THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN COUNTERING RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF INTERFAITH YOUTH PROGRAM ALUMNI

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has not focused on youth participants in interfaith programs and how these programs affected their attitudes toward religious intolerance. This qualitative phenomenological study addressed this gap through semi-structured interviews examining the perceptions of interfaith youth program alumni. The impact on their attitude involved how the participants' beliefs regarding different religions were affected over time. The effects of their actions examined how the program empowered participants to engage in efforts to counter religious intolerance. Findings revealed that the alumni derived a sense of confidence from the knowledge gained about other religions. Participation in community service projects and program activities shaped their attitudes to be more appreciative and tolerant of other faiths. This change in attitude empowered the alumni to engage in concrete actions to address religious intolerance. This analysis of the effectiveness of interfaith youth programs in countering religious discrimination can be helpful to scholars, practitioners, and policymakers.

Keywords: religious intolerance, interfaith programs, phenomenological study

INTRODUCTION

Religious intolerance is an alarming issue for U.S. policymakers and society. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Hate Crime Statistics for 2018 and 2019 indicated an overall incident rate increase of 0.95%, with 7,036 hate crimes reported in 2018 and 7,103 hate crimes reported in 2019 in the United States, with the categories of race/ethnicity/ancestry bias decreasing by 2.1% and religion increasing by 7.2% (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2019, 2020). Through its annual "Audit of Antisemitic Incidents," the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) Center on Extremism has reported an increase in antisemitic harassment, vandalism, and assault in the United States. Over the last 10 years, the total number of incidents rose from 1,121 in 2011 to 2,024 in 2020, an 80.6% increase (Anti-Defamation League [ADL], 2022). In 2019, the ADL tabulated 2,107 antisemitic incidents, a 12% increase from the 1,879 incidents recorded in 2018. This increase marked the highest number on record since ADL began tracking these incidents (ADL, 2020).

There is limited research on the effectiveness of interfaith programs to counter intolerance. Scholars have examined what causes individuals to become intolerant and the potential of dialogue, especially interfaith dialogue, as a policy tool to counter intolerance. However, the research has not focused on or provided deep insight into the perceptions and perspectives of

how interfaith programs and initiatives have influenced youth participants to reject intolerance. In their studies, Halafoff (2011) only interviewed multifaith relations experts, and Miller (2018) only interviewed adult community leaders. Halafoff (2013) analyzed data from interviews and focus groups, but only 11% of the participants were youth. In studying the generational trends between youth and adults regarding tolerance and intolerance, Janmaat and Keating (2019) pointed out a gap in academic studies that required a more in-depth analysis of these trends. Miller (2018) and Halafoff (2011) identified a gap in the effectiveness of interfaith programs due to the lack of outreach to minority religious communities. Scholars emphasized the importance of developing freedom of conscience to reject misinformation and intolerance as a core value in youth (Janmaat & Keating, 2019; Slatinek, 2015; van der Walt, 2016). However, studies examining if this approach was successful in steering youth away from intolerance are scarce, not allowing for an in-depth analysis of the impact of these programs' long-term effects on the participants' levels of intolerance.

This paper is based on the author's doctoral dissertation. The research question for the author's dissertation was, "What are the perceptions of youth interfaith program alumni about the effectiveness of the programs in countering religious intolerance?" (Barnas, 2022). This question addressed the long-term effects of interfaith programs by focusing on the effectiveness of the programs in countering religious intolerance with the youth interfaith program alumni. The versatility of the phenomenological research design and the lack of examination of the perceptions of youth participants led this researcher to choose a phenomenological interview-based qualitative research methodology. The research examined the perceptions of alumni of interfaith youth programs of the programs' contribution to countering intolerance. Leedy and Ormrod (2015) noted that a phenomenological study "attempts to understand people's perceptions and perspectives relative to a particular situation" (p. 255). Leedy and Ormrod further pointed out that examining multiple perspectives of the same situation can allow the researcher to "make some generalizations of *what something is like* from an insider's perspective" (p. 255).

The doctoral study examined how the programs impacted participants' attitudes toward other religions and empowered participants to engage in actions to counter religious intolerance (Barnas, 2022). Turning the focus on youth alumni of these interfaith youth programs indicates the programs resulted in the alumni gaining a sense of confidence from the knowledge learned about other religions. This sense of confidence shaped their attitudes, empowering them to be engaged in actions to counter religious intolerance in their communities and workplaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last several decades, scholars have studied the root causes of intolerance. Their examination included the role of interfaith dialogue in countering discrimination through a sampling of interfaith programs in the United States and internationally. This representative sampling revealed gaps in the scholarship in not examining or inadequately examining the role of interfaith youth programs in countering religious intolerance.

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Root Causes of Religious Intolerance

Scholars have offered various definitions of tolerance, specifically religious tolerance and intolerance. Mala (2016) defined *religious tolerance* as "the disposition or willingness of religious adherents to tolerate or allow religious views, opinions, ideas, or practices other than their own" (p. 63) and *religious intolerance* as "the unwillingness or refusal to accord respect to a religious faith, its adherents, leaders, teachings, books, and practices" (p. 64). *Religious intolerance* has also been defined as "negative judgments, both in the form of attitudes and actions, towards certain individuals and groups for reasons of their religious background" (Hidayat et al., 2020, p. 2218). Potgieter et al. (2014) noted the complexity of the concept of intolerance by describing intolerance as "a psychologically interesting phenomenon because it is symptomatic of insecurity and fear" (p. 2). To better understand these symptoms, scholars have examined the root causes that define whether a person is religiously tolerant or intolerant toward others of different religious beliefs. Scholars (Halder, 2017; Potgieter, 2015; van der Walt, 2016) examined root causes for how youth were influenced to be religiously tolerant or intolerant through education and the influence of significant people in their lives such as parents, friends, older acquaintances, mentors, and teachers.

Van der Walt (2016) posited that the road to religious intolerance resulted from education gone wrong through indoctrination. He described indoctrination as depriving youth of free choice by closing their minds to other paths in life, focusing on a single viewpoint, and making dialogue challenging to achieve. The resulting destructive and anti-social attitudes, behaviors, and actions went beyond just affecting the religious views of youth, impacting their other functions and interactions as human beings. Halder (2017) noted the key influence family members had in forming an individual's values early on. Potgieter (2015) emphasized the importance of educational safe spaces to develop life skills for religious respect and hospitality to counter religious intolerance. The conclusions van der Walt (2016) reached on how failed education or indoctrination could cause youth to become religiously intolerant due to narrow-mindedness were addressed in a more general context by Lester and Roberts (2006). Lester and Roberts discussed a lack of active engagement in not "standing up for a beleaguered minority or recognizing religious diversity" (p. 339) as an indirect cause of religious intolerance. They concluded that a lack of active engagement could cause religious minorities to feel alienated or insecure, with dominant religious groups only passively supporting the rights and liberties of minority religious groups.

