IMPROVING ENCOUNTERS WITH PEOPLE WHO HOLD CONTENTIOUS DIFFERENCES: AN EXPLORATION

Morgan Braganza
voit8350@mylaurier.ca

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IMPROVING ENCOUNTERS WITH PEOPLE WHO HOLD CONTENTIOUS DIFFERENCES: AN EXPLORATION

by

Morgan Elizabeth Braganza

Honours Bachelor of Arts, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2007
Master of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2009

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

It is inevitable that we will encounter people different from us in terms of worldview, values, or lifestyle choices. Research suggests that people struggle to encounter such differences when they find them contentious. This study is guided by the broad research question, “How can we better encounter persons who hold contentious differences?” I explore approaches for improving contentious encounters described in three multidisciplinary frameworks – the anti-oppressive practice/intergroup dialogue (AOP/IGD), inclusion/exclusion, and hospitality frameworks. Using narrative inquiry, I conducted 32 interviews with persons for whom their Muslim faith, Christian faith, or their membership in the LGBTQ+ community was important. Participants were graduate social work students and recent alumni from Wilfrid Laurier University’s Faculty of Social Work. I develop the Caring Encounters Guiding Framework that includes guiding principles and guiding processes to improve contentious encounters. It is designed to be useful in a variety of settings so that people can be encountered in ways that make them feel valued.
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I did not navigate my doctoral journey alone, and for that reason, there are many words of gratitude that I want to extend.

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“There’s room for you
And room for him,
Room for her
And room for them.
Room for young
Room for old.
Room for shy,
Room for bold,
Room for short
And room for tall.
Tell me how is there
Room for all?
Here is the secret
To making rooms great:
We refuse to ever
Make room for hate” (Montague, 2016).

Every day, in our various roles, we encounter those who are different from us – in ethnicity, cultural norms, political perspectives, gender identities, religious beliefs, and other important aspects of living. In the workplace, grocery store, or even within our own families, we are required to engage with those unlike us. More than one in five Canadians, for instance, are born outside of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2015). The number of Canadians identifying as members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) community has increased from 2006 to 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2016). In 2011, 7.2% of the Canadian population reported their religious affiliation as Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist, and about 22 million Canadians identified as Christian (Statistics Canada, 2013). As Canada is becoming more and more diverse (Allen, 2014), we should expect to increasingly encounter those who are different.
Part of what makes us human is our differences. Our differences set us apart from one another. They make us unique. Our differences are important to our sense of self: they help us define who we are (Myers & Spencer, 2004).

Human beings are also inherently relational. Some psychologists claim that we have an innate need to be in relationship with others (Myers & Spencer, 2004). From birth, we depend on social attachments. We need companionship and community. We need to belong. Our need to be in relationship means we almost inevitably will have connections with those who are different from us.

Such relations can be peaceful, amicable, positive, and even rewarding. Through them, we can learn more about ourselves. We can experience the pleasure of having others know us, and what is important to us. We can also learn about others including how their differences inspire their lives.

The horrifyingly hateful stories portrayed in national and international media, and the empirical research, however, tell us that it is often not the reality that relations are positive. Instead, differences frequently evoke discomfort, anxiety, fear, distrust, and even aggression. Take, for instance, the woman who was spat on and hit in a London, Ontario supermarket for wearing a hijab (Shum, 2016). Or the Ottawa man who dawned a shirt reading, “If you’re gay, don’t approach [sic] me, I’ll kill you” (Skube, 2016). These actions, and many others, seem to confirm Harvard psychologist Gordon Allport’s (1979) argument that it is a fundamental human condition to avoid or dislike encountering those who are different. And so people struggle in encounters where significant differences are present.

Some argue that humans come by this naturally. We quickly learn to identify with those similar to us (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and distance ourselves from those who are different
(Allport, 1979). Once someone holds a difference we experience as disagreeable, they may be viewed as “not quite human” (Goffman, 1963, p. 17, emphasis added). This justifies suspicion, distrust and negative treatment (Goffman, 1963).

In Canada, religion is one example of a difference that is often treated negatively. Some scholars contend that Canadians in many settings do not want to talk about religion (Guilfoyle & St Pierre-Hansen, 2012) and struggle to interact with those who are religiously different from themselves. In the workforce, for example, religious persons, especially Muslims, regularly experience discrimination because workers are uncomfortable encountering their co-workers’ religious perspectives (Burke & Ng, 2006). In secondary (Guo, 2015) and post-secondary education (Pesut, 2016), religious persons often experience “hostility” (Hodge, 2002, p. 405) and “overt and covert discrimination” (Thyer & Myers, 2009, p. 145; Hodge, 2002; Hodge, 2003). This has been observed in disciplines such as health care/medicine (Guilfoyle & St Pierre-Hansen, 2012; King, Dimmers, Langer, & Murphy, 2013; Koenig, 2012; Pesut, 2016), psychiatry (Koenig, 2012), and social work (Gotterer, 2001; Groen, n.d.).

Gender identity and sexual orientation is another example of a difference that is often treated negatively. While some researchers (MacDonnell & Daley, 2015) argue that in some settings (e.g., workplaces, universities), members of the LGBTQ+ community are intentionally welcomed; in others, they “experience elevated rates of stigmatization, discrimination and prejudice” (Davidson, 2015, p. 41). Some argue that sexual orientation and gender identity are rarely authentically discussed in secondary and post-secondary education in ways that foster connections across differences (Barrett, McKay, Dickson, Seto, Fisher, Read, Steben, Gale-Rowe, & Wong, 2012; Dentato, Craig, Lloyd, Kelly, Wright, & Austin, 2016). In faculties of social work in Canada and the United States, many LGBTQ+ students experience hostility
LGBTQ+ students report being forced to discuss their identity in their classes. They are also regularly treated as token representatives of their group (Dentato et al., 2016).

Taken together, a wealth of scholarship suggests that people in a variety of contexts do not know how to manage contentious differences. I am defining contentious differences for this study as disagreeable differences that evoke strong negative reactions such as fear, distaste, anger, or hostility. They can include differences that we find controversial or objectionable morally, ideologically, or theologically. What constitutes a contentious difference may vary from person to person and by setting. The scholarship suggests that people do not know how to encounter such differences in a caring manner. Caring requires that we thoughtfully encounter people so that they are engaged constructively, and feel valued as members of a collective. It cannot be assumed that positive encounters across differences will happen naturally in any setting (e.g., education, practice, the workplace, daily interactions). We need ways of being more caring when we find ourselves in interactions with those who hold contentious differences.

My own lived experience echoes this reality. The genesis of this research is found in my personal and professional concerns and experiences as a Christian. As someone who holds a difference due to religion, I have personally been encountered negatively in a variety of educational, professional, and community contexts. My own identity and lived experience allowed me, from a different perspective, to identify challenges in practice and gaps in knowledge and therefore choose the focus of this research (Hodge, Wolfer, Limb, & Nadir, 2009). I agree with Hodge and colleagues (2009) that “those with personal knowledge of the subject are often best positioned to examine and discuss the phenomena in question” (p. 206).
My professional concerns also shaped my interests and exploration. I regularly have students, fellow colleagues, and community members who hold various contentious differences share with me how they have been told that their identities are irrational, intolerant, and even evil. I hear them talk about how they wish that they would have been encountered. Their pleas conveyed to me that, ultimately, we are not encountering each other’s differences very well. More must be done to encounter differences more productively.

This is the subject of this research. It is guided by the research question, “How can we better encounter persons who hold contentious differences?” I wrote this volume to offer a fresh perspective for enhancing our understanding of this issue and to start new conversations.

In this study, I define encounters as purposeful or accidental face-to-face meetings (Goffman, 1956) between individuals or small groups of people. However, I will also examine the reciprocal relationships between such encounters and the immediate environments within which they take place. It will become clear that how we engage across differences affects not only participants in such encounters, but relationships more broadly in the proximate contexts for such engagements. Reciprocally, these contexts set expectations and provide resources for such engagements.

In this chapter, I have introduced the issue and explained why my exploration is important. In Chapter Two, I present the work done by scholars who have previously studied approaches for encountering persons who hold contentious differences. In Chapter Three, I present a conceptual framework that I developed after analyzing the literature from the three frameworks. In Chapter Four, I detail the process of why and how I used narrative inquiry to gather the stories of 32 persons for whom their Muslim faith, Christian faith, or their membership in the LGBTQ+ community was important.
I present the findings of my fieldwork within the context of a guiding framework made up of three elements – *Context, Core Issues*, and *Prescriptions*. Beginning with Chapter Five, each of these elements is detailed in its own chapter. Finally, in Chapter Eight, I provide a full discussion of the guiding framework including how the three elements inform one another, its dynamics, and the caveats for its use.

This guiding framework, which I refer to as the *Caring Encounters Guiding Framework*, is my primary contribution to the topic of encountering persons holding contentious differences. Its construction was the core dynamic moving this thesis from its original concern to the guiding elements of this guiding framework. It offers an approach that can facilitate encounters where persons holding contentious differences are engaged in more caring ways.

This guiding framework is unique among already existing frameworks in a variety of ways. Its prioritization of care is distinct from other frameworks. It offers a complex and flexible approach in order to respect the difficulties and variations in encounters. It intentionally attends to a wealth of previously unexplored considerations such as the context of encounters, the lived realities of encountered parties, the need for balance among encounter priorities, and other important issues for facilitating and understanding encounters. It considers how the nature of encounters influences relations between people more broadly and the building of community. Finally, while other frameworks generally offer reactive strategies for managing encounters, the Caring Encounters Guiding Framework offers subjects and insights to consider in advance in addition to strategies to use during encounters. As such, this guiding framework is meant to bring possibilities to difficult encounters. It also points to future needs for exploration.

In a pluralistic society, it is necessary to find ways to encounter persons holding difficult differences so that they are perceived positively and treated with caring. Whether contentious or
not, it is necessary to make room for many differences. I trust that improvement is possible and I intend, through this research, to help forge a future more welcoming of differences.

**Open to Dialogue**

Participants interviewed for this research had an opportunity to review some of the study's findings and the final Guiding Framework that resulted from this thesis. The selected comments below show both a willingness to talk about varied ways of approaching contentious encounters and a wish to have encounters become more accepting of identities and individualities. These outcomes reflect the primary motivation for undertaking this project:

*I liked the focus on stories in this chapter as I think it does justice to humanizing difference, as you suggested. I enjoyed reading your perspective. I like the idea about a caring encounters framework. I wonder, in relation to your comments on AOP, if it's like a pendulum. That AOP is needed to create space for difference--to make sure that there is safety for lives--and only when there is space for all lives to really matter can encounters be caring. I think, for example, the Black Lives Matter movement has tried many caring encounters before they became more radical. At some point many groups have to have less caring encounters because lives are at stake. I appreciate their militant stance, and why they must do this, even if I personally have the privilege of opting for more caring encounters myself!*

*I find myself wanting to learn how the ... storylines are carried over into the other groups of identity, and I am fascinated by that last storyline of “seeing the human beyond the difference.” ... I am challenged to think about how best to set up my practice in way that*
encourages positive encounters between people who hold contentious differences ... I think your insight into using stories to explore the lived realities of persons holding contentious differences is engaging ... I find myself yearning to read more.
Before I offer any pragmatic or conceptual ideas for how to more constructively encounter persons who hold contentious differences, I need to shed light on a few of the already existing approaches.

In this chapter, I review literature from three multidisciplinary frameworks: the anti-oppressive practice/intergroup dialogue (AOP/IGD), inclusion/exclusion, and hospitality frameworks. I chose to explore three frameworks with roots in a variety of disciplines. This was for several reasons. First, the focus in this study on the fact that contentious encounters are often characterized by tension, awkwardness and difficulty is of concern in a number of disciplines such as social work, psychology, sociology and theology. Reviewing multidisciplinary literature brought depth and richness to my understanding of this issue (Jabareen, 2009). In addition to wanting to strengthen my comprehension of this complex topic, I wanted to have different perspectives to scrutinize, compare, contrast and interpret (Alvesson, & Skoldberg, 2009). I also assumed utilizing several multidisciplinary frameworks would challenge my thinking and permit “ambiguity, inconsistency, [and] contradiction” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 191). Since each framework introduces a unique yet informative way of thinking, this helpfully guided the investigation (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). Finally, I wanted to make an original contribution to the scholarship by connecting literature and ideas no one else has previously connected (Maxwell, 2005).

This chapter includes an overview of each of the three frameworks. The overviews of each framework are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to include information about its relevance to this issue, why I selected it for study as well as its purpose, theoretical, philosophical and/or theological underpinnings, values, and how it is implemented in practice.
when encountering contentious differences. I also offer some of the frameworks’ respective strengths and challenges. I have attempted to remain “faithful” (Kearney & Taylor, 2011, p. 2) to the language and logic used in the framework.

**Framework One: Anti-Oppressive Practice Framework and Intergroup Dialogue Pedagogy**

The first of the three multidisciplinary frameworks I explore is the anti-oppressive practice (AOP) framework using the intergroup dialogue (IGD) pedagogy as a vehicle. The main objective of the AOP/IGD framework is to improve intergroup relations, especially between groups where conflict is present. In IGDs, the encounter between diverse persons is intentional and facilitated. The IGD pedagogy is informed by social theories and research. In other words, AOP/IGD is a framework the social sciences have offered to eradicate prejudice and oppression, improve intergroup relations, and ultimately, result in more successful encounters (Stephan & Stephan, 2001).

The AOP/IGD framework has become an influential approach both provincially and nationally directing social relations, policy, and academic activities. It is influential because of its connection to AOP, which seeks to offer pragmatic strategies for tackling issues of oppression and marginalization. I selected it because of its influential position in directing persons and institutions on how to encounter contentious differences.

As early as 1993, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training directed elementary and secondary schools to achieve the aims of AOP (see *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation*). More recently, policies such as *Caring and Safe Schools in Ontario* (Ministry of Education, n.d.), initiatives such as the Safe Schools Action Team (2008), and resources (e.g., the Safe@school lesson plans
https://www.safeatschool.ca/resources/resources-on-equity-and-inclusion/general-resources/tool-kits-and-activities) provide evidence of continued commitment to AOP.

In Ontario post-secondary universities, the principles of the AOP framework have been integrated into strategic mandates such as at Wilfrid Laurier University (Diversity and Equity Office, 2016) and activities such as anti-oppression training for student groups at the University of Guelph (n.d.).

Some disciplines, such as social work, hold AOP as one of its main theories or paradigms (see McLaughlin, 2005; Wilson & Beresford, 2000). In social work, several scholars argue that AOP has become an “essential” (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 283), “central” (Rush & Keenan, 2014, p. 3; Wilson & Beresford, 2000, p. 553) and “sometimes…a key approach and theory” (Wilson & Beresford, 2000, p. 553, emphasis added). The AOP framework informs much teaching, research and professional practice in social work.

Finally, community social services also show commitment to realizing the aims of AOP. The Canadian Mental Health Association (2016), for instance, encourages health and social services providers to receive anti-oppression training.

**Anti-Oppressive Practice**

In 1994, Dominelli defined anti-oppressive practice as, “practice which addresses social divisions and structural inequalities in the work that is done with people” (p. 3, as cited in Dominelli, 1996, pp. 170-171). *Oppression* happens to persons and/or groups holding particular social identities. A social identity is a signifier of group membership such as gender, ethnicity or religion. Oppression occurs when some identity groups become privileged and control the actions of those whose social identities are devalued or considered inferior (Baines, 2011; Dominelli, 2002). Importantly, however, sometimes “people who are oppressed in one aspect of
their lives may be oppressive in other elements of it” (Dominelli, 2002, p. 13, emphasis added).

People, then, can be both oppressed and oppressive at the same time (Dominelli, 2002).

Oppression prevents people from positively encountering those from different identity groups.

Theoretically, anti-oppressive practice can help people (e.g., politicians, social service workers) consider, explore and respond to oppression against others or self (Baines, 2011). Some scholars claimed, however, that AOP did not have any pragmatic strategies (see Hick, 2002) so the IGD pedagogy was created for addressing oppression generally, and improving difficult encounters specifically (Nagda, Spearmon, Holley, Harding, Balassone, Moïse-Swanson, & de Mello, 1999).

What is Intergroup Dialogue?

Intergroup dialogue (IGD) is a, “face-to-face facilitated communication between roughly equal numbers of members of two (or more) social identity groups (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, social class, others) that have a history of conflict or potential conflict” (Dessel & Ali, 2015, p. 1; Stephan & Stephan, 2001; Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002).

The point of intergroup dialogue is to have contentiously different persons from purposefully selected identity groups (Zúñiga et al., 2002) intentionally encounter one another and openly discuss the issues causing conflict between them (e.g., emotions, experiences, perspectives) in constructive ways (Schoem, 2003; Stephan & Stephan, 2001). It is hoped that all encountered parties will benefit (Stephan & Stephan, 2001) and encounters can be stimulated and enriched. IGDs have taken place between a variety of groups holding contentious differences including “white people and people of color; men and women; lesbians, gay men, bisexual and heterosexual people; Christians, Muslims, and Jews; working, middle, and upper socio-economic classes” (Werkmeister Rozas, 2007, p. 6).
Facilitation of curriculum. Using theoretically- and empirically-informed curriculum, IGDs are run much like courses or workshops with a clear beginning and end. IGDs require facilitators with extensive training and expertise in the theoretically- and empirically-informed IGD methodology (Dessel & Ali, 2015; Schoem, 2003). They are typically run by a minimum of two facilitators (Dessel & Ali, 2015; Schoem, 2003) who, ideally, hold the same social identities as the groups represented (e.g., male and female) or at minimum, who differ in some way from one another (Schoem, 2003; Stephan & Stephan, 2001). In some academic settings, peer facilitators include undergraduate or graduate students (Lopez & Zúñiga, 2010).

Facilitators have specific responsibilities during sessions. For instance, facilitators are responsible for “clarifying issues, providing information, mediating conflicts, and relating the interactions among the group members to larger theoretical or conceptual issues” (Stephan & Stephan, 2001, p. 105). They must teach and “model” dialogic skills such as “active listening, asking questions, probing, sharing personal experiences, voicing emotions, expressing appreciation, voicing observations of group and communication processes” (Nadga et al., 1999, p. 440). Since encounters between participants are typically characterized by tension, hostility and conflict, facilitators are responsible for creating a safe environment for participants to encounter one another. This is influenced by the session’s location and by facilitators’ own knowledge, friendliness, and passion (Dessel & Rogge, 2008; Werkmeister Rozas, 2007).

Facilitators use a variety of pedagogical activities such as “experiential exercises, role-plays, simulation games, and other structured exercises” (Nagda et al., 1999, as cited in Stephan & Stephan, 2001, p. 104) to safely facilitate dialogue “across lines of difference” (Zúñiga et al., 2002, p. 7; Dessel & Ali, 2015).
**Group size and composition.** Participants represent identity groups in equal numbers (Nagda, et al., 1999): half from the “targetted” (Zúñiga et al., 2002, p. 11) (i.e., oppressed) social identity group and the other half from the privileged social identity group as identified by IGD facilitators (Zúñiga et al., 2002). This is to create a sense of safety, equality for persons from both groups, and to avoid tokenism (Nagda, et al., 1999). Privilege is determined based on what are considered to be the “systems of oppression” (p. 9) confronting each identity group such as racism, sexism or heterosexism (Zúñiga et al., 2002). In some forms of IGD, group composition is not limited and instead, participants simply reflect on their various social identity groups and as part of the dialogue, discuss which identities are most important to them and why (Nagda & Gurin, 2007). In either case, groups are typically small and made up of between 10 and 20 participants (Nadga et al., 1999; Nagda, Zúñiga, & Sevig, 1995, as cited in Stephan & Stephan, 2001). Managing larger groups or too many identity groups can make encounters more difficult when conflict is already present.

**Curriculum.** Intergroup dialogues incorporate four stages, each with its own activities that are intentionally scaffolded to build on previous stages. In the first stage, participants are taught how to dialogue and provided tangible instructions for doing so. In stage two, participants actually engage in dialogue focused on one topic (e.g., race, gender). They dialogue across differences due to social identity and learn more about the socialization process that caused their identity group to become privileged or disadvantaged. All sessions are meant to stimulate dialogue because it is difficult (e.g., due to hostilities, contention).

In the third stage of IGD, participants intentionally discuss uncomfortable and controversial issues related to the topic and their social identities, especially those issues that can lead to intergroup conflict (Nagda et al., 1999; Zúñiga et al., 2002). “Interracial dating” or
“affirmative action” (Nagda et al., 1999, p. 441) are examples in relation to racialized identity groups and race-based IGDs. Typically the issues discussed, while controversial, are of concern to both groups (Stephan & Stephan, 2001) although identity groups might have opposing opinions about them. During this stage, participants are to actively listen to one another’s perspectives in order to learn how to better understand differing and oppositional perspectives as well as find areas of agreement to promote relationships despite difference (Dessel & Ali, 2015; Nagda, 2006; Nagda & Gurin, 2007) and disagreements (Nagda & Gurin, 2007). This also helps participants learn how to engage with, rather than avoid, persons and topics that cause conflict. Additionally, participants are taught how to respectfully challenge perspectives they disagree with, instead of responding in a hostile manner toward persons (Stephan & Stephan, 2001). Participants are taught to dialogue so they might “arrive at a mutual understanding” (Stephan & Stephan, 2001, p. 105; Zúñiga et al., 2002) rather than debate until one party changes their perspective. It is expected that as participants come to learn more about each other, and feel an increased sense of safety, that the dialogue will become easier and that participants will engage in increasingly difficult conversations (e.g., ask controversial questions, raise emotions such as anger) (Zúñiga et al., 2002).

While Dessel and Rogge (2008) claim that IGD can be offered as a workshop or one-time session, most scholars argue that participants involved in IGD must have “sustained communication” (Zúñiga et al., 2002, p. 8) and commitment to IGD (Schoem, 2003). That is, IGD involves dialogue that happens repeatedly over weeks or months (Schoem, 2003; Zúñiga et al., 2002). In academic settings, for instance, IGD may be offered over the course of a semester. Participants, then, meet regularly (e.g., weekly) often for several hours at a time (Nagda, 2006). Time is needed to feel safe dialoguing with those who are contentiously different about
controversial topics and to realize change in biased, prejudiced, oppressive thoughts, habits, or behaviours (Werkmeister Rozas, 2007; Zúñiga et al., 2002). In the case that IGD is run as a training session or workshop outside of academia, Nagda and colleagues (1999) recommend that sessions be run closely together to avoid long breaks.

**Theoretical underpinnings.** IGD is multi-disciplinary and can be traced to a number of theories. For instance, Dessel and Ali (2015) as well as Nagda (2006) point to the work of Allport (1979), Dovidio and Gaetner (1999), Eagly and Chaiken (1993), Pettigrew (1998), and Stephan and Stephan (2001) as major theoretical contributions to intergroup dialogue.

**Intergroup Contact Theory.** In 1979, Harvard psychologist Gordon Allport offered insight into the behaviours of engagement with others, especially those outside of one’s group. His theory (Intergroup Contact Theory) is based on the hypothesis that in order for prejudice to be reduced, people need to interact with each other. Even more, interacting people/groups need to perceive themselves to be of equal status, have common goals to work toward together and interdependently, and have groups or persons in authority encouraging or mandating their cooperation (Allport, 1979). Allport’s (1979) work has informed the IGD pedagogy especially as this relates to how to approach, rather than avoid others, communicate, and find ways to acknowledge, understand, and overcome prejudice.

**Friendship.** In 1998, Thomas Pettigrew, a researcher in psychology, built on Allport’s (1979) Intergroup Contact Theory with empirical evidence. Among other claims, Pettigrew (1998) argued that when members of an “ingroup” (para. 21) learn about, have repeated interactions with, and develop positive emotions toward, or friendships with members of an “outgroup” (para. 21), this can challenge negative perceptions and lead to more positive attitudes toward members of the entire group.
**Attitude Theory.** In 1993, Eagly and Chaiken wrote extensively from a social psychological perspective about *attitudes*. Attitudes are hypothetical constructs (that is, they cannot be directly seen) defined as “psychological tendencies” (p. 1) to evaluate, react and respond either positively or negatively to certain objects or “entities” (p. 1). The more people engage with entities and respond in the same way (either positively or negatively), the more they tend to (or have) the “tendency” (p. 2) to sustain their attitude toward them. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) say these tendencies “can be regarded as a type of bias that predisposes the individual toward evaluative responses that are positive or negative” (p. 2, emphasis added). Attitudes can, however, be short-lived, and can change.

Additionally, attitudes can be formed in relation to certain people and groups, and in relation to self, and ultimately elicit a variety of external negative or positive thoughts, emotions or actions (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Indeed, negative attitudes toward others, and even intergroup conflict, begin with cognitive processes (e.g., attitude formation). The IGD pedagogy is premised on the belief that if negative attitudes are formed cognitively (learned), then cognitive processes can also be used to alter them. They can, therefore, be unlearned.

**Prejudice Theory.** In 1999, psychologists Dovidio and Gaetner wrote about prejudice. *Prejudice* is defined as “an unfair negative attitude toward a social group or a member of that group” (Dovidio & Gaetner, 1999, p. 101). Prejudice is closely connected to other concepts such as *stereotyping*, which involves “overgeneralizing” (Dovidio & Gaetner, 1999, p. 101) faulty beliefs to a group. They argue there are two different forms of prejudice: “traditional” (p. 101) prejudice which involves overt, typically negative behaviour or attitudes toward a group, and “contemporary” (p. 101) prejudice which are biases, or prejudicial attitudes a person can be unaware of but still act upon.
There are different strategies appropriate for combating traditional or contemporary prejudice. Traditional prejudice is best addressed through education about what it is and its inappropriateness, and by increasing positive attitudes toward others. Intergroup contact, rather than individual education or intervention, is the most appropriate way to combat contemporary prejudice. Additionally, drawing upon the work of other scholars (see Brewer & Miller, 1984 and Urban & Miller, 1998, as cited in Dovidio and Gaetner, 1999), Dovidio and Gaetner (1999) claim that processes such as “personalization” (p. 103) and “recategorization” (p. 103) reduce prejudice. Personalization involves intentionally highlighting the uniqueness of people in a group such that an entire group can no longer be stereotyped in homogenizing ways. Recategorization forces people to see outgroup members as similar in some way to ingroup members and therefore part of their own ingroup (Dovidio & Gaetner, 1999).

Anti-oppressive practice. IGD is informed by the language, values, and theories of AOP (Nagda, et al., 1999). The work of Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) informs many of the theoretical and practical elements of the pedagogical IGD training. Their aim, as outlined in their edited book, is to enhance education interested in achieving social justice and so they offer a “framework for helping people understand and critically analyze multiple forms of oppression” (Adams et al., 2007, p. xvii). This involves developing a “sophisticated understanding of diversity and social group interaction, more critically evaluate oppressive social patterns and institutions, and work more democratically with diverse others to create just and inclusive practices and social structures” (Adams et al., 2007, p. xvii).

Values informing the AOP/IGD framework. There are a number of values undergirding this framework. For example, IGD values learning about others in order to raise awareness about how particular groups are oppressed or oppressive (Dessel, Woodford, &
Conflict resolution is also valued which is evident in the aim to mitigate conflict, especially between different groups that hold conflicting beliefs, histories or identities of which “sex, sexual orientation, or religion” (Stephan & Stephan, 2001, p. 3) are a few. Further, IGDs teach participants to value all members of the dialogue equally in terms of privilege and power, and therefore hear all voices equally, without judgement, and with empathic interest (Werkmeister Rozas, 2004).

Not only is learning about the other valued, so is learning about the self: understanding one’s perspectives of others, experiences of oppression and privilege, socio-political status, and how these things shape one’s attitudes and actions (Nagda, et al., 1999; Werkmeister Rozas, 2007). In some instances, participants will have no awareness of how their identity group is either privileged or targeted and so coming to this awareness is valued in striving for social justice (Zúñiga et al., 2002).

Social justice, then, is also valued. There is attendance to understanding injustice stemming from differences or conflict between identity groups (Schoem, 2003; Zúñiga et al., 2002). Participants explore current and historical injustice (Schoem, 2003). Groups determine how different identity groups can equally access and benefit from societal opportunities in order to achieve social justice (Schoem, 2003). This means critical thinking is also valued. Engaging in social justice work means both identity groups come together as a group to do the work (Nagda & Gurin, 2007), which is of value in this framework.

**Strengths and Challenges of the Framework in Relation to the Issue**

**Theoretical base.** The IGD/AOP framework is informed by a number of well-articulated and well-researched theories about social relations from a variety of disciplines which gives it
strength. Having said this, its diverse theoretical base means it is not discipline-specific which is both an asset and a challenge.

**Motivations.** An asset of the AOP/IGD framework is that it calls direct attention to and strives to rectify the injustice that can hinder encounters (see Zúñiga et al., 2002). Additionally, IGDs are “designed to provide a safe yet communal space [for participants] to express anger and indignation about injustice” (Dessel, Rogge, & Garlington, 2006, p. 303). However, it is not altogether clear what is meant by social justice. For instance, social justice can involve being “concerned with people's relations to certain tangible and intangible ‘things’—namely goods, means, honours, positions, powers, rewards, privileges, burdens, punishments, penalties, and so on— in respect of which they may have various moral rights, entitlements, obligations, and liabilities” (Kane, 1996, pp. 379-380). Injustice occurs, then, when one group is “systematically given preferential treatment” (Christensen & Smith, 2005, p. 159) over a different group. Implied in this definition of social justice is that the treatment of groups ought to be equal.

In contrast, other scholars argue justice involves unequal distribution. Supporting the disadvantaged, for instance, is of priority if “it leads to a preferential outcome for the least well off” (Rawls, 1971, as cited in Christensen & Smith, 2005, p. 156; Quong, 2010; Saleebey, 2015; Vera & Speight, 2003). What type of justice is the AOP/IGD framework actually committed to? How does this translate into encountering the oppressed or the oppressive? Based on the practices and values of AOP and IGD described above, the answer seems to be that seeking justice involves uncovering the unequal treatment of people so that the oppressed can be prioritized. Indeed, it is a “problematic corollary” (Orme, 2002, p. 811) to hear the voices of everyone: “if all voices are to be heard, and all ‘otherness’ to be acknowledged then the voices of
those who have been seen to dominate, oppress and abuse have also to be heard” (Orme, 2002, p. 11).

Considerations about justice also include considerations about morality (Kane, 1996; Orme, 2002; Saleebey, 2015). Justice involves judgement – an assessment of good and evil, deserving and undeserving, what people are “rightly due” (Kane, 1996, p. 378) and of who is responsible for withholding their rightful claims. In the AOP/IGD framework, it seems there are those who ought to be judged as responsible for the oppression of the marginalized, but this raises questions for encounters. Who is to be held guilty and responsible for injustice, and who gets to decide? Does justice involve judging and/or blaming those who are privileged, and how does this influence encounters? How are encounters impacted when some persons and/or actions are considered good or evil, right or wrong? Since social justice motivates the AOP/IGD framework, encounters are characterized by voicing grievances, and holding anger and grudges until wrongs are addressed (e.g., such as through an IGD). This raises other potential questions such as whether it would be desirable or possible within encounters to simply wipe the slate clean.

Participants and participation. Previous research shows that people generally do not feel comfortable dialoguing with outgroup members – or those who are different – because they are different (see Allport, 1979, for example). One of the main advantages of IGD is that it intentionally brings diverse individuals together to dialogue. In contrast, however, it might be argued that the IGD classroom does not actually reflect social relations outside the classroom. Participants, for instance, volunteer to participate and are chosen based on certain identities (see Dessel & Ali, 2015). One group of participants must be deemed oppressed while the other group is deemed the oppressors in relation to the prioritized focus of conversation (see Dessel & Ali,
Participants, then, are chosen based on certain identities plus their willingness to talk about certain issues (e.g., sexual orientation, race). This suggests that certain identity groups and topics will be missed as will those persons reluctant to engage the topic or areas of conflict. In general, limiting IGD to particular students or topics may not resolve the problem of how to encounter contentious diversity more broadly.

**Identities and labels.** Paramount to IGD is to recognize, and appreciate, differences due to social identities. For the purposes of dialogue, IGD participants are asked to cut their identities into segments (e.g., race, religion). Focusing on specific identities could be an asset for a number of reasons. First, it provides facilitators the opportunity to focus more carefully on one topic at a time (Dessel & Ali, 2015). Second, recognizing one’s social identities is both necessary and important: identities can inform one’s self-knowledge and behaviour. This IGD approach does not deny the concept of intersectionality in AOP – the contention that oppressed groups confront a variety of disadvantages and discriminations. It does, however, reflect AOP’s focus on oppressed identities (e.g., LGBTQ+, Black, Indigenous).

Focusing on and segmenting identities can also be a challenge, however, and doing so raises a number of considerations and questions. Can participants, for example, successfully segment themselves into one identity (e.g., race), but not another (e.g., gender)? How can (and does) doing so impact everyday encounters and dialogue? Focusing too extensively on identities is a form of labelling that can become dehumanizing. Talking continuously, for instance, about the identities of self and others risks erasing the whole person. Further, my personal and professional experience has taught me that people regularly resist being identified and labelled, especially when labels carry negative connotations. I would add that the labels *targeted, disadvantaged or oppressed, privileged, advantaged or oppressive* connote something negative
about people’s identities. Generally speaking, people want to feel pride in their identities but it is not clear that this is possible if labels such as oppressive have been attached to them. Indeed, in one clear example, researchers found in a race-based IGD that white participants could not verbally declare pride in their race like racialized participants could (Zúñiga, Mildred, Varghese, DeJong, & Keehn, 2012). This suggests only some can feel – and declare – pride in their identity. In this case, it was minority (or oppressed) group members.

Even more, some people resist being considered different from others. A balance must be sought, then, between highlighting group differences and group similarities. If too many differences are highlighted, it can drive a wedge between groups (Dovidio & Gaetner, 1999). If too many similarities are highlighted, then conflict due to differences is not illuminated or addressed (Stephan & Stephan, 2001). Consideration must also be given to how differences are perceived when the differences between groups have been linked to things such as privilege, power, discrimination, inequality, injustice, or being either oppressed or oppressive.

**Dialogue and intergroup relations.** In IGDs, participants do not simply learn – theoretically – how to encounter others; they actually engage them through dialogue. This is an asset because, while people can learn about how to encounter contentious differences through books, it is my belief that practice is important.

Another asset is on the prioritization of safety in dialogues (see Dessel & Ali, 2015; Zúñiga et al., 2002). With this said, it is not clear that dialogues are always “safe” such that IGD participants can voice their perspectives. One evaluation of an IGD showed that some participants actually talked about their “fear” (Dessel, Woodford, Routenberg, & Breijak, 2013, p. 1063) of having homophobic students voice their perspectives and creating a space unsafe for productive dialogue. It might be argued that dialogue was already hindered if the hope was that
these conversations would not come up. Indeed, participants claimed at the end of the IGD that homophobic conversations did not come up and that some heterosexual students self-censored some of their comments (Dessel et al., 2013).

Relatedly, and perhaps inadvertently, this raises a question about where the line is in the AOP/IGD framework between speech that ought to be declared freely, authentically, and without censorship, and speech that ought to be deemed hurtful and thus censored. In a series of articles that went back and forth between IGD scholars Dessel, Bolen, and Shepardson (2011a) and another scholar (Hodge, 2011) in relation to freedom of speech in classroom settings, the authors debated whether and when the speech of one identity group ought to be censored to avoid harm to another group. Specifically, in relation to sexual orientation, the values, perspectives, and therefore the speech of evangelical Christian students was considered and “termed inciteful” (p. 225) and “hate speech” (p. 225) according to Dessel and colleagues (2011a) when contrasted to the speech of LGBTQ+ group members. As such, the right to authentic or free speech of evangelical Christian group members ought to be recanted (see Dessel et al., 2011a).

These scholars seem to be suggesting that only some be permitted the right to freedom of speech while the speech of others ought to be deemed hateful, inciteful, oppressive, or discriminatory and in need of censorship. The right to freedom, in the AOP/IGD framework, seems to be reserved for members of oppressed populations. If any dialogue is censored at all, it seems to me that the notion of dialoguing despite difference or conflict is challenged as is the authentic, honest and non-judgemental nature of IGD. Indeed, if dialogue is censored, it must first be judged and deemed harmful, which undermines the claim to equality and non-judgement in this framework. If dialogue is censored, groups and individuals cannot authentically know the perspectives of diverse others.
In response, Hodge (2011) posits that restricting speech from one group actually limits the other because they cannot have the opportunity, in a safe environment (when arguments are presented carefully and thoughtfully), to learn. All are, therefore, less prepared for encountering contentious perspectives in future, especially because these perspectives will not always be offered carefully (Hodge, 2011). Arguably, group members cannot actually dialogue about conflicts or bridge differences if “unsafe” ideas cannot be raised. Finally, censoring the speech and therefore the perspectives, worldviews and beliefs of some identity groups is the same as censoring their identities since these are intimately interwoven.

A last asset of this framework related to dialogue is that its aim is to problematize and reduce the oppression that hinders encounters. This is, however, simultaneously a challenge. First, several authors overtly claim that one of the goals of IGD is to problematize and change the perspective of the majority group (Dessel & Ali, 2015; Stephan & Stephan, 2001). In one study, dominant (majority) group members had to disagree with heteronormativity and homophobic ideas and values (see Dessel et al., 2013). In other words, what is claimed to be dialogue may actually be debate which scholars (see Stephan & Stephan, 2001) state is not part of IGD. IGD participants are supposed to be able to voice their perspectives without experiencing judgement or having to concede (Stephan & Stephan, 2001). Second, it does not seem that members of the heterosexual and LGBTQ+ groups would be permitted to dialogue without forcing heterosexual persons to relinquish their worldviews or perspectives. Must persons affirm the perspectives – even the worldviews – of another group in order to dialogue? Or can dialogue involve listening respectfully to the perspective of others and disagreeing with certain perspectives? If concession is part of dialogue, does this not reduce the opportunity to dialogue despite conflict?
**Language and worldview.** Intergroup dialogue has been informed by certain concepts, language and worldviews in relation to encountering diversity. The framework, for instance, is interested in *social justice* and urges participants to become aware of and resist things such as *oppression, marginalization, and privilege*. While it is without question that oppression, marginalization and privilege are realities and ought to be named, it is important to consider whether the language and worldview may be troubling for some. For instance, in her scholarship on oppression and the anti-oppressive framework, Dominelli (2002) claims that, “being identified as an oppressor can cause feelings of paralysis and guilt, especially where it is difficult for the individual concerned to individually extricate him or herself from a privileged position” (46). On the one hand, as Dominelli (2002) argues, individuals experience negative emotions when they become aware of themselves as oppressed or as oppressors. Viewed another way, it might be that they are reacting negatively toward the language or the worldview. Additionally, the language and worldview that inform this framework are not universal nor in line with all other worldviews. Not everyone, then, would agree with how this framework approaches encounters with persons holding contentious differences.

**Framework Two: Inclusion/Exclusion Framework**

Like the last framework, the inclusion/exclusion framework is a policy and social sciences-informed framework that I selected for its central place in provincial and national public policy (see Health Canada, 2002; the 1985 *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*), and educational settings (see Sheppard, 2006). According to Health Canada (2002), it is used as a lens to determine whether social and economic policies, practices, and services include everybody equally. For this project, I understand its purpose is to ensure that everyone is equally encountered.
This framework holds a particularly central place in post-secondary education. The language and concepts related to this framework are regularly employed in efforts to include those who are underrepresented in the classroom, scholarship, practice, and teaching. This is evident by viewing the vision and mission statements of a number of Ontario universities where the terms inclusion and/or exclusion have been incorporated (e.g., at Wilfrid Laurier University: https://www.wlu.ca/about/values-vision-mission/index.html; at University of Waterloo: https://uwaterloo.ca/co-operative-education-career-action/our-mission-vision; at McMaster University: https://president.mcmaster.ca/mission-and-vision/).

This framework is also popular in disciplines such as social work (Sheppard, 2006). According to the International Federation of Social Workers (2012), one of the “core purposes of the social work profession [is to] facilitate the inclusion of…socially excluded” individuals (para 5, emphasis added). The current Canadian accreditation standards (Canadian Association for Social Work Education, 2014) expect social work students to have knowledge about exclusion and its impact on individuals, groups and encounters. Sheppard (2006) claims that the framework “represents a conceptual way of bringing together many – perhaps all – the key themes of social work’s enduring concerns” (p. 5, emphasis added). Many efforts to encounter contentious differences in this and other disciplines are motivated by this framework.

This framework also heavily informs secondary education. In Ontario, the Ministry of Education (2009) declared that it will support efforts such as “the development, implementation, and monitoring of equitable and inclusive education policies, programs, and practices in the Ministry, school boards, and schools” (p. 19). A number of policies, procedures and strategies (see the 2009 Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy developed by the Ministry of Education) as well as frameworks (see the 2013 Ontario Leadership Framework developed by
the Institute for Education Leadership) have been established that support this reality. These efforts are in keeping with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) which called inclusive education “the way of the future” (2008, p. 31).

**What is Social Exclusion?**

The term *social exclusion* can be understood as “a state, a process or both” (Taket, Crisp, Nevill, Lamaro, Graham, & Barter-Godfrey, 2009, p. 8). It is a *state of being* such that individuals and/or groups are excluded (Labonté, Hadi, & Kauffmann, 2011). People or groups are excluded when they do not have the same levels of “advantage” (Peace, 2001, p. 6) as others. Exclusion also happens when some individuals (or groups) experience limited or unequal access or participation in social activities that others have access to (Labonté et al., 2011; Taket et al., 2009). As a *process*, exclusion is something that happens to individuals and/or groups: they *become* excluded.

Exclusion is also a “*conceptual tool*” (Peace, 2001, p. 33, emphasis added). It is used as a way of exploring, understanding and “naming the *collective processes*” (Peace, 2001, p. 34, emphasis added) that exclude people. In other words, it is useful for understanding and exploring how “cumulative factors and processes” (Peace, 2001, p. 33) limit opportunities for participation within social contexts for individuals or groups (Barry, 1998; Peace, 2001). As a conceptual tool, it provides “novel insights into the nature, causes and consequences” (Mathieson, Popay, Enoch, Escorel, Hernandez, Johnston, & Rispel, 2008, p. 7) of exclusion. These can inform actions such as policy change or service provision.

Some scholars claim macro level processes such as norms cause exclusion (Taket et al., 2009). Others claim exclusion results from micro level processes such as relational practices with family, friends or colleagues. Simply belonging to a particular group, for instance, can be enough
to cause exclusion from encounters (Taket, et al., 2009). Those who do not maintain the same values or beliefs as the dominant group risk exclusion. Persons with certain political or religious beliefs are examples. They risk more if they refuse to assimilate into the dominant norms (Williams, 1998). Ultimately, people can be excluded from anything they feel is important, particularly to “achieve well-being and security” (Peace, 2001, p. 34). This can include “opportunities and means, material or otherwise” (Peace, 2001, p. 34).

Exclusion can have short- or longer-term negative consequences (Mathieson et al., 2009; Taket et al., 2009). For instance, researchers have found that exclusion can lead to things such as severed or impaired social relationships (Peace, 2001), familial breakdown (Peace, 2001; Pierson, 2002), impaired mental and/or physical health, or diminished self-esteem (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998; Pierson, 2002). It can cause problems at school, or result in unemployment (Pierson, 2002). At a community level, people may try to voluntarily leave situations and even communities that are exclusionary (Taket et al., 2009). The literature suggests that leaving can also be relational such as when people refuse to participate or share their perspectives.

**What is Social inclusion?**

Scholars writing about social exclusion are the first to point out that it is not wholly clear what the opposite of exclusion is. *Social inclusion* is the term/concept most commonly used. Simply, social inclusion has been defined as “the attempt to re-integrate, or to increase the participation of” (Barry, 1998, p. 1) excluded individuals or groups in society. Social inclusion involves seeking or creating opportunities or advantages for excluded individuals or groups (Peace, 2001; Sheppard, 2006). Assuming inclusion and exclusion are related, the goal is to find ways to explore both, and move people from being excluded to being included. Some contend that the social inclusion/exclusion framework gained prominence in social sciences theory,
research, and practice because it offered a conceptual tool for understanding and encountering diverse groups that are excluded (Peace, 2001; Sheppard, 2006). It certainly provides a way of understanding why some encounters are awkward, contentious or simply avoided: it is often contentious differences that lead to exclusion.

**Theoretical Underpinnings**

There are a plethora of theories that attempt to explain why exclusion happens. For instance, theories related to group processes posit that in general, people avoid and therefore exclude those who are somehow different from them because they make them feel uncomfortable (Blau, 1977, as cited in Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998; Cobigo, Ouellette-Kuntz, Lysaght, & Martin, 2012). Cobigo and colleagues (2012) theorize that there are social expectations people must fulfill or certain social roles they must perform (e.g., employee) and when they fail to do so, they become excluded. Further to this, some social roles are more valued than others. It adds an extra layer of exclusion when people fail to perform valued roles (Cobigo et al., 2012). There are also theories that suggest people can become excluded if they engage in immoral or “deviant” (Taket et al., 2009, p. 8) behaviour such as “crime, substance use and teenage pregnancy” (Watt & Jacobs 2000, as cited in Taket et al., 2009, p. 15). They can be excluded physically through incarceration or socially through stigma. Finally, some theories suggest that people become excluded due to discrimination or “overt or covert racism, sexism, and ageism” (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998, p. 50).

