still sharing that sense of, I guess, appreciating other people and being open to other people. (Interview C: 244-249, 251-255)

Participant C’s strong inclination toward balanced information processing offset her relative lack of interfaith organizational leadership experience. Throughout her story, she consistently returned to integrating an open perspective and relational focus directed toward caring activism. Her fundamental orientation in seeking to understand others’ views and operate from an inclusive leadership perspective was reminiscent of seasoned interfaith organization leaders. Participant C’s mentoring relationship with Participant B may account for their strikingly similar open perspective and relational focus-based leadership approaches. Her willingness to engage others with opposing views was clear:

because, often, the event or the types of people at these events garner our, or the types of people at these events gather, people who are open. But it’s really necessary to have people who might not be so open to also attend these events, because if we don’t have them participate, how will we have them to become more open to these ideas, or more open to understanding others? (Interview C: 286-290)

Similar to Participant B, Participant C addressed the need to have diversity in interfaith participation. Her thoughts and action in this area surpassed perfunctory or philosophical reflections. She demonstrated her values-based actions and internal moral perspective by indicating how inclusiveness is tied to her traits and acceptance as an interfaith leader:
I really tried to, I guess, not just impose my opinions but really show an openness for other people to express their religious identities as well. So having, and I think that people can see that I’m very curious to learn about other religions and kind of help people express their religious identities as well. So, I mean, they’ll see me promoting an event where we might be visiting a Muslim service, but they’ll also see me promoting an event where we might be visiting a Hindu service, so it’s kind of just seeing that I’m supportive of all these types of programs. I think that helps people see me as an authentic leader. (Interview C: 323-331)

Participant C’s relational capacity and emotional intelligence were visible in the manner that she built relationships with other interfaith participants. Like Participant B, she sought interaction across faith boundaries as part of her caring activism. Dissimilar to Participant A, she did not engage in these actions as an explicit part of her social identity or as part of a specific social-justice construct like gender equality. Her interactions with other students provided insights into how her leadership credibility was being increased:

I’ve developed friendships with them, and that’s been really interesting for me, as having more friends with different faiths also branched out to a lot of the other organizations we’ve worked with. A lot of the Christian organizations; we’ve worked with the Hindu organizations, the Jewish students, the Muslim students. Just trying to help people in those organizations, who, even if they, themselves, might not be involved in interfaith work, that they can see our interfaith organization is a group that supports them in the work that they’re doing and is interested in learning more about it. (Interview C: 336-344)
Participant C noted how her relational focus and open perspective are both linked to her authentic acceptance as an interfaith organizational leader. Consistent with her earlier narrative reflections, inclusiveness underpinned the views people have of her as a leader:

I think part of it is that I have been working with interfaith groups and interfaith leaders in this community for a long time, and I think people are very aware of that, and I think that contributes to a bit of the authenticity, and I think also that I just try to make it very clear that I want people of different faiths to be able to express themselves, and so I think people are seeing that as well, and so that contributes to the authenticity as well . . . I think that also has helped people accept me, generally, as a leader, and I think people can see that I’m passionate about the organization, not just, well, I’m here but also having it be something that is long lasting. (Interview C: 349-354, 356-359)

In contrast to more seasoned women interfaith organizational leaders, Participant C did not specifically elaborate on any gender-focused concerns relative to her interfaith organizational experiences. The forte of her narrative resided in her consistent focus on being open-minded and developing sincere and respectful relationships across faith and gender boundaries. Her closing narrative statement illustrates the depth of her devotion to having an open perspective, a relational focus, and participating in caring activism:

I think a lot of people are curious about people of different faiths. But, I think it’s almost a relief, sometimes, to have this formal space where you can actually express that curiosity . . . there’s so many different opinions, and you really get to kind of see why people act the way they do, or why people believe the way that they do. So I think that is really motivating for me, because it’s an opportunity for
me not only to try to affirm my own beliefs and try to explore what my beliefs are, but also hear those of others and try to understand others in that deeper way. (Interview C: 403-405, 410-415)

Participant C and the researcher were acquainted by working together in community- and university-related interfaith initiatives. The researcher was also familiar with Participant C’s previous interfaith work and volunteering efforts accomplished during high school and thereafter. Like the interviews with Participants A and B, the researcher maintained objectivity by approaching the research topic with Participant C through a social constructivist framework and using the interview protocol’s structure.

Participant C’s interview was conducted at the researcher’s home with his spouse (who also knows Participant C very well) attending the discussion. Though very reserved and modest, Participant C was very forthcoming in her narrative input and reflections on interfaith organizational leadership. As a young interfaith leader, her perspectives offered an interesting contrast to the other study participants. Her receptiveness to others’ views and fluidity in navigating diverse environments and relationships may portend the traits of future interfaith leaders. Her self-awareness, sensitivity to others, and collaborative leadership approach was indicative of a seasoned interfaith organizational leader. As Participant C looked forward, Participant D recounted her current interfaith experiences.

Participant D. While serving as an organizational functional director, Participant D is responsible for her organization’s interfaith outreach efforts. With national and international interfaith and religious leadership experience, Participant D is a very active local interfaith leader at the forefront of many activities and organizations in her community. In her mid-40s, she offers a mid-career perspective of interfaith leadership
that aligns with similar issues offered in Participant A’s narrative. Her frank and firm clarity in voicing her interfaith organizational leadership viewpoints are grounded in her broad experiences.

Participant D is a Rabbi with duties that involve several interfaith interactions. She serves in leadership roles on an interfaith commission, an interfaith forum, an interfaith institute, and an academically based interfaith institute. With her considerable leadership experiences, Participant D’s educational background supported her interfaith efforts. She holds Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Hebrew literature studies and is an ordained Reform Rabbi. Her education and professionalism was evident in her direct approach. Her forthright descriptions of interfaith leadership attributes were insightful:

Starting with the personality traits, which I think drive a lot of the conversation, I think the people who have been blessed to both be alongside of, and to work with, who are very strong interfaith leaders are open and welcoming, non-judgmental, not preachy or didactic, wanting to deepen understanding, committed to social justice, usually on either some level or levels, and wanting to do community building and coalition building and are committed to, as I said, not just deepening understanding, but to deepening relationships in a specific community in order to come to know each other better and also to come to make a better community . . . I think it’s multilevel, multifaceted. (Interview D: 55-63, 64-65)

Participant D’s interfaith organizational leadership is based in her rabbinical experience. In describing her entrée to interfaith leadership, she introduced gender-related considerations in her observations. Her unvarnished narrative candor supports Participant A’s reflections on women’s participation in the interfaith and religious leadership realm:
I loved much of what I did, but it felt a little siloed, a little insular, that I was only working in one part of my community, and our tradition teaches that we shouldn’t separate ourselves from the broader community, and so this was a good and organic fit for me to go from that to this. One of the things that I like most and what I think I’m adept at is convening people . . . I think, stereotypically, a lot of women, and that’s a big nasty, broad brush stroke, but I think it’s often a fair one, are very good at bringing people together, and that’s, I think, pretty vital interfaith work to bring people together in an atmosphere which is neutral, by neutral, I mean to void of judgment, neutral and open minded, and I think that’s a very important characteristic to interfaith work and something that was very appealing to me in my rabbinic colleagues and then my interfaith colleagues that I met along the way. So I think that’s a very important quality in the work that I do.

(Interview D: 75-80, 84-89)

Like the opening comments that Participants A, B, and C offered in their narratives, Participant D raised the notion of inclusiveness and open-mindedness being germane to interfaith leadership. In clarifying her reflections on openness, she offered a surprisingly sharp response that outlined her unwavering clarity in her social identity and hinted at elements of moral exclusivity. Her observation on this point may have been implicitly related to gender equality themes that emerged throughout her narrative reflections:

So, I would hope that you know not just my personal, but my religious, which are one in the same, those values come to bear in any of my decisions, so it’s rooted in my tradition, it’s rooted in my living in these United States of America, and so yes, that openness is part of what I hope guides my style. But there’s, you know, I
think a difference between being open and being flexible, and being spineless. I think there’s a difference, right, to not just blow whichever way the wind blows, but to make my decisions true to my faith and true to my sensibilities, which I hope are often one in the same from my learning. (Interview D: 101-108)

This reflection opened the interview to more candid and exploratory conversation on values linked to social identity and Participant D’s approach to interfaith inclusiveness. At this point in the interview, the researcher’s questioning and Participant D’s responses were assumed to be dialogical in nature. When asked to further convey her perspectives on values and openness, Participant D provided another clear-cut response that presented insight on how different participants’ may view interactions within the interfaith realm:

So, I’ll give you, like, a for example . . . very clearly that you shouldn’t embarrass somebody and that embarrassing someone is akin to causing their death, and I think, especially in an interfaith setting, not intentionally, but I think sometimes inadvertently, there are opportunities for a person to be embarrassed by either not knowing the etiquette or, you know, whatever it is, not knowing the customs, and that’s, I think, that has to be a careful, that’s just cultural, that’s just culturally when we come to the different tables. Then I think there are core values around justice and action and giving, and clothing the naked and feeding the hungry, and tending to the poor, and those who are bereaved, those are all things that I think are part and parcel, you know, the work that we do both personally and then in an interfaith setting, as well, where some of those might be at odds with another faith tradition. So that has to come into play as well. (Interview D: 112-124)
Participant D candidly offered another strong response when asked to further elaborate on her thoughts on the manifestation of values and openness in her decision-making style. As an experienced and well-respected interfaith leader, her reflections offered insight into how personal and religious values may inform interfaith leaders’ outlooks and practices:

there are certain interfaith gatherings that take place on our Sabbath that I feel very strongly it’s a place where we should be represented, but not a place where we can go on a Sabbath, not a place where I can be performing actions on our Sabbath. So that’s a very clear conflict that arises sometimes and that’s a non-negotiable, you know, that it’s a matter of life and death. (Interview D: 130-135)

Similar sentiments were expressed when the conflict resolution methods were discussed. Her thoughts on religious and personal values being integral to leadership approaches were framed in the context of dealing with diametric views opposed or strong conflict:

there are hot-button issues where in an interfaith setting and even in a same-faith setting, right, where we’re at odds with one another, and I would like to think, and I would like to hope, that I hear that and can, you know, it’s not saying agree to disagree, as best I can. You know, if fundamentally it’s a question of danger or something that’s really of tremendous import then, I think when things are stretched to that limit, it’s a different kind of question; but on a more pedestrian level, I think my hope is I would hear, and even where I disagree or where we disagree, that that relationship continues. (Interview D: 144-151)

Participant D’s forthright reflections articulated on interfaith realm interactions contrasted with the foci in Participant B and C’s open perspective and relational focus narratives. Similar to Participant A, her thoughts on interfaith organizational leadership
experiences inclined toward a social identity-based perspective. Distinct from the other interviewees, Participant D directly outlined challenges of navigating interfaith relations:

Those are bigger challenges for me, I don’t know if that, it’s kind of vague, I have something in mind and don’t want to name it for the sake of not offending, but there are events, which I sometimes have to attend that I think, if I wasn’t in this role I don’t think I would attend that . . . I think that’s largely in part the goal of interfaith work is to find the places where we do have discussion and shared values, or shared thoughts or even shared struggles, where we ultimately might not come to the same end or the same resolve, but where sometimes a struggle is where we find commonality. (Interview D: 163-167, 174-178)

She extended her cogent insight on relational, outlook, and inclusiveness challenges to intra-faith interactions as well. Her self-awareness as a leader was clearly articulated when she reflected on her interactions with people that have different perspectives or values:

where I’ve had to kind of tread a little bit more carefully, it’s usually around a social-justice issue. Whether it’s something like gun violence prevention or something like that where it’s polarized or it’s kind of more politically charged. (Interview D: 198-201)

Participant D offered insights about interfaith organizational leaders’ characteristics in conflict-infused situations. In interfaith and intra-faith settings, she illustrated the impact conflict has on the leadership style she utilized and specific measures that she has taken:

there are some places where I bow to the wisdom of the group and those who are longer in a specific group than I have been and who are elders, right, who are
elder-states folk, elder-states people. And there are other times, though not often, where I have made the careful decision, very careful and usually painstaking, to lead in a different direction than sometimes where the group wants to go because I think it may be detrimental to the health of the group . . . . Because I think, in some of those instances, not that I’m afraid of difference of opinions, but because sometimes I think some conversations bring more heat than they do light and while there is value to sometimes just having that process, sometimes there isn’t, and more damage is done than good. (Interview D: 208-213, 215-218)

Participant D also alluded to collaborative leadership traits when adjudicating arguments:

I think sometimes the issue is too explosive, I think sometimes, yeah, I mean, I’ve had it in at least two groups that I’m active with that sometimes the issue itself is too hot with very little seeming return to it, and maybe I will have been wrong about it, but I always work in my structures, also, with committees, which is nice, so I have some vetting, which is also my style to do, so I’m fully capable of making a decision on my own. They’re not always the right decisions, so it’s nice to work in committee structures where there’s input and feedback. (Interview D: 223-229)

Her reflection on interactions with her committees reinforced the ideas of self-awareness contained throughout the narrative. Her clarity of purpose as an interfaith organizational leader was expressed primarily as a function of her social identity. Participant D referred to relational focus as a subset of her social identity. Her perspectives on this point also illustrated the centrality of relational focus to interfaith leadership traits and practices:
I think are there settings in which people don’t care for my style or my approach or my, maybe even my values, I don’t know, I would imagine so for sure. I don’t think interfaith work, in particular, can happen, can exist, can flourish, can ebb and flow the way I think it sometimes does in different faith communities were it not for the strength and the fabric of the relationships of those groups . . . . I mean, just, it could not be more central to the work that we do is the strength and the length [sic] actually of time of relationships that predate me. Many people who sit around the different tables have been at those tables for decades . . . (Interview D: 243-248, 251-254)

Offering an account that emphasized her social identity viewpoints, Participant D’s narrative demonstrated qualitative substantiation of gender equality challenges in the interfaith organizational leadership realm. Like Participant A, her narrative input directly addressed gender questions. Differentiated from Participant A’s reflections, Participant D’s observations on gender equality were more extensive, detailed, and elicited strongly worded responses that seemed to suggest a deeply felt experience and perspective. She delivered the following thoughtful response when asked about being a woman interfaith organizational leader and any influence on her experiences with perceived authenticity:

I would think that questions of my authenticity as a woman, you know, it’s kind of I feel like I’m wearing two different hats. My being clergy gives me one whole hat, keep out or wear . . . . So sometimes that’s, I would say, 85% of the time that’s a great, of great benefit to the work that I do. Every once in a while, it puts me in a precarious position, not often, but every once in a while, it puts me in a precarious position . . . I think there’s some entrée that’s given me because of my
title. I think, in some more traditional religious settings, it can be to my detriment. I think there is debate about whether or not a woman can be a full-fledged clergy member with all its obligations . . . I haven’t overtly experienced dissonance or conflict. I have, in all candor, I have, at times, sensed a kind of diminutive, there’s another word I’m looking for, but inferior kind of perception as a woman in some of those settings . . . In some, not very many, but that is certainly the exception not the norm. (Interview D: 272-274, 279-282, 288-290, 294-296, 298)

Participant D proceeded to offer specific examples and clarity on how these experiences have been manifest for her:

these are some old gender stereotypes, right? These are the stereotypical, “would you mind taking notes,” “could you get coffee,,” you know, some of those that still astonish me in this generation . . . it is very rare in this community, though, it does exist, it does exist. You know there are still times that I get referred to as the “woman rabbi,” or mistaken for another woman rabbi in town . . . I’m mindful of it. I hear it? Do I sometimes bristle? Yeah. Do I sometimes think it’s generational or age based, or even sometimes culturally, you know, kind of culturally driven? I’m ordained, you know, just under 20 years . . . so I’m more accustomed to it now; it’s far less than at the beginning of my career, and it’s certainly far less in this capacity than it was when I served in a congregational setting . . . . They do continue to surprise me, however, they do, when they pop up, I think, “Really? We’re still there, we’re still there?” Yeah. (Interview D: 302-304, 311-313, 318-323, 332-333)
After giving examples that represented not only what happened, but how it also felt, Participant D offered how social identity and gender equality frame these experiences:

I think your whole question about gender at the table, you know, kind of who is where and in what capacity, I think in our discussion, we’re just scratching the surface. I think the infrastructures of some of the organizations that sit at the table, I think some of those dictate what can and can’t be done in a leadership capacity or what is or isn’t being done right now . . . I think the structure of an institution, of an organization of a faith community often bespeaks, I’ll just speak from my perspective, how I am received or welcomed or included or perhaps not, but not excluded in any kind of bold way but just kind of not included in as more of an inclusive way . . . . (Interview D: 338-342, 343-346)

She also commented on possible underlying causes and the extent of the observed issues:

Systemic, yeah, and I wouldn’t limit it to cultural, I mean I think some of them are denominationally driven. So while, yes, some of them are age-based, right, and I think some of them are culturally based. I think some of them are denominationally based . . . as an exception not the norm. I mean, in the majority of places, I feel welcomed, I feel well received, I feel included, I feel like my leadership is accepted and valued, you know, in many places, and in some places not, and I think that’s the nature of this. I was going to say, beast, but I don’t want to make it sound negative. I think that’s the nature of this work. I think that’s pretty central to this work actually. (Interview D: 349-352, 362-367)

Highlighting the dialogical nature of the interview, Participant D’s closing responses to an open-ended offer to provide any other thoughts returned social identity and gender
equality themes. She offered more lived experiences as an interfaith organizational leader. She revealed the idea of moral exclusivity being a dynamic in the interfaith arena:

I’d be curious to know any other people with whom you’re meeting, you know, if you were to ask them a question about deference, right, about being deferential, you know, what they might say in terms of the work that they do. You know, in what ways have you found in your work that you need to be deferential, and there are different levels of deference, I think. There’s deference faith based, which says I don’t know your faith, and I don’t know the customs, and so I aspire to be a gracious guest and come into your space whether it’s a meeting or a prayer space or a communal space and be deferential to your space . . . so you come in and observe and hope not to offend and do right by those people in their space as best you can, and then there’s infrastructure, and that’s not just specific to interfaith work, that’s specific to any structure, then there’s deference to, Is there a hierarchy in your faith? I mean, is there a hierarchy in your organization to which I need to be, or you are expecting me to be, deferential, and does that meet up with, or is it at odds with, who I am as a person of faith and a leader of faith. So that’s just kind of the other piece that I was thinking about in your line of questions. (Interview D: 374-382, 383-389)

Participant D offered revealing comments when asked if the deference was gender-based:

I mean, yes, I could give you kind of the benign, very mundane, could you get coffee, could you run some photocopies, kind of things that I think people would not ask. (Interview D: 397-399)
Wanting to continue the insights that were revealed, the researcher elicited additional reflection by adding to her statement “. . . a male colleague that has just similar or identical background” (Interview D: 400). Participant D then extended her thoughts on the topic:

I have been in meeting settings where I would be asked something that somebody else at the table in a similar more seasoned capacity than I would not be asked, I think, by virtue of his being a male. I think, maybe I’m wrong, I don’t think so, I don’t think so. Then, I think, there are hierarchically some different kinds of places where there’s a rub as well, where I think the edict is given from on high, from on male high and expect to be made out by the minions. Sometimes male and female alike, but often times female . . . . Hierarchy, structures, infrastructures, leadership; leadership, even those of us who work in kind of multilevel leadership, you know, places where there’s multi-levels of leadership, yeah. I don’t want to leave you with the sense, however, that I think interfaith work is sexist, I don’t. I think in much of the work that I have done, both in congregational work and social-justice work and in interfaith work, that this is probably the place that I see it the very least and that the doors are the most wide open as a woman. So I do want you to hear that very clearly and with a big bold kind of underline underneath. I think that interfaith settings in large in are, by virtue of it being interfaith, are very open, are very welcoming, are very open to difference of thought, opinion, values, and gender. (Interview D: 401-407, 410-419)

After her powerful reflection, Participant D optimistically concluded her narrative input:
I love my work, it’s a gift to do, it’s a gift to get to with the people that come my way do it . . . . I think it can only be better, richer, and stronger and more sustainable, if we’re all that the table, men and women, liberal, progressive, conservative, traditional, I mean all of us. I think that’s the only way for us to really bring meaning and change, positive change. (Interview D: 425-426, 427-430)

Participant D and the researcher were previously acquainted by virtue of having worked with each other on interfaith organizational forums, communal gatherings, and interfaith initiatives. The researcher’s familiarity with Participant D facilitated open dialogue, candid responses, and instructive narrative reflections that provided distinctive insights on the lived experiences of a woman interfaith organizational leader. Like the preceding interviews with Participants A, B, and C, the researcher maintained objectivity by approaching the research topic and interview questions through a social constructivist framework and exercising the interview protocol’s arrangement.