Other scholars studied the causes of the conflict leading to religious intolerance between those holding fundamentalist beliefs and those embracing a more diverse or pluralistic stance. Gross (1996) attributed this intra-religious intolerance to an emotional and psychological immaturity, where fundamentalist believers saw the diversity of religion as a threat to the community. This intolerance was due to their lack of adequate self-esteem, flexibility, and openness, resulting in a fundamentalist religious intolerance of the more diverse religious groups. Doebler (2013, 2015) examined this intolerant fundamentalist mindset through an analysis of data from a European values study of 47 European countries regarding religious intolerance of fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist faith groups toward Muslims in non-Muslim majority countries. Doebler found a

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robust positive relationship between religious and racial discrimination in fundamentalist believers. In contrast, non-fundamentalist religious believers, whether in traditional or modern congregations, were more tolerant of different beliefs. Van Tongeren et al. (2016) further developed this type of religious intolerance by studying its opposite aspect: intolerance of close-minded, more fundamentalist individuals exhibited by more open-minded religious individuals.

Van Tongeren et al. described quest religious individuals as valuing open-mindedness, openness to change, and comfort with doubt in religious matters, possibly accounting for their intolerance of more traditional and fundamentalist religious groups. A more recent cause of religious intolerance noted by scholars is New Atheists' activities. Powell and Clarke (2013) discussed this new source of religious intolerance as stemming from atheists who blamed religion for the injustices of history and the current conflicts and difficulties in the world.

In summary, scholars cited macro root causes for religious intolerance, including religious, psychological, political, economic, educational, social, and cultural factors. They also provided more specific reasons, such as youth being indoctrinated into intolerance due to narrow-minded educational systems and negative influences of family and acquaintances, lack of active engagement to protect religious minorities, the conflict between religious fundamentalists and those more diverse and pluralistic in their religious beliefs, and New Atheists blaming religion for the ills of the past and present.

Interfaith Dialogue

Ahmed (2018) proposed a three-step process for interfaith dialogue: dialogue, understanding, and friendship. By building harmony among the different religious traditions by concentrating on their commonalities, Ahmed concluded that through collaboration and coexistence, bridges could be built. Such interfaith dialogue involving communication and exchange could be conducted at all levels, with those of different faith traditions or even with those of no faith belief. The dialogue involved open-mindedness and the willingness to exchange views with those of another faith belief to increase mutual knowledge leading to better understanding.

Ahmed's (2018) second step, understanding, involved creatively interacting with others in joint activities to further enhance knowledge about the other by building upon the similarities between the different faith beliefs. Ahmed's third step, friendship, might not always be possible, but it could provide a convincing example: members of other religions need not conflict. Ahmed observed that interfaith dialogue on a personal level, beginning with the initial contact, followed by an energized and continuous effort to better learn about and understand others, could result in a more effective friendship with a maximum impact than dialogue and association at official levels.

Interfaith programs have utilized dialogue and community involvement to capitalize on the commonalities Ahmed (2018) discussed to achieve harmony rather than intolerance. These initiatives have included youth-specific programs and those involving adults and youth in the United States and internationally. Scholars have studied the successes and shortcomings of the role interfaith dialogue has played in countering intolerance.

The Practice of Interfaith Programs in the United States and Internationally

A listing of interfaith programs (Appendix A) was compiled through a Google search to develop a representation of the variety of interfaith efforts and programs available in the United States and internationally. The historical evolution in the growth of these programs has varied over the decades. The oldest international organization listed, the World Student Christian Federation, founded in 1895 in Sweden by the North American evangelist John Mott and Karl Fries of Sweden, began with representatives from 10 countries but is now active in over 90 countries (World Student Christian Federation, 2022). In the United States, the oldest organization listed, the Interfaith Council of Greater Sacramento, was founded in 1911 as the Sacramento Federation of Churches (Interfaith Council of Greater Sacramento, 2021). A Google search revealed only a few organizations were established later in the 20th century (1970s and 1980s), the middle to later period of the Cold War. The 1990s, the decade after the end of the Cold War, saw the establishment of 11 interfaith programs. The decade that saw the most program initiations was the first decade of the 21st century, with the 2000s accounting for 16 interfaith program starts. Several organizations founded during this decade cited the events of September 11, 2001, as catalysts for their formation to combat intolerance and religious discrimination, explaining some of the reasons for this surge in new interfaith activity. The 2010s accounted for 11 new interfaith organizations, demonstrating continued growth in the post–Cold War period from the 1990s to the present.

The programs listed in Appendix A shared a mission of promoting tolerance, understanding, respect, and support among people of different faiths, or no faith, through dialogue, education, and service in their communities. The common theme prevalent through their vision and mission statements was to promote religious freedom and counter religious bigotry by employing the positive role of religion as a healing force for social justice and equality. The organizations listed varied in their target participants; about half of the programs centered around adult participants and activities. About a third of the listed programs involved youth, usually middle- and high-school students, with some explicitly targeting college and university students. The Interfaith Partnership of St. Louis took a different approach by focusing on pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students through its Sprouts of Peace program, believing that no age is too early to begin building friendships and understanding (Sprouts of Peace, 2022). Programs concentrating on youth and adult interfaith activity accounted for about a quarter of the programs listed.

Interfaith Youth Programs Countering Religious Intolerance

By examining the existing scholarship, this researcher concluded that the current scholarship inadequately examined the role of interfaith youth programs in countering religious intolerance, leaving gaps that needed to be addressed. Todd (2012) studied programs that focused on just one annual event rather than on programs that involved the youth in activities throughout the year. Halafoff (2011, 2013) captured the perceptions of adult interfaith experts and faith-based actors through focus groups and interviews but did not examine the specific programs or the source participants, the youth themselves. Others (Doebler, 2013; Janmaat & Keating, 2019) studied databases but not specific programs or student participants. Scholars (Hidayat et al., 2020; Khan

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et al., 2017) employed descriptive statistics and mixed-method studies of surveys and interviews to assess social factors associated with religious intolerance and the aspects of the influence of family and adult school and religious leaders but did not look at the specific programs. The research focus needed to be on the actual participants; otherwise, the research misses the mark, not capturing the perceptions of those in the line of fire (the youth participants) and failing to garner an objective evaluation of the youth programs effects measured over time. As previously stated, Hidayat et al. (2020) defined religious intolerance as "negative judgments, both in the form of attitudes and actions, toward certain individuals and groups for reasons of their religious background" (p. 2218). Scholars may learn how to reduce religious intolerance by studying interfaith youth programs.

