Inter-Religious Interaction in Urban Australia: the influence of religious-identity on perceptions of 'the Other'

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by

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Statement of Originality

The work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material written or published by any person other than as duly acknowledged by referencing within this thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis explores perceptions of the religious 'Other' using symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework in the sociology of religion, and a qualitative research approach of participant observations of eight worship gatherings: two Jewish, four Christian, and two Islamic; thirty-six in-depth semi-structured interviews of affiliates from each religion; and textual analysis of political and mass media information.

The thesis explores and provides insight into two areas of religious-related expression. The first is the nature of religious self-identity from affiliates of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic worship gatherings and secondly, from that basis, affiliates' perceptions of the religious 'Other' that arise in a context of religious diversity.

This thesis finds that that religious identity is more complex than having a fixed and single affiliation. Pluralists exist who are fluid in their identity, affiliations, and practices. Some fundamentalists tolerate and even appreciate difference. Interfaith interactions are often conducted in a quiet and informal way between individuals and small groups, rather than in large and spectacular fashion. Those who encounter mystical spiritual types of experiences are also 'Other' because they, too, 'think and know differently'. This different way of knowing complements normally-accepted knowledge sources.

Perceptions of 'the Other', then, range from outright rejection and antagonism by those firmly entrenched in their own beliefs; to ambivalence; and to respect and appreciation of difference for the opportunities opened for learning, expanding one's knowledge and perspective, and for creating an inclusive, shared, and diverse social context.

The thesis finds that these perceptions of the religious 'Other' relate to perceptions of change, and are based on interpretations of 'right living' as contrasted with interpretations of 'wrong living'. As people encounter difference, which disturbs and threatens to undermine their own right ways, they act to remedy that disturbance. Social change has implications for religious self-identity and intentions of right living.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into two sections.

Section I concerns the context and process of the thesis. Chapter one introduces the thesis, and includes the intentions that motivated the thesis, the research questions, and the main findings. Chapter two discusses the world context and religious conflict in Australia, which is the background influence in which perceptions of otherness arise. Chapter three reviews literature in symbolic interactionism and the sociology of religion, and chapter four discusses qualitative methodology and methods.

Section II discusses various dimensions of religious identity. Chapter five investigates the importance of religion as 'right living', and explores the concepts of 'intention' and 'intentionality'. Chapter six explores the application of the concept of plurality in the lives of individuals and chapter seven discusses expressions of fundamentality. These sections suggest the fluidity of the nature of religious identity. Chapter eight considers a special type of otherness that relates to the effects and perceptions of spiritual mystical-type experiences. Chapter nine concludes the thesis and suggests further research possibilities.

Section I: Context and Process

Chapter One: Introduction

One of the most prevalent and salient *intentions* for religious affiliates who participated in this research is to 'live the right way' according to their religious teachings and beliefs in the wider social world context. From a sociological perspective, such a sentiment may be interpreted as being more about order and co-operation. Yet from the religious perspective, the foundation for living rightly is about adhering to the teachings of one's religious affiliation regarding concerns such as morality, values, and the ways to conduct interpersonal interactions. For most affiliates, this also includes living peacefully and many will state that their own religion is about *being* peaceful. Such sentiments raise questions about the social implications in a culturally and religiously diverse and changing Australian urban environment, as influenced by the current context of globalisation and the recent increase in what appears to be inter-religious conflicts globally.

This qualitative and interpretive project seeks to understand these social implications as the symbolic worlds of the three religions of the 'Children of Abraham' — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — encounter religious difference, and affiliates develop perceptions of 'the Other'. These three universalizing religions evolved from an 'in-common' genealogical, doctrinal, and territorial, heritage, have a history of interaction that extends into the present day, developed diverse religious expressions, include traditions of cultural diversity and, some members have adopted a fundamentalist stance (Thurow 1996; Waters 1995; Lawrence 1998).

The project uses the concepts of 'identity', 'reference group', 'change', and 'perceptions' within the framework of symbolic interactionism to understand how individuals' religious identity, and macro-level institutional practices such as mass-media representations of religiously-connected events and issues, influence

members' own religious identity, and particularly, their perceptions of the 'Other'. The boundaries of otherness discussed in this thesis apply to those who 'are different', who 'do things differently', and/or who 'understand differently' from the general group around them — that is, those whose beliefs, understandings, and practices differ from one's own, and especially those not of one's own religious affiliation. As various moral and value belief systems encounter each other, contestations and changes occur (Coser 1956; Simmel 1971; Parsons 1994; Armstrong 2004; Davie 2007). People emphasis the favourable aspects of their own group, and contrast differing others and their ways as less desirable (Dempsey 1990). Contestations for authority (Celemajer 2006) and legitimacy simultaneously exist with appreciation of difference, depending on the way people from differing heritages and normative practices perceive each 'Other'.

This research offers an approach to the study of religious understanding in Australia that differs in emphasis compared with other approaches in the sociology of religion. Studies often inform about *perspectives* — the frames of reference people use to 'see' and evaluate the world — whereas the focus of this work is *perceptions* — the interpretations and definitions (or opinions) that people develop and which provide an orientation for their social acts and interactions. My enquiry took me deeply into the intimate and detailed accounts of lived religious life and the importance of religion in the lives of participants. This, in turn offered different understandings of concepts, such as 'fundamental', 'plural', and 'extreme', whilst exploring the perceptions people develop about religious 'Others' as they consider information from various sources. Influential information sources can include macro-level political, mass media, and religious institutions, and micro-level information from direct inter-personal communicative interaction amongst one's own kind and/or with 'Others'.

This research problematises pre-existing assumptions related to concepts such as 'fundamentality', 'plurality', and 'extreme', by comparing theoretical definitions with affiliates' perceptions of lived realities. It draws out intricacies and

complexities of people's approaches to religion, religious self-identity, intentions, the right way to live, perceptions, and acts. It highlights what is important to people in their religious affiliations, how and why they perceive and respond to 'Others', and what it is about 'Others' that is perceived to be especially threatening. As such, this research offers insights, in the hope that it may encourage, facilitate, and contribute to dialogue between differing religious groups.

Research Questions

Before beginning this research, my main question was how do people regard 'Others' who are not of their own kind? I was especially interested in what exists about religious identity and affiliation that motivated people to suggest their own superiority compared with those whose affiliation differs from their own. I was interested in why there is an 'either/or' need in the religious domain, where people are expected to be committed to only one religious system despite the prevalence of similar beliefs. I was also interested in knowing more about the vested interests that spur people to promote and defend their religious beliefs so strongly, even with their lives. As such, two major related areas of interest underpin this research:

> a) What is important to religious affiliates about their religion and religious *identity*?
> b) What do religious affiliates think of 'Others' — that is, what are the *perceptions* of those with religious beliefs, values, and practices that differ from one's own?

These two questions, that concern self-religious-identity perceptions and perceptions of differing and even opposing 'Others', further suggest inquiry into:

> c) What *influences* the perceptions held by religious affiliates, and,
> d) To what extent the 'either/or' attitudes hold, or whether respect or appreciation of difference may exist simultaneously with one's personal affiliation commitment.

These sorts of questions raise issues about religious self-identity and the practice of beliefs in the wider social world — about values, absolutes, imperatives, legitimacy, and doctrinal interpretation, to mention only a few. The responses to these issues, especially during encounters with difference, result in an inevitable negotiation process (Strauss 1991), that comprises contestation, conflict, negotiation, integration, adaptation and, eventually, the development of a 'new normal'.

Data were gathered from participant observations, interviews, informal conversations, and mass media news reports. Participant observations occurred in eight worship gatherings: two Jewish, two Muslim, and four Christian, over a period of nine months. Religious affiliates provided thirty-six audio-taped in-depth one-to-one qualitative interviews.

Thesis Argument

Instead of structuring the thesis around a formal argument, this exploratory project offers insights into lived religiosity. The original intention of the research was to explore affiliates' perceptions of otherness. However, other important issues also evolved from observations and the grounded theory analytic process. The first of these, which concerns religious identity, is that of participants' perceptions about living rightly as contrasted with wrong living. Every participant expressed the same concept in some form, explicitly and/or implicitly: that of *intending* to 'do the right thing' — to 'live the right way' according to their understanding of the beliefs and teachings and/or traditions of their personal religious affiliation. Development of this theme employs the concepts of *intention* and *intentionality*. Intentionality, which is integral with religious self-identity, is about 'aboutness' and is about God, G-d, or Allah,[1] depending on one's religious affiliation. It is also about the associated sets of beliefs that include ideas about an afterlife and

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[1] Within the thesis, the word 'God' includes the Christian God, Jewish 'G-d', and Islamic 'Allah', unless written in an occasional context that relates only to Christians or Christianity.

practices in this worldly life that are oriented towards an otherworldly afterlife. This is the foundation upon which these people interpret and conduct their lives, the standard against which they evaluate and perceive 'Others', and so *act* toward or about those 'Others', who may then be tolerated, accepted, appreciated, or rejected.