The interview with Participant D was conducted at her office building in a private conference room. This setting was different from the three prior interviews, conducted with Participants A, B, and C, which took place in residential settings. The interview setting within Participant D’s professional workspace was a neutral factor. Although in a professional location, the depth of response and narrative insight offered by Participant D equaled those tendered by the participants on the previous interviews.

Participant D’s forthright, confident, and strikingly clear reflections and narrative accounts facilitated the development of the *social identity* and *gender equality* themes. Her thoughts on dynamics with the interfaith leadership realm generated a separate theme.
related to moral exclusivity. Participant D’s thoughts on the social identity and gender equality themes came from a perspective of a practicing interfaith organizational leader. Her views were different from Participant A whose reflections on those same themes was positioned from contemplation on a well-tenured interfaith leadership career. The contrast in focus on the social identity and gender equality themes versus caring activism and relational focus themes became more apparent in the interview with Participant E.

Participant E. In her extensive experiences and service as a Roman Catholic Nun, Participant E is currently a pastoral administrator of a parish Church in an Upstate New York village. Her broad religious service and leadership efforts within the context of her faith are complemented by extensive interfaith organizational leadership experiences. Starting in the mid-1980s, she was instrumental in the creation and development of a community interfaith forum based in a Catholic Church located in the downtown of an Upstate New York city. In her 70s, Participant E’s professional experiences have taken her to international travels as well as a variety of domestic urban and rural locations. Like Participant A, her interfaith leadership efforts are underscored by a robust education.

Participant E has a Bachelor’s Degree in mathematics from a private Catholic College, a Master’s Degree from a distinguished Midwestern Catholic University, and a Divinity Degree from a seminary. After receiving her education, her religious duties have occupied the preponderance of her professional career. The concentration of her specific interfaith organizational leadership occurred in the period prior to the 9/11 tragedy.

In line with Participants A, B, C, and D’s opening narrative reflections, Participant E’s introductory views on interfaith organizational leadership focused on
inclusiveness. She offered an insightful answer to the question on interfaith leadership characteristics:

The first thing would be a sense of hospitality toward the world community, that one needs to have to be somewhat well read, not necessarily in a particular discipline but well-read in the actions, the growth in the tensions in various parts of the world, so that can serve as a backdrop against which any kind of conversation then can go on. So the hospitality has to include that kind of background leading and learning, but it’s more expansive. The hospitality needs to be willing to go into places where the other is, but also then to welcome the other into one’s own place of work, worship, home, however that is . . . because this particular interview is specifically about interfaith relations, what we want to talk about is, when I say the other, that that’s an umbrella name for our Jewish, Muslim brothers and sisters, people of other religious groups around the world. (Interview E: 52-59, 62-65)

She expanded upon her perceptions of interfaith leadership with insights on interactions: another ingredient is attentive listening to the other, so by that I mean not distracted listening, not listening in such a way that I’m waiting for you to pause for me to get my word in but listening with the sense of trying to absorb what is being said and then, if possible, probe in a way that is non-offensive. (Interview E: 69-72)

Building upon her observations on inclusiveness and attentive listening, Participant E relayed an insightful and rich description of her initial interfaith leadership experiences. Her reflection provides a detailed view of developing interfaith community relationships:
in 1985, we had a group of people who would come to our regular programs, and our programs were not centered specifically on religious issues, they were centered on community issues and community questions and how those conversations could be enhanced by bringing it to a place where people could simply walk in the door and be part of it and not necessarily belong to the host organization or maybe never been there before and may never come back, but this particular thing would be of interest. So among the people who came to this variety of programs were members bright, engaged, downtown members of the Jewish community, and it was they who one day surrounded me at the end of a program and said, “We ought to have a Jewish-Christian dialog.” Those things do exist at high levels, in other words, at the levels of leadership and theology, but this was intended to be a conversation among people who lived the Jewish traditions and the Christian traditions and who then intended to do something constructive with that basic experience . . . and, to some extent, it was a mixed group, by that I mean it was Jewish members of various synagogues, Christians of various denominations including Roman Catholics. It was a fairly stable group to some extent. By that there might have been 15 or 20 people who came on a regular basis, but then there would be times that others would come, and then once in a while, we would have a Sunday event whereby we would share a meal and have an extended conversation. They were conversations, we would at the end of one, we would say, “Now we need to continue to probe this aspect of what we’ve been talking about,” or “For now, let’s set this aside and talk about X or Y or Z or W,” and that’s how we went from week to week. There were no
achievable goals except the conversation, which to my way, and those people when I see them, a number of them have died since, but when I see the ones who are still carrying on in a variety of ways, they’re still concerned about those issues and the warmth is there and the sense that we shared a good thing. So out of that Jewish-Christian perspective, I also got the sense that what we were talking about was vivifying and allowed for a mutual understanding, although we didn’t always agree, and some days it got hot, as you can well imagine, because, “No, no, how can you believe that, well yes we do,” and then it would go back and forth and that sort of thing . . . as this Jewish-Christian dialog began to move along, what we recognized is that I was beginning to be recognized as somebody who supported that kind of conversation, and one day I got so far. It’s been Jews and Christians, because in the 80s, we still had not come upon . . . that whole thing with the Muslim community, that came late; that was more in the 90s, I would say. But on the cusp of that, early on we, I got a call from a woman . . . and she said, “Sister, would you ever come to our Mosque for our women’s group?” I said, “Of course, is it just to be there with you, is there a program, how are you shaping that?” She said, “Well, they want to know about American Christian women.” I said, “Shall I bring somebody with me?” “No you come yourself this time, and then we’ll see where we go from there.” So I did, and well, I walked in and took off my shoes and put them aside and went to the group and lovely, lovely women who had positions of value in the community beyond their own worship site . . . and that was the beginning of a lovely relationship. We would periodically get together, and sometimes there would be more of us that came
along. One woman, in particular, has since died of breast cancer and I, curiously, I
had breast cancer at the same time. But, she refused to do any of the chemo or that
sort of thing, and I said . . . “you’re not going to make it,” well she didn’t. My last
visit with her was in New Jersey, she had moved there with her daughter, I was in
New York for a meeting, and I took the train to New Jersey and spent a couple of
hours with her. She dressed up for the occasion, she put her lovely flowing
garments on, and I rubbed her feet, and I rubbed her feet with rosemary oil, and a
couple weeks later, I got word that she had died, so it was that close. But those
women were very special in introducing me to the Muslim culture, and then little
by little, there were programs that we would develop . . . the connections that we
could make with our Jewish brothers and sisters, and then another one with the
Muslims, and then another one with the Buddhists, and so there’s always this
effort for understanding. I think that that’s probably the critical issue is the
understanding. (Interview E: 75-88, 90-107, 108-111, 112-114, 116-122, 124-128,
128-136, 143-147)

Within her comprehensive response, Participant E revealed the essence of the
themes emerging from her narrative. Her strong relational focus was evident in the
trusting relationships she developed across the interfaith community. The interfaith
organizations that she helped organize and lead demonstrated her caring activism. The
contemplative and erudite reflections she extended on regarding the nature of interfaith
organizational leadership is a manifestation of her spiritual maturity. Participant E’s
wellspring of spiritually based leadership was grounded in inclusiveness. The contour of
her inclusive and open-minded approach to interfaith leadership was demonstrated in her narrative:

Well, I think one reason was that our program, our umbrella program, was known to be open to the world and to the issues of the world . . . I think people found me open to exploration, and I think you can be hospitable all you want, but if you’re not open to exploration, or if the desire, if my desire was to steer the conversation in a particular direction or achieve a particular outcome, that would be unsatisfying not only to me, but it would also be unsatisfying to the people who didn’t know where it was going and didn’t want to know in advance and that’s why they were there . . . we felt what we were there to do would be to share ideas, hopes, aspirations, fears, miseries, things that were part of the human condition.

(Interview E: 155-156, 157-163, 170-171)

Along with being inclusive, Participant E’s narrative reflections were imbued with a sense of clarity in her convictions and ascription to a higher moral purpose. This broadminded and inclusive philosophy on interfaith leadership was further pronounced:

If I were not rooted in my faith tradition, really rooted in it, I could be less than open to hearing what other people say, because they could be viewed as a threat to my basic belief or orientation. So my own rootedness, and people knew that, they could say anything that it might, outlandish as it might be, or as challenging as it might be, and that would be fine. We would hold it and sometimes leave it and then come back to it another time and sometimes we didn’t; we just talked about it until we talked it out. So there is that, and then the decision-making style. Well, I am an ENFP so as an extrovert, I’m given to being reasonably quick and verbal
about making a decision. Over time, I’ve learned to say, “Yeah, I think I can do that, but I think I should give it a little bit more thought,” . . . and so, in order to be able to make a decision, I would talk it out with people, but never did I make a decision on my own so that I always ran it past people, I consulted, I had committees and groups that we worked with . . . there was this delightful bunch of people who were from various public and private sectors downtown, and I would ask them to sit on the committee for maybe a year or two, and they were from various faith traditions, as well as various disciplines, and so they would throw out an idea, and we would work on it, and maybe we would develop it, and maybe it would kind of go away, and that would be the end of it, but it was never that . . . sometimes you’ve got to be out there by yourself, first, before you can begin to draw other people in, and that’s a leadership style that you have to know when to, at least, put your toe in the water or when you go with the group initially . . . . I was pretty free when I worked with these folks. I was careful about my language so that I would not use language that would be off putting, but at the same time . . . we didn’t always gain consensus except to say the consensus is we’ll leave it. But I would always ask the question, “Do we go on with the same thing or do we need to stop or do we need to do more research. Do we need to consult some other people? Do we need to hear what other folks have contributed in this area?” (Interview E: 180-190, 193-195, 196-201, 207-210, 215-218, 221-225)

Participant E’s robust relational focus also underpinned how she addressed conflict and differentiating views in interfaith situations that were contrary to her views and values. When questioned about her philosophy and approach of interacting with other
interfaith participants, her reflection showed the recurring *spiritual maturity* theme in her narrative:

> Well, always with respect I hope, I mean that’s the primary thing that my own faith tradition, at its deepest core level, is built on human respect. The respect for the other . . . . So whatever I thought of myself, I would also have to think of them and presume that the reason they were here is to carry on the conversation and not to strong arm evangelization. Evangelization was not part of this conversation at all. We were not attempting to draw one another away from where we were to some other place. (Interview E: 241-243, 244-248)

Like Participants B and C, Participant E’s narrative had clear elements of *relational focus* that stressed finding common ground or shared values with other interfaith participants.

> We saw shared values . . . there was a Jewish-Catholic understanding that took place at the diocese level, and we were part of the celebration of that because, later on, with the Muslims, also there was a Muslim-Catholic kind of covenant that was signed and formed . . . . So those are things we would celebrate as they came along, because they were so carefully nuanced, and what we’ve been blessed with, pretty much right along the way, is learning scholarly people who could move in both directions . . . in those years when we worked carefully together, it was because we recognized that we all worked carefully together, and that we were, the people in this group were remarkable. They were as rooted in their own traditions, as I was in my own, and nobody came to problem solve, and nobody was there as the resident authority, that we all had a piece of that
authority, so that was one of the unique things of that time, I don’t think it could be replicated easily. (Interview E: 255, 256-259, 264-266, 276-282)

Participant E framed her acceptance as an interfaith organizational leader in terms of *caring activism* and *how* her journey in the interfaith realm has unfolded and evolved. Her observations on this point also symbolized her *spiritual maturity* and *relational focus*:

> without compartmentalizing my life, there are times when I have been invested in something for a period, and then by virtue of circumstances, I am taken out of that and thrust in a whole different direction. So the work of my life on myself has been to grow in life-giving consistency. Now none of us will be totally consistent up until the day we die. Now, having said that, we also have to work at it all of our life, so I think the values, the ingredients, the hospitality, the careful listening, all of those, if I have been at all authentic in doing those things, then, they need to carry over into my life where I am now and that was pretty, and I think that’s been so. So working with the interfaith people has created in me a continued thirst for doing that, however, the circumstances of my life have been such that I haven’t been able to. So I can’t, well you know, I went from that to a year’s sabbatical, and then after that, I was in my order’s leadership for four years, and then I was out of the country . . . but so I just keep rolling with it and who knows what’s next? (Interview E: 306-318, 320-321)

In her narrative, Participant E also reflected upon the diversity she experienced in the interfaith realm. Her observations are differentiated from the diversity-related reflections that Participant C offered in her narrative regarding the uniformity in interfaith
gatherings, organizations, and informal dialog groups. Instead of directly answering the question, Participant E explained an interfaith contact she had that exemplified diversity: people presume that I’m open in a variety of ways, so my chiropractor came in one day to begin working on me, and he had with him another doctor who was visiting, and so we chatted about my particular chiropractic needs, and we chatted with this other doctor too, and I said, “What is your country of origin?” and he said, “Persia.” “Oh,” I hooted, I said, “Oh, that’s wonderful. That is absolutely wonderful that you go back to your historic name.” And he was thrilled, you know, he was thrilled, and I think that is just an example of a bunch of small things in which I try to encourage; say positive things, applaud aspects of people’s lives that are potentially foreign to us but we, and I think that’s an important thing for anybody who comes along, . . . . That’s why I go back and say I have to be educated, somewhat, I have to know that Iran was Persia, I have to know that this was a remarkable historic civilization and all of that. But you know, just to say, “Good for you, I hope you go back, I hope you, you know, you just kind of encourage them . . . .” (Interview E: 335-344, 345-349)

Participant E concluded her interview input by offering narrative reflections and another vignette that integrated and demonstrated her themes of spiritual maturity, caring activism, and relational focus. Her inclusive perspective suffuses her closing statements: I, myself, could not be a lifelong consistent interfaith worker, because there are other calls to me from other directions that, by virtue of my overall commitment, I’m required to at least consider and, if possible, fulfill. So, and I think that you’ll find any number of us, it’s not that we don’t, we would like to continue, but you
know, here for example, in this parish, this is a full-time job, which is out here in a part of the area where there may be some interfaith folks over at the campus, but we don’t get there because we’ve got this whole town and the environments and so on, so we just, personally, I can’t stay the course forever in one area, even though I might like it; that’s not to say, though, that it hasn’t, that those years have not been formative and influential on how I approach other people in other situations. . . . A few years ago, I was in New York City and staying in a hotel down in the Chelsea area, and I was walking along by myself just looking at flowers, and this man started walking up alongside me, and I had stopped to look at some roses, and he said, “Beautiful, aren’t they?” and I say, “Yeah they really are.” So I just kept walking, and he was walking with me, and he said, “Are you visiting in town?” and I said, “Yeah, I’m only here for a short period of time.” But I said, “Where are you from?” He said, “Well, I’m from Pakistan.” And I said, “Oh, I have a good friend who was from Pakistan, and she died recently.” . . . and so we were talking, and he was a cab driver here in the city, but he had been up at, when he was in Pakistan, he had some other better position, and he said, “Well, can I buy you supper.” And I said, “Oh no thanks,” I said, “I ate on the train,” and I said, “I’m really fine.” So we walked along a little further and chit-chatted, and he says, “Now can I get you dinner?” And I don’t know what possessed me, I said, “Sure.” So there was a Pakistani restaurant right across the street so we went in the Pakistani restaurant, he ordered my meal, paid for it, and said, “I’ve got to go to work, bye.” . . . But, you know, I tend to not to be fearful in a
situation like that you know, and I think it was fun; it was fun . . . . Out to meet the world. (Interview E: 356-366, 375-382, 382-389, 391-392, 398)

Participant E and the researcher were not acquainted prior to the study interview and preparatory discussions. The researcher’s unfamiliarity with Participant E was offset by Participant E’s open and welcoming persona and gracious participation in the study. Her calm, thoughtful, and reflective narrative thoughts offered insights into the period preceding the sizable growth in interfaith organizations subsequent to the 9/11 tragedy. The interview with Participant E took place in a private conference room in a Catholic Church parish. This distinctive setting underpinned the reflective nature of the interview.

The interview with Participant E bore similar temperamental characteristics that the interviews with Participants B and C also demonstrated. This serene environment was contrasted with the more powerfully stated and focused interview atmospheres realized in the discussions with Participants A and D. The themes and feelings evoked in Participant E’s interview reflected a lifetime of devoted service as a nun. While she was not able to serve exclusively in the interfaith realm, Participant F had a lifetime of interfaith efforts.