Barnas's (2022) doctoral study mitigated the limitation of previous scholarship in studying the impacts of interfaith youth programs on intolerance. This was accomplished by analyzing programs' effectiveness in countering participants' religious intolerance by focusing on how specific interfaith programs impacted the elements of the attitudes and actions in Hidayat et al.'s definition of religious intolerance. The impact of the attitude element involved how the participants' beliefs were affected and modified regarding different religions. In contrast, the action element involved another level of influence: What change resulted in program participants' actions due to the effects on their beliefs because of their program participation? The author accomplished this analysis through a qualitative study utilizing interviews with alumni from interfaith youth programs who had completed the program several years before, had been in the workforce, or who were in or had completed college. With the advantage of time and life experiences, these alumni could now be in a better position to more objectively evaluate how the program had or had not assisted them in addressing and countering religious intolerance.

METHODOLOGY

The doctoral study that this paper is based on utilized non-probability purposive and snowball sampling by focusing only on the youth alumni of specific interfaith youth programs to assess their perceptions of the effectiveness of the programs in countering intolerance (Barnas, 2022). Including only alumni of the program rather than current high-school-aged participants reduced inherent positive bias for the programs' effectiveness that individuals might exhibit due to feelings of origination or ownership, as discussed by Krosnick (1999). Targeting alumni with post-program experiences of college and participation in the workplace provided a more balanced, objective, and richer measure of the perceptions of program effectiveness in countering intolerance.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were utilized for this phenomenological study to examine the question of interfaith programs countering intolerance. Seven interviews were conducted in January and February of 2022. Five interviewees were alumni from the Interfaith Philadelphia Walking the Walk (WTW) Youth Initiative, and two were from the Garden State Mobilizing Our Students for Action to Build Interfaith Community (MOSAIC) program in New Jersey. Although

this researcher was aiming for a more sizable number of study participants, the final number of seven yielded fruitful data for analysis. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 29 years. Two were currently pursuing PhDs, one was in veterinary graduate school, two had earned their undergraduate degrees, and two were presently undergraduate students. Those in post-graduate school had varied work experiences, which included medical research and mentoring and interning with youth programs.

Problems with obtaining participants for the study resulted in a smaller sample than this researcher had desired are detailed below. This smaller sample was due to such factors as the inaccuracy of email contact information for the alumni and some alumni initially agreeing to participate but later backing out. The participants' various life experiences and education compensated for the limitations of the smaller sample.

The process for identifying program alumni participants for the interviews began with contacting the staff of several interfaith youth programs and searching through materials on the program websites. For example, in the case of the Interfaith Philadelphia WTW Youth Initiative program, the director of institutional advancement assisted by placing invitations in the Interfaith Philadelphia newsletter, soliciting alumni participants. The researcher followed this with an initial scrub of the testimonials, video clips, and annual reports on the Interfaith Philadelphia website, which provided 31 potential alumni, most of whom were identified with their first names or first and the first initial of their last names.

A search on Facebook and LinkedIn yielded 17 individuals that were dependable matches to the program alumni. The other 14 could not be verified as the actual program alumni (search results providing too many hits or results were inconclusive for some names). The researcher messaged 17 probable individuals via social media, with only six responding via LinkedIn and none on Facebook. These six agreed to be interviewed for the study. The director of institutional advancement at Interfaith Philadelphia again assisted by contacting three other alumni who agreed to be interviewed. In addition, one of the alumni respondents posted study information on the WTW alumni Facebook page, illustrating the use of the snowballing technique. However, although nine alumni initially agreed to be interviewed, only five were. The researcher could not make contact with three of the other four to schedule interviews, despite multiple follow-up attempts. The fourth individual responded but could not participate due to extensive work commitments.

The interview guide (Appendix B) is divided into three main sections. The first section provides demographic data about the interviewees, details of how the program was conducted when they participated in it, the demographics of their fellow program participants, and that of the adult leaders in the program. The second section details the program's impact on participants' attitudes about other religions by analyzing participants' perceptions of other religions before, during, and after completing the program and their perceptions of their fellow alumni during and after the program. The third section outlines the impact of the program activities on participants in empowering them to engage in actions to counter religious intolerance. The interviews examined the role of program activities by asking about participants' current attitudes toward other religions and movements in the community to promote religious tolerance since completing the

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program. Last, the interview concluded with questions allowing the interviewees to provide recommendations for improvements to the programs and any final thoughts.

Data Coding and Analysis

The interviews were conducted online via Zoom and were transcribed using Otter.ai transcription software, with notes taken by the researcher during the discussions, each lasting 45 minutes to an hour. The researcher then listened to the recording to clarify parts of the recordings incorrectly transcribed by the transcription software. The printed transcripts were then read several times to begin manual coding, identify general themes, and identify connections to the scholarship discussed in the literature review. The researcher followed this preliminary analysis with a more formalized process using qualitative data analysis software.

The researcher used Quirkos 2.4.1 software for the detailed coding and analysis to organize the program's demographic information, select significant statements, and begin the complex coding process. The significant statements were coded, and similar codes were grouped under categories that were then assigned under the anchor codes (Adu, 2013) that corresponded to the program demographic information and the research and subsidiary questions (detailed in Table 2). Evaluation coding was used in combination with in vivo coding to assess the perception of the alumni of the interfaith youth programs as to the program's effectiveness in countering religious intolerance: Table 1 details the categories and the frequency of the codes. Interviewees noted building a sense of confidence as a critical element in the overall effectiveness of the programs, connecting and communicating with others as crucial elements in the impact on their attitudes toward other religions, and team building and community service projects as key in empowering them to counter intolerance.

Table 1.   Frequency of Codes and Categories

Anchor codes	Category	Codes	Code Frequency
Demographics	Program	Attendee numbers	6
		Attendee gender	7
		Attendee religion	15
		Leadership roles	9
		Meeting frequency/format	38
		Attendee race	16
		Adult leaders	10
RQ: Effectiveness	Current perceptions	Building tolerance	14
		Sense of confidence	18
		Current actions to promote tolerance	35
	Future vision	Recommendations for improvement	16
SQ1: impact on attitudes toward religions	Baseline attitudes	Attitude about religion before the program	19
	Knowledge gained	Welcoming/immersive environment	4
		Learn about other religions	11
		Similarities among religions	9
		Similar experiences	3
		Learn about own religion	7
	Shaping attitudes	Learn from peers	5
		Connect/communicate with others	13
		Alone in identity/misconceptions	2
	Current attitudes	Current attitudes regarding other religions	22
SQ2: empower to counter intolerance	Experience	Intolerance incidents	31
	Tools/techniques to empower	Educate for justice	5
		Build empathy	6
		Open mind	7
	Community	Part of solution	3
		Team building/community	12
		Community service projects	15
		Bystander intervention	5
Total	10	29	363

FINDINGS

Analysis of the interview data revealed themes that supported the research and subsidiary questions. Each of the interviews offered a unique perception and perspective. The backgrounds of all participants varied concerning the depth of their religious faith, the role that religious faith played in their lives, their knowledge of other religions, the diversity of their environments, and the amount of religious tolerance they experienced. Six themes emerged from the analysis and subsidiary questions. Table 2 summarizes the emergent themes derived from the interview data as aligned to the research and subsidiary questions.