Other points that emerged from the analytic process concern respondents' understandings of 'fundamental', 'extreme', 'plural', and of encountering difference. Some participants from each religion in this project are fundamental because they sincerely believe that they must put God and their religion before and above other life concerns — that they must be committed and dedicated, yet they do not necessarily believe in violence or the need to coerce others into complying with their ways. That is, they do not conform to the stereotypical idea of fundamentalism that is currently prevalent in mass media disseminations. Such affiliates are perceived as being 'extreme' because their religious commitment and acts go beyond what is considered to be normal within a given context — it is perceived to be excessive in (Bouma's 2006) the 'shy hope in the heart' Australian social world.

A second example of affiliates who do not conform to expected norms are those who are pluralist in their identity, affiliations, and expressions of the sacred — who identify with two or more religions and/or religious sub-groups,[2] reconcile religious differences *within* themselves, and take the opportunity to appreciate more than a bounded religious social world would normally offer. They perceive the possibility of truth more widely, do not restrict God, and are less restrictive of their own form of religious expressions. When known to be plural, these people can become 'Other' in each of their affiliations. The third example of affiliates, who become a different type of 'Other' because of their differing understandings, are those who encounter mystical or spiritual experiences. The personal and social

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[2] Replacement, where possible, of Christian-associated terminology, with inclusive descriptors, simultaneously accommodates the three differing religions.

implications and perceptions in this instance differ in some ways from experiences of other affiliates.

One's religious self-identity, which is familiar and is one's understanding of normality, is, thus, a basis for beliefs, social acts, religious practices, interpretations, definitions, perceptions, and a basis for perceiving 'Others'. One's perceptions, from this standpoint, influence one's social acts directly toward or indirectly about various 'Others'. People trust, believe, and hope; they continue to do so because of the existence of social plausibility and legitimising structures (Berger 1971), which reinforce the rightness of one's affiliation. Interactive social processes and norms support continued religious affiliation, at the worship gathering level, and across the legal and moral institutions concerning right and wrong and justice in the wider social world. Sanctions reward or punish in order to draw boundaries, thus giving rise to understandings of intentions.

Conversely, encounters with difference inevitably result in the occurrence of individual and social change; people either retreat into defending their own understandings as much as they are able to sustain that defence, or adapt to the infiltration of difference in their lives: as one's understanding changes, so too, does their reality. Even those who may resist change contribute to the process of change, which continues to occur around people. Any responses, resistance, or adaptation to the new conditions, ultimately contributes to that change. Change itself is inevitable, so perceptions of the 'Other' relate to perceptions of change and right and wrong ways of living, which underpin and have implications for religious identity. Some perceive this risk of change as highly threatening; some appreciate that which is offered by 'Others' as opportunities for engaging with difference, for learning, appreciation, and for enlarging one's own perspective. As people negotiate differences, become familiar with them, and incorporate them little-by-little into their lives, they contribute to the creation of a 'new normal'.

Chapter Two: Religious Conflict in Australia

The topic of this thesis is set in a context of what appears to be worldwide endemic religious-related conflicts; the context influences individuals' perceptions of otherness in everyday social settings. In 1993, Samuel Huntington queried whether ongoing global conflicts are a clash of civilizations. Mathieu Guidère and Newton Howard countered that in 2006 by proposing that the issue is a clash of perceptions. Malcolm Waters recounts Nettl and Robertson's (1968) views, which explain that religion is recognised as being the primary preventing factor — a significant cleavage — during attempts to create international unity and systemisation (1995: 41). The public issues are many, and are highly visible to the general Australian population, as may be quickly established by perusing daily news bulletins. If one begins with the event that is now known as '9/11' and continues to the present, the prevalence of conflict, between religions, between religious and secular issues, and even within religions, suggests the salience of religion in what was proposed to be a secularising world (cf. Berger 1973; Thomas 2005). As people encounter change, in the form of differing communicative symbolisms in this culturally diverse and globalised context, accommodation of difference raises issues of legitimacy, security, and 'rights'. As such, conflict, contestation, and tension ensue.

The Nature of Religious Conflict

At the macro social level, conflict is invariably, but not necessarily, linked to social change (Giddens 1972; Simmel 1908/1971; Dahrendorf 1964). Conflict may be expressed through, for example, social institutions, such as the mass media; through physical violence, such as warfare or riots; by contestation for legitimacy; through discourses (e.g. *Orientalism*, Said 1978/1995); and/or through 'racism', a form of which includes targeting religions (Briskin 1998). At the micro individual level, people may engage in conflict in, for example, direct interaction in the form of enacting strategies for achievement of their own

outcomes in conflict (Coleman 1994); in direct interaction such as debates; or in direct interaction such as fist-fights, spitting, verbal assault, throwing rocks or use of other hand-held missiles or weaponry. "Conflict theory is just a way of looking at the world", explains Ian Craib (1984: 61), who highlights the contrast between conflict theory and integration theory; each of which has a different perspective, emphasis, and set of assumptions. The process of conflict is a struggle for one's own interests and values (Craib 1984); in the religious context, it is a struggle for the imperatives and absolutes of one's own belief affiliation — the right way of living.

Georg Simmel offers a useful sociological framework for the conceptualisation and relevance of conflict; he identifies the subject matter of sociology substantially as the study of "the individual unit and the unit of individuals", which would appear to negate any study of conflict (1908/1971: 71). However, when one reconceptualises sociological intentions to study the *relations* between individuals and groups of individuals, it becomes clear that conflict, being an expression of relations between people, is relevant subject matter for sociological research (Simmel 1971). Relations between people are divergent and convergent. In social worlds, conflict is inevitable and necessary, and contributes to "establishing and maintaining group identities" and boundaries (Coser 1956: 34). According to Giddens' interpretation of Durkheim's work, conflict is foundational to social change (1972).

> Social conflict is a necessary condition of social change and is the more extreme to the degree to which a radical reorganisation of a given type of society is taking place ... [but also] there tend to occur conflicts and dissensions which are symptomatic of the need for social change, but which do not themselves directly contribute to it (Giddens 1972: 48).

This suggests that conflict, as a precursor to change, acts as an indicator of the likelihood of necessary transformation. For example,

> ... class conflict is definitely not ... the vehicle whereby the necessary social reorganisation can be attained; rather than promoting the required social

and moral restructuring of industry, class conflict inhibits the chances of its occurrence (Giddens 1972: 48).

Conflict can indicate unrest, discontent, and a desire for change, but any social change that may relieve such symptoms may evolve slowly for other reasons, such as "through slow accretion" and not as a result of rebellion, which, for example, may, be forcibly subdued (Giddens 1972: 47). Bouma explains that violence can become part of the process for change: "Where legitimate avenues for addressing the problems identified are blocked, these religious energies can be harnessed to motivate revolution, violent protest and the killing of self or others" (2006: 158). Simmel goes further, by arguing that "Conflict is thus designed to resolve divergent dualisms; it is a way of achieving some kind of unity, even if it be though the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties" and, that because conflict is dynamic compared with the apathy of indifference, "conflict contains something positive" (1971: 70, 71). It may be appreciated that differing opinions and understandings that begin discussion are fruitful when enlarging knowledge and perspectives. However, this is not to suggest that violent expressions of conflict — the ugliness of disagreements — are necessarily appropriate, though they obviously act as catalysts to begin *processes*, especially of resolution and, invariably, change.

Global religious-related issues have been prominent in news reports for several years, many involving Islam and Muslims. A few examples include Israel's conflicts with Palestine and Lebanon; the 'Cartoon Controversy' involving publications of humour that Muslims perceived as offensive; debates and contestation concerning the coverings worn by Islamic women; and the ongoing Catholic scandal of sexual abuse of children by priests. All provided gripping headlines, sensational(ised) stories, and graphic footage. A proposal by Terry Jones, a pastor in Florida, for an 'International burn the Quran day', failed to gain the hoped-for support (*BBC News U.S and Canada* 2010). Jones allegedly wanted to honour the victims of the September 11th destruction with this highly symbolic gesture. Many news reports inform about the ways Islamic women are ill-treated

in countries, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and others, including linking the cultural practice of female genital mutilation with Islam because *some* Islamic *cultures* continue the practice. Stories abound about the way Taliban moral police cruelly punish women for laxity in personal presentation and/or 'improper conduct'. In media articles, where there is any mention of terrorism, the words Islam or Muslim are close-by. Additionally, using Roland Barthes' literary method of textual analysis, Alfred J. Fortin (1989) demonstrated the creation of discourse in a textual interrogation of a televised and printed statement against 'terrorism' by Jeane J. Kirkpatrick (as printed in *Harpers* October 1984: 44-46). He argues that the effect of the "penetration of that discourse into our ordinary language is a measure of the increasing militarization of our common life" and that "issues of world order and conflict are problematized as issues of everyday life" (Fortin 1989: 189). Fortin has explored "how the text's agenda of creating the terrorist as a kind of Other gets actualized" (1989: 202). The next explicit step in discourse construction, beyond that expressed in Kirkpatrick's text, was to link 'terrorism' specifically with Islam, thereby emphasising their religious 'Otherness' in addition to the political.

Most Muslims, in contrast, "have no voice" in the media, and "the expressions of their cultural identity are often dismissed as fanaticism" (Possamaï 2007: 143). Apart from creating fear that Islam will become the norm in Australia, media attacks also suggest that religion, generally, is irrational, unreasonable, superstition, and outdated when compared with scientific knowledge. In her textual analysis of two Australian newspapers, Alia Imtoual found that "there is a climate of hostility and negativity towards Islam and Muslims currently in operation in the Australian print media" (2005 online). Sharp divisions occur between believers and non-believers. That some believers commit reprehensible acts against the vulnerable further discredits religion. The many debates and conflicts about religious issues contribute to the ongoing prominence of religion as a topic for discussion in the mass media worldwide.