**Values Informing the Framework**

Equality is an important value driving this framework. When individuals do not have an equal chance to participate, or have unequal access to opportunities or resources, social exclusion
results (Peace, 2001; Sheppard, 2006; Williams, 1998). The response is to look for ways to achieve a fair and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

For many scholars, however, it is not enough that individuals and groups have equitable access to resources and opportunities. They have to be accepted into society, deemed valuable, and not seen as inferior (see Calabrese, Patterson, Liu, Goodvin, Hummel, & Nance, 2008; Mikami, Griggs, Lerner, Emeh, Reuland, Jack, & Anthony, 2013). Another value is acceptance. Respect for human diversity is valued (see Calabrese et al., 2008; Pittendrigh, 2007). When diverse individuals are accepted, equity becomes possible.

Given this, it is not surprising that caring for others is valued in this framework (see Calabrese et al., 2008; Prilleltensky, 2011). While this is a broad ambition, it generally means that the needs of every person are recognized and ideally attended to, especially those who have been excluded. This raises another value in this framework: making the needs and concerns of excluded groups both visible and important (see Taket et al., 2009). It is often the case that those who are excluded are invisible and absent from public discourses.

Finally, collaboration is valued (Pittendrigh, 2007). Given the complex nature of social exclusion and the equally complex steps needed to address it, collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed. If possible, the individuals or groups experiencing the exclusion should be included such that solutions meet their realities and needs.

**What does Attending to Social Exclusion Look Like in Practice?**

Responses to social exclusion are often at the macro level. They involve defining the concepts, policies and practices that would facilitate inclusion for excluded groups. Less effort is directed toward micro or individual practice. Sheppard (2006) said, “there remains some debate about its significance for practice” (p. 27). Moreover, the literature describing practical responses
to exclusion/inclusion was vague. It regularly pointed to strategies such as enhancing peer relations, adjusting attitudes toward diversity, or engaging in collaboration without explaining why these were appropriate.

Efforts to respond to exclusion are often very broad in their nature. Some are focused at macro level systems such as employment, and education. One Canadian scholar talks about social inclusion/exclusion within the context of housing (see Thibert, 2007). Specifically, the author argues that “social mixing” (p. iii) (mixing housing designs) can facilitate inclusion in urban neighbourhoods due to the variety of homeowners. The argument is that proximity to diverse people is enough to rupture segregation and the ghettoization of particular neighbourhoods.

Some responses to exclusion are focused at micro level systems. In a Midwestern state in the United States, for instance, a group of researchers studied the efficacy of a program called Circle of Friends (COFP) designed to foster the inclusion of children with disabilities within schools (Calabrese et al., 2008). The COFP paired disabled children with a “buddy” (Calabrese et al., 2008, p. 25) (a non-disabled peer) who supported them socially to facilitate inclusion. The researchers discovered that, as a result of the program, excluded children with disabilities became included: they participated in the same activities as other children and extended their groups of friends and supports.

In general, the overarching strategy for inclusion is ensuring that excluded individuals are seen as equals and participate equally in whatever context is being discussed – the classroom, the community, housing, or Canadian society.

Additionally, what seems important, according to some scholars (see Levitas, 2003, 2006), is not necessarily the approaches taken to understanding and responding to social
exclusion as much as it is necessary to realize that the ways in which people think about and explore social exclusion dictates the response. In other words, if social exclusion is believed to be the result of poverty, the response might be to adjust policies or services related to reducing poverty. If social exclusion is believed to be the result of poor individual choices, a response will follow accordingly. This claim was made by Ruth Levitas who, in 2003, studied the various approaches taken to respond to social exclusion in the European Union. Briefly, Levitas (2003, 2006) found that in the 1980s and 1990s, exclusion was believed to be the result of poverty (in its broadest sense) so the response was to reduce poverty. In the 1990s, exclusion was believed to be the result of un- or under-employment so efforts were directed toward “integrating” (Levitas, 2003, para. 8) the excluded back into society through the workforce. Also in the 1990s, Charles Murray argued that the “moral underclass” (Levitas, 2003, para. 9) and those who made up the underclass, came to be excluded because of their attitudes (e.g., their negative valuation of work) and behaviours, such as “truancy” or “teenage pregnancy” (Levitas, 2006, p. 128; Barry, 1998). The response to exclusion was to address immorality.

Whether of micro or macro focus, the literature does reveal that relations are important in strategizing around social inclusion/exclusion. Indeed, exclusion happens because individuals are removed from social relations. Dialogue, then, is a key part of this framework. For dialogue to happen, processes must be put in place so that different individuals or groups can come together (such as through collaboration in response to an issue, or as part of the inclusion process itself). For instance, at the macro level, mixed housing is theorized to bring diverse people together through proximity so that they can dialogue (Thibert, 2007). At the micro level, curriculum change, and the inclusion of children with disabilities or from diverse ethnic backgrounds happened through dialogue (Aboud, Tredoux, Tropp, Spears Brown, Niens, & Ali, 2012;
Dialogue is meant to lead to discovery about others through active and respectful listening, democratic conversations, and collaboration so that multiple voices are heard.

Finally, when responding to exclusion, it is necessary to avoid homogenizing the individuals, and even groups, who are considered excluded (e.g., “homeless people, lone parents, young offenders”) (Barry, 1998, p. 3). Doing so risks erasing or ignoring the differences and nuances that separate groups. Those experiencing homelessness should not be understood – and therefore supported – in the same way as lone mothers, even though they may both be excluded due to unemployment.

**Strengths and Challenges of the Social Inclusion/Exclusion Framework in Relation to the Issue**

**Labels.** An important strength of this framework is the focus of attention on the needs and interests of the excluded (Morris, Barnes, & Balloch, 2009). In doing this, however, there is a necessary requirement that the excluded first be labelled and categorized in some way (e.g., as unemployed, having a disability) in order to be recognized as excluded (Sheppard, 2006; Williams, 1998). The excluded must also be recognized as different from the group(s) that are not excluded (Peace, 2001). This does two things: forces those who are excluded to first be labelled and sorted into groups, and forces them to be labelled as “different,” perhaps implying “deviance or non-conformity” (Taket et al., 2009, p. 8; Sheppard, 2006). It creates a double layer of labelling: as excluded and why they are being excluded (e.g., being homeless).

The attempt to eliminate exclusion might actually contribute to exclusion because of the process of applying labels. This can cause people to be seen as different (Calabrese et al., 2008). It also seems inadvertently to give the dominant group more power by making them the standard
to emulate. Those with power get to decide who is excluded or not. Arguably, labelling people as excluded and using this as a foundation upon which to determine how to best encounter them may strain encounters.

**Boundaries and categorization.** For an excluded group to become included, they must come into the “boundar[y]” (Williams, 1998, p. 17) of the included groups. There is a boundary, for instance, between the private and public sphere so for women to be included, they need to leave the private sphere (e.g., stay-at-home parenting) and come into the public sphere (e.g., employment) (Williams, 1998). The danger in boundaries is that they can create dualisms whereby people are either “insiders” (Levitas, 2003, para. 14) or “outsiders” (para. 14), included or excluded (Levitas, 2003; Taket et al., 2009). Inherent in these dichotomies are ideas of goodness, idealism, or advantage that get attached to the insider or included status, while ideas of badness or disadvantage get attached to the excluded status. Further, inclusion can result in a “false universalism” (Williams, 1998, p. 17) whereby those who are excluded can become included, but only if they assimilate into the boundaries, or otherwise fit into the hegemonic, or prioritized norms of the included group. This raises more complex considerations about boundaries and categorizations such as whether a person is automatically included if they are not excluded. It also assumes that the excluded group wants to fit into the included group, which may be problematic for groups who do not wish to be excluded, but perhaps also do not want to be included because they want to maintain their own beliefs and ways of living.

Categorization can also be problematic in that certain groups, who are in reality, heterogeneous, become merged into one category. Recognizing heterogeneity, however, can make identifying and defining exclusion difficult and result in too many nuanced categories (Taket et al., 2009). Further, persons and groups can be excluded in some contexts but not others.
Categorization, then, may not be as simple or stable as it can appear in the social inclusion/exclusion literature.

**Assessment of inclusion and exclusion.** Many scholars have written about the indicators of exclusion. These discussions are helpful for raising awareness about who is excluded and under what circumstances. Indicators, such as employment or finances, communicate where attention should be directed in facilitating inclusion. They dictate who gains attention and who does not. Indicators of exclusion, however, also communicate what ought to be considered valuable or normal in society (Levitas, 2006). For instance, if employment is being used as an indicator of inclusion/exclusion, implicitly, the claim is being made that employment is valuable and that unemployment, or perhaps the unpaid work done by stay-at-home parents, is not valued. Further, what is considered valuable or normal changes over time (Cobigo et al., 2012). Indicators also raise questions about things such as who gets to establish the indicators and determine who is (not) excluded.

**Addressing exclusion and strategies for social inclusion.** That there seems to be no end to the type of strategies that can be developed and used to support those who are excluded is an asset of this framework. It allows for innovation and for tailored context- and population-specific strategies (Pierson, 2002). Because so many different groups are excluded, and the social inclusion/exclusion framework is so broad, some scholars have argued that a plethora of social issues can and have been tackled in terms of policy and social service initiatives (see Morris et al., 2009).

This asset may also be a challenge. It seems many concepts and problems get thrown under the exclusion umbrella, and so the range of corresponding interventions cover everything from improving income support to community building efforts. This makes it hard to separate
this framework from other theories, concepts, strategies, or frameworks that might more specifically relate to each issue under study (e.g., relationship building, collaboration, attitudes). It also makes this framework challenging to apply when seeking specific strategies to encounter excluded persons.

Scholars also seem concerned with whose job it is to address exclusion. Some (see Beresford & Wilson, 1998, for example) claim exclusion is often approached from a top down position such that it becomes the job of the included to identify those who are excluded, and then remedy the exclusion. This risks making those who are excluded “(passive) subjects” (Beresford & Wilson, 1998, p. 87) with the debates, discussions, decisions, and work done by experts. The excluded become associated with problems to be fixed and the focus of conversations for those who are included. Sheppard (2006) argues, however, that the “problems” to be fixed are themselves contestable. Just because it has been collectively agreed upon in a formal setting that certain exclusions are problems does not mean everyone views them as problems in need of addressing.

**Challenging the status quo.** While finding ways to include the excluded is certainly an asset of this framework, it does not in itself always challenge the status quo, or the processes causing exclusion (Barry, 1998; Levitas, 2003; Ward, 2009). Instead, the excluded may simply become integrated into the existing mainstream, whether this is in terms of social practices, structures, ideas, or values (Barry, 1998; Levitas, 2003). These are often taken for granted and assumed in themselves, to be unproblematic (Levitas, 2003; Ward, 2009). Inclusion may actually limit the choices of excluded persons (Ward, 2009). This is because, in many cases, it is the values, perspectives and ideals of the dominant group that are imposed on the excluded. Put another way, the excluded are assessed against the dominant group and, in some cases, must
achieve their standards in order to be included (Cobigo et al., 2012). This leaves little room for the position of the dominant group to be challenged or critiqued. A strength of this framework, however, is its focus on changing the status quo of systems; most of the work is done at theoretical, conceptual, discursive levels often concentrating on policy and community-based initiatives that are exclusionary and finding ways to make them more inclusive. This could make it more possible to challenge the status quo within systems.

**Including voices in the change process.** An asset of this framework is that it values (as well as offers strategies for) bringing together multiple voices to create change. These voices are often multi-disciplinary, which lends strength to debating and discussing how to remedy social exclusions (Cheetham & Fuller, 1998). It is also considered the ideal to include the voices of the excluded which in itself promotes inclusion, and strengthens interventions (Beresford & Wilson, 1998).

There are challenges, however, in including certain voices. One is having “experts” (Beresford & Wilson, 1998, p. 88) speak for the excluded. This can also heighten the divide between the excluded and the experts (Beresford & Wilson, 1998). Another is making the excluded identify themselves as excluded in order to give them a voice (Beresford & Wilson, 1998). This assumes that people, in the first place, have an awareness of their own exclusion, which is not always the case (Beresford & Wilson, 1998). It also assumes this is something people actually want to do. In 1998, Beresford and Wilson claimed there was no research to consider how those who fell into the excluded category felt about being labelled as excluded. It does not appear this has changed in the more recent literature.

It is also important to consider whether those who are excluded actually want to participate in conversations, especially if they feel their voices will not be heard or that nothing
will come of the conversations (Beresford & Wilson, 1998). Additionally, those who have been excluded might find it difficult to find words to articulate their perspectives when confronting dominant perspectives. Because their ideas are likely also different, they might be labelled in a problematic way, or pathologized (Beresford & Wilson, 1998).

Motivations. Equality is an important value as well as philosophical underpinning of this framework. Yet, it is not altogether clear what is meant by equality and whether (and when) equality is desirable when encountering contentious differences. Some, for instance, claim inequality occurs when individuals and/or groups do not have a real or perceived equal chance to participate, or to have the same access as others to social opportunities or resources (see Christensen & Smith, 2005; Fourie, 2012; Peace, 2001; Sheppard, 2006; Wall, 2011; Williams, 1998). Based on this definition, the response is to achieve fair and equitable distribution of, or access to, resources.

Others claim inequality occurs when one group is treated as “better or worse, inferior or superior” (Fourie, 2012, p. 112) than another. Based on this definition, the response is to support inequality so that those worse off can be given preference to increase their advantages (Quong, 2010). The differences in definitions and response raise a number of questions. In the long run, will unequally prioritizing those worse off lead to equality in terms of encounters? Ultimately, some claim that there are inadequate or simplistic answers for what is being equalized (e.g., “income, happiness, welfare”) (Phillips, 2004, p. 1). Arguably, some also assume (perhaps wrongly) everyone wants whatever is being equalized.

Additionally, this framework raises considerations about morality that are implicit in the debates about equality (Wall, 2011). While most of the inclusion/exclusion literature does not attend directly to issues of morality, some discussion about things such as responsibility, good
and evil, right and wrong are implied. Most specifically, there is discussion about blame for exclusion and inequality as well as accountability. For instance, it is regularly persons/groups believed to hold positions of power or privilege that are held responsible (see Baines, 2011). I think how issues of morality are attended to can cause potential challenges for encounters. While I think holding persons or groups accountable for errors is necessary for correcting mistakes, I think it risks labelling them as evil or wrong. Encounters may become motivated by remedying inequality, allocating blame and responsibility rather than concern for well-being.

**Framework Three: Hospitality Framework**

The last of the three frameworks I explore is the hospitality framework. Hospitality is a commonly used concept in Western society associated with entertainment, either in the home through meals or parties, or in relation to the travel and tourism industry (Duce, 2013; Gibble, 1981; Nouwen, 1986). *Theological* hospitality is a rich concept with foundations in the Christian Bible (Boys & Alexander, 2012; Nouwen, 1986), Hadith (Amhad, 2011), and Qur’an (Siddiqui, 2015). According to Christian theologian Henri Nouwen (1986), it is “worth restoring to its original depth and evocative potential” (p. 66) for encountering persons holding contentious differences. It offers insights different from social sciences-informed frameworks.

**Purpose and Outcomes of Hospitality**

According to Muslim and Christian scholars, hospitality involves a particular type of welcome: encounters are to be characterized by a willingness by people to open their lives to one another (Lumbard, 2011; Siddiqui, 2015). Christian scholars add that hospitality calls people to join together in life’s struggles, and journey together (Frambach, 2011; Pohl & Buck, 2004). Christian hospitality encourages the creation of a welcoming space for others such that they feel safe, free, loved, and “at home” (Kinnamon, 1999, p. 160; Koyama, 1993; Nouwen, 1986). This
can, according to scholars from both faith traditions, have important and sometimes life-changing implications for encountered parties (Lumbard, 2011; Nouwen, 1986; Omar, 2009; Pohl, 2012; Siddiqui, 2015). For example, according to Christian scholar Christine Pohl (2012), people who practice hospitality often feel that they are blessed, and their lives are improved. The recipients of hospitality are similarly blessed, humbled, and transformed according to scholars in both faith traditions (Pohl, 2012; Siddiqui, 2015). Sometimes “the best gift people can offer is their time and attention” because it can bring people “to life” (Pohl, 2012, p. 25).

**Recipients of Hospitality**

Hospitality can be *extended* as well as *demonstrated* to anyone, anytime, anywhere say Christian and Muslim scholars (Cornille, 2011; de Béthune, 2007; FitzGerald, 2011; Frambach, 2011; Jones, 1992; Kinnamon, 1999; Loring, 2001; Nouwen, 1986; Riddle, 1938; Siddiqui, 2015; Yong, 2008). Christian scholars claim that hospitality is a paradigmatic attitude that should be “emblematic of all encounters” (de Béthune, 2007, p. 15, emphasis added; Nouwen, 1986). Christians and Muslims speak of universalism in reference to Allah (Islam) and God (Christianity) who love, encounter, and welcome all, without exception or conditions (Cornille, 2011; de Béthune, 2007; Kinnamon, 1999; Siddiqui, 2015). There are no limits to who receives hospitality in either faith tradition (Cornille, 2011; Siddiqui, 2015).

Both faith traditions, however, paradoxically encourage encountering *particular* persons. This is because it is acknowledged that it is easy to demand that everyone be encountered, but the reality is that there are some persons who are simply more challenging, awkward, and contentious to encounter (Lumbard, 2011). Strangers, according to the Muslim and Christian literature, are particularly challenging to encounter (see Afridi, 2005; Akpinar, 2007; Brandner, 2013; Carroll, 2011; Cornille, 2011; Kinnamon, 1999; Koyama, 1993; Lumbard, 2011; Meehan,
Also challenging to encounter are the vulnerable (Pohl, 2012; Siddiqui, 2015) defined by Christian scholars as including the “poor and needy” (Carroll, 2011, p. 523), refugees, and those no longer connected with groups important to them (e.g., their family or work community) (Carroll, 2011; Pohl, 2012). According to Christian scholars, those who have committed wrongs are also difficult to encounter (see Matthew 5:44, New International Version; Kinnamon, 1999; Loring, 2001; Sykes, 2014).

Wrongs may refer to a wide spectrum of actions: actions deemed wrong at a personal, social, or moral level. Finally, Muslim and Christian scholars claim that those considered enemies (Koyama, 1993; Loring, 2001; Meehan, 2012) whether personally or more broadly (e.g., persons from a country at war with one’s own) are to be hospitably encountered even though it is difficult.

**What does Hospitality Look Like in Practice?**

Pragmatically, demonstrations of hospitality are to be offered in everyday encounters with the people “in front of us” (Carroll, 2011, p. 526; Adeney, Bidwell, & Walker, 2012; Pohl & Buck, 2004; Yong, 2008). Scholars from both Christian and Muslim faith traditions provide examples of how to offer hospitality in the home (see Allard, 2012; Lombard, 2011), in church-based services (Duce, 2013), in education (Adeney et al., 2012; Nouwen, 1986) as well as at a national level (Siddiqui, 2015) and in politics (Allard, 2102). Hospitality is generally demonstrated in both faith traditions through small or large acts of love, mercy, generosity, kindness, and respect.

More specifically, hospitality involves a host who encounters a guest and invites and/or receives the guest (Akpinar, 2007; Boys & Alexander, 2012; Siddiqui, 2015; Stacey, 2014;
Vogels, 2002) often, into their own homes, as is evident in the Holy Bible and the Qur’an. The guest is shown hospitality in a variety of ways, such as by being offered food, shelter, and conversation (see Genesis 18 in the Holy Bible and Q51:24-30 in the Qur’an). Hosts are not only responsible for ensuring that the guest feels welcomed and for their physical care (Boys & Alexander, 2012; Siddiqui, 2015), but also for ensuring that their needs are prioritized (Anderson, 1998; Frambach, 2011; Lumbard, 2011). This is true even when guests show up unexpectedly and interrupt the “routines” (de Béthune, 2007, p. 4; Siddiqui, 2015) of the host. In return, the guest is expected to behave in a respectable manner toward their host according to Christian scholars. This means, at minimum, demonstrating gratitude for what is offered (Vogels, 2002). Even more, guests ought to “hold in esteem” (de Béthune, 2007, p. 17) their hosts and the hospitality offered to them. To start from a place of respect and esteem allows for things such as mutual welcome, respect, and dialogue (de Béthune, 2007). In contrast, starting from a place where the host’s offering or “daily life seems meaningless or repugnant” (de Béthune, 2007, p. 17) inhibits hospitality and encounters.

Demonstrations of hospitality also happen through dialogue. For dialogue to be hospitable, as Christian scholars contend, people must move beyond mere discussion or “exchanges of knowledge” (de Béthune, 2007, p. 6) toward “communion” (de Béthune, 2007, p. 6) and intimate understanding (de Béthune, 2007; Kessler, 2012). Encountered parties “dwell” (Brandner, 2013, p. 101) in one another’s story. This is facilitated by asking questions about people’s lives, experiences, and what is important to them and why it is so, say Christian scholars (Durley, 2012).

Since the intent of hospitable dialogue is to support and strengthen understanding and relationships, not convince others of one’s arguments (Mosher, 2011), judgement is reserved
(Durley, 2012). Dialogue of this nature, say Muslim and Christian scholars, provides opportunities to see the “real” (Durley, 2012, p. 102) lives of others including their struggles, experiences, and beliefs (Omar, 2009) and to learn how to “live together” and “[envision a] future together” (Yong, 2008, p. 156; Omar, 2009). It allows each party to move away from their own perspectives, “meet” (de Béthune, 2007, p. 6; Omar, 2009) the other and “welcome them as a friend who is different” (Durley, 2012, p. 101). This does not mean that people need to agree with one another, sacrifice their differences, or even avoid conflict (Omar, 2009). Rather, differences and contentions must be approached with humility, openness, curiosity and respect. The attitude undergirding the dialogue, no matter what is communicated in it, must be hospitable (de Béthune, 2007).

**Handling Otherness, Difference and Conflict**

Hospitality involves an authentic attempt to come to know the other (Boys & Alexander, 2012; Carroll, 2011): an attempt made to have all parties discover one another’s differences because they are important to discover (Omar, 2009). Christian scholars add that the welcome must not diminish or erase other-ness (de Béthune, 2007; Mosher, 2011). Instead, the other stays an “other” (Mosher, 2011, p. 643) and even more, is encouraged to “thrive as other” (Mosher, 2011, p. 643; Kinnamon, 1999; Yong, 2008). People are encouraged to “[delight]” (Mosher, 2011, p. 643; de Béthune, 2007) in differences. It is inappropriate to welcome others only to eliminate their difference by integrating them into one’s “own universe” (de Béthune, 2007, p. 14; Reynolds, 2006). The “goal is unity of spirit” (Reinert, 1977, p. 303) whereby persons can sustain their own beliefs while valuing, respecting, and understanding the beliefs of others, even when they are oppositional.
According to some Christian scholars, to take a hospitable position means recognizing and respecting the lines of difference between people – not aiming to change people or orchestrate the dialogue, but rather creating freedom and space for dialogue and change to occur, if appropriate (Nouwen, 1986; Yong, 2008). It also means finding ways to approach difference constructively (Cornille, 2011), respectfully, responsibly, and with an attitude of curiosity (Adeney et al., 2012; Brandner, 2013). A hospitable attitude and welcoming dialogue may not, themselves, resolve disagreements, disputes, confrontation, and conflict (Nouwen, 1986), and might instead, invite them (Cornille, 2011). Disputes are openly discussed (Kessler, 2012; Nouwen, 1986) while recognizing that, sometimes, there are no easy or ready solutions (Nouwen, 1986). Actions or thinking that inhibits welcome are spoken out against. For instance, in both Christian and Muslim hospitality, fear and hostility are called out as well as the desire to separate from, rather than encounter, contentious differences (Carroll, 2011; Gibble, 1981; Siddiqui, 2015) because they stand in the way of hearing others’ stories (Mosher, 2011). In the Christian faith, Durley (2012) says, “the Bible stresses that each of us must overcome prejudice, racism, hate, and be unafraid to share one another's stories. Every ethnic, racial, cultural, and faith group has a story” (p. 100). Yet, welcoming the other, especially when fear, hostility and conflict are present, “run[s] directly against the grain of our own experience” (Gibble, 1981, p. 184) and many have struggled and failed to do so. Several theologians and scholars acknowledge that Muslims and Christians themselves have permitted and sometimes fostered separation and prejudice instead of unity (Torbett 2005-2006) and encountered others poorly due to difference (e.g., in religious beliefs, worship styles) (Afridi, 2005; Durley, 2012).

Hospitality necessarily involves paradoxical movement, role reversals, mixing, and blurriness between the roles of guest and host (Boys & Alexander, 2012; de Béthune, 2007;
Nouwen, 1986; Reynolds, 2006) which inform encounters. While it is the host who welcomes, invites, and receives the guest, the host must also be prepared to be a guest to the other to receive their gifts and talents. Both host and guest act with “reciprocity” (de Béthune, 2007, p. 3) and recognize that “each side has an equal amount to give and to receive” (p. 3). The host gives gifts to the guest (e.g., space, food) but the guest also gives gifts to the host (e.g., conversation, their stories) and both gain something from the encounter (Reynolds, 2006). When discomfort or conflict occur, it is outweighed by the “larger mutual indebtedness” (Reynolds, 2006, p. 198) of both host and guest.

**Theological Underpinnings**

In this framework, all people, including those who are contentiously different, are to be perceived as brothers and sisters (Carroll, 2011; de Béthune, 2007; Lumbard, 2011; p. Pohl & Buck, 2004; Yong, 2008), as equal to one another, and at minimum, united in common humanity (Amhad, 2011; Carroll, 2011; Heaton, 1937; The Reconstructionist, 1947). In Christian theology, this is because, “God is no respecter of persons. He has no favorites…no man is intrinsically before God better than another” (Heaton, 1937, p. 69). Through Jesus in the Christian faith, there is actually a demand to “discover” (Fortune, 1919, p. 17) in everyone a brother or sister, and to be united, even when the other is considered an enemy (Fortune, 1919; Pope John Paul II, 1998). In Islam, according to professor Joseph Lumbard (2011), persons should “desire for [their] brother what [they] desire for [themselves]” (p. 137). Pope John Paul II (1988) claims that underlying brother/sisterhood is:

- respect for others, a willingness to dialogue, justice, healthy ethics in personal and community living, freedom, equality, peace in unity, promotion of the dignity of the human person, the capacity to share and to divide with others. Brother[sister]hood and
solidarity rise above all clannish and corporation spirit, all nationalism, all racism, every abuse of power, every individual fanaticism, be it cultural or religious. (p. 121)

In other words, the sibling language communicates the moral, ethical and theological directive to perceive others as equal.

Even more, persons are to move beyond equality and perceive others – their needs and desires – as more important than one’s own. This challenges division between people by shifting thinking toward unity even when there is personal resistance to it (Torbett, 2005-2006). Instead, in Muslim and Christian theology, difference and diversity are appreciated (Reinert, 1997) because difference is, paradoxically, at “the heart of unity” (Gregorios, 1985, p. 210) and successfully encountering contentious diversity. Muslim scholar Mona Siddiqui (2015) adds, “hospitality is first and foremost a duty toward others, a way of living in which we are constantly reminded of human diversity” (p. 12, emphasis added). The sibling language conveys how it is theologically possible to promote unity while at the same time, permitting and celebrating differences. In families, for instance, kin are uniquely different from one another yet united in terms of familial bonds (Horrell, 2001). Each individual, then, is to be perceived as uniquely and wonderfully different.

**Values Informing the Framework**

There are a multitude of values that undergird the theology of hospitality. For instance, for hospitality to occur, there must first be an interest in others (Adeney et al., 2012; Meehan, 2012), even when contention exists. Unconditional welcome must precede any judgement about the other to communicate their value and worth as a person (Kinnamon, 1999; Siddiqui, 2015). Christian scholars add that there must also be an attitude of curiosity (Adeney et al., 2012; Brandner, 2013) and humility (Brandner, 2013) for learning to occur (Adeney, et al., 2012;
Carroll, 2011). Additionally, Christian and Muslim scholars contend that persons must be willing to become vulnerable (Allard, 2012; Boys & Alexander, 2012; Siddiqui, 2015). This is especially important when tension, awkwardness, or conflict is present. This means a dedication to exploring and growing in self-awareness and self-knowledge is valued (Adeney et al., 2012; Siddiqui, 2015; Yong, 2008).

Paradoxically, allowing encounters with others to clarify, challenge and “[stir] up” (Koyama, 1993, p. 283) one’s self-knowledge, beliefs, and theological understandings is valued (Adeney et al., 2012; Koyama, 1993; Siddiqui, 2015; Yong, 2008) because, as Kinnamon (1999) argues, welcoming the other is crucial to strengthening one’s self, one’s faith, and ultimately, encounters with others.

As mentioned, hospitality often involves “dialogue” (Adeney, et al., 2012, p. 38; Allard, 2012; Boys & Alexander, 2012) or conversations between parties. According to Adeney and colleagues (2012), these parties should be thought of as “conversation partners” (p. 36). This conveys the value of equality between persons where neither is superior or inferior (Amhad, 2011; Yong, 2008). Authenticity within conversations is also valued according to Christian scholars (Adeney, et al., 2012; Yong, 2008). This means an authentic attempt should be made to come to know and understand the other (Adeney et al., 2012) while respecting “boundaries” (Adeney, et al., 2012, p. 40) between self and others (Adeney, et al., 2012; Boys & Alexander, 2012; Sykes, 2014). In both faith traditions, it also means that others are respected and appreciated generally (Amhad, 2011), and that the differences and gifts they bring are valued and respected (Adeney et al., 2012; Boys & Alexander, 2012; Brandner, 2013; Durley, 2012; Sobh et al., 2013).
Christian scholars claim this includes the “tensions and lessons” (Adeney, et al., 2012, p. 38) others can bring to conversations (Adeney, et al., 2012; Yong, 2008). Conversations must make evident to the other that they are valuable (Adeney et al., 2012; Carroll, 2011). It is of value to seek areas of agreement (Adeney et al., 2012) and unity (Adeney et al., 2012; Yong, 2008) in the face of disagreement and conflict. This allows for ecumenism and collaboration (Adeney et al., 2012) which Christian scholars argue are valued in this framework.

When it is understood that everyone deserves hospitality (Adeney et al., 2012; Siddiqui, 2015; Sykes, 2014), others are approached with love (Durley, 2012; Gaddy, 2004), compassion (Adeney et al., 2012; Carroll, 2011; Siddiqui, 2015), “sensitivity” (Adeney, et al., 2012, p. 38; Omar, 2009; Yong, 2008), generosity (Allard, 2012; Lumbard, 2011), and grace (Adeney et al., 2012; Siddiqui, 2015; Sykes, 2014). All of these are valued in this framework. Ideally, both guest and host will be mutually enriched in encounters (Allard, 2012; Boys & Alexander, 2012; Frambach, 2011; Reynolds, 2006; Siddiqui, 2015; Yong, 2008) because love, relationships, community, and neighbourliness have been prioritized (Durley, 2012; Gaddy, 2014; Siddiqui, 2015).

Given this, in the theology of hospitality, certain values are also challenged and avoided. Competitiveness (Adeney, et al., 2012) between ideas and people is one such example. Power that leads to the control or devaluing of another is denounced (Adeney et al., 2012) as is failing to extend welcome (Adeney, et al., 2012; Durley, 2012; Siddiqui, 2015; Sykes, 2014). Self-righteousness (Kinnamon, 1999), fear (Adeney et al., 2012; Carroll, 2011; Siddiqui, 2015; Sykes, 2014) and avoidance (Adeney et al., 2012) are not valued in the framework. Christian scholars claim that superficiality, which could be in the welcome itself, in the dialogue between parties, or occur in other ways, is not valued (Kinnamon, 1999; Reynolds, 2006). Additionally, scholars
argue that hospitality must move beyond superficial tolerance or civility to more authentic conversations (see Durley, 2012; Kinnamon, 1999; Yong, 2008).

**Strengths and Challenges of the Hospitality Framework in Relation to the Issue**

**Roles and rules within encounters.** In this framework, there are both implicit and explicit rules and roles for hosts and guests who are encountering one another. These paradigmatic and pragmatic rules and roles are an asset because they give people insight into how to encounter others, even when they hold contentious differences.

There are several challenges, however, that these rules and roles can introduce. First, they can introduce a dualism whereby one is either a *host* or a *guest*. This communicates differences between people. While not inherently problematic, if accompanied by power, superiority, or an interest in hierarchies, the dualism could challenge encounters. It is possible, for instance, for a host to behave in ways that demonstrate superiority to a guest. The dualism also introduces potential problematic responsibility: the language implies it is only a *host* who is responsible for encountering.

Second, the terms *host* and *guest* are labels that can be (and are) applied to people. While in this framework, they are intended to be positive, labels have the potential to dehumanize and must be used with care. Someone labelled a guest, for instance, may inadvertently communicate they will only be welcomed for a limited time period or that they do not fully belong. Hosts primarily control the setting whereas guests, given their temporality, have little power over affairs.

Finally, the rules and roles for hosts and guests are not always clear in this framework, especially in the Christian literature. Drawing an example from the Christian scholarship, in the New Testament, Jesus illustrates the rules and roles of hosts and guests are anything but simple
(Boys & Alexander, 2012; Sykes, 2014; Yong, 2008). On several occasions, Jesus acts as a guest by relying on the hospitality of strangers for refuge (de Béthune, 2007; Yong, 2008). In behaving as a guest, Jesus accepted food, shelter, and the kindness of many people (Yong, 2008). Jesus complicated the role of guest, however, by demonstrating the hospitality of God toward His hosts in His behaviour and kindness (Yong, 2008) and so He became the host. His reversal of roles was not always appreciated: in His role as guest, He often “violated the prohibitions” (de Béthune, 2007, p. 15; Vogels, 2002) of His time and culture and therefore angered people (including His hosts). While these violations were necessary because they demonstrated and communicated appropriate God-driven hospitality, this example shows that the roles of guest and host do not fall neatly into dualities nor are they mutually exclusive in Christianity. Genuine hospitality necessarily involves role reversals and blurriness between the roles of guest and host (Boys & Alexander, 2012; de Béthune, 2007; Nouwen, 1986; Reynolds, 2006). This can make it difficult to understand who is a guest, who is a host, the relationship between the roles, and how to negotiate the rules of hospitable encounters.

**Relationships and dialogue.** Hospitality necessarily requires an encounter and “exchange” (de Béthune, 2007, p. 3) between people. It is inherently relational (Adeney et al., 2012; Omar, 2009; Siddiqui, 2015; Sykes, 2014; Yong, 2008). Dialogues are to be characterized by hospitable traits such as humility (Lumbard, 2011), openness, curiosity, and respect, so that they can “blossom” (Carroll, 2007, p. 522) into relationships (Carroll, 2007; Gaddy, 2004) or friendships (Koyama, 1993). Hospitable conversations can begin simply (Carroll, 2007) but get deeper as dialogue partners share their stories (Durley, 2012; Siddiqui, 2015). The listener should also share their story (Durley, 2012). A strength of this framework is that it shows the potential
power of dialogue to move superficial conversations to relationships, and help strangers become friends.

This raises, however, a number of questions and considerations. First, it is implied that no dialogue can be superficial – that all must be intentional, relational, and intimate. Is this type of dialogue always possible, or even desirable? I think it ought to be possible, for instance, to encounter others who hold contentious differences in superficial conversations (e.g., in the classroom, in practice, in the hallway) without having to intimately dialogue with them. In other words, I think there are instances when small talk is acceptable. Second, it is not clear whether achieving rich, deep, meaningful dialogue is possible in a variety of contexts. Is this achievable in a classroom setting? Is it achievable between an instructor and student? What contexts, then, would be suitable for this type of dialogue? Finally, it seems to be assumed (perhaps falsely) that both parties (host and guest) want to engage in such a rich dialogue. It is not clear how to move beyond superficiality if only one party is willing to share their story while the other is not. I suspect that it is often the case that one or both parties confronting a contentious difference would be less than eager to share their story.

**Universalism.** An asset of this framework is its call to universalism. Specifically, all persons are to be encountered despite their otherness (Lumbard, 2011; Siddiqui, 2015; Vosloo, 2004), their differences, or any contention. All are to be encountered hospitably. Universalism is challenged, however, by the particularity introduced in this framework. Both Christian and Islamic scholars name persons (e.g., strangers, wrongdoers) who must, in particular, be hospitably encountered. This potentially means other encounters will not be prioritized. Nonetheless, there are times when certain groups of people ought to be prioritized. This
framework offers little guidance on how to manage this tension between being open to all encounters and giving more weight to certain types of encounters.

**Handling the differences of encountered persons.** An asset of this framework is the positive emphasis on diversity and difference: differences are to be recognized (de Béthune, 2007; Mosher, 2011; Siddiqui, 2015), appreciated, and even more, accentuated (Reinert, 1997). They are not to be diminished (de Béthune, 2007; Mosher, 2011). This raises questions, however, about how to actually delight in differences, especially those that are contentious, awkward or oppositional between self and other. The answers in this framework are not always clear or easy to parse out.

Additionally, an asset of this framework is that it encourages people to strive for “unity of spirit” (Reinert, 1977, p. 303) so that people can sustain their own beliefs rather than eliminating, assimilating or integrating differences (de Béthune, 2007; Reynolds, 2006). This raises complex questions, however, about whether and when to challenge certain beliefs or differences. Some beliefs cause harm toward others – is it appropriate, or hospitable, to allow people to sustain them? The framework itself suggests the answer is “no,” but it is not clear when differences should be sustained and when they should be eliminated. Relatedly, it is suggested in this framework that persons should seek areas of unity when disagreements arise (Nouwen, 1986), but little guidance is provided about how to proceed if areas of unity are hard to find or are simply not present. Finally, it is possible that seeking areas of unity can actually diminish or erase differences. This is especially delicate if persons want attention paid to their differences.

**Self-awareness.** An asset of this framework is that it invites self-awareness and self-growth. Indeed, Christian scholars in particular claim distinctions made between self and other are necessary for differences to be revealed and appreciated (Adeney, et al., 2012; Boys &
Alexander, 2012; Sykes, 2014). It is not possible to know the other without knowing one’s self. Further, coming to know others can clarify, confirm and teach more about personal beliefs (Adeney et al., 2012; Kinnamon, 1999; Siddiqui, 2015; Yong, 2008). FitzGerald (2011) argues that guests offer a powerful opportunity to learn about self specifically when an other is encountered that causes discomfort because such situations offer opportunities to consider why discomfort exists. This assumes, however, that persons are interested in and/or capable of self-awareness and self-reflection. Since this is not always the case, it is not clear in this framework how to proceed.

**Practicing hospitality.** Muslim and Christian scholars agree that theological hospitality is pragmatic as well as paradigmatic (Afridi, 2005; Brandner, 2013; Kinnamon, 1999; Siddiqui, 2015). The fact that hospitality can be practiced in a variety of ways and contexts is a strength of this framework. This strength, however, might simultaneously be seen as a challenge since there are no concrete, step-by-step, straightforward strategies or procedures to follow to direct action. The practice of hospitality ranges from informing dialogue to hosting guests to welcoming conversations in a variety of settings. Relatedly, scholars have argued hospitality is an attitude or virtue that is lived out in practice (see Boys & Alexander, 2012; Cornille, 2011; FitzGerald, 2011; Gaddy, 2012; Jones, 1992; Nouwen, 1986; Siddiqui, 2015; Yong, 2008). Its far-reaching nature and application is an asset, yet may be hard to achieve.

**Failure and learning.** Scholars are quick to point out that Christians and Muslims do not always demonstrate hospitality well, and that there have been historical examples to substantiate this (Afridi, 2005; Boys & Alexander, 2012; de Béthune, 2007; Durley, 2012; Koyama, 1993; Pohl & Buck, 2004; Sykes, 2014). This might limit the trust and legitimacy of the ideas, concepts, directions, and practices for encountering contentious differences from this framework.
While perhaps counterintuitive, a strength of the framework lies in the fact that scholars from both faith traditions are quick to acknowledge their own behaviours, attitudes, and past failings, challenge why they happened, and aspire to change (Afridi, 2005; Boys & Alexander, 2012; de Béthune, 2007; Durley, 2012; Koyama, 1993; Pohl & Buck, 2004; Sykes, 2014). Failures related to hospitality are not dismissed, but rather accepted, written about, and used as opportunities to learn and improve (Boys & Alexander, 2012). The past failings and suggestions for improvement provide a foundation upon which to consider improving encounters. Lessons have already been learned about what does not work as well as what will be more successful (and why). Further, scholars regularly talk about hospitality as something that ought to happen and aspire toward, not as something that always happens (see Torbett, 2005-2006).

**Paradoxes.** There are a number of paradoxes inherent in this framework. Many questions raised in this framework, for instance, have answers that involve a “yes” and a “no.” Reynolds (2006) asks the question, “Does hospitality require a person or group to re-adjust who they are in order to welcome the guest?” (p. 196). The answer is “yes and no” (Reynolds, 2006, p. 196). On the surface, this might be perceived as a challenge. It can make engaging in hospitable encounters complex. Christian scholars, however, claim that the many paradoxes, dualities and tensions are important and “fruitful” (Reynolds, 2006, p. 196; Nouwen, 1986). Nouwen (1986) argues that the lack of answers to questions causes discomfort that is necessary to move forward: uneasy questions and the lack of answers provide opportunities for careful consideration. Not having simple, straightforward answers is challenging, but evokes thought (Cornille, 2011). According to Nouwen (1986), people generally do not like not having answers, confronting the unknown, and do not feel comfortable being contemplative. Instead, people tend to feel the need to resolve questions and seek solutions (Nouwen, 1986). This, however, exposes “our intolerance
for the incomprehensibility of people and events and makes us look for labels or classifications to fill the emptiness of self-created illusions” (Nouwen, 1986, p. 74). Ultimately, it raises the question of “how we can ever expect something really new to happen to us if our hearts and minds are so full of our own concerns that we do not even listen to the sounds announcing a new reality” (Nouwen, 1986, p. 75)? This framework presents paradoxical questions and answers and invites contemplation, struggle, failure, and learning. These are claimed to be powerful to propel encounters forward between persons who are contentiously different.

**Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter, I presented an overview of the literature I reviewed to strengthen my comprehension of contentious encounters. As a result of this conceptual work, I came to several conclusions.

First, the fact that there are at least three frameworks designed to attend to the problematic – that tension, awkwardness, and difficulty often characterize encounters where there are contentious differences – shows this issue is of pressing concern to scholars and practitioners among others. Even more, the fact that the frameworks are multidisciplinary shows this issue is of concern in a variety of disciplines such as social work, psychology, sociology, and theology.

Second, each of these three frameworks offers conceptually and pragmatically interesting and useful insights. As evidenced by their strengths, each framework facilitates research and discussion for positively attending to this problematic.

Finally, the differences between each framework in terms of motivation, undergirding theories, values, and language show that there is dissention, and even incongruence between them in terms of how to respond to the issue. More specifically, the inconsistencies, limitations
and challenges of each framework suggest to me that none are sufficient to attend to the issue, and that more thinking and exploration is needed. To respond to this need, and to promote greater understanding, I developed a conceptual framework. In the next chapter, I introduce this conceptual framework in greater detail.
CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK GUIDING THIS STUDY

As detailed in Chapter Two, I explored literature from the AOP/IGD, inclusion/exclusion, and hospitality frameworks to increase my comprehension of the topic. Out of this exploration, I developed a conceptual framework to guide this study.

First, I used various search engines (e.g., Scholars Portal) and resources (e.g., librarians, scholars knowledgeable about the frameworks) to locate literature from each of the three frameworks. I intentionally searched for literature that included a discussion of the frameworks’ philosophies, theories and/or methodologies for encountering others.

Then, moving one framework at a time, I reviewed relevant literature by attending to information on the framework’s (1) history, (2) theoretical, philosophical and/or theological underpinnings, (3) motivations and values, (4) strategies (methodologies) for encountering others, and (5) any strengths and critiques. Most of the AOP/IGD scholarship I included in the review was data-based, although some was more conceptual (e.g., providing overviews of the AOP framework and IGD pedagogy). This was reversed for the inclusion/exclusion framework: a large portion was conceptual, coming from books and grey literature. For the hospitality framework, most scholarship came from books, including the Holy Christian Bible, Qur’an, Hadith, and grey literature.

Next, I identified the most important ideas/processes for encountering others emerging from each of the three frameworks. Finally, I organized and grouped these ideas/processes into broader themes (Berg, 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clews, 2000). I did this by looking for patterns and broader issues across all three frameworks. The result was five broad sensitizing concepts that make up a conceptual framework. I will refer to this conceptual framework as the *Encountering Contentious Differences (ECD) Conceptual Framework*.
The ECD Conceptual Framework is a general frame comprised of five sensitizing concepts meant to identify key issues to be sensitive to within various frameworks, models and approaches to contentious encounters. These key issues can influence encounters. This conceptual framework does not offer a way to approach encounters: it is not delimited by specific procedures for encountering contentious differences. Instead, it offers a lens through which to analyze, deconstruct, assess and consider various models, frameworks, and approaches to encounters. It is conceptual, abstract, and general. It invites complexity in studying, thinking about, and discussing the issue.