Table 2.   Themes Aligned With Research and Subsidiary Questions

Research/Subsidiary Question	Theme
RQ: What are the perceptions of youth interfaith program alumni about the effectiveness of the programs in countering religious intolerance?	1. Sense of confidence 2. Vision for the future
SQ1: From the perspectives of program alumni, how does the program impact participants' attitudes toward other religions?	3. Knowledge gained 4. Shaping attitudes
SQ2: From the perspectives of program alumni, how does the program empower participants to engage in actions to counter religious intolerance?	5. Empowerment 6. Community

Overall Impacts of Interfaith Programs

The study yielded two findings concerning the research question of the overall impact of the interfaith programs: alumni derived a sense of confidence from their participation and their **vision for the future** resulted in their engaging in proactive actions to counter religious intolerance.

Sense of Confidence. Participants recognized that the programs gave them the confidence to approach members of other faiths. Some reflected how coming from environments where they were in the minority, religiously or ethnically, caused them to withdraw into themselves. Participants recollected that when they were attending public school they were not encouraged to talk about their religion or religion at all. Those attending religious schools mostly had little or no exposure to or discussion of other faiths. These factors made many participants reluctant to engage in any significant dialogue about religion outside of their family or religious circles. Building a sense of belonging and trust was emphasized by scholars (Halafoff, 2011; Miller, 2018; Todd, 2012). Participants of the interfaith programs commented that the programs gave them a sense of belonging by giving them the confidence to ask others how they practiced their faith. Some felt that the programs provided a safe space for participants to share their

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experiences of intolerance, allowing them the chance for a cathartic release. Others said the interfaith programs gave them the strength to start a conversation with others who acted intolerantly due to having false assumptions about other religions.

The programs made participants more culturally and religiously aware of how people related to their faith and the different needs that people might have, enabling participants to appreciate other people's diversity better. A byproduct of participating in the programs went further than just improving religious tolerance, leading many participants to engage in efforts beyond interfaith work. Several participants mentioned their interest in social justice, reinforced by their experiences in interfaith programs. One said it encouraged her to expand her passion for social justice to co-found an organization for social justice. Another remarked that her interfaith program involvement was a good steppingstone in realizing how religious intolerance was interwoven with other forms of intolerance, making it a complicated problem to solve and encouraging her to bring healing and understanding to all sorts of people.

Vision for the Future. Some called for the programs to be more adaptable to changing circumstances, such as the in-person restrictions experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting being more creative with hybrid programs that could deliver an immersive virtual experience. Others called for a better presentation and discussion of how religious, racial, gender, and sexuality issues are often interwoven to bring a better realization that religious discrimination is not the only form of discrimination.

Some participants advocated for more time for team-building and community-building activities that might be more engaging and impactful for the student participants. One participant had tried to extend an offshoot initiative, Teens for Intolerance, from her interfaith program into a club or after-school program at her high school. The school did not approve of the effort because of fears by school administrators that it was an effort to preach religion. The teens championing this effort aimed to achieve a better understanding and tolerance among the students rather than proselytization.

Impacts on Attitudes

Two findings emerged regarding the first subsidiary question, the interfaith programs' impact on the attitudes of the alumni regarding other religions: knowledge gained and shaping attitudes. The knowledge gained about other religions shaped the program participants' attitudes regarding other faiths, empowering them to work to counter religious intolerance.

Knowledge Gained. Participants recollected different motives for students participating in interfaith programs. Inquisitiveness, concern for the community, desire for self-discovery, varying degrees of prior awareness and knowledge of religions, involvement with other religions, and interest in social justice were among the reasons participants were drawn to interfaith activity. One participant reflected on having little religious education or dialogue during her public school education, now calling it a missed opportunity. She was unaware of the wealth of different cultures surrounding her. Still, she acknowledged that the interfaith program experience made her more aware and appreciative of that wealth she had not been paying attention to. This

new awareness included the realization of how much beauty was in religion. Some participants related that their lack of knowledge before entering interfaith programs was due to not being encouraged to talk about religion for fear of such conversations being perceived as offensive. The interfaith programs gave participants a better understanding of how and why religion fits into society and everyday life.

Participants commented on the value of the welcoming attitude some congregations demonstrated to the interfaith youth who visited them routinely, resulting in a more immersive and rewarding experience. Participants recollected the benefit of different religious leaders sitting down with them at the interfaith sessions, telling them their stories, and broadening their knowledge and understanding of their faiths and their practices. This sharing helped the participants recognize similarities among different religions they had no concept before joining the programs. The realization of similarities went beyond their rituals and practices by showing the participants religious similarities in core values.

Besides the similarities in religions being an exciting feature of the programs, participants explained they experienced more of a desire to learn by hearing from other participants who might have had similar life experiences but from their religious perspectives. Participants felt that learning how their peers experienced their religions in their daily lives was very powerful. Participants observed that they experienced self-discovery with a better understanding of and knowledge of their faith through the program. They noted that by talking to others to teach them about their religion, they learned more about their own in addition to the other person's religion.

Shaping Attitudes. Participants emphasized that their peers were instrumental in this learning process in shaping their attitudes toward other religions. They valued hearing from other students in their programs who were the same or near their age. The participants found they shared many of the same life experiences and problems with religion and outside of religion. The participants appreciated the more structured faith presentations. Still, they expressed the value of learning from their peers over the more formal school setting, commenting how the peer experience made it feel more real. The peer experience helped them to develop connections and friendships that improved communication and solve any hurtful comments that occurred by working through them as a group.

The change in attitude toward others because of the program inspired participants to seek different experiences and cultures. Some participants expressed the desire to work with people who were different—now and in the future— by incorporating their values, experiences, and backgrounds into their future life decisions. Participants talked about their program experiences, increasing their mutual respect for others by enabling them to be more comfortable talking to people of other faiths and seeing things from different perspectives while explaining their religious background. This increased comfort also relieved the isolation they felt due to misconceptions about other religions. This mutual respect led participants to display a more considerate attitude, enabling them to hear other people's experiences and respect their different religious and cultural traditions.