**Participant F.** As an experienced interfaith organizational leader, Participant F lends her leadership expertise to a variety of local and national interfaith organizations, such as the Interfaith Forum and the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI). In her late-70s, she has been a key leader in sustaining interfaith partnerships and social-justice endeavors at critical junctures in those organizations’ growth. Her interfaith leadership experiences are complemented by her extensive professional background in counseling and teaching. Her compelling relational focus is the basis for her leadership narrative:
I’ve been involved with the interfaith forum for many years, I’d say probably at least 25 years, and, as such, I was on the steering committee for a number of years, or at least that length of time, been involved with the Commission on Jewish Relations and have twice served as chair, and specifically organizations in positions. I think that’s it for, well or just informal, informally in part with an interfaith tea group, that’s originally Muslim and Jewish women, and then expanded to Muslim, Christian, and Jewish women, but that’s been since, I guess, 2001. I’ve done other things, like leading a workshop at Temple Sinai, my work has been with the National Coalition Building Institute. The whole purpose of which is to bring people together across the barriers into doing healing work so that people can learn how to be better allies for one another and actually to support grass-roots activists to be supportive of anti-oppression work no matter what. (Interview F: 12-24)

Like Participants A, D, and E, Participant F used her robust educational background as a foundation for her interfaith organizational leadership and social-justice-related efforts. She also employed her education to become involved in community-related occupations:

I have a Bachelor’s in English, a Master’s . . . in Career and Human Resource Development. I have just dropped it as a retiree, but I’m a nationally certified counselor. I think what’s relevant to all of this is, more than 40 years ago, I became involved with something called re-evaluation counseling, which is a peer counseling program with the objective of people healing their own hurts that have been either the result of a personal experience or as a result of being part of a group that has been oppressed and that we considered is everybody, since we’ve
all been young people and been subject to some of what we call adultism. So that’s what’s been contingent in my life and also underlay National Coalition Building Institute work, which led me to be invited to be in the Counseling Center . . . I got that Master’s, I also wound up teaching some courses in the process of it . . . . (Interview F: 29-38, 46-47)

Participant F’s professional experiences intertwined with her personal characteristics and supported her leadership development and journey as an interfaith organizational leader:

I got to do things I wouldn’t be able to do today, I think, but it was great. I was . . . for 25 years, in different capacities but that was really my primary identity . . . . I started off in staff development with the vice president of Student Affairs and then went over to the Counseling Center for 10 years, and I was invited to be part of the faculty in Career Development where I worked for the faculty career center . . . went downtown to Continuing Ed., where the dean there had been my former boss, and he wanted me there. So the idea was that I was going to be able to do some conflict-resolution work . . . . (Interview F: 49-50, 50-51, 54-57, 58-61)

At that point in her professional career, Participant F engaged in developing interfaith organizations in additional to her professional responsibilities. Her opening narrative reflections demonstrated the relationship between her interfaith community work, educational pursuits, and professional endeavors:

. . . left and started the National Coalition Building Institute . . . Chapter . . . I had been involved with the national founding of it . . . I did a research study on mentors for women in 1980, and in 1978, I probably started it. When we say mentors, now it was like in the lexicon all the time, it was not . . . what was the
influence of mentors and role models on women that were becoming successful in fields that they were not traditionally successful in or not traditionally being able to rise in. So I did the study of 15 women . . . who were non-traditional and highly successful and it led to all kinds of things. I wound up giving a course to students; I brought the women in to meet the students; I asked the women, “What do you want?” they said more for each other. We met for years, I wrote about it, I got invited to give the keynote address in a major conference of New York State women leaders in academic and state government, so it was presidents of colleges, major positions in New York State government, and I got to be the keynote speaker . . . . (Interview F: 63-64, 80-82, 85-95)

She framed her broad interfaith and professional experiences by sharing her cultural and religious affiliations, which are also fundamental to her interfaith organizational leadership:

affiliated to reform Judaism, but I’m really interested in something called Jewish renewal . . . . It’s a more spiritual, goes back to some of the more traditional Hasidic concepts, but in a feminist and environmental and all that kind of social activism kind of way. (Interview F: 107-108, 108-110)

Consistent with the other study participants, Participant F’s contemplation and description of interfaith organizational leadership characteristics focused on the concept of inclusiveness. She offered insights on the fundamental nature of the interfaith calling:

I think it’s where people feel pretty solidly grounded in their own faith and are curious, open; they’re “people people,” and also I think people do come to it from different motivations. I think that there’s a passion to make things right and to
cross barriers to clarify misunderstandings; all that I think is there and sometimes it’s self-interest. I think sometimes for, it’s different, too, for Christians and for Jews, and for, I would imagine, for Muslims, too. I think their motivations are based on whatever pain they’re carrying from their own identities, whether it’s grief, humiliation, guilt, whatever; I think some of that is going on for people and just that it’s fun to connect with people who are different and to find that you can fairly easily, sometimes, find commonalities that bring us together. I think there’s a human desire to connect on that heart-to-heart level. (Interview F: 121-131)

Participant F proceeded to delineate her narrative reflections by framing her experiences in terms of her openness, curiosity, and well-tenured continuity in the interfaith realm. She offers a unique historical perspective that outlined interfaith activities grounded social-justice movements. Reflections on the social-justice and interfaith areas also demonstrated her key themes of relational focus, spiritual maturity, and caring activism:

Well, let’s see, it started for me actually in the 60s, which I talked about in the panel where I came home, my husband was in the service, we came back to Rochester, he was starting a law practice, I was a young matron, and joined the National Council of Jewish Women. So and then it was the 60s, so we became involved in Civil Rights issues, and as we were working on housing issues, for instance, fair housing, and then we found that there was United Church women, and they were doing that so we joined together, women and women joining with, bless her soul, Mrs. Harper Sibley, you know, was an amazing human being … that was the beginning of our involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, of
course, then that gave birth to the Women’s Movement and the Anti-Vietnam Movement and Mothers for Peace, so those were interfaith and, you know …. For me it wasn’t until there were some women mentors who pointed out prophetic Judaism to me … the message of prophetic Judaism, which these women highlighted and that was the motivation to “do justice and to love mercy,” and so, the concept of Tikkun olam in Judaism, that is the focus, that’s why we’re here to repair the world. So that’s, it just took, it was the time, and it was people, and it was the foundation out of faith. (Interview F: 137-144, 148-151, 151-153, 154-158)

As she outlined her interesting background, Participant F described the traits of some of the other women leaders that she encountered in the interfaith and social-justice contexts:

Determination . . . I mean for those women, because that was more activist than some of the stuff in these commissions and forums, which are more conversational dialog, that was activist, and so they came with maybe a little different set of, and I was struck by the fact as I went back and thought about this, that these women who were maybe 15 years older than I, a lot of them came from New York City, and there was something about, I think, being more willing to be in your face, more willing to be just as women to show themselves as strong women. (Interview F: 163, 163-169)

She continued the narrative on her interfaith organizational leadership trajectory by reflecting on the roots of her upbringing and the attending cultural milieu that was the basis for her life-long interfaith and social-justice efforts. The origins and motivation of her *caring activism* and *relational focus* were evident as she detailed her experiences:
I grew up in the 50s, you know, and I was groomed to be Mrs. . . . basically that was the name I claimed for a long time, and I think, underneath all of that, something I’ve come to understand more actually through re-evaluation counseling, was so much the drive for assimilation was just implicit in our families and how, and so I shared the other part of it as just something I’ve most recently come to understand as they immigrated to this country, my grandparents didn’t assimilate, but the next generation, my parents, did, and they became white . . . part of that, I think, you know, in my mother’s family, it was to be, like, not to look like immigrants and to be refined and not, you don’t call attention to yourself you know, it wasn’t to be, I mean it’s still post-Holocaust, and there was plenty of anti-Semitism in this country in the 40s, 50s, and 60s, so it wasn’t until I was with those women, and I was a married woman and these women came from New York and their styles, as I said they were bolder and probably in my innate nature would be bold, you know. But, I’ve been pretty suppressed, so it was a chance to come out, and we were, so we were battling as we saw it the status quo and the general, our communal leaders, both general and Jewish to be both general and Jewish, to be bolder and to stand up and to do the right thing. (Interview F: 189-197, 203-212)

While describing her background and her interfaith leadership experiences, Participant F illustrated a critical life event that transformed her into the activism that marked her life: I remember we were walking in a parade and one of the women, this must have been Vietnam, took the flag and held it upside down and part of me wanted to do that. She was one of the mentors, you know, I mean we were really
experimenting, I think, “I have to ask my husband” . . . I became involved with
the National Coalition Building Institute with RC Evaluation Council and the
National Coalition Building Institute, and the 60s were gone, and we were then in
the 70s, 80s, 90s; whatever, what shifted was the in-your-face advocacy
antagonism stuff . . . . I’ve shifted to try to do it in a way that’s somehow uplifting
and calling people to their higher selves and not just being accusatory . . . . Well, I
think it was always trying to balance that boldness with, well, a big part of my
style is that I’m a very warm, open person; people know I love them, and I let
them love me. I think that’s really true, so that’s what has happened with this
interfaith is, I mean, my heart you know, because we’re open, that’s what we’ve
got with one another and knowing that what we want is to know that we have one
another’s backs, and that should always happen, but that’s what we want to know.

(Interview F: 216-219, 221-224, 226-227, 232-237)

Participant F further extended her thoughts on the connection between relational focus
and caring activism by providing an example of how she built consensus. By navigating
differences with an inclusive leadership style, she learned from this series of interactions:

One that comes to mind is when I chaired the Commission on Christian and
Jewish Relations, I raised and insisted that we spend time talking about Israel and
Palestine. I have also, I can’t remember what the year would have been back then,
things got very tight in the interfaith community when some of the Protestant
ministers had a piece in the paper that was very damming of Israel, and the Jews
felt stabbed by their friends . . . that brought together these, it was called
something for Palestinian, Israeli peace, but they were all Christian, and they were
all I would say pretty much, their sentiments were with the Palestinians . . . within myself was this conflict between, multidimensional conflict right, I mean this is the elephant in the room of all interfaith stuff that I think goes on. So I had to negotiate within myself and in making an offer, because I knew I had some templates to offer for conversation and that I was also doing my own personal healing work as we went along, so that I had places to vent and be able to get more clarity to be able to see everybody’s issues and be willing for them to come forward. (Interview F: 243-248, 252-254, 264-270)

While reflecting on her maturation as an interfaith leader, Participant F noted the role that gender and other characteristics had on her ability to adjudicate issues and fully participate as an interfaith organizational leader. Her narrative portrayed multifaceted barriers that intersected and overlapped with each other in different ways and contexts:

In my mind, the degree of sexism that was always there, well, let me back up for one second and say two things, there were several barriers in all of my interfaith activities; one, I wasn’t clergy; two, I was a woman; I don’t know which would be more important; three, I didn’t have a doctorate, which would have opened a little more doors; four, I was bold; you know, and yeah, I think I’ve gotten to be more judicious over the years too . . . . So I was always trying to figure out how to express this. I would say it would be rare that I would say, “Okay this is what needs to be done.” I think I could do this and this is how I’m going to go about doing it without a lot of ruminating about, you know, how am I to do it, how am I going to get to see who’s going to be, you know, who’s going to have their feathers ruffled or, you know, and sometimes with people that I would have most
expected to support me, I didn’t get it; I didn’t get it, and there was a certain, they trusted me, but because I was always a little bit on the forefront for stuff, I would say they respected me but didn’t necessarily trust me, because I was a little on the forefront. (Interview F: 278-283, 294-302)

Participant F’s narrative reflections, compared to the other study participants, advanced specific examples of interfaith leadership challenges addressed through the empathetic and experiential lenses of relational focus and caring activism. Her observations in this area denoted her spiritual maturity gained from her cultural and interfaith experiences:

oh, my, it’s a deep subject, I mean it’s a really deep subject. So, again, because of all these years of doing the healing with people of color, with Jews, with women, with gay people . . . . There’s a stance that some people take, which is hard to accept initially, and maybe even more than initially, and that is, I’ll put it this way, if somebody is mistreating you because they don’t like the hat you’re wearing or if they think you’re whatever, it’s very racism, regardless, that there’s an element of not getting that mistreating a Black man isn’t taking into consideration a whole bunch of other stuff and is giving rise to some kind of racism . . . . And, in particular, with any group but one of the things around Jews is understanding what our background is and what defenses we have erected against thousands of years of that mistreatment and that it may be being brisk, it may be over defensive, it may be having to feel like I’m going to take charge ‘cause I can’t trust anybody else to take charge, because my survival is at stake and all that comes out, you know, may come out in ways that people say . . . . And it’s tricky, I just don’t like you, and people will often say about Jews and certainly
about Blacks and certainly about gays, I just don’t like them; and they don’t even
know, they can’t even articulate why, but it’s some underlying . . . . (Interview F:
318-320, 322-327, 332-337, 342-344)

In the course of articulating her observations concerning interpersonal relations,
Participant F offered several reflective insights, again, denoting her *spiritual maturity.*
She concluded the first of two interview sessions by pondering on her current focus and
path:

> at the age that I’m at, I am actually finding I’m doing age-appropriate things like
> thinking about my soul, and I’m taking a course on authentic awakening. I’ve
done some meditation, but this is authentic, so really to be in touch with what’s
> going on in my heart and my mind and my emotions and to be having that not
> only inside but outside . . . . I can’t believe how people come into my life in such
> ways that are such a gift, such a blessing . . . . I’m just trying to scan some of the
> people . . . one person that comes to mind, as I’m thinking of a person, Reverend .
> . . we’ve been together for a long time, and I know that we’ve had a lot of, gone
> through a lot of different things together, it’s a very, it’s just so clear that we love
each other . . . . I remember a conversation we had in a parking lot one time, and
we just went on and on and on, it was really about what was it we were willing to
go to the wall for, what were we willing to die for. So that was intense. (Interview

Her reflections on commitment started to define the characteristics, and place parameters
around, an important aspect of interfaith leadership. Her life-long dedication to interfaith
and social-justice endeavors was further characterized in the continuation of her narrative
reflections. The second interview session with Participant F expanded upon the evidence of her relational focus and caring activism. Her reflections on relations were revealing.

Participant F opened the second interview session with a reflection on her conflict-management experiences. From a spiritual maturity outlook, she addressed the historical context of how she and others have attended to conflict in interfaith relations and actions:

from the time of being a small child with the influence of the Holocaust . . . well, I just came from a class at the synagogue on making prayer real and on spirituality, and people were sort of asking, “Is this kind of fear that we carry and weariness something that other groups have or is it specific to Jews?” . . . so, absolutely, it was that sense of injustice, horrendous injustice, I know my parents also always said to me, “You know, anybody who’s anti-Negro is going to be anti-Jewish too.” So it was like, okay, you know, it was a sense that we’re in it together and that our fates were tied up together and so that it was wanting to stand up for what was right with an element of self-interest in there . . . I think that we felt we came from a base of being Jews and prophetic Judaism. But, we were on our own doing it with other Jews who were like minded as well as other Christians who were like minded, and it was only Jews and Christians at those times. So there certainly was a lot, and the pushback is, I like to use that cliché, from the communities, I think was not so much we don’t stand for justice, but it’s like, either it wasn’t a high priority or it wasn’t time yet that other leaders would say people aren’t ready for this, yet, which is what I had, at the time, started to do the diversity work. People aren’t ready for this work, they’re not ready for the emotional piece of it, so there
certainly was that. I mean there was a lot of sense of struggle to get people to come on board from within organizations . . . . (Interview F-2: 56, 57-60, 61-65, 89-99)

After relaying some of the cultural and religious context of her experiences, Participant F showed the importance of developing trust and shared values through relational focus. Her reflections about interfaith talks on the Israel/Palestine conflict were an exemplar:

what’s more up for me in the last, I don’t know, 30 years, I guess is Israel/Palestine . . . that is, in some ways, the elephant in the room . . . so my perspective coming out of NCBI is to bring people together and to create a safe enough environment where people will speak their thoughts, speak from their hearts, and be willing to listen to others speak from their thoughts and from their hearts and to do that in a way that’s not necessarily trying to change them, but to understand where they’re coming from, and that’s a huge challenge ‘cause we’ve all got this need, you know, to like for you to get what my issues are, and if I get your issues, how do I get my issues, too, in this case . . . to assume that there’s a monolithic point of view among Jews is certainly incorrect, and I’m imagining that it’s also the same certainly, around Muslims, and that’s been my experience as well. So, yeah, I mean the whole idea of shared values, Abrahamic faith, recognizing that our destinies are all tied up together, and so the harder struggle for me is intra. It’s intra, and I did just manage right before we left on vacation to have at Temple . . . a conversation, invite people that we didn’t know where their points of view were or people that we thought would be just able to listen to one another just the Jews, congregants to talk about feelings that come up for them
about Israel/Palestine, which was something new that had really not been done at least in that way... people were very happy to be able to speak, you know, feel unfettered and whatever their ignorance was and whatever their fears were, whatever. (Interview F-2: 101-102, 102-103, 118-125, 125-135, 136-138)

She offered additional insight on how conflict resolution techniques used in interfaith dialogue were applied to intra-faith discussions and issues that have a broader context: constantly, in our interfaith and in our civil rights and our social-justice efforts, the ongoing theme is I feel so much more comfortable with you, you guys, you're my tribe, you're my people... because we’ve come to listen to one another and share and know that we can be fully engaged in our own, fully engaged, and committed to our own practices, while appreciating and being enriched by the other, and that’s why, despite that so it’s not just all the honeymoon, you know, it’s not just all honeymoon because other stuff then starts to come up whether it is around Israel/Palestine or whether it is about a piece of theology or what, you know, it still could get tricky, but because there are relationships that are established over such a long period of time, you know, it feels like it’s very, that people still hang in even when it gets tougher... Have a relationship, and have trust, but I wouldn’t, I think, it would be Pollyannaish to not acknowledge that there are times when the trust is eroded, at least for some. I hear (it) certainly with my [sic] co-religionists, and I think it’s happened as far as I could observe with the Muslims that there’s something that can happen whether it’s over there or in the community and it gets tight, it gets tight... I think the relationships are there and the trust is there, and then I know that there have been times when there’s
been pulling back, I think, on both sides. (Interview F-2: 142-143, 149-157, 163-167, 172-174)

Participant F continued to show how her relational focus, applied at different leadership interfaces, was manifest in personal relations and worked toward conflict resolution. She illustrated the benefit of humanizing other people during moments of profound tension:

I have a relationship with . . . that goes back so many years, and it’s just, we just like each other . . . there was a march for the Palestinians, or something, and there was going to be a sign, and I said . . . “Can we talk about this?” so he said, “Yes . . . so I went to his house, and we had tea, and there was the television was on with the, what’s the channel Al Jazeera, which is actually the first time I had seen it, it was interesting, I mean stuff was hot, stuff was going on . . . . But, we have just this very warm affection for each other over a long time . . . I think, as a result of that conversation, I think you change some of the, you know, we talked about it, I understand fully his desire to support the Palestinian cause. But to have inflammatory words is going to have a lot of that will have ramifications for our community . . . . There were several, we met for coffee at Starbucks and just kept the conversation going. (Interview F-2: 180-182, 184-186, 187-189, 194-195, 203-206, 211-212)

Through her cultural framing, religious perspectives, and personal actions, Participant F exhibited traits of relational focus, caring activism, and spiritual maturity. Her narrative reflections demonstrated the similar overarching themes of inclusiveness, trusting relationship, and balanced perspectives found in the other participants’ interview
input. Her strong sense of right and wrong and values-based actions were also confirmed through *relational focus* when exhibiting deep empathy for other people’s perspectives:

I’m remembering a time . . . I heard about Baruch Goldstein shooting people in the Mosque, and I don’t know that I’ve ever, well maybe there have been some, a few other times, when I just felt this huge call, all right, and I was going by and it was like, I’d say in Yiddish, . . . it was meant to be, you know, I was going by . . . . I had been to the Mosque often, invited to a meeting, I can just go uninvited not knowing who I will find, but I would like to find Dr. . . . . So I did, I walked in . . . and I asked if he was there, and he was, and so it’s like a movie in my mind, you know. I said I just came, I felt like I had to say I’m sorry. We stood, and I’m never sure what to say, we stood, he actually took my arm and so on, but we just stood together and gave a prayer for peace. (Interview F-2: 249, 251-255, 257-259, 261, 262-266)

As Participant F shared exemplars of interfaith leadership in action, she was also exemplifying her *relational focus* by understanding and empathizing with other people’s positionality and views. Another hallmark of her narrative, the theme of *caring activism*, was also manifest in her proactive interfaith relations and personal leadership evolution. She noted the development in interfaith dialogue from bi- and trilateral discussions to more comprehensive endeavors that realized more diverse inclusion and more activism:

the biggest issue is Christian-Jewish, and then it became Christian-Jewish-Muslim, and then there was an awareness that what about the non-Abrahamic (faiths) . . . we had all these different organizations, and the interfaith forum was designed to be a picture of it, including the Jains and the Buddhists . . . as
Participant F’s narrative reflected her deep commitment to interfaith and social-justice pursuits by also revealing some of the figures who influenced her core moral perspective. She also made connections between the social-justice movements and the interfaith arena:

. . . Rabbi Arthur Waskow is a hero of mine, and he’s still, he’s out there, he’s in Washington for every one of those causes. He’s quite amazing in the spirit of Dr. Heschel. He (Rabbi Waskow) just celebrated his 80th birthday . . . and I went to Philadelphia to celebrate his 80th and Gloria Steinem’s, they celebrated together. It was so cool, two heroes, and I’ve had a chance to be in her company a number of times. So, you know, one thing that occurs to me is that when the Civil Rights Movement arose, there it was in our face, it was the focus, and you were either in or you were not in, okay? So then it gave rise to the women’s movement, or it was happening, and it flowed into the peace movement, and it flowed into the gender movement, gender issues, and the environment, and we didn’t even have that much awareness. I mean we did with Jewish action for nuclear responsibility, and I know others, I know we were scared of nuclear war, and for me, that was actually a piece of strengthening of my spirituality that I had never experienced.
before, and I was suddenly contemplating the end of the world; it felt like, I, you know, it made me stronger both as in my Jewishness and in my spirituality, my deep appreciation for all of life. (Interview F-2: 321-336)

Participant F continued her narrative by ruminating on the state of affairs in the current interfaith arena. She compared the precursor of the social-justice movements’ clarity of purpose and clear sense of right and wrong with today’s more complex and equivocal conditions:

But I think today the people, and with the multiplicity of ways of getting the information and the calls, I mean I get more than 100 e-mails a day, and I can’t figure out where is the best place to send our money, you know, where is the, which meeting am I going to go to. So there is a core, it’s probably not, we may say it’s different, I don’t know that it is different from then, because if you go out to the progressive Democrats or the band of rebels, it’s some of the same people, we got old. You know, the anti-fracking, which I’m very involved with. The numbers, I don’t know, the numbers may not be that different . . . . I’m reassessing it right now. But I will, and the rallies against the war in Iraq, you know, one of the biggest turnouts that I had seen in a long time and that was kind of hopeful. But it didn’t matter, you know, so there’s a lot of that you know of, or having, putting a lot into an event or a rally, and the media doesn’t cover it, so it’s like it didn’t happen, if the tree falls and nobody sees it . . . . So there’s a lot of hopelessness and despair that people feel that I’m not immune to, but I keep finding other ways to keep going. (Interview F-2: 336-343, 345-350, 352-353)
After her historical and comparative framing of interfaith activities, Participant F offered thoughts on how conveying experiences are a key factor in interfaith leadership:

the point is you can never be doing anything on your own and be effective, so it’s always finding ways to gather a group, and I think that’s been probably the pursuit of my life, the major pursuit of my life is how to not only keep expanding my own awareness but how somehow can be a catalyst for other people’s awareness so that, so you know, whether it’s writing an op-ed piece or doing a workshop . . . for the last 25 years, when I’ve done my co-counseling, I said, “Okay, I’m going to write because my belief, which clearly is the one you bought into,” is that at least if you’ve got something down in writing there’s a chance that somebody someday will get something from it . . . my motivation is to make a difference, to change the world, and I think I’ve learned so much. I wish I had known earlier what I know now about myself and about people, but I guess I have to be grateful that I’ve learned and grown. (Interview F-2: 369-374, 377-380, 391-393)

Participant F described an array of experiences and perspectives that she had conveyed to emerging leaders. While reflecting on those thoughts, she contemplated on the nature of disparities that she faced as an interfaith organizational leader in different circumstances:

There was sexism then, and there’s sexism now; it’s subtler now maybe. Oh man, I was attacked; I mean, I don’t mean physically, although it was pretty close to that. Actually, I have been. In NCBI, we teach that not only is there racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, I don’t know, all that, there’s leadership oppression and the reality is anybody who steps out into a leadership position is going, there’s a
pretty good chance, that they’re going to get it and some of it comes in the form of being on a pedestal, you know, and then people, which is what we do, we put people up on a pedestal, and then when we see the feet of clay, we knock them down . . . And we’ll have feet of clay, so there’s that; there is the kind of, “Who does she think she is?” you know, as I said before, being a woman, not being clergy, not being a Ph.D., speaking my mind, probably not, I think I’ve learned a lot, like I say, in more recent years about how to say it in a way that maybe is easier to hear. So as a woman, see I’m thinking of stuff back in the 80s was, I had a lot of, some very challenging experiences. I mean there could be a whole book on with one minister who challenged my leadership when I was the chair of the commission . . . . It’s a very long story, but I think one of the things that happens with women, it’s very complicated . . . people maybe sometimes see me that way, especially when I’m in leadership and I’m embracing and I’m a very embracing person, because, and so they start attaching stuff, all the mother stuff . . . . I did experience a fair amount of that. I know one woman minister who totally decided she was practically idolizing me, which was very uncomfortable, and then turned against me . . . and brought other people kind of with her, which felt, it was anti-Semitic also, given the history of our people of being used for their skills and being used for what they can bring and then expelled . . . . I never knew for sure why my grandparents came to this country, I never knew what they endured. So that’s, so it’s the sexism, it’s the anti-Semitism, you know, if you’re Black, then it’s going to be the racism, I mean it’s whatever it is and anti-Muslim. So you asked whether I see it different, certainly what’s different today is the visibility of
women leaders, and it’s not shocking, all those years there was no woman rabbi. I was never, I never knew any girls getting Bat Mitzvah in this community until, I don’t know, the 80’s, 70s or something . . . but now, of course, we didn’t have Title IX, so I wasn’t expected to be out there going for a goal, you know, physically or having these women role models, we didn’t have them. (Interview F-2: 406-413, 415-421, 425-426, 428-430, 435-437, 459-465, 470-472)

Participant F illustrated a powerful example of the inequities she faced as an interfaith organizational leader. She describes an incident that offers insight on the dynamics in the interfaith environment regarding gender, religious affiliation, and cultural background:

a man who was very disturbed, what upset him, I think, had nothing to do with what he said it was . . . as the Chair, I took over at a time when there wasn’t much structure, and I felt like we were going sort of nowhere, so I wanted to resurrect us to look at the mission, look at the terms, you know, just to see where we were, and that people could, if they want, to stay on forever that’s fine, but you had to sign up for another term. So it wasn’t a matter of getting rid of people, but it was a matter of let’s be mindful about this. Well he took it as an insult, he said, and he started screaming at me. He literally bangs on things, went out, and slammed doors, and accused me that what people said about me was that I was in the work for the money . . . . I made very minimal money, but that number one was anti-Semitic, and I think, as any, and I think he wouldn’t have said it to a man, he could have thought this guy is greedy, and in it for the money, but he wouldn’t in front of a table of clergy and leaders said, people say that you’re basically greedy . . . he had a lot going on, no question, and I think you know there was probably
some issues around sex that were, you know, ‘cause once we had gone out to lunch when I was president of the network and talked about, he wanted to talk about women leaders, he wanted to support women and he wanted to support, he had a reputation for being a great supporter . . . heavy stuff happens that has heavy origins . . . so being a woman certainly is a big piece of what that was . . . . So those are some of the tough things, hard to talk about. (Interview F-2: 502-512, 514-517, 528-532, 539, 541, 546-547)

Despite the inequities and challenges she faced as an interfaith organizational leader, Participant F was a consistent advocate for *caring activism*. Like Participant A, her narrative reflected a historical view of the development of interfaith activities up to the present. She reflected on the turmoil of earlier times that became critical life events:

it was the 70s, it was the end of the 60s and 70s, it was really the beginning of the protests in the 70s, because I went to work at . . . in 1970, I think it was, and he showed me there was a back doorway, you know, that administrators could go out if things got rough, they never did at . . . which I was hoping it would get a little more vocal . . . but, again, it was an erosion of security of being in the U.S. of A., which I felt when the police came and started, they were in our face, it turned out I didn’t get so into the talk but it turned out that Stokely Carmichael was in, at the time was coming to speak, I guess he’d been invited to speak that night . . . and they saw him as such a threat . . . . And so we became part of that big threat, but getting our pictures taken was very, it was definitely like, okay, so I know they’ve got a dossier on us, I’m sure they do. Yeah, and what does that do to our freedom of speech and freedom of action? It’s okay the corporations can speak . . . Yeah,
we’re on our way toward the great turning, which we just, we got to bottom out first. (Interview F-2: 576-577, 578-580, 586-589, 591, 593-596, 601,602)

As a nourishing interfaith organizational leader, Participant F relayed her critical life experiences into trusting relationships that typified her relational focus and spiritual maturity. Her extensive interview finishes with reflections on the relationships she built:

some women from the . . . Church . . . had been to a workshop that I had done, and they came to me and said, “Would you lead us?,” the women, the leaders of this statewide women’s group from .. Church . . . in a workshop . . . it was such a highlight of my life. It was so incredible . . . being in my room and hearing them sing chants, singing these gorgeous high women’s voices singing at night. I was in my room because I was getting ready for the next day; that was so beautiful. Then I led alone, which was rare; our style is to always be leading with others, but I led alone and just invited them, as women, to tell their stories and to connect with one another, and, I don’t know, they had planned this whole thing. It was all about Miriam going to the well, and they I think knew, in advance, that I was Jewish, and then afterwards, one of the ministers gave me, I may even have it still, the most, most touching thing was the sermon she preached after that at her church about being led by a Jewish woman . . . it wasn’t billed as interfaith, but it sure was . . . it was so enriching to me to be there with them. (Interview F-2: 611-614, 615, 617-626, 636, 638)

She goes on to describe another enriching relationship framed by the interfaith context: she asked if I would come and speak, not speak, but read from the Hebrew Bible at her installation . . . we’ve shared very deeply with one another and she got it,
she got what the concern was. It wasn’t in her perspective, you know, but she got it, and she shifted somehow how it got introduced in what she said so that it was so embracing, it was, you know, it was, and she was a fierce ally for Jews, a very fierce ally for Jews and Muslims; I experienced it. Yeah. So that was, you know, where we cross through boundaries we don’t usually have, you know, . . . . And then it opens up something else, and then I could have either said, “Well I’m not going to do it,” or whatever, but we kept opening to each other . . . . Which we had as women, you know, very, very strongly, very strongly. (Interview F-2: 646-647, 652-657, 659-660, 663)

Like Participant E, Participant F and the researcher were not acquainted prior to the study interview and preparatory discussions. Within a short time, the researcher and Participant F had formed a warm, open, and trusting bond that facilitated her considerable sharing during the interview. Her extensive and insightful reflections were imbued with a sense of historical significance and spiritual depth. Also like Participant E, her reflections provided insights into the period preceding the 9/11 tragedy. Her input shaped a view that interwove her personal evolution with historical social-justice and interfaith events.

Participant F’s interview had a similar ambiance of spiritual reflection that was the hallmark of Participant E’s interview. Part I of the interview with Participant F took place in a public restaurant. Once interpersonal rapport was established, Participant F graciously offered to have Part II of the interview at her residence. The welcoming and pleasant atmosphere of her home and spouse further enabled an open and free-following interview session. As a well-tenured interfaith organizational leader, Participant F’s narrative displayed a life’s work of dedication to interfaith dialogue. Her strong relational
focus mirrored the inclusiveness communicated by the other participants. Though from a different faith tradition, Participant G had a comparable lifetime of interfaith endeavors.

**Participant G.** Having thoroughly participated in different religious traditions, Participant G provided a distinct perspective on interfaith activities and organizational leadership. She is also an experienced and very active interfaith leader that contributes to several national, international, and local interfaith organizations and initiatives. The breadth of her interfaith organizational leadership was balanced with the length of her participation. As an action advocate, community activism was germane to her narrative:

the first one would be the Islamic Society of Central New York, where I did a lot of interfaith work for them, bridging gaps between mainly Christianity and Islam, because of my background from being raised as a Christian and then converting to Islam. Then it would be women cofounder of Women Transcending Boundaries, which was formed about two weeks after 9/11; not formally, but I guess you could probably say “formally” would have been maybe three or four months after that was the formalization of the organization. I’m also the vice chair of the Leadership Council of the United Religious Initiatives (URI) of North America.

(Interview G: 9-17)

An active interfaith participant since 1995, Participant G has worked with interfaith organization members from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Her experiences and expertise in this area were indicative of her *open perspective* that underscored her *caring activism*:

I do it through the URI; they have international forums and, you know, despite being in dialog internationally with the, you know, in conjunction with other
organizations, you know, here in Syracuse. Also there’s an international center that we work with that brings in people from overseas, you know, we have dialogue with them many times with transcending boundaries. I’m trying to think [sic] we’ve had many different countries that have come that we’ve had interfaith dialogue with that have come here to Syracuse. (Interview G: 31-37)

Her broad exposure to different views and cultures was aided by her inclusive outlook:

I’m Muslim, but I would probably say my journey through interfaith has actually helped me to embrace many different religious; so I can’t, I don’t know how to state that, I guess I’m a very spiritual, broad-minded Muslim . . . . Progressive, I don’t know, if you want to call it progressive or . . . I think we have to be open minded to embrace others. There’s good in every religion, and I think if we can embrace all of that, it helps to make us all better. (Interview G: 49-51, 53-55)

After describing her overall interfaith experiences and disposition to religion, Participant G shared her thoughts on the traits of interfaith leadership. Her reflection summarized her interpretation of effective interfaith organizational leadership qualities.