I used the ECD Conceptual Framework to guide the fieldwork in this study. For example, it alerted me to the fact that the actual experiences of encounters are rarely considered in the literature I reviewed. This justified gathering stories of encounter experiences from those with differences deemed contentious. Additionally, I drew upon the ECD Conceptual Framework to help me make sense of (interpret) the data. Most specifically, it sensitized me to certain experiences within participants’ stories, and helped me identify common storylines (threads, plotlines) in their stories. I also drew upon the ECD Conceptual Framework to identify core interpretive issues for understanding the encounter experiences of participants, and then to create a general guiding framework for encounters. The fieldwork is described in detail in later chapters.

I use the remainder of this chapter to introduce the ECD Conceptual Framework. I start by explaining what I mean by “sensitizing concepts” and “conceptual frameworks.” Then, I introduce the ECD Conceptual Framework in detail. This includes a brief overview of each of the sensitizing concepts followed by a more detailed discussion. I also discuss the importance of the sensitizing concepts to the issue. Accompanying this discussion is one table (Table 1). The
Table provides: the name of each of the five sensitizing concepts; a brief explanation of each and its relevance, and the operational indicators of each of the sensitizing concepts within frameworks, models and approaches to encounters. I conclude the chapter by discussing the implications of the ECD Conceptual Framework.

What are Sensitizing Concepts?

Sensitizing concepts are “terms, phrases, labels, and constructs” (Patton, 2015, p. 360) that “raise consciousness about something” (Patton, 2015, p. 362). Patton (2015) names “stakeholder involvement” (p. 359) and “homeless” (p. 362) as examples of sensitizing concepts. Their role is to signal to practitioners, researchers, and others key issues to pay attention to, “ponder” (Patton, 2015, p. 361), question, discuss, and debate. In this study, the five sensitizing concepts raise consciousness about key issues to pay attention to when encountering persons holding contentious differences.

In light of this, sensitizing concepts can be used to advance research (Bowen, 2006; Patton, 2015). They can identify issues (e.g., social realities, processes, problems) that warrant further inquiry (Patton, 2015). At minimum, each of the five sensitizing concepts presented in this chapter alert researchers to novel avenues for research.

One way to study sensitizing concepts is to explore how they are manifested. Using the five sensitizing concepts as an example, researchers can explore whether and how they are manifested in other frameworks, models, and approaches to encounters (Ostrom, Cox, & Schlager, 2014; Patton, 2015). These sensitizing concepts, then, invite a slew of important research questions for future research studies: Are these sensitizing concepts relevant and/or evident in other frameworks besides the AOP/IGD, inclusion/exclusion, and hospitality frameworks? How do these concepts relate to how people think and/or talk about the issue
(encountering contentious differences)? How are these concepts manifested in everyday life, and how do various social contexts influence (e.g., inform, facilitate, challenge) how they are manifested (Ostrom et al., 2014)?

Researchers can also explore how sensitizing concepts relate to one another and to an issue (Ostrom et al., 2014). It may be worth future researchers, for instance, studying the accuracy of my belief that these five sensitizing concepts all generally tie to the issue under study and therefore relate to each other. This is important because there are a number of places where they conflict. It also might be worth studying whether all are, in fact, important for this issue, or whether there any other key sensitizing concepts missing (Bowen, 2006). Sensitizing concepts are supposed to be improved and modified (Bowen, 2006) through further exploration and study (Patton, 2015). Such exploration may result in judgments about the “utility” (Patton, 2015, p. 363) of the sensitizing concepts and give rise to other research questions about their centrality, relevance or usefulness.

Finally, sensitizing concepts may be used by researchers to “interpret what is happening” (Bowen, 2006, p. 3) in social interactions. Researchers might, for instance, use any or all of the five sensitizing concepts as a lens through which to identify or filter information such as discussions in the scholarship about how to encounter persons holding contentious differences (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Jabareen, 2009). These sensitizing concepts offer researchers a lens through which to see important issues they may not otherwise consider when studying this topic.

**What is a Conceptual Framework?**

Sensitizing concepts can become more useful when they are conceptually linked (or framed) together. *Conceptual frameworks* link sensitizing concepts together in order to facilitate
the exploration (not explanation) of a topic (Beresford, 2005; Jabareen, 2009; Nilsen, 2015; Ostrom et al., 2014). A conceptual framework, then, is something of an “outline” (Nilsen, 2015, p. 2) or “network” (Jabareen, 2009, p. 51) of “interlinked concepts” (Jabareen, 2009, p. 51). In this study, the ECD Conceptual Framework links five key sensitizing concepts. These, together, can be used to identify key issues to be sensitive to within various frameworks, models and approaches to contentious encounters.

Scholars claim conceptual frameworks differ from theories or models. They are not meant to provide theoretical explanations or predictions (Jabareen, 2009). Instead, conceptual frameworks are meant to extend understanding of an issue (see Jabareen, 2009; Ostrom et al., 2014). They can provide, for instance, “a starting point” (Bowen, 2006, p. 2; Ostrom et al., 2014) as well as “directions” (Blumer, 1954, p. 3; Beresford, 2005) for deeper exploration. In this study, the ECD Conceptual Framework provided a “conceptual foundation” (Ostrom et al., 2014, p. 298) for my dissertation research design (Hutton, Munt, Zeitz, Cusack, Kako, & Arbon, 2010; Jabareen, 2009; Maxwell, 2005; Ostrom et al., 2014). I also propose the ECD Conceptual Framework be used by other researchers as a starting point (Bowen, 2006) for their studies. Researchers might consider, for instance, using this conceptual framework to develop other conceptual tools such as models and theories (Ostrom et al., 2014).

Conceptual frameworks can also extend knowledge by casting a new and different “light” (Beresford, 2005, p. 60) on issues, such as the one I am studying. The ECD Conceptual Framework brings together important insights I derived from multiple frameworks not readily apparent in any one body of literature. In doing so, the ECD Conceptual Framework approaches this topic very differently than other existing frameworks. In this way, it introduces novel considerations for study.
Features of the Encountering Contentious Differences Conceptual Framework Used to Guide the Fieldwork in this Study

In this section, I detail the features of the ECD Conceptual Framework (see Figure 1); that is, an expanded description of each of the five key sensitizing concepts. In other words, I “outline [the] respective properties” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 61) of each sensitizing concept. The sensitizing concepts are presented generally because they are complex abstractions. Additionally, they are presented as distinctive rather than overlapping because I do not yet know whether and/or how these issues are actually related to one another. They all seem to relate to the issue of encountering contentious differences although they are, in places, inconsistent with one another. These inconsistencies betray the fact that the language and approaches recommended (and used) for encountering differences in the literature I explored are incompatible. For these reasons, it is clear to me that further study is warranted on these sensitizing concepts and on the conceptual framework as a whole.
Table 1 provides a brief overview (and explanation) of what is meant by each of these sensitizing concepts. Additionally, Table 1 lists the relevance of the sensitizing concepts. Finally, it provides conceptual indicators of each. A more extensive discussion of the sensitizing concepts and then the conceptual framework as a whole follows this overview.
Table 1

Definition, Relevance and Operational Indicators for each Sensitizing Concept

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Sensitizing Concept</th>
<th>Definition of Sensitizing Concept</th>
<th>Operational Indicators within Frameworks, Models and Approaches to Encounters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Language                        | The actual words or phrases used within an approach for encountering others that capture its nature and core ambitions for thinking about/looking at encounters. Words carry meaning, evoke emotion, and therefore have the force to impact encounters. | • Words or phrases used to label, define, explain or categorize elements of the approach  
• Words or phrases that have framing power (i.e., influence thoughts or emotions)  
• Words or phrases used repeatedly  
• Impacts on encounters  
• Other related information |
| Prioritization of Persons       | Who gets brought into encounters and who does not (as well as the rationale). Giving more focus, attention, or consideration to the encounter of some over others has implications for encounters. | • Discussion about who to bring into encounters  
• Discussion about the reason(s) to bring persons into encounters  
• Discussion about who to leave out of encounters  
• Discussion about the reason(s) to leave persons out of encounters  
• Discussion about the acceptability/appropriateness of encountering non-prioritized persons  
• Impacts on encounters  
• Other related information |
| Wrongs                          | Harm done toward participants to encounters (e.g., injustice, oppression, inequality, exclusion, being inhospitable). The ways in which wrongs are discussed and emphasized in importance can influence encounters (e.g., spark conversations or action, influence directives). | • Description of wrongs  
• Centrality/importance of wrongs  
• Discussion of responsibility (e.g., who committed a wrong)  
• Impacts on encounters  
• Other related information |
| Normalcy                        | Norms (ideals, standards) in an approach to encounters. This concept also has to do with the minimization of deviations from the norm. Norms influence encounters by | • Discussions that describe/frame norms (e.g., ideal outcomes, ideal behaviour of participants to encounters, ideal processes, etc.)  
• Discussions about how to attain norms |
communicating who or what is acceptable. In doing so, norms communicate who or what is problematic in relation to deviating from the norm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humanity</th>
<th>The way(s) of being with and relating to people in the process of encountering them. Relation(ship)s impact approaches to encounters as well as how participants to encounters experience encounters (e.g., as positive, negative, harmful, exclusionary, healing, welcoming).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|                  | • Discussion that arouses emotion toward the normal and the deviant
|                  | • Impacts on encounters
|                  | • Other related information
| Sensitizing Concept One: **Language.** The first key sensitizing concept is *Language.* By this, I mean the actual words or phrases used within a framework, model or approach for encountering others that capture its nature and core ambitions for thinking about and/or looking at encounters. This includes the specific words or phrases used to define concepts, label participants to encounters, or otherwise explain elements of the approach to encounters. This sensitizing concept is important because words carry meaning. They evoke emotion, whether positive or negative, and therefore influence how people approach encounters.

The three frameworks explored for this study can be used to illustrate the importance of this sensitizing concept. Each of these three frameworks contains unique language that when taken together, capture the nature of the framework and point to its core approach to encounters. Without certain language, the framework would be fundamentally altered.

The AOP/IGD framework, for instance, uses language such as *social identities, privilege, conflict,* and *social justice.* This language points to the central ambition of the framework which, in brief, is to achieve social justice by improving relations between social identity groups experiencing conflict.
In contrast, the inclusion/exclusion framework uses language such as *exclusion*, *inclusion*, *equal opportunity*, and *normal*. This language suggests the inclusion/exclusion framework’s core ambition is to overcome the exclusion of certain persons or groups so all can achieve equal opportunity.

Finally, the hospitality framework uses language such as *guest*, *host*, *human being*, *love*, *welcome*, *unity*, and *brother/sisterhood*. This communicates its central ambition as attempting to lovingly welcome guests to encounters given their status as a brother/sister in humanity.

The language of an approach to encounters impacts various aspects of the encounter. Language, for instance, communicates how participants to encounters ought to be perceived. The words *oppressed*, *excluded*, and *guest* all communicate something different about a participant to an encounter. Even more, since language evokes emotion, the words used in a framework can influence whether participants to encounters are perceived positively or negatively. This means that the words used can actually risk causing persons (or the differences they hold) to become perceived as contentious.

Relatedly, language can bring attention to differences between people and groups. The labels *guest* and *host*, or *included* and *excluded* highlight differences. Ultimately, this can impact encounters by bringing people together or dividing them along lines of difference. The label *excluded*, for example, can bring people together by offering a reason to encounter those who are not being granted equal social opportunity. This same label can also divide: those who are included may encounter those who are excluded with hostility because the differences of the excluded somehow deviate from the norm (the differences which are included).

Language can homogenize participants to encounters: language can erase difference by merging heterogeneous groups into one category causing diversity among persons to become
overlooked. Using the social identity label *Christian*, for example, can quickly erase denominational nuances (e.g., Protestant, Catholic). On the flipside, labels can also induce too much attention to differences between groups and overlook commonalities. To use the social identity labels *Muslim*, *Christian*, or *Jewish*, for example, can direct too much attention to differences in terms of religion rather than acknowledging all as persons of faith. This can risk compartmentalizing people’s differences for the purpose of encountering them.

Compartmentalization is not inherently problematic. It can become problematic when persons are intentionally or unintentionally divided into too many segmented differences or when compartmentalization is too difficult. It may be, for instance, too difficult for people to be segmented by one label (e.g., woman) and not another (e.g., race, religion, culture) for the purposes of being encountered. Furthermore, in order to be encountered, persons might have to divulge as well as associate with a particular label. This presumes persons want to be associated with the label, which may not always be the case. When labels are associated with negativity, for instance, the persons holding them may not want to be associated with them if they think they will be encountered with negativity.

Language, then, can implicitly or explicitly communicate how to best encounter contentiously different persons. Language creates directives for how participants to encounters ought to be perceived and thus, how they ought to be encountered. Words can spark encounters, or cause some persons to be encountered with tension, conflict or hostility. Words can even discourage encounters.

Taken together, the findings suggest language is important and has the force to impact encounters. It makes evident a framework’s nature and core ambitions for approaching encounters. It can influence how participants to encounters are perceived. It can also make
differences visible or invisible. It is for these reasons the concept of Language is relevant for encountering persons holding contentious differences.

**Sensitizing Concept Two: Prioritization of Persons.** The second sensitizing concept, *Prioritization of Persons*, has to do with who gets brought into encounters and who does not. This includes the rationale. This sensitizing concept emerged from the idea that various frameworks, models, and approaches to encounters explicitly or implicitly identify groups of people that are not being encountered well (or at all). Each framework prioritizes certain persons to ensure they are brought in to encounters. Additionally, each framework contains its own unique rationale for prioritizing certain groups of people. This sensitizing concept is relevant because ultimately, giving more focus, attention, or consideration to the encounter of some over others has implications for encounters.

In the AOP/IGD framework, for instance, persons considered oppressed are the ones who ought to be brought into encounters. They experience oppression and are therefore encountered with conflict (Dessel, 2010). They are brought into encounters because of disadvantage. Disadvantage happens when some differences are considered to be of greater value than others (Baines, 2011; Dominelli, 2002).

In the inclusion/exclusion framework, persons who are excluded – are on the outside of social systems, processes and relations (Sheppard, 2002) – are to be brought into encounters. They are excluded because their differences deviate from the norm and are often considered less valuable. By virtue of their exclusion, they are prioritized (Morris et al., 2009).

In the hospitality framework, everyone universally is to be brought into encounters (Cornille, 2011; de Béthune, 2007; FitzGerald, 2011; Frambach, 2011; Jones, 1992; Kinnamon, 1999; Loring, 2001; Nouwen, 1975; Siddiqui, 2015; Yong, 2008). With this said, there are
certain persons who are more specifically prioritized. Strangers, those who have committed wrongs, those considered enemies as well as the vulnerable are of greater focus in this framework (Afridi, 2005; Akpinar, 2007; Brandner, 2013; Carroll, 2011; Cornille, 2011; Kinnamon, 1999; Koyama, 1993; Loring, 2001; Lumbard, 2011; Meehan, 2012; Nouwen, 1986; Omar, 2009; Pohl, 2012; Sackreiter & Armstrong, 2010; Siddiqui, 2015; Sobh et al., 2013; Sykes, 2014; Taylor, 2005; Vogels, 2002). They hold differences that are difficult to encounter (e.g., create fear, tension, awkwardness) and, therefore, they are regularly left out of encounters.

Discussion about who gets brought into encounters (and who does not) has implications for encounters. There is risk, for instance, in giving more focus to some over others. Furthermore, directives for who to bring in (e.g., the oppressed, the excluded, the stranger) may be communicating who to leave out (e.g., the oppressors, the included, the friend). This is most clearly illustrated in the AOP/IGD framework. Dessel et al. (2011a) claimed evangelical Christian students’ speech is “inciteful,” ought to be considered “hate speech,” (p. 225) and therefore censored for its harm toward LGBTQ+ group members. Thought about differently, the authors were prioritizing the voices of LGBTQ+ group members because of past and present oppression. They were encouraging readers to leave out the voices of evangelical Christians. I am not arguing that oppressed voices be ignored. Intentional focus is needed, at times, on particular persons or groups. Rather, I am arguing that this sensitizing concept may be used to illuminate and consider what various frameworks have to say about who to bring into encounters and who to leave out, focus on, and deprioritize.

I am also contending that this sensitizing concept be used to consider the impact of prioritization. Bringing in only certain persons, voices or ideas risks communicating that those
not brought in are not important or are even harmful. The prioritization of persons may implicitly provide justification for avoiding others.

The reality is that people, often those holding contentious differences, are left out of encounters for a variety of reasons. This sensitizing concept is useful for casting light on what various frameworks, models and approaches to encounters have to say about who ought to be brought in to encounters. The prioritization of persons has implications for encounters.

**Sensitizing Concept Three: Wrongs.** By *wrongs*, I mean past and ongoing actions committed (or omitted) in social relations that purposely or accidentally harm participants to encounters. This sensitizing concept is important because wrongs regularly cause tension between people, undermine encounters, and therefore can spark efforts to improve encounters. Yet, the ways in which wrongs are discussed in an approach to encounters as well as emphasized in terms of its importance impacts encounters. It is worth exploring, then, whether/how this sensitizing concept is manifested in approaches to encounters.

In all three frameworks I explored, there was some discussion of wrongs. In the AOP/IGD framework, for example, injustice and oppression are wrongs discussed in the approach to encounters. The wrongs discussed in the inclusion/exclusion framework are exclusion and unequal opportunity. In the hospitality framework, the overarching wrong Muslim and Christian scholars are attempting to simultaneously avoid and address is being inhospitable toward others in encounters.

Encapsulated within the discussion of wrongs is a discussion of responsibility. By *responsibility*, I mean the people (or systems) discussed in a framework as having committed a wrong. In the AOP/IGD framework, for instance, one author claims “White, Christian, middle class and/or heterosexual” groups are responsible for the dominant “norms” (Dessel, 2010, p.
that facilitate prejudice, oppression, and frustrate encounters. Discussions of responsibility are important because they inform how to encounter people who are wronged and have wronged. Drawing upon the AOP/IGD framework, there will be a difference between how heterosexual and homosexual group members, for example, are encountered given their various responsibilities for oppression.

Furthermore, the literature I reviewed suggests the discussion of responsibility can victimize or vilify certain differences. Women may become perceived as victims when they are encountered in light of the wrongs of patriarchy. Christians may be perceived as perpetrators within encounters in light of the wrongs of Residential School Systems for First Nations children.

While it can be helpful to associate victimization or vilification with certain differences so wrongs can be addressed, this association can create problems for encounters. Persons whose differences are associated with perpetration may be avoided or encountered with hostility. Additionally, the findings show that wrongs can unintentionally provide reason not to encounter those who are contentiously different.

The literature suggests wrongs can cause some differences to become associated with right and wrong, good and bad. Implied within the literature is that when wrongs occur, there are good people and there are bad people. Bad people are responsible or guilty for wrongs committed against others. Good people are not responsible for wrongs and are therefore innocent. Ideas of villains and victims are interwoven: victims of wrongs are good and perpetrators of wrongs are bad.

Dichotomizing persons holding certain differences into good and bad is linked to judgment: a person or group must judge certain behaviour as evil and by extension, the person(s)
responsible as bad. It is not inherently problematic to judge behaviour or to label behavior as bad. Not all behaviour is good. Judgments of right and wrong, good and evil are appropriate and inevitable in order to respond to wrongs. There is no question that persons and/or groups engage in bad behavior. The attribution, however, of badness to differences can impact how those holding them are perceived and then encountered. If particular differences (e.g., political, religious) have become associated with villainy, it can make encountering those differences difficult. The attribution of villainy to differences can become all-consuming or “monolithic” (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On, & Fakhereldeen, 2002, p. 932): people are perceived only as “bad” making it difficult to see any good behaviour that they engage in or to perceive them as also “good.” Attributions of villainy may stick with people for a long time making it difficult to ever re-classify them as good. Associating a person with villainy can also intentionally or unintentionally vilify others similar to them. One teenager who commits a wrong might cause all teenagers to become associated with badness. It assumes all those holding the same difference (e.g., teenager) are guilty of wrongs when they may not be. They are “guilty by association.” This can become a problem when those who have done no wrong are encountered in ways that would suggest they, too, are bad.

Finally, this sensitizing concept illuminates the centrality or importance of wrongs within an approach to encounters. In the AOP/IGD and inclusion/exclusion frameworks, for instance, wrongs are given central importance. It drives the reason for encounters. Responding to oppression and exclusion respectively is the primary aim of these approaches. In the hospitality framework, the discussion of wrongs is less central. Instead, more emphasis is placed on attending to relationships in addition to explaining concepts such as guest, host, and unity.
The risks are that in approaches where wrongs are of central importance, the focus of encounters may become more about problems than people, evil rather than good, and the correction of wrongs rather than building of relationships. This could challenge encounters: emphasizing wrongs may justify encountering some people with negativity or anger, whether fairly or unfairly. Illuminating wrongs can bring people together by giving them reason to converse, or drive them apart.

This sensitizing concept alerts readers to the idea that in approaches to encounters, wrongs are often part of the discussion. The way in which wrongs as well as responsibility for wrongs are discussed, and how much centrality or emphasis is placed on wrongs within the approach, impacts encounters.

Sensitizing Concept Four: Normalcy. Another key sensitizing concept worth considering is Normalcy. Normalcy has to do with what is considered normal, ideal or standard in an approach to encounters. This may include things such as the ideal approach taken to encounter people, ideal outcome for encounters, and even ideals related to participants to encounters (e.g., their traits, their behaviour). Norms influence various aspects of approaches to encounters, which is why this sensitizing concept is important.

Most specifically, norms influence encounters by implicitly or explicitly communicating what, or who, is acceptable. By default, normalcy also communicates deviance (Sheppard, 2006; Taket et al., 2009): what constitutes a deviation from a norm. Ultimately, the aim in relation to normalcy is to minimize deviations from the norm. Additionally, this concept is important because the way normalcy is framed can arouse positive or negative emotions toward whatever or whoever is considered deviant or normal.
Norms related to participants to encounters can influence encounters in a variety of ways. Indeed, various frameworks, models and approaches to encounters have ideals related to participants to encounters. They can influence how participants to encounters are perceived as well as communicate what behaviour they ought to display. In the hospitality framework, for example, it is normal for participants in encounters to take on the role of either a host or a guest. Given their role, participants to encounters are expected to behave in certain ways. This influences encounters by normalizing dichotomies between people – someone is either a host or a guest. Dichotomies are not, themselves, problematic. They can become problematic, however, if one group in the dichotomy becomes considered superior over the other. If hosts are deemed superior to guests, this challenges the ability to perceive guests as equally valuable.

Even more, dichotomies can lead to people becoming viewed as either normal or deviant. This is best evidenced in the inclusion/exclusion framework where people are dichotomized into included and excluded. The included are often perceived as normal while the excluded are perceived as deviant because they somehow fail to conform to the norms of the included. Even more, norms are often viewed positively and thus deviancy is often viewed negatively. As such, dichotomies can arouse emotions toward anyone associated with normalcy or deviance. This can influence encounters.

Norms related to outcomes of encounters can also influence various aspects of the approach. In the inclusion/exclusion framework, the ideal outcome of encounters is that the people who are excluded become included. Achieving this ideal can require the excluded to accept a norm in order to become included. Thought about differently, this ideal risks communicating that there is a problem with people who do not fit the norm. Furthermore, these persons must somehow be fixed in order to conform to the norm. People whose differences
deviate from the norm may be forced to come into a state of normalcy if they want to be encountered positively. This is most evident in the AOP/IGD framework where dominant identity group members are expected to correct (change) their oppressive, prejudicial perspectives, habits or behaviours (Dessel & Ali, 2015; Stephan & Stephan, 2001; Werkmeister Rozas, 2007; Zúñiga et al., 2002). Dominant group members, who are considered deviant as a result of their being oppressive toward minority group members, must disaffirm their prejudicial values, perspectives, and worldviews in order to conform to an ideal.

Fixing people, or asking them to come into a state of normalcy, risks erasing differences. Moreover, those considered deviant may feel shame in their differences. As a result, they may hide their differences or try to pass as normal. If it is not considered normal to be religious in the workplace, for instance, a religious person may try to keep their religious beliefs quiet so that the ideal outcome can be achieved. Hiding or passing does not mean that deviant people have actually become normal. It simply creates a “false” (Williams, 1998, p. 17) belief that normalcy has been achieved. Ultimately, it may only become possible for those who deviate from the norm to be encountered positively if they assimilate into the norm. For some, however, it may not be possible to hide or alter their differences, or to pass as normal. It also presumes, perhaps falsely, that people want their differences to be perceived as normal. Some may want to maintain their deviant differences.

Finally, this sensitizing concept is important because it invites consideration of what constitutes normalcy and who creates established norms. In many cases, normalcy is decided upon by those with the power to decide who or what aspects of encounters ought to be considered normal or deviant. In current Western society, it is often “experts” (Beresford & Wilson, 1998, p. 88) and those in positions of influence (e.g. business, political or religious
leaders) who frame normalcy. Their ideals and self-interests are imposed so the deviant must accommodate their standards in order to be accepted (Cobigo et al, 2012).

Even more, those who are deviant can inadvertently become the “(passive) subjects” (Beresford & Wilson, 1998, p. 87) of debate, discussion, and work for those with power. In other words, deviant differences can become associated with problems to be fixed (brought into the ideal) and the focus of conversations for the normal. This is not always a problem: normalcy can be good and there are problems to be fixed. Having experts fix the problems associated with deviant differences, however, does have several potential risks for encounters. First, it risks having those who are normal speak for, not with, the deviant. Second, the status quo can inadvertently be reproduced. Third, in order for those holding deviant differences to have a voice, they must first identify themselves as deviant. This can heighten the dichotomy between, and ultimately divide the normal and the deviant. It also assumes the deviant actually want to participate in conversations. This may be untrue if they feel their perspectives will be ignored (Beresford & Wilson, 1998). Finding ways to bring the deviant into the norm also does nothing to challenge a norm itself (Barry, 1998; Levitas, 2003; Ward, 2009). It simply integrates the deviant into it (Barry, 1998; Levitas, 2003). Norms are often taken for granted and assumed to be unproblematic (Levitas, 2003; Ward, 2009). Normalcy can enforce conformity (Ward, 2009) and do nothing to ensure differences are encountered positively.

Normalcy, then, is an important concept for considering encounters. Norms influence encounters by implicitly or explicitly communicating what or who is acceptable and can arouse negative emotions toward the non-compliant.

Sensitizing Concept Five: Humanity. The final sensitizing concept is Humanity. This concept refers to the way(s) of being with and relating to people in encounters. Various
frameworks encourage differing approaches to relating to participants in encounters. They also place different emphasis on the importance of building relationships. These discussions impact the process of encountering people. Ultimately, they impact how participants to encounters experience encounters.

Intergroup dialogue, as part of the AOP framework, for example, offers step-by-step instructions for how to relate to participants in encounters. Specifically, relations are improved between persons in conflict through gaining awareness about social identities (Dessel et al., 2011b) and hearing about another’s experiences of oppression and privilege (Nagda, et al., 1999; Werkmeister Rozas, 2007). The more information participants have about identities and experiences of oppression, the more likely they are to collaborate. Ideally, they will become allies in addressing social injustices.

By way of contrast, in the inclusion/exclusion framework, discussions about relations are less clear. At the core, it seems the simple act of including the excluded is enough to improve relations. The way of being with people in this framework ranges from ensuring people have a chance to bump into the excluded (e.g., by mixing housing in a neighbourhood) to purposefully spending time and dialoguing with them (e.g., through peer mentorship). The more exposure included people have to the excluded, the more likely they are to perceive and then relate to them positively.

Finally, in the hospitality framework, there is no simple way of being with participants to encounters. This is because each participant to an encounter is different. Relations are complex, difficult, and often uncomfortable because there is no straightforward way of being with people. Instead, the hospitality framework encourages participants in encounters to journey with one another. The journey is different for every person. Journeying requires time, but even more, it
requires a commitment to being compassionate, respectful and kind. This allows others to be fully themselves as unique human beings. Relations in this framework are focus on finding ways to make everyone feel loved, revered, respected, and welcomed in all contexts.

This sensitizing concept is important because the ways of being with people impacts encounters. This is most clear in the AOP/IGD and hospitality frameworks. Schoem (2003), who writes from the AOP/IGD perspective, claims that it should be anticipated that participants to encounters will not feel good much of the time. One reason is that people are educating one another about their identities and their oppression (Schoem, 2003). Framed one way, it may simply be painful to learn about another’s oppression. Framed differently, it could be the process of learning about people’s social identity groups (rather than people), and then relating to one another as oppressed or oppressive is painful. A second reason participants to encounters may not feel good much of the time is because in intergroup dialogues, people are offered “a safe yet communal space to express anger and indignation about injustice” (Dessel et al., 2006, p. 303, emphasis added). Participants to encounters, then, may relate to each other in anger. If anger is directed toward those considered oppressive, their way of being in the process of encounters is likely to be altered. Indeed, in one study on a sexual orientation-focused IGD dialogue, Dessel and colleagues (2013) found some participants from the oppressive identity group censored their contributions.

In contrast, it is hoped in the hospitality framework that each person treats others in a welcoming fashion so that each will feel loved, respected, and valued. This is not always the case given the complexity of demonstrating hospitality. Indeed, Christian scholars acknowledge that Christians do not always relate well with others in their encounters, and there have been ample historical examples to substantiate this (Boys & Alexander, 2012; de Béthune, 2007; Durley,
Christian scholars also claim the ways of being with people described in this framework have had life-changing positive implications for many (Nouwen, 1975, Pohl, 2012). According to Pohl (2012), people often feel they are blessed, and their lives improved when there is true kindness, compassion, and an authentic valuing of each person. Offering people love, welcome, time, and attention has brought people “to life” (Pohl, 2012, p. 25; Nouwen, 1975).

As alluded to earlier, discussions about the ways of relating to participants to encounters have differing levels of centrality within a framework. In some frameworks, these discussions are more central than in others. The directives for building relations are clear in the AOP/IGD framework and relationship building is frequently discussed (Dessel & Ali, 2015; Nagda, 2006). The emphasis of the framework, however, is more heavily on attending to issues of injustice. Relations are the vehicle for achieving social justice.

The inclusion/exclusion framework is similar in that relations are a vehicle for greater social inclusion. Discussions about how to build relationships are evident in the framework, although not always clear. Discussions about how to be with people in encounters are less central than discussions about achieving inclusion.

Of central importance in the hospitality framework are relationships. Most of the discussion is focused on the ways of being with people. This particular framework offers much in the way of thinking about how to relate to people who are different. There is a risk, however, that focusing on relations means too little attention is paid to other social issues such as injustice or exclusion. Additionally, the ways of being with people in the hospitality framework may be too idealistic for many encounters. Demonstrating love, respect, compassion, kindness as well as allowing space for differences is a complex, difficult task.
This sensitizing concept is important because it draws attention to relations in encounters. It invites the reader to consider how various frameworks, models and approaches to encounters discuss the ways of being with people in the process of encounters. It invites consideration of how central discussions about relationship building are within an approach to encounters. Ultimately, relations impact both the approach to encounters as well as how persons experience encounters.
A wealth of scholarship suggests that people in a variety of contexts (e.g., the classroom, workplace, community) do not know how to manage contentious differences. When those holding contentious differences are encountered, it is often with discomfort and negativity. How to best manage these encounters, however, is debated amongst scholars from multiple disciplines. The result is inconsistencies and insufficiencies in the approaches taken. This is evident through my exploration of the literature from the anti-oppressive practice/intergroup dialogue, inclusion/exclusion, and hospitality frameworks in earlier parts of the paper.

This suggests to me that (1) the established ways of navigating and managing encounters leave something to be desired, (2) encounters with those who are contentiously different are regularly difficult for all involved, and (3) there is a gap in knowledge, and therefore a need to explore ways to do better.

One way to continue exploring this issue, and ultimately to attempt to better navigate and manage encounters, is to add the voices of those who hold contentious differences. Very little of the available scholarship asks them how they have been or want to be encountered. Instead, the existing approaches began with the assumption that scholars or practitioners (e.g., social workers, psychologists, pastors) know how to best navigate encounters. I responded to this gap by gathering stories from three groups of people holding differences deemed contentious. In this section, I explain how I gathered and made sense of their experiences.

**Narrative Inquiry**

For this study, I used narrative inquiry. *Narrative inquiry* is the study of stories. It is founded upon the idea that people naturally and effectively use stories to report events that have happened to them as well as to give order and to bring meaning to their experiences (Bruner,
People use stories to “explain their actions” (Ewick & Silbey, 2003, p. 1340) to themselves and others, and to communicate the meanings they have given to their experiences (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative inquiry makes it possible to study people’s experiences and their interpretations of them (Riessman, 2008). Even more, since stories reflect larger social realities, these too can be studied (Ewick & Silbey, 2003). Stories were selected for this study to understand social realities and personal experiences where contentious differences are present.

Stories are shaped and told with intentionality (Bruner, 1990) and so attending to the structure of stories is important for gaining insight into their meaning for the narrator (Bruner, 1990; Riessman, 2008). To communicate the meaning that they have made of their experiences, narrators choose, arrange, and share specific details in intentional sequences (Riessman, 2008). Narrators, for instance, emphasize certain storylines (Bruner, 1990) or a “point of the story” (White, 1987, as cited in Ewick & Silbey, 2003, p. 1341). They take care in explaining the order (chronology) in which events occurred (Bruner, 1990). Narrators also choose their language, metaphors and other communicative devices intentionally (although not always consciously). Even the tone or emotionality of stories is important for gaining insight into a story.

Second, as part of the interpretive and meaning-making process, people comment on what they think and believe about their experiences (Bruner, 1990; Riessman, 2008). While sharing their experiences, people will often simultaneously evaluate the events (Riessman, 2008).

Finally, narrative inquiry was chosen because it offers a sense of individuals’ “whole” stories about encounters rather than abstracted segments or themes (Bruner, 1990). This allows comparisons among individuals’ stories while retaining a sense of the people telling them.
Scholars such as Jerome Bruner (1990) and Catherine Riessman (2008) argue stories should be understood as constructions. This is because narrators only share certain events for a purpose. This means narrators embellish some details in their stories while excluding others (Riessman, 2008). Stories are constructed as they are told, and their construction changes depending on the audiences (Riessman, 2008). Second, interpretations (or meaning making) of stories by narrators also change in light of later experiences – or later interpretations. Third, stories are informed by how narrators have constructed themselves – as part of different identity groups, communities, and the like (Ewick & Silbey, 2003). Finally, stories are constructed because they must be interpreted by the listener (Bruner, 1990). Listeners use their own experiences, and interpretive frameworks to derive their own meaning from the stories that they are told (Franzosi, 1998). Narrators and listeners therefore together construct stories (Riessman, 2008).

Each narrative, according to Riessman (2001), “does not assume objectivity but, instead, privileges positionality and subjectivity” (p. 696). In other words, while there are some ways to arrive at what factually happened in this study when participants were encountered (e.g., through dates, experiences common to several participants) (Bruner, 1990; Riessman, 2001), the goal in using a narrative approach is to gain insight into participants’ personal experiences, meaning-making, and interpretive knowledge of encounters across contentious differences, not to gain verifiable observations (Riessman, 2001, 2008). Participants’ stories are expected to provide a subjective account of their experiences.

Riessman (2008) argues compellingly that theorizing can be done using findings from narrative inquiries. Narrative data can support more focused thematic or interpretive analyses as a supplement to understanding and comparing stories. Using rich data derived from the stories of
one group to make “conceptual inferences” about another group is a useful “kind of inquiry with a long history in anthropology and sociology” (Riessman, 2008, p. 13) and social work (Riessman, 2001).

**Participants, Sampling and Recruitment**

Participation was restricted to those from one of three groups: persons for whom their Muslim faith, Christian faith, or membership in the LGBTQ+ community was important. A small number of participants did belong to two groups (e.g., LGBTQ+ and Christian). I chose to include multiple groups of participants because it reflects my interest in gathering diverse perspectives relative to the same issue (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009).

I focused on these three groups for several reasons. First, the literature suggests that relations with these particular groups are often contentious. In a variety of contexts, people struggle to positively encounter members of these groups. This reality has received a great deal of attention for all three groups. Some researchers report, for instance, that in a variety of settings, including employment (Davidson, 2015), education (D’Augelli & Rose, 1990) and faculties of social work (Dentato et al., 2016), members of the LGBTQ+ community regularly have difficult encounters. On the other hand, others point out that in some settings where sexual orientation has been prioritized for inclusion, members of the LGBTQ+ community have been encountered more positively (MacDonnell & Daley, 2015).

In comparison, some research suggests that Muslims are regularly left out of encounters (Hodge, Zidan, & Husain, 2015) or treated negatively in a variety of settings (Crabtree, 2009) including the workplace (see Burke & Ng, 2006) as well as secondary and post-secondary education (see Guo, 2015; Pesut, 2016). Paradoxically, intentional efforts have been made in some settings to meet Muslims with positivity (Edwards, 2018). This is because Islam is
understood to be an object of discrimination (Edwards, 2018). Little if any research exists on how Muslims perceive their varied encounter experiences (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2006).

Some scholars argue that in many settings, people do not want to talk about religion (Guilfoyle & St Pierre-Hansen, 2012) and afford Christians little opportunity to contribute their perspectives (Hodge, 2011). Because Christianity is understood, particularly in educational settings, to be discriminatory toward other groups (Blumenfeld & Jackel, 2012; Dessel et al., 2011) because of its privileged position in Western society, some scholars claim that Christians have been verbally attacked for their views, removed from their educational pursuits, or terminated (Hodge, 2002; Thyer & Myers, 2009).

This literature suggests, however, that these three groups are not all encountered in the same ways. A second reason I chose these three groups was to intentionally compare and contrast their differentiated experiences to strengthen my comprehension of encounters. I expected there to be important distinctions in their encounter experiences, and I wanted to explore a variety of perspectives.

For this study, I purposively recruited current graduate social work students (i.e., master’s and PhD students) and recent alumni (i.e., graduated in 2013 or more recently). All participants were from Wilfrid Laurier University’s (WLU) Faculty of Social Work.

I focused on the experiences of graduate social work students from WLU for several reasons. First, I had a particular interest in social work.

Second, I believed that my status as a student and former adjunct faculty member would grant me access to participants (Luton, 2010). Given the potentially sensitive nature of my research, I anticipated gaining access to participants could be a challenge.
Third, my familiarity with the institution meant that I knew that the curriculum was designed to require students to engage in difficult conversations across contentious differences. I expected this would give these students first-hand knowledge of my topic. Furthermore, I knew that both the anti-oppressive practice and inclusion/exclusion frameworks informed the curriculum as it does in many Canadian schools of social work. I anticipated that these frameworks would influence the nature of encounters among students in potentially insightful ways.

Finally, I knew that the student population at the institution included members of the LGBTQ+, Muslim, and Christian communities. The issues facing these groups and how encounters are understood (e.g., in the AOP and inclusion/exclusion frameworks) are typical, however, of many Canadian schools of social work.

Although WLU provided the site for recruitment, my purpose was not to evaluate the institution or its social work program. This setting was used for practical reasons and only as a backdrop for understanding other contexts. It was used to raise issues and generate insights typical of encounters among graduate social work students across Canada for the three selected groups. My broader aim was to help to elucidate the social processes (Riessman, 2001) of encountering persons holding contentious differences. Indeed, participants’ shared experiences of encounters spanned several years, and a variety of social settings not limited to the University.

Recruitment commenced April 30, 2018. I anticipated potential participants would be difficult to recruit: I expected some to resist being openly identified as religious (Groen, n.d.; Streets, 2009) or as members of the LGBTQ+ community (Davidson, 2015) due to fear of discrimination. I also expected some might not be ready to “out” themselves by coming forward to participate (Browne, 2005). Finally, I anticipated some would resist sharing their stories due to
the sensitivity of the topic (Browne, 2005). For these reasons, I used multiple sampling techniques. First, I posted recruitment flyers in various places around the FSW (see Appendix A). I also distributed a similar recruitment flyer through WLU Graduate Student Association social media (i.e., Twitter, Facebook) (see Appendix B). Additionally, I had the flyer distributed to current PhD students through the PhD and MSW email mailing lists. Finally, I emailed 17 instructors teaching MSW courses and asked if I could visit their classrooms to explain the study and distribute flyers (see Appendix C). 11 instructors agreed. All potential participants were invited to contact me directly if they were interested in learning more about taking part in the study.

I coupled these efforts with a snowball or chain referral sampling technique (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Browne, 2005; Loseke, 2017; Sadler, Lee, Lim, & Fullerton, 2010). Once participants were recruited, in confidence, they provided information about the study and their interview experiences to other potential participants and invited them to contact me (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Browne, 2005; Sadler et al., 2010). Faculty and staff members as well as those who had heard about the study also invited potential participants to contact me.

Using these recruitment strategies, 45 persons expressed interest in participating in the study with 42 meeting eligibility criteria. Of these, 32 participated: 11 members of the LGBTQ+ community, 10 Muslims, and 11 Christians. Three participants held two identities (e.g., LGBTQ+ and Muslim) but self-selected which of the three identity groups they wanted to be associated with and primarily speak about.

Table 2 includes demographic information for participants. It reflects how they self-identified when asked open-ended questions about their group membership, program, gender, and ethnicity. It has been grouped to preserve their confidentiality.
Table 2

*Demographic Information for Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LGBTQ+</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transmasculine</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+ and Christian/Muslim</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW – Full time</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW – Part time</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW – Advanced Standing</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW – Alumni</td>
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<tr>
<td>PhD – Full time</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>South American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern/Asian</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>

Due to persons identifying as being part of multiple groups, numbers may not add up precisely.

Most ($n = 11$) were recruited through the snowball sampling technique with four referred by a participant of the study and seven referred by an instructor or friend. The rest were recruited...
through an in-class announcement \((n = 5)\), recruitment poster \((n = 5)\), email \((n = 6)\), or a personal conversation with me about the study \((n = 4)\). It is unknown how two heard about the study.

(One indicated being recruited by both a flyer and a previous participant.)

**Data Gathering Methods**

I gathered data through narrative interviews. Narrative interviews are used to encourage participants to share long, detailed stories relative to the topic under study in their own words about the events that they find most meaningful (Riessman, 2008). These topic-focused interviews were completed within a relatively short time period (i.e., 60 to 180 minutes) to allow for more people to be interviewed in order to make comparisons across respondents and groups. This came at the expense of deeper explorations of these identities and encounter experiences that can be typical in narrative inquiry (Riessman, 1993).

According to Riessman (1993), researchers using a narrative approach should use open-ended questions that “open up topics” (p. 54) by eliciting accounts of experiences and thus “encourage narrativization” (p. 54). Rather than facilitating a question/answer period, which limits participant responses, I aimed to create a conversational space that would encourage participants to share longer, fuller stories (Riessman, 2008). Drawing upon the work of Veroff and colleagues (1993b), I began by asking them to “to imagine that I [was] going to write a book about [their] interpersonal experiences... [but] in order to really understand [their experiences], what [they] thought about them, how [they] felt about them, it is important that I know a little bit about [them]...including [their] values...motivations... [and then, their interpersonal] experiences.”

Then, I asked participants grand tour questions such as, “Thinking about your interactions with other students, instructors and/or staff (rather than about things like your grades or how
much you liked your teachers) tell me about your time at the FSW.” This encouraged participants to “begin at the beginning” (Riessman, 2008, p. 25) of their stories of encounters and describe how they gave them meaning over time. It also facilitated “long narratives” by encouraging participants to “recoun[t]” their experiences of “specific incidents and particular moments” (Riessman, 2008, p. 24) relative to encounters. Among the grand tour questions were evaluative questions such as asking participants how they would like to have been encountered as persons holding contentious differences, what they appreciated during their encounter experiences, and how they thought others who hold contentious differences ought to be encountered.

I had open-ended questions prepared to back up these grand tour questions if more detail was needed (e.g., “What was your experience being a Muslim/Christian/member of the LGBTQ+ community at the FSW?”). I also used unbiased prompting questions such as “tell me more” and “what happened” (Riessman, 2008, p. 25) to evoke detail.

While the grand tour questions invited participants to begin at the beginning and to freely tell their story, there were constraints placed on their stories through the questions. Specifically, at some point in the interview, participants were asked temporal questions that would shape their stories around a timeline and similar topics (Veroff, Sutherland, Chadiha, & Ortega, 1993b): they were asked to discuss their expectations of encounters, then their realities (e.g., how they were encountered, how others holding differences were encountered, how they encountered others holding differences), then their evaluations of their experiences. The ordering of these questions was not rigid so for the most part, participants directed how their stories were told. These questions were asked to ensure participants’ stories had a somewhat linear progression and that they deeply reflected on their experiences and the meaning they gave them over time, as well as
to facilitate the identification of storylines, patterns, and variations within and across participants’ stories during the analysis process (Kim, 2015).

Finally, I began each interview by collecting demographic information adapted from the work of Hodge (2006). I asked questions about age, gender, ethnicity, and what program they were taking in their graduate studies (or graduated from) (Hodge, 2006). (The full interview guide is available in Appendix D.)