In this research, conflict within and between religious symbolic systems appears in a range of expressions from outright violent confrontation, such as terrorism and riots, to 'managed' or 'negotiated' conflict, some of which is expressed through interfaith initiatives. James S. Coleman (1957) described the various "areas of life" in which conflict occurs as being "*economic...power or authority...*and *cultural values or beliefs*", and as response-attitudes by individuals: "If he's for it I'm against it" (cited in Bell and Newby 1971: 246). George H. Mead (1934/1955) discusses conflict in relation to feelings of the superiority of one's own social group and of social cohesion resulting from uniting against a common enemy. He located feelings of superiority in the religious context when discussing "the period of religious wars: "One belonged to one group that was superior to other groups and could assert himself confidently because he had God on his side" (Mead 1934/1955: 207). Regarding social cohesion, Mead stated: "there is no situation in which the self can express itself so easily as it can over against the common enemy of the groups to which it is united" (1934/1955: 220). Both of these points, which are about beliefs and values are also related and relevant to the major theme in this thesis regarding perceptions of the religious 'Other' — that of the intention to 'live rightly' in a context of change, according to what one believes to be the right way, becomes explicit when encountering the religious (or secular) 'Other'.

Religious Conflict in Australia

Australia presents as one of the most culturally diverse countries (Bouma 2006). Around 75% of Australia's population have a religious affiliation (Cahill, Bouma, Dellal, and Leahy 2004), and about 64% of Australia's population identify as Christian (Australian Government 2008). Australia is becoming more, not less, religious — and paradoxically, more secular (Cahill and Leahy 2004). Globalisation has created unprecedented mobility dynamics and shifts in populations' interactions, because of the speed and extent by which various dispersed populations have come to occupy Others' social worlds: people are

exposed directly and indirectly to cultural and religious Otherness (cf. Crook, Pakulski, and Waters 1992). Immigration from a variety of countries, for political, economic, and humanitarian reasons, has been the source of much of the Australian population, which includes migrants "from around 200 countries" (Australian Government 2008). Cultural and religious diversity in Australia is an ongoing process of complex negotiation between those already settled and immigrants — a side-by-side existence of multiple and diverse cultures and ideologies. This involves, for example, language use; diverse cultural practices; customs; political, legal, and education systems; values, norms, and religious understandings, as well as political and media portrayal of various social (moral) boundaries in a given society.

> With the migration of commodities, which in themselves are cultural artefacts, is the dispersing of ideologies in the form of "values, tastes, and desires", so that "the cultures incorporate fragments of each other's identities" (Gergen 1991: 255).

This infiltration occurs through ideas and ideology, technology, artefacts, beliefs, and many other ways. Newcomers may struggle to adapt to a world that differs vastly from their known and familiar, and with which they identify; existing residents also adapt to the influx of change and difference. The result is a re-evaluation by some regarding tolerance, acceptance, co-operation, and dialogue with 'Otherness', and self-evaluation compared with 'Otherness'. As such, negotiations and shifting occur in response to perceptions (Mead 1934/1955; Powers 1973a, 1973b). Some countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada have developed social justice policies and multicultural ideals (Bouma 1995; 1999) and are alleged to be comfortable with diversity within their boundaries. Multiculturalism, now known as cultural diversity in Australia, was the official policy approach to otherness that developed as an alternative to the 'White Australia' policy (Bouma 1995; Burke 2002; Saeed 2004). Although religious and ethnic/racial conflicts occur, the general norms of tolerance have generally restricted these incidents to isolated cases throughout Australia's history.

Gary Bouma perceives tolerance to be a part of the Australian psyche (1999). However, not all perceive Australia as a place tolerant of difference. The meaning of the concept 'tolerance' is questioned, tested, and debated (Ang, Brand, Noble, and Wilding 2002; Thomas and Witenberg 2004; Fopp and Ellis 2005; Ang, Brand, Noble and Sternberg 2006; Borooah and Mangan 2007; Van Zomeren, Fischer, and Spears 2007). Additionally, open and persistent racism is perceived to exist in Australia (Castles 1996; Foundation for Bringing Australia Together 1998; Betts and Birrell 2007). "Australia is in the contradictory position of being both a multicultural and a multi-racist society" (Vasta and Castles 1996: 5). Christine Stafford cites and adopts the perception of van den Berghe, who describes racism as

> ...any set of beliefs that organic, genetically transmitted differences (whether real or imagined) between human groups, are intrinsically associated with the presence or absence of certain socially relevant abilities or characteristics; hence that such differences are a legitimate basis of invidious distinctions between groups socially defined as races (1997: 295-296).

It is immediately apparent that moral as well as physical characteristics are understood to be racial tendencies. Such categorisations become related to religious beliefs where religion and race are perceived to be linked, such as in Ireland where Protestantism is perceived to be English whilst Catholicism is identified with Irish ethnicity (Mitchell 2005). Divisions may also dehumanise certain groups in certain contexts, for example, as in the treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany (Shibutani 1955; Goffman 1968; *The Holocaust Project* 1998; Bauman 2001). In Australia, such categorisations affect Indigenous people, 'non-white' immigrants, and, more recently, Muslims. Eve Fesl describes three types of racism in Australia:

> ... individual racism — when an individual takes negative action, verbally or physically, against another on the basis of race ... which can occur anywhere within the community, school, workplace, in sports and any other social setting ... group racism [which] can occur in all of the above settings but it involves more than one person ... [and] institutional racism ... [which] in its worst form is extremely covert, and is dominated by the need

of groups or individuals within an institution to exert power and control over others of a different racial group or over the intellectual and cultural property rights of those groups (1998: 49).

John Kelley and Nan Dirk de Graaf confirm the argument regarding the effectiveness of macro-level discourse, when they find "that one source of durability of religious belief is the religious context of the nation as a whole" (1997: 1). That is, the prevailing religious norms shape the religious expectations and perceptions of citizens, generally (Kelley and Dirk de Graaf 1997). Questions exist then, regarding how tolerant Australians are in practice, with instances of negative racial discrimination, the use of derogatory language to describe immigrants and Aboriginals, violence, and victimisation at both State and individual levels (Vasta and Castles 1996; Foundation for Bringing Australia Together 1998).

Conflict and Interfaith Interactions

In religious terms, conflict concerns 'right living' in all areas of life — the right ways to live, to worship, to dress, to educate, to legislate — and *whose* way is *the* right way. Difference is more frequently encountered, with wider variety and greater numbers, which results in changes in relationships and contexts of interaction as people disseminate their beliefs and traditions (Kurtz, 1995; McLuhan, 1964; Urry, 2002; Waters 1995). As Gergen asks, when faced with encounters and contestation between differing realities, "…whose reality is to be privileged? On what grounds?" (1991: 144). During the most intimate encounters, such as marriages or funerals, each group prioritises their own symbolic religious practices, which becomes particularly challenging (Downman, 2004; Haddad, 2000; Tan 2003). Conflicts highlighted in political and media institutions, and in other contexts worldwide in recent years focus on this very issue, which Ulrich Beck (1992) discusses as the balance between equality and safety, and Zygmunt Bauman (2001) describes as the tension between freedom and security. Many religious institutions forsake freedom of personal individual

expression for the security of 'living the right way', by complying with laws and imperatives from God. God, and the attendant religious doctrinal directives, becomes the reference point for daily being. Instead, secular orientations of being prioritise freedom — freedom of speech, freedom from oppression, freedoms concerning religious expression, and others (Bauman 2001). Additionally, Gerald Parsons (1994) posits the question 'to what extent should change occur to accommodate differing otherness?' How far should — or *can* — one's own standards and ways adapt for 'Others', yet still retain the necessary imperatives and characteristics? What of one's 'self' may one sacrifice so 'Others' may be at ease, and what implications exist, then, for one's own integrity? C. Wright Mills reminds us to ask about a society, "what is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change?" (1959: 4).

It is frequently the threat — this risk or experience — of change that disturbs the familiar and predictable world, and which comes about through tensions and conflicts between people with differing perspectives, perceptions, norms, and values, each of which are relevant in this research. Interaction is relational and reciprocal. When those from differing religious and ethnic cultures, beliefs, values, and symbolic systems communicate, something is shared — there exists in the interaction a 'give-and-take' of understandings. Diversity becomes a little more diverse and a 'new normal' emerges. Simultaneously, identity, in relation to others, may be evaluated or consolidated in response to recognition of difference.

> To be convinced of the "truth" of a discourse is to find the alternatives foolish or fatuous — to slander or silence the outside. Warring camps are developed that speak only to themselves, and that seek means of destroying others' credibility and influence (and life), all with an abiding sense of righteousness. As modernism gained hegemony, for example, religion was forced out of college curricula and replaced by science, the eloquent were replaced by the efficient, school prayer was replaced by guidance counseling, organizational loyalty by systems analysis, and psychoanalysis by cognitive therapy … When convinced of the truth or right of a given worldview, a culture has only two significant options: totalitarian control of the opposition or annihilation of it (Gergen 1991: 252).