Participants recollected how the new respectful attitude toward different religions and cultures made them more excited and eager to talk to people and learn more about them. They commented that everyone had a story to share and that there was much value in many different religious experiences and the breadth of knowledge people could learn from those experiences. The longer-term effects on participants' attitudes included greater trust in college, with participants feeling more approachable because of their better knowledge of other religions. Participants learned skills to better combat fearmongering, such as Islamophobic rhetoric, that fed religious and cultural intolerance. The most striking example of shaping attitudes was one participant's belief that her decision to pursue her college degree in conflict analysis and resolution was due to the influence of the interfaith program.

Impacts on Actions

Two findings emerged regarding the second subsidiary question: empowerment and community and the program's impact on empowering participants to engage in actions to counter religious intolerance. The empowerment realized through the community service facet of interfaith youth programs combined with the enhanced awareness of the needs of others in their communities empowered the alumni to engage in action to counter religious and other forms of intolerance.

Empowerment. Many of the participants felt that the programs empowered them to engage in actions to counter religious intolerance, including discrimination experienced by themselves, family members, or others in their community. Some participants acknowledged not experiencing intolerance directly but recounted various levels of prejudice others experienced or related to them, which they eventually recognized as microaggressions. These lower-intensity incidents built over time, resulting in various levels of fear, anxiety, and wide-ranging reactions. One participant related that microaggressions and an incident directed at a family member resulted in her family's positive, passionate response to educate for justice rather than to fight for justice. They chose to listen and learn from others with compassion, leading to educating others about themselves. This participant concluded that she and her family's experiences built empathy for others facing religious and other forms of intolerance. This empathy grew out of their trauma from such incidents. The empathy for others extended beyond meeting and interacting with people of different religions to people of different races and cultures.

The empathy participants described positively affected them, empowering them to engage in actions to counter intolerance by keeping an open mind. Participants echoed the educating for justice theme through their recollections of listening to other students sharing their experiences at program sessions, which widened their perspectives through the different lived experiences of the other students. The participants recounted that the program experiences empowered them to better interact with the diverse environment at college and beyond, realizing that despite this diverse group of people, they could all coexist by valuing each other's differences. This empowering thought process led to engaging in actions and initiatives to counter intolerance. One participant co-founded an organization for racial justice, primarily for Black and Brown people. Other participants noted how the interfaith programs empowered students to act against religious intolerance by recognizing when a hate crime or any bias was taking place,

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empowering students to be encouraged to stand up and talk to school principals about such incidents. This empowerment helped to ensure the offenders understood why their actions were wrong, again emphasizing the educate for justice theme.

Community. Participants wanted to be part of the solution and be of service, even if they had not been victims of intolerance. Program participants were empowered toward action to help their community to be more tolerant through team-building efforts during the program sessions, participation in community service projects, and such tools as bystander intervention. One participant commented that community building was the most essential part of her program because she thought that was necessary to counter or eradicate hate, misunderstanding, or intolerance. Participants talked about their programs' two-fold goals: learning about others and religious tolerance and giving back to the community. Participants described doing something together to help others, doing the best for others, and wanting to give back and to do good to others.

A group leader in one of the programs explained how he used the examples from his work with the program when talking to family members or neighbors who were not very religious or were antipathetic toward religion. He used examples of the charitable good works and community building accomplished by the program participants to illustrate the positive impact religion and interfaith activity could have on the betterment of the community. An example of this was a community gardens project undertaken by the program participants. Community gardens reduce violence by bringing a sense of safety to the residents. In addition, the project provided a needed source of fresh food to the depressed community.

Team-building exercises using role-playing and other techniques conducted at the program sessions prepared participants to engage positively to counter intolerance. Bystander intervention was one exercise that the participants were very receptive to. The participants appreciated these skills because they observed that it was difficult for them in high school when they saw things they disagreed with and did not know how to intervene. Exercising bystander intervention skills provided a safe space to practice and learn these skills, enabling the students to better act to defuse such situations, peacefully countering intolerance.

The resultant study findings indicated significantly improved tolerance levels in the program participants, demonstrated by concrete examples of their proactive actions in working to counter intolerance in their college years and communities. Their "empowerment to action" gained from their participation in interfaith youth programs enabled them to be agents of change in their communities, such as working with a Zones of Peace program to recognize and nurture organizations committed to reducing violence in their communities.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implications for Policy

The four policy recommendations are outlined as follows and detailed in the subsequent text:

1. Include comparative religion courses in middle and high schools.
2. Teach effective dialogue and critical thinking skills that emphasize an understanding and appreciation of different religious beliefs in communities, schools, and governmental agencies.
3. Promote religious equality by inviting smaller religious communities to join larger communities in shared projects.
4. Adopt a conflict prevention approach, rather than a conflict resolution approach, at the local, state, and federal levels.

The perceptions and experiences of the alumni participants in this study suggest policy recommendations to maximize youth empowerment to counter religious intolerance and extend this empowerment to other facets of the community and society. In education, many participants recounted limited knowledge of other religions in their school experience before entering interfaith youth programs. The participants commented that their schools did not emphasize making tolerance of other religions a core value. Still, that core value was instilled in them by their interfaith youth program experience. These feelings expressed by the alumni mirror the observations of scholars (Janmaat & Keating, 2019; Potgieter, 2015; van der Walt, 2016; Yusuf et al., 2020), recommending improving students' knowledge of other religions and their reasoning skills by increasing their understanding and tolerance of other religions. Formal education resources could be better utilized through the first policy recommendation: to include comparative religion courses in middle and high schools for students to gain more knowledge about the beliefs, traditions, rituals, and practices of different religions. Such objective, nonjudgmental courses increase understanding and appreciation of world religions and could alleviate prejudices that feed discrimination and intolerance.

Scholars have noted that effective dialogue and critical thinking skills can improve understanding and appreciation of differences among people (Benson, 2016; Mala, 2016; Slatinek, 2015; Van Tongeren et al., 2016). More inclusive use of these skills in communities, schools, and governmental agencies has the potential to instill a better understanding of different religions at all levels of society. The second policy recommendation concerns adopting a philosophy of effective dialogue and critical thinking skills that would emphasize the achievement of a better understanding and appreciation of different religious beliefs without trying to convert anyone to a particular religious belief. Discussion of religious issues in the context of real-life experiences could facilitate this recommendation by creating an atmosphere of mutual respect, enabling individuals to respond better to meet life-threatening challenges stemming from religious misconceptions and misinformation. Such an approach would require patience but could effectively achieve some of the positive results interfaith programs have accomplished in the public and private sectors.

Hidayat et al. (2020) found that larger religious communities can influence society's attitudes toward members of minority religious communities. The third policy recommendation stems from the example of the interfaith youth programs giving equal stances to all the religions and social statuses of its participants in their sessions and various community service projects. Local communities are the first to experience the negative impacts of bias and religious intolerance in their communities, resulting in the least mistrust and hatred among different religious groups and, at the worst, violent incidents and attacks on individuals of other religions. Deeper engagement at the local level with all the community stakeholders, together with the critical thinking and dialogue skills mentioned above, might reap some of the benefits that interfaith programs have achieved in countering intolerance.