**Procedures.** Once potential participants informed me of their interest in being part of the study, they were invited to select a date and time to meet for an interview. Locations were chosen by participants. The majority of interviews were conducted in person: nineteen were conducted at the FSW at WLU, one was conducted in another building on the WLU campus, six were conducted at coffee shops, and two were conducted at participants’ houses. Two were conducted by phone while another two were conducted using (Apple) FaceTime® and (Google) Hangouts®.

At the time of the interview, all participants were given an Information and Informed Consent document (see Appendix E). For interviews done by phone or virtually, this document was emailed to participants in advance. This document was reviewed with all participants and they were given time to ask questions. For in-person interviews, participants were asked to sign a copy of the document, which I kept for my records. They were given a blank copy for their records. For phone and virtual interviews, I documented the date, time, name of the participant, as well as recorded that I had reviewed the Information and Informed Consent document with them, that they understood the project, and that they offered their verbal consent.
Each interview was conducted individually and lasted 60 to 180 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of the data collected and to avoid distracting participants by taking detailed notes (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005).

After each interview was completed, I typed out field notes to capture my reactions (Riessman, 2008), analytic thoughts (Riessman, 2008; Sim, 1998), and questions emerging after hearing their stories (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). I used these notes in subsequent data analysis.

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim either by a transcriptionist or myself. During the transcription process, all names and other information that could identify participants were removed to preserve their confidentiality (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014).

**Data Analysis Strategies**

In the first stage of analysis, the focus was on presenting what participants said with minimal abstraction or generalization. I accomplished this by exploring participants’ narratives to identify core storylines throughout the stories.

In the second stage of analysis, there was more extensive interpretation of the data (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). Guided by the literature from the four earlier frameworks (e.g., AOP/IGD, inclusion/exclusion, hospitality, and the ECD Conceptual Framework), additional literature, and my thoughts recorded in my research journal (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009), I identified “general concepts” (Riessman, 2008, p. 13) or issues that I deem to be matters of concern when deliberating about how to encounter persons holding contentious differences in any context.
In the final stage of analysis, I engaged in “reflective analysis” (Craig, 2012, p. 98). Guided by material from the entire study, and reflecting on the topic more broadly (Craig, 2012), I arrived at a set of guiding prescriptions for navigating encounters across difference in any context. I offer guiding prescriptions because the purpose of narrative inquiry is not to offer answers, but rather to introduce a means of thinking about a topic more deeply (Craig, 2007).

**Keeping an analytic journal.** Before immersing myself in the analysis process, I engaged in bracketing. I did this by documenting some of my initial ideas, thoughts and feelings about the topic in a research journal (Saldaña, 2009; Tufford & Newman, 2010). Bracketing was an important process because I disagreed with some ideas from the earlier literature I explored and acknowledged this could influence my interpretation of participants’ stories (Cameron, 2012; Tufford & Newman, 2010). Additionally, I was approaching the stories as a Christian, and therefore as someone with personal experience being encountered with hostility toward my difference. I wanted to avoid filtering participants’ stories through my own experiences.

I did not engage in bracketing to *set aside* my own reflections, preconceptions, emotions, questions, or thoughts (Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Tufford & Newman, 2010). Instead, I documented them in my research journal. Then throughout the data collection process, I added analytic memos to the journal. That is, I continued noting my reactions to participants’ stories as well as noting initial interpretive questions and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 2008; Saldaña, 2009; Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & O’Flynn-Magee, 2004; Tufford & Newman, 2010). I later drew upon these analytic memos to help make sense of the data because a researcher’s professional and personal knowledge supports the research process (Creswell, 2013; Thorne et
al., 2004). In narrative inquiry specifically, researchers are expected to interpret stories using their own preconceptions and “evolving understandings” (Riessman, 2000, p. 701).

**Stage one: Identifying and presenting participants’ core storylines.** Stage One of the analysis of data included three processes.

**Identifying the core storylines describing the experiences of each group.** First, I explored the narrative data to identify and “excavat[e]” (Kim, 2015, p. 204) core storylines (i.e., plotlines, threads woven throughout participants’ stories) that were common to members of each of the three groups. To facilitate the process, I developed an analytic framework to help me organize and document the data. Specifically, I read through each transcript while asking myself the analytic question, “What is this story about?” Storylines were selected as core when there were substantial “chunks of text” (Riessman, 1993, p. 67) about a topic, issues were repeated, and/or participants communicated issues as important.

Once I identified core storylines in the transcripts, I coded chunks of text supporting the storylines into the analytic framework. I deemed it easiest to organize participants’ stories temporally into their expectations, actual experiences, and then finally, their sense-making (Veroff et al., 1993b).

As part of the process, I considered things such as participants’ words and phrases, emotions, challenges, successes, hopes for encounters, and how their experiences influenced their understandings of encounters. For example, phrases such as “and then” helped me temporally sort the data. “Evaluative statements” (Riessman, 2008, p. 89; Bruner, 1990) such as “I just think that…,” “I don’t think we should…,” or “it has meant that…” helped me understand how participants gave meaning of their experiences. Phrases such as “there would need to be…” or “what about trying…,” or “there needs to be…” pointed to participants’ future
desires for encounters. I also attended to metaphors, irony, and emotive or affective language (Veroff, Chadiha, Leber, & Sutherland, 1993a) (e.g., “I felt,” “I was excited,” “I was livid,” “there was froth”) to get a sense of how participants felt during their encounter experiences. This helped me remain faithful to their stories and therefore avoid abstraction or generalization. Finally, I paid attention to discussions that included concepts or approaches to encounters consistent with those discussed in my earlier conceptual work (e.g., the ECD Conceptual Framework).

Preparing a story summary for each participant. Next, I prepared short summaries of each participant’s story to feature the core storylines (Cameron & Frensch, 2015). I did this by distilling the data coded from the analytic framework while retaining the actual words of participants, especially emotive ones. This allowed me to maintain and retell participants’ experiences in temporal order (i.e., expectations of, then actual encounter experiences, then evaluations of them) (Kim, 2015). It also allowed me to keep the level of interpretation low so that I could provide a “faithful account” (Kim, 2015, p. 192; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009) of encounter experiences including the meaning participants gave them (Riessman, 2001). I acknowledge, however, that I have constructed the story summaries, so others may have constructed them differently (Cameron & Frensch, 2015). Analytically, the story summaries provide insight into each individual person’s unique experience (Kim, 2015). Additionally, they served as a basis for comparison within and across groups in later analysis (Cameron & Frensch, 2015).

Identifying storylines describing the experiences across all three groups. During the analysis process, I noticed differences between participants’ experiences depending on the group to which they belonged. This justified searching for insights across groups (Veroff et al., 1993b).
So, I drew upon the data documented in the analytic framework as well as the story summaries to search for common patterns of experience as well as variations across all three groups (Kim, 2015; McAlpine, 2016; Riessman, 2008). This process was guided by the analytic question, “What are all the stories about?” The findings are organized around six storylines common within all 32 participants’ stories across the three groups.

**Stage two: Identifying core interpretive issues for understanding the encounter experiences across all participants.** At this point in the analysis process, I interpreted (made sense of) of participants’ data (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). To do this, I first developed two analytic questions to guide the process (Reissman, 2008):

- What issue(s) seems to be of most concern when encountering persons holding contentious differences?
- What message(s) seem important (e.g., repeated, emphasized) relative to encountering persons holding contentious differences?

Guided by these analytic questions, I reviewed participant’s narratives (e.g., story summaries). Then, I reviewed the material written in my earlier work (i.e., on the AOP/IGD, inclusion/exclusion, hospitality, and my own ECD Conceptual Framework), and the analytic memos I documented throughout the study in my journal. I used these analytic questions to help me identify general issues of concern for encountering persons holding contentious differences prevalent across all of the materials used in the study.

**Stage three: Creating a general prescriptive framework for encounters based on my extrapolations and interpretations of all of the material in the study.** In the final stage of analysis, I spent considerable time reflecting on what I thought were the important lessons about constructively navigating encounters gained from my time spent exploring this issue.
Guided by the analytic question, “What are the most important things to do to improve encounters in all contexts?” I reflected on participants’ data, the three frameworks I reviewed, my own ECD Conceptual Framework, my interpretations, the four general issues I identified in Stage Two of the analysis process, and additional relevant literature. I documented my reflections in analytic memos. Over several iterations of grouping and sorting my reflections, I organized my thoughts around a set of guiding prescriptions I felt would be the most helpful for navigating encounters where persons holding contentious differences are present.

**Gathering feedback on my initial findings.** During the interviews, I asked all participants if I could re-contact them to discuss the findings. Twenty-five agreed. I wanted to solicit their feedback, first, to explore whether the findings resonated with their experiences (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Second, the act of soliciting feedback would grant participants additional opportunity to share their stories (Birt et al., 2016). Finally, it serves as a way of being transparent and responsible to participants for sharing one’s research (Birt et al., 2016).

Once the findings were developed, all 32 participants were re-contacted and provided “stimulus material” (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009, p. 4) upon which they could offer their feedback. This included a section of the findings discussing the encounter experiences of participants from their respective group (i.e., LGBTQ+, Muslim, Christian), a copy of a general guiding framework I developed based on the study’s findings, and a copy of my conclusion section. Since email was indicated as the best way to reach participants, these materials were distributed using this platform. The email itself served as a cover letter explaining the purpose of the materials and instructions for how to offer feedback (see Appendix F). In addition to the summary document, transcripts were returned to those participants who requested them.
Participants were offered two weeks to provide their feedback and to comment on how their identity group was presented (which included their story) via email (Birt et al., 2016) or through a phone meeting.

I originally intended to host a series of focus groups to solicit this feedback from participants. During the course of this study, however, it became clear that this would be inappropriate. Most specifically, there were ethical challenges relative to the protection of participants’ identities (Birt et al., 2016). Participants collectively experienced fear in being identified as participants. Ensuring their confidentiality was imperative making a focus group unethical.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study received ethical approval from Wilfrid Laurier University’s Research Ethics Board. In addition, I followed ethical considerations outlined in the Tri Council Policy Statement 2 (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014). For example, I received full and informed consent from participants to hear their stories through narrative interviews. Participants were informed about the purpose of my study, were offered the opportunity to ask questions, to voluntarily participate, to refuse to answer any of my interview questions, and to withdraw from the study without penalty.

During the transcription and analysis process, I removed identifying information from participants’ stories (e.g., their names or personal details) to assure their confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used in place of participants’ names to protect their identity.

To attend to issues of transparency, trustworthiness, and power, I only interviewed participants who were either not known to me or were no longer my students in courses I was teaching at the time as an adjunct faculty member. I also offered participants an opportunity to
review and provide feedback on my findings, review their transcript, and have access to the final
paper. I have also offered lots of detail relative to participants’ stories in the descriptive
narratives section to show that I have been faithful to the data. As recommended by
Polkinghorne (1995), my place in the study has remained transparent by making clear throughout
this paper which insights were derived from data or material (e.g., the three frameworks,
additional scholarship) and which came from my own interpretative analysis.

Strengths, Weaknesses and Contributions of the Methodology

A weakness of the current data collection strategy is that participation was limited to a
small number of participants, all of whom were in the social work profession. Because they
shared similar experiences due to their professional affiliation as social workers, the knowledge,
experience, and insights of the participants I have chosen may differ in important ways from
persons with alternative professional affiliations.

Relatedly, participation was limited in terms of context: all participants were affiliated
with one university. Again, insights from other contexts, such as in various universities,
workplaces or the community may influence the findings.

This study, however, was meant to be exploratory. It promises to be a starting point for
more research. Future research should involve gathering data from other groups of participants in
an assortment of contexts to explore whether and how their encounter experiences differ from
those included in this study. With this said, having a representative pool of participants is
generally considered unnecessary in research informed by a narrative approach (Riessman,
1993). Instead, as was done in this study, participation should be limited to a small number of
participants who can speak intimately about the topic (Riessman, 1993). Having too many
participants risks detracting from the research by requiring too much time and energy to be
directed toward analyzing their stories. Riessman (1993) contends that longstanding, useful theories have been established from a small pool of participants because their stories are meant to help understand broader social issues.

Additionally, the sites of data collection are secondary to the insights gleaned through participant stories (Riessman, 1993). An argument can be made, then, that limiting the number of participants to those who held differences deemed contentious who could therefore speak intimately about improving encounters was an asset.

An obvious strength of the data collection strategy is that it adds the voices and lived experiences of persons who hold contentious differences. This humanizes the issue. It also fills a gap since little of the existing scholarship explores the issue from the perspective of those who hold contentious differences. Not only that, I contribute the experiences of not just one, but three different groups. This provides richness to the insights that can be gleaned, especially by comparing their experiences. Including differing and even dissenting points of view lends confidence to the findings. In the next chapter of the study, I detail my findings.
So far, our exploration of how to constructively navigate encounters where there are contentious differences has been limited to the conceptual and pragmatic recommendations of scholars in existing literature. The presentation of this work is important. It elucidates what is already known about the issue. Additionally, by pulling it together as I have, I offer novel insights for consideration. I even offer a new conceptual framework useful for examining other approaches, models, and scholarships not reviewed here. The fact remains, however, that encounters are still regularly fraught with difficulties, and so ending with an exploration of the existing scholarship would not go far enough in improving the problematic.

Furthermore, as I point out in earlier chapters, there are limitations to the approaches I reviewed. There are also inconsistencies among the frameworks whereby, in some places, the recommended approaches actually contradict each another. This suggests that there is potential for these approaches to be limited, inappropriate, or even harmful in encounters. This begs the question driving this research – how can we better navigate encounters where there are contentious differences?

To respond to this question, I provide the findings of the fieldwork portion of this research organized within a guiding framework. Over the next three chapters, I present my findings. In doing so, I will gradually amplify my guiding framework.

A guiding framework is a heuristic device for thinking and/or action. It provides guidelines for performing certain activities or realizing a specific goal. Guiding frameworks offer new ways of thinking about issues and information upon which well-reasoned decisions can be made (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). The guiding framework I have generated serves as a general
guide for more constructively thinking about and navigating encounters where contentious differences are present.

My guiding framework is comprised of three elements – Context, Core Issues, and Prescriptions (see Figure 2). These three elements have their own characteristics and functions. Each element contains a number of dimensions. These dimensions’ relevance and salience will change in every encounter, and so the application of each must be tailored to fit the circumstances. The outside element in the framework shapes decisions made about the interior elements.

*Figure 2.* Pictorial representation of the Guiding Framework being used to present the study findings.
Over the next three chapters, I offer a full description of each element. More specifically, in each chapter, I introduce one element of the guiding framework. In Chapter Five, I present the Context element. I do this by summarizing the encounter experiences of 32 persons who hold contentious difference (i.e., LGBTQ+, Muslim, Christian). I present their repeated, prominent, common storylines (patterns of experience). Then, I describe the storylines in detail.

In Chapter Six, I introduce the Core Issues element of the guiding framework. In it, I present my interpretation (the sense I made) of participants’ stories informed by material from earlier Chapters (e.g., the three frameworks, my own conceptual framework) as well as additional relevant literature.

Guided by material from the entire study, I reflect on the problematic more broadly. In Chapter Seven, I introduce the Prescriptions element of the guiding framework: I present the findings from my reflections on the whole study as general prescriptions for intervening in situations where there are contentious differences. The final chapter follows this and provides a more detailed description of the entire guiding framework including its potential uses for addressing the problematic.

While this framework is grounded in literature and data, it is also generated from my interpretive insights. I acknowledge others could arrive at their own insights and therefore identify other important elements or dimensions within the guiding framework. Additionally, I recognize that no one framework could provide a definitive template for navigating encounters when contentious differences are present. Despite this, my contention is that this guiding framework, in its current format, could have considerable potential to assist practitioners, researchers, students, or members of the public arrive at reasoned and appropriate approaches for contentious encounters.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONTEXT

Introductory Comments

As we have seen in earlier chapters, debates surround how best to encounter persons holding contentious differences. These debates are not new: much scholarship already exists about this topic in various disciplines beyond what has been presented and critiqued in earlier chapters. Little, if any research, however, has explored the lived realities of persons holding contentious differences. How are they being encountered, and what can their realities teach us?

As part of my fieldwork for this study, I filled this gap by gathering the stories of 32 people deeply inspired by differences that I deemed contentious in many social work educational settings – by belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, or by their Muslim, or their Christian faith. Over the next three sections of this chapter, I share what members of each of these three groups have to say about their encounter experiences.

It is important to hear their stories because their lived realities bring richness, complexity, and valuable insights to this topic. Storytelling is also a “relational activity” (Riessman, 2001, p. 697) meant to draw listeners into an issue in an empathic, humanizing way. We can quickly turn this topic into a conceptual problem to be studied and debated while forgetting that its importance is rooted in improving encounters between real people with difficult, even non-negotiable differences. Stories combat such abstraction (Riessman, 2001). I trust, then, that in hearing participants’ stories, you will learn what encounters look and feel like from their perspectives. Both their positive and painful experiences of encounters are presented, alongside their dreams and desires for future encounters. I also hope their stories promote compassion toward persons holding contentious differences while simultaneously offering fresh insights for addressing the issue.
In each section, I explain why I chose the particular group. Then, I provide background on the participants in the group. This serves to introduce each group, but also to reflect the fact that when participants were asked during the interview to introduce themselves to me, many did not begin by talking about their LGBTQ+, Muslim, or Christian identity. Finally, I detail their encounter experiences. Throughout, I structure participants’ stories chronologically, for readability as well as to preserve the storied nature of their accounts. I begin with participants’ expectations of encounters before coming to their degree program, move on to the realities of encounters during their program, and end with their current assessment of their experiences and their hopes for future encounters. I include illustrative quotations throughout, and use their actual words and speech patterns wherever possible. I do this to remain faithful to their stories, maintain their humanity and individuality, and provide richness to the findings. I chose pseudonyms for participants to protect their identities.

In all three sections, I structure participants’ encounter experiences around the same six general storylines (see Figure 3). Storylines are threads or plotlines that help explain what a person’s story is about. They make up participants’ interpretations of their encounter experiences. I consider the six storylines I selected to be the main threads in participants’ stories; they are spoken about by participants repeatedly or at length. I focus on the same six storylines across all three groups because they were shared by most participants and were common across all the groups. By structuring the findings around the same six general shared storylines, I can highlight commonalities within as well as variations across groups in terms of encounter experiences. This provides deeper, richer insight into how persons holding contentious differences experience encounters more broadly (McAlpine, 2016). To capture the variations
across groups, there are a few slight variations in names of the storylines across the three groups. Most of the storyline names were created using participants’ words.

- **Storyline 1: Telling single-sided stories about differences** – This storyline is about how participants were told one-dimensional, simplistic, unbalanced stories about differences, with little recognition of how this shapes perceptions and encounters.

- **Storyline 2: Avoiding, seeking, and torn between avoiding and pursuing encounters** – This storyline is generally about participants’ response when confronted with the prospect of encountering persons holding contentious differences. There was variability in the responses across groups, however, which are captured through variations in the titles of this storyline across the three groups. Within the LGBTQ+ group, the *Avoiding Encounters* storyline is about how, when confronted with the prospect of encountering those holding contentious differences, many participants in this group wanted to evade such encounters despite the fact that doing so limited understanding. Within the Muslim group, the *Torn between Avoiding and Pursuing Encounters* storyline is about how many participants in this group were torn between wanting to avoid and pursue encounters. Within the Christian group, the *Seeking Encounters* storyline is about how many participants in this group wanted to seek encounters because it increased understanding.

- **Storyline 3: Managing positive, negative, and conflicting positive and negative treatment of an identity** – This storyline is generally about how participants managed the treatment of their (contentious) identity. There were divergences in the experiences across groups, however, which are captured using slightly different titles for this storyline across the three groups. Within the LGBTQ+ group, the *Managing Positive Treatment of an LGBTQ+ Identity* storyline is about how the members of this group managed encounters
when their difference was mostly treated positively. Within the Muslim group, the
Managing a Conflicting Positive and Negative Treatment of a Muslim Identity storyline is
about how the members of this group managed encounters where their difference was
treated both positively and negatively. Within the Christian group, the Managing Negative
Treatment of a Christian Identity storyline is about how the members of this group
managed encounters when their difference was mostly treated negatively.

• **Storyline 4: Silencing particular contentious voices** – This storyline is about how certain
contentious differences were restricted, with little regard for how this process hindered
dialogue about differences.

• **Storyline 5: Identity reigns supreme** – This storyline is about how preoccupation with
contentious differences impedes the process of encountering those who hold them.

• **Storyline 6: Seeing the human beyond the difference** – This storyline is about how the
process of considering people beyond contentious differences might improve
understanding as well as encounters.
I present the storylines for each of the interviewed groups separately: in Section One, I offer the storylines of the LGBTQ+ participants; in Section Two, the Muslim participants; and in Section Three, the Christian participants.

I support the discussion of the storylines in each of the three sections by offering one table of “case summaries” (McAlpine, 2016, p. 39). Case summaries are a “comprehensive” but “reduced” (McAlpine, 2016, p. 43) version of the stories told by each case (participant). The
case summaries preserve and re-tell a shortened account of each participants’ idiosyncratic story (McAlpine, 2016). They also display the data so that readers can verify my later interpretations (McAlpine, 2016). They use short, direct quotes of participants’ exact words and speech patterns (McAlpine, 2016). Doing this helps me stay faithful to their account and limits my interpretation (McAlpine, 2016). It also humanizes the findings. The case summaries are constructed around the six core storylines. By putting the accounts of each participant’s encounter experiences in one table, the idiosyncrasies within each of their stories as well as patterns relative to the storylines among all group members can be seen more clearly.

I also offer two “narrative cameos” (McAlpine, 2016, p. 36) to support the discussion of the storylines. Narrative cameos are lengthy non-fictional narratives constructed by a researcher that highlight important findings while preserving the complexity of individual participant’s stories (McAlpine, 2016). The narrative cameos will contain some of the same information as the case summaries. They are meant to expand some of the stories and therefore offer broader portraits of individuals than the case summaries. Since narrative cameos are long, I have only offered two in each section, which serve as exemplars for all members of their respective group. Like the case summaries, the narrative cameos are told in participants’ own words and speech patterns with minimal interpretation. They have also been structured to highlight the six core storylines.

This chapter serves as a foundation for my subsequent interpretations in later chapters. The presentation of the findings allows the readers to assess my later sense-making, and to ground their own points of view in these data.

Finally, this chapter completes the Context element of the guiding framework for this study. In describing participants’ experiences, we can better understand how contextual realities
may shape and influence encounters when contentious differences are present. This is important because the influence of contextual realities on encounters were rarely discussed in any depth within the literature that I reviewed.

**Section One: Descriptive Narratives from the LGBTQ+ Group**

As part of this research, I gathered the stories of members of the LGBTQ+ community. Many differences could be deemed difficult or contentious and therefore chosen for this research. However, some differences seem to create more challenges for encounters than others. Gender identity and sexual orientation are examples.

On the one hand, the members of this group are often encountered with negativity – awkwardness, tension, anxiety, distaste, or hostility. In employment and healthcare, for example, some researchers report that LGBTQ+ members regularly experience prejudice (Davidson, 2015). In their study, D’Augelli and Rose (1990) reported that some students held strongly negative opinions about homosexuality in educational settings; that is, they perceived homosexuality to be “wrong.” These students’ subsequent treatment of LGBTQ+ students was negative. In faculties of social work, some LGBTQ+ students report being forced to discuss their identity in class against their will. They also regularly report being treated as the spokesperson for their group during class discussions on issues related to the LGBTQ+ community (Dentato et al., 2016).

Although this group’s difference is often encountered negatively, it can also be encountered positively. Some researchers (see MacDonnell & Daley, 2015 for an example) have recognized that in many settings (e.g., the community, workplaces, universities), spaces have been intentionally created that are positive toward members of the LGBTQ+ community. Some
scholars suggest that in these contexts, the positive reception of their difference is made a priority (MacDonnell & Daley, 2015).

I learned a great deal about this group and their encounter experiences through the interviews. For instance, while they differed in their family histories, prior education, work experiences, motivations for coming to social work, and even in terms of their affiliations with the LGBTQ+ identity, all participants found their LGBTQ+ identity important. It motivated a number of them to become social workers, although for most, their LGBTQ+ identity was not their primary motivation. Many were pursuing their degree because of significant previous experiences with poverty, neglect, isolation, mental illness and so on. Some said they were excited about entering their degree program.

Most said their identity motivated them to advocate for or represent the LGBTQ+ community in voluntary and paid capacities. Being mistreated or marginalized for their difference meant that they felt that they could empathize with others who had been mistreated. As such, many worked in their communities responding to social issues such as domestic violence, social isolation, and addictions.

In their spare time, some said they engaged in activities such as bird watching, exploring nature, gaming, and singing in a choir.

Most said their LGBTQ+ identity influenced their values, passions, and even their outlook on encounters. For instance, several claimed that because they had been treated negatively (i.e., discriminatory comments made toward their difference), they wanted to treat others holding differences more positively. The remainder of this section details their actual encounter experiences and their assessment (sense-making) of them.
Presentation of the Core Storylines in the LGBTQ+ Group’s Stories

In this section, I share the encounter experiences of the members of the LGBTQ+ community structured around the six storylines. First, however, I offer a narrative cameo. Celeste’s narrative cameo is in her own words and speech patterns as much as possible. To respect the nature of the narratives told by Celeste and other participants, the narrative cameos are not interrupted by comments or headings imposed by the researcher. I wanted, to the extent possible, to allow the reader to meet the individuals telling the stories.
Celeste’s story

Celeste said she “came out” in the early 2000’s. At the time, she experienced being gay bashed. She said it has been a long time, however, since she has felt discriminated against for her difference.

Celeste said she has been an advocate and activist in the LGBTQ+ community for many years. This work was part of her journey to coming into social work. She specifically said she wanted LGBTQ+ youth to know they do not have to hide their difference in order to succeed. Celeste said this was because when she was growing up, being LGBTQ+ was very hidden. She said this meant there were no role models or mentors, which was horrible because it feels like you just disappear.

She said she came to social work after receiving a degree in a different discipline because it gave her no opportunity to interact with people holding differences.

During the first week of her program, Celeste said she was excited because she had found her people; that is, other members of the LGBTQ+ community. Despite this, she said she had a number of experiences that were problematic as a queer person. On her first day of classes, she said students were told to introduce themselves by their name and social location. To do this, she said she would have had to out herself right there, so she chose to pass because she didn’t feel comfortable. She said the activity made it explicit that she needed to touch on her LGBTQ+ identity. In a number of classes after that, she said students were asked to discuss their differences. She said this was an issue for several reasons. It highlighted, for instance, who was different. Celeste said these activities were awful and had the effect of ostracizing instead of creating a sense of belonging. Additionally, she said there was a lot of “us” and “them” language used when talking about differences. She said that when persons were referred to as “they,” it was really hard for her because she was “one of the ‘they’.” She said there was an assumption that students with differences were not sitting there amongst you and so they were invisible.

In her last year, Celeste said that a Christian student from another degree program made mind-blowing statements any time LGBTQ+ stuff would come up. These comments were treated as though everyone’s opinion was equal and there were no lines drawn around acceptable and unacceptable speech. Ultimately, Celeste felt there was no safety established for people in the classroom who were queer.

In one of her classes, Celeste said that a Christian student was treated as an outsider because she was Christian. This student received a lot of pushback for asking questions that would have been received differently if she had not been Christian. Celeste said she answered the student’s questions, and they ended up becoming friends, even though this student has a very different outlook than Celeste on various issues. Celeste said that they now meet regularly and have conversations across their differing perspectives. Celeste said these conversations are positive because this student modeled valuing humanity and valuing looking for the common ground which is very different than someone who’s very intent on maintaining their own ideology and coming into conflict with others in order to maintain it. Celeste added that their conversations are productive because they understand each other a little better by the end of them.
Reflecting across her experiences, Celeste concluded there should be safe space guidelines so that people can authentically show up and share their differences. She said there should be boundaries around saying hurtful things about differences with consequences for crossing boundaries. She felt that people should also have the courage to disagree rather than silently tolerating differing perspectives for which they do not agree. She said that people should get to know each other and share a bit of their story because it humanizes. Sharing one’s story allows others to get to know you and where you’re coming from in terms of different perspectives shared. Celeste said that, ideally, her LGBTQ+ identity would be encountered as just a part of who she is. She said she would also like her LGBTQ+ identity to be received with openness, respectful curiosity, and a willingness to learn.

Although Celeste’s story represents encounter experiences commonly discussed among this group’s members, it only offers one person’s account. To augment Celeste’s narrative cameo, I offer one table (Table 3) of case summaries. Table 3 captures a comprehensive but reduced account of all 11 participants’ encounter experiences. I follow Table 3 with a discussion about the encounter experiences shared by members of this group. This discussion is organized around the six core storylines.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Table 3: Case Summaries</th>
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<td><strong>Celeste</strong></td>
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Table 3

Case Summaries of the Encounter Experiences of each Participant in the LGBTQ+ Group

**Taylor**

Having switched from another discipline because they were tired of people only focusing on their LGBTQ identity, Taylor said they looked forward to having a genuine discussion of ideas across differences in their degree program. Taylor said they also hoped not to feel different from others due to an LGBTQ+ identity. While in their program, however, Taylor said they felt like the queer in the classroom. This was, in part, because so many conversations focused on differences. Taylor said their teachers shut down or moved the discussion away from certain differences (e.g., due to faith) making it impossible for students to dialogue. Taylor said their peers self-silenced their perspectives out of fear that they would offend Taylor. Taylor said both classmates and teachers tiptoed around Taylor’s difference, which made Taylor feel uncomfortable. Reflecting on these experiences, Taylor said focusing on differences is superreductive because there are lots of dimensions to individuals. Taylor said that students are not being challenged to explore the opinions of others because they are being silenced. Taylor said that differences should not be erased, and that people can have disconnected, conflicting beliefs and still recognize the value of people.

**Pam**

Before her degree program, Pam said she was used to navigating how to disclose her LGBTQ+ identity to others. She said she looked forward to meeting others with a similar identity. During her program, Pam said her LGBTQ+ identity was generally received well by her instructors and peers. Pam said she had trouble with an in-class activity where students were forced to disclose their differences by forming into groups based on them. She said she found people to be very progressive and wondered if this was the reason, along with classroom norms, that she did not hear from Muslim, Christian, or socially conservative students. She said the tone of discussions shut people down who voiced differing perspectives. Reflecting across her experiences, Pam felt it was unfortunate there were so few discussions across difference, especially faith. She said these conversations are uncomfortable but important, and that differences need to exist.

**Jessica**

Before coming to the program, Jessica felt that her queer identity was accepted by her family but not by her co-workers who held differing beliefs around same-sex marriage. To preserve relationships, she said she often avoided discussions about her difference. She said that she hoped her queer identity would be accepted in her program. She said her experience in her program was really positive in that she did not feel discriminated against based on her sexual orientation. She said she did not, however, bump up against a lot of challenge relative to differences because there was a taking for granted that everyone was progressive. She said she interacted with conservative Christians in only one class and described the interaction as intense and homophobic. Reflecting across her experiences, Jessica said she believed her conservative Christian classmates felt isolated as a minority in a class of mostly liberal folks. Because their

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1 For readability, where the first letter of the words they, their, or them have been italicized, it signifies a singular use of the term and refers to the individual participant. All other formats are plural.
opinions were regularly challenged, she said she could see them thinking they had no room in social work. Jessica said she believed spirituality and religion should specifically have a place in her program, but was not convinced that people should have a right to voice differing perspectives that discriminate.

Jordan

Jordan said they came to queerness at a young age. While Jordan said they experienced some harassment before coming to their program, mostly, Jordan felt comfortable with their LGBTQ+ identity. Jordan said this was because the queer community is well represented and because Jordan chose to be surrounded by queer or queer-minded folks. Coming into their program, Jordan didn’t quite know what to expect in terms of being personally encountered. Jordan said there was a lot of discussion around differences, and they often felt in the role of educator as a person holding an LGBTQ+ identity. While Jordan felt this was not fair because others’ stories were not shared in return, Jordan said queer students should have their stories heard. In one instance, when Jordan’s Christian classmates challenged what they perceived to be offensive comments about their religious difference, Jordan was livid because Christianity is dominant and violent in the way that it has been enacted. Reflecting across their experiences, Jordan said professors often shut down discussions across difference. Jordan said that while such discussions are uncomfortable, they can offer powerful opportunities for transformation. Jordan said people should learn to lean in with curiosity and with love in encounters and extend an open hand to somebody’s words.

Liam

Before his degree program, Liam said he engaged in community work supporting the gay community because mostly, he felt this community (including himself) was received negatively. He said people were often scared or walked on eggshells around him fearing they would say something bad about his difference. Coming into his program, Liam said he expected people to say ignorant things about his difference, but he said this happened a lot more than he expected. He said an instructor and a Christian classmate, for instance, encountered him in a homophobic manner and caused him some depression. Liam also generally felt there was silence when it came to discussions across difference. He said the Christians in his program were afraid to speak because of the legacy of Christianity being oppressive. He said that when people of colour spoke, everyone else just nodded along in silence. When Liam challenged others, he said they did not challenge him back with their differing perspectives. Reflecting across his experiences, Liam concluded that students offering perspectives deemed oppressive will get reprimanded or called out. He felt exploited for his learning because he shared perspectives from his difference while others did not reciprocate. He felt there should be rules around what differences can be voiced. He felt there was separation or a divide between groups of students based on differences. For example, he said the LGBTQ+ people all sit together. He said people holding differences should connect beyond difference. He said he wants people to inquire about him beyond his identity and beyond the labels.

Rachel

Before coming to her program, Rachel said she celebrated her LGBTQ+ identity. Generally, she felt that it has been received well. In her program, Rachel felt a sense of camaraderie with her peers, including those holding differences. She said that many other students, however, felt there
was tension between people holding differences. She said that her approach to encountering persons holding differences is to find things they have in common first. While she felt she had enough space to express her differing perspectives in the classroom, there was no space for discussion from certain angles. She said some instructors dismissed people’s perspectives. For example, she said Christian students were shut down. Reflecting across her experiences, Rachel concluded that differences should be acknowledged, not dismissed. She added that it should be okay if people don’t agree. Rachel also concluded that Christian students should compartmentalize spirituality in their secular program although doing so is problematic because social workers need to understand their difference.

**Kathy**

Before coming to her program, Kathy felt she did not fit into the LGBTQ+ community because she “came out” later in life. Coming into her program, Kathy said her LGBTQ+ identity did not make a difference in any way to how she was encountered. She said the exception was with her LGBTQ+ classmates where she felt she was not really one of them and she felt like a fraud. Kathy said she surrounded herself with people holding the same perspective as her. She said she encountered differences due to race, but not faith. She said that if there were people of faith, they were not open or vocal about it in her classes. Kathy said that she was really upset about a class activity where students had to separate into identity categories (e.g., LGBTQ+, race). She said that focusing on differences forced students to out themselves and left them feeling alienated, isolated, and put on display. Kathy said she lost her cool in some interactions across difference. Reflecting across her experiences, Kathy concluded that interactions across difference should be gentle rather than angry because yelling isn’t helpful. She said that getting mad at others’ differences is inappropriate because it makes the person seem like a big monster. She said that she is learning to be open to others’ perceptions and accepting the possibility that she could be wrong in hers. She recommended sharing personal experiences to build connection across difference because it brings people up to the human level. She said that she was able to do this with classmates of whom she was not a big fan.

**Janet**

Growing up, Janet said that she was encouraged by her parents to fit in and not be different from others. She said that she learned to really dislike when people get labeled and reduced down to their label. When Janet started her program, she said that she was unsure when or how to disclose her identity as queer. She said that when her classmates identified as queer first, and the reaction was no big deal, she felt okay to identify as queer. She said that she was not reprimanded or singled out. She said that other differences were not as well received. She said that when religious students spoke up after their faith was slammed, other students were challenged in listening to them. Janet said that instructors mostly skirted away from discussions across difference. She said that she engaged in self-silencing to avoid difficult discussions. Reflecting across her experiences, Janet said that when encountering differences, people should be curious. She said that asking curious questions feels better than the judgment of assumptions and statements. She said that questions also help people learn what is underneath the label of an LGBTQ+ person.

**Jamie**

As a child, Jamie said that she witnessed domestic violence and experienced low income. As an
adult, she said that she received treatment from a social worker for an undiagnosed mental illness. Jamie said these experiences helped her learn how to see another with a difference as a whole person. Coming into her program, Jamie said that there were no negative connotations or issues with her LGBTQ+ identity. She said that her LGBTQ+ identity was well received, for which she was grateful, although her Christian identity was not. She said that there was more froth about her holding a Christian identity. She said that generally, it is dangerous for people to identify as Christian because religion has done a lot of damage to a lot of people. She said that generally, difficult conversations across differences were not happening in classrooms. She said that there were a few conversations around race, but not other intersectionalities. She said the result was that students were only getting along superficially. Jamie said that instructors set the norm or tone for encounters when they locate themselves (their identities) at the beginning of the year. Reflecting across her experiences, Jamie said that if people ask, “what does that look like for you?” when encountering difference, it would lead to interesting conversations, seeing people as human beings, and recognizing their unique experiences.

Celeste

Celeste said that she expected her LGBTQ+ identity to be well received in her degree program. During her program, she said she learned quickly that students needed to focus on their differences. Celeste said that on her first day, students were told to introduce themselves by their social location. She said she chose to pass. She said that focusing on differences was awful and ostracizing and that she wanted her LGBTQ+ identity to be seen as a holistic part her. Additionally, she said that there was a lot of “us” and “them” language used which made people invisible. She said that differences were not encountered equally in classes. For instance, she said that a Christian student received pushback for asking questions that would have been received differently if she were not Christian. Celeste said that another classmate said that it was important to center visible minorities because being LGBTQ+ was trendy. She said that the conversation, however, was shut down so that it could not be explored. In her last year, Celeste said that a Christian student from another degree program made mind-blowing statements about LGBTQ stuff. She said that this student’s speech was not silenced, even though it was unacceptable. Reflecting back across her experiences, Celeste recommended that people share a bit of their story when encountering difference because it humanizes. She said that sharing one’s story allows others to get to know you and where you’re coming from. She also said that people need to verbalize disagreements rather than just being silent.

Lee

Besides some ignorant or homophobic comments made in Lee’s workplace or in public, Lee said that their queer identity has been received well. Lee said that they typically gravitated toward queer people and those who have a queer lens. In their degree program, Lee said that there was a very accepting queer centric view. Despite this, Lee said that they were very guarded about disclosing their difference with classmates perceived as having views that were different. Lee described avoiding confrontational conversations with these students. Lee said that they expected greater interaction across differences. Instead, Lee said that there was a lot of “us and them” and siloes. Lee said that people parsed off to hang out in identity groups (e.g., white, queer, religious). Since there was little time for students to get to know each other, Lee said that people connected along prime identities out of comfort and familiarity. Lee said that students were
primed to be thinking constantly about their differences. Lee said that this is important, yet exhausting, frustrating, and overwhelming. Lee also said that people risk losing parts of themselves and that everyone sort of feels on edge. Lee described being shocked that some students had homophobic views informed by their religion. Lee also said, however, that you need to have everyone in social work because that’s representative of the population that exists. Reflecting across their experiences, Lee said that they are learning how to be ok with differences and letting them exist.

In this Table, participants’ individual case summaries serve as a foundation for the rest of the section. Next, I provide a more extensive description of this group’s collective encounter experiences organized around the six core storylines. I conclude by offering some important messages abstracted from the findings about encountering persons holding contentious differences.

**Telling single-sided stories about differences.** Before coming to their degree program, several participants said they heard stories about differences. These stories were often either positive or negative but not both. For example, the story that they heard about their own difference was that it is unnatural, wrong, and not normal.

During their program, several participants said that the story told about their own difference by instructors, peers, guest speakers, and in course material, was one-sided, but often positive. As one participant put it, they tended to hear “very accepting queer-centric” stories.

Many participants spoke about hearing single-sided stories told about other differences (e.g., verbally or through classroom materials). For instance, many spoke at length about the stories communicated by their instructors and classmates about religious difference. The main story several said that they heard about conservative religion, and Evangelical Christianity in particular, was that it is violent, dominant, and oppressive. Several said no positive stories were told about Christianity.
Reflecting across their experiences, many participants said that single-sided stories can harm encounters and people. For example, when people believe the stories, differences can become perceived monolithically. This makes it difficult for differences to be perceived as anything other than what is conveyed by the story. Take, for instance, the comments of one participant:

…it was suggested to me that I do my placement at [a Christian agency]...I was like, “ok.” ... I told one of my friends ...and they’re like ...“they’re super homophobic” and I was like “no!” And I was like, “are they?”...so I was sort of like “no! They’re homophobic. Oh god! S**t!”

As this quote also illustrates, single-sided stories are powerful. Several participants added that it can be difficult, or even dangerous to challenge them (e.g., by offering positive information about a difference described negatively). Several said stories can also shape the perceptions of differences. If a story is negative, those holding differences can become negatively perceived. A number of participants explained that negative stories about religion, for instance, caused those holding a religious difference to be perceived of as adversaries, stupid, “perpetrators of something terrible,” or as a group that “perpetuates systemic discrimination.” A few added that this can justify encountering certain differences with anger. In contrast, if a story is positive, those holding differences may be perceived more positively, as participants experienced with their own difference.

**Avoiding encounters.** Before coming to their degree program, many participants said they generally avoided talking to persons holding differences – in their families, workplaces, and
communities. Instead, many said they gravitated toward other members of the LGBTQ+ community. Several, for instance, said they intentionally attended queer-centric social engagements. Even in contexts where they had no choice but to encounter persons holding differences, many said they found ways to avoid speaking with them.

During their degree program, many participants said they still largely avoided persons holding differences. They purposely searched for other members of the LGBTQ+ community. Only one participant eschewed such avoidance, and actively tried to meet people across differences.

Reflecting on their experiences, many participants disdained their own tendency to evade encounters. Instead, they said that they felt it was appropriate to purposely seek encounters with those who did not share their difference. They felt that avoiding those holding differences can constrain the ability to understand others. It can also create division. Evading encounters with those holding differences in the first place can also lead to continuing to evade them in the future.

**Managing positive treatment of an LGBTQ+ identity.** Before coming to their program, many participants talked about how their difference was generally treated positively. Their communities, families, and friendship networks, for instance, were mostly supportive of their difference. Few recounted stories where their difference was not treated well. Several said that they managed this positive treatment by speaking openly about their difference.

In light of these realities, coming into their degree program, most participants said they expected their difference to be treated positively. Few participants spoke about what they did in response to this anticipated positive treatment. Instead, many spoke about how they looked forward to their program.
During their program, most participants said they felt their difference was encountered positively. As one participant explains:

*Not only was I not reprimanded in whatever reason, or singled out, or felt like I was under some watchful eye, I was just, like, I was welcomed.*

They managed this by being honest about their differences and being mostly forthcoming about it.

Reflecting across their experience, most participants said they were grateful for the positive treatment of their difference. They said that being treated with acceptance made them feel more willing to discuss their difference amongst their peers and instructors.

**Silencing particular contentious voices.** Coming into their degree program, participants said they expected to hear a variety of perspectives, including contentious ones. Although this caused apprehension for some and excitement for others, most felt it was necessary for learning about others’ differences.

Most participants said that generally, during their degree program, only certain differences were permitted (e.g., race, sexual orientation); others were silenced (e.g., religion). One way certain differences became restricted was that they were simply never discussed. Many participants said the absence of certain differences from course material and class dialogue created a sort of silencing of these perspectives. Several participants added that established classroom norms also had a way of silencing certain differences and making clear which differences were to be permitted or silenced.
Second, when persons holding certain contentious differences did voice their perspectives, several participants said that their contributions were silenced. They said instructors, for instance, would direct conversations in such a way as to shut them down. As one participant commented:

*So often, what would happen...somebody might say something about what they believe, the instructor would respond in a way that just kind of closed it off.*

It was not only instructors that silenced certain differences. A number of participants said that students also regularly shut down certain perspectives. A few participants even recounted instances where *they* shut others down. Several even acknowledged that it was their goal to silence those perspectives that they felt were difficult.

Finally, many participants said that those holding certain differences would silence themselves in large or small group encounters by not offering their perspectives. As one participant said:

*... [Christian students] were very upfront when we had the larger class discussions...when that person was in a smaller group with me, they were either silent and not wanting to engage... [there was a] silencing of themselves...*

Only a few participants talked about silencing their own perspectives.

In assessing their experiences, many participants claimed that silencing certain differences can undermine encounters. Many participants experienced discussions across
difference as inauthentic because people holding disallowed differences were not voicing their genuine perspectives. This made learning about differences, or hearing from those holding them, impossible. A few, however, said they felt that some differing perspectives ought to be silenced (e.g., conservative religious perspectives) because they are harmful. They suggested intentional action be taken to restrict certain voices.

**Identity reigns supreme.** Many participants said that it was fairly typical, before coming to their degree program, for people to be preoccupied with their LGBTQ+ identity. They said strangers in the street would focus on their difference: they would make comments about it (e.g., call them “dyke”). Their family members and co-workers also attended to it, often before focusing on their other identities. Many said this was because they had visible signifiers that communicated their difference to others. They claimed these signifiers made it possible for people to focus on their difference: people knew, by the way participants dressed or styled their hair that they identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community. And so, people did focus on this identity.