Where religious values, absolutes, or imperatives, become to be at risk when confronted with otherness the perceived threat is very real, that is, one's perceptions of the 'Other' may signal polarisation and opposition. The intrusion of difference into a relatively settled social world disrupts that world and all that is taken-for-granted.   Difference intrudes into one's familiarity, into one's ontological security — that familiar and predictable state of being that one lives and experiences physically, emotionally, and ideologically. The response then, is to attempt to repair and restore the known 'normality', which is perceived to be the 'right way' of being (Mead 1936/1964; Powers 1973a, 1973b).

In the case of the introduction of different religious systems into what was previously an almost exclusively Christian country — England — adjustments became necessary at many levels of social and institutional life (Parsons 1994). A similar process is occurring in present-day Australia, which results in questioning many issues. To what extent should Australia, a nation state, accommodate cultural and religious differences amid the influx of extensive immigrant diversity? Should those with differing expressions of similar values and those with quite different values be included or excluded in the areas of politics, education, the legal system, health and welfare, and employment? Even if the answer is a resounding 'yes', the next question is 'how' — how are such differences to be accommodated and integrated; how are such adaptations to be implemented? For example, it was found in Britain that when immigrants have difficulties accommodating themselves to British legal requirements, they are "accused of not integrating, [yet] the truth of the matter has often been that they have merely been insisting on practising their own religions faithfully" (Chryssides 1994: 63). Is it possible for all to participate *equally*? As Bouma notes, for example, challenges exist for workplaces as many religions celebrate holy days at differing times (2006). For the sake of equality, should all holy days be celebrated, or none? One may ask 'is non-accommodation of difference racist — or practical', and where does one draw the line?

> Probably the most important cause of major increases in group violence is the widespread frustration of socially deprived expectations about the goods and conditions of life men believe theirs by right…[people] feel satisfactions and frustrations with reference to what they think they ought to have, not according to some absolute standard (Graham and Gurr 1973: 18).

The expected conditions include "security, status, freedom to manage one's own affairs, and satisfying personal relations with others" (Graham and Gurr 1973: 18). This "freedom to manage one's own affairs" in the American context, includes, in principle, the perceptions that people will have the freedom to practice their own religious beliefs.

The considerations are complex and extensive. Bauman discusses the fluidity of boundaries and dissolving of 'fixity': "A most salient aspect of the vanishing act performed by old securities is the new fragility of human bonds" that facilitates "individuals' *right* to pursue their individual goals" (2000: 170, emphasis original). This leads to major questioning regarding the Australian national identity: if all-comers are equally welcome in a social environment of tolerance and/or acceptance (Bouma 1995; Australian Government 2008), what becomes of the national identity? Conversely, if a national identity becomes narrow and 'fixed' so that immigrants must become 'Australian' to be accepted, where does that leave acceptance of otherness and diversity (e.g. Parsons 1994; Kenny 1999)? When one encounters difference in an 'Other', where symbolic understandings differ, the trust that normally features in interaction with others may become risk; one cannot be sure that the 'Other' thinks and understands the same way (see Weber 1970).

Conclusion

This chapter discusses sites of conflict and tension that influence perceptions of the religious 'Other' at the macro-institutional level and the micro-interpersonal interactive level. Sites of social encounters with difference are where conflict

occurs. Conflict, which is a form of expression of relations between people, is a form of setting and maintaining identity and beliefs boundaries. Conflict serves to contest established structures, which eventuates as change, by making explicit and reconciling social issues, which occur with minority groups amongst a majority, or by eliminating — perhaps by assimilation — a conflicting party. Conflict, then, may be destructive or beneficial to a social world, but is always a catalyst for a change in perceptions, at least, and, frequently, in actions. The social conditions and structure of a given social world will influence the expression of conflict according to that allowed, or suppressed, within that social environment (Dahrendorf 1964). In this research, conflict and/or tension exists, for example, in the way religion is represented in political and mass media institutions, between faiths and their various sub-groups regarding doctrinal interpretations, between perceptions of values, and with regard to the physical expression of faiths. Conflict also occurs between believers and non-believers, the latter being those who often base their understandings of life, living, and the workings of the world on 'rational and scientific' means, rather than accepting a creator or God as necessary for human 'being'. A major underlying reason for conflict is that encountering difference alters the *status quo* where one's own beliefs and understandings cannot help but be influenced by the 'Other'. For some, encounters with difference threaten the underlying order and normality, and so their self-identity. Yet, even resistance to change, and any acts that are intended to maintain the *status quo*, contribute to the process. During that process, oneself also influences the 'Other'; boundaries are permeable, and ideas and practices 'filter through' affecting change in various degrees for all concerned in any form of interaction, however remote or virtual that might be. Change itself is inevitable, so perceptions of the 'Other' relate to perceptions of change and right and wrong ways of living, which underpin religious identity. Some perceive this risk of change as highly threatening; some appreciate what is offered by the 'Other' as opportunities for engaging with difference, for learning, appreciation, and for enlarging one's own perspective.

Chapter Three: Symbolic Interactionism and Religious Identity

This chapter discusses socialisation, religious identity, reference groups, the use of language, and other symbolic indicators, as they pertain to religious expression and to interaction in the Australian context. Symbolic interaction offers a framework through which religious interaction may be understood, at the micro-level of interpersonal interactive communication, and at the macro-level institutional interconnectedness and influences. Religious worlds are rich with symbolism, rituals, communal celebrations, and life-transition ceremonies, with which one is able to identify, communicate, and structure one's life — with a greater or lesser degree of participation. For affiliates, it is an important world, offering, from their perspectives, a right way of living, a path to God and the heavenly realm in the afterlife, and a world of understood and accepted morality that one lives and strives towards in daily life. It is a world of familiarity, security, reassurance, and safety though which one finds meaning for one's life and life-path.

As such, one's religious affiliation, and thus religious self-identity, is a frame of reference used when one interacts with others within one's given social world, and also in the wider world with 'Others' who have differing conceptual frameworks, and with whom one will achieve varying degrees of success during interactions, or in understanding those 'Others'.

> *Symbolic interactionism proposes that human beings employ symbols, carve out and act toward objects rather than merely respond to stimuli, and act on the basis of interpreted and not only fixed meanings.* These ideas are so basic to interactionist work that it is easy for both students and practitioners to forget that they answer fundamental questions about the nature of human society and human conduct" (Hewitt 2003: 307, emphasis added).

From the perspective of symbolic interaction, then, interpretation within a known and common frame of reference is the key to successful communication. One's success in communication with otherness depends on one's perceptions of those

'Others', whether as 'friend or foe', and in negotiating understanding of their symbolic systems and forms of expression, of their beliefs and frame of reference, and of their morality and values. One's definition of the situation determines one's perception.

Others, Bruno Latour observes, are most of the people with whom we share our social world: "There are more ways to be other, and vastly more others, than the most tolerant soul alive can conceive" (2004: 453). Despite similarities in one's symbolic world, others, as variously defined, occur at all levels of the social structure, beginning with one's family (for some) and continuing on to those with whom one has almost nothing in common beyond that they are human beings who live on this earth, and who have vastly different symbolic worlds.

> What is essential to communication is that the symbol should arouse in one's self what it arouses in the other individual (Mead 1934/1955: 149).

During encounters with difference, the anticipated predictability and orderliness of communication can become compromised; individuals and groups negotiate unfamiliar symbolic social-worlds, values, and practices, without a familiar frame of reference (Chittock 2009). Interaction and communication occur through use of symbolism, which includes gestures, objects and artefacts, personal presentation, and the institution of language, amongst others. Although individuals are socialised into what appears to be, essentially, a common social context, differences exist in interpretations of that world, depending on specifics in individuals' lives, such as gender, age, educational and income opportunities, political orientation, and religious affiliation. When considering religious identity, a further dimension of considerations exists — the related beliefs, practices, rituals, values, and understandings of 'right and wrong' — the moral imperatives and absolutes. Through defining and categorising, people become 'the same' and 'different'. When encountering difference, some of these considerations will be negotiated and even modified. Society, then, is a process.

Mead's work underlies both symbolic interactionism and the argument of this thesis, which is that perceptions of the religious 'Other' relate to perceptions of change, which has implications for personal religious self-identity perceptions of right living as contrasted with perceptions of wrong living. Right and wrong acting and living are further underpinned by the taken-for-granted and apparently 'natural' and 'normal' social structures of interaction and orderliness, which are disturbed during encounters with difference. Perceptions of right and wrong living, with one's own way being the right way and the ways of 'Others' being wrong ways can be understood using Mead's ideas about mind, self, and society. Mead did not write about religious experiences or belonging. However, his ideas about the cognitive processes of interpretations of beliefs can allow one to study religious self-identity and practices, both in relation to one's social actions and immediate religious affiliation, and also to the wider secular Australian social-world contexts in which these beliefs and practices occur.

The Australian context comprises religious and cultural diversity, political directives, and mass media dissemination of global and local religious-related events and issues, all of which influence perceptions of otherness. Symbolic interaction suggests a process: the (generally intentional) conveying of information through symbolic means, by individuals in interactive communication, where another or others perceive and interpret that information. Fred Kniss (1996) argues for the recognition of the central role played by symbols and ideas in sites of conflict. John Hewitt reminds us that symbols indicate intentions, things, and temporal directions:

> ... it is fundamental to an understanding of symbolic meaning ... Symbols
> ... point not only to a concrete present but also (and more important) to an
> abstract, categorical future. Symbols stand for things, but also for plans
> and patterns of activity involving complex interactions among people over
> extended periods of time. Symbols, as often as not, point to the future and
> what people will do in the future. Symbols stand for intentions as well as
> for things" (2003: 309).