Consistent with the other six study participants, she noted inclusiveness as a key attribute:

I think to be a good listener is one of the first traits. Being open, I think, to having a difference of opinion but respecting that person’s opinion and beliefs . . . . We provide, I think, providing a safe environment, especially with women, I think it’s easier for women to have that conversation, I have found anyway . . . being able to bring in women from many different faith traditions and being able to provide them with a safe environment where they can talk about their faith, their story, you know, have it respected and be listened to and respected by the audience; that
is something that I see in our with the organization . . . . We have covered topics that have been very difficult in some spaces. I’ll give you an example, we had a Jewish woman who left in 1948, her family, she was very young when she left in 1948, you know, when they had the transition of Israel and Palestine, and then we had a Palestinian woman here who also came from that same time period to the United States and these women had never spoke while they were here, you know; there’s always been that conflict. Well, we provided an environment where these two women could come in and tell their stories, you know, we asked them to come and, okay, I want you to tell your story as a Jewish woman; you need to tell your stories of a Palestinian woman, and then we’re not judging; it’s a very non-judgmental environment, the environment is very non-judgmental. So providing that these women sat down and each told their stories, and by the end of that meeting, the women were at least talking in a friendly manner to one another and realized that they had actually more in common from their backgrounds than they had that divided them, and obviously, the thing with all interfaith organizations and dialogue is what we have in common is what brings us together than what divides us. But I think by creating that environment is something that interfaith groups and good interfaith leadership can provide. (Interview G: 65-67, 72-74, 80-84, 86-103)

She extended her thoughts on inclusiveness and demonstrated the open perspective and caring activism themes that were prevalent in her narrative reflections. Compared to Participant A’s emphasis on leadership training, Participant G’s interfaith organizational leadership experiences also inclined toward developing community-service partnerships:
I’ve seen some interfaiths that don’t provide that space or are very judgmental, and you can’t do that . . . you can’t allow people to come in and say, “No, well, we’re right, and you’re wrong; our faith is always right, and your faith is always wrong; you know you’re wrong.” And we do not allow that, we always have a statement before we start our meetings that provides that security . . . there’s not any topic that we shy away from, I mean, we, the topic comes from the people who want to learn certain topics, you know, and we educate, and I think that’s another thing that with leadership of interfaith groups it’s not only a dialogue but to be able to provide areas where groups can come together for service organizations, you know, for service within the community, you know, to do social-justice work. Interfaith has . . . there’s great opportunity there, and I don’t think that a lot of communities tap into it . . . We have a huge refugee community here, and we do a lot with the refugees. 501C3 . . . is able to get grants for refugees, help to do a lot of programs with them; we did a, I guess you could call it, a service weekend in 2010 called Acts of Kindness Weekend; it was through a grant that we’d gotten . . . the community foundation offered a nine-month program of leadership, interfaith leadership, and so we took that course, and at the end of the course for nine months, they gave you a grant for a project that you wanted to develop, that they helped you develop. So we did Acts of Kindness Weekend and our goal was to bring in people from all ages, interfaith groups, all over the city to do acts of kindness throughout the city. If it was cleaning up a park or painting a rec room or cleaning up streets . . . there was, if you go to our website, we have that all documented also. There was over 100
different projects that were done all over the city during that weekend, and it brought in the business factor, the parks, it brought in all the suburbs came in, you know, different churches, different synagogues, different religious organizations, all came and worked side by side together to do acts of kindness, be they small or big. We worked with the . . . city police; they had a rec center they wanted to build on the north side, and they didn’t have the money to provide it, so we partnered them with the . . . Law Firm . . . after that partnership, that was just one example, being a college city, too, we have . . . these kids need community service, and a lot of times don’t have anything to do, so we bring them into many of our service programs, and they painted a church rec room, and you had Jewish kids and Buddhist kids painting a church rec room, and I think that’s wonderful . . . you bring kids from all different faith traditions just to come in and just even clean up a park, you know. So it was a huge, huge endeavor. It took us a long, it took us many, many, many months of planning, but it went over really, really well, and like I said, I think this is people who are dedicated, committed to realizing that it’s only \(sic\) a week, and take what we learned, I think, is education and then service, they have to go hand in hand. You can’t just sit and dialogue for the rest of your life, you know, that’s not going to work. I found that to be the case in many organization. (Interview G: 103-105, 105-109, 113-119, 124-125, 125-128, 128-143, 148-149, 151-154, 157-164)

As part of her opening thoughts, Participant G talked about having broad-minded viewpoints and openness as a construct for interfaith leadership. She also discussed the
perspective of going beyond tolerance. She articulated having an *open perspective* based on an internal values-based acceptance that is more welcoming than just being tolerant:

as I first converted to this (Islam), I really went very much the other way. I used to *[sic]* wear a Niqab for a while, because I think sometimes when you convert, you just think, oh you go gung ho, and then I got there, and I thought nah, this is really not for me. Because. even in Christianity, when I was a Christian I was a born again Christian for a while, you know, and I think, oh I went that path . . . I’ve been baptized with water on the head and immersed and anointed with oil, and you name it, but now I’m here, you know, and with all these different perspectives I can look back on, you know, but I think non-judgmental, I think, is really, really important for interfaith work. Many times, I think, when people go into interfaith work, they think they’re going with the, they want to convert you know, or they want you to see that you’re wrong . . . who go in there with that attitude, like, you know, I’m here to show you that your way is, this is a better way for you, and you really have got part of it, but you don’t have all of it; and you can’t go with that attitude at all, you know, everybody is on their own journey, and you can’t, like you said, impose your journey, or what a journey is, on somebody else. That has to be totally their decision and close to their heart.

But that is a big mistake that I think, a lot of people make in interfaith. (Interview G: 175-180, 182-187, 188-194)

Reflecting from a balanced and open-minded perspective, Participant G exhibited her *spiritual maturity* as she explored the qualities and relationships in interfaith leadership:
I think you have to do things with education and patience, it takes a lot of patience to be an interfaith person I think. You're never going to convince everybody, you know; I figure I pick my battles now and I’ve very (focused) in direction to trying to be with people who really want to make a change for the positive, and if I’m in a situation where I feel that it’s just a lot of negative, and there’s really not any progress or any objective, you know, looking forward and getting beyond, you know, people just want to go back and not forward. I tend to leave that, I don’t have the energy for that right now because there are other things I know that I can put my energy into that are going to be much more productive. (Interview G: 205-214)

By focusing on positive endeavors, Participant G contemplated some of the critical life events and important relationships she developed as an interfaith organizational leader. She reflected on a key relationship that was formed in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy: after 9/11, as you all know, there was a lot of negative backlash against Muslims. Suzie (pseudonym), at the time her husband was the director of . . . the interfaith organization, she had gone to church that morning, and a lady in church said that she had seen some Muslim women shopping, and they looked fearful, and she didn’t know what to say to them; she didn’t know how to go to them and say, “You know, I feel for you I know that this is not your fault.” She didn’t know what to say. So Betsy (pseudonym) called the local Mosque here, and at the time, . . . He was the Imam here, very open minded, and he had already done a lot of building, foundation building in interfaith here, and he put her in touch with me because I had been doing some of that mainly with Christian churches, and I had
already formed a women’s leadership group at the mosque, and so he put her in
touch with me, and she invited me out for coffee about two weeks after 9/11, at
her house, and she basically just wanted to know about Islam, you know, she
wanted to know what she could do to help. So we must have talked at least a
couple hours on the phone before I met her, and then when I got to her house, it
was like three hours of conversation, and we realized sitting in that conversation
that we would like to have shared this conversation with others that we knew. So
between the two of us, we thought, “Well how do we do this?” So she decided,
we both decided, that she would invite nine women of different faith traditions
that she knew from her husband’s work, and I said, “Well, I’ll bring nine Muslim
women, Sunni Muslim women, from different countries because we’re very
fortunate to have a very diverse Mosque here.” So, ‘cause I wanted them to see
that no matter where this woman was from, her concerns for her family and her
ideas were very much in common with what other women in this country were
thinking. With that commonality, I wanted them to see, no matter what country
they were from. So I invited women from Egypt and Palestine, and Pakistan,
Bangladesh, and I had a different array of women that I had brought, and it really
wasn’t an easy sell for me because many women didn’t want to come out and say
anything, but I think because I had built up, and I don’t mean this in a bragging
way, but I had built up a friendship with these women over the years, so they
knew that they could trust me, that I wasn’t going to bring them into a situation
that was going to be harmful to them, you know, that it was something that they
really should do and could help them with their families. So we had no idea, Suzie
and I, did that bringing these women together, that we were going to form an organization at the time. We were just trying to bring something positive from something that had happened that was a very negative, a very tragic situation. So that first group of 20 women, and we all brought food so there was food from 20 countries. So the conversation starts around our families, and that conversation went on probably about four hours with all these women; it was a long afternoon, and we thought, “Well, gee, we really don’t want to stop this.” So we said we’ll meet again in two weeks; can you bring a friend. Well, everybody brings a friend, okay, so we had 40 women next time . . . . Thank God, Suzie had a big house, so we filled the house with 40 women, and then we realized, okay, we still didn’t want to end this conversation, okay. So we decided that we would meet again after the holidays, after the Christmas holiday, so we met at the . . . Church in January of 2002, and about 80 or 90 women showed up just by word of mouth.

(Interview G: 226-233, 236-270, 272-276)

The relationship also led to an important interfaith organizational leadership partnership. Participant G showed how her new relationship was the nucleus of an interfaith endeavor:

So, Suzie and I in the meantime, we’re talking on the phone a lot, you know, trying to decide, okay, what did we just start, you know; what happened here? Obviously, there was some synergy here that, you know, we tapped into something that needs to be looked at and maybe formalized, so we thought, “What are we going to call this group?,” you know, so that, in itself, is a story because this has always been a group that has been from the grass roots up. Okay, it’s always come from the energy of the women in the group and, cause you can’t
have anything that’s productive from the top down, anyway, so, you know, we sent out e-mails to all these women that had come, the first 40 e-mails, saying, okay, we want to put a name to our group, so we’re going to pick ten names that had come to us, so we’re going to vote on these names at our next meeting in January. So in January, we all got together, about between 80 and 90 of us, so we go, “These are the names, these are ten names.” And we got it down to three, we had voted it down to three, and then we, finally, got it down to one, and it was something like Women and Peace and whatever, and it was so funny because this one lady who’s a Buddhist woman, in the front row, and she kind of raised her hand really quietly, and she goes, “You know, I’m really not comfortable with this name at all, and from the back of the room another woman, just making a statement, she wasn’t even coming up with a name, she was just making a statement. She said, “Women have always transcended boundaries.” And everybody went, “That’s it!” That’s our name, you know, so that’s how the name actually came about, and that is kind of how the group has evolved over the last 13 years, it has gone. We formed a council, you know, of women, and we had another woman who came forward. It’s been amazing that the women in the group have offered their talents, you know, so openly, and it never ceases to amaze me that somebody always comes forward at a time when we need them, and so we had a person who came forward, and a couple of us put together a constitution and bylaws and put together a mission statement and a vision of what we wanted to do. (Interview G: 276-303)
After forming an interfaith organizational leadership partnership, Participant G reflected on the challenges of enacting *caring activism* and also ensuring that an *open perspective* was reflected in the new organization’s structure and operations. Of note, she and Suzie reached out to an expert woman corporate leader for guidance and mentoring:

> It was a struggle, I mean, you have to go back and forth because a mission statement is very, very important in any organization, as you know, and a vision, so we came up with that. A woman who was very instrumental in helping us form the organizational aspects of it, and the committees was Ruth Colvin. Do you know Ruth Colvin is the, she’s the founder of Literacy Volunteers of America, and she’s from here in Syracuse, and she started Literacy Volunteers of America in the basement of her home here in Syracuse when she turned 60 years old . . . . She got the Medal of Freedom Award when she was 90, and so she was one of those first 20 women that came to that group. So she, I’m telling you, God just puts these people together for a reason. So she sat Suzie and I down and she said, “Okay, you guys, this is what I’m going to help you with this, because I went through it with forming my group, with forming Literacy Volunteers.” She said, “I’m going to give you some of the pitfalls and some of the things to avoid, and some of the things you can do to help you.” So she sat down and helped us a lot, you know, with the organizational aspects of it. So then we had to decide, once you get a bunch of women together, you know, you all have different ideas and respecting those ideas, you know, and we wanted it to strictly remain interfaith, you know, our bylaws strictly state that our council has to be diverse. (Interview G: 303-310, 312-322)
At this point, Participant G noted key aspects and attributes of an inclusive interfaith leadership style. She contrasted the inclusive interfaith organizational leadership style she sought to create with the hierarchal leadership that she had experienced in other arenas:

and then we thought, “Well, are we going to be a majority rule, are we going to be consensus rule?” So, because most organizations aren’t majority rule, but we’re thinking, “Okay, we’re a group that wants to listen; we’re a group that it’s important to hear everybody’s voice.” So, we are a very consensus-based organization. When there are decisions that are made within our council or within the organization, we listen to everybody’s voice. But (when) there’s one voice that’s very, very strong against a particular thing we want to do, we table it unless it’s very time constraining and we can’t table it. We table it, and all of us have gone through consensus, you know, and sensitivity classes to become more versed in that type of policy . . . . On the Leadership Council of URI, because it’s male and female, I found that there is some aspects of consensus there, but there’s a lot of majority rule also. There’s some of the old school and new school combined there, it’s not strictly one or the other, which is okay with me. If it was strictly majority rule, where I felt that not everybody’s voices were being heard or respected, I would not be a part of that organization. I think URI is very good about interviewing their perspective council, leadership council people, ahead of time to realize. Plus, you get somebody who comes on board, who doesn’t really feel like they fit in, or they want to get their ideas and just their ideas. They don’t stay very long, because they find that they’re not going to get anywhere, anyway,
because no one is going to let them; no one is going to pay attention to them. They may respect them, listen to them, but they’re not going to let them be pushed in a direction they’re not going to want to go. That takes very strong, I think, leadership. (Interview G: 323-332, 337-350)

Participant G’s open perspective was, again, evident as she described specific challenges of developing an inclusive leadership style in the new organization that she had formed: in our group, in the early formation of it, it was called a core of women that helped to counsel the rest of the group, and we had an intern from Syracuse University that did a study on our group, and we asked her to find out from the general membership of the group what they thought of the organizational structure. And when she came back here, we were quite surprised that many people felt that the core group was not in sync with the rest of the membership. They felt like they were above, you know, some people in the core group felt that they were above the others, you know. So, we dissolved the whole core group, and we came up with the council, and in the council, we started to revise many of our bylaws to make room for more interaction with the membership. So, I think it’s good, periodically, for any organization to take a look, have somebody from the outside take a look at what you’re doing and how you’re doing it, because sometimes you’re so involved in what you’re doing, you’re not actually seeing that you’re losing some members for certain . . . are you veering off from your mission, you know, always going back to your mission statement, always going back to your mission is critical in any interfaith organization. We’ve had many people try to come . . . with their own agenda, you know, where they want to lead
you in a different direction, you know, and you can be very easily led because there are a lot of social-justice initiatives that are obviously very connected with interfaith, but there are also social-justice groups that are handling that. You can work together and partner together, it doesn’t mean that you have to incorporate yours into theirs, and I think that happens sometimes with some of our organizations, and I think that’s how they end up not functioning as well . . . if we’re going to be a safe place for all women’s voices, we have to be able to listen to all of them. So, we’re very careful about making statements now against anything, because then that excludes. I don’t want to exclude anybody’s voice, you know. I’m even out there looking for the voice that is totally against interfaith. I want them to come to our group, I want them to come tell me why . . . we invite them . . . I think a lot of times starting out with service projects together helps to open that one door, you know, that you do find, if you find an initiative that you’re both very passionate about. Like, for instance, we do the United Nations World Harmony event; this is our fourth year doing it. We get 400 to 500 people that come to this event every year, and it’s an interfaith . . . . So I think, sometimes, providing a platform where people can come and feel comfortable, you know, interfaith groups can come and feel like they’re going to be heard and not criticized or stereotyped. (Interview G: 356-370, 373-376, 377- 383, 403-408, 412, 415-419, 439-441)

In her narrative, Participant G talked about the relationships with different people that influenced her as an interfaith leader. She observed that forming relationships with
other interfaith participants may have influenced the perception and acceptance of her as an interfaith leader. But, she also noted the relative place of that relationship dynamic:

there’s been a lot of friendships. I know that my interfaith involvement, personally, has been very enriching, and I think you’ll find any interfaith person will tell you that. I think that my dealing with other interfaith leaders has enriched my life a great deal . . . I try not to think about that anymore. I think, you know, I’m not going to worry about what other people think, because if I know, in my heart, I’m doing the right thing; you’re never going to please everybody . . . at least I opened up a door and planted a seed, you know? So, I don’t know, like I said, I think interfaith groups have to create opportunities for people. (Interview G: 454-457, 45-461, 497-499)

She reflected on her experiences with resistance to interfaith activities from some groups within different religious denominations. She also showed how these opposing attitudes she faced were an impetus for her development and maturation as an interfaith leader:

It’s not just Muslims, there are Christians who say that within their own Christian groups, and Jewish people who we know criticize the Jews for being in an interfaith group. So the dynamics of it . . . I personally feel sorry for people like that, I have a sadness for them, because they really don’t know what they’re missing, to be honest with you. I have some very, very fond friendships that I have with people of other traditions, and, I don’t know, I think it’s very closed minded. I think to harbor that kind of discord or hate within your heart, to me, does not say what Islam represents, you know, . . . if you look at all the traditions,
you know, the more I learned for myself, anyway, they all taught love, mercy, forgiveness . . . . I think my interfaith work has helped me to come to a higher level of understanding of that, and I think if you close your mind to that, then you’re going to always harbor these judgments. And I don’t know, that’s why we get into trouble; that’s why we’re having so much violence in the world I think . . . . (Interview G: 512-514, 516-520, 526-527, 528-532).

Participant G revealed a powerful critical life event that informed her understanding of interfaith relations and the criticality of having an open perspective to others’ humanity:

interfaith work has, I think, it has an obligation and I think that it can lead the way in helping people to come to that point. I tell you, this has been a journey. Like I said, my feelings for this obviously didn’t come overnight; it’s been a journey for me. So, and I think life experiences changes a lot, obviously. I have to tell you, my daughter was killed in a car accident about 11 years ago, and I remember when we buried her at the Mosque The Mosque had never seen anything like it, you know, this was like two years after Women Transcending Boundaries had formed, and there were probably fifteen different religious traditions at that Mosque for her funeral . . . . That speaks for interfaith work, you know, for the work that the group had been doing . . . . What’s interesting is Suzie had lost a child previous to that, you know, before I knew her, so we both had that bond together, it’s like being a member of a group you don’t want to be a member of, and you hope nobody else joins. But I think because of that experience, not only that, I think any type of a tragedy in one’s life, helps you to dig within. I think the goal, any kind of sorrow or deep grief, if you can go within, and you find out,
“Okay, what do I really believe?” You know, what is, where is this peace that I find, where does it come from? I think these kinds of things can either change you for the better, or they change you for the worse. You know, you can become angry and in denial and have hatred . . . or you can expand and say, “Okay.” And I think that had a big impact on me, seeing the love from all these different women from different faith traditions, who actually cared, you know, the compassion that was shown from Hindu and Buddhist, you know, it made me realize that, hey, you know, Muslims don’t hold the answers to everything, you know. Christians don’t hold the answers to everything, you know; all of us are here on this earth to get along and to take what each of us has and to share it and come up with your own path and your own journey and be respectful of that journey. (Interview G: 542-550, 552-553, 555-563. 565-572)

Participant G transformed her very difficult personal experience into broadening her interfaith leadership philosophy. Her closing comments confirmed the wisdom of her spiritual maturity, her caring activism actions, and the empathy of her open perspective: if you look at all the tragedy that’s going on in our world today. I mean, obviously, what I’ve gone through is nothing compared to what is going on in Syria and all these refugees have gone through. You know, I listen to some of the stories of the refugees that come over here from Somalia. For instance, a woman who walked with her son for like 100 miles to get out of Somalia just to survive, and, I think, and now she’s a wonderful person. I mean, she’s got her Master’s degree now; she’s helped other refugees, and look at the strength of that person. you know? These are stories that I wish we heard more of . . . I wish that the
media would highlight more of this than what? And there’s, like, hundreds of these stories, you know, thousands of these stories in every community. So, I think that’s the next thing for interfaith groups is . . . strategic things that we’re thinking about is how do we network interfaith organizations throughout the country to share each other’s own idea but to work together? Because I really think we have the ability now, with social media and with many other platforms, you know, with webinars and other things, to be able to do this. There’s, like, interfaith work has a wonderful community dialogue program that could really help San Francisco’s Talk Back to Hate campaign, you know? What if those two partnered together? Look at how much more they could do? And I really think that that is the next step for interfaith groups. It is not just confined to your own community but being able to cross the bridges with everybody . . . . We’re doing something. Can you do something in your community just to support us? And that’s just a small way of showing how to do it, but I think it should be done on a larger scale. Because there’s a lot of good organizations throughout the country that are doing good work, and I think the time is right, now, for that, and I think when you do that, you get national attention, too, and because it’s only through these large movements that you’re going to be able to get the national media attention, that you’re going to need people to change the mind frame of people . . . . It’s not something that’s going to happen overnight, but it’s something I think we can start striving for. Now, I may never see it in my lifetime, but you know, who knows? If we don’t start somewhere, you’re never going to. You know, it’s
like the women’s movement, you know, if you don’t start, you’re not going to go anywhere . . . . (Interview G: 591-598, 602-604, 607-615, 628-635, 639-644)

While contemplating structural and societal changes, Participant G finished her narrative reflections by returning to the importance of personal relationships and collaboration:

Suzie and I, we look back now, and we’ll sit together now, and she’ll say, “Gosh, we did that?” You know, we look back, and we think, “Where did all this time go?” We were doing all of this, and then we look back at everything that the organization has done over the years, and we’re now a part of the roundtable of discussion of interfaith leaders, you know, and I’m thinking that’s a really good affirmation for the community of the work that we’re doing. So now we’re looking at, I think, our biggest challenge right now for smaller interfaith groups like us, which is strictly voluntary, you know, we don’t have a budget, we have money, but we don’t have paid staff, you know, but now ours is sustainability. How do you sustain this group, because most of the women in our group are older now. How do you engage youth, you know, young people into the interfaith movement? . . . How do we engage young women into interfaith work, because they are the future leaders, you know? Many of them, obviously, are in college, or they’re starting families and, you know, with kids and all, they don’t have the time, but I’m thinking there’s got to be a way; we’ve got to think outside the box. We’ve got to think of ways to engage them, and even if it’s small ways, to get them interested, so that when their kids do get older, they can take over the leadership positions . . . maybe if an opportunity comes up in communities where they are, they will take those opportunities to get involved in interfaith in their
communities. You know, you at least plant seeds, you know? We’re trying to figure out how we can do that with youth . . . if we can do this on a global scale, why can’t we do this here in our country on a bigger scale? But, I don’t know, priorities here in the United States are so materialistic sometimes . . . . So how do you interest our youth into taking that initiative? . . . Give them the opportunity . . . You create the space and the opportunity and you, you know, it’s like the Field of Dreams thing, “you build it, they will come.” But, you have to build it in a way that it is safe and respectful and listening. (Interview G: 662-673, 675-681, 695-699, 707-708, 711, 730, 783-785)

Like Participants E and F, the researcher and Participant G were not acquainted prior to the study interview and preparatory discussions. With the researcher’s spouse present for the interview, a connection of trust and open sharing was quickly established with Participant G. Her extensive participation in interfaith organizational development and leadership contributed a perspective on the challenges and leadership approaches to building a successful organization. Although done in a restaurant, the interview was still imbued with a sense of spiritual maturity, like the meetings with Participants E and F. The interview with Participant G was an apropos capstone to the study’s narrative reflections.