Most participants talked about how the preoccupation with differences intensified during their degree program. The focus, however, was not just on their LGBTQ+ identity. There was a general preoccupation with differences. As one participant put it, “identity reigns supreme.” In other words, most participants said that many conversations (e.g., in classrooms, between peers) related to differences. Students were “primed” (taught) to focus on their own and others’ differences. One participant explained that, “There's, like, Marginalization Day where we talked about black people and queers… an Indigenous day, a LGBTQ day.” They said that priming students to focus on differences began early in their program, even as early as the first day. As one participant commented:
I remember first year, first day sitting in [class] right?... the question was, “ok, so we’re going to go around sort of in a circle and, like, say, like, what is your name and, like, your social location so” and the prof was like “ok, my name is blah and I’m a straight, black, male and, you know, from this community and sort of like this economic structure and blah, ok.”

Many participants said discussions, class activities, and readings all focused on differences. Reflecting on their experiences, most participants felt that being preoccupied with differences made encounters difficult. They said that it became hard for people to see anything but their LGBTQ+ identity, and that this made encounters awkward. One said that the pervasive centrality of their LGBTQ+ difference meant people could not recognize that they can “be more than queer and trans.” One participant claimed it was exhausting, frustrating, overwhelming, and unsafe to be constantly thinking about differences generally, including their own LGBTQ+ identity. Some said that it forces people to involuntarily “out” (reveal) their identities, which can be harmful. As a result, several concluded that students ought to be taught and encouraged to focus less on differences, even their own. A few concluded that students should actually have been primed not to be preoccupied with differences.

**Seeing the human beyond the difference.** Several participants said that one lesson they learned before their degree program was that people holding differences should be encountered as people. This lesson came from being encountered as someone holding a contentious difference. When they were encountered negatively, they said that they wished the other person had seen them as more than their difference. When they were encountered positively, they said that they were grateful they were seen as a whole person.
A number of participants said that when they were encountering others, however, they often struggled to see the complete person beyond the difference. They said that they wanted to do better. This was because they found it easier to hear others’ perspectives if they had a deeper understanding of them as individuals and members of an identity group. Knowing their history, motivations, or the source of their differences made it easier to encounter them.

Reflecting on their experiences, a few participants suggested that people holding differences talk about themselves in humanizing ways. As one participant explained:

*I think if you can share a bit of your story... it humanizes you... It allows people in a little bit to get to know you and where you’re coming from... it gives people the opportunity to see you and to know you and to connect with something in themselves that has felt that way...*

A few added that doing this does not necessarily mean agreeing across differences, but rather demonstrating that their presence is valued. This would allow people to disagree while still respecting each others’ shared humanity.

**Pam’s Story**

I want to conclude the discussion of the storylines by returning the focus to the personal realities of encounters. I do this by sharing Pam’s story. This narrative includes Pam’s encounter experiences told, to the extent possible, in her own words and speech patterns. It is structured around the six storylines.
Pam’s Story

Pam said that she has done a lot of activism around LGBTQ+ issues. She said that her biggest motivator for coming to her degree program, however, was to do clinical work, not her LGBTQ+ identity.

Before coming to her program, Pam said that it was difficult for her to navigate her LGBTQ identity because she is often “perceived as a straight person.” She said it takes a long time to disclose her LGBTQ+ identity. She said she worries about being rejected by either the LGBTQ+ or straight community, and about making people feel uncomfortable with her difference.

Pam said her experience in her degree program was mostly great. She felt a real connection with people even when they were not exactly the same as her in terms of their values, beliefs or perspectives. Pam said her LGBTQ+ identity was received well although she did experience a sense of “crushing invisibility” until she disclosed her difference to her classmates.

Pam said she had trouble with an in-class activity where students were required to form into groups based on identity, “so, like, LGBTQ, like, racialized identity.” She said that the activity felt wrong, and that spaces for differences should not be forced or created from the top down. She said students were not able to organize themselves according to the identity groups they preferred, nor decide for themselves how to connect with others. She added that there are lots of ways that people can align themselves with people on a variety of identities.

Pam said that classes were set up in such a way that it influenced who discussed their differences. Even though there were students in her class that voiced very strongly different opinions, she said she did not hear Muslim, Christian, or “socially conservative perspectives.” She said that it was unfortunate there were so few discussions across differences, especially due to faith. She said that it is important for people to feel like they have the space to discuss their differences.

She said that many class discussions were “reactive” (characterized by anger, disbelief or righteousness) rather than “responsive” (characterized by listening, understanding, kindness, or compassion). She felt that reactive classes shut people down. She added, however, that this was better than silence.

Reflecting on her experience, Pam said it is important not to impose or make assumptions about people based on identities. She also said it is important not to make differences not exist. At the same time, Pam said she has hard limits on anything violent. When people are willing to talk across differences, they can glean “a better understanding of what motivates people to say certain things and more…space…for things that [they] don’t immediately understand or agree with.” She said that conversations related to faith are really challenging and potentially uncomfortable, but important.
Discussion

After gathering and analyzing this group’s stories of encounters, I took several important messages from their experiences. First, it seems important to recognize just how significant people’s differences are to them. The difference of most members of this group inform and motivate their values, beliefs, work and school motivations, extra-curricular activities, and encounter experiences. Despite this, many members of this group longed for people to recognize that they also hold other differences (e.g., race, religion) that influence their lives in important ways.

Another key message is the difficulty of meeting across difference. On the one hand, most participants generally avoided those they felt held contentious differences. On the other, many critiqued avoiding encountering difference and expressed deep disappointment with the lack of opportunity to meet across difference. They expressed their desire to hear others’ perspectives and felt frustrated when this did not happen.

How to go about encountering people’s differences, however, seems to matter. How to treat people once we learn they hold a contentious difference is crucial. Intentionally treating them positively can facilitate encounters and make people feel more comfortable.

Single-sided stories told about differences can influence encounters. Single-sided stories are powerful: they are dangerous to challenge, and cause differences to be perceived in monolithic ways. Several participants said encounters can be hindered when mostly negative stories are told about others’ differences. Negative stories told about difference can keep people from wanting to encounter those holding them, or worse, justify encountering people with hostility. Several members of this group who heard both positive and negative stories told about their difference said that they appreciated the more positive stories. Yet even positive stories can
be problematic: they do not reflect differences in a balanced, nuanced way. They can put people in a box by denying their individuality and presenting an inaccurate reflection of who they are.

Restricting perspectives to reflect only certain differences through course content, classroom norms, or discussions seems to hinder encounters. When people expect to hear about or from those holding differences, limited discussion can frustrate them. Inauthentic dialogue makes learning about and dialoguing across difference very difficult.

Another important message relates to the preoccupation with difference. Some focus on learning, thinking, and talking about differences is important. Being preoccupied with differences, however, can be exhausting, myopic, or reductionist. It can also impede encounters. It can teach people, for instance, to make difference too much of a focal point. This can make it hard to see past differences. It can also force people to involuntarily “out” (identify) their difference.

Finally, it seems important to encounter those holding contentious differences as human beings. This means understanding that people are more than their differences. Remembering people’s humanity can actually make it easier to encounter those holding contentious differences. It creates room for learning why they hold their difference and how it motivates them.

**Section Two: Descriptive Narratives from the Muslim Group**

As part of this study, I also gathered stories from persons for whom their Muslim faith is important. I selected this group primarily because, in many different settings, religion is considered contentious. Religious differences regularly cause discomfort and tension, and so issues related to faith (and therefore persons of faith) are not easy to encounter. Scholars report that it is not uncommon for religious persons to experience “hostility” (Hodge, 2002, p. 405) or “overt and covert discrimination” (Thyer & Myers, 2009, p. 145; Hodge, 2002; Hodge, 2003).
Muslims, in particular, experience discrimination in a variety of Western contexts (Crabtree, 2009) such as in the workplace (see Burke & Ng, 2006), and secondary and post-secondary education (see Guo, 2015; Pesut, 2016). Some scholars suggest that this is the result of Islam’s regular portrayal by the media as violent, oppressive, or radically opposed to Western values (Hodge, 2005a).

Some scholars also report that Muslims can be made to feel invisible, and are regularly left out of encounters (Hodge et al., 2015). One postulated reason is that Muslims hold non-dominant beliefs in Western society, and consequently their perspectives are deemed inferior (Hodge et al., 2015).

Unlike issues such as ethnicity (Crabtree, 2009) or sexual orientation (MacDonnell & Daley, 2015), faith is not prioritized for inclusion in many Western settings. This means that less attention is directed toward improving difficult encounters with persons holding religious differences. Even more, some Canadian and American scholars contend that the motivations and perspectives of religious persons are not just deprioritized, they are not welcome. This prevents persons holding religious differences from claiming and sharing their perspectives. Those who attempt to share them frequently “run into a brick wall of resistance and indifference” (Cox, 2003, p. 204).

Paradoxically, Muslims are met with positivity in some instances. Since Islam is a non-dominant minority religious difference, it is understood to be an object of discrimination (Edwards, 2018). As such, intentional efforts have been made in some settings to improve intergroup relations with Muslims (Edwards, 2018).
Given that scholars admit that little research exists on how Muslims perceive their varied encounter experiences, and how their realities have shaped interactions (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2006), my aim was to learn about their actual experiences.

Through my interviews with members of this group, I learned that their Muslim faith was important. It influenced their values, passions, and decisions. For many, their faith played a substantial role in motivating them to become social workers. For example, as one participant explained, Islam talks about the importance of “looking out for those who are oppressed and marginalized in society.” It makes Muslims responsible for helping others. A few talked about how on the Day of Judgment, they will stand before God and be accountable for how they behaved toward others. They want to be able to stand before their Creator and say they tried to make the world a better place for this and coming generations.

In addition to their faith, other experiences influenced participants to pursue social work. For instance, many found they were already doing so much work in their community that social work seemed a natural fit. A number also talked about the need for Muslim social workers and for increased mental health services for Muslims. Many participants regularly volunteered in their communities, particularly supporting Muslims dealing with a variety of challenges. Several also worked or volunteered with other groups. Several had worked in residential settings, settlement services, employment counselling, child welfare, and politics. Some engaged in activism and community organizing. Several have responded to a variety of social issues such as human rights, gender issues, mental health, employment, and immigration.

In their spare time, many said they enjoy engaging in activities within the Muslim community. A few said they enjoy activities that foster their other differences such as “listening to black music” or being in “queer Muslim spaces.”
Many participants in this group said their identity influenced their outlook on encounters. Many said that the Qur’an, Sharia, as well as the life and words of the Prophet Mohammed inspired or obligated them to care about, love, and respect others, including those with differences. Several participants said that they tried to leave judgment for God and instead demonstrate compassion and salaam (peace) toward others.

**Presentation of the Core Storylines in the Muslim Group’s Stories**

Qahtan’s story introduces the encounter experiences of the Muslim participants. Although it is told in Qahtan’s own words and speech patterns as much as possible, it is structured around the six storylines. Qahtan’s story was chosen because it represents encounter experiences common to many participants in this group.
Qahtan’s story

Qahtan said his religion is one of the most important things about him. He said it provides structure and guiding principles for how he should interact with people. He said it teaches him to do good work and to help others, and was a big factor in choosing social work as a career. He said he spends a lot of time gathering over food with members of his Muslim community growing in his faith, socializing, and volunteering. He said he has worked with the Muslim community, and specifically with Muslim youth with Autism.

Qahtan said he often hears ideas about his difference that are offensive. He said he has gotten used to people saying racist things toward him. He said he knew coming to his program that his faith would be somewhat included, but also not. He said this was because he knew the school and program were mainstream, left leaning, and liberal, but that his faith was more conservative. He also said he knew Islam is sometimes considered marginalized.

During his program, Qahtan said people were respectful toward his religion and that he never felt out of place. No one treated him negatively for his Islamic perspectives, but he admitted he was very careful who he shared them with. He said he feared what people would do if they found out that his faith is not left leaning at all. He said people treated him well because Islam is “part of the rainbow of all the people who are oppressed,” but he said this may only be because not enough is known about Islam to know it is very conservative.

Qahtan said one LBGTQ+ student made fun of religion to Qahtan and his Christian friend. Qahtan said he found it a really funny thing because the same student had, earlier, been discussing oppressive comments made towards the LGBTQ+ community. Qahtan explained that his Christian friend said this student probably just had bad experiences with religion. Qahtan said his Christian friend’s comment made the LGBTQ+ student seem more human.

Qahtan said that during his program, it felt like there was an agenda for what differences could be discussed. He said students could not, and did not, share counterpoints. He thought if they did, others would jump on them. He said students would bash those with opposing views, and difficult conversations were often stopped. He found this frustrating. Additionally, he said his classmates would challenge ideas without investigating both sides.

He said he met other persons of different faiths and enjoyed their conversations about religion. He said otherwise, there were few conversations about religion. He felt that his religion, however, could be discussed while Christianity could not. He said Islam is in the middle – where he holds an oppressed difference, yet at the same time, religion is on the outskirts of social work and society.

Reflecting across his experiences, Qahtan concluded that people need to respect the fact that not everyone will agree with others’ differences. Despite this, he said he wants room for everyone to express them. He challenged the idea of creating safe space in the classroom because it just makes everyone scared to voice their differing opinions. He wishes people would not just echo what they think they are supposed to say. He said people often take shortcuts when encountering those holding differences, and are quick to think they are a bad person. Instead, he said it is
important to see the humanness of the other person which will change how they encounter them, and how they react if something offensive is said.

In Table 4, I offer material from all 10 participants’ stories, organized into brief case summaries of their encounter experiences. The summaries are organized around the six core storylines, but are told using participants’ own words and speech patterns to preserve their individuality. This Table is followed by a detailed discussion of the storylines.
Table 4

Case Summaries of the Encounter Experiences of each Participant in the Muslim Group

**Qahtan**

In response to his faith, which encouraged him to work with marginalized populations, Qahtan said he came to his degree program yearning to have awesome dialogue across difference. Although he said he knew his program was left leaning, he expected his faith to be received well because it is part of the inclusion thing. He added that he came fearful he would say something offensive to those holding differences. During this program, he said people were respectful toward his religion and he never felt out of place. He admitted, however, he did not always share his religious beliefs and did not talk about controversial things. His said his faith was treated well because Muslims are part of the rainbow of all the people who are oppressed, although he thought people would be less supportive if they learned many Muslims are very conservative. He felt people had a hive mind and just agreed that certain differences are bad without seeing both sides. He said people were scared of confrontation. He said they did not talk about controversial stuff. He said they did not offer counterpoints to arguments because people would bash them. He said he was frustrated that conversation stopped and that no one was willing to really voice their differing perspectives. Reflecting on his experiences, Qahtan said that people should not be scared to say something potentially offensive because not everyone holds the same opinions. His wish was that people would be given room to express different perspectives. He said it is important to see the human when interacting with persons holding differences and not jump to conclusions that they are bad if they say something oppositional.

**Basma**

Before her program, Basma said she experienced verbal attacks and nasty comments against her faith because of how it is portrayed in the media. She also said some feel guilty about this, and compensate by behaving nicely. She said that because she is visibly Muslim, she does not hide her faith, but does navigate talking about it in ways that won’t offend others. She said she expected to experience acceptance and safety in her program, but said it was tricky to be open about her faith. She said she would never share teachings from the religion, and took a big risk talking about it in a paper. She said students refused to discuss issues around Islam during class. She added that she would not offer her opinion on difficult topics such as same-sex relationships. She said she tried to humanize her classmates that held differences. She said she went out of her way to be extra nice to compensate for all the misconceptions that Muslims are just crazy people who are intolerant. Reflecting on her experiences, Basma said her Muslim identity is a double-edged sword because sometimes, it comes to her disadvantage while at the same time, her identity advantages her. She said that sometimes, she is given support or fame for her difference. She said that other times, people avoid talking about faith. She said that, while every single person has a story, they are not sharing their identity with others in her program or society. She added that people should be seen for the human beings they are. She said that God will hold people accountable for how they encounter persons holding differences.

**Chahrazad**

As a young activist, Chahrazad said she held rage toward those who disagreed with her
perspective. During her program, she said there was no space to bring certain differences to the forefront. For instance, she said there was judgment toward Christianity, but she felt comfortable and confident to talk about Islam. She said that generally, however, there was no space to discuss faith. She said her program assigned social currency to marginalized differences. She felt this silenced other differences. She said that in her program, the Christian kids hang out with the Christian kids and the Muslim students have gravitated towards each other. She said the school created a space where the LGBTQ+ community can highlight their experiences, although she found that the conversations were more about equity than hearing their story. She felt there was little opportunity to learn how to navigate conversations across difference. She said those who voiced differences considered wrong were crucified. She said this shoved things down. Having been forced to encounter a classmate holding a difference, she said she realized stereotypes create walls instead of bridges. She said that before her program, she was not interested in those holding differences. She said that now, she is hungry to understand their perspectives. She said she is less defensive toward those holding differences and values them as a human. She said she thinks denying one element of a person can flatten them. She said she wants others to know her in her entirety as someone who holds several identities.

**Fara**

Earlier in her life, Fara struggled with her Muslim identity because of all the poisonous, negative stereotypes. She said she was stunned by what she read about her difference in the newspaper and media. She said that people regularly asked offensive questions about her faith. She said that during her program, she just wanted to be herself, but her faith was mostly received negatively. She said a classmate told her they would change therapists if she was their therapist. She said this comment disturbed her. She said it also made two other Muslim classmates afraid because they realized this is how people feel about their difference. She said another classmate made factually incorrect statements about how Muslims have treated the LGBTQ+ community. She said that one instructor assigned her to a group to ensure it was diverse, and she felt discredited. She said there was no space to have difficult conversations or to disagree in her program. She said that information was one-sided and that there was little room for differing viewpoints. She said people kept quiet and conversations moved on to other topics. She said that while her faith was visible, she did not want to talk about it, so she would not bring it up. Reflecting on her experiences, she said social workers put people in categories and focus only on religion. She said that while she and other Muslims want to address misconceptions about Islam, they also feel resentment that they cannot be more than just a Muslim. She said she wants to choose when to talk about her faith. She said that people suppress particular points of view, but she said she would rather people talk than not talk across differences. She said that it is important people do not shut others holding differing perspectives.

**Geela**

Geela said she came to her program expecting to learn how to address mental health challenges in the Muslim community. She said she always saw herself as Muslim first and black. She said others perceive and encounter her Muslim identity negatively because of Islamophobia and global terrorism. During her program, she said she was surprised there was little inclusion and zero conversation about religion. She said Muslim and Christian students would have liked to
talk about religion along with other issues. She said there was emphasis on the LGBTQ+ community and racism in the curricula. She said students were constantly expected to talk about their social location. She said she was not hiding her faith, but did not announce to people, “Hey, I’m a Muslim.” She said when faith was discussed, she felt awkward and like a token as the only Muslim. She said that she and others came to see her as just black and she felt less connected with her Muslim identity. She said one guest lecturer separated students into people of colour and white people. She said it reminded her that she was a token in the program. She said that in another class, she spoke up about an issue of faith. She said her comments were met with silence and everyone moved on. Reflecting across her experiences, she said that not until the time of the interview had she recognized how much impact that not speaking on part of her identity had on her. She said it was not helpful for people just to talk about identities. She felt people need to bring their full stories to the table so others can learn who they are. She said that focusing only on how differences have been negatively encountered feels like trauma porn. She said she recognized that academia is a secular space, but said it is important to talk about faith. She said that every voice matters and deserves to be heard, including difficult ones. She said Islam should be discussed because of its negative perception in society.

**Pinar**

Pinar said that her faith gives her a responsibility to demonstrate respect for people holding differences. Before coming to her program, she said that an employer criticized the ways of encountering clients that she derived from her faith (i.e., her gentleness with them). She said that faith generally, and Islam particularly, is marginalized and considered backward because it does not fit with the secular enlightened worldview. She said that negative assumptions are made about her based on her visible faith. She said this gets tiring. During her program, she said that encounters were as she expected them to be: a microcosm of society. She said she found it disturbing that curriculum talks about diversity, but people can’t or shouldn’t talk about religion. She said she was open about her faith because she had to be: it’s not hidden. In contrast, she said that her Christian classmates would keep their faith out of conversation. She said that students were afraid of engaging in conversations about religion, which made Muslims voiceless. She said that conversations across difference didn’t happen in the classroom and that people sat with those holding their same identities. Reflecting across her experiences, Pinar said it would have been great to have been received just like everybody else. She said that people should interact with Muslims in a way that they are human. She added that they should get rid of their assumptions.

**Layla**

Layla said that she follows the Quran and Allah which demand that she be good with others when she encounters difference. She said that people both positively and negatively encounter her religion. She said that some will smile. She said that others look at you very weird and stare. She said that she was astonished to learn that Canadians perceive Muslims as terrorists, as not educated, as depressed, and as oppressed. Layla said she was hoping to have good conversations with her classmates during her program. She said she hoped that people would forget about her religion, and just communicate with her as a normal person. During her program, she felt she was an outsider and not normal. She said she stopped saying things because she was afraid people would perceive her comments negatively. She said that people encountered her negatively. She said that a classmate was always staring at her. She said that a professor asked
her offensive questions. She said that she was suspected of leaving racist graffiti in the school based on her appearance as a Muslim. She said that no one asked about her faith. She said that she would ignore these things and minimize her time at the school. She said that she treated people nicely to prove that she was not a terrorist or a bad person, but that this was tiring. She said that she would be open about her faith, but only if people did not take what she was saying against her. Reflecting across her experiences, she said her school was not a good place for her. She said they put people in categories. She said they did not welcome her faith. She said that in Canada, the first thing people see is religion. She said, then, their fears and misconceptions are reflected in their relations. She concluded people should challenge the propaganda they hear about Muslims. She said they should communicate with them as humans to discover they are not terrorists or bad people. She said that it is better to ask questions than to stare. She said that she thinks Allah created differences so people can get to know each other while recognizing they are sisters and brothers.

*Amina*

Earlier in her life, Amina said she had a tense relationship with her Muslim identity: she felt she did not belong because of her queer identity. She said she no longer holds a monolithic view of Islam, and is now both queer and Muslim. Amina said she was excited for her program, but felt instead that it was a violent experience. She said she spent a lot of time in tears. She said there were many times she was made invisible, small, inadequate, rejected, and pushed aside. She said parts of her identity were shut down. She said that when difference came up, it was in violent ways. She said that in a theatre of the oppressed activity, guest speakers had attendees yell out ways that people should encounter the oppressed. She said she left shaking and crying. She said that a Muslim professor questioned her queer Muslim identity. She said that students organized an event to support Muslims in response to Islamophobia. She said that when she pointed out that no one included Muslim students in the organization efforts, she was shut down. She said it was only a spectacle: people wanted to support Muslims in big ways, and not actually be a friend. She said that people only wanted to get to know her because she was the queer Muslim in the program. She said they always encountered her by asking about her trauma as a queer Muslim. She said this was exhausting and not caring. She added her queer and Muslim identities didn’t go hand in hand: when she was seen as queer, the Muslim part of her didn’t exist, and when she was seen as Muslim and racialized, the queer part of her didn’t exist. She said she did not hide her faith but regularly felt invisible. She said that perspectives that were not mainstream were shut down. She said that students holding marginalized differences played the Oppression Olympics (fought about which difference was most oppressed) which she said made it difficult to navigate differences. Reflecting across her experiences, Amina said she wished she would have been treated more like a human rather than like a really great queer Muslim. She also said she wanted to not feel that part of her identity was cut out. Amina said that in her dream world, encounters would be grounded in love and care. She said that she would like it if when people make mistakes, they would move through tension rather than sever bonds, seek to learn more, and move on to do things better.

*Yusuf*

Yusuf said that nowadays, there is a lot of not good news about Muslims in the media. He said that Islam is not only violence. He said that the negative perceptions of Islam encourage him to be nice others even if they hate him. He said he wondered if the perception of Islam influenced
how people encountered him. Before his program, Yusuf said he had opportunities to have conversation across differences. During his program, he said students and professors were not talking about faith. He said that, instead, they were quiet and changed the topic. He said people didn’t like to talk about difficult things or meet people holding differences. He said that instead, people stayed with those in the same group as them in terms of their differences. Yusuf said that because he was not visible in his faith, a lot of students did not know he was Muslim. He said he felt comfortable, however, to discuss his faith, although he said faith did not come up a lot. He said that, once, his classmates talked about Islam and specifically, how Muslims faced discrimination. He added that in social work, he has not seen a lot of research about Islam. Yusuf wondered if his faith would keep him from getting good grades. Yusuf said he had a difficult time encountering Christian students because they seemed to be against the LGBTQ+ community. Reflecting across his experiences, Yusuf said it is important to talk to persons holding differences because they are human. He said it is also important to talk about difficult issues because there are people who have direct experiences with them.

**Nikhat**

Nikhat said her Muslim faith is a very big part of her life, but that her identities as a mom, wife, daughter, and student are also important. She said she feels comfortable meeting people with different perspectives because she knows her own. During her degree program, she said she was reluctant to share her religious identity because it is not mainstream in Canada. She said she assumed her classmates had already developed a specific image of Muslims that was negative based on stories associated with Muslims and Islam in the media. Nikhat said that the dominant discourse in social work academia is secular. She said that material came from one perspective, omitted religion, and had nothing from the Islamic tradition. She said it felt unnatural to avoid talking about religion because it was normal and natural for her to discuss faith. She said that she and others were hiding their faith. She said that constant fear kept her from discussing faith. She said she censored her religious language. She said that she was afraid people wouldn’t understand her faith, and that she would feel judged, dismissed, and would not fit in. She said she often felt she needed to prove that she was not stupid, an idiot, inferior or a piece of garbage because her difference is connected with stupidity. She said she would keep silent during difficult conversations. She said there was a tendency to pay attention more to some differences over others. She said homosexuality, heterosexuality, abilities, disabilities, and culture were discussed unlike religion. Reflecting across her experiences, she said students would not step into dangerous spaces and talk about their differences. She said they were afraid to offend or challenge. By hiding, she said she and others were performing roles and not being authentic. She said there was no opportunity to learn across differences so conversations did not feel safe. She said that avoiding conversations makes people afraid of difference, and more likely to defend their perspectives than to understand each other. She said people look to identities and make conclusions. She said this is a big mistake because the whole person is not seen. She said differences should not reduce people from being human beings.

**Telling single-sided stories about difference.** A number of participants spoke at length about how they heard single-sided stories about their difference (e.g., communicated through the media or in society more broadly) before coming to their degree program. They described these
stories as one-dimensional, and often negative. The most common story put forward about their difference is that Islam is horrible and violent and that Muslims, specifically, are terrorists, bad apples who take advantage of the system, oppressed, uneducated, depressed, and weak.

Talking about their program involvements, many participants spoke at length about the single-sided stories about differences. They said these stories were told verbally or through classroom materials. Many participants said the main story they heard about Islam was that it is marginalized and oppressed. Several claimed, however, that the story about their difference was more positive than the stories about other differences. Christianity, some said, was described as oppressive. Christians were described as perpetrators of wrongs against oppressed people. In contrast, a few felt that the story about differences due to sexual orientation was more positive than the story about religious differences.

Reflecting across their experiences, many participants said single-sided stories can hinder encounters and hurt people. They can influence people’s perceptions of differences. A number of participants said that the stories told about differences were typically black and white and portrayed the people holding them as either a bad person or a good person. A few said that when stories were negative, it became difficult for others to feel anything other than hatred toward those holding less “popular” differences. Based on the stories they were told about Islam, a number of participants said people developed a negative image of Muslims and perceive them as inferior, and as one participant put it, coming from “somewhere [that] is a terrible place with terrible people with terrible practices.”

Several participants added that single-sided stories told about differences can emotionally impact those seen as different. Many said they were astonished by the negative stories they heard
about their difference. The stories made them reluctant to tell people that they were Muslim. As one participant explained:

_We have all the stories associated with Muslims ...you would think before sharing your religious identity ...you would think [people have] already developed a specific image of Muslims... you have this always thoughts in back of your mind... and this constant fear somewhere is...holding you from sharing..._

Additionally, as one participant said, they and other Muslims were “internalizing the messages that are out there” and making them question who they are as Muslims.

Several participants felt that it is important that stories do not remain one-sided. They claimed people are missing something when both sides of the story of difference are not shared. Based on their experiences, however, a few participants said that people were not always receptive to hearing a different side of the story. They become hostile toward opposing perspectives. Those who attempted to present a different story risked being “jumped on.” In response, they said that people should be critical of the stories they read or hear about differences.

**Torn between avoiding and pursuing encounters.** Before coming to their degree program, many said they spent their time seeking relationships mainly with other members of the Muslim community. Most talked about interactions across difference only within the contexts of “helping people” or volunteering. Encounters with those holding differences, a number said, were difficult and therefore unappealing. On the other hand, a few said they also deliberately
attempted to meet people different from themselves and have conversations with them because their faith required they treat others well.

During their degree program, participants still seemed torn. Some participants said they intentionally searched for other Muslims. They said that they felt safe and understood with them. Although a few said they also sought to encounter those holding differences, for most, such encounters were avoided.

In assessing their experiences, participants felt that it was important to seek encounters with those who share their difference. However, they also said that it was important to seek encounters with those who hold contentious differences. Avoiding them challenged encounters. As one participant said, it did not help “get [people] to the part where [they] can have the conversations” about differences. It did not allow people to learn about others who are different from them.

**Managing a conflicting positive and negative treatment of a Muslim identity.** Before their program, many participants said their difference was treated mostly negatively. They said that they regularly experienced blatant Islamophobia and aggression from strangers and co-workers. People would stare at them, ask them offensive questions, and make direct comments about their physical appearance such as “You stupid f***ing Pack**” and “go back home.” They managed this treatment in a variety of ways. Some said that they tried to counteract the negative treatment by behaving nicely to people to give them no choice but to encounter them positively. Some others talked about avoiding such encounters where they thought they might be treated negatively.

Coming into their degree program, a few said they expected that their difference would be treated positively. Many others, as one participant explained, expected “a little bit of this and
a little bit of that”: some positive and some negative treatment of their difference. These participants said that they responded by preparing themselves mentally to be careful in each encounter (e.g., in their dress, comments) so that they could avoid being treated negatively.

During their program, many participants described positive and negative treatments of their difference. Some said their faith was treated positively because their difference was considered “oppressed.” They described having open conversations about their faith with their peers, and being treated with respect. One participant, however, felt that their difference was only treated well through “spectacle moment[s]” (i.e., large scale efforts to support Muslims), not during one-on-one encounters. Some said that they responded to positive treatment by speaking more confidently and openly about their difference.

However, some participants talked about their perception that their faith was treated negatively. One participant, for example, talked about a classmate laughing at a religious comment. Another talked about a classmate staring at her to a degree that made her uncomfortable. Yet another said:

I remember in the break time, the person asked me, “oh can I ask a question?” I said “sure.” It wasn’t a question. They said... and it’s still very hard for me to say this, they said, “if I came ... and you were presented as my therapist, I would ask for someone else, right? I wouldn’t accept you”... completely out of the blue...

They managed this varied treatment of their difference in a variety of ways. Some talked about being careful about when and how to talk about their difference. Others spoke about avoiding conversations about differences.
Participants had mixed feelings about the treatment of their difference. A few said that they felt happy when their difference was treated positively: they were grateful that people were respectful toward or supportive of their difference. Such encounters, they felt, were easy to manage because they felt comfortable talking about their difference. Several others said they were disturbed by the negative treatment that they experienced. It caused them to try to hide their difference. These encounters were considered to be much more difficult to manage and were described as unproductive because they could not be open or honest about their difference.

**Silencing particular contentious voices.** Coming into their degree program, some participants expected to hear a variety of perspectives, including contentious ones. They felt that this was exciting and important because hearing various perspectives would enhance their learning.

During their program, many participants said that only certain differences were permitted (e.g., sexual orientation) while others were restricted (e.g., religion). One way this happened was that some differences were not discussed in course materials or during classes. As one participant explained, “there [were] zero conversations about religion,” and no mention of Islam specifically in materials or discussion. Since there was no explicit mention of religious differences, there was a kind of silencing of these perspectives. There was “no space” to talk about them. As one participant said:

> In our classrooms ...religion is something which we try to omit, and not necessarily bring to the table...for me, seems to be very natural to talk about religion because I came from the religious background. This was my normality. This is how I see the world, but we are not really discussing that in the classrooms.
Several participants said since there was space for only certain differences, the silence of others was more apparent.

Several participants added that faculty and classroom norms made it clear which differences were to be silenced and why – because these perspectives were offensive. Creating “safe space” was described as silencing certain voices. As one participant explained, in safe spaces, people who held specific differences deemed contentious were scared to “say anything that could potentially be seen as offensive,” so they kept silent.

Second, several participants spoke about how certain behaviours silenced some perspectives. Students, for example, displayed anger when other students voiced some perspectives. This served to silence these students. Additionally, other students and instructors were considered to have regularly silenced certain perspectives by steering conversations away from them.

Finally, a number of participants said those holding certain differences (e.g. Christians) would silence themselves in large and small group encounters by not offering their perspectives. In the words of one participant, a few participants said that, generally, students were afraid to engage with differences. Although a number of participants said they felt that, for the most part, they could share their perspectives, many said they silenced themselves. Several claimed that they felt that it was “dangerous” to speak because, as one participant explained, there was too “much at stake” (e.g., their grades, relationships). A few described themselves as careful or uncertain about how and when to share their perspectives.

Reflecting on their experiences, several said they found silencing certain differences problematic. One participant described silence as “heavy.” It kept people from learning how others see their difference. It caused discussions to be superficial because people kept quiet about
their actual points of view. Several said those who were silenced felt “totally ignored” and “alienated.” One participant added that silencing some perspectives communicated that they should “be voiceless.” One participant said that “not speaking on part of [her] identity” had a significant impact on her that she is still confronting. Several participants concluded that “every voice matters.”

A number of participants felt that using silence to avoid “tension” or “discomfort” was inappropriate. No one could learn how to actually hear one another’s perspectives. They added that silence ultimately made people even more afraid of differences and conversations “less safe.”

**Identity reigns supreme.** Many participants said that before coming to their degree program, it was typical for people to be preoccupied with their Muslim identity. They said this was especially true if their difference was visible (e.g., they wore a hijab). Strangers in the street, for example, would make comments about their difference (e.g., “take the hood off [your] head”). Even for those whose difference was not visible, many said their family members or co-workers would attend to it first before focusing on other parts of their lives. One participant perceived that an invitation to lunch was based solely on her Muslim identity.

During their program, many participants said the preoccupation with differences increased. Students and instructors focused on their Muslim identity within the context of a general preoccupation with differences. Students, for example, were encouraged to think and talk about their own and others’ identities through class assignments, and during class discussions and activities. As one participant explained, students were “constantly tal[king] about [their] social location.”
Reflecting on their experiences, many participants felt that being preoccupied with differences can challenge encounters. Some said it can “flatten” people. Some said it can make people look to rather than beyond differences. As one participant commented:

*Sometimes people are looking just to their...identity and it becomes who they are but it’s not, right? We need to look to the people, just whole self as a person ...people are looking to...their identity...and it becomes a priority. And not looking to us as a whole person, right?*

Many others echoed these sentiments, saying they wanted people to recognize that they are more than their Muslim identity. Several said the preoccupation with their Muslim identity meant that their other differences (e.g., woman, mom, daughter, queer) were overlooked. In some cases, they felt that these differences were just as important as their Muslim identity. Some voiced resentment because people did not recognize their religious difference, as one participant puts it, as only a “part of who [they are].” As another participant explained, several members of this group wanted to have all their “identities always there and to not feel that part of [their] identity was cut out.”

A few said the preoccupation with their difference was uncomfortable. It forced them to discuss their difference whether they wanted to do so or not. Several said that just because their difference was visible did not mean they actually wanted to focus on it. One participant said that even though her faith is “visible,” she would “rather be invisible.”

Several participants also concluded that focusing on differences gives people the wrong reasons to encounter others. One participant said people only met her because her difference was
“very cool and very interesting for people.” Others said, as one participant put it, that their difference “became the centre of so many conversations” and learning for others. They concluded that instead of focusing on learning about particular differences, people should learn more about who they are as people.

**Seeing the human beyond the difference.** One of the lessons some participants derived from their faith, as well as encounters across differences before coming to their degree program, was to see the “common humanity” of people. Most specifically, they saw it as important to remember that the people they encounter, regardless of their differences, are people with whom they have much in common.

During their degree program, a number of participants said they wanted to continue to see the human beyond the difference. Several said they tried to remember that beyond differences, people are all part of “one human race” as one participant put it. This means they have more “alike-ness” than difference. They said that remembering this helped them “value” people who were different without dehumanizing them. As one participant commented:

> Actually, I saw her at, last week at convocation, and I went up to her and I hugged her... even though...I know that...her interests...goes against a lot of the things that I personally believe in... I will not dehumanize her.... I would still see her for the human being that she is...that’s definitely one interaction that stands out to me.

Several participants also said they wanted their classmates and instructors to treat them more as part of “the human family.” As one said:
Your question is how do I want people to treat me?...To feel like you belong almost to humanity...Oftentimes we talk about belonging to like a certain...group, but I think it’s belonging to humanity...You may not associate with their beliefs... [but] it’s just the human family. And again, maybe it’s just my utopian vision of the world.

Using the words of one participant, a few talked about how their experience of “feeling dehumanized is not a good feeling.”

Reflecting across their experiences, using the words of one participant, several participants recommended that students be encouraged to “interact with the person [holding a difference] in a way that they’re human.” This includes getting to know others as people. As one participant explains, this can help people “get to a point” where they can engage in a “civil dialogue.”

Several recommended that people try to see the “humanness” of the other person. As one participant explained, they felt this could “change how you react to them.” It can make it less likely that they will be seen as a “mean, terrible individual.”

**Pinar’s Story**

I conclude this section with a second narrative cameo. Pinar’s story returns the focus to the lived realities of encounters told, to the extent possible, in Pinar’s own words and speech patterns. It is structured around the six storylines.
Pinar’s Story

Pinar said her faith is the guiding principle by which she lives her life. She said it informs how she encounters persons holding difference. She said in her faith, people have a responsibility towards other people, and the Sharia inspires her to demonstrate respect for people.

She said in Canadian culture, Muslims are “othered” while differences such as race are not. She feels there is a scapegoating and targeting of Muslims and that people perceive Muslims to be terrorists. In a variety of social settings, Pinar said she has had people say offensive things toward her. For instance, she said that in her workplace, someone said “you stupid f***ing Pack**.” She said she has had strangers say, “You better don’t look back” while she was walking. She said that because they don’t know about Islam, people regularly make negative assumptions about her (e.g., that she “came from a terrible place with terrible people with terrible practices”). She said this gets tiring, but she tries to see the humour in it unless she is being threatened. She said she expected encounters in her program to be a microcosm of society.

She said the things that happen out there happened in her program. She said the curriculum included issues of diversity in so many different ways except for religion. She found it sad and disturbing that people can’t or shouldn’t talk about religion. She said her classmates were afraid of engaging in conversation about religion but comfortable with every other kind of difference. She said her difference was accommodated: she felt free to talk about it. She said other differences (e.g., Christians) felt pressured to keep quiet. She said she couldn’t not talk about her faith because it was visible while Christian classmates had the privilege of hiding their difference.

She said students tried to censor discussions about issues impacting the Muslim community (e.g., the Quebec shooting) because it is upsetting. She said this keeps the Muslim community voiceless and sends the message that it should be voiceless. She said for people not to talk about issues facing the Muslim community is further alienating to her and was silencing. She said the silencing is heavy to walk around with. She said she would rather have people tell her what they are thinking than wonder what are they thinking about her.

She said conversations across difference don’t happen in the classroom and that people have their guard up. She said if they feel like they need to protect themselves, they are not going to open up about their differences. She added that the common perception is that religion is anti-LGBTQ+ and this makes people avoid potential conflict. She said people also avoid those holding difference and sit with those who were similar to them.

Reflecting across her experiences, Pinar said she would like her religious difference to be received just like everybody else. She said that it must be understood that persons of faith are a person before being a Muslim, Christian, or anything else. She said they are human beings. She said there should be an appreciation for the humanness of people beyond their faith. She said avoiding conflict doesn't allow people to have conversations across difference, and people can have civilized conversations about faith without having to agree. She felt people should learn about each other realizing that we are all one human race. She felt people should relinquish the “us and them” mentality. She concluded that wanting to have conversations across difference
would be a good first step. She said the second step would be making room and creating space where conversations can happen.

**Discussion**

Gathering and analyzing this group’s stories of encounters yielded several important messages. First, this group’s difference often drives how they live their lives: their work and school motivations, extra-curricular activities, and ways in which they encounter others. Despite this, the members of this group have other differences (e.g., race, gender) that they deem important and wish not to be ignored.

Second, meeting across difference can be difficult and complicated. In some cases, participants said they avoided encountering others holding contentious differences. In other cases, they sought these encounters. Although participants admitted they spend most of their time with other members of the Muslim community, they also felt that avoiding differences is not an appropriate approach for encounters. It keeps people from actually meeting across difference. When they did establish relationships across difference, they appreciated them.

Participants talked about the importance of encountering people’s differences positively. When this happens, people generally experience encounters positively. When there is an agenda for treating people’s differences positively (e.g., for show or to get information about someone’s difference), on the other hand, such encounters can be experienced negatively. In contrast, treating differences negatively can make people defensive and reluctant to engage in encounters across difference.

Third, single-sided stories about difference can influence encounters. They can influence people’s perceptions of differences either positively or negatively. Since such stories are by definition black or white, it can be difficult to perceive differences as nuanced, or as anything other than what has been conveyed in the stories. This means people are perceived as good or
bad, violent or oppressed, powerful or weak. Having heard mostly negative stories told about their differences, Muslim participants said stories can justify pity, avoidance, and even hatred. Challenging single-sided stories can be risky. Left unchallenged, however, those holding differences can internalize stories, and feel reluctant to openly identify with their difference.

It seems risky to restrict voices during encounters. Those whose voices are restricted often feel ignored, alienated, and voiceless. Additionally, suppressing various perspectives can keep people from learning about one another. This can increase the fear and tension already associated with dialoguing with those holding differences. It can also make these dialogues superficial. Constantly thinking or talking about differences can flatten people. It can make it hard to see anything but their contentious difference. This is especially problematic when people want others to appreciate other important parts of their identity. It can also force people to focus on their differences against their will.

Finally, it is important to consider that those who hold contentious differences are all part of the human family and have much in common. Remembering commonalities can facilitate more civility in encounters. It can also prevent dehumanizing other people.

**Section Three: Descriptive Narratives from the Christian Group**

Finally, as part of this study, I gathered the stories of people for whom their Christian faith is important. The main reason I chose this group is that in a variety of settings, religion is considered contentious. Although all religious differences are generally either ignored or encountered with tension or hostility (Hodge, 2002; Hodge, 2003; Thyer & Myers, 2009), they are not all met with equal difficulty.

According to some scholars, Christianity is considered to occupy a dominant or privileged position in Western society (Blumenfeld & Jaekel, 2012). This means Christians are
understood to be restricting and disempowering other groups (Blumenfeld & Jaekel, 2012). This
difference, then, is deemed dangerous (Dessel et al., 2011a). It is responsible for other groups
becoming “victims of marginalization” (Blumenfeld & Jaekel, 2012, p. 130).

To further “social justice,” several scholars argue that oppressed groups of people ought
to be protected from Christianity (Blumenfeld & Jackel, 2012; Dessel et al., 2011). Based on
this, they contend that the beliefs, motivations, and perspectives of Christians be deprioritized in
favour of more oppressed differences. They claim that Christianity must also generally be
challenged given its discriminatory nature (Blumenfeld & Jackel, 2012; Dessel et al., 2011).

As a result, Christians can experience difficulties in encounters. In some settings,
Christians are afforded little opportunity to contribute their perspectives (Hodge, 2011).
Vanderwoerd (2011) reports that in educational settings in particular, Christianity is perceived as
“judgmental, moralistic, unscientific, and an obstacle to progress [and] professionalism” (p. 248).
Some claim that Christians have been verbally attacked for their views, removed from their
educational pursuits, or terminated (Hodge, 2002; Thyer & Myers, 2009). One social work
scholar argues that Christian students and academics hide their difference because researching,
teaching, or talking about it is deemed “risky business” (Groen, n.d., p. 261).

I learned from this group of study participants that their Christian faith helped shape their
values, life experiences, and encounters with others from different backgrounds. Their faith
motivated many participants to become social workers. Some said they wanted to use their God-
given abilities and life opportunities to serve others in meaningful ways. A number saw their
pursuit of social work as a calling and an outpouring of their faith. Some said they were excited
about entering their degree program.
Most said that their Christianity motivated them to volunteer in their local communities as well as overseas. A number said this identity prompted them to see every person as worthy of being loved and deserving of a sense of belonging. Some had worked in schools, group homes, children’s homes, hospitals, and social service agencies such as Children’s Aid.

In their spare time, some participants said they engaged in environmental activism and advocacy work as well as social activities such as hosting games nights and potluck dinners, spending time with family, going to church, and going to local community events.

Most said their faith encouraged them to seek a variety of social connections and relationships, including with those holding differences they found contentious.

**Presentation of the Core Storylines in the Christian Group’s Stories**

In this section, I present the encounter experiences of the Christian participants. Again, the findings have been structured around the six core storylines, the main threads that weave together participants’ stories of encounter experiences.