Alumni of the interfaith programs noted issues of politics entwined with religion, sometimes feeding religious intolerance and leaving the alumni frustrated. The fourth policy recommendation involves government actions at the federal and state levels that could contribute to countering the root causes of religious intolerance. These policies might include promoting economic reforms to reduce income inequalities that indirectly feed religious intolerance (Yusuf et al., 2020) and enacting more effective legislation to counter religious intolerance by prosecuting perpetrators of religious bias and discrimination incidents. This policy recommendation includes governments taking a more proactive approach to counter religious intolerance by adopting a conflict prevention approach rather than a conflict resolution approach (Salawu, 2010).

Implications for Practice

The four practice recommendations are outlined as follows and detailed in the subsequent text:

1. Create middle- and high-school courses on religious and ethnic ethics, coupled with community service.
2. Establish a partnership between communities and religious houses of worship.
3. Increase understanding of the needs of others by reaching out to more diverse faiths and cultures
4. Incorporate interfaith topics into middle and high school assembly programs to counter religious intolerance.

The results of this study also suggest the following initiatives for future practice. The first would be to harvest the successes of interfaith programs in promoting better knowledge and understanding through their program sessions and community service activities. Harvesting these successes could be accomplished by establishing courses in middle and high schools on religious and ethnic ethics, coupled with community service to expose students to different cultural perspectives. The classes could focus on the betterment of the community through knowledge sharing and conversation to better all community members but not favor or indoctrinate students into a particular faith or tradition. The second involves having faith houses of worship partner with communities to replicate the interfaith youth program model to generate more cordial relations between different religions and ethnic groups. The third practice is reaching out to more diverse faiths and cultures, such as African American, Hispanic, and Native American groups,

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that some interfaith programs have not succeeded in the past. Such efforts could increase understanding of the needs of others and other religious faiths and traditions by reducing the marginalization of these groups. An excellent example of such an effort was a session MOSAIC conducted in February 2021 on systemic racism featuring four African American high school and college students regarding their experiences of racism.

The fourth involves establishing interfaith-type clubs or incorporating interfaith topics into school assembly programs in middle and high schools to counter religious intolerance. This effort would be like an early MOSAIC program project, Teens Against Intolerance, through which students participated in various community events to promote understanding of different faiths by dispelling stereotypes and false presuppositions about other faiths and traditions. To be successful, school officials must understand that the effort was rooted in tolerance, acceptance, and cooperation, not in preaching religion. Such actions would address a deficiency van der Walt (2016) noted in educational systems by providing a more positive educational experience that would help students develop a freedom of conscience to choose tolerance over intolerance. The final recommendation concerning expanding interfaith youth programs beyond their more traditional goals of interfaith understanding and community service might be a more controversial initiative. This program expansion would require a cautious, well-thought-out approach led by individuals trained in sophisticated civil discourse, conflict analysis, and resolution skills. Such an initiative could reinforce what Potgieter (2015) called the two-fold purpose of education: forming the character of youth and bringing them to maturity by equipping them to incorporate themselves into society successfully. This effort would need to be approached with caution and vigilance to provide a balanced framework that values, guards, and fosters the equal rights of all the individuals in such programs.

Future Research

As the dynamics of communities develop and mature, guaranteeing a future atmosphere of tolerance to adapt to changing ethnic and culturally diverse aspects will bring new challenges in dealing effectively with the complex, dynamic nature of prejudice and intolerance. Several avenues of future research on the utility of interfaith youth dialogue programs in countering intolerance are possible. The first recommendation is to conduct a quantitative pre-post-program study. This study would survey participants at the beginning of the program year to assess their existing knowledge of other religions, their views of and experience with intolerance, and their history of any actions taken to counter intolerance. A similar survey at the end of the year would assess changes in their attitudes and actions after completing the program. This effort would be a short-term pre-post-program study. A longer-term qualitative longitudinal study conducted with participants who continue as student group leaders could assess how their perceptions change over subsequent years of service in the program. In addition to the student participants and student group leaders, including religious leaders, parents of participants, and other facilitators of the programs could provide a more robust comparative study of the perceptions and perspectives of these different stakeholders.

For the 2020-2021 program year, the MOSAIC program adopted a theme of racial justice and pursued two racial justice projects. The second recommendation is for a study comparing interfaith programs that expand their horizons (as MOSAIC did) to those who just kept to their more traditional goals of understanding other religions and working in community service. Such a study could provide insight into the programs' comparative effectiveness and impact by considering their relevance in dealing with current issues. The third recommendation is for a study comparing interfaith youth programs to non-interfaith programs in countering intolerance. Comparing this study to previous studies, such as Todd et al.'s (2017) study of eighty-one interfaith groups that dealt with religious, social, and religious and social issues, would provide deeper insight and expansion of the previous research.

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS, EXPECTED/UNEXPECTED FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSION

The seven youth program alumni were very forthcoming with the pros and cons of their recollections and perceptions of their time in the programs, providing details of their attitudes toward other religions and intolerance before, during, and after participation in the programs. The alumni offered concrete examples of their actions and those of their peers to counter religious discrimination. Although this study supported some of the trends found in previous research, the data revealed unexpected findings.

Before entering the programs, some participants already possessed varying levels of a tolerant attitude. It was not surprising to have a tolerant attitude already existing due to their family and religious beliefs or because they were already interested in social justice. However, the degree to which some attributed their existing tolerance to experiencing intolerance themselves or witnessing family members' or acquaintances' experiences of intolerance was not evident in the research scholarship. That was an unexpected finding. The pre-program attitudes about other religions and why they entered the program were another mix of the expected and unexpected areas. Some alumni voiced reasons for joining due to their religious leaders inviting them into the programs, some cited inquisitiveness as a leading factor, and some joined to fulfill community service credits required by their schools. However, the unexpected finding was how many attributed their lack of awareness and knowledge of other religions to being sheltered in their community with little or no exposure to other religions.

In today's world of much media exposure, especially on social media, the isolation regarding other religions was surprising and another unexpected finding. The intolerance of religious leaders and the political implications entwined in religious matters offered some unexpected results. While the tolerance or intolerance of religious leaders will vary, just as with any other group or profession, a surprising finding was how the perception of the intolerance of some religious leaders affected one alumni participant who turned to agnosticism because of this perceived intolerance. That revelation was unexpected, as most alumni and the scholarship praised the value religious leaders contributed to the programs. Some participants recounted misgivings regarding religion when it became entwined with politics. An unexpected finding was related to the parents of one alumnus who became minimalistic in practicing their faith because of the religious conflicts in Northern Ireland. This revelation was surprising, as the scholarship

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dealt with political-religious connections in macro terms, while this instance was a very particular, personal revelation.