People want, and intend, to live the right way according to the beliefs of their religious affiliation, but, during encounters with difference in the form of direct and indirect interactions with otherness in Australia, contestations and conflicts exist regarding which way is the right way and whose way should and will take priority.

Mead explains that the "conversation of gestures" is located in "*co-operative* activity" (1934/1955: 144, emphasis added). Mead's statement, that "... there cannot be symbols unless there are responses", suggests that symbols must be collectively understood in order for responses to be possible. Without this 'in-common' agreement, co-operative symbolic activity cannot exist. At the micro-level of interpersonal interaction, the symbols used in communication can be fully understood only in context. Clifford Geertz uses Ryle's example — that of eyelid movements in two persons, one of which is defined as a twitch and the other as a wink, but which would not necessarily be apparent in photographs of the two faces 'in the act' of moving the eyelids (2008: 2). In Mead's theory of communication through symbols, primarily language, one's communication elicits the same understanding in another as is intended by oneself; it then becomes a stimulus for that other's response, which response, in turn, becomes a stimulus for a further response, in a form of 'gestural dialogue' (Mead 1934/1955). Thus, the social world is an organized set of responses (Mead 1934/1955: 152) with a certain level of predictability. In one's social world, Mead argues, one grows to understand that in adopting the generalised perspective one can possess the attitude of the whole community (1934/1955). In this context, one "governs [one's] own conduct accordingly" (Mead 1934/1955: 156). In a consistent context of sanctioning individuals according to their achievement, they learn, practice, and utilise the accepted communication skills. Mead links the process of identity formation with the significance of symbols as a means of communication, and discussed how individuals both shape, and are shaped by, society (1934/1955). Such ideas are central to developing and understanding religious identities, perspectives, and communication.

Socialisation

Symbolic interaction theory argues that individuals are born into a symbolic world and are socialised into that world. During socialisation, people communicate, identify, and 'bond', in social groups using symbolic interaction, and absorb all the unwritten rules of social interaction. The understandings people learn through the socialisation process enable them to participate with others around them in communication, knowledge acquisition, and transactions (Perinbanyagam 1985). The community to which one relates and derives one's identity is, for Mead, the "generalized other"; it is a community with a set of commonly accepted understandings known to, and maintained by, all members, and from which one internalizes the conversation of gestures (1934/1955: 154). As such, individuals perceive and evaluate themselves through the group perspective and act and respond according to the expectations that are normal to their social (reference) group context. One's 'self' develops through 'taking the role of the (generalised) other' within one's social context (Mead 1955). With regard to religious interaction, the source of one's frame of reference is usually one's significant religious affiliation, the "social self thus arises in interaction with others, as the individual looks at himself [or herself] through others' eyes" (Merrill 1973: 134).

Mead discusses the differences and influences of the two aspects of the self, the 'I' and the 'Me'. The 'Me' is the visible worldly socialised presentation of oneself, the co-operative and conforming self that, at least superficially, appears to comply with social norms and expectations. However, as Mead explains, the 'I' is always a possible influence in any situation (1934/1955: 303). The 'I', in contrast with the 'Me', may be spontaneous, impulsive, and unpredictable — and may appear in ways that would not be normal for the 'Me'. The 'I' may present as subversive and even rebellious. When accounting for 'unexplainable' behaviours, such as religious conversion or other 'inconsistencies', it is conceivable that promptings of the 'I' may win over the socialised, conformist and 'respectable' 'Me'.

Cooley (1902), instead, described development of the self as an interactional three-stage process. One imagines what one's image projects to others, imagines what others think of that image, and then one responds with pride or shame — self-feeling — when perceiving others' responses to one's image. It was referred to as the 'Looking-Glass Self' because of the reflective nature of the process. This reflexively enacted interaction, then, may be interpreted differently according to the context. One interpretation of Cooley's theory is based on the assumption — and trust — that others think and understand in a way that is sufficiently similar to one's own experience of socialisation and that they share similar symbolic and communication meanings. One's response, then, is a form of discovery and self-surveillance whereby one learns about those acts or behaviours that are found to be acceptable and those acts that are likely to be condemned as inappropriate. A second interpretation of the theory can occur in a context of encountering difference, where individuals perceive their *own* difference, and reflexively understand their status to be 'self *as* Other'. When comparing their understandings with those around them, and imagining what those 'Others' think of them, they may imagine, instead, that those 'Others' dislike, resent, or reject them. They will be reminded that they do not belong or fit into the wider social group even if they belong in a minority and marginalised group that believes in and supports their acts. Self, then, is always in tension with differing 'Otherness'.

Identity and Reference Groups

Tamotsu Shibutani described a social world as a frame of reference that has only a partial perspective, and which influences one's identity formation as one internalises the norms: "Once one has incorporated a particular outlook from [one's] group, it becomes [one's] orientation toward the world, and [one] brings this frame of reference to bear on all new situations" (1955: 565). At times, one may be involved with two (or more) reference groups with conflicting values and norms, which may include one's religion, and a workplace context, such as in a military position or in the scientific field. A reference group is generally

understood as a collection of people with a set of shared norms and values; it is the social world with which an individual associates and identifies, and "*whose perspective the individual uses*" (Charon 2004: 37, emphasis original). Occasionally, however, one's reference group may not necessarily be other than one's membership group: one may feel influenced to *differ* from a group and regard it as something to which one does *not* aspire (Newcomb 1973: 78) by defining self-identity as 'what I am not'.

One's religious affiliation will be one's reference group, to a greater or lesser degree, which will influence one's moral outlook and behaviours, such as modesty in one's personal presentation. As such, a religious affiliate is likely to adopt the outlook of the group as "the frame of reference in the organization of his[/her] perceptual field" (Shibutani 1955: 565). Shibutani (1955) also explains that in a pluralistic context individuals internalise more than one perspective, thus giving rise to multiple perspectives upon which to draw according to the circumstances, though which may result in embarrassment with the existence of any conflicting standards among those perspectives, or in the marginalisation of such individuals. The expectations of others around us "can have a powerful effect on behaviour" (Banton 1968: 100). People refer to others around them for indications of how to act, for appropriate responses during interactions, and for perceiving themselves as compared with and/or in response to others' behaviours and perceived expectations.

Personal Presentation

Erving Goffman (1969) describes the visual presentation of the self in what is known as 'dramaturgy'. People carry and enact messages and meaning with and on their bodies (Goffman 1969). Embodied practices facilitate recognition of "the social deep within the individual" (Jodelet 1984: 212). Dramaturgy, however, is the scaffold Goffman used to construct his theory, which is removed when the principles of the theory become clear (1969: 224). His extensive descriptions

detail interactions between individuals and between groups. Examples of symbolism used to identify individuals as members of particular religious social worlds include: conformity in appearance; adherence to common values, morals, ideology, and doctrine; use of commonly understood terminology; conventionality in action, as during worship and praising; and observance of ritual and ceremony. Important in this are the impressions given and interpreted. Interactions are managed communications that involve orientations of individuals towards the parts they 'play', with accompanying 'props' and 'costumes'. When used, visual indicators are immediate and symbolic communicators of one's religious affiliation. Indicators both bind and separate; they become boundaries and divisions. The most obvious visual indicator is body adornment, which includes anything on or about one's body during normal daily life and interactions with others, such as clothing, jewellery such as prayer beads, other worn objects (e.g. the Jewish *tefillin*), head-hair styling, facial hair, 'skin art' as tattoos or use of henna or other ink, and/or carried objects. They include acts and gestures, such as abstaining from drinking alcohol, reading scriptural texts, or explicitly taking time to pray or meditate. Such publicly visible personal expressions are statements of "I am....." that type of person, whichever type one happens to be.

Gregory P. Stone explains that although Mead stated that for successful communication that indicative gestures by one must elicit the same meaning in the other, that, in fact, the symbolically mobilised meanings only "*more or less coincide*" (1970: 396, emphasis original). Visual presentation — appearance — in the form of clothing, becomes the communicative marker of self-identity, of affiliations, of activities, and of role or identity changes; clothing choice is likely to be similar to those with whom one identifies. Costume, Stone explains, is a type of "misrepresentation of the self" whereas *uniform* reminds oneself "and others of an *appropriate* identity, a *real* identity" (1970: 411; also Rubenstein 2001). This strong sense of what constitutes real identity versus costumed play identity has implications when encountering (religious) difference. If one perceives real identity to be associated with a specific type of clothing — the type

one normally wears, is familiar and with which one identifies, it may be difficult to take seriously another's 'costume type' apparel. Clothing and other personal presentation that radically differs from one's own type may be interpreted as a type of costume. It is a type with which one cannot identify or accept as real, and so may not be able to agree with or accept as 'normal'— the symbolic communication does not elicit the same response in the perceiver as it does for the wearer. As such, communication may falter as neither appears as, or *is*, normal to the 'Other'. Even when people introduce themselves during direct communication, the information may be insufficient for establishing trusting interaction (Simmel 1908/1950). 'Not knowing' can create distance between religiously-diverse affiliates where there is insufficient understanding of each 'Other's' beliefs or forms of communication, and where people are uncertain how 'Others' will respond in interaction:

> The immediate psychological result of being in a new situation is lack of security. Ignorance of the potentialities inherent in the situation, of the means to reach a goal, and of the probable outcomes of an intended action leads to insecurity (Herman and Schield 1961: 165, cited in Smith and Bond 1993: 164).