**Summary of Results**

The purpose of this study was to investigate and increase insight into women interfaith organizational leaders’ experiences regarding leadership authenticity. Using the principles of authentic leadership theory, the study considered the common attributes and organizational experiences of women interfaith leaders. The research study also
established qualitative evidence pertaining to women being recognized (or not) as authentic interfaith organizational leaders. Through qualitative narrative inquiry methods, seven participants were interviewed and shared their experiences on interfaith leadership.

The study findings derived from the participants’ narrative data revealed common characteristics in five categories and differentiation in two areas. The areas of similarity in common traits related to interfaith organizational leadership experiences included: (a) gender, (b) education, (c) class, (d) ability, and (e) sexuality (a neutral factor that was not addressed in this study). Two diversity categories consisted of race/ethnicity and age. These principal trait groups were further stratified by the a priori code analysis.

The participants’ responses were categorized through the a priori codes structure. The ALT-based code evaluation enabled classification of the participant’s responses into seven classes that included: (a) self-awareness, (b) internal moral perspective, (c) balanced information processing, (d) relational transparency, (e) values-based actions, (f) higher moral reasoning, and (g) critical life events. The coding analysis revealed strength in the participants’ responses in the relational transparency, values-based actions, balanced information processing, and self-awareness categories. The internal moral perspective characteristic was less evident in the participants’ input. Likewise, the higher moral reasoning and critical life events categories had also less prevalent input.

As a research-study cohort, seven themes became apparent from the participants’ interview input. Subsequent to the coding process, the interconnected themes emerged from the narrative data. The seven themes comprised: (a) caring activism, (b) gender equality, (c) moral exclusivity, (d) open perspectives, (e) relational focus, (f) social identity, and (g) spiritual maturity. The individual participant’s first, second, and third
themes were associated with one of the seven thematic focus areas. Except for the moral exclusivity category, the other six themes were generally reflected across all of the participants’ narratives. The narrative comparisons were accomplished through iterative data analysis and relating the narrative input to the research questions and ALT concept.

The findings suggested three key implications that consisted of: (a) participant narratives that supplied two distinct perspectives of interfaith organizational leadership, (b) the participants’ intersectionality, which posed a fuller view of their leadership traits, and (c) an understanding of interfaith organizational leadership authenticity that was more thorough than the postulated ALT construct. Of the three implications, the data from the two outlooks on interfaith leadership related closest to the existing literature.

One distinct view, embodied in Participants A and D’s reflections, focused on the social identity of women interfaith leaders and interrelated gender-equality challenges. Another outlook, represented in the narratives of Participants B, C, E, F, and G, inclined toward the relational capacity, inclusiveness, and activism attributes in women interfaith leaders. Together, these two distinctive viewpoints, which emerged from the findings, form a topology of women interfaith organizational leaders’ experiences and views. In Chapter 5, this topology is related to the extant literature by reflection on the research questions. Also, the topology is examined for learned knowledge on women’s interfaith leadership.

In addition to adding to the existing literature and developing new knowledge, the findings and derivative topology advanced a unique understanding of authentic leadership constructs. Through directed-content analysis, seven specific themes materialized that were related to the participants’ narratives. Beyond these specific themes, the study’s
findings posited a generalizable theme based on inclusiveness that broadened the concept of authenticity in interfaith leadership endeavors. Chapter 5 outlines the framework and implications of the inclusiveness theme regarding policy, practice, and possible research.
Chapter 5: Summary and Discussion

Introduction

The objective of this research study was to investigate and develop understanding of women interfaith organizational leaders’ traits and experiences. Through a qualitative narrative strategy of inquiry, the dissertation presented new knowledge in the emergent area of women’s interfaith organizational leadership literature. Across the globe, religion is interwoven with various societal endeavors. In those contexts, interfaith leaders play an important role in resolving conflicts and developing understanding across diverse societal strata. With its pluralism, the United States has religious diversity that presents a unique environment to study robust interfaith activities (Patel & Hartman, 2009). Even so, there is limited research on interfaith organizational leaders within this setting. More acutely, the experiences and features of women interfaith leaders have even less-specific research.

The dissertation contributed to the nascent topic literature by illustrating personal views and experiences of women interfaith leaders. Beyond general descriptions of their lives, the narrative reflections in the research yielded rich descriptive data of formal and informal women interfaith leaders’ experiences. Informing the emergent literature with the narratives of a potentially underserved population was the main goal of the research. Interfaith leadership opportunities are impacted by issues of women occupying leadership positions. The participants’ narratives were elicited to focus on the dynamics of interfaith organizational leadership. Understanding women’s experiences in interfaith organizations was undertaken to gain insight on the fuller facets of a group of active interfaith leaders.
**Problem statement.** Specific works on women’s interfaith leadership are rare in the canon of interfaith and religious literature. Due to the paucity of research on women interfaith leaders, the study design used semi-structured interviews to acquire narrative data. Seven women interfaith organizational leaders from the Rochester, NY and Finger Lakes region offered their personal experiences and viewpoints. The study used research questions to develop qualitative data that complemented the existing literature (Creswell, 2013). The dissertation’s central focus and main purpose was to investigate if authenticity issues had any direct impact upon women interfaith organizational leaders’ experiences.

Using authentic leadership theory as a focusing lens, the study examined what was transpiring with women’s organizational interfaith leadership, who women organizational interfaith leaders are, and how their values impacted their leadership styles. The research was organized by applying ALT’s tenets and was oriented to investigate two questions regarding women’s interfaith leadership. Exercising a narrative strategy of inquiry, the research established qualitative evidence that illustrated examples of women being recognized (or not) as authentic interfaith organizational leaders. Through the research questions, the study also assessed the subject of women’s interfaith leadership authenticity being informed (or not) by common attributes or organizational experiences.

**Research questions.** Two research questions served as the study’s basis of design for the data collection instruments, interview protocol, and data-analysis model:

1. Do women interfaith leaders share common authentic leadership traits and/or organizational experiences?
2. Is there evidence that women in formal and informal leadership roles are accepted as authentic interfaith organizational leaders?

Two instruments were used in the study design to develop the qualitative narrative data. The primary instrument, comprising semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, used four ALT-based interview questions to prompt narrative input. The supporting instrument recorded the participants’ demographic information. Applying an adaptation of Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2009) methodology, the interviews began with a self-awareness question, they were followed by two values-based questions, and the last question was objectivity related.

**Analysis procedures.** The research’s data-analysis model was based on a spiral analysis method and directed-content analysis processes. The data-analysis model applied Creswell’s (2013) iterative, five-step technique to organize, assess, code, represent, and interpret participants’ input. Using directed content analysis, the study’s coding scheme consisted of five initial a priori codes, based on the ALT facets (Walumbwa et al., 2008) and ALT traits (George, 2003). Leveraging Hsieh and Shannon’s (2005) content-analysis methodology, the a priori codes were modified after initially assessing the narratives and developing the themes. A sixth code, related to ALT behaviors, was added in addition to a seventh code that represented higher moral reasoning. Jointly, the seven a priori codes were applied to categorize and analyze the narrative research data in the ALT framework.

Overall themes emerged from the participants’ input during the iterative coding process. Categorized into coded clusters, the initial themes became the foundation of the data analysis. The coded data were translated into graphics that showed the responses by code clusters and themes. The study’s initial findings were validated by triangulating the
emergent themes and corroborating the preliminary results with the study’s participants (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study’s data-analysis construct and analytic techniques yielded richly a descriptive and credible, qualitative, empirical-narrative research.

**Findings.** The narrative data and insights obtained from the participants’ input were translated into broad themes. Through the study’s data-analysis procedures, the key ideas in the narrative data were converted into seven themes that denoted the participant’s response areas of focus. Although focused on ALT traits and organizational experiences, the interviews presented narrative data that resulted in three distinct findings categories. First, the findings showed common attributes in five categories and differentiation in two areas. For the common traits, areas of similarity related to interfaith organizational leadership experiences included: (a) gender, (b) education, (c) class, (d) ability, and (e) sexuality (not specifically addressed). Race/ethnicity and age were two categories that showed the participants’ diversity. These trait groups were stratified by the a priori codes.

Second, the coding resulted in seven classes of: (a) self-awareness, (b) internal moral perspective, (c) balanced information processing, (d) relational transparency, (e) values-based actions, (f) higher moral reasoning, and (g) critical life events. The analysis showed strong responses related to the relational transparency, values-based actions, balanced information processing, and self-awareness categories. The internal moral perspective, higher moral reasoning, and critical life-events categories were less evident.

During the coding process, the interconnected themes emerged from the narrative data. The seven themes comprised: (a) caring activism, (b) gender equality, (c) moral exclusivity, (d) open perspectives, (e) relational focus, (f) social identity, and (g) spiritual
maturity. The individual participants’ first, second, and third themes were associated with one of the seven thematic focus areas. Except for the moral exclusivity class, all of the themes were generally reflected across all of the participants’ narratives. In turn, the findings groups bore key data that formed the basis of the study implications.

As a dissertation’s culmination, Chapter 5 presents a discussion and reflection of the study’s results. The chapter is formed on three sections that include a comparison of results with prior literature and research, an increased understanding of interfaith leaders’ experiences, and a new consideration of authentic interfaith leadership. The chapter also outlines the limitations and recommendations for policy, practice, and research. To frame the findings implications, the chapter begins with a summary of the researcher’s insights.

**Implications of Findings**

The study’s results have implications for developing new knowledge of women’s interfaith organizational leadership. The findings discovered three key implications that consisted of a topology of women’s interfaith organizational leadership with two distinct perspectives, an enhanced understanding of the participants’ leadership traits, and fresh insight into the definition and use of authentic leadership constructs. The researcher’s reflections on the study provide an introduction to the overall implications of the findings.

**Researcher insights.** Women’s interfaith organizational leadership is an area of study that is relatively new, when compared to the broader field of religious leadership. Without context or consideration, the topic of women’s interfaith organizational leadership may seem to be a very specific and a specialized area of interest. On the contrary, interfaith activities, organizations, and leaders have become more prominent as
global, geopolitical complexities and conflicts increase. Women, key participants in interfaith activities, have not been fully understood or acknowledged for their important contributions in this arena. There has been some research and literary efforts dedicated to the subject. Still, these works, themselves, call for additional research into the topic. As intended, this dissertation addressed the call for additional research into the narratives of women interfaith leaders.

The prior research and literature on women’s interfaith leadership was manifest in peer-reviewed articles, subject-matter books, and topic-related research. The majority of the research directly related to women’s interfaith leadership was resident in dissertations and theses. There were also books by Kwok (2012), O’Neill (2007), and Stokes (2006) that directly dealt with the subject’s unique nature through empirical research methods. The research sought to fill a gap in the emerging literature by bringing to life experiences of a select group of women interfaith leaders. Based on the literature’s orientation and focus, the researcher conjectured an expectation of feminist orientation in the narratives. The study’s findings contradicted this supposition with the participants offering broader views beyond the expected feminist inclinations suggested in the preponderant literature.

Unanticipated findings. The study participants shared views and life experiences that revealed a comprehensive and diverse perspective on interfaith leadership. Because they each are unique individuals, there was an expectation for wide-ranging viewpoints on the topic. Yet, there was an unanticipated dichotomy in the participants’ orientation toward social-justice concerns versus feminist interests. A comparison of a perspective from the literature, with a participant response in an interview, is instructive on this point:
The mixing of scholarly material with personal narrative is an intentional approach to the subject that I would call feminist. Feminists are critical writers who claim to be “objective,” and/or to be normative for all; instead, they recognize that each person’s perspective is necessarily limited by her or his context and experiences. (Stokes, 2006, p. vii)

Stokes’s (2006) book offered a view on interfaith leadership clearly stated that feminist thought played an integral function in the author’s understanding of the subject.

In contrast to the literature extract, one of the participant’s narrative reflections provided a fundamentally different orientation toward the topic of interfaith leadership:

I would be really interested in the interfaith setting here if it included more socioeconomic diversity. [sic] Because, right now, I think like my sense is, just from the vibe I get, that it’s very middle class across, pretty middle class, you know, across the board. Or if it’s not middle class, then it’s people more, kind of, in a voluntary-poverty set of circumstances, which is different than not having, not being able to, get out of poverty . . . experientially, I would say the interfaith gatherings and interaction I’ve seen are mostly people that are financially in a decent place and, in terms of education, societal position. Those types of things they have enjoyed the advantage of having, those things, or experienced them, as opposed to people who have a lot more stress in their life in regards to those things. (Interview B: 492-497, 498-503)

The participant’s focus on the socioeconomic issue was indicative of her overall strong inclination toward social justice. The differentiation in approach noted in these examples unexpectedly yielded a two-branched topology of women’s interfaith leadership matters.
As noted in the findings, there were seven themes that emerged from the data analysis. Each participant reflected each one of the themes to varying degrees in their narratives. The unanticipated topological view originating from the narrative themes presented an opportunity for the researcher to compare the participants’ macro-perspectives with the broader topic literature. In regard to authentic leadership, the topological evaluation with the literature also opened an unexpected opportunity to recommend a new research area. Trust-based interactions with the participants were vital in discovering the new topology.

**Reflection on interviews and member checks.** The study’s procedures stipulated that the researcher undertake the interviews from a social-constructivist framework. By using this approach, the researcher could develop subjective understanding of the input by relying on the participants’ perspectives of the situation (Creswell, 2013). Through a social construction lens, the study increased understanding and found new knowledge of women interfaith organizational leaders. However, the researcher and participants also experienced personal and transformative growth through the interviews and interactions.

The findings explained that the researcher was acquainted with four of the seven participants prior to the study. Given these relationships, the social-constructivist frame was an essential part of the researcher maintaining objectivity in the research. That was the case, but the sincere trust and rapport created in each interview facilitated a different dynamic beyond the interviews’ intended functions. Like the relational focus that was prevalent in the results, the participants also developed a relationship with the researcher.

**Going into the study, the researcher’s own experiences, biases, and acculturation obscured the possibility that building relationships during the interviews was a key part of the process itself. Trust and openness became more apparent in the interviews as each**
participant and the researcher reached an unspoken and nonhierarchical equipoise that freed the women to unreservedly illustrate the imagery of their experiences and perspectives (Gilligan, 1982). The interviews and dissertation process did yield qualitative empirical data that aligned with the planned outcomes. But, the interactions were also opportunities for deepening existing relationships and creating newly developed relationships as well. After the preliminary data analysis, the researcher conducted member checks with the participants to discuss the results. These follow-on talks confirmed the evolving relationship dynamic.

The member-check discussions with the participants strengthened the sense of relationship that was building through the dissertation process. From the researcher’s perspective, the participants not only discussed relationships in the interviews, they were also building one at the same time. The researcher offered the participants insights on the themes and dissertation’s general status during the member checks. As those discussions evolved, the participants and the researcher exchanged thoughts on the interviews and themes that moved toward relationship building and developing opportunities for additional collaboration. Behind the relationship evolutions were shared interests in social justice and peacemaking.

**Broader social-justice context.** The dissertation’s focus on women’s interfaith organizational leadership, considered through authentic leadership theory, was placed in a broader social-justice context. As with other human endeavors, the interfaith setting has its own attending culture, organizations, activities, and politics. ALT was used as a lens to study interfaith leadership dynamics while taking into account these realities. As an added outcome, the study findings implicitly suggested that the interfaith milieu is part of
a broader social-justice framework. Prior to conducting the study, the researcher perceived interfaith activities to be distinctive pursuits associated with religious practice. However, the participants’ reflections gave pause to this notion as they linked interfaith organizational leadership and authentic acceptance to the broader social-justice construct.

The participants’ responses moved the understanding of interfaith organizational leadership authenticity toward an inclusion of social-justice consciousness. During their narratives, each participant alluded to interfaith leadership being part of social-justice awareness. Their observations of this issue imply that there may be a broader definition of authentic leadership concerning women in interfaith organizational leadership roles.