Overall, it was enlightening to examine the development of the alumni's attitudes and actions before, during, and after their program participation and the programs' effectiveness in empowering them to engage in efforts to counter religious intolerance. They showed great enthusiasm, dedication, and hope for countering religious and other forms of intolerance in the future.

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APPENDIX A. LISTING OF INTERFAITH PROGRAMS

Program Name/website	Began	Location	Participants	Mission
African Students for Interfaith Tolerance http://www.asfitnetwork.org	2019	Ghana	High School students	To build sustainable peace, interfaith harmony, and development by empowering Africa's youth and engaging religious actors for sustainable development
Arizona Interfaith Movement http://www.interfaithmovement.com	1995	Arizona	Members of Interfaith Council and community leaders	To build bridges of understanding, respect, and support among diverse people of faith through education, dialogue, service, and implementation of the Golden Rule
Calgary Interfaith Council http://www.calgaryinterfaithcouncil.org	2014	Calgary, Canada	Clergy and lay leaders of religious institutions	To be the central address and voice of interfaith in Calgary
Dialogue for Life and Reconciliation http://www.dlroperationhope.org	2011	Lebanon	"Interreligious Academy" for Youth	To find common ground based on reconciliation and inter-religious dialogue and the dignity of being different and the need to promote it
Central Illinois Chapter of the Interfaith Alliance http://www.facebook.com/Interfaith.Alliance.Central.Illinois/	2001	Peoria, Illinois	Members of various religious faiths	To celebrate religious freedom by championing individual rights, promoting policies that protect both religion and democracy, and uniting diverse voices to challenge extremism
EquaSion (Equality, Spirituality, Inclusion) http://www.equasion.org	2016	Ohio	Youth and adults of all faith communities	To counter religious bigotry and promote inclusion of all groups
Faith Voices of Arkansas http://www.facebook.com/faithvoicesar/	---	Arkansas	Various faith groups across the state	To work on legislation at the state and federal levels for the progressive faith community
Garden State MOSAIC http://www.gardenstatemosaic.org	2013	Monmouth County, New Jersey	Middle and High School students	To promote tolerance and understanding through a multifaith educational and leadership program through interfaith dialogue and involvement in community projects
Interfaith Alliance http://www.interfaithalliance.org	1994	United States	Members across the U.S. from 75 faith traditions and those of no faith	To celebrate religious freedom by championing individual rights, promoting policies that protect both religion and democracy, and uniting diverse voices to challenge extremism
Interfaith Alliance of the Bluegrass http://www.facebook.com/The-Interfaith-Alliance-of-the-Bluegrass-TIABG-274166302692226/	---	Lexington, Kentucky	Various faith groups	To foster relationships among a diversity of religious traditions and organizations, to discover and celebrate shared values in mutual respect
Interfaith Alliance of Central California http://www.interfaithalliancecc.org/	1997	Central California	Various faith traditions and those of no faith tradition	To promote the positive role of religion as a healing and constructive force in public life by working toward protecting First Amendment rights and joining our voices

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Program Name/website	Began	Location	Participants	Mission
				with those whose civil rights are under threat
Interfaith Alliance of Colorado http://www.interfaithallianceco.org	1998	Colorado	Approximately 40 faith institutions	To promote justice, religious liberty, and interfaith understanding through building relationships to educate, advocate, and catalyze social change
Interfaith Alliance of Hawaii http://www.interfaithalliancehawaii.org/	2003	Hawaii	Various faith traditions as well as agnostics and atheists	To promote the healing role of religion in public life by encouraging dialogue, challenging extremism, and facilitating nonviolent community activism
Interfaith Alliance of Idaho http://www.facebook.com/tiaidaho/	1999	Idaho	Various faith groups	Dedicated to challenging religious extremism through promoting social justice and equality throughout the state
Interfaith Alliance of Iowa http://www.interfaithallianceiowa.org	1996	Iowa	Various faith traditions as well as agnostics and atheists	To empower Iowans of faith and goodwill to become actively involved and to be effective in the political process as the progressive voice of faith and goodwill across our state
Interfaith Alliance of Oklahoma http://www.tiaok.org/	---	Oklahoma	Various faith traditions as well as agnostics and atheists	To ensure that faith and freedom flourish so that individuals can worship freely or not worship at all, so they can embrace matters of personal conscience without fear of government intrusion, and so that all can live in a vibrant, healthy society
Interfaith Alliance of Pennsylvania http://www.facebook.com/pg/interfaithalliancepa/	---	Harrisburg, Pennsylvania	Various faith groups	A statewide grassroots network of people of faith and goodwill prepared to advocate for social justice and religious liberty, and to protest when religion is manipulated for political purposes or to oppress others
Interfaith Alliance of Rochester http://www.tiar.org	---	Rochester, New York	Various faith groups	To join the growing number of people of faith who are speaking to current public policy concerns.
Interfaith Center for Northeast Florida http://www.interfaithnefl.org	2012	Jacksonville, Florida	Youth and adults	To be the leader in building mutual understanding among diverse faiths in Northeast Florida
Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee http://www.interfaithconference.org	1970	Milwaukee, Wisconsin	Adult leaders and members of 22 faith groups	To uphold the dignity of every person and the solidarity of the human community
Interfaith Council of Greater Sacramento http://www.sacramentointerfaith.org	1911	Sacramento, California	Faith groups and congregations are contributing members	To engage the entire faith community to foster greater understanding and respect among people of different faiths
Interfaith Council of Southern Nevada http://www.interfaithsn.org	2005	Southern Nevada	-Youth (Camp Anytown – a summer youth program) -Adults (Interfaith	To promote understanding and respect among all people, traditions, cultures, philosophies, and communities