Rightly or wrongly, people interpret and assume about 'Others' and "may believe that the stranger's group follows a different life-style and is aggressively disposed towards their own group" (Smith and Bond 1993: 164). Avoidance of the 'Other' may be the preferred strategy, especially when encountering fundamentalists, whose strong convictions and religious practices differ from the wider social norms as they adhere strictly to religious doctrine and laws — as *they* interpret and understand them to be. In the religious context of moral imperatives, absolutes, and right and wrong living, personal visual presentation can carry messages that elicit contestation rather than understanding. This is especially true when considering women's clothing, and the choice to reveal or disguise/hide body shape. Both Garfinkel (1967 in Rogers 1992) and Goffman (1968) referred to the contrast between 'normals' and those who differ or deviate.

Language

Language, both written and spoken, is the most pervasive symbolic institution that facilitates communication within a social world (Mead 1934/1955; Hayakawa 1964; Berger 1973; Perinbanyagam 1985). The religious world, also, is one of symbolism, which includes language, icons, gestures, rituals, acts, and personal presentation. Humans use symbols for communication and expression (Mead 1934/1955; Hayakawa 1964; Goffman 1969; Berger 1973; White 1973; Perinbanyagam 1985; Gergen 1991; Charon 2004). Intentionally used symbolism in interpersonal communicative acts conveys, abstract thoughts, messages, meanings, and affiliations. If one speaks wrongly, sanctions quickly follow to correct the offender (Berger 1973; Berger and Berger 1976). Language becomes the context for highlighting the occurrence of misunderstandings during communication attempts between people from different social worlds. In locations of cultural diversity, language use and understanding become particularly important to one's individual and social identity, and one's perceptions of 'Others'.

Gergen cites Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922) as stating, "the limits of language ... means the limits of my world" (1991: 5). In contexts of diverse ethnicity and religiosity, negotiation of language differences and ensuing misunderstandings result in the striving for plausibility and legitimacy as those involved prioritise their own understanding and mode of expression. When one religious group talks of God, and another talks of Allah, are they both speaking of the same Deity? How can surety exist without inter-communication by which to organise definitions? Language is an ordering structure on any social interaction and experience — it is *how* we order what we know: "language is ... a ready-made and collectively recognised universe of discourse within which individuals may understand each other and themselves" (Berger 1973: 22). Knowing the language of one's neighbours — particularly that of any 'significant others' — enables one to maintain plausibility in one's subjective world (Berger 1973). However, the introduction of a variant symbolic system with an 'alien' language disrupts

communication ability, and so disrupts one's social world and sense of order (Berger 1973).

Language use creates boundaries — of either connections or separations, whereby people are accepted or rejected. Use of an 'out of context' language is the most obvious example of the existence of a boundary. Hayakawa (1964) discusses the linguistic mechanism of a statements-and-agreements interaction that facilitates connectedness; for example the exchange 'nice day'/'yeah', 'great for a walk'/'yeah', 'hope it stays this way'/'yeah' may begin the way for further intimacy, such as 'do you walk often?', and so on. If, instead, disagreement occurs at some point in the initial statement-response interaction, it may indicate that further interaction is unwelcome — or impossible. Agreement between people, Hayakawa demonstrates with his examples, relaxes any initial tension and so provides a basis from which to move into further familiarity (1964: 73). Yet, this also suggests the inverse — that disagreement may result in separation or division. Although chit-chat about the weather, or other similarly-perceived topics, may seem to be innocuous, room for error exists, especially if one speaks to another who hates the sunshine and longs for the familiarity of rain, or if the initiator loves the rain and begins the above interaction.... How may one agree with what one experiences as the disagreeable? For those whose norms differ from those around her or him, and when all the local social world norms and values are perceived as 'wrong', it is difficult to agree: Julia Kristeva states, "the words, the smiles, the manias, the judgements, the tastes of the natives are excessive, faltering, or simply unjust and false" (1991: 17). Vocal tone and inflection, as well as language, alert people to Otherness: 'And where are you from?' is often an immediate question upon hearing another's accent and language use.

Language use and physical acts quickly demonstrate one's status as an insider or outsider. Accent, pronunciation, words used in a given context, knowledge of jargon, and similar, as well as knowing or not knowing the language itself, mark the boundaries of who knows and/or belongs, and who is a stranger, outsider, or

'Other'. *That* people talk, and *how* they talk, influences social cohesion (Hayakawa 1964; Heilman 1998). In the synagogue where Samuel Heilman (1998) studied the interactions between people, holy books for men were written in Hebrew, whereas the books for women included the information written in English because most women are unable to read Hebrew — they are excluded from religious studies. Although the use of the English language would appear to include women, that they are unable to access and learn Hebrew as males do simultaneously demonstrates exclusion; women in this instance also become a type of 'other'. Religious acts and rituals, such as those in a worship context, similarly alert one to those who are insiders and those who are newcomers (learners), strangers, visitors, or outsiders. Those who do not know either do not fully participate or stumble in their participation in their attempts to imitate 'insiders'. Collective participation in known physical symbolic gestures towards one's God contributes to maintaining insider cohesion (Heilman 1998; Warner 1997; cf. McPhail 1997, 2006).

However, such communication and bonding only occur as long as the integrity of the symbolic means remains intact. People are perceived as 'Other' because of, for example, differing language, culture, religion, religious interpretations within a religion, ethnicity, values, and/or practices. In such cases, symbolic interaction fails to some degree because of differences in understandings. Even some of those closest to oneself, one's family, may *become* other because of choices they, or oneself, have made — someone has chosen to 'think differently' and so reject compliance and conformity with previously accepted norms. Religious conversion is one example that results in people 'thinking differently', and so, acting differently, thus, becoming '*Other*'. The distinction is important. As such, the religious other *is* 'Other', and comprises religious affiliates whose beliefs, practices, understandings, symbolic systems, absolutes, and imperatives, differ from each 'Other'.

Conclusion

A fundamental and foundational part of any successful society lies in the success of communication. Where the symbol arouses or elicits essentially the same meaning for both user and receiver, as normally occurs when socialisation is sufficiently similar, communication can succeed and proceed. However, without common-use perspectives, understandings, and meanings, communication may become compromised or even fail. Symbolic interaction as a framework for this thesis offers an understanding of the way people from differing symbolic worlds encounter each 'Other'. It also suggests reasons for either successful or compromised communication attempts between people whose meaning systems differ and *mis*understandings occur. Issues of familiarity versus the strange — in visual indicators, language, and values symbolism — can exist as barriers to acceptance of difference, though may also attract interest. Familiarity arises from the socialisation process, where people learn the difference between right and wrong beliefs, values, ways of living, and religious practices. Religious imperatives and absolutes may clash with other wider social world structures or priorities. Some affiliates must negotiate these issues in daily life; those who are either not religious or are differently religious must also negotiate the preferences and expectations of those for whom these religious directives are believed to determine their otherworld salvation. That 'negotiation', at times, takes the form of ignoring or resisting acts that are considered to be private religious practices in public areas of life.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods

Foundational to any research endeavour are three stages or types of activities: the gathering or collection of materials, information, or data; the management, critical analysis, and interpretation of those materials; and the writing about and presentation or report of one's 'discoveries' (Lofland 1971). In an interpretive inquiry, 'discoveries' are not to suggest the finding of something that has never previously been known, but, instead, the researcher comes to understand that which exists in the everyday lived experiences of participants in their social world(s) through an enlarged or widened perspective. *How* these activities *should* proceed and be achieved is still debated. Émile Durkeim led the way in sociological research by emphasising a positivist science approach. In *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1938/1964), for example, Durkheim speaks the scientific language of 'facts', 'cause', 'objective', 'calculation', 'verification', 'error', and 'laws'; his first rule for the observation of social facts is "*Consider social facts as things*" (1938/1964: 14, emphasis original). Max Weber, in contrast, emphasised necessary humanness and meaning in his interpretive approach, whereby "we understand in terms of *motive* the meaning an actor attaches to [an act] … we understand what makes [one] do this at precisely this moment and in these circumstances" (1968: 8).

Mead, also, emphasised the empathetic approach whereby the researcher attempts to achieve intimate understanding of another's understanding:

> In the field of any social science the objective data are those experiences of the individuals in which they take the attitude of the community, that is, in which they enter into the perspectives of the other members of the community (Mead 1964: 346).

Denzin explains one should "seek out subjects who have experienced the types of experiences the researcher seeks to understand … Life experiences give greater substance and depth to the problem the researcher wants to study" (1989a: 49). The research itself is something that interests and is guided or structured by the

researcher — the topic chosen, the framing of research questions, the way interviews are guided, the themes noticed during analysis, and the choices regarding what to include and omit during writing — all stages reflect the researcher's interests (Lofland 1971; Denzin 1989b; Charmaz 2002). Whilst interviewing, I realised I was confronting respondents with questions they had not explicitly thought about prior to their interviews.