The following story uses excerpts from Victoria’s story to highlight the six storylines. This means that I have used Victoria’s own words and speech patterns as much as possible.
Victoria’s Story

Victoria said her Christian faith dictates her decisions, conversations, values, and the way she looks at life generally. She said: “if you separate my faith from me there’s no me.”

Victoria said that every human being is valuable and that this motivates how she encounters persons holding differences. She said that God structured life in a way that people must always be connected to, and work with others. She said this belief is her driving force for helping people and coming to social work.

Before coming to her program, Victoria said she was expecting difficult conversations where people could come out and be themselves. She said she wanted them because she regularly encountered diversity in her life outside of academia (e.g., has friendships with persons in the LGBTQ+ community).

Victoria said that in her first semester, there was extensive conversation about categories, and students were told to figure out how they identify or fit into them. Victoria described this as very egocentric and challenging because she didn’t even fit in to the categories offered. She said she had other ways she wants to identify herself.

Additionally, Victoria said she felt as though she was being indoctrinated through her courses. She also said that the story shared about differences was one sided. For example, she felt Christianity was portrayed negatively. She said that the story makes it look like Christians are demons and devils. Even more, she said people found a way of packaging their words so that discussion, debate, or disagreement was difficult. Victoria said that if you don’t agree with certain perspectives, instructors take it personally and students see it reflected in their grades. She said, “it just got to the point where I, you know, I just get through this [because] they don’t want you to be truthful.”

Victoria felt some of the attitudes of instructors and students in her program were not genuine. She said people seemed to be walking on eggshells so they wouldn’t offend anyone. She claimed they refused to say how they really feel about things because they will be judged. She said that conversations about or across difference felt superficial.

She said that because others knew she was Christian, working in groups became a challenge. She said that people identified her as having certain views, and because of this, they didn’t want to associate with her. Victoria said she had a classmate who said to her, “I hate Catholics” knowing she was Catholic. She said this made her upset because she knew if she said something like that about another difference, the school would be in an uproar. She said that she has a choice to either protect her views, or just shrink and be silent. She said she chose not to hide. She said that conversations about faith became so bad that people couldn’t even talk. Victoria said that in conversations, everybody draws back and goes to their own small cliques. Victoria said there is no opportunity to ask people about their differences because it would make them feel challenged or bad.

Reflecting across her experiences, Victoria said she would like people who hold differences to
get to know her. She would like them to know, for instance, that she has a close friend who is from the LGBTQ+ community, and that their difference doesn’t stop Victoria from loving them unconditionally. Victoria argued that people should not throw the baby away with the bathwater – meaning, they should not hate or avoid encountering those who hold differences they do not agree with. Victoria felt people complicate encounters with boxes and divisions. Victoria said she wants people to be truthful to themselves. Victoria said there’s danger in telling a single story: it is not balanced. She said it also implicitly tells students to ignore those who hold different perspectives (e.g., conservative perspectives). Victoria argued that students should come to the environment wanting to learn: with the stance of not knowing, and remembering that everyone is valuable as a brother or sister.

Table 5 includes case summaries of all 11 Christian participants’ stories. The case summaries are intended to preserve the complexity and individuality of each participant’s story while illuminating how the six storylines are emphasized within each one. These case summaries serve as an efficient introduction to the descriptive findings for the Christian respondents. Following this Table is a detailed discussion of the storylines.
Table 5  

**Case Summaries of the Encounter Experiences for each Participant in the Christian Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lindsay</th>
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<td>Lindsay said she came to social work to understand how she could serve others better as part of her calling as a Christian. She said she hoped to be received as a professional, competent, capable student and expected her colleagues to be open-minded in exchanging ideas that don’t coincide with their own. During her program, she said she experienced a lot of backlash toward her difference, and this gave her the impression that religion was not welcomed in social work. Lindsay said she felt like it was bad to talk about Christianity, so she was very careful when talking about her faith. Lindsay said that people associate Christians with being oppressive. She added that nobody wants to be associated with an oppressor. She said she felt forced to be “for” Christianity and therefore “against” social work. She said she felt she couldn’t be a Christian and a social worker. She said she became pigeonholed as a Christian. Despite the cost, Lindsay said she enjoyed speaking positively about Christianity because it dispels the myth that religion is bad. Reflecting across her experiences, Lindsay said that the judgments made about difference can be violent. So, too, is the act of labeling and putting someone in a box. She said that people’s humanity should be upheld. She said people should be allowed to disagree without being disliked or excluded. She also said that people should see the humanity in others because they’re still brothers and sisters.</td>
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<table>
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<th>Sean</th>
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<td>Sean said that he was motivated by his faith to come to social work and gain the skills needed to help those who are marginalized. He said he expected to feel accepted as a Christian, and said that overall, he had a positive experience. He said that during his program, students talked a lot about their social identity. He said he felt he could ask questions in class and not feel judged. He admitted, however, that he was not open about his religious difference. His said that his perception was that if he did talk about his faith, people would judge him as a right-wing kind of religious fanatic with extreme views. He said there was backlash toward those who were open about their Christian faith. He said that while he felt guilty for denying his faith, he felt it best to avoid getting sucked into people’s assumption that he was a conservative Christian. He felt other groups (e.g., the LGBTQ+ community) were encouraged to express their differences without fear of judgment or any negative treatment. Sean would avoid having conversations about faith with students who viewed Christianity as negative and with LGBTQ+ students, but did connect with a Muslim student on issues of faith. Reflecting across his experiences, Sean said that students need to be able to share opposing views. Otherwise, different factions of people get created. Sean said that in his dream world, people would be open about core parts of their identity without fear of being shut down or being seen as religious fanatics.</td>
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<th>Anna</th>
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<td>Anna said she pursued social work to see change happen. She said that while her faith did not motivate her specifically to pursue her current degree, it did motivate her to remain. Anna said she knew coming into her program that discussions around Christianity can be sensitive. During her program, Anna said she did not immediately disclose her faith but felt her faith came out in...</td>
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in her behavior and values. Rather than making a declaration of her faith, she said she wanted others to feel comfortable. Although she did not separate her faith from her professional identity, she said she also didn’t use language that would convey her faith. Reflecting across her experiences, Anna said that she has learned that sometimes, she will shut down others’ perspectives. She said she has been trying to allow people to hold their perspectives without trying to shift them in a particular direction. She said she has realized she doesn’t need to accept or embrace somebody else’s perspective. Instead, she said people are entitled to have their own perspectives, and that these opinions demand to be treated in a humane way. She also said that people need to make fewer assumptions about those holding differences.

**Lily**

Lily said she came to social work interested in learning how to incorporate spirituality into mental health services. She found herself frequently serving clients who were persons of faith. While she said her friends are mostly Christians, she said she also regularly encounters persons holding differences (e.g., who are of Muslim faith). She said she came to her program expecting a balance in the perspectives to be shared: both secular and religious. She said she also expected people to be mature adults who love each other as people and classmates even if they hold different values. During her program, she said that the level of resentment toward Christians came as a shock she didn’t expect. She said one professor openly said they were anti-Christian. She said a guest speaker described Christianity as an invisible disability. She said one of her classmates talked to her about how Christians don’t like gays. She said course materials and guest speakers offered a one-sided, liberal perspective. She said Christians don’t have a say and that conservative perspectives are not shared. Lily said that students are being denied the chance to talk about Christianity or religion. She also said through readings as well as instructor and guest speaker comments, all she heard is the bad things Christianity has done to Canada, Aboriginals, and gay people. She said they were saying that Christianity is dominant, should be silent, and that it’s negative. She said she couldn’t take it because nobody knows her background and why she is Christian. She also said people don’t know that Christianity has done humanity good. Lily said she, and some of her classmates, felt indoctrinated in their program. She also said that she learned the LGBTQ+ label is acceptable while the Christian label is not. She said that when she met a gay classmate, she wondered how he was going to treat her. She also said she wasn’t sure how to interact with him because she didn’t want to say anything that might offend him. She decided to love him and respect him as a person. She said she introduced herself as Christian in class to make friends but realized that was a foolish thing to do. She felt Christians were targeted. She added that if Christians stand for their faith, they will be seen as a hater of the LGBTQ people. They will have no group members. She said that Christians need to lie so she kept her faith quiet to pass her courses and survive her program. She said that if she divulged that she is a conservative Christian who loved all people, she would be considered someone who hates other people and thinks that Christians are superior. She concluded that course materials encourage division between people. She said that on the inside, we are all human. She said that people should not force each other to agree with their perspective. She said nobody should hate each other because of faith. Instead, people should tolerate each other.

**Maria**

Maria said her faith informed the pursuit of her degree. Specifically, she said she wanted to do something to help people to achieve a better life. Maria said she came to her program expecting...
her classmates to accept her difference, and to be mature and professional in encounters across difference. Maria said that during her program, she could not be herself. She said faith does not come up in course content or discussions, which she described as unfortunate and sad. On the one hand, Maria said she didn’t hide her faith. There was simply no opportunity for discussions of faith to surface. On the other hand, she said she would hide her Christian faith from those in authority. She said other Christians hid their faith because they thought others were not going to accept them or might punish them. Maria said that students see people based on their labels. She admitted she wasn’t always sure how to encounter students from the LGBTQ+ community, but felt it was easier to connect with them than some other groups because she had been marginalized like them. Reflecting across her experiences, she said the culture in her program made it so that there is no space to talk about faith. She said students are walking away from the program with the same prejudice they held toward differences as when they walked in. Maria said she used to be critical, judgmental, and not very accepting of differences, but has realized that everybody is the same in God's eyes. In assessing her experiences, Maria said it really sucks when people don't see you for who you are. She concluded that people should just be human.

**Alexa**

Alexa said she was motivated to come to social work by her Christian perspective that life is valuable. Before coming in to the program, she said she was prepared that it would be terrible to disclose her faith. She said she knew not to bring it up. During her program, Alexa said she was fine with being a Christian because she kept her faith to herself. She said she avoided talking about her difference to survive her time with her classmates. Alexa said she and her classmates tended to avoid difficult conversations across difference because there was too much tension. People did not voice their perspectives. Alexa said that “in every friggin” class, students discussed differences and made assumptions about people based on their differences. Alexa said that talking about being a Christian during a presentation was the hardest thing she’s ever done in her life. She said that it was particularly hard for conservative students to voice their perspective in their liberal program. These students keep to themselves and everyone else avoided them. She said even she was challenged to receive conservative Christian students positively because she considers herself liberal. Alexa said she formed friendships with Muslim and LGBTQ+ students because they do agree on some perspectives. Reflecting across her experiences, Alexa said she recommends recognizing that we only get to see a small part of people’s entire being. She said it is important to dialogue across difference because contrast brings clarity: by constantly bumping into people they’re not, people know who they are. Alexa said that people with differences deserve to feel comfortable, safe, and loved.

**Peyton**

Motivated by her faith, Peyton said she switched to social work from another discipline to have more opportunities to help people and to give them the love that they need. Before her program, she said she would only share her true beliefs with a few people while keeping her faith under cover strategically. She said she experienced trepidation coming into her program and how interactions would go, but hoped she could be candid, authentic and not have to censor herself. Coming into her program, she said she was open about being Catholic but was careful about how she introduced her difference. She said she could not be candid and uncensored about her beliefs. She said that people in her program often equate Christianity with being anti-gay or homophobic which she said made interactions difficult. She said it also made her much more careful in her
interactions with the LGBTQ+ community. She said she tiptoed because she didn’t know how to act. Peyton said conversations across difference were rare. It was also assumed everyone was left leaning. She said those who offered alternative perspectives were brave. She said there were also some issues that students were not allowed to question. She said she would disclose her Catholic background in some situations to force herself not to hide. Peyton said that at her institution more broadly, there are certain inclusions that are permitted and that rhetoric signals who is welcomed. Peyton said that if students get associated with holding particular moral or religious beliefs on one issue (e.g., being prolife), they are assumed to hold these beliefs on several issues. Reflecting across her experiences, Peyton said she felt sad that people were demonizing those offering alternative perspectives.

**Molly**

Motivated by her faith, Molly said she was attracted to social work to affirm people’s inherent dignity and worth. Before coming to her degree program, Molly said she knew she needed to be careful in talking about her difference because she had seen a lot of attacks on Christian faith. She said she got the sense religion was private. She said spirituality is discussed rather than religion even though most of the world is religious. She said difficult issues are generally not discussed. She said the level of censorship in classes can be volatile. She said people are afraid to express themselves because people will jump all over it. She said in her program, there is an assumption that everyone’s on the same page in their perspectives and beliefs. Reflecting across her experiences, Molly said people need to be careful not to make assumptions about an entire group based on small pieces of information because identity is complicated and people within groups are extremely diverse. Molly said it is dangerous to only associate with people with whom you agree because it ends up demonizing the “other” and separating people. She said people should be meeting across differences to shed preconceived notions about others and to better know yourself. She said her hope for future encounters is to express her thoughts without being categorized or stereotyped. She said she hopes she will do more to hear the perspectives of others.

**Victoria**

Before coming to her program, Victoria said she expected people would tell the whole truth of their differences. During her program, she said there was extensive conversation about categories and differences. She said that she identified as conservative, so she had to pretend or hide who she was to pass a course. She felt words were packaged in a way that made disagreement difficult and people would be held responsible if they hurt somebody’s feelings. She felt people were just waiting for mistakes so they could react. She said she was very open about her difference but it was made clear persons of faith didn’t have space in the program. She said Christians were labeled and made to look like the demon, the devils and there was no opportunity for the other side of the story. She said that it became a challenge to work in groups because people did not want to associate with her. She said an instructor wrote her a note on her paper asking if she had read the bigotry of religion. She couldn’t ask questions about understanding about other people’s differences because people assumed they were being challenged. Reflecting across her experiences, Victoria said she wanted people to get to know her. She perceived others holding differences as unique, valuable, and as brothers or sisters and wanted others to see her the same way. She said people should not hate or avoid encountering those with differences. She also said that people should be truthful and stop pretending to be...
something they are not. She felt that course content should be more balanced and not ignore conservative perspectives. She said that people should be able to disagree and not be made to feel uncomfortable because of who they are.

**Serena**

Serena said that her relationship with Christ informs her effort to love other people unconditionally. She said her belief in the power of relationships motivated her to come to social work. In coming to her program, Serena said she hoped to be all parts of herself including her Christian faith, but was not naïve in thinking this was actually going to happen. She said she expected to be pushed in terms of having deep dialogues across difference. During her program, Serena said she did not have the freedom to be all parts of herself. She felt difficult topics were avoided. She said there were negative undertones about Christianity so she felt her difference was unwelcomed. She said there were assumptions made about Christians. She said that people had strong reactions to Christianity so she was cautious in how she voiced her faith. She said that when she did share her faith, she got looks from classmates and found they wrote her experiences off. She felt conversations about faith needed to be kept private, so she wasn’t totally open about her faith. She said one of her field placement advisers affirmed faith is invalid to share in her discipline. She said she befriended someone holding a difference who made targeted comments toward her faith because she believed that that person had value. Reflecting across her experiences, Serena said that her responsibility is to love and remember there is a whole person behind differences. She said that those who have done bad things are not bad people. She said that people should not avoid encountering differences. She said that people should be authentic in encounters and be ready for difficult conversations.

**Theo**

Theo said a central part of his faith is connecting with people. He came to social work to learn to better connect with people who are different. He was expecting to be received fairly well in his program and said he was received in the same way that he would have expected. People in his program, however, were not connecting well across divided lines. In his program, students did a lot of activities around social location and identifying with differences. Theo said because he didn’t hold his faith as firmly as other people, he was happy to leave his faith at the door. Those who held their faith really firmly had a difficult time. Theo said he was not honest about his faith and would hide or blend in. Classroom norms and conversations challenged him in openly identifying as a person of faith. For instance, he said when instructors identify as Indigenous and classmates identify as gay or lesbian or trans, he felt it was difficult to explain why the church holds significance for him while it harms others. He avoided most conversations and encounters across difference because he experienced anxiety and fear around screwing up. While he did have one Muslim friend in his program, he said he would primarily hang out with heterosexual people because meeting across differences was difficult. Few difficult conversations happened during his program. He was disappointed by an encounter where he attached significance to a label when interacting with an LGBTQ+ classmate. Reflecting across his experiences, Theo concluded discussions across differences do not have to be along those divided lines. He said there was a cost in not bringing up his faith in that others could not genuinely know him. He said focusing too much on differences means people cannot be treated like another human being. Holding the belief that people are human beings should make people more willing to listen and seek understanding rather than being right or wrong. Theo concludes insecurity and fear keeps
Telling single-sided stories about differences. Participants spoke little about their
difference before their degree program. A few participants said they were told that Christians
were conservative “right wing fanatics.”

Many participants spoke at length about how they heard single-sided stories told about
differences early into their degree program. They said these stories were communicated verbally
(e.g., by instructors, students), and through classroom materials. As one participant put it, the
main story that participants said they heard about Christianity was that it “has been responsible
for some terrible things.” This included, said one participant, “the role of the church in
residential schools” and in marginalizing groups of people such as members of the LGBTQ+
community. As another explains, students were told that:

“Christians were out to kill all the native Indians,”... “the Catholic Church was all
about discriminating homosexuals.”

The resulting message was that Christians were oppressors, and that the Christian church
was an “evil organization” with punitive rules. One participant claimed that not once was a
positive story offered about their difference by anyone not Christian. The story told about their
difference, they felt, was more negative than the stories told about other differences.

One participant claimed, “there’s danger in telling a single story.” A number of
participants felt that stories influenced people’s perceptions of differences. Several participants
said that missing the positives makes it impossible to perceive a difference as anything other than
bad. These participants claimed that “two sides of a story” (both positive and negative) need to
be presented so that differences can be appropriately perceived as murky rather than “black and white.” Then, as one participant said, people can “make up their mind.” Using the words of one participant, a couple stressed that “there are always different sides to a story depending on where you are standing.”

The challenge, several participants claimed, is that telling single-sided stories can be hard to interrupt; there can be a cost for challenging stories. Several participants said that they quickly learned that those who questioned single-sided stories were immediately “ganged up on,” made to feel bad, and became outcasts. One participant said students were told to “buy [stories] hook, line, and sinker.” A number of participants said that witnessing others experience backlash made them afraid to challenge the stories about their difference. As one participant commented:

*If I say the wrong thing in a small group and sort of reveal that I don't think that the Catholic church is this evil organization...people might turn on me.*

As a result, most participants said they hid their dissent while feeling helpless.

Telling negative single-sided stories, according to several participants, led to an inability to hear the positive side of the story (e.g., that, as one participant said, “religion can also be a good influence”). One participant said that it “got so bad...people couldn’t even talk” because all people could concentrate on were the wrongs attributed to Christianity.

**Seeking encounters.** Before coming to their degree program, many participants spoke about the various opportunities that they had to encounter persons holding differences – in their families, workplaces, and communities. While many acknowledged that they had more close relationships with other Christians, they said that they intentionally encountered persons holding
differences. Several, for instance, discussed close friendships with members of the LGBTQ+ and Muslim communities. Many said they sought such encounters out of their desire to love everyone, regardless of difference. Additionally, a few attributed their response to the belief that, as one participant put it, “you can't know yourself unless you interact with people that are different from you.”

Although some participants said they were nervous about encountering persons holding differences during their program, they still sought such encounters. A number said that they managed to establish relationships or with persons holding differences from themselves (e.g., who were racialized, Muslim, members of the LGBTQ+ community).

One participant claimed that encounters across differences can prevent the creation of “echo chamber[s]” where people “separate [them]selves into [their] own little circles of people who agree 100% with what [they] think.”

**Managing negative treatment of a Christian identity.** Before coming to their program, some participants talked about how their difference was generally not treated well in their previous educational settings, although few spoke about personally being encountered negatively due to their difference. Some said they managed this negative treatment by hiding their difference.

Coming into their degree program, some said they expected their difference to be encountered negatively. For instance, one said she was warned to hide her difference because otherwise she should expect to be treated negatively.

During their program, many participants said they felt their difference was encountered with hostility. For instance, they described receiving disapproving looks, rejections, and critical comments from students and instructors. Many said they managed this treatment by hiding their
difference. A few said they objected to the treatment of their difference to their peers or teachers. They claimed that this only fueled the negativity.

Reflecting across their experiences, a few participants concluded that people who hold differences should not feel as though they need to hide their differences, or pretend to be something they are not in order to be encountered positively. Some said people should not have to expect their difference will be rejected, or expect to be “swarmed” or punished if it is discovered. Under such conditions, encounters are not productive, and people holding differences cannot be themselves.

**Silencing particular contentious voices.** Coming to their program, many participants said they expected to hear the perspectives of those holding perspectives that they might find difficult. For most of them, this was exciting and important: they said they wanted to hear these perspectives in order to better encounter those holding them as well as to learn more about their own ways.

During their program, many participants talked about how certain differences were restricted. This was contrasted with others that were encouraged. One way certain differences became restricted was by failing to discuss them in class or include them in course materials. Some participants said that the culture and mindset established at the Faculty fostered the silencing of certain differences.

Second, several participants talked about how certain behaviours inhibited sharing some perspectives. Students would “jump all over” persons who voiced certain viewpoints. Instructors would facilitate conversations in such a way as to “shut down” further conversation. As one participant said:
My experience has been when difficult topics have been brought up, the individual bringing it up is allowed to respond. And then it's, “let's move on.”

Finally, most participants talked about how persons holding unpopular differences would silence themselves. A number of participants said that persons holding religious differences would not offer their perspectives during classroom and small group discussions. According to one participant, “a lot of people [felt] as though they're not able to ask certain questions or to hold certain beliefs so they just keep quiet.” One participant said, “I know a lot of Christians that just keep quiet [because] they don't want to expose themselves or get into trouble.” A number of participants described themselves as guarded, careful, cautious, and even scared to discuss their difference or their perspective on issues.

Many participants concluded that silencing certain differences undermined encounters. As one participant put it, this can make people feel as though they are “walking on eggshells” during encounters. Several participants said that it can make discussions about differences feel superficial and inauthentic because people holding disallowed differences are not voicing their “naked truth.” One participant argued that people should be able to “express [them]selves openly and honestly” without being silenced. Others said something similar. Another participant added that everyone’s “voice matters,” even when others don’t agree with the opinion expressed.

Identity reigns supreme. Before coming to their program, few participants talked about other people fixating on their difference. During their program, many participants said there was a preoccupation with differences. Students were continuously told to focus on their own and others’ “social identity” through assignments, readings, discussions, and activities. For instance, one participant said:
I remember in my...class, we were doing an activity once where we broke apart into small groups based on an identity of marginalization.

Other participants described similar activities. One participant described them as exercises in learning “who’s like me and who’s not.”

Many participants’ assessment was that fixating on differences impeded encountering people who had differences. As one participant put it, people can become “pigeonholed” based on their difference. Then, as another explained, people can become reduced to that particular difference with its myths and stereotypes. One participant explained that being constantly told to “see other people by their labels” caused him to relate to a LGBTQ+ classmate “like an other, by their label.” He and others claimed that fixating on differences only heightens divides between people. One participant said that encountering people by fixating on their contentious difference is like meeting “people across...divided lines.”

Many participants claimed this was also true of their own difference: when people fixated on their Christian difference, they could no longer perceive them “fully Christian” and fully anything else (e.g., a student, social worker). This practice, one participant said, ignores that “people are a combination of lots of identities.” Other participants echoed this sentiment. They said it ignores nuances and complexity within people’s differences. It also does not fit the reality of many Christian participants, who said they were unable – and unwilling – to separate their Christian difference from other parts of themselves.

Several participants concluded that people must shift their focus beyond labels. As one participant explained, “every LGBTQ person I interact with doesn’t need to talk about their sexual orientation.” Instead, people can talk “just on the basis of the person themselves.”
Finally, using the words of one participant, several claimed that focusing on differences or “the very act of psychologically putting someone in a box, is violent.” Others argued that putting people in categories and fixating on differences must stop. As one participant said:

*Life isn’t so complicated, we just complicate issues with all the boxes and divisions and the language of difference that we speak. It’s not. If we unpack it, we have more commonalities than differences. So why don’t we stop with that?*

**Seeing the human beyond the difference.** Before their degree program, one important lesson to some participants was the need to see people in their “full humanity.” They said that it is important to see them as valuable and worthy of dignity. They described this as striving to achieve an unconditional love for others.

During their program, a number of participants said they wanted to continue to see the person beyond the difference. Several admitted that this is not always easy. Several said they wanted their classmates and instructors to value their humanity.

Reflecting across their experiences, as one participant put it, the “key” to positively encountering those holding differences is to take up a fundamental belief that they are “brothers (sic) first.” A few said that this process makes it possible to listen respectfully to other perspectives. As one participant said:

*I don’t need to accept or necessarily embrace somebody else’s perspective fully. I think we’re entitled to have our own opinions and perspectives, but I do think other opinions demand respect and to be treated in a humane way.*
One participant said that the process allows us to be “respectful enough to understand that people will always be different.” Others said something similar. Using one participant’s words, some felt that every human being deserves to feel loved for the various “piece[s] of them.”

**Sean’s Story**

To conclude the discussion of the six storylines, I will share another narrative cameo. Sean’s story of his encounter experiences will bring the reader’s attention back to the individual and idiosyncratic accounts of encounter experiences. Like Victoria’s earlier cameo, it is told in Sean’s own words to the extent possible and structured around the six storylines.
Sean’s story

Sean said that he grew up in the Catholic faith and felt his faith is the part of his identity that impacts him the most.

Before coming into his program, Sean said he expected to get along with very well with his classmates and instructors. He said his experiences matched his expectations, and overall, it was a great experience. He felt accepted and part of his school’s community because of the good relationships he had with people.

During his program, Sean felt he could make comments without feeling judged but acknowledged he was careful about what he said and was not open about the role his faith played in his life. He said this was because he witnessed people pick on the Catholic church claiming their strict rules have resulted in marginalization and talking about the role of the church in residential schools. He said he didn’t expose his faith because he did not want to be perceived or judged as a right-wing kind of religious fanatic who had extreme views about gay marriage, or abortion or other things like that. He felt if he said the Catholic church was not evil, people might turn on him and call him naïve. He said there were other Christians who were explicit about their faith, but he witnessed other students gossiping and criticizing them. He said these were reminders that if he wasn’t careful about what he said that could be him too.

Sean said students were encouraged to talk about their social identity. He said in one of his classes, students broke apart into small groups based on an identity of marginalization. When talking about differences, Sean said that there was a lot of criticism that gets directed towards Christianity. For example, he said a faculty member who was a guest speaker claimed to be anti-Christian. Sean said he didn’t see criticism directed towards any other group. He said this meant students from other groups are encouraged to express their differences without fear of judgment or anything bad. He said that when Christianity is discussed, it gets picked on in a way that marginalized groups wouldn't get picked on. He said that rarely is anything negative said about Islam or LGBTQ communities. He felt this was a good thing, but the reality is still that Christians, like him, were not encouraged to be open to talk about their faith. Sean says he knows what he wants to say about his faith but also knows he shouldn’t say it.

Sean said that in the program, there is only one way to look at things and that is the “liberal progressive” way. He said those with “conservative” perspectives are perceived as being oppressive, not matured enough in their thought, as having a skewed opinion, and they are shut down immediately. In one class, Sean said he witnessed a student who was defending a more conservative view be ganged up on. He said this made it clear to him that there would be a backlash against anyone expressing differing opinions.

Sean said that he has developed relationships with members of the LGBTQ+ and Muslim communities in his program. But, in making those relationships, he said he would sometimes hide his faith in order to establish a relationship first. He said he did this in the hopes that the relationship would be a positive experience of Catholicism compared to what they might have experienced before. He described the relationships he made with members of the LGBTQ community as good, but also said that faith hadn’t come up in their conversations.
Reflecting back across his experiences, Sean said he felt a little bit guilty and deceptive that he had to kind of deny something that was so important to him to avoid backlash. At the same time, he said that it seemed like the best thing to do for self-preservation. He said space should be allowed for people to share strongly opposing views otherwise people break into different factions which doesn’t help with open classroom discussion. He said in a dream world, people could be open about core parts of their identity without fear of judgment, feeling that they are oppressing someone by talking about something that’s important to them, or being seen as religious fanatics. He said he wishes conservative perspectives were not seen as crazy, oppressive, and marginalizing people. Sean said his wish was that people would be able to express themselves openly and honestly without being shut down. He said this was not an anti-oppressive view, but that being shut down seemed oppressive.

Discussion

After gathering and analyzing this group’s stories of encounters, I took several important messages from their experiences. The first key message is that people’s differences can motivate their life decisions and activities. Many members of this group claimed that their faith played a significant role in their employment, volunteering, and other activities as well as in the relationships that they developed. Several said their difference also informed their decisions about encountering persons holding different identities from their own.

A number of participants said they intentionally sought such encounters across contentious differences. They claimed that it helped people learn about one another and facilitated encounters.

Another key message is to consider how contentious differences are treated. It seems that treating differences negatively can cause people to hide their identities.

Stories can shape how differences are perceived. When stories are black and white – positive or negative – it is difficult to acknowledge nuances. It also becomes difficult for people to meet across differences.
Stories are also powerful. People are encouraged to take them up without questioning them. They often keep people from looking, listening, and deciding for themselves what to think about other perspectives.

Another important message is that restricting certain perspectives can create tension and fear in dialogues across difference. When certain perspectives cannot be expressed honestly or at all, dialogues can become inauthentic. It also communicates that some voices ought to be silent.

Being constantly told to learn, think, and talk about differences makes encounters difficult. It contributes to the labelling and compartmentalization of people. Once people are labelled, it is hard to see them as anything but their difference.

A final important message is to see people in their full humanity, beyond their difference. A few participants claimed that this is key to positively encountering persons who hold contentious differences. Doing so can make it possible to listen to and respect differences.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter completes the Context element of the guiding framework for this study. The assumption in this element is that to improve encounters, we might consider the lived realities of those holding contentious differences, as well as the circumstances surrounding the encounter that might influence those realities. This chapter presents this information.

As important and potentially powerful as this Context element might be, I do not think it is sufficient for thinking and debating about how to more successfully navigate encounters when contentious differences are present. I think this element, along with the information presented in previous chapters, point to broader, more abstract issues that must also be considered. In the next chapter, I present a few of those.
Introductory Comments

In the previous chapter, I detailed the lived realities of encounter experiences of 32 persons who hold contentious differences. Their stories illuminate what actually happens during encounters across difference. Their stories simultaneously point to the circumstances and contextual realities that can shape and inform encounters. The chapter’s shortcoming, however, is that it does not offer a broader, more abstract way of thinking about some general issues relevant for encounters beyond considering or examining the everyday lived realities of encounters. In this chapter, I will offer a response to this limitation.

After reviewing the particulars of participants’ stories, it became clear to me that there are a number of broad issues (matters of concern) that ought to be considered when navigating encounters. Because of their general nature, these issues will be important regardless of the contextual realities of encounters – although we might think about each one differently depending on the circumstances surrounding the encounter. These issues of concern do not garner much attention in the literature that I reviewed, although I argue they can challenge our attempts to engage in encounters constructively. This is why they are important to consider. In this chapter, I discuss four issues that I deem particularly core based on the data and the literature, which I will explain below. By “core,” I mean the most pertinent to consider when deliberating about how to best navigate encounters. They are Person, Regard, Communication, and Climate (see Figure 4). Each of these four issues points to a unique yet important matter of concern for navigating encounters in various contexts.
Figure 4. Pictorial representation of the Core Issues element of the Guiding Framework. This includes the four core issues that make up the dimensions of this element.

The first of these core issues, Person, is about how we view persons holding contentious differences. It assumes our views will shape encounters, and therefore invites us to consider how we think and talk about them. Where our views might hinder encounters, this core issue invites us to ponder how we might view them differently. Relatedly, it encourages us to consider how those holding differences would like to be viewed. This is because all too often, decisions are made for them, and tend to be about how differences, not people, ought to be viewed. This core issue, then, also encompasses the idea that in concerning ourselves with differences, we can make differences and not people the objects of our focus, consideration, and encounter. Encounters then become meetings across differences, rather than meetings amongst people.
The data point to three specific sub-issues that can shape our view of persons, and therefore ought to be specifically considered. First, when people in general encounter those holding contentious differences, we tend to centralize differences; that is, overemphasize the importance of differences while neglecting persons (who are more than their differences). Second, while people have differences, they also have areas of alikeness. We regularly neglect, however, to see our commonalities. Finally, we often fail to view the persons holding contentious differences as human beings. We imagine their character traits in ways that cause them to become viewed as sub-human. Each of these three sub-issues, separately and in combination, can undermine our attempts to navigate encounters because they influence how we view persons holding differences.

The second of the four core issues, Regard, is about how we view contentious differences. It assumes that how we think and talk about contentious differences makes it more or less possible to encounter those holding them. This is because our views have the power to shape the knowledge we hold about differences (e.g., that they are normal or deviant, positive or negative). Our views can influence our behaviour, and thus, inform our interactions with those holding them. For example, our views can fuel respect, curiosity, and empathy, or dislike, hostility, aggression, and animosity. They can cause us to elevate some differences over others, or leave some differences out of encounters. This core issue calls us to consider how our views might influence our behaviour toward the prospect of encountering those holding differences as well as our behaviour during encounters. Encompassed in this core issue is the idea that we ought to consider how our views have been shaped. This is because many factors (e.g., personal experience, education, social norms) can guide them. This core issue, then, is about how we view differences, and the resultant influence on how we encounter the persons holding them.
The data point to two specific sub-issues that can shape our view of differences, and therefore ought to be specifically considered. First, the data suggest that we can view some contentious differences negatively. When this happens, however, it becomes difficult to see their positive elements. Second, we tend to direct our attention to some differences while leaving other differences out. Focusing only on certain differences can harm all parties, whether their differences are given attention or not. These two considerations can challenge encounters because they influence how we view differences.

The third core issue, Communication, relates to the nature, amount, and process of conversation amongst persons holding contentious differences. Conversation is a necessary part of encounters across difference. It is needed for people to meet, learn about and from those holding differences, and build relations. This core issue assumes that certain features of communication make it more or less possible to encounter people holding differences. Put simply, communication can influence encounters (and encountered parties). This core issue invites us to question how we communicate across difference, and how our communication could shape encounters. It also encourages us to think about the potential influence of communication on all parties: those spoken about, spoken toward, and listeners. More specifically, this core issue considers the amount and process of communication; that is, how often communication actually happens among those holding contentious differences. This includes who gets to speak, and the level of openness toward communication. It assumes various factors will invite or constrict communication. Attention, then, can be paid to what is influencing the amount and process of conversations. This core issue also considers the nature of communication; that is, the messages communicated, including how they are communicated. This includes the language we use, and
what motivates us to speak in the ways that we do (e.g., fear, anger, power, values, what we have been taught).

The data point to three specific sub-issues that can influence communication, and therefore ought to be specifically considered. First, the data suggest that we tend not to actually have conversations across differences: we do not meet nor talk to one another. But, when communication is limited, it can reduce openness to encounters and otherwise hinder them. Second, we tend to engage in communication that is nonreciprocal; that is, conversations where people holding certain differences are left out or intentionally do not participate in conversations. When this happens, conversations across difference are unrepresentative. When only some participate, people cannot actually encounter others’ differences. Finally, the data suggest that speech norms (i.e., the words used during encounters as well as communication patterns) can hurt people and/or impair encounters. Put simply, the ways in which we talk to each other can impact encounters. Negative words and the harsh expression of opinions can particularly derail encounters. These three considerations ought to be pondered because they can influence – and challenge – communication across differences.

The final core issue, Climate, is about the nature of the environment in which encounters take place between persons holding differences. By climate, I mean the tone, tenor, or feel of the environment. Climate can exist in society, workplaces, schools, or classrooms. Much like the climate of a room can influence the behaviour of those in the space, this core issue assumes that encounters can be influenced by the social climate (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2013): the nature of the spaces in which encounters take place can facilitate or constrict encounters.

While the idea of climate may seem a bit abstract, participants and scholars agree on its importance. Some researchers suggest that the way a climate feels, as well as what people
witness within it, can influence encounters (Folger et al., 2013). This is because people feed off of the tone of the environment (Goleman, Bovatzis, & McKee, 2002). This core issue, then, invites us to think about how people might feel in various spaces. It encourages us to consider how the tone of environments can make it more or less possible to encounter people. Relatedly, it calls us to question what climates we are producing, and how they might shape our interactions. This includes considering how encounters might be obstructed by the tone – either covertly (e.g., by attitudes held by people in the environment) or overtly (e.g., by norms, policies). This core issue can likewise invite us to question what types of climates needs to be created in order to produce the encounters that we actually want. When we are clear about our aims for encounters, the climate can be shaped accordingly. This is because, according to some researchers, the climate can be changed or controlled. It can be controlled, for instance, by how people interact with one another (Folger et al., 2013). It can also be controlled by the collective attitudes of parties to encounters. Finally, it can be shaped by those holding power (e.g., an instructor). This core issue calls our attention toward who (and how) the climate is being controlled, and then how the environment shapes encounters.

The data point to two specific sub-issues that can shape the climate, and therefore ought to be specifically considered. First, the data suggest that the level of felt tension in the environment can influence encounters. The amount of tension, however, is often unbalanced (having either too much or too little discomfort). This imbalance can undermine encounters. Second, climates that are characterized by a posture of disinterest in differences (i.e., a clear lack of curiosity or an unwillingness to learn about differences) can set the tone for encounters to be evaded. These two considerations are important because they can shape the climate of the space, and ultimately influence the encounters that happen within them.
Before we move into a more detailed discussion about each of these four core issues, let me summarize the introduction to the four core issues I offered above in a table. Table 6 provides a brief overview (and explanation) of what is meant by each of the four core issues (and sub-issues of concern that make them up). The Table names the core issues, the sub-issues, and the relevance of each to encounters where there are persons holding contentious differences; that is, why they ought to be considered important. Readers can refer back to this Table as they move through the discussion of the core issues.
Table 6

*Name of Core Issue, Meaning of the Issue, Sub-Issue making up the Core Issue, and the Relevance of the Sub-Issue*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Core Issue</th>
<th>Meaning of the core issue</th>
<th><em>Sub-issue making up the core issue</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>How the <em>person</em> holding the contentious difference is seen</td>
<td><em>The centralization of differences</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Focusing exclusively on people’s (contentious) differences can influence how parties to encounters are viewed and make encounters seem impossible.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Considering commonalities</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>While people do hold contentious differences, they can also have areas of alikeness. Viewing people holding contentious differences as having only dissimilarities can limit encounters.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Dehumanization</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The tendency to fail to view the people holding contentious differences as human beings can hinder encounters.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regard</td>
<td>How contentious <em>differences</em> are seen</td>
<td><em>Viewing differences negatively</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Viewing only the negative features of contentious differences and failing to view any of their positive elements can impede encounters.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Viewing differences with focused attention</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The tendency to show more consideration toward certain differences can obstruct encounters.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>The nature of conversations across contentious differences</td>
<td><em>Limited conversation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The limited extent to which conversations are happening among persons holding contentious differences can reduce openness to encounters.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Nonreciprocal conversations</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
** Conversations across difference that tend to be unrepresentative with only some perspectives participating can challenge encounters.

* Deleterious speech norms
** The words used during encounters as well as communication patterns impact encounters. Negative words and the harsh expression of opinions particularly derail encounters.

Climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The nature of the environment in which encounters take place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Unbalanced tension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** The amount of discomfort experienced during encounters across difference seems to influence encounters. Having either too much or too little discomfort can influence the outcomes of encounters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Disinterest in differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** Climates characterized by a tone of incuriosity or an unwillingness to learn about differences can limit encounters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the next four sections, I provide an expanded description of each of the four core issues introduced above by describing their respective sub-issues. To help explain my meaning, I reference or use illustrations from participant data and other relevant materials. I also include participant’s own words wherever possible.

I present each of the four core issues as distinct from one another because each points to a unique consideration to keep in mind when deliberating about how to better encounter contentious differences. Because they each point to different matters of concern, this suggests to me that all must be considered in relation to each other. None seems sufficient on its own to improve this problematic. How much significance we place on each, however, may depend on other factors such as the purpose and contextual realities shaping encounters. They will need to be considered and balanced against one another as well as against the contextual realities.
presented in Chapter Five. Having said this, I acknowledge that in places, they are contradictory so they will not easily be balanced or brought together. Each issue is also complex. As such, it does not offer simple or straightforward ways of understanding or acting in encounters. These issues, then, are not meant to be directives. Rather, they are abstract, general, broad issues meant to generally guide our thinking and discussions about how to more constructively navigate encounters. I deem them important to consider because they can influence the outcome of encounters across difference. Together, they make up the second element of the guiding framework (Core Issues) developed from the fieldwork done in this study.

I arrived at these issues based on my interpretation of participants’ stories, the three encounter frameworks (i.e., the AOP/IGD, inclusion/exclusion, and hospitality frameworks), my initial Encountering Contentious Differences Conceptual Framework presented earlier, insights from my analytic journal, and additional literature. I focus on these four issues in particular because, first, they have prevalence in the material. They are contained in the storylines across all three groups, and are discussed by many participants. Second, they are also important in scholarship; that is, they are contained in the AOP/IGD, inclusion/exclusion, and hospitality frameworks. Third, they capture issues that have an important influence – either negatively or positively – on encounters, and therefore relate to the broad purpose of this study.

While I contend that these four specific issues are core for deliberating about how to best encounter persons holding contentious differences, I make no claims they are the only important issues. Having read the scholarship and participants’ narratives in earlier chapters, readers may identify other issues that they feel are important. Further study will also be needed to examine whether the issues I have arrived at are, in fact, important as well as how they play a role in encounters across differences.
Core Issue One: Person

The Centralization of Differences

With disappointment, Theo told me about how all too easily, people can focus too much attention on others’ differences during encounters:

So these weren’t necessarily people so much as they were like gay people...you’re this label...then all of a sudden, ... [it’s] like “Aaaahh!”...they weren’t just simply people...and fear and kind of like, “oh dear, I don’t wanna connect with these people.”

He continued by explaining that if we want to more positively encounter people holding contentious differences, centralizing their (contentious) differences can cause problems. Other participants echoed his sentiments. Consider some of their stories. Some participants, for instance, said that when people see those holding differences only by their labels, they treat them like an “other”. They also claimed that being overly concerned with differences makes those differences so pronounced that it can feel impossible to engage in encounters across such an enormous divide. People, for instance, can become unsure of “what they should say, shouldn’t say.”

None of this is surprising in light of prior research. Generally, some researchers argue that people naturally learn to very quickly zero in on differences (Allport, 1979). Many participants said they were actually trained to do so. As I point out in my sensitizing concept Language, however, focusing on people’s differences for the purpose of encountering them problematically assumes that people want to be encountered based on that difference. Some participants’ stories suggest this is not always true. As one participant explained:
I was hoping to communicate with people like people. Forget about my religion, forget about where I come from, just communicate with me as a normal person you know?

This may be because, as some participant’s stories indicate, when people resolve to encounter differences, the persons holding them can become reduced to the difference: they cannot be seen as more than that difference.

Some participants’ stories suggest that if we see persons as more than contentious differences, it could have positive, even transformative impacts on people and encounters. Hundreds of years of theological study in hospitality echoes this. Several theological scholars claim that in encountering persons (Boys & Alexander, 2012; Carroll, 2011), we can discover their differences (Omar, 2009). But, we must view their personhood first.

Some researchers contend that it will likely be very difficult to see people as more than their differences, although they admit it is possible. Psychologists Dovidio and Gaetner (1999), for instance, suggest one way to achieve this is by engaging in a process called “personalization” (p. 103). This involves intentionally focusing on the individual uniqueness of a person who holds a difficult difference. Personalization is applied in intergroup dialogues because it is argued that it can make encounters more natural. A few participants echoed these sentiments: encounters are experienced as far more positive when differences do not drive them.

The idea of seeing more than people’s differences is not flawless. One potential challenge is that it is somewhat akin to taking a “colour blind” approach. This approach has the potential to erase differences (Park & Judd, 2005). Many participants said differences are important to people so they should not be erased. A number of participants also claimed that denying people’s differences flattens them.
Another challenge is that, sometimes, people want their contentious differences to be centralized. This directly contradicts the idea of not zeroing in on them. This suggests that this sub-issue is complex and without simple answers.

**Considering Commonalities**

During my conversation with Victoria, she explained that:

*Life isn’t so complicated. We just complicate issues with all the boxes and divisions and the language of difference that we speak. It’s not. If we unpack it, we have more commonalities than differences. So why don’t we stop with that?*

The matter of concern Victoria (and other participants) voiced is about viewing only the dissimilarities among people who hold contentious differences. While people do hold contentious differences, they can also have areas of alikeness. Failing to consider commonalities can limit encounters.

Several researchers suggest that North Americans are socially trained to search for distinctions between people (e.g., see Keating, 2004; Taylor & Lobel, 1989). If we look to participants’ stories, we can see this is evident in some of their encounter experiences (e.g., in the Telling Single-Sided Stories about Differences and the Identity Reigns Supreme storylines). The potential result according to the data is the separation of people along lines of differences. This should be expected, however, since some researchers from the AOP/IGD framework argue that if too many distinctions between groups are highlighted, it can drive a wedge between them (Dovidio & Gaetner, 1999). Some empirical research agrees: too much emphasis on distinctions
can result in a separatist approach to encounters. This is because there are no imagined places of
commonality among people (Keating, 2004).