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Program Name/website	Began	Location	Participants	Mission
			forums and community discussion)	
Interfaith Partnership of Greater St. Louis http://www.interfaithstl.org/sprouts-of-peace	2015	St. Louis, Missouri	Pre-K through fifth-grade students and their parents	To build interfaith friendships and knowledge about other faiths
Interfaith Encounter Association http://www.interfaith-encounter.org	2001	Israel	Youth and adults	To build bridges among Jews, Muslims, Christians, and others, based on traditions and cultures without any political agendas in the Holy Land and the Middle East
Interfaith Peace Project http://www.interfaithpeaceproject.org	2006	California	Youth and adults	To provide education programs to develop and enhance appreciation of faith traditions of the world
Interfaith Philadelphia Walking the Walk Youth Initiative http://www.interfaithphiladelphia.org/walking-the-walkInterfaith	2004	Phila-delphia, Penn-sylvania	High School students	To break down walls that divide youth from people of other religious, cultural, and economic backgrounds
Interfaith Relations and Community Partnerships Dialogue Project http://www.imgh.org/ircp	2017	Houston, Texas	All faith groups in the Houston area	Houston's interfaith hub to connect faith communities and interfaith groups
Interfaith Youth and Young Adult Conversations http://www.arizonafaithnetwork.org/interfaith-youth-and-young-adult-conversations	2015	Arizona	Youth (14-22 years)	To educate and connect young leaders from diverse faiths across the state
Interfaith Youth Core http://www.ifyc.org	2002	United States	College and University students	Interfaith cooperation as part of the college experience
Islamic Society of Delaware http://www.isdonline.org/interfaith-advocacy	1992	Wilming-ton, Delaware	Members of diverse faith groups in the community	To promote dialogue with individuals and groups of diverse beliefs and practices, to develop positive relationships with our neighbors and community.
Islamic Society of North America http://www.isna.net/interfaith-relations/	2009 1996 2008 2007 2010	Plainfield, Indiana	Muslim and clergy and lay faith leaders	To connect Muslims and people of other faiths to build mutual respect and understanding: - National Baptist-Muslim Dialogue - Midwest Muslim-Catholic Dialogue - National Muslim-Christian Initiative - Children of Abraham: Jews and Muslims in Conversations - Judaism and Islam in America
JAM and ALL Interfaith http://www.jamandallinterfaith.net	2001	South Florida	Youth and adults	To foster understanding, social harmony, and peace through dialogue and multi-cultural interaction

Program Name/website	Began	Location	Participants	Mission
Kansas City Interfaith Alliance http://www.kcinterfaithproject.org/the-kc-interfaith-youth-alliance-kciya	2009-2020	Kansas City, Missouri	High School students	To change the conversation about religion through the empowerment of youth
Kaufman Interfaith Institute http://www.gvsu.edu/interfaith	2007	Grand Rapids, Michigan	Middle and High School students	To promote interfaith understanding and mutual respect in western Michigan
Kids4Peace http://www.k4p.org	2002	Jerusalem, France, United States (Boston, Cincinnati, and Seattle)	Middle and High School students	Global interfaith youth movement to empower youth to create more peaceful communities
Long Island Chapter of the Interfaith Alliance http://www.facebook.com/The-Interfaith-Alliance-of-Long-Island-173914759349322/	---	Long Island, New York	Various faith groups	To promote religious and civil liberty as well as positive faith-based voices in the public square
New Mexico Interfaith Dialogue http://www.nminterfaithdialogue.org	1982	New Mexico	Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faith members	To facilitate understanding of Abrahamic faiths through dialogue
North American Interfaith Network http://www.nain.org	1990	United States and Canada	Adults and young adults	To provide a network of organizations affirming humanity's diverse and historic spiritual resources
Orange County Interfaith Network http://www.ocinterfaith.org	2011	Orange County, California	-High School students (Annual interfaith forum) -Adults (Community forums)	To connect, promote, and facilitate interfaith engagement, dialogue, and understanding
Triangle Interfaith Alliance http://www.interfaithalliance-nc.org	1996	Raleigh, North Carolina	Various faith groups	To promote understanding, religious tolerance, acceptance, education, and respect among all faith groups who are interested in interfaith work in the hopes of building compassionate communities to benefit Raleigh, Cary, Durham, Chapel Hill, and surrounding areas of the Greater Triangle
United Religions Initiative http://www.uri.org	2000	International	Youth and adults	To promote daily interfaith cooperation, end religiously motivated violence, and create cultures of peace and justice
Westchester Youth Alliance https://westchesteryouthalliance.org	2012	Westchester, New York	High School students	To build bridges across our diverse communities of faith, race, and identity through dialogue and service that strives for justice and understanding

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Program Name/website	Began	Location	Participants	Mission
World Faith-Interfaith Youth in Action http://www.worldfaith.org	2008	International	Youth	To end religious violence by engaging religiously diverse youth to lead development projects
World Student Christian Federation http://www.wscf.ch	1895	International	High School and University students	A global federation of student Christian movements for renewal of the ecumenical movement and promotion of peace and justice
Wyoming Interfaith Network https://www.wyointerfaith.org	1976	Laramie, Wyoming	Various faith groups	To bring together the diverse voices of our community to challenge religious and political extremism and to protect religious freedom in ways that are most relevant to our community
Youth Celebrate Diversity http://www.ycdiversity.org	1993	Colorado and New Mexico	Middle, High School, and College students	To engage teens in dialogue around diversity, inclusion, equity, activism, and justice

APPENDIX B. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to speak to me. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of interfaith youth program alumni about the effectiveness of the programs in reducing religious intolerance. I will be recording this interview. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Background

I'd like you to tell me about yourself and the program you participated in:
- ❖ **Yourself**: (gender, age, race, current religious faith, if any)
- ❖ **Program**: (name/location of the program, duration of the program, the year you started, how long you were in the program, frequency of meetings, your leadership role (mentor, student leader)
- ❖ **Other Participants** (approximate number, diversity in race, gender, age, religious faith)
- ❖ **Instructors and program administrators** (if possible: number, diversity in race, gender, age, religious faith)

Religious Intolerance

This study defines religious tolerance/intolerance in terms of people's **attitudes** and/or **actions** towards other religious beliefs (their thoughts and actions). These attitudes and actions can range from **negative (highly intolerant) to positive** (highly tolerant). For example, someone who believes other religions are violent or acts to restrict or discriminate against other religions might be considered intolerant. Someone who believes other religions should be allowed to worship freely and defends that belief by publicly affirming it could be considered tolerant.
Please describe your and other participants' experiences (with actual examples if possible):
- ❖ Your personal experience of religious intolerance by others toward you or others (Examples from your life)
- ❖ Your own attitudes and actions towards other religions **before** entering the program
- ❖ Your own attitudes and actions towards other religions **during** the program
- ❖ Your own attitudes and actions towards other religions **since** completion of the program
- ❖ Your judgment of other participants' attitudes and actions towards other religions during and after completion of the program.

Impacts of Program Activities

I'd like to get your reflections on how the program activities impacted you and other participants:
- ❖ Describe each of the major activities offered by the program you attended: types/nature (lecture vs. practice), frequency and duration, content, presentation
- ❖ You reported in Question 6 that, before entering the program, your attitude and your actions toward other religious beliefs were…… With examples, please describe/explain what aspect(s) of the program (activities) influenced:
- ❖ Your current **attitudes** towards other religions
- ❖ Your **actions**, if any, in the community to promote religious tolerance since completion of the program
- ❖ Other alumni's attitudes/actions in the community since completion

Recommendations

12. You've given me a lot of information about your experiences in your program. Do you have any recommendations that might improve the program's effectiveness in reducing intolerance?

Closure

13. That concludes my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thanks very much for your participation.