One's perspective or epistemological orientation, the methodological justification, and the methods or tools used, inform each other and so determine both the type of research one does and the outcome or findings of one's project (Carter and Little 2007). To achieve relevance, one must know what one wishes to know — one must define and be explicit regarding concepts (Berg 2004; Bouma 1996; Madge 1953/1978). Yet, if one is too constrained, one's expectations risk restricting one's findings according to those expectations, rather than allowing one's data to inform findings (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2002). J. Milton Yinger advises concerning two important points: firstly, "Rather than asking *if* a person is religious, we ask *how* he is religious" (1969: 90); and "Let us ask our respondents to 'speak their religion' to us, uninstructed by our own preconceptions" (1969: 91). Yinger's basis for the first point is that religion and religious practice is not necessarily predictable or obvious: "We may discover that there are many hidden religions around us which haven't been apparent because we expected all religions to look like the most familiar ones" (1969: 90). As such, my question at all times was 'What are participants actually *telling* me about the intersection of religious identity and perceptions of differing religious Others?' Qualitative research is usually the preferred approach for sociologists concerned with understanding meanings, or as Lofland puts it, to enquire about "what kinds of things *are* happening, rather that to determine the frequency of predetermined kinds of things the researcher already believes can happen" (1971: 76, emphasis added).

John Creswell discusses the many necessary considerations related to qualitative studies, and, accordingly, offers a summary and definition of qualitative research:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (1998: 15).

Additionally, Lawrence Neuman explains, the interpretive approach focuses on the 'common sense' understandings in everyday life that is the stock of knowledge through which people make decisions and "organize and explain events in the world" (1991: 52). This research, then, adopts the interpretive and common sense approach in order to explore that which participants' perceive as meaningful about their religious identities and, secondly, participants' interpretations and definitions — perceptions — of their lived experiences of encounters with religious Others, as conveyed during formal interviews and informal conversations.

Obtaining Access to Eight Religious Groups

This project followed the ethics procedure of submitting all documents to be used in communication with interview respondents, clergy, and for general notices on notice boards to the ethics committee for approval. All ethics requirements were adhered to throughout the research; there were no deviations from the methods that were stated in the ethics application. Documents used included an information sheet and consent form for each participant interviewed; a letter of introduction for congregational leaders; and a notice-board flyer. Also submitted was a summary of potential interview questions with the understanding that interviews would be semi-structured or unstructured and would take the direction relevant to each participant according to their answers and the need to 'probe' according to relevance to the topic. These included asking about what is important to the respondent about his or her religion; about perceptions of others of differing religions; about perceptions of news representation of religious events and issues, of inter-faith interactions, of behaviour demonstrating extreme convictions about religious beliefs and about spiritual mystical-type experiences. Questions were

general, open-ended, and designed to encourage respondents to talk freely with only occasional probing.

After satisfactorily completing ethics formalities (H9020), entering the field occurred through two methods. I sent a formal letter of introduction to relevant priests, reverends, rabbis, imams, or other leaders of gatherings with the request to research their gathering. In two cases, an affiliate also introduced me into the worship context (as a type of 'gatekeeper') and offered information to facilitate my initial learning about 'how to act'. Further invitations, by other gathering leaders, for me to include them in the research suggested the potential for a much larger project. Initially, attending these gatherings was a foray into mostly semi-familiar or unfamiliar worlds. Upon receiving consent to participate in gatherings, I spoke with relevant affiliates to query and ensure about any specific requirements in my presentation regarding group norms and practices. With consent, I placed flyers about my research on gatherings' notice boards. I also carried information sheets to give to interested affiliates. Detailed descriptions of observations were recorded frequently, during and/or immediately following observations (Travers 2001), and so became data for analysis. I attended and participated as a known researcher and observed the semi-public settings of eight religious worship meetings: two Jewish, four Christian, and two Muslim gatherings, where diversity in worshipping norms became explicit.

Insider-Outsider Concerns

The insider/outsider status is, potentially, a difficult area to negotiate. Although I hoped to understand affiliates' perceptions of 'the Other' in each religion, I do not affiliate with any religion; I had no real understanding of the 'inside workings' of any of the groups with which I participated. This gave me a *somewhat neutral*, though *not* 'objective', stance, as one is always positioned and brings presuppositions to one's approach (Travers 2001). The 'somewhat neutral' stance refers to my lack of vested interests towards or in defence of any single religion or religious sub-group, my lack of any conversion intentions towards people I meet,

and my appreciation for a wide variety of worship styles and belief systems — for what I perceive to be 'the essence' of religious intention and conviction. Some insiders, instead, may feel a stronger need or preference to defend and even promote the beliefs of their specific religious affiliation against the differing ways of Others — and with very good reason if they believe their 'otherworldliness' salvation depends on those beliefs. I do, however, have my own beliefs and values, which positions me accordingly.

To contextualise my personal status further and clarify my 'neutral' claim: I have not belonged to/with any religious group for some 35 years. As a child, I followed the inclinations of my parents through three Christian religious affiliations. After leaving home in my late teens, I attended a range of groups — amongst them, several Christian denominations — Catholic, Assembly of God, Quakers and others, and also the 'Moonies', Hare Krisnas, Buddhists, Baha'is, Spiritualists, Theosophists and many others, and participated in meditation groups and some New Age-type activities. I explored many different possibilities, but never settled into any of them. They all worship 'God'.... This project offered my first opportunity to engage directly with Jews and Muslims. I still have no religious affiliation — I am not a member and do not 'belong' anywhere. My personal beliefs and past experiences contribute to rapport with believers, and my 'neutral' claim only suggests an appreciation of believers of all kinds — including those who are not religious.

Regarding practices, social structures, and hierarchy, insiders are familiar with group norms, customs, rituals, and the unspoken rules of conduct. As an insider, one knows where and when to find people with whom to talk; who to approach for various reasons; how to approach them; how to create rapport using in-group norms and interests; how to symbolically present oneself in context — using, for example, appropriate clothing, actions, and language. In his study of Goths as a member-insider, Paul Hodkinson understood the "distinct, if complex set of rules" (2002: 1-2). Accessing information was relatively easy without the socialising

process an outsider would need to undergo; he already understood the "dominant discourses, values and assumptions" (Hodkinson 2002: 5). As a result, details in my personal presentation become a major preoccupation, both in how to clothe my body and how I was to act in each context. The 'getting-to-know' process was an interesting transition period, with which I would have become absorbed differently if I had been interested in joining any of the groups. As Goffman stated about participant observation:

> It's one of getting data, it seems to me, by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle or response to their social situation ... (1989: 125).

However, understanding comes from involvement. R. Stephen Warner (1997) describes how increased understanding arises during participation — of activities such as the salat, singing, and sharing food, which foster inclusion and builds bridges rather than barriers. To avoid confrontation or other tensions, I avoided involving myself with discussions regarding doctrine, convictions of any religious 'rightness', or truth debates; such discussions are not connected with my purpose. The time-span for fieldwork observations for this project lasted approximately nine months, during which interviews with affiliates began, until the completion of thirty-six interviews.

Robert K. Merton (1972) outlines the dissension among sociologists regarding the value of the insider versus the outsider status in sociological research. In its extreme form, the insider theory would state that nobody could understand anyone outside of his or her own, either ascribed or achieved, 'social status' (Merton 1972). However, people are never *only* insiders or outsiders but simultaneously "confront one another as Insiders and Outsiders" — whether that status is one of, for example, gender, age, profession, nationality, or religious membership — though one may experience differing levels of loyalty to each status (Merton 1972: 22). However, individuals are comprised of *multiple* statuses defined by Merton

as social sets, and social sets overlap as "aggregates of individuals share some statuses and not others" (Merton 1972: 22). One may simultaneously be, for example, a woman, a Buddhist, a European-Negro, and a doctor. These social statuses overlap where others have similar understandings and experiences depending on which status they share. To be 'total' insiders, all would have to share *all* of the same status sets, which, if taken to the extreme, including all aspects of the individual, such as race, gender, occupation, residence, date (and time) of birth, nationality and religion, would leave only one person as a member in each exclusive 'group'. In the extreme interpretation of insider theory, each individual would be the only insider person who could understand the 'members' of his or her own 'group' — his or her own self!

Castells links fundamentalists with what he refers to as a 'resistance identity' and with expressions of — using a wonderfully imaginative but relevant phrase — "*the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded*", which refers to those who build a "defensive identity in the terms of dominant institutions/ideologies, reversing the value judgement while reinforcing the boundary" (1997: 9). A similar reversing of value judgements became part of my experience — of *my* perception — during participant observations as I became the 'Other' in several religious contexts, particularly in one with a population comprising mostly 'colour other than white' (Sin 2007; Perry 2007). As such, I approached fieldwork keeping the following intentions in mind:

> 'I will approach your beliefs with respect and with the aim of understanding; knowing and accepting that my perspective is partial, is influenced by my experiences and presuppositions, and which may change through our association. I hope to share something of your perspective to reach some sort of understanding, and, as I may not understand fully, I will avoid making judgements about those issues of which I know too little. I will attempt, at all times, to be insightful and fair in my interpretations and understandings of your meaning-making, and the importance of your beliefs in your lives.'