Several participants talked about the importance of intentionally seeking areas of
alikeness amongst people who hold differences. It can give them places from which they can
encounter differences, and help them engage others more confidently. They said areas of
alikeness might be found in biographical or experiential information. As one participant said:

*What about talking about why you're here? Why do you want to be a social worker?*

*What kind of social worker do you want to be?...Like, we're all here for social work, can we focus on that? Why does it have to be about our individual identities?*

As this quote illustrates, some participants found it easier to connect across differences once they
discovered things they had in common.

A problem, however, is that viewing distinctions amongst people seems to be a basic and
stable feature of human encounters according to some scholars (Olweean, 2002). People
gravitate toward “clannish” behaviour (Pope John Paul II, 1988, p. 121) and ingroup and
outgroup mentality (Keating, 2004; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1954). Thinking in
terms of “self” and “other” is argued by some to be a part of basic human cognition (Decety &
Sommerville, 2003; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Some of the data from my fieldwork
echoes this scholarship: participants said that it was difficult to recognize that people with
differences have things in common.

There are also potential risks associated with the idea of searching for alikeness. As
Stephan and Stephan (2001) point out in the AOP/IGD framework, viewing similarities can
homogenize people. Alikeness can also proliferate (Stephan & Stephan, 2001) making people appear more alike than they actually are (Weisinger & Salipante, 1995, as cited in Folger et al., 2013). I discussed something similar in my earlier sensitizing concept Normalcy. Viewing commonalities, then, could offer opportunities for connection whereby people could better relate to one another. Prioritizing them, however, can homogenize people and ignore differences so prudence is needed in considering this sub-issue.

**Dehumanization**

When I talked with Serena, she said to me:

*Just knowing that we're just all humans... despite that you're different... matters... I won't say [difference] doesn't matter, but you're a human being and I'm a human being... so acknowledging that, first and foremost.*

The sub-issue here is that the tendency to fail to view the people holding contentious differences as human beings can hinder encounters.

Many participants’ stories, along with my earlier conceptual work, point to the matter of viewing people holding contentious differences as human beings “first and foremost.” I do not think, however, that what is being suggested is that people have somehow forgotten about or do not recognize others’ humanity. I think this issue comes from their recognition that the way we view others’ humanity can challenge encounters.

Philosophy professor David Livingstone Smith (2011) claims that the dehumanization of people can occur when they become viewed as sub- or non-human. People are still seen as human in appearance. It is their essence or character that is seen as sub-human. People or groups
deemed a threat to social or moral order, for instance, can become seen as dangerous, monstrous, or animals in their character. Once people’s character takes on these attributes, they are no longer seen as fully human. Seeing people as sub- or non-human grants permission – even an obligation – to act toward them in dehumanizing ways. This can include keeping people from encounters, or engaging in verbal abuse or violence toward them within encounters (Smith, 2011).

Many participants said they experienced or witnessed what they called inhumane treatment in encounters. They said those holding certain contentious differences were viewed as monsters and adversaries. Then, many participants said violent behaviour was demonstrated toward them. As one participant said:

*I remember there was a professor... I don’t know if she said “F*** Christianity,” but she said something like really out there (laughs) and she was like “I don’t like Christianity”... she was very angry.*

The tendency toward dehumanization may be a serious and difficult challenge to manage, but not impossible. In fact, a few participants described positive interactions that took place because people holding differences were seen as human. As one participant put it, it may help to have people intentionally “share a bit of [their] story because it humanizes” them and moves them beyond the views that are leading to dehumanization. Several participants echoed these sentiments. A few scholars in the hospitality framework argue we can humanize people by viewing them as sisters and brothers despite differences (Horrell, 2001; Siddiqui, 2015). A number of participants said something similar. Drawing upon Smith’s (2011) research, doing so might ensure people’s attributes are viewed in a more humane way. Humanizing people’s
character and viewing everyone as part of the human family could prevent dehumanizing behaviour toward those holding contentious differences. The tendency toward dehumanizing people, however, is deep-seated so this sub-issue will likely be difficult to navigate.

**Core Issue Two: Regard**

**Viewing Differences Negatively**

With pride, Layla told me about all the wonderful things that Muslims have contributed to the community:

*There is lots of Muslim scientists. A lot of things, you know. The airplane, it’s routed in Muslim scientists and so, so many discovery, you know? But unfortunately, no one mention that... Why [do people] always mention terrorist? .... If we really wanted to improve this misconception [of Islam], why are we starting from that?*

She shared this with me as she explained that too few people know about the positive elements of her difference. They do not know, for instance, the contributions of Muslims, or how this difference positively influences people’s lives. The matter of concern in this sub-issue is simple: viewing only the negative features of contentious differences (or seeing differences as only negative) can impede encounters.

Layla was not alone in expressing these sentiments. Participants across all three groups discussed the assets of their differences. Many also expressed their desire to have others search for and come to know these assets. They believed that if people searched for the positives in differences, encounters could be improved.
To do this, some scholars argue that opportunities be made for people to learn the culture, history, and even struggles of those holding differences (Norman, 1994). Participant data suggests intentionally presenting the positive and the negative sides of contentious differences.

One challenge is that humans have a stronger tendency toward viewing differences negatively than they do toward seeing the positives (Allport, 1979; Eger, 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Some participants’ comments echoed this. They claimed they and others were quick to jump to thinking that some differences were bad.

Another challenge, according to many participants, is that people tend to think and talk only about the negative aspects of others’ differences (see the Telling Single-Sided Stories about Differences storyline). This makes it difficult to hear or share the positive side. As one participant put it, the result is that “nobody knows [their] background,” what their difference has contributed to their lives, or what good their difference has done for others. Another said:

_All I was hearing is the bad things Christianity has done to Canada, Christianity has done to Aboriginals, Christianity has done to gay people... nobody knows my background, why I’m a Christian. As far as I know, true Christianity has done humanity good._

A third challenge is that the information about differences tends to be limited. For instance, in his work on Black-Korean relations, social work scholar Alex Norman (1994) concluded that encounters were undermined when “neither group ha[d] a realistic picture of the day-to-day achievements of the other [or] … an appreciation of [their] history, contributions and struggles” (p. 89). This created social distancing and conflict.
Based on many participants’ stories (as well as literature), I think that another challenge in seeing the positives in differences has stemmed from well-intentioned beginnings. For example, a powerful intent encapsulated within the AOP/IGD and inclusion/exclusion frameworks is to rectify wrongs committed by persons holding certain differences. Certainly, wrongs have been committed and need to be redressed. Drawing upon participants’ stories and my sensitizing concept Wrongs, however, it seems that focusing too much on the negative features of differences (e.g., offenses associated with them) can make it challenging to search for their positive elements. Even more, it can justify viewing those representing difference with repugnance (e.g., hatred, disgust).

Furthermore, messages communicating the repugnance of difference are regularly and widely projected. As elucidated in the Telling Single-Sided Stories about Differences storyline, most participants regularly heard messages of repugnance in the media, in their workplaces, and in their schools. As one participant said:

*My first years here [in Canada] that people are staring at me and I don’t know why...So I went to the internet and I searched “Muslim women.” ... And I was kind of astonished of what I had, what I got you know? There was a lot of description, it’s not true, that we are, um, we are, um, we are not educated, we are, ehmm, depressed...just, em, communicate with us in a very bad way...*

Messages communicating repugnance are particularly powerful, claim a number of scholars, because they build off of people’s natural tendencies to view differences with distaste (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Especially when authority figures (e.g., researchers, teachers)
communicate these messages, repugnance can be long lasting and resistant to alternative information (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Some psychologists suggest this is because negative messages (more than positive ones) tend to “stick” (Boydston, Ledgerwood, & Sparks, 2019, p. 53). People also prioritize negative messaging (Boydston et al., 2019). Tremendous energy is then needed to view differences in any other way (Eger, 2017). This aligns with participants’ stories. Some said that once differences were seen as bad, it was difficult to view them positively. Viewing only the negative aspects of difference can limit appreciation of them. Viewing the positive elements of differences, instead, could move us toward more positive encounters, but it will require a tremendous amount of effort.

**Viewing Differences with Focused Attention**

The second sub-matter of concern relates to viewing differences with focused attention; that is, showing more consideration or preferential treatment toward certain differences. The data suggest that, in some contexts, viewing some differences with focused attention can obstruct encounters.

Participants described how focused attention was demonstrated toward certain differences. Course materials included a greater focus on some differences than others. As one participant put it, these differences were given more “social currency” than others. They claimed that this hindered encounters. Differences, for instance, that were not shown the same focused attention tended to be treated more negatively in encounters (see the Managing Positive, Negative, or Conflicting Positive and Negative Treatment of an Identity storyline). Participants’ experiences mirror the literature and my conceptual work. My sensitizing concept Prioritization of Persons suggests that showing greater attention toward some differences intentionally or unintentionally leaves others out of encounters. Scholars in the inclusion/exclusion framework
similarly problematize the idea of preferential treatment (Christensen & Smith, 2005): it can lead to the exclusion of non-preferred persons or groups. As some participants argued, it can also make some differences appear superior to others.

Importantly, participants’ whose differences were given preference did not describe encounters as being more positive. Instead, they discussed their frustration with how others were left out, or with overtly being treated differently from others. As one participant said:

\[\text{[In my previous degree program], I was definitely the, an odd one out... They joked that I was the token diversity in my year... I had very high hopes that I wouldn't be, different, here [in social work]. But that wasn't the case...}\]

Many felt that encounters across difference were made impossible when focused attention was shown toward some differences. As such, they wanted their difference to be encountered in the same way as everyone else’s. These sentiments echoed scholarship in the inclusion/exclusion framework where Calabrese and colleagues (2008) found that excluded children with disabilities wanted to be encountered just the same as everyone else in the school. Encounters were undermined because they were not.

A seemingly straightforward ideal is to strive toward eliminating focused attention by ensuring that all differences are viewed equally; that is, without preference or with equal attention. Participants, scholars from all three frameworks, and other researchers talk about the importance of equality. In his Intergroup Contact Theory, for instance, Gordon Allport (1979) argues for equal regard for differences in order to combat hatred and thus, improve encounters. Participants in intergroup dialogues are taught to value every difference equally (Werkmeister
Rozas, 2004). Hospitality scholars agree: none should be considered inferior or superior (Amhad, 2011; Yong, 2008) over any other (Heaton, 1937).

There are several problems that I see, however, with this simplistic solution. First, it assumes all differences should be viewed equally. The reality, however, is that certain differences have historically been excluded from encounters (e.g., race, gender) and therefore may deserve preferential regard to compensate for this. Some scholars in the AOP/IGD, inclusion/exclusion, and hospitality frameworks argue something similar. They argue, for instance, for giving preferential consideration toward some differences, such as to the oppressed in the AOP/IGD framework (Dessel, 2010), the excluded in the inclusion/exclusion framework (Morris et al., 2009; Sheppard, 2002), and the least of these in the hospitality framework (Afridi, 2005; Akpinar, 2007; Brandner, 2013; Carroll, 2011; Cornille, 2011; Kinnamon, 1999; Koyama, 1993; Loring, 2001; Lumbard, 2011; Meehan, 2012; Nouwen, 1986; Omar, 2009; Pohl, 2012; Sackreiter & Armstrong, 2010; Siddiqui, 2015; Sobh et al., 2013; Sykes, 2014; Taylor, 2005; Vogels, 2002).

Another problem is that this ideal might inadvertently suggest that somehow all differences need to be attended to so that none are unfairly prioritized. Not only is this unrealistic (i.e., it is impossible to attend to all differences), doing so could also be inappropriate in some settings or situations. Drawing on Calabrese and colleagues’ (2008) work on the encounter of disabled children, the children in their study found it inappropriate to have focused attention shown toward their difference. In their context, it led to their exclusion because it gave their difference “social currency,” called attention to it, and therefore made it awkward for others to encounter them. In this situation, these children wanted less attention paid toward their difference so they could better encounter others. This example shows how in certain
circumstances or contexts, some differences cannot or should not be given equal attention, or very little, if any, attention at all. In other contexts, the data suggests that only focusing on certain differences and not others (e.g., sexual orientation but not religion in academic spaces) can be uncalled for, and that persistently missing them (and showing focused attention toward others) in these contexts is unfair. This is true even if the reason for their de-prioritization seems justifiable (e.g., they hold differences deemed oppressive). Whatever the rationale, showing focused attention toward some differences can lead to treating differences that are not shown the same focused attention with negativity. It can also leave those whose differences are focused upon feeling frustrated or not being seen for who they believe they are. Simply striving toward viewing all differences equally, however, may not be realistic or appropriate, so the best response to this sub-issue will require intentional thought.

Core Issue Three: Communication

Limited Conversation

While perhaps seemingly obvious, some participants’ stories (as well as my earlier conceptual work) suggest conversation needs to happen for encounters across difference to be successful. Yet the old adage, “if it were so simple, we would be doing it already” seems fitting here. At issue is that conversation between persons holding differences is often not happening. This is evidenced within participants’ stories (see the Silencing Particular Contentious Voices storyline). It echoes the scholarship in all three frameworks. The purpose, for instance, of intergroup dialogues is to encourage conversation across differences because they do not tend to occur naturally. Encounters cannot be improved when people are not talking to one another.

Many participants spoke about the importance of communicating across difference. Several participants said that positive encounters rely on opportunities for conversation.
Hospitality scholars argue that such conversations can allow for an intimate understanding of the “real” (Durley, 2012, p. 102) lives of others (de Béthune, 2007; Kessler, 2012). In the AOP/IGD framework, Thomas Pettigrew (1998) contended that conversations are needed for positive emotions to develop about others, and for friendships to form among those holding differences.

Herein lies one of the challenges: conversations cannot occur unless there is contact among persons holding differences. Several AOP/IGD scholars (see Allport, 1979; Pettigrew, 1998) argue ingroup and outgroup members need to have repeated conversations, particularly where conflict or prejudice exists.

A seemingly straightforward idea is to simply create more opportunities for people holding differences to engage in dialogue. A number of inclusion/exclusion scholars argue for strategies such as mixed housing to provide people with differences more opportunity to meet one another (Aboud et al., 2012; Calabrese et al., 2008; Mikami et al., 2013; Pittendrigh, 2007; Thibert, 2007). Intergroup dialogue intentionally forces groups with a history of conflict to converse (Dessel & Ali, 2015; Stephan & Stephan, 2001; Zúñiga et al., 2002).

There are problems, however, with this simple solution. Fear of conversation across difference is pervasive. Several participants, for instance, said they feared saying “something bad” or offensive about others’ differences, saying the wrong thing, or hurting other people if they discussed their difference. Others were afraid to speak about their differences because they thought people would judge or dismiss them. As a result, conversations across difference mostly did not happen. Finding ways to overcome the real and pervasive fear of talking across differences is necessary, but also very challenging.
Nonreciprocal Conversations

During our interview, Taylor said to me: “For instance, in my [classes] when we were talking about Black Lives Matter, none of the white people spoke….And I get that – respecting people's space, they have a better understanding. But nobody would bring up, their, like, their views on the matter… And it just makes it very uncomfortable.” The sub-issue Taylor described is that conversations across difference tend to be unrepresentative with only some perspectives participating (see the Silencing Particular Contentious Voices and the Avoiding, Seeking, and Torn between Avoiding and Pursuing Encounters storylines).

In many participants’ experiences, people holding certain differences opted not to contribute their perspectives choosing to keep them silent instead. In other instances, people holding certain differences were made to keep their differences silent. Indeed, in the storyline Silencing Particular Contentious Voices, most participants said the reality is that not everyone is permitted to participate in conversations. There can be real and harmful consequences if they do. Participants said that people could be reprimanded, called out, ganged up on, slammed, or jumped all over.

Participants’ stories and some previous scholarship suggests that mutual participation in conversation across difference could improve encounters; that is, if everyone offered their perspectives (rooted in differences) as well as listened to others’ perspectives. Several participants claimed that conversations across difference could be richer if everyone participates. They thought that mutuality could decrease conflict, facilitate learning about differences, and lead to more genuine and meaningful conversations. Some researchers argue something similar. During intergroup dialogues, for instance, it is contended that reciprocal conversations can
decrease conflict by increasing the learning about differences across parties (Nadga, et al., 1999).

A few participants echoed these sentiments. This is illustrated in one participant’s story:

*I can remember looking at her and saying “I’ll be really honest, hearing it framed that way makes me super uncomfortable”... and she said “mmm ya ya, I get it and I can understand that but this is my context and this is their context and it’s actually helpful and healthy”... it was a productive conversation at the end of the conversation, I still didn’t agree with her but we understood each other a little better.*

A number of hospitality scholars claim that for reciprocal conversations to happen, people must be prepared to receive the perspective someone brings as a gift, regardless of how challenging it is (Reynolds, 2006). They must also be prepared to reciprocate by presenting their perspective as a gift in return (Reynolds, 2006). Parties must first, however, believe that each has something to “give and to receive” (de Béthune, 2007, p. 3, emphasis added).

Herein lies one problem: people do not currently perceive the perspectives of those holding contentious differences as a gift. Instead, some researchers argue that people tend to be competitive believing that their difference (or position) is better or right (Folger et al., 2013). Then, they will argue for it rather than attempt to cooperate during conversations. They will reject the position of others. Sometimes, they will even emotionally or physically harm others to sustain their views. Participants talked about indoctrination whereby attempts were made to convert people’s (disallowed) perspectives to permitted perspectives. The result is “win-lose” (Folger et al., 2013, p. 9), rather than reciprocal conversations.
Reciprocal conversations would also require, according to several participants, intentionally protecting everyone’s right to voice their differences. This necessarily means allowing and permitting points of view that may “bump up against” others, in the words of one participant, and even offend. This aligns with the aims of intergroup dialogue (Werkmeister Rozas, 2004) and ideas discussed by some hospitality scholars (see Nouwen, 1986). I argue the trouble is that it is unreasonable to claim all perspectives ought to be protected or given space. The reality is that some perspectives can cause significant harm, or even encourage violence. Establishing context-specific rules or guidelines before permitting these perspectives might be a way to navigate this challenge. Generally, however, it is important to consider whether communication can and ought to be reciprocal.

**Deleterious Speech Norms**

A final sub-matter of concern related to communication is that the words used during encounters as well as communication patterns impact encounters. Negative words and the harsh expression of opinions particularly derail encounters.

In my sensitizing concept Language, I argue that words evoke emotions that can influence encounters. Some other researchers might agree. Unambiguously connecting descriptive words to identities, for instance, can contribute to long lasting judgements about them (Reynaert & Gelman, 2007). Some of the descriptive words participants heard used to describe differences (see the Identity Reigns Supreme storyline) were oppressors, abomination, hateful, or stupid. Some scholars from the inclusion/exclusion framework contend such descriptive words can create dualisms whereby people are seen as only good or bad, insiders or outsiders (Levitas, 2003). Additionally, several researchers claim that referring to those holding differences by “global features” (e.g., “I hate Catholics”), a process called “deindividuation” (p. 147), can
remove the individuality from differences and make it easier to avoid encountering anyone holding them (Folger et al., 2013).

Not only can words influence encounters, participants’ stories (see the Managing Positive, Negative, and Conflicting Positive and Negative Treatment of an Identity storyline) suggest that communication patterns can as well. Many participants said that people (e.g., students, instructors) expressed their words angrily toward persons holding differences. In some cases, words were even screamed. Some psychological literature points out that aggressive communication, such as participants described, can be “highly destructive” (Infante, 1995, p. 51). Not only could it cause lasting psychological harm (Jay, 2009) such as “feelings of inadequacy, humiliation, depression, despair, hopelessness, embarrassment,” (Infante, 1995, p. 53), it can potentially harm people’s reputations (Solove, 2007). Once a person’s reputation is damaged, it can dissuade others from encountering them in future (Garfield, 2011; Infante, 1995). I will point out that not everyone agrees with this assertion. Some scholars in the AOP/IGD framework encourage people to express anger at those holding differences (Dessel et al., 2006). They claim that doing so will improve encounters.

Many participants argued that norms of speech should involve gently, compassionately, and respectfully communicating words. This complements some scholarship from the hospitality framework that claims people should speak to one another with love (Durley, 2012; Gaddy, 2004), compassion (Adeney et al., 2012; Carroll, 2011; Siddiqui, 2015), and sensitivity (Adeney, et al., 2012; Omar, 2009; Yong, 2008). This can make people more likely to engage in conversations across difference, establish ongoing relations, and perceive conversations as positive. It can also lead to civility when persons meet across difference.
Of practical concern, however, is inadvertently suggesting that the appropriate norm for speech is that it always be positive or free of negativity. Not only is this impossible, it is not desirable. Participants, for instance, claimed that by virtue of allowing people to discuss their differences, their words will hurt because differences will clash. Because of this, some participants talked about establishing agreed upon norms to help manage speech. While more gentle, compassionate speech may facilitate encounters, it is not appropriate to keep conversations free of negativity. Establishing appropriate norms of speech, then, will not be straightforward. Generally, however, consideration can be given toward how differences are talked about – the words used to describe differences – as well as the ways in which people communicate with one another across differences, and how speech norms can either positively or negatively influence parties to encounters, their reputations, and encounters.

Core Issue Four: Climate

Unbalanced Tension

During our conversations, Taylor and Pam both told me about how tension influences encounters. Taylor described being frustrated with the elimination of tension: “We had a class discussion….it just became very soft and gentle …it was uncomfortable, but more than anything, it was just frustrating because it meant we weren't getting anything done.” In contrast, Pam told me about how too much tension stifled encounters: “I think that the first term was especially challenging for all of us…I wouldn’t say that there was a lot of conflict because I’ve heard that other cohorts, like, run out of the room crying… [but] there were some that had very strongly different opinions… it took people a long time to um listen to each other.” Together, Taylor and Pam’s sentiments point to this sub-issue: having either too much or too little discomfort can
influence the outcome of encounters. Tension refers to fear of not knowing what to do or say, or the potential for *some* conflict.

Like Pam, many participants talked about how some environments felt so tense that they were afraid to encounter one another across difference. A few said that they were “walking on eggshells” around one another. One participant said that their classroom environment felt so tense, it made talking about her difference during a class presentation the hardest thing she had ever done. When environments feel too tense, they can make encounters seem impossible according to participants.

Some scholars contend that our psychological and social tendencies are to avoid such tensions (Parker, 2018). Instead, like Taylor described, we seek to create peaceful, harmonious encounters. Some scholars argue that it is actually considered unacceptable to intentionally disrupt social harmony (see Parker, 2018). Several participants discussed attempts made (e.g., by instructors, institutional rhetoric) to create safe environments where no one would be made to feel uncomfortable, especially by someone else’s difference. Some participants think these environments are important so that people don’t feel so defensive or anxious that they refuse to meet across differences.

The danger is that this kind of environment can place unhealthy limitations on encounters. Indeed, a few participants claimed that well-meaning attempts to keep people from experiencing tension stifled encounters and severed bonds between people. Professional facilitator Priya Parker (2018) agrees: a danger of avoiding or preventing tension is an “unhealthy peace … within the habit of saying nothing that matters” (pp. 232-234).

Based on some participants’ realities (and other scholarship), it seems some level of tension ought to be expected, and even be considered a desirable part of the process of
encounters. It is a by-product of actually meeting across difference: it is unlikely people will truly encounter one another’s differences without experiencing some tension. Scholar Marc Gopin (2012) says something similar when he writes about how Arab and Jewish persons became “peace partners” (p. 4), but did so only by moving through nearly impossible tension. Rather than avoiding tension, it was part of their encounters. In the AOP/IGD framework, a number of scholars said that they believe that if persons holding differences move through tension, they will ultimately have more constructive encounters (Dessel & Ali, 2015; Schoem, 2003; Stephan & Stephan, 2001; Zúñiga et al., 2002). Several hospitality scholars argue that people should appreciate, and even invite tension because it means that people are actually encountering one another’s differences (Adeney, et al., 2012; Cornille, 2011; Nouwen, 1986; Yong, 2008).

While navigating and balancing such tension will not be easy, it is possible. One participant, for instance, talked about how she appreciated the tension she experienced when people brought their differences to encounters:

*I remember feeling so deeply unsettled in the classroom...And I guess in that way that was quite a profound experience for me, because I did see the value in conflict. I did see how people moving through conflict, are also people who are learning.... That doesn't make it comfortable. Doesn't make it easy.*

The trouble is that within many participants’ stories is the suggestion that there is a tendency to avoid encounters *because* of the possibility of tension. People do not appreciate nor want to be in climates that feel uncomfortable. To overcome discomfort with tension, some
researchers claim that people must gradually and intentionally be exposed to things that cause reasonable levels of tension. While exposure does not take away the inherent tension of the environment, it can reduce how uncomfortable people feel and therefore reduce aversion to climates that feel tense in the future (Curtis, Kimball, & Stroup, 2004). If people come to expect some tension as part of the process, perhaps encounters could be better navigated, although this assumes the human tendency to avoid tension can be overcome.

**Disinterest in Differences**

During our conversation, Jamie emphatically explained to me that:

> The second we tell someone ‘I know who you are’ [is the] the second you’ve lost [in the encounter]. ‘I know who you are – you are my enemy.’ ‘I know who you are – you’re this’... And that’s when someone loses me too... It’s human nature. We all do it. We all think we know where the other person’s coming from.

The matter of concern Jamie was speaking about relates to the tone of incuriosity, unwillingness, or apathy toward learning about differences. This core issue stems from the assertions of some participants, including Jamie, that they witnessed such a disinterest in a number of environments. In such climates, there does not seem to be an outright rejection of differences, but rather a passionless indifference or an outright lack of interest. Differences do not arouse enthusiasm, curiosity, or even animosity. There is simply little or no concern about hearing from those holding differences or learning about them.

According to several participants, this limited interest can shape the tone and feel of the climate. Such a climate can be difficult to manage because often, there is no awareness of the
tone or consideration for its impact on encounters. There is a kind of satisfaction with the way things are. Alternatively, a few participants claimed that when people think they already know enough about differences, it can become hard to convince them otherwise or encourage them to hear alternative perspectives. This is a kind of deceit that there is nothing more to know. In such environments, said several participants, there are a number of problems for encounters. In the words of one participant, people are discouraged, for example, from taking a “not knowing stance” toward differences, and so encounters are stifled.

The tendency toward creating climates of disinterest in differences is not surprising in light of previous research. Some scholars claim that our general human tendency is toward incuriosity toward differences. For instance, we perceive differences as being too difficult to comprehend so we tend toward being disinterested in learning about them (Allport, 1979). Coupled with this is our tendency toward assuming we already know enough about them that there is no reason to learn more (Dovidio & Gaetner, 1999). When people are guided by these tendencies, their posture can create climates characterized by a tone of disinterest.

Creating a climate characterized, instead, by a “willingness to learn” about differences, using one participant’s words, was an idea discussed by a number of participants. The tone of such climates could encourage people to share a bit about their difference and allow people to be more open to learning about them. A number of scholars from the hospitality framework contend this type of climate might allow people to really “meet” one another (de Béthune, 2007, p. 6; Adeney et al., 2012; Omar, 2009; Siddiqui, 2015; Yong, 2008). Some of the literature from the three frameworks as well as the writings of other scholars suggest such a climate can be created when the people in the environment do simple things such as show a willingness to ask about differences. Some participants echoed these sentiments:
Be humbled in knowing that you don’t know… It’s always ok to assume the stance of not knowing so that you can be educated… it’s always ok to ask those questions and seek clarification.

I’d really appreciate it if someone said ‘what does that look like for you?’… ‘So what does LGBTQ look like for you?’… Then again, our very first class on our very first day…our tone was set.

Not only could creating climates characterized by a tone of curiosity cause people to become more excited about learning about others’ differences and therefore ask more questions of others, several participants claimed it could encourage people to share their own differences. The human tendency toward being disinterested in differences is deeply rooted, however, so this sub-issue will be challenging to consider.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I offer a broader, more abstract way of thinking about some general issues relevant for encounters. These considerations move us beyond simply examining the everyday lived actualities of encounters (as in the Context element in Chapter Five). The purpose of this element (Core Issues) is to introduce broad issues (matters of concern) that ought to be considered when navigating encounters – regardless of the particular realities of individual encounters. The assumption in this element is that these core issues can derail our efforts. The four issues that I deem particularly core to consider – Person, Regard, Communication, and Climate – each point to a unique yet equally important matter of concern for more successfully navigating encounters.
Person, for instance, urges us to consider how the people who hold differences are viewed. This core issue can influence our approach to navigating encounters in several ways. First, it can invite us to consider whether (and how) we view the human being holding a contentious difference. Second, it can cause us to ask ourselves how much attention we direct toward differences over the people holding them. Are there other elements of people we might be curious about instead? Implied is that sometimes, our attention is misdirected. Sometimes, differences are relevant. Other times, they are not. This core issue demands nuance in how and when we centralize differences. Relatedly, this issue can challenge us to think about whether, when and how to view (and encounter) people in a more holistic fashion, or attend to other elements of the person. Third, this core issue can influence our approach to encounters by challenging us to think more pointedly about how much attention we are paying to differences over commonalities (e.g., life experiences, hobbies), and the impact of our focus. The core issue Person, then, introduces complexity in how we view people holding differences. This does not negate the significance of differences, or the importance people place on them. Rather, it encourages us to deliberate more intentionally about what our views of people are, ought to be, and how they might shape encounters.

The second core issue, Regard, persuades us to think about how we view contentious differences. Like the last core issue, Regard can influence our approach to navigating encounters in several ways. First, it can unsettle the need to think about and talk about differences in the ways we currently do. This is particularly important given our tendencies to view certain differences negatively or with focused attention. This core issue can draw our attention to the fact that viewing differences in certain ways (e.g., as oppressed, evil) can constrain opportunities to see them in alternative ways, or to see their nuances. This core issue, then, can encourage us to
think about whether and how our views of differences can reduce, oversimplify, or misrepresent them. In disrupting the ways in which we see differences, this core issue can, secondly, raise questions about how we gather knowledge about differences. It bids us to explore how our views become shaped (e.g., through historical influences, education, media). Relatedly, it can challenge us to consider our partialities toward or against certain differences – including how these partialities are shaped, whether they should be held, accurate, and how they could shape encounters (e.g., encourage avoiding certain differences). By calling our views of differences into question, we can have more control over them (e.g., to accept them, challenge them, or give them greater nuance).

The third core issue, Communication, invites us to think about how we communicate across differences, and how our communication shapes encounters. This core issue can influence our approach to navigating encounters, first, by disrupting our beliefs about how we think we ought to communicate with one another. It can simultaneously call our attention to how we are currently communicating. It can confront some of our particularly problematic tendencies such as avoiding conversations and limiting certain voices. By bringing these hindrances to our attention, we might also consider what other tendencies we might employ, question why we resort to such tendencies, and what the impacts might be (e.g., in what ways they are helpful or harmful for encounters). This core issue can also help us navigate encounters by drawing our attention to what messages are being communicated, and whether our communication positions differences in certain ways (e.g., as good, evil, not normal, oppressed). It can also invite us to consider how we want our speech to impact encounters (and parties to encounters), and then choose our speech norms accordingly. It can draw our attention to encounters where speech norms have resulted in successful encounters (e.g., increased relationships, learning about
differences) as well as hindered encounters (e.g., acts of violence committed through conversations such as expressions of rage) in order to deconstruct our approaches.

The fourth and final core issue, Climate, invites us to think about the feel, tone or nature of the environments in which encounters take place, and how the climate shapes encounters. This core issue can influence our approach to navigating encounters, first, by compelling us to question what climate we want to create in order to produce the outcomes of encounters that we desire. Then, we can shape the climate accordingly. Relatedly, it can draw our attention to the ways in which we set up the environment, and how these could shape the resultant encounters. Has the environment been set up in ways that might predispose people toward encounters, or to avoid them? At present, our tendency is to create climates characterized by unbalanced tension and disinterest in differences. This core issue can call our attention to how such environments feel for parties to encounters, and how this influences their participation.

In light of the potential contributions of each core issue, it seems important to consider all of them in relation to one another. Each points to a different issue, so this suggests to me that each must be considered against one another when navigating encounters. They also, however, seem to be interrelated. How we communicate about differences, for instance, might shape how we view them (or vice versa). In this case, it would be prudent to consider Regard and Communication together. Another example is that certain speech norms might influence the level of tension in the environment. In this example, Communication and Climate ought to be considered together. With this said, there will be situations where these core issues offer contradictory ideas and will, therefore, be in conflict. One cannot attempt, for instance, to attend to all differences (Regard) without somehow centralizing differences (Person). Determining how best to attend to each core issue, then, will not be straightforward. A variety of factors must also
be taken into consideration (e.g., aims of the encounter, parties to encounter, context). In some contexts, it may be important to centralize certain differences while in others, centralizing the very same differences could be harmful. As such, a main feature of these core issues is that they invite complexity when deliberating about how to successfully navigate encounters. They do not offer simple, linear, regulatory ways of understanding or acting. Instead, to draw upon these core issues usefully, there will be an ongoing requirement to consider, and somehow balance each one individually and together. This points, however, to the reality that navigating encounters is inherently complex. Not only does it seem fitting to offer broad issues that respect such difficult processes, it signals our need to avoid simple answers or formulas in our deliberations.

While I think this Core Issues element helpfully supplies us with a wealth of important considerations for navigating encounters, I think one of this element’s limitations lies in the abstract nature of the core issues. In other words, this element offers matters of concern useful for deliberations, but no directives for actually navigating encounters. In the next chapter (Chapter Seven), I address this limitation by presenting several strategies intended to help successfully navigate encounters. I do this by introducing my reflections on all of the material I explored in this study. This discussion fills in the third – and final – element of the guiding framework (Prescriptions).
Throughout this study, I have demonstrated the need for alternative ways of constructively navigating encounters where contentious differences are present. In earlier sections of this paper, I introduced three frameworks that offer approaches for encounters when contentious differences are present (i.e., the anti-oppressive practice/intergroup dialogue, inclusion/exclusion, and hospitality frameworks). I showed that while these frameworks each offer useful recommendations for making such encounters more successful, they have limitations and discrepancies in their approaches, and sometimes, their implementation can hinder encounters.

To this, I added the actual encounter experiences of persons holding contentious differences. Their experiences illuminate the lived realities of encounters for those holding differences. They also provide insight into how contextual realities can influence encounters.

Drawing on their stories and my earlier work (e.g., the three frameworks, my Encountering Contentious Differences Conceptual Framework, my analytic journal), I presented four broad issues (matters of concern) that ought to be considered when navigating encounters regardless of the contextual realities of encounters. Their limitation, however, is that they lack specific strategies for navigating encounters.

In this chapter, I address this gap by bringing together the insights gained across the entire study to delineate and offer several broad prescriptions for intervening in situations where there are contentious differences. These prescriptions are non-reducible guides general enough to be used in a variety of contexts. While I do offer them as prescriptions, they are meant to guide, not direct encounters. They are not step-by-step procedures for intervention. Rather, they offer a blueprint for developing more specific methods for practice. They must be taken and applied in
ways that consider the situation relative to each encounter. Because they are abstract, they invite such flexibility when approaching encounters.

These prescriptions consist of a set of three guiding principles and a set of six guiding processes. They emerged from a “reflective analysis” (Craig, 2012, p. 98). That is, reflecting on the topic more broadly guided by material from the entire study (e.g., the literature, the four frameworks, participants’ stories presented in Chapter Five, the core issues presented in Chapter Six, and my interpretation of all of the material). I make no claims they are the only relevant or important principles or processes. These are simply the ones I deem most important based on my review of the material. Because I arrived at them through a reflective analysis process, it is possible others could arrive at others. I also acknowledge that other material (e.g., literature, interview data) could influence the principles or processes at which I have arrived (Locke, 2002).

I limit my discussion of these prescriptions to three guiding principles and six guiding processes primarily for manageability: since my hope is that these prescriptions will helpfully guide action, having too many may negate their usefulness. I also limit the length of their discussion for comprehensibility.

In the remainder of this chapter, I introduce my prescriptions. First, I explain what I mean by “guiding principles” and “guiding processes.” Then, I discuss their features. Finally, I offer a brief overview of principles and processes using one table that provides the name and a brief explanation of each. I follow the table with a detailed discussion: an explanation of the principle or process, their importance for the topic, and at least one example to demonstrate their applicability. The examples, however, are not inclusive or exhaustive because ideally, these prescriptions could be used in many different ways and in a variety of situations (Locke, 2002).
conclude the chapter by briefly discussing how the prescriptions might facilitate a more successful approach for navigating encounters.

I want to point out that there seem to be some challenges and contextual realities that could influence how these prescriptions may be applied. Rather than get into the specific caveats of the prescriptions, I more broadly discuss the caveats to using the three elements of the entire guiding framework (Context, Core Issues, and Prescriptions) in the concluding chapter (Chapter Eight) where I discuss the framework as a whole.

**What are Guiding Principles?**

*Guiding principles* are an integration of learnings, conclusions and conceptual knowledge drawn from sources such as data, literature, and experience. They provide a platform and justification for future action. They also act as heuristic devices that can guide actions and decisions in various contexts (Locke, 2002; Oliver & Jacobs, 2007).

**What are Guiding Processes?**

For the purposes of this study, I define *guiding processes* as general, abstract and high level actions to take in different situations. Guiding processes are meant to offer broad steps for action, not technical methods. They can be used as a foundation for step-by-step actions, but are not so specific themselves.

**Features of the Guiding Principles and Guiding Processes**

Both the guiding principles and guiding processes are abstract in their nature. They allow those using them to devise their own methods for intervening in encounters while offering justification for their decisions. Relatedly, they allow flexibility for “judgment calls” (Locke, 2002, p. 203) because every situation will be unique and cannot be imagined beforehand. With this said, they are not so abstract as to be detached from everyday realities.
Since they are primarily grounded in the data (e.g., participants’ experiences) and informed by other materials from this project, they may be applicable in a variety of contexts (Locke, 2002). This includes a range of locations (e.g., in a classroom, the workplace, public spaces, one’s own family dining table) and when different parties are included in encounters (e.g., workmates, classmates, members of the public).

There are three guiding principles and six guiding processes (pictorially represented in Figure 5). Together, they make up the Prescriptions element of the guiding framework.

*Figure 5.* Pictorial representation of the Prescriptions element of the Guiding Framework. This includes the guiding principles and guiding processes which make up the dimensions of this element.
Table 7 provides a brief definition of what is meant by each of the guiding principles and guiding processes. A more extensive discussion of the prescriptions follows this Table.

### Table 7

*Name and Definition of each of the Guiding Principles and Guiding Processes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guiding Principle</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Flexibility</td>
<td>A willingness to adapt one’s approach to fit the situation when intervening in encounters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See People before Differences</td>
<td>Ensuring people’s humanity is dignified by making adjustments in terms of how differences are emphasized (or de-emphasized).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Humility</td>
<td>Maintaining an appropriate amount of modesty relative to one’s own difference and others’ differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guiding Process</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain in Encounters</td>
<td>Intentionally choosing to persist, stay, or continue in encounters with persons who are contentiously different.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider Emotionality</td>
<td>Intentionally considering affect during conversations including whether it is appropriate and how it might influence encounters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider Contributions</td>
<td>Carefully considering the points made by persons holding contentious differences as well as the extent to which they should participate in discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balanced Portraits</td>
<td>Carefully considering how to imagine and describe contentious differences so that they can be equitably perceived.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call Truces</td>
<td>Making a commitment to stop fixating on offences for a period of time so that people can actually be encountered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space for All Differences</td>
<td>Affording space for all differences during encounters so that none are unnecessarily left out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Presentation of the Prescriptions Element

In this section, I provide an expanded description of each of the guiding principles and guiding processes that comprise the Prescriptions element introduced in Table 7. These prescriptions are discussed generally although I provide examples, derived mainly from participants’ stories, to elucidate how they can be applied in various situations. Each of the
guiding principles and process are introduced separately, and they should be understood independently from one another. They also, however, should be considered as part of a whole approach to encounters.

First, all may be needed, and they should somehow balance one another. How they would be used individually and in light of one another would depend on a variety of factors such as the context of the encounter, its nature (e.g., who is involved, its purpose) and other relevant considerations. Second, none is adequate on its own; no one principle or process should dominate encounters.

To be clear, they are not designed to balance one another easily or simply. They can pull in opposite directions or work at cross-purposes. This reflects the complexities and inconsistencies within encounters. Each may be weighed as more or less appropriate in light of the situation in which it is being applied. Some may be more helpful than others under specific circumstances.

While these guiding principles and processes have been informed by various materials from this project (e.g., the three frameworks), I acknowledge that they are primarily grounded in the data (e.g., participants’ experiences). As such, there may be places where these guiding principles or processes seem skewed or do not seem to align with other perspectives. There may be places where they directly contradict other recommended approaches to encounters.

I try to temper my insights from these data with insights drawn from other perspectives (e.g., frameworks). But in the end, these guiding principles and processes reflect my ideas about improving encounters based primarily upon what participants said in this study.
Presentation of the Guiding Principles

Guiding Principle One: Maintain flexibility. The foremost principle in constructively orchestrating encounters where contentious differences are present is flexibility. *Flexibility* in this context means a willingness to adapt one’s approach to intervening in encounters to fit the situation.

Fluctuating situational factors, such as changes in the persons involved and other relevant issues, will make each encounter distinct. Participant data suggest that some approaches, attitudes, or actions may not be suitable in certain situations. Sustaining a rigid adherence to predefined methods could hinder encounters. What seems warranted is a willingness to adapt to increase the vitality of encounters.

It is legitimate to wonder whether flexibility means avoiding the repeated use of helpful or beloved approaches. It does not. It simply suggests being open to using whatever approach(es) the circumstances dictate. This may require some caution, however. Existing frameworks (e.g., AOP/IGD, inclusion/exclusion, hospitality) offer practices that have been utilized, studied, and debated for years. To ignore these to use new or different approaches to encounters in all situations is not advisable. The material in previous chapters can remind us that we have trusted approaches for a reason; they offer useful strategies for navigating encounters.

What I am suggesting is that when we look at the approaches used to intervene in encounters in the literature and in participants’ stories, we see there seems to be a propensity toward inflexibility. Scholars, for instance, recommend using the same approaches all the time regardless of situational factors. Most participants said something similar. One example of this was that in most classes, students needed to discuss their differences. This approach was used so that differences typically considered *oppressed or marginalized* would intentionally be
encountered. Although many participants said that while there were certainly situations where this approach was appropriate, in most situations, they found it unsuitable. Instead, many participants suggested letting people meet one another more naturally (e.g., over food, through organic conversation in small groups).

Lindsay, a participant in this study, points toward this principle in one of her stories. During one of her classes, a classmate reacted negatively during a presentation to Lindsay’s scholarly interests in Christianity. This classmate later apologized and explained her reaction. At the time, Lindsay said she thought the most appropriate – and professional – approach was to allow her classmate to voice their offence, and to accept the apology without response. Later, she realized the more suitable approach would have been to engage her classmate in a conversation to understand her classmate’s struggle with Christianity, and to clarify her scholarly and personal interests. This approach, while more difficult, could have helped them get to know one another’s differences better.

Some approaches purport to be flexibly applied, and be suitable for a variety of situations. The challenge is that participant data suggest that in some situations, our most trusted approaches may not actually fit. Some personal reflection and honesty may be needed to recognize this. Maintaining flexibility could involve creativity in trying different or new approaches to encounters. It could also involve using insights and ways of relating not tied to any formalized approach. This could specifically combat the certitude that our preferred approach can facilitate encounters in all situations. Alternatively, it could mean discerning how to adapt familiar approaches as situations change. Tolerance for being uncertain may be needed as might a preparedness to take risks in trying approaches that may not always work.
This guiding principle could be applied in a number of ways. Adapting one’s approach to encounters in light of contextual factors, the parties involved, the purposes of the encounter, or other relevant issues are considerations. If, for instance, the purpose of an encounter is to discuss but ultimately challenge differences, this principle could draw upon insights from the AOP/IGD framework. If, on the other hand, the purpose is to hear about others’ differences to understand them, seeking insights from the hospitality framework could be an application of this principle.

**Guiding Principle Two: See people before differences.** After reviewing participants’ stories and the literature, it seems that contentious differences are often put in the spotlight: they are regularly studied and debated. Participants said that as a result, differences may always be at the front of our mind. The lesson their stories point to is that we see differences before we see people.

We seem well intended in spotlighting differences. We want to ensure those holding them are included, less oppressed, or welcomed. Yet participants’ stories suggest that spotlighting differences can hinder encounters. I recommend more appropriately emphasizing difference: dignifying people’s humanity by making adjustments in terms of how their differences are emphasized (or de-emphasized). Doing so may mean that the people holding differences would not feel (or be) ignored or dehumanized (i.e., reduced to their difference).