The study’s narrative reflections and themes offered meaning that transcended the researcher’s summarized insights. The three major findings from the research warranted further examination to fully understand their implications. The two-dimensional topology served as a basis for comparing the study results with the prior literature and research. An increased understanding of the participants’ experiences came through a consideration of their fuller characteristics. A new definition of authentic leadership constructs integrated the social-justice aspects of interfaith leadership. Together, the key findings implications depicted the meaning derived from the participants’ input and the researcher’s analysis.

**Comparison of results with prior literature and research.** The two-faceted topological perspective that emerged from the findings provided a different viewpoint of women’s interfaith leadership that were presented in the extant literature. With social-identity and social-justice outlooks, the study’s topological outcome contrasted with the general feminist and religious liberal-versus-conservative views posited in the literature. A comparison between the topology and the literature illustrates the participants’ insights.
As indicated in the Chapter 4, Summary of Results, and the Chapter 5, Researcher Insights, an integrated consideration of the participants’ view yielded a topology with two distinct views. One of the views, exemplified in Participants A and D’s thoughts focused on the *social identity* of women interfaith leaders. This view was germane to how women interfaith leaders perceived themselves and dealt with gender-equality issues. The other view of the topology epitomized the narrative perspectives of Participants B, C, E, F, and G. This view was oriented toward relational capacity, inclusiveness, and activism traits in women interfaith leaders. The topology was related to the three literature groupings by utilizing the two research questions to assess similarities and differences in their positions.

The literature that pertained to the dissertation’s topic was organized into three different categories of (a) women’s interfaith leadership, (b) feminist and womanist theologies, and (c) religious leadership. Each literature category provided insights into the research subject and also verified the paucity of related literature. The women’s interfaith leadership area had the preponderance of applicable literature. Differences between the participant topology and the literature were evident when examining a model dissertation.

O’Neill’s (1989) dissertation demonstrated the historical absence of women from many interfaith activities. The dissertation theorized that interfaith activities were divided by gender lines and were not inclusive. In stark contrast, the study participants conveying the social-justice view posed that interfaith activities are inclusive and gender integrated. Participant E provided an example of that perspective in her narrative: “dialogue was integrated, totally integrated, and sometimes there would be more men than women, and
sometimes there would be more women than men, but I mean everybody was heard” (Interview E: 285-287). The divergence in views is, of course, an outgrowth of the specific experiences. But, the research suggests that the fundamentally different perspectives may also be a function of divergent philosophical positions on women’s interfaith leadership. One research question inquired if women interfaith leaders shared common experiences. The experiences may have been alike, but the understanding from them was quite varied.

The social-identity view from the participant topology generally agreed with the feminist and womanist theological literature. In a literature article, an interfaith scholar contended that: “Through feminist social practices, theologians can work to strengthen solidarity among women across national, racial, economic and religious boundaries” (Kwok, 2007, p. 141). Participant A also advocated a like solidary and leadership style. In her narrative, she presented this notion: “I want to lead by consensus, very feminist or womanist style, seeing it in a circle, hearing from everybody, trying to reach consensus” (Interview A: 139-141). This topological perspective focused on the individuals’ personal and group identities and their interactions within those contexts. Strong relationships with other women interfaith devotees were a critical part of this disposition and perspective. In a like manner, Participant D offered thoughts on the issue: “I think, stereotypically, a lot of women, and that’s a big nasty, broad brush stroke, but I think it’s often a fair one, are very good at bringing people together, and that’s, I think, pretty vital interfaith work . . . ” (Interview D: 82-84). Exploring the research question on shared traits, the social identity topological view advocated that identity-based bonding is a requisite leadership attribute.
Social identities tying with feminist literature epitomized that topological view in the study.

Both topological outlooks had alignment with the religious leadership literature. This category incorporated the two participant’s views that were unlike the unitary affiliations with the women’s interfaith leadership and feminist theological literature. An article written by Gramick (2001) explained a New Testament-grounded Catholic leadership model and how women Catholic leaders observe its tenets. The literature postulated that Catholic women leaders have collaborative and informal styles and feminist connections. This viewpoint mirrored the two-dimensional outlook found in the participant topology. In the article, the inclusive and relational position advocated in the topology’s social-justice perspective is harmonized with the social-identity outlook. Although, representative of the two macro-perspectives in the topology, the article and the literature, in general, seem to lack a view reflected in the participants’ narratives. Their reflections, originating from individual experiences, offered a theme that was, at once, feminist and social but just in a unique way.

The study findings yielded seven distinct themes while suggesting an overarching theme related to inclusiveness. The researcher understood these themes to be associated with feminist, womanist, and religious leadership constructs articulated in the literature. In effect, the researcher assigned meaning to participants’ narratives by an interpretation of others’ experiences with interfaith organizational leadership. “But, this construction reveals the limitation in an account, which measures women’s development against a male standard and ignores the possibility of a different truth” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 170).
Beyond the researcher’s initial vision, the participants’ stories spoke in their own authentic voice.

The study results aligned with the expansion of feminist theological philosophy. In the literature, Ruether’s (2012) analysis delineated the historical evolution of feminist theology and defined the evolving expressions of feminist theology in women’s interfaith leadership. Based on diverse cultures and religions, the article observed different attitudes on what constitutes a shared experience. Ruether (2012) recognized how women religious leaders were expressing their experiences and authenticity in their own unique ways. The developing feminist theological literature offered fresh outlooks on feminist authenticity. Feminist theologians are constructing new literature in an interfaith context (Ruether, 2012). The study participants’ lived experiences are evidence of this developing reality.

The two-dimensional participant topology exhibited similarities and differences in the study findings and the extant literature. The topology also proposed a distinctive view of women’s interfaith leadership that was neither wholly feminist nor fully established in social-justice constructs. The narratives, as understood and confirmed by the researcher, produced a main theme based on inclusiveness. Superficially, this idea may seem clearly related to interfaith leadership. A closer look at the narratives revealed a deeper meaning.

*Increased understanding of interfaith leaders’ experiences.* The findings extend insights into women interfaith leaders’ authenticity experiences in organizational settings. Generally, the primary emphasis in qualitative narrative research “is to develop an idiographic body of knowledge” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 38). In this dissertation, the findings yielded seven mutual themes that emerged from the participants’ narratives.
These themes are generalizable to all women’s interfaith leaders by offering a nomothetic topology that incorporates authenticity as a key factor in examining interfaith leadership. Examining each participant’s fuller intersectionality extended a more complete view of their leadership characteristics. “The concept of ‘intersectionality’ refers to the interactivity of social identity structures, such as race, class, and gender, in fostering life experiences, especially experiences of privilege and oppression” (Gopaldas, 2013, p. 90). In order to see the participants’ authentic values and leadership, they should be viewed as more than single-dimension entities that were solely focused on interfaith leadership or a particular approach to that endeavor. Each of the study’s participants had rich and varied backgrounds that contributed to their approach and experiences in the interfaith realm. Coming to understand their authenticity also meant acknowledging their intersectionality. The participants’ diverse idiographic input became the basis of the nomothetic topology.

Assessment of the seven themes juxtaposed with individual participant exemplars lends credence to the notion of a qualitative nomothetic topology from the study’s results. The idea is not seeking to create a positivist generalization that is liberated from time and context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead, the participants’ topological results suggest that authenticity is a key factor to consider when seeking understanding of women’s interfaith leadership experiences. The idiographic narratives in the seven themes display this point:

- **Theme 1** was *Caring Activism* and represented the participants’ values-based, social-justice, and interfaith-leadership activities. Participant F demonstrated an authentic series of values-based actions in her evolution from a housewife to a long-tenured community leader. By discovering and carrying out her authentic principles, she was able to build sustaining interfaith organizations.
and bring about positive change in her community. The caring activism in her narrative personified the positive psychological traits and values-based actions espoused in ALT (Northouse, 2013; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Participant F’s narrative reflections also situated interfaith leadership in the broader social-justice arena. Participant F’s authentic values were key to her interfaith leadership evolution.

- **Theme 2** concentrated on *Gender Equality* and the participants’ experiences with gender-related issues within the interfaith organizational leadership realm. Participant A’s graduate and doctoral credentials from Ivy League institutions and ministerial ordination were not enough to gain her access to opportunities afforded to her male peers. Her clarity of purpose in pursuing acceptance as an authentic clergy member was grounded in a strong sense of right and wrong. The critical life experiences in this area exemplify the challenges early women interfaith leaders confronted and present women leaders may still have to face. “Interreligious dialogue, as currently understood, practiced and promoted in many parts of the world, particularly among Christians, is strongly marked by the absence of women” (King, 1998, p. 42). Without narrowing this dynamic to one faith, the point is that Participant A’s authenticity-related experiences can be extrapolated to the generalizable postulate seen in the nomothetic topology.

- **Theme 3** of *Moral Exclusivity* was a narrowly applied concept that stressed incidences of superiority toward other beliefs/faiths. Participant D provided an unflinchingly clear perspective of her self-awareness and authentic feelings
concerning her religious values. Placed in a historical context, Participant D’s personal narrative is transferable in understanding deeply held beliefs due to a particular people’s experiences. “This is not an academic issue, because people’s lives depend on it—certainly from a Jewish experience” (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 127). Viewed in isolation, Participant D’s idiographic input seemed applicable to her individual experiences. But when the narrative is understood as part of a larger faith tradition, it undertakes qualities that are germane to the nomothetic topology. Similarly, Participant D can be viewed one-dimensionally as a single person with specific experiences. Her narrative reflections showed otherwise, as her self-awareness is affected by the moral exclusivity placed against her faith.

- **Theme 4** dealt with the *Open Perspectives* displayed by interfaith leaders’ informed, welcoming, and perceptive outlooks on others’ opinions and beliefs. As a religiously conservative Muslim, Participant C might be stereotyped as a parochially minded person. Conversely, her narrative illustrated a balanced and welcoming disposition to a wide range of perspectives. Like Participant D, her narrative could be interpreted as an individual experience. But, the nomothetic implications suggest that care should be given to not conflate traditional beliefs with close-minded views. O’Neill (2007) suggested that women’s interfaith issues are at the center of disagreements between conservatives and liberals. The topology offers a more multifaceted view of women’s interfaith matters. This is an important point central to the study’s findings. The literature posits a situation in which women’s interfaith
organizational leadership is stratified by conservative or liberal views. The participants’ narratives, the intersectional reality of their lives and experiences, and the resultant topology provide a different view that realizes intricacies in different leaders and their approaches to interfaith leadership. The nomothetic topological implications offer that authenticity in women’s interfaith leadership supersedes a conservative versus liberal concept.

- **Theme 5** represented the participants’ *Relational Focus*, which underscored developing authentic, sustained, and trust-based relations with diverse people. Participant B’s narrative was replete with examples of her relational focus and emotional intelligence. Known for her expertise in nonviolence awareness and community organizing, a fuller examination of Participant B’s leadership style demonstrated that her strengths are based on relational transparency and trust. Her highly inclusive leadership, notably in organizational settings, facilitates all voices being included in the conversations and in the decision-making process. This collaborative approach mirrors her broader persona and values that place great importance on acknowledging the dignity of all living beings. “Sensitivity to the needs of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care lead women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgment other points of view” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 16). Observed in a singular manner, the strength of Participant B’s narrative might be seen as community leadership in an interfaith context. Understanding her open-minded and self-aware leadership offer a different understanding of her idiographic narrative. The relational focus depicted in her reflections
highlighted the overarching theme related to inclusiveness. The hypothesized nomothetic topology posits a distinctive view, which is related to social justice. Participant B’s inclusive leadership is representative of this view and the prevailing theme seen across the participants’ narratives. The idiographic experiences in Participant B’s narrative can be translated into the nomothetic model. Consideration of how interfaith leaders relate with others’ is germane to understanding authenticity.

- **Theme 6 on Social Identity** centered on the participants’ perceptions of their identities in relationship to their faith communities. As interfaith organizational leaders, Participants A and D’s narratives manifest this theme in two different ways. Participant A unquestionably identified with her Christian and Universalist faith traditions. But as part of her social identity, Participant A’s narrative also illustrated that interfaith leadership was also an important aspect of her persona. She offered reflections that exhibited how interfaith activities were closely intertwined with her core religious beliefs and spirituality. In her circumstances, “religious pluralism has to be understood as carrying ultimately a spiritual significance” (King, 1998, p. 41). Interfaith is not an ancillary matter that is separate from her primary beliefs. As an individual, this perspective may be taken as unique. When viewing interfaith leadership, it may be fundamental to understanding the endeavor. Participant A’s disposition toward interfaith organizations provided another case of idiographic narratives being linked to the nomothetic topology. Complexities of social identity, versus liberal or conservative views, may be inherent to
understanding women’s interfaith organizational leadership. Participant D’s narrative also showed that she linked interfaith with her social identity. In contrast to Participant A, Participant D’s interfaith activities were an important adjunct to her core beliefs versus an integral part of them. Being an interfaith organizational leader was an extension of exercising her religious practices. Participant D’s narrative demonstrated that “Interfaith dialogue means to hold on to one’s faith while simultaneously trying to understand another person’s faith” (Shafiq & Abu-Nimer, 2011, p. 2). This subtle, yet important, distinction between the two participants’ display of social identity informs the topology. Both idiographic narratives offer that social identity should be understood in the nomothetic context of women’s interfaith organizational leadership. As individuals, the participants’ social identity also showed their intersectionality.

- **Theme 7** presented the concept of *Spiritual Maturity* or the experiential wisdom and reflective contemplations stemming from the participants’ lived experiences. Participants A, E, F, and G articulated characteristics of the very rare universalizing faith and independent thought that was a product of their spiritual maturity and interfaith leadership wisdom (Fowler, 1981). Participant E’s narrative especially emphasized these attributes. Solely viewed as a parish nun, Participant E’s broader persona and qualities as a wise spiritual leader and interfaith activist would be missed. Through a life-long journey of spiritual and personal maturation, Participant E’s narrative offered several instances of how interfaith interactions were an essential part of her religious
beliefs and arrival at an advanced spiritual station. Spiritual maturity, which has many authentic leadership characteristics, was the core of Participant E’s idiographic narrative. An understanding of how universal and welcoming perspectives are germane to interfaith organizations was carried through the spiritual maturity theme. The nomothetic topology’s social-justice view is based upon an inclusiveness construct. These universal and inclusive views were also revealed in Participant G’s narrative. As a self-described progressive-minded Muslim, Participant G’s inclusive and harmonizing views align with interfaith leadership definitions in the literature. O’Neill (2007) defines religious progressives as those who forego literalism to have a broader understanding of their faith, its institutions, and its relevance to the modern world. More clarity is attained by avoiding the binary liberal versus conservative classifications. This description notwithstanding, definitions in the literature do not fully grasp the connotation of the spiritual maturity seen in Participant E or G’s narratives. Spiritual maturity warrants further definition, like the other six themes derived from the participants’ idiographic narratives.
The seven themes that emerged from the participants’ narratives can be translated from idiographic experiences into a nomothetic topological model (see Figure 5.1). By generalizing the implications of the findings, the participants’ personal experiences offer insights on the function of authenticity in interfaith organizational leadership. The participants, and their individual narratives, were regarded from an intersectional outlook versus a one-dimensional aspect. In this light, the traditionally applied liberal versus conservative terminology did not accurately or fully portray the participants’ experiences or outlooks. ALT offered a relevant and constructive way to research women interfaith organizational leaders’ traits, experiences, and authentic acceptance. The findings suggest development of an augmented authenticity model that pertains to interfaith leadership.

**A new consideration of authentic interfaith leadership.** The findings from the participants’ narratives can form the basis of an interfaith leadership nomothetic topology model. ALT, and its attending tenets and ontological constructs, offered a reliable method to view the participants’ input and develop the study’s findings. As the foundation of the
data-analysis construct, ALT provided the framework to understand and develop meaning from the qualitative data. The seven themes emerged from the ALT-based a priori codes.

Each of the seven themes that emerged from the participants’ correlated to one of the a priori codes. The theme and ALT-based code relationships were comprised of: (a) caring activism with values-based actions (VBA), (b) gender equality with internal moral perspective (IMP), (c) moral exclusivity with critical life events (CLE), (d) open perspectives with balanced information processing (BPI), (e) relational focus with relational transparency (RTT), (f) social identity with self-awareness (SAC), and (g) spiritual maturity with higher moral reasoning (HMR). The theme/code pairs reflected the ALT facets (Walumbwa et al., 2008) and ALT traits (George, 2003). ALT also served as the theoretical foundation for placing the nomothetic topology model (see Figure 5.2). Brecht’s (2010) Virtuous Doxastic Practices indirectly and spiritual leadership theory (SLT) directly build upon ALT to form a broader context with the nomothetic topology.

Figure 5.2. Interfaith topology model in theory context.
The literature confirmed that there have been previous efforts to model women’s interfaith leadership and augment ALT’s principles with religiously related principles. Brecht’s (2010) virtuous doxastic (reasoning in beliefs) practice model illustrated the use of beliefs and values between women interfaith leaders and various communities. As a complementary lens, the nomothetic topology model from this study can be used to also enhance understanding of women’s interfaith leadership. Equally, the academic efforts to extend the core ALT model can be enhanced by the nomothetic topology. Examination of applicable efforts to evolve the ALT model displays the nomothetic topology’s relevance.

Two modifications of the ALT model have some relevance to women’s interfaith organizational leadership. Both adaptations center on adding a spiritual component to the ALT’s core foundation of “self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 94). By adding spirituality, these academic amendments sought to leverage ALT’s elementary tenets and also make the model more specific to researching and understanding religious leadership. Interfaith leadership, as evidenced in the participants’ narratives, has elements of spirituality. The spiritual authentic leadership concept is relevant to the study’s topology.

Authentic leadership theories were developed with the idea of gaining insight into leaders’ values and actions. The public’s desire for trustworthy leaders and researchers’ interested in leadership authenticity generated the development of the ALT and related constructs (Northouse, 2013). Women interfaith leaders are also a subject of interest and scrutiny as religious leaders. As evidenced by the study findings, spirituality is a central
part of their ethos. The study results suggested that spirituality and interfaith leadership are connected.

Prior literature described how spirituality plays a key role in authentic leadership. Spiritual leadership theory (SLT) definitions and models are consonant with the study’s design, but it does not fully align with the participants’ narrative reflections and the findings:

SLT specifically addresses three critical issues raised earlier for authentic leadership in that it: (1) explicitly identifies and incorporates universal consensus values of altruistic love that are necessary for authentic leadership; (2) provides a process for achieving value congruence across the personal, empowered team, and organizational levels; and (3) predicts that authentic leaders will experience ethical well-being and, when coupled with a transcendent vision, spiritual well-being manifested as joy, peace, serenity, positive human health, and psychological well-being. (Fry & Whittington, 2005, p. 191)

SLT modeled the incorporation of religiously focused leaders’ values and considered an organizational construct for authenticity as well. Although marked by love and altruism, the participants’ narratives suggested a leadership model that went beyond SLT’s primary focus on leaders’ spiritual elevation. SLT tackled leaders’ spiritual advancement and their satisfaction in attaining spiritual maturation. In contrast, the study’s nomothetic topology findings focus on spirituality as an element in the leaders’ views of authentic leadership.

Another theory addressed the spiritual dimensions of religiously based authentic leadership. By integrating cognitive, effective, conative, and spiritual aspects of authentic leadership, this model pondered three dimensions of spirituality including transcendence,
meaningfulness, and self-sacrifice (Klenke, 2005). Like SLT, the other model integrated spirituality into ALT by focusing on the leader’s spiritual condition. Also, like SLT, the nomothetic topology differs with this model by focusing on how leaders’ perceive facets of spirituality in interfaith organizational leadership as opposed to how they are achieving it. Beyond these efforts, the study’s nomothetic topology does work with a current model.

The study’s proposed interfaith leadership nomothetic topology model provides a new consideration and definition of authentic leadership. In the literature, Brecht’s (2010) epistemological model of interfaith dialogue outlined soteriological (salvation) doctrines with women interfaith leaders’ experiences. The dissertation studied women’s interfaith meetings while considering religious diversity and disagreements. As a precursor to the nomothetic topology, Brecht’s (2010) virtuous doxastic practice (VDP) model explores how interfaith participants broadened and anchored their own views of faith by partaking in interfaith dialogue and increasing their religious awareness. By gauging how interfaith participants viewed their settings, VDP provided an introduction for the study’s topology:

More recently, theologians address religious diversity as a soteriological and epistemological problem: what is the status of the beliefs of religious others and what does this mean for salvation? This dissertation works to push the theological conversation on religious diversity even more squarely into epistemological territory. Specifically, what are the ways in which religious beliefs are shaped by the encounter with religious others? (Brecht, 2010, p. 370)

The interfaith leadership nomothetic topology model offers a new consideration of authentic interfaith leadership (AIL). By proposing an epistemological analysis of social identity and social justice in interfaith leadership, the nomothetic topology extends
the core ALT definition to add more bearing to interfaith leadership activities. Necessity and validity questions may arise about the nomothetic topology, but, ALT is an evolving theory, and the nomothetic topology was derived from directed-content analysis methods.

As evidenced by a number of augmenting literature and data, evolving ALT is a valid undertaking. “Authentic leadership is still in the formative phase of development. As a result, authentic leadership needs to be considered more tentatively. It is likely to change as new research about the theory is published” (Northouse, 2013, p. 253). AIL is a new consideration of ALT with regard to interfaith leaders’ views of their environments. As previously noted, directed-content analysis methods facilitate validating or extending existing theories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This approach was used to apply ALT constructs to analyze the participants’ narratives, which ultimately resulted in the nomothetic topology.

The anticipated interfaith leadership nomothetic topology model has a theoretical aspect and a practical first instantiation. In alignment with the study’s research questions, the theory-based aspect of the model posits that interfaith leaders’ idiographic traits and experiences can be translated into a nomothetic understanding of interfaith leadership. A qualitatively researched group of interfaith leaders’ experiences could be recognized as a characterization of interfaith leadership dynamics. Avoiding the positivist predilection to predict and control, the nomothetic generalization in the proposed model seeks to develop understanding of the participants’ perspectives as a group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The initial model manifestation has two outlooks developed from the participants’ narratives.

The participants’ idiographic narratives yielded seven themes, which were then further grouped into two, broad interfaith-leadership outlooks of social identity and social
justice. The nomothetic topology from the findings concluded that the study participants had either a perspective based in their social identity as women interfaith organizational or a social justice outlook that saw interfaith organizational leadership as part of a larger social-justice construct. The participants used either frame as the primary lens to describe their experiences and thoughts. In developing the nomothetic topology, the study yielded findings from the participants’ narratives and also a proposed interfaith research model.

The dissertations’ implications of findings increased the baseline of knowledge and enhanced understanding of women interfaith organizational leaders’ characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of authentic acceptance. The findings revealed three main implications. The outcomes consisted of a topology of women’s interfaith organizational leadership with two viewpoints: improved understanding of the participants’ leadership attributes, and fresh insight into the definition and use of authentic leadership constructs.

The researcher’s reflections discovered a dichotomy in the participants’ outlooks, pondered relationship building during the member checks, and assessed interfaith links to social justice. Comparing the results with the literature yielded the two-dimensional topology that became the basis for the nomothetic model. Increased understanding of the participants’ experiences gave idiographic evidence for the first instantiation of the nomothetic model. A new consideration of authentic interfaith leadership examined other academic efforts to amend the core ALT concept. The structure and theoretical foundation for the proposed nomothetic topological model was delineated and compared with another relevant model. Together, the data analysis and the implications of findings yielded new knowledge about women’s interfaith organizational leadership and a nascent research model that can be further researched.
Limitations

This study has participatory, geographic, and temporal limits that might impact the findings and conclusions. The study’s research design methodology utilized a purposive sample to facilitate investigating the research questions. Compared with positivist studies, qualitative narrative inquiries use purposively selected participants to inform the research (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to develop a detailed narrative data, a small number of participants with diverse attributes were selected. Generalizable aspects of the seven individual narratives could be limited to the specific participants in the study.

The study’s geographic locale was chosen because of Rochester, NY and the Finger Lakes region’s role as a locus of national and international interfaith activities. The women interfaith leaders in this location generally have involvement and/or exposure to national and international interfaith activities. Even with diverse participants, the study’s limited purposive sample does not necessarily represent the range of participants in the larger interfaith environment. The purposive sample’s diversity was reflected in the participants’ backgrounds. The lack of ethnic and age diversity may be a limiting factor. The study is only a narrow view of the wide range of interfaith practices and perceptions.

The research investigated the participants’ interfaith experiences preponderantly from the January 1999 to January 2014 timeframe. By focusing on this timeframe, the women’s interfaith leaders’ narratives provided insight on the development of interfaith organizational leadership in the period shortly before and subsequent to the 9/11 tragedy. The seminal event initiated a rapid expansion in interfaith activities. Although defined in
the study’s design, some participants’ surpassed the temporal bounds in their narratives. Additional limits related to the study’s design interview protocols are noted in Chapter 3.

**Recommendations for Policy, Practice, Education, and Leadership**

The study’s findings and implications evaluation are the basis for policy, practice, and leadership suggestions. Interfaith organizational accession policies and practices may benefit from increased understanding of women’s leadership experiences and traits. In addition to offering application-focused suggestions, leadership research may benefit from the participants’ narratives by further investigation of the nomothetic topology. A look at women interfaith leaders’ historical-social location would uncover policy implications.

Gender-based doctrines and traditions have been translated from religious faiths into the interfaith organizations. Without passing wholesale judgment on the validity or justness of these conditions, the study findings suggest the capabilities, experiences, and wisdom of women leaders would be a great benefit to emerging interfaith organizations. Historically, this has not been the case, and the current situation may not have improved: Thus one can legitimately ask whether, in spite of all the rich flowering of interreligious dialogue over recent years, the horizon of global ecumenism is still conceived of in terms that are too narrow . . . Such narrowness is evident with regard to the marginalization, invisibility, and exclusion of women, for wherever interreligious dialogue has developed, women seem to have had little part in it, at least at the official level. (King, 1998, p. 42)

The innumerable local, national, and international interfaith organizations have wide-ranging diversity and gender-related adherences. The study findings demonstrate that
women interfaith leaders’ capabilities have relevance regardless of organizational levels. Bolman and Deal’s (2008) organizational reframing theory shows how structures, human resources, politics, and symbols noted in the study have an impact on policy and practice.

**Implications for policy and practice.** The findings in this study cannot provide a comprehensive foundation to reconstitute all of interfaith organizational leadership. But, when viewed through Bolman and Deal’s (2008) framework the study findings advance additional ways to consider women in interfaith organizational leadership roles. The four frames are divided between the policy and practice areas to outline the recommendations.

**Policy recommendations.** The participants’ narratives relayed their experiences in interfaith organizations. Although some of participants founded interfaith organizations, none mentioned a formal incorporation of gender-related diversity goals or plans into the organizational structures. Specific gender-inclusive leadership objectives can be reflected in interfaith organizational bylaws, strategic planning documents, and vision statements. Inclusion in these organizational structures can facilitate an increase in women leaders.

Gender-inclusive interfaith organizational policies can also be extended to the human resources realm. Increased consideration and policies to hire women as interfaith organizational leaders may serve public or specific constituencies’ interests. “If this is true, then there is no single public interest, but rather sets of separate interests with separate publics and separate opinions about what should be done” (Birkland, 2011, p. 134). The study findings do not suggest or provide evidence for a sweeping affirmative-action policy. Conversely, the participants’ narratives suggest that organizational human resource policies in the interfaith realm should evaluate how leaders are assessed. These processes should consider, in a relevant and constructing way for each organization, how
women are being viewed and evaluated as potential interfaith leaders. Participant F’s narrative was clear that interfaith organizations and leaders need to do a better job at valuing women. Besides policies and practices, the interfaith leadership tradecraft should evolve too.

**Practice recommendations.** Women interfaith leaders should have the benefit of mentoring and professional leadership development. Education and advisor relationships were discussed in the participants’ narratives. In the political frame, promising women interfaith leaders can profit from coaching and insights on navigating power structures, resolving personal and organizational conflict, and developing coalitions and advocates (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Being considered or chosen as an interfaith organizational leader is not sufficient. Through professional development and mentoring, women aspirants may gain a better understanding of interfaith organizational leadership politics and practices.

Emerging and well-tenured women interfaith organizational leaders should also be recognized and celebrated. The symbolic nature of their accomplishments is important. Successful women interfaith leaders who occupy informal and formal positions should be noted for their contributions and capabilities. By acting as mentors and advocates, these leaders can pass on interfaith leadership knowledge. Both Participants A and G emphasized the importance of developing a newfound generation of interfaith leaders. By developing leadership training and mentoring, they endeavor to share their experiences as symbols of interfaith leadership success. Sharing their narratives may motivate others.

**Recommendations for education and leadership.** Deriving knowledge from women interfaith organizational leaders’ narratives should enhance the topic literature. Part of the study’s significance was to offer new data on the subject while also giving
voice to women interfaith leaders’ lived experiences. The research questions were
designed to facilitate discovery of individual experiences. As an outcome of the findings,
the study yielded a model that considers individual authenticity traits as part of a class of
leaders. Further research on this model can add to the interfaith leadership literary canon.

In general, there is a paucity of research and understanding of interfaith matters.
There should be increased understanding of this field, given religions’ relevance to global
geopolitical and societal affairs. Developing research on the nascent interfaith leadership
nomothetic topology and increasing awareness on women’s interfaith leadership are part
of maturing an emerging academic field. Two future research actions are recommended.

**Education recommendation.** This study provides a foundation for developing a
comprehensive phenomenological study on women interfaith organizational leaders. By
focusing on the individual experiences of a purposive sample, this research developed a
nomothetic model that could be used to develop common meaning for a class of interfaith
leaders (Creswell, 2013). The nomothetic topology model could be used to understand
“what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell,
2013, p. 76). Authenticity in interfaith organizations would be the phenomenon to study.
Along with the phenomenological study, an interfaith ethnography could also be studied.

**Leadership recommendation.** Women interfaith organizational leaders share
cultural and leadership traits as a distinct group. Understanding their attributes and
authenticity experiences on a larger scale could be accomplished through an ethnographic
study. The purposive sample in this study offered narratives from a limited number of
participants. An ethnographic study could leverage the proposed nomothetic topology to
research and understand women interfaith leaders as a generalizable cultural grouping
(Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although they have national and international interfaith experiences, all of the study participants were from a limited geographic region. A phenomenological study focused on authenticity, with ethnographic research on an array of participants, are suggested to further knowledge on women interfaith leaders.

Conclusions

The participants’ narratives in this study represent close to 400 years of collective wisdom and lived experiences. The seven themes that arose from their reflections support the conclusions to the research questions. There is qualitative data in the findings that women interfaith leaders do share common leadership traits and organizational experiences. Also, there is evidence in the findings that women in formal and informal leadership roles are accepted as authentic interfaith organizational leaders. Based on the study’s findings, the researcher reflected and suggests that more comprehensive topic research is necessary.

The narratives of seven women interfaith organizational leaders were researched through an ALT-focused and directed content-analysis-based data analysis procedure. The results showed that the cohort of women leaders participating in the study had seven themes that were shared in differing degrees. By demonstrating (a) caring activism, (b) gender equality, (c) moral exclusivity, (d) open perspectives, (e) relational focus, (f) social identity, and (g) spiritual maturity, the participants presented generalizable traits, despite their very unique individual experiences. Although idiographic in nature, the data implies that a nomothetic topology could be developed on women’s interfaith leadership.

Each participant offered narrative reflections that presented their experiences with gaining acceptance as an authentic interfaith organizational leader. Both in formal and
informal roles, the participants’ idiographic experiences aligned with one of two distinct perspectives on interfaith organizational leadership that emerged from the narratives. The understanding of leadership authenticity constructs can be revisited with the nomothetic topology developed from the participants’ intersectional experiences. The conclusions guide the researcher to advocate added research as part of a social-justice responsibility.

This study’s purpose was to investigate women interfaith organizational leaders’ shared traits, experiences, and authentic acceptance. The narratives, findings, topology model, and recommendation all indicate that the study achieved that objective. Beyond researching interfaith authenticity concepts, the study endeavored to provide insights on an academically and socially underserved group. Interfaith involvement is an important undertaking that can enable improved relations. Women leaders are a vital part of achieving that goal.

Reflecting upon the role that interfaith activities and organizations perform lends impetus to advocating increased understanding of their leaders and leadership dynamics. In his recent call to action on women and religion, former President Jimmy Carter (2014) offered a powerful argument and strategies for thwarting religiously based discrimination against women. Interfaith organizations can serve a principal function in addressing these global issues that transcend faiths, cultures, and countries. But, in order for that goal to be realized, interfaith organizations must first accept and support women in leadership roles.

The overall conclusion reached from this study is that continued research on the interfaith realm, focusing on women interfaith leaders, in particular, is an important and urgent need. In the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy, interfaith leaders have a critical role to
fulfill in building understanding, forming consensus, and initiating collaborative action in
the religious realm. The global environment compels more interfaith leadership action:

Religion has had a resurgence in many parts of the world and has entered the
public domain and policy discussions, both nationally and internationally. There
is clearly a change of attitude in the secular state and in public discourse with
respect to the enduring impulses of religion and religious communities. Some
have called this the post secular world (Kwok, 2012, p. 2).

As interfaith leadership evolves and assumes increased responsibilities, there is a parallel
opportunity to develop research on interfaith leadership. Researching women’s authentic
acceptance as interfaith leaders may increase knowledge and awareness of this
undiscovered discipline.

Studying the authenticity and culture around interfaith leadership serves a societal
interest. Authentic leadership constructs were ostensibly developed to have a structured
way of gauging leaders’ trustworthiness and genuineness (Northouse, 2013). Given the
work that authentic leaders are charged with undertaking, it follows that gaining insight
on their authenticity is important. An important component of interfaith leaders’ authentic
behavior is their disposition toward, and acceptance of, women into interfaith leadership.

Researching women’s interfaith organizational leadership was associated with the
researcher’s concern for social justice and wish to contribute to the canon of literature on
a pressing societal issue. Recognizing, understanding, and memorializing women that are
making critical contributions to interfaith activities were valuable academic and personal
experiences for the researcher.
Studying women interfaith leaders attended to urgent social-justice and academic needs and revealed that the participants’ efforts had a broader purpose:

While the struggle for gender equality is about justice and human rights for women, it cannot be regarded as a women’s struggle any more than the battle against anti-Semitism is a Jewish struggle, or that of non-racialism a struggle belonging to Blacks, or that of religious pluralism one belonging to Western academics. All of us, whether in our offices, bedrooms, kitchens, mosques or boardrooms participate in the shaping of the cultural and religious images and assumptions that oppress or liberate the Other, and thus ourselves. (Esack, 1997, p. 261)

Through qualitative narrative research, this dissertation presented new knowledge on women interfaith organizational leaders. More so, the dissertation hopefully prompts further discussion on women’s interfaith leadership and its importance in societal and academic affairs.
References


Kinsler, L. (2014, March). Born to be me... who am I again? The development of authentic leadership using evidence-based leadership coaching and mindfulness. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 9*(1), 92-105.


Steiner, S. (2011). Religious soft power as accountability mechanism for power in world politics: The interfaith leaders’ summit(s). SAGE Open, 1-16.


Appendix

Interview Protocol

Initiate Interview Setup

- Introductions
- Restate the study’s purpose and thank participants for taking part in the study
- Confirm that Informed Consent has been signed
- Explain how interview will be conducted:
  - Electronically recorded interview which will be transcribed
  - Written supplementary notes will be taken
  - Participants call halt the interview at any time
  - Explain the supporting instrument and how the data may be used
  - Explain the primary instrument and how the data may be used
- See if there are any questions before starting the interview

Start Interview Opening

- Initiate interview by starting the recording and making the opening statement:
  - The interview with____________is being conducted on _____ (date/ time) at
    ______________________(location).
  - This interview is being conducted to collect narrative data for a doctoral
dissertation by researcher Rashid Muhammad in the St. John Fisher College’s
Ed. D. Executive Leadership program.

Complete Supporting Instrument Data

- Participant Identifier (e.g., “Participant A”):
- Title(s):
- Timeframe and Location of Interfaith Activities:
- Current and Former Interfaith Organizations:
- Academic Degree(s), Training and Professional Credentials:
- Religious and Cultural Affiliation(s) and Ethnicity(ies).

Conduct Interview with Primary Instrument
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What are your personal experiences and thoughts about characteristics pertaining to interfaith leadership?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How has your decision-making style and personal values informed your interfaith leadership?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>When there was a perspective that conflicted with your values, how did you handle that situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>How have your relationships influenced being viewed and accepted as an authentic interfaith leader?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Optional Supplementary Questions**

- How would you characterize the nature and continuity of your interfaith leadership experiences?
- What is an example of how you motivated people in an interfaith setting to move forward on a humanitarian initiative?
- How are you mindful of philosophical differences and how do you identify shared values?
- What have been your experiences leading gender-specific and gender-integrated interfaith activities?