How might we go about dignifying people’s humanity? First, we may need a willingness to lay aside labels and categorizations. This must be done with caution, however. Drawing from the AOP/IGD, inclusion/exclusion, and hospitality frameworks, it seems important in some situations to purposely centralize differences, labels, and categorizations (in order to respond to oppression, exclusion, or certain persons being left out encounters).
Second, we might give intentional consideration to how people want their differences emphasized. To the extent possible, this means offering the people we encounter the ability to determine for themselves how they want their differences emphasized. In some situations, this means we might consider de-emphasizing differences – unless people communicate their importance. Taylor, a participant in this study, talked about feeling set apart from workplace colleagues when all that these workmates did was focus on Taylor’s difference as an LGBTQ+ community member. In this context, Taylor wanted this difference de-emphasized. When we emphasize a difference inappropriately, we can harm people and undermine encounters. Spotlighting differences when people want them de-emphasized can make them feel diminished or ignored.

In other situations, it may be perfectly appropriate to spotlight differences or at least consider them at certain points during an encounter. By way of a fictional example, imagine community representatives, including a law enforcement officer and a person who uses substances, coming together to plan the startup of a safe injection site. In this situation, it may be appropriate at some points in the encounter to spotlight their differences: the law enforcement officer may have important insights on safety and the person using substances may have important insights from their lived experience. At other points in the encounter, they may want those differences de-emphasized so that their other attributes (e.g., as community members or parents) can be emphasized.

In other situations, there may need to be emphases on several identities at once to dignify people’s humanity. For example, during some encounters, Layla said that she wanted her classmates and instructors to de-emphasize her Muslim difference to meet her as any other student. At the same time, she wanted people to recognize her faith. Dignifying Layla would
involve a back and forth movement between spotlighting and de-emphasizing her Muslim identity.

Geela, on the other hand, wanted her race and Muslim faith to be present in people’s minds at the same time. She described feeling that only one or the other ever mattered to her classmates and instructors, although both mattered equally to her. Dignifying Geela would involve multiple focuses.

At its core, applying this principle may involve respecting the level of emphasis others want placed on their differences to the extent that this is possible. This could serve to acknowledge that a person may hold more than one identity, and that the relative importance of their differences could fluctuate depending on the context. We might believe a difference ought to be emphasized while the person holding it might want it de-emphasized. What we think may not always dignify another’s humanity.

**Guiding Principle Three: Maintain humility.** In my opinion, participants’ data point to a need for a modest view of differences during encounters. This means striving to discover an appropriate balance between humility and confidence in our convictions about one’s own and others’ differences. Having too much confidence in one’s differences could lead to a dangerous blindness of our limitations and others’ assets. Instead, those with a humble view of differences may have a willingness to consider the value of their own differences in addition to its limitations. They may also be more likely to recognize that others’ differences can have assets, integrity, and value. Such humility might bring with it a willingness to learn about or from others’ realities. We may also be more open to adjusting our opinions based on this learning, although maintaining humility would not necessitate we alter our perspectives. Instead, this mindset may foster a desire to hear the perspectives of others who are different.
Let me offer an example of what a humble view of differences might look like. In 2012, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) broadcasted a one-on-one meeting between Lord Jonathan Sacks, a chief Jewish Rabbi, and professor Richard Dawkins, an ethologist, evolutionary biologist, and atheist. The purpose of their encounter was to discuss potential compatibilities between religion and science (Rabbi Sacks, 2012). Rooted in his atheistic beliefs, Dawkins shared his perspective, and informed by his religious beliefs, Sacks shared his views. During the encounter, they demonstrated humility during their conversation, for instance, by listening as the each pointed out the potential limitations of the others’ beliefs and perspectives. They considered one another’s comments showing their willingness to learn about or from others’ realities. Yet, they also listened while the other spoke about what they perceived to be the assets and worth of their differences – to society, and to themselves personally. Although neither relinquished their differences, and there were points where the conversation appeared challenging, Rabbi Sacks (2012) described their encounter as positive because they were willing to learn more about the others’ difference.

There may be some circumstances that will challenge this guiding principle. Both the AOP/IGD and hospitality frameworks encourage parties to encounters to consider the value, not the limitations, of those whose differences have been oppressed or marginalized. Discussing limitations could risk further marginalization. These frameworks might invite us to consider how the context might inform our efforts in maintaining a humble view.

Presentation of the Guiding Processes

Guiding Process One: Remain in encounters. All of the materials in this study point to a yearning to encounter those holding contentious differences. The three frameworks (i.e., the AOP/IGD, inclusion/exclusion, and hospitality frameworks) are rooted in a desire to bring
people into encounters across differences. Most participants explicitly talked about their desire for conversation with those holding differences. But what seems to me to be communicated even more poignantly across all the materials is a deep longing to have relations with those holding differences, or to somehow be a part of their lives. This may require, however, that persons choose to remain in encounters (rather than avoid them or depart during them). By *remain*, I mean that people persist, stay, or continue in encounters with persons who are contentiously different. A person may need to demonstrate a certain mindset, however, in order to remain in such encounters. This may be especially true when these encounters are awkward or difficult. They would choose to continue encountering those holding differences despite the challenges. Together, the material from this study suggests that if we choose to remain in encounters, they may become more constructive. People who once presented only difficulties and contentions could suddenly have much deeper value in our lives.

Part of this guiding process is about being open to something more than simply “encountering” difference. It is about choosing to be with those unlike us in order to create the possibility of having more connections, relationships and friendships. Developing this mindset may move us closer to accepting, liking, and even loving those who are different.

When people choose to connect with those who hold contentious differences, the literature and data suggest they do so knowing that encounters may be difficult and unpredictable. The key to this guiding process is that *despite* this, they still choose to meet people. Even more, they choose to listen to their stories. They even allow themselves to feel angered or repulsed. But they persist.

Lee described an encounter where a co-worker made derogatory comments about lesbians. Lee, who identifies as lesbian, was shocked and repulsed by the comments, but decided
to engage this co-worker in a conversation anyway. Specifically, Lee chose to invite this co-worker to talk about his experiences with the LGBTQ+ community. In doing so, Lee learned that this co-worker’s comments were based on previous negative experiences with the queer community. In response, Lee offered some information about the LGBTQ+ community. Afterward, Lee’s co-worker apologized and hugged Lee. Even though Lee said the derogatory comments “left a scar,” had Lee chosen not to continue encountering this co-worker, they could not have connected in the way that they did through the conversation.

Serena talked about intentionally connecting with a classmate who not only held differences that she deemed contentious, but who also made angry comments toward Serena about her difference. Serena described remaining in encounters with this classmate by intentionally talking to her, then sitting with her, then purposely being in a group with her, and then finally, doing groupwork with her. The important part of Serena’s process was her mindset: she chose to do these things despite her discomfort with her classmate. They now connect outside of school, and their children are friends. While Serena admitted they are not best friends, she said that because she chose to persist with her classmate, they have both changed for the better.

Guiding Process Two: Consider emotionality. Participants’ stories suggest that in encounters across contentious differences, we can be prone to use heated words and to angry displays. It is not surprising that attempts to have mutually beneficial conversations where such intense emotions are displayed can be formidable. Based on participant data, it seems there may be limited circumstances where angry emotionality is appropriate. In many more situations, it seems that attenuating emotionally negative expressions may be more appropriate.
I am not suggesting that all encounters must be dictated by positive emotionality (e.g., politeness, sensitivity, gentleness). There will be situations where anger is appropriate. In the AOP/IGD framework, we can understand that it could be appropriate to express anger about oppression. To avoid such emotionality under those circumstances could actually serve to hinder encounters.

Rather, this guiding process is about intentionally considering the emotionality dictating expressions, and determining whether it is appropriate for the situation. Part of this consideration lies in the potential impact on parties to encounters. This means monitoring one’s emotionality so that others are not unnecessarily harmed. This may also involve embracing the inevitability of emotionality in encounters, and learning how to manage it so that careful decisions can be made about how to converse. Take Kathy’s story. Kathy said that she would regularly become angry with perspectives that differed from hers. She would lose her “cool” during encounters. She said that her negative emotionality regularly stifled encounters. She concluded that if she had managed her emotions differently, she could have engaged more successfully with persons holding differences. She subsequently tried to manage her emotionality in encounters.

Janet described a conversation that she had with her sister who is a Christian about her LGBTQ+ identity. Janet’s sister wanted to learn more about her difference. This involved her sister asking her questions about her LGBTQ+ identity. Janet claimed that although she experienced the actual questions as hurtful, the emotions expressed by Janet’s sister were positive: there were no expressions of anger (e.g., yelling) or judgment (e.g., the questions were asked tentatively, curiously, and cautiously). Although the encounter was difficult, Janet described it as “loving” because the emotionality shaping her sister’s utterances was considerate towards Janet.
**Guiding Process Three: Consider contributions.** Participant data suggest that there is a tendency to limit or to force certain contributions in encounters. *Contributions* refer to the things said about or by persons holding contentious differences. Those holding certain contentious differences were invited to contribute their perspectives in encounters with little or no restriction; those holding other contentious differences were encouraged or forced into silence. For instance, Jamie said that during her classes, she was obliged to speak about her LGBTQ+ identity but told not to speak about her Christian faith – she understood that her faith was considered “stupid” and “oppressive.”

At issue is that limiting contributions can undermine encounters. It can cause conversations to become one-sided rather than reciprocal. This can make it difficult to acquire knowledge about some differences. This process suggests that there may be a need to make careful decisions about what contributions to permit in conversations.

This may be simple but not easy. In some situations, permitting some contributions could be problematic. In others, restricting those same contributions could be harmful. Deciding which contributions to permit may be difficult and most certainly nuanced. To navigate this, we might consider the intellectual impact of permitting or restricting contributions on various parties to encounters. The AOP/IGD and hospitality frameworks may offer another consideration. We might think about historical limitations in terms of contributions: where certain differences have historically been encouraged or forced into silence, more permission may be warranted.

Let me offer a rule of thumb to facilitate the application of this guiding process: To the extent possible, contributions should be equitable (recognizing that social structures, power differentials, and other contextual factors may make this difficult). Equitability, in this context, means permitting all perspectives without *undue* limitation – even if listeners do not like the
content or it seems to be violent or dangerous. Equitability seems important because if we never permit certain perspectives, we will never really understand or learn from them. Where there are conversations across difference, there may necessarily be contentions. Unless the situation truly warrants it, it seems important that these contributions be permitted.

*How* to do this may require some consideration. In some contexts, it may be appropriate to obtain the permission of parties to encounters about what type of conversation to permit, or to set some conversation ground rules beforehand. An error could be to assume that the “leader” of the conversation must control the processes.

This is not to say that there should be no limits placed on contributions. Contributions, for instance, where acts of violence toward differences are threatened should not be permitted. Applying this guiding process can invite us to (re)consider, however, what is truly appropriate to limit. It may equally invite us to permit some contributions that we know may be difficult to hear. If we do not, the intellectual cost may continue to be limited information and understanding about differences.

**Guiding Process Four: Balanced portraits.** How we imagine or describe others’ differences matters. This lesson comes from participants’ data. It suggests that we regularly describe others’ differences in monolithic and unbalanced ways. For instance, Layla said that she noticed others often imagined Muslims as “terrorists.” The result, said Layla, was that people would avoid encountering her, or be afraid of her when they did. Participants claimed that in some situations, the response to this problem was to try to portray differences more positively. They said this still constitutes bias and distortion. In these situations, the less favourable aspects of differences cannot be considered or even raised. This guiding process is about making careful decisions not to portray differences as only negative or positive, deviant or normal, good or bad.
This guiding process invites us to strive to achieve a more balanced portrait of differences. Doing this may involve personally seeking such information. Or it may involve sharing information about differences with others that is purposely balanced (including assets, limitations, and areas of ambiguity). In some situations, however, a balanced portrait might need to be engineered. This might involve presenting either the assets or the limitations of differences in order to ensure that the overall portrait of the difference becomes more balanced.

In Lindsay’s story, a Christian participant in this study, she described a conversation with a classmate who identified as an atheist. During their conversation, Lindsay’s classmate stated that she believed Christian practices are often “very patriarchal.” At the same time, she discussed how she understood that Christianity could positively motivate people like Lindsay. In this situation, the student’s portrait of Christianity, to Lindsay anyway, seemed acceptable because it was balanced.

The AOP/IGD and hospitality frameworks introduce a caution. Seeking to achieve a balanced portrait of all contentious differences may be undesirable. It may not be warranted, for instance, to portray illegal or immoral differences in positive ways. Many differences, however, do not fit this definition. It seems to me that in the data for this study, many differences were unjustifiably portrayed in unbalanced ways, and that achieving balance was not considered.

**Guiding Process Five: Call truces.** One of our human proclivities is to rectify social offences. In the inclusion/exclusion framework, for instance, scholars aim to rectify exclusion. In the AOP/IGD framework, scholars aim to alter perceptions of oppressive differences. Participants’ stories, however, suggest that when we are too heavily fixated on offences, we can spend too much time living in a state of attack and defense: looking for slights, and being poised
to pounce on those we think perpetrated them. This seems to be true too often for those holding contentious differences.

Instead, in this guiding process, we might consider being prepared to call momentary truces (sparingly) when conversations become overwhelming for parties to encounters. This could mean taking a break from talking. It could mean not fixating on offences for a period of time. A truce is intended to allow people to respond to perceived offences when appropriate, but not being primed to attack.

Chahrazad, a participant of Muslim faith, said that, when she was younger, she would scream at those holding differences. She claimed that she spent a lot of her energy confronting offenses. Over time, and through actually conversing with persons holding contentious differences, she realized that her enraged disposition only created divisiveness that hindered subsequent encounters. In response, Chahrazad said that she shifted her mentality to one of calling truces. For Chahrazad, this involved being less defensive when she heard differing perspectives. She claimed that doing so allowed her to better meet people who held contentious differences. If one’s primary motivation is to react to offenses, this easily becomes all-consuming. People look for offenses. And offenses become more prominent.

**Guiding Process Six: Space for all differences.** Participants’ stories suggest that affording space during encounters only selected differences was uncomfortable. This guiding process invites us to consider how to effectively afford space to all differences so that none are unnecessarily left out.

This guiding process, however, may be particularly difficult to navigate because it contradicts some of the recommendations in other approaches to encounters. All the materials in this study point to the importance of specifically affording space in encounters to those whose
differences have been disadvantaged (treated unfavorably). The AOP/IGD framework makes clear that persons holding oppressed differences should be given more voice in encounters. In the inclusion/exclusion framework, those experiencing exclusion should be given additional attention to be included. In the hospitality framework, the unlovable or outcasts, in particular, should be welcomed. Many participants talked about the importance of affording space to disadvantaged differences in encounters. The benefits of doing so are also vividly evidenced in their stories. Most members of the LGBTQ+ community, for instance, spoke about how wonderful it felt for their difference to be afforded space. They felt welcomed in encounters. They could be open about their difference. And they relished these opportunities.

However, affording space only to certain disadvantaged differences can come at the expense of limiting space for other differences. According to participant data, those seen as holding more advantage (such as Christianity) were afforded little or no space. This undermined encounters because only those considered disadvantaged could – or would – speak, so there was little conversation across difference. This led to very little being understood among others about the lives and motivations of those whose speech was not tolerated. In particular, others do not learn about positive motivations and actions that might be motivated by their differences. We also cannot experience what we have in common.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I offered broad prescriptions for intervening in a variety of situations where there are contentious differences. These prescriptions advance us beyond simply examining the realities of encounters (as in the Context element in Chapter Five) or thinking about issues that might challenge our efforts (as in the Core Issues element in Chapter Six). These prescriptions can guide the actions that we might take during encounters – ideally, in light
of the contextual realities and core issues. The assumption in this element is that these prescriptions can make our efforts more successful. This is because the three guiding principles provide heuristic devices for guiding our decisions about how to act. This includes a justification for our actions. The six guiding processes offer broad, high level actions to take in various situations. They provide a foundation for more specific step-by-step actions. The three principles and six processes that I deem most important each highlight a unique principle or process that could help encounters be more successfully navigated.

Given the unique contributions of the guiding principles and processes, it seems necessary to consider them in relation to each other when navigating encounters. This means considering the principles against one another, the processes against one another, and finally, the principles against the processes since they will guide our actions in unique ways.

In deciding how to best apply the prescriptions, it seems we might consider such factors as the contextual realities, parties to encounter, and purposes of the encounter. We might also consider other issues that could challenge our efforts. Applying these prescriptions will likely be complex. This is because one of their main features is that they do not offer straightforward nor step-by-step strategies for how to act in encounters. Rather, it seems they demand that each encounter be imagined and approached differently. The guiding principles and processes could be usefully applied by being considered and balanced against each one. Just as the Core Issues introduced in Chapter Five, these prescriptions suggest that navigating encounters will be complicated. Knowing this, we may be less likely to apply simplistic heuristics to navigate them.

While these guiding principles and processes were meant to helpfully offer us some broad strategies to apply in order to navigate encounters, they cannot alone help improve our efforts. What seems to be needed is a way of bringing together all three of the elements that I
have introduced over the last three chapters – Context, Core Issues, and Prescriptions. In other words, I think we may require a way of considering the prescriptions in light of the contextual realities shaping the encounter, and the core issues that might hinder the process. In the concluding chapter of this study, I introduce a guiding framework that brings together all three elements.
Much debate exists about how to encounter others, particularly when they bring differences in worldviews, attitudes or beliefs that are contentious, uncomfortable, and create hostility.

In this volume, I offer some ways of navigating encounters more constructively among two or more people when contentious differences are present. This comes through the review of three frameworks meant for approaching encounters (i.e., the AOP/IGD, inclusion/exclusion, and hospitality frameworks), the development of a conceptual framework useful for exploring and critiquing such approaches (the Encountering Contentious Differences Conceptual Framework), and the development of a guiding framework consisting of Context, Core Issues, and Prescriptions elements. Moving forward, I will refer to the guiding framework as the Caring Encounters Guiding Framework.

Through years of study into this topic, I have learned that encounters are highly complex and difficult. Take, for instance, the fact that as human beings, we generally tend to view differences negatively. Then, we distance ourselves from those holding them, or react with disinterest, awkwardness, or even aggression (Allport, 1979). Yet at the same time, we yearn for relations across differences. Balancing these competing human tendencies is difficult.

Coupled with this is the fact that the processes of encountering those holding contentious differences are complex. We also meet in multiple and fluctuating environments. Because each encounter is so different, there are no simple or straightforward approaches for going about meeting.

At issue is that Canadian statistics tell us that diversity is increasing. And this trend will only continue. This means that more and more, in one way or another, we will have to encounter
people different from us in values and lifestyles. This inevitably includes differences that we find contentious – differences that we find objectionable morally, ideologically, or theologically. Given this inevitability, it is not enough to simply encounter differences. We should strive to make encounters constructive.

I have learned in the setting for this research, however, that encounters were rarely constructive. The data I gathered from 32 people as well as the literature I reviewed suggest that they are often fraught with challenges and negativity. When people holding differences come together, there can be posturing and single-sided conversations. Others’ differences are regularly constructed negatively (e.g., as evil, adversarial, oppressive, illogical). This can come in part from actual harms. It can also come from deep suspicion, fear, or hatred of certain differences. People confront, debate, reprimand, or silence perspectives that they find wrong. There can be yelling and screaming. Hateful words are often expressed. This can create wounds that only seem to make divisions deeper. There can also be outright rejection, alienation and ostracism of those holding “unacceptable” differences. There can be competition between identity groups for legitimacy, voice, and the chance to be encountered. People physically separate into their ingroups. And, as people become increasingly separated, they become more unsure about how to come together. They also become unsure how to move past the “us versus them” divide. Where attempts have been made to create “safe” places where people can speak across differences, there can be a sort of false harmony where people are not offering their true perspectives.

It seems that sometimes, our current approaches – approaches meant for more constructively navigating encounters – can fail to mitigate or address many of these issues. They can emphasize categorizations of people. They can condone aggressive communication. They can promote the silencing of certain differences. They can prolong attention on wrongs and
offenses. Said differently, the realities of encounters described in participants’ stories did not always align with some of the proposed outcomes described by scholars writing about the merits of the approaches reviewed.

On the surface, the situation seems dire, but there is hope. Through this study, I have learned that there is a deep desire for more constructive encounters – encounters where people listen to each other’s perspectives, and learn about themselves as well. The frameworks that I reviewed are committed to this outcome. Their roots – and the reason they are so extensively discussed and studied – are found in an aspiration to realize more constructive encounters. They all seek to rectify the divide between people holding differences, and so each offers recommendations for navigating encounters more constructively.

A similar hope is found in the stories of participants. Their desire to meet others holding differences and to learn how to better interact with them was unmistakable. Participants’ impatience with their current realities was also clear. This hope gives reason to find ways to more constructively come together in encounters and to build new approaches, such as the ones I have offered in this study – the ECD Conceptual Framework in Chapter Two, and the Caring Encounters Guiding Framework, the three elements of which were detailed in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. As shown in Figure 6, the Caring Encounters Guiding Framework has three independent yet related elements – Context, Core Issues, and Prescriptions – that each call attention to various relevant dimensions. Such elements have not been previously considered in much depth when approaching encounters. In this concluding chapter, I discuss this guiding framework in more detail including its central aspirations – of caring for people and creating community – and how the Context, Core Issues and Prescriptions connect with such considerations.
Caring as the Central Ambition

The Caring Encounters Guiding Framework has been so named to reflect its central purpose: I believe that the data, and therefore all three elements of the guiding framework, point to the need for encounters to be informed by care. By care, I mean striving to be intentionally present, compassionate, and thoughtful in encounters so that people may be treated positively, encountered constructively, and experience a sense of high regard. This term is not intended to incorporate the depth or breadth of caring reflected in theological (Adams, 2014) or other scholarship such as a feminist ethic of care (Held, 2006). It refers to a more limited aspiration for
how we might approach the use of this guiding framework with diverse populations in various encounters.

In this guiding framework, care can be considered at individual and relational levels. At the individual level, care can relate to how we view differences and personhood. At the level of relationships, care can relate to how conversations are managed when persons holding difficult differences are present. Care can mean intentionally considering whether and how their perspectives are permitted or the words used during conversations. Thus, the care being recommended in this guiding framework occurs through intentional individual attitudes and actions taken within each encounter across differences.

Drawing upon the various dimensions within the Context, Core Issues, and Prescriptions elements can facilitate the care recommended in this guiding framework. The Context element, for example, could urge us to consider how the context of the encounter may influence its outcome. Our awareness of the context may cause us to approach encounters more thoughtfully. The Core Issues element could persuade us to think about how we might navigate relevant matters of concern that could lead to harmful, rather than caring encounters. The Prescriptions element could offer us a blueprint for how to care for people in light of contextual realities and core issues.

Creating Caring Communities

A secondary ambition is to consider the nature of the milieu or community within which encounters occur. An implicit question asked by the Caring Encounters Guiding Framework is about the type of environment or community we are trying to create when using this guiding framework. The immediate environments (contexts) within which encounters take place fundamentally shape what takes place (and what potentially can take place) in encounters.
Environmental or community values and norms shape how people are perceived and treated during encounters and more generally. Additionally, how encounters (in particular contentious encounters) are experienced will have profound effects on the immediate surrounding environments (contexts). This means that the question “What type of communities do we want to create?” must be central to how we think about and approach encounters.

Should people strive to create environments characterized by an ethos or culture of care? The implicit answer to this question from participants in this study was clearly “yes.” Without encounters being situated in a supportive environment, it may be difficult to achieve caring encounters.

Some community scholars (see Born, 2010; Peck, 1987; Vanier, 1989) and psychologists (see Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010) theorize that as soon as two or more people come together in conversations, they have formed a small community. But Peck (1987) argues that “community” is not a group of people. It is something that is experienced or felt: people know “community” when they feel it. Community, for instance, is created when, despite differences, people feel that they do not have to hide their differences, when there is no distaste for others’ differences, and when divisiveness, rivalry, or exclusion are minimized (Peck, 1987). Community exists when people “delight in each other” (Peck, 1987, p. 59). Given this, Peck (1987) argues that community ought to refer to “a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, [and] whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure” (p. 59).

Likewise, people know when they have not experienced community. Both Peck (1987) and Vanier (1989) argue that community ceases to exist when people simply behave with civility.

I acknowledge the recent accusations about Jean Vanier’s inappropriate conduct, but I also recognize the value in his extensive community work and scholarship.
or composure. This is because civility does not encourage the honest communication or authenticity needed to create community. This is echoed in participants’ sentiments when they explained how encounters were regularly so diplomatic that they were experienced as inauthentic.

This guiding framework, then, recommends acknowledging the reciprocal relationship between encounters and community, and to aim for community life that is caring. This implies that it may be inappropriate or impossible to focus only on micro encounters (how people ought to engage one another). People cannot just “encounter” one another. Scholars suggest that encounters should be understood as people-in-relation (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010): as soon as people encounter one another, they begin sharing life together (Vanier, 1989). This means that the ways in which people relate during encounters is essential to building the kind of community life they want (Peck, 1987; Vanier, 1989). Community-making begins with how people engage each other (Peck, 1987; Vanier, 1989). Vanier (1989) argues we must first be concerned about how we encounter individuals so that community life can flourish. Giving due consideration toward how parties to encounters are personally impacted by exchanges among those holding differences has important implications for the type of community life being created (see Peck, 1987; Vanier, 1989).

Exploration of relationships between encounters and community was beyond the scope of this investigation but is clearly calling for deeper investigations. I propose scholars more intentionally consider the broader relational and community building impacts of encounters. I encourage exploration into how we should live together in community (Vanier, 1989) and into the kind of communities we want to create when we engage in encounters across difficult differences (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Peck, 1987; Vanier, 1989). Future research might
consider things such as the desired community outcomes of encounters and how people should see, treat, and relate to one another to achieve these outcomes (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). This would lead to a reframing of encountering differences that prompts additional ways of responding.

**Caveats for the Use of the Caring Encounters Guiding Framework**

**Extreme disagreement.** First, this guiding framework assumes that while encounters may be difficult, they are still possible. The reality, however, is that in some situations, differences will be more than contentious. They will be insurmountable or even violent. There is a likely connection, then, between the nature and level of disagreement and how successfully this guiding framework can be used to navigate encounters constructively.

**Apathy.** Second, the guiding framework assumes that however minimal, there will be some level of desire to actually encounter persons holding differences. In some situations, however, people may not be sufficiently motivated to actually encounter those who hold different perspectives. If there is no desire to engage difference, most dimensions of the guiding framework cannot be considered.

**Large scale encounters.** This guiding framework assumes encounters are taking place on a small scale – between individuals or small groups of people where communications are mostly face-to-face. It was not designed for community-wide or even more expanded encounters where indirect communication may be very common. While I suspect that many of the dimensions could still offer valuable guidance for navigating larger encounters, generally, these types of encounters did not inform the development of this guiding framework.

**Using other frameworks.** I make no attempt in offering this guiding framework to abolish or replace other frameworks such as those reviewed in this study. I respect the insights
and richness of the other frameworks and therefore offer this guiding framework as one possible
option among many. In fact, I contend that the flexibility and complexity inherent in this guiding
framework as well as its roots in several frameworks actually gives it the potential to bring
insights from multiple frameworks together to support the encounter process. Typically,
approaches to encounters are separated. They each have their own purpose, histories,
philosophical or theological underpinnings, approaches to encounters, and expected outcomes. I
would go as far as to suggest that these frameworks have been pitted against one another. Just as
I argue in the Considering Commonalities core issue that searching for and focusing on areas of
alikeness where there are persons holding differences could influence how we engage
encounters, I would argue could be similar for frameworks.

The adoption of the Caring Encounters Guiding Framework, then, could have significant
implications not only for more constructively navigating encounters where contentious
differences are present, but for more successfully using other frameworks meant for approaching
encounters. It could be used, for instance, to explore, uncover, or consider ways the frameworks
could work together to better navigate encounters. This could reduce the bifurcated way of
thinking about how to best approach encounters, and allow different frameworks to be used in
unique and novel ways.

Concluding Remarks

By offering the Caring Encounters Guiding Framework, I provide some insights into
navigating small-scale encounters across difficult differences. I also raise questions about the
type of community we want to create. Additionally, I offer an invitation: to reconsider our
response to encounters, and to approach them in new or different ways (as detailed in the guiding
framework).
My hope is that this guiding framework can help us reframe our perceptions and actions. This guiding framework could teach us how to view contentious differences as worthy of being known and understood. It might help us to experience “others” in ways that we may not have otherwise noticed. Instead of being preoccupied with areas of disagreement or wrongs, this guiding framework could help us approach encounters with curiosity and openness. Indeed, it might help us consider acknowledging, and even building upon, the motivations of others stemming from their identities. Given that people may be unlikely to relinquish their differences and that their motivations are regularly positive, it may be helpful in some contexts to intentionally build upon their belief systems and ways of living. This guiding framework could also encourage us to be more proactive: to approach encounters with a sense of possibility, and to pause and reflect on whether our preferred approach to encounters is appropriate. It might point to thinking less about ourselves during difficult encounters and more about what others need. This might stimulate new conversations, learnings about self and other, and foster relationships.

I came to this work because I wanted to explore how to better navigate encounters with those holding contentious differences, and in such a way that they are constructive – more often than not – for everyone involved. Originally, I was persuaded by the pleas of my Christian, Muslim, racialized, and LGBTQ+ students, colleagues, neighbours, and friends to take up this pursuit. It was too often that they experienced the pain of being encountered with apprehension, distaste, or aggression. Their experiences compelled me to learn how to do better.

Completing this work has made me realize, however, that doing better is not just my desire alone. The scholars I read and the people I interviewed share my desire. It matters deeply to many besides me that people who find each other difficult – even deplorable – engage one
another. There seems to be a collective hope that people will learn to reach across differences to connect.

Change theorists explain that individual change tends to happen when people are sufficiently dissatisfied with their circumstances (Schein, 1996). I want to urge you, then, to be sufficiently dissatisfied with the current circumstances. While, certainly, there are many examples of encounters with positive outcomes, it is my hope is that at minimum, the contents of this volume have sufficiently convinced you that there are too many instances of encounters where deep pain and hurt is caused toward those holding contentious differences. Given this, I contend that each of us has a responsibility to act toward change, however uncomfortable this may be. My hope is that my Caring Encounters Guiding Framework may offer us a roadmap for beginning change. While the appropriate next steps may not always be clear, what is certain is that we cannot navigate encounters constructively unless we try. We must choose to meet the very people who challenge us. Only then can we make strides to understand differences, appreciate diversity, and enjoy life with each other.


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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer Posted in the Faculty of Social Work

Is being Muslim, LGBTQ+, or Christian important to you?

I’d like to hear about the interpersonal experiences of different groups of students here at the Faculty of Social Work. You are uniquely positioned to describe your experiences.

We will talk during a 90-180 minute interview. You will also be invited to take part in a later focus group discussion of my results.

Please contact me so I can tell you about my PhD research and you can decide if you’d like to participate.

Morgan Bagnana is a PhD Candidate at Wilfrid Laurier University. This dissertation is supervised by Dr. Gary Casement, Professor, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University. This study has been reviewed and approved by Wilfrid Laurier University’s Research Ethics Board #6619.
Appendix B: Flyer Distributed through the Wilfrid Laurier University Graduate Students’ Association (WLUGSA) Facebook Page
Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer Distributed in Classrooms

Is being Muslim, LGBTQ+, or Christian important to you?

I’d like to hear about the interpersonal experiences of different groups of students here at the Faculty of Social Work. You are uniquely positioned to describe your experiences.

We will talk during a 90-180 minute interview. You will also be invited to take part in a later focus group discussion of my results.

Please contact me so I can tell you about my PhD research and you can decide if you’d like to participate.

Please contact me at mbaganza@wlu.ca or confidentially at 519-884-0710 ext. 5231.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request,

Morgan Braganza  MSW, PhD Candidate
Faculty of Social Work
Wilfrid Laurier University

Morgan Braganza is a PhD Candidate at Wilfrid Laurier University
This dissertation is supervised by Dr. Gary Cameron, Professor, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier.
This study has been reviewed and approved by Wilfrid Laurier University’s Research Ethics Board #5698.
Appendix D: Interview Guide for Participants

Introduction

The purpose of the interview is to learn more about the interpersonal experiences of different groups of students here at the Faculty of Social Work. By interpersonal experiences, I mean interactions and relationships you have here at the Faculty of Social Work with classmates, other students, instructors, and/or staff. As someone who is [Christian/Muslim/a member of the LGBTQ+ community], you are in a unique position to describe how you have experienced these interactions. And that’s what the interview is about: your experiences, as well as your thoughts and your feelings about your interactions and relationships. I will be talking to approximately 10 Muslims, 10 Christians, and 10 members of the LGBTQ+ community so I can learn about many people’s experiences.

We are going to talk today as though we are writing a story together. Specifically, I want you to imagine that I am going to write a book about your interpersonal experiences here in the Faculty of Social Work. In this book, I’d like you to tell your readers about your motivations for coming here as well as your interpersonal experiences while here.

Ultimately, you get to decide what goes into your story. I will ask you some questions as you tell your story, and if there is something you wish not to discuss, just say so. There is no consequence for not answering one of my questions. You don’t have to tell me any more than you want to about anything we talk about. If, at any time in our discussion, you want to talk about something different or to stop our conversation, that is fine – just let me know.

Please be assured that I take your privacy very seriously, and so this means I will keep your information confidential. In other words, nothing you say will identify you personally.

If you have any questions for me as we go along, please ask. Do you have any questions at this point?

Demographic Questions

I’d like to start with some demographic information first so I can get a sense of the people I am speaking with. I also want to understand how your background is connected to your experiences.

For CURRENT students
   What program are you currently in (e.g., 2 year full time, Advanced Standing)?
   What year of your program are you currently in?

For GRADUATED students
   What program did you complete (e.g., 2 year full time, Advanced Standing)?
   How many years were you enrolled in your program?

---

3 Hodge, 2006
4 Hodge, 2006
5 Hodge, 2006
Can you tell me your current age?\textsuperscript{6}

With what ethnicity would you identify?\textsuperscript{7}

How do you identify in terms of gender?
  \textbf{Prompt:} what are your gender pronouns?

\textsuperscript{6} Hodge, 2006
\textsuperscript{7} Hodge, 2006
Interview Questions

**AREA ONE: THE PERSON**

Just a reminder that we are going to talk today as though we are writing a story together about your interpersonal experiences here in the Faculty of Social Work. In this story, I'd like you to tell your readers about your motivations for coming here as well as your interpersonal experiences while here.

**TOPICS**

- Faith/membership in LGBTQ+ community
- Values/ethics/beliefs
- School
- Community Involvement
- Life/lifestyle
- Home life
- Work

**GRAND TOUR QUESTION # 1: Alternative wording**

What was going on in the year before coming to the FSW?

What was this like?

What happens?

Tell me more?

Uh-huh?

- What was going on in the year before your entrance into the FSW look like for you?

But let's begin the story, first by telling your readers who you are and specifically by telling them about what life was like before coming here. In the year before coming to the Faculty of Social Work, what kinds of things were you doing?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Probes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith/membership in LGBTQ+ community</td>
<td>What is this like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values/ethics/beliefs?</td>
<td>Can you give me an example?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoped to be?</td>
<td>What happened?</td>
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<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoped to do/accomplish?</td>
<td>Tell me more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith/membership in LGBTQ+ community</td>
<td>Uhh-huh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Alternative wording:**
- Why did you want to come to the FSW?
- What motivated you to come to the FSW?

**Grand Tour Question #2:**
- What brought you to the Faculty of Social Work?
### AREA THREE: ENCOUNTERS

**Grand Tour Question #1:**

- Thinking about your interactions with other students, instructors and/or staff – rather than about things like your grades or how much you liked your teachers – tell me about your time at the FSW.

**Additional Wording:**

Your teachers – tell me about your time at the FSW.

- Thinking about your interactions with other students, instructors and/or staff – rather than about things like your grades or how much you liked your teachers – tell me about your time at the FSW.

---

**Topics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison (Difference from experiences of other identity group members)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with other group members (e.g., Muslims/Christians/members of the LGBTQ+ community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness about identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In smaller conversations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is this like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you give me an example?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell me more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uh-huh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

8 (G. Cameron, personal communication, April 5, 2018)

9 Rogers & Bouey, 1996
AREA FOUR: IDEALS

GRAND TOUR QUESTION #1:

• Looking back over your time at the FSW, is there anything you’d like to say about relations between people?

Alternative wording:

What have you taken away or learned about interactions between people?

TOPICS

- Perceptions
- Behaviour/interactions
- Toward your identity
- Toward other identity groups (e.g., Muslims, Christians, members of the LGBTQ+ community)
- Support this?
- What is this like?
- Thorough?
- Importance
- What happened?
- Tell me more
-Uh-huh

PROBES
Wrap Up

Before we close, I would like to ask you a few housekeeping items.

1. Would I be able to follow up with you with more questions if I misunderstood or missed something from this first conversation?

2. Would you like me to send you a copy of the transcript from this interview for you to review it?

3. After I have completed all 30 interviews and have some preliminary findings, I would like to host a couple of focus groups to get some feedback on my findings. Given your intimate knowledge of my study and the topic, would I be able to contact you to participate in one of the focus groups so that you can provide some feedback on my findings?

If any of the answers to the above questions are “yes”
What is/are the most appropriate way(s) to contact you?  (Prompts: email, phone)

Thank you for your time today!
Appendix E: Information and Informed Consent Document for Participants

Improving Encounters with People who hold Contentious Differences: An Exploration
Information Form for Interview Participants

Researcher: Morgan Braganza, MSW, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University
Primary Supervisor: Dr. Gary Cameron, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University

INFORMATION
You have been invited to participate in a research study. This study is being conducted by Morgan Braganza to fulfill the requirements of the PhD in Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. Your participation is completely voluntary.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of the study is to learn more about the interpersonal experiences of different groups of students here at the Faculty of Social Work. Persons who are Christian, Muslim and/or members of the LGBTQ+ community are in a unique position to describe how they have experienced interactions at the Faculty of Social Work with classmates, instructors and/or staff.

PROCEDURES
You will be asked to answer questions about your interpersonal experience.

This will take approximately 90-180 minutes although the length of your responses, and therefore the duration of each interview will vary.

Approximately 30 graduate students and recent alumni will be interviewed.

During the interview, you can:
- say as much or as little as you like
- stop your participation at any time
- refuse to answer any question you wish not to answer

The interview questions will be open-ended. This means that you may choose to provide as much or as little information as you wish. You may also withdraw from the study with no repercussions and notify the principal investigator of this at any time. Once your data has been merged with everyone else’s and/or a final report has been written, however, it will be impossible to withdraw your data.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded so that it can be transcribed by the researcher, Morgan Braganza, by a non-research professional, or by a post-secondary student. Interviews will also be recorded so that quotations may be included in the written report to maintain the accuracy of the statements made by those interviewed. You may refuse, however, to have your voice audio-recorded if you are not comfortable, and you may also ask to have the audio recorder turned off at any point during the interview.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST, RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
Sharing your experiences may cause you to feel upset or uncomfortable. There is also a conflict of interest present if you have a previous interpersonal relationship with the researcher, Morgan Braganza (e.g., as a colleague). To manage these risks, discomforts, and potential conflicts of interest, at any time, or with any of the questions asked during the interview, you can:
- refuse to answer the question
• stop answering questions (at any time)
• decide which questions you wish to answer
• choose how much and which information to provide

You may also:
• end the interview at any point
• withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion
• decide whether you want quotations used in written reports and/or any other final materials (e.g., presentations)

While it is not anticipated that you will experience distress beyond what has already been described, if any part of your participation in this project makes you feel upset and you would like to talk about this with someone, please contact Morgan Braganza at mbraganza@wlu.ca or (519) 884-0710 ext. 5231.

COMPENSATION
To thank you for participating in this research, your name will be entered into a draw for a chance to win one of three prizes: one $100, $75, or $50 gift card to your choice of the WLU bookstore or Amazon. The draw will take place approximately December, 2018.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
This research will assist the researcher to learn and disseminate valuable information to improve interpersonal experiences with diverse persons in academia, research, and practice. What is currently known and acted upon in various settings (e.g., education, research, social services) is based primarily on the ideas and beliefs of researchers and scholars. Your experiences, suggestions and feedback will inform current practices. Your suggestions and feedback may also be used to adjust policies (e.g., in universities) relative to diversity.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained within this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential.
• A pseudonym, code, or number will be used in place of your real name in any notes taken by the researcher and/or included in any final papers.
• The researcher, Morgan Braganza, a non-research professional, or a post-secondary student will be transcribing interviews. As such, the non-research professional or post-secondary student may have access to your audio recorded interview in order to transcribe it. These transcribers, however, have agreed to keep all data confidential.
• All notes and written transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet or a password-protected computer which only the researcher, Morgan Braganza, can access.
• During the transcription process, identifying information (e.g., your name) and demographic information will be removed. This information will be stored separately from the transcript of your interview. Your transcript will be given a code that only Morgan Braganza will have access to in order to be able to link your demographic information to your transcript.
• The researcher’s thesis supervisor, Dr. Gary Cameron, will have access to the audio recordings and transcripts but only for the purposes of assessing and critiquing Morgan’s interviewing strategies.
• If your interview is quoted, no information will be included that would reveal your identity in any written report.

HANDLING AND SECURITY OF DATA
Data collection can never be guaranteed to be completely secure. However every effort will be made to ensure that your privacy and confidentiality is protected throughout the project.
• All audio recordings, data and/or notes will be stored on a password-protected computer and/or a
locked filing cabinets that only Morgan Braganza will have access to.

- Audio recordings will be downloaded onto a password-protected computer and then deleted from the recorder.
- Audio recordings will be sent to the transcriptionist (non-research professional or post-secondary student) a secured Microsoft OneDrive folder. Once the audio files have been transcribed by the transcriptionists, they will be deleted. The transcripts developed by the non-research professional or post-secondary student will be sent back to the researcher via the same OneDrive folder. Once the researcher has received them, they will be deleted from the OneDrive folder.
- All audio recordings and transcriptions of these audio recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer in Morgan Braganza’s home office that only Morgan has access to.
- Immediately after the audio recording has been transcribed, the audio recordings will be securely destroyed by Morgan Braganza.
- All de-identified transcripts will be kept indefinitely in order to continue to disseminate (e.g., through journal articles, books, other publications, presentations/conferences, etc.) and share the findings gained through this important research project.

PARTICIPATION, WITHDRAWAL and RIGHTS OF PARTICIPANTS
Your participation in this study is voluntary:
- You can choose whether to be in this project or not.
- You can stop participating at any time and withdraw without penalty.
- You may refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer.
- You will have any questions about this project answered before beginning participation.
- You will be able to exercise the option of removing your data from the project until the data has been analyzed and/or included in a final report when it will become impossible to know which data was yours.

RESULTS OF THE PROJECT
Once your interview has been transcribed, I will send it to you to review and/or edit (add to, modify, remove information). If you have any questions or comments, you will be invited to contact me.

Additionally, you may be invited to participate in a second phase of this research project. Phase Two of this project will consist of a series of focus groups whereby focus group participants comment on my preliminary findings.

Finally, you will be able to access a copy of the final report through Wilfrid Laurier University’s Scholars Commons http://scholars.wlu.ca. Additionally, if you would like a copy of the final report, you may contact Morgan Braganza at mbraganza@wlu.ca or morganbraganza@hotmail.com.

CONTACT
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact the researcher, Morgan Braganza at mbraganza@wlu.ca or (519) 884-0710 ext. 5231. You may also contact the researcher’s advisor, Dr. Gary Cameron by phone at (519) 884-0710 ext. 5240 or by email at camerongary@wlu.ca.

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair of the Research Ethics Board at (519) 884-0710 ext. 4994.

This project has been reviewed and approved by Wilfrid Laurier University’s Research Ethics Board (TRACKING #5698).

______________________ participant’s initials
Improving Encounters with People who hold Contentious Differences: An Exploration

Consent Form for Interview Participants

Researcher: Morgan Braganza, MSW, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University
Primary Supervisor: Dr. Gary Cameron, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University

☐ I have read and understand the Information Letter
☐ I understand the risks and discomforts involved
☐ I had all questions answered to my satisfaction
☐ I agree to participate in this project
☐ I agree to be audio-recorded
☐ I agree to the use of quotations (knowing that any identifying information will be removed)

Participant’s name ____________________________
(please print)

Participant’s signature_________________________ Date ________________

Researcher’s signature_________________________ Date ________________
Appendix F: Email to Solicit Participant Feedback

Good day,

Thank you, again, for participating in my doctoral research exploring how we can better encounter persons who hold difficult or contentious differences! Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and your story with me. I am so grateful for the time we spent together.

During the interview, I asked if you would be interested in commenting on my initial findings. I am emailing you today to follow up on that conversation.

If you are interested (and have the time) to offer reactions (feedback) toward my initial findings, I have attached:

- A section of the findings which details the experiences in encounters of all participants who identified as LGBTQ+ / Muslim / Christian.
- A copy of a general framework I developed based on this study’s findings. It is meant to help guide decisions about how to constructively navigate encounters with persons who hold difficult or contentious differences.
- A copy of my conclusions.

I have invited everyone who took part in an interview as part of this study to offer their feedback on the findings.

Please email me your feedback by Friday, June 5, 2020, and I will take it under advisement. I hope to have the full study available in 2020-2021.

If you would like to share your feedback with me via phone, I would be happy to arrange this. Please let me know.

If you have any questions at this time, feel free to contact me at voit8350@mylaurier.ca.

With gratitude,

Morgan Braganza
MSW, PhD (cand.)
Wilfrid Laurier University