Data Collection

The data for this interpretive and qualitative project derived from three sources: participant observations in eight worship gatherings; interviews of religious affiliates; and analysis of mass media sources, including news items of religious events and issues and online 'blogs' or discussion forums. The strength of this multi-strand approach — or triangulation — facilitated the acquisition of variable and complimentary data from differing perspectives and so provided a deeper understanding of the research considerations, as well as tests for reliability and validity. My exploring of worship gatherings, two Jewish, four Christian, and two Islamic, became my 'three working Sabbaths' as I attended, as a known researcher, Jewish and Islamic worship gatherings on Fridays, Jewish worship on Saturdays, and Christian worship on Sundays. Upon invitation, I attended further gatherings and celebrations beyond the main worship days, amongst them the Catholic 'Stations of the Cross' and a 'youth walk', an interfaith 'Hiroshima commemoration', meetings to promote interfaith peace and interfaith interactions, general socialising dinners, the Jewish Seder, Ramadan meals, and an Islamic wedding.

Disclosure of participants' personal identifying information and the worship gatherings with which they are affiliated is restricted in this research for security and ethical reasons. Some groups are quite small and at least four (across the three religions) of the eight I attended have needed, at times, to implement security measures because of wider public threat. This also suggests the possibility and risk of personal identification of affiliates. As such, few indications are given that refer to the different groups, or individual affiliations, gender, or any other potentially identifying information.

Participant Observations

The first step in ethnographic fieldwork is observations in natural settings (Crane and Angrosino 1974; Fetterman 1998; Goffman 1989; Travers 2001). It was important for the research, and for me as a researcher, that I attend, participate in,

and observe, each worship gathering in order to familiarise myself with the various ways people worship and interact within their reference group worship-gathering affiliation — to understand their practices more fully and with what they identify. I was able to learn about affiliates' beliefs and the widely different expressions of those beliefs. Goffman states, "... you are close to them while they are responding to what life does to them" (1989: 125). Each religious context is a paradigm that affiliates may use when considering how to act in the wider social world (Charon 2004; Shibutani 1955). Silverman (2004) explains participant observations as the scrutinising of observable lived experience with the aim of understanding any underlying social order. As Kellehear details, observations included watching and listening in the areas of physical actions and interactions, verbal communication, patterns of behaviour and interaction — such as who interacts with who and how, personal presentation of actors, and the environment or setting (1993: 116). Attending gatherings across the three religions were included to obtain diversity of identities, contexts, and so, perceptions. Gatherings are categorised according to approximate numbers of affiliates who normally attend worship participation (or 'services') with four being small (less than 100), two being medium (around 100), and two being large (more than 100).

Although an outsider in every group with which I participated (cf. Merton1972; Hodkinson 2002), I appreciated the generous welcome extended to me in each context. Attending gatherings facilitated informal conversations and 'getting to know you' time, where affiliates could question me as a person as well as a researcher, and build trust and rapport. I learnt about similarities and differences between the religions and between the religious sub-groups or 'denominations' within each religion. I was able to observe the social processes of rituals, of ways that contribute to the achievement of group social cohesion, and of ways that separate and divide individuals and groups. Additionally, participation in worship contexts offered the opportunity to source interview respondents. This occurred as I answered questions about my reason for being in each gathering and made it explicit that I hoped to interview people. Some immediately expressed interest in

participating; some thought about if for a while before contacting me via telephone or e-mail, or by approaching me at the next gathering. Some participants contacted me after reading the notice board flyers. Even when people expressed immediate interest, I postponed setting an interview time to allow for a 'cooling off' period to be certain that it was their choice to participate and not any direct inducement on my part for their involvement. In this context people responded to me as a person, which resulted in non-probability sampling; a different researcher would have attracted different respondents and obtained results relevant to those individuals and the researcher and the development of topics during the interview process. People engage differently according to the interests that are emphasised during communication.

One needs sensitivity when entering and engaging in another's sacredness. I negotiated decisions regarding levels of participation in each worship-gathering setting, which included whether to engage in worship practices that are not my own, and to what extent participation or non-participation may be disrespectful or detrimental to the research. Any decision not to participate led to questions regarding whether the research was compromised by that non-participation and so potential lack of deeper understanding. Yet, to participate in something in which one does not believe is potentially to disrespect another's sacredness. Such an interpretation would also depend on the understandings and perceptions, by affiliates, of the level of sacredness accorded to any particular practice — something a 'non-attached' researcher cannot know, and which differed with each participating congregant. As such, I participated most of the time, and observed when participation seemed inappropriate.

Concerns about participant observations include that the researcher may be perceived to be intrusive; researchers may not have developed the necessary observation skills, or be able to commit to the needed consistency for prolonged observations (Creswell 2003). In the case of an Islamic gathering, I was told towards the end of my participation with them that some had initially wondered if

I was from ASIO coming to check on them. Such is the social mood in Australia that some Muslims are experiencing an acute sense of self *as* 'Other'. One ongoing challenge was my isolation because I do not belong to any group and lived remotely from 'the field'; I did not always receive news of upcoming events and, at times found out only after the occurrence. However, with the volume of data already generated, 'attending more' may not necessarily have offered further insights.

Ethnographic descriptions, when done well, capture events 'on-the-spot' without having to rely on the memory recall of others. Rich and detailed descriptions provides data open to a range of potential analysis options, as well as interesting insights into social 'microcosms' demonstrating, for example, symbolic interaction in process. An excellent example of this is *Synagogue Life* by Samuel C. Heilman (1988). This long-term and systematic work revealed a 'social microcosm' of symbolic interaction in process, disclosing all the relevant intricacies of social involvement and interaction associated with an American synagogue. He does so from the perspective of a disciplined participant insider who demonstrates the questioning attitude typical of an outsider and combines it with his insider's knowledge. Behaviours and attitudes are explicitly disclosed, such as speech mannerisms, the symbolic 'language' of clothing, shared and taken-for-granted understandings, rituals and conventions, terminology understandings, hierarchical demonstrations and recognitions, and group divisions based on differing interpretations and levels of practice, so demonstrating a social organisation and hierarchy that is understood by participants to be normal and 'natural'. This social order is constructed, maintained, modified and legitimised through the acceptance and contribution of actors in their everyday involvement with each other, particularly in their association with 'shul' — that is, synagogue life. The context of religious identity is important.

From my own participation observations, I learnt about multiple gatherings and wrote copious notes. The discipline of observing and keeping records of religious-

affiliation communities and worship practices contributes to understanding religious identity as located in context. However, affiliates' perceptions of the 'Other' are not observable but must be told and explained. As Charon notes, "We can see, recognise, and understand what is taking place *within* us", whether anger, sadness, jealousy, love, or fear (2004: 79, emphasis added). People know how they feel, but need to *tell* it. Reflexive explanation of thoughts, opinions, and feelings; recollections of experiences; interpretations, definitions, and the resulting descriptions of perceptions, became the source of information needed for the findings for this project. Without conversational communicative interaction, it would not be possible to observe the identity characteristics of plurality and fundamentality, to understand the relativity of 'extreme' to personal interpretation and wider context, and to explore individuals' perceptions of differing religious 'Others'.

Interviewing

In order to elicit responses about religious identity and perceptions of the religious Other, thirty-six interviews became the major data source chosen for this thesis. As stated above, participant observations were important for understanding the context of affiliates' religious self-identity and for learning about the many different worship practices that are expressions of (some) similar beliefs. Interviews were qualitative; in-depth; semi-structured; one-to-one; audio-recorded with respondents' consent and transcribed; and based on 'open' and open-ended questions. All respondents received information sheets, which outlined the aims of the research and provided contact names and telephone numbers of researcher, supervisor, and ethics committee contact, prior to their interviews and for them to keep for further reference. Such interviews are akin to guided or directed, but relaxed and informal conversations (Lofland 1971; Denzin 1970, 1989b; Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Warren 2002; Charmaz 2002, 2006). Questions for checking consistency of responses occurred at intervals through the interview (Hay 1982). Interview formats need to address the research intentions:

If the criterion of ascertaining respondent meanings and definitions is considered, the less structured interviews are more suitable. If, however, it is desired to obtain the same set of information from all persons, then the schedule standardized form is necessary (Denzin1970: 127).

Denzin describes three types of interview forms, each of which "answers particular types of problems" for different research settings and needs: the highly structured "schedule standardized interview"; the semi-structured "nonschedule standardized interview"; and the minimally structured "nonstandardized interview" (1970: 126-127). For some participants, responses to initial questions were sufficient to "cover all the relevant issues as well as raise topics not included on the list" (Denzin 1970: 126). The first question for all respondents was "What is important to you about your religion?" This encouraged and even gave permission for them to talk about themselves, and about how they felt concerning religious issues that are of importance to them personally.

Interviewing, as a data-collection method, enables multiple and varied perspectives according to the number of interviews conducted. They also enable more temporal leeway with collection of data relating to past events that the researcher may not have attended, and about situations from previous years in respondents' lives — as Carol Warren states, the "temporal range is biographical, extending into the past and the future" (2002: 85). People convey and make sense of their experiences, understandings, and meanings through narratives (Yamane 2000); they do so in linguistic conversational interactions and collaborations (Warren 2002; Ellis and Berger 2003).

In essence, we argue that participant observation and interviewing are themselves distinctive forms of social action, generating distinctive kinds of accounts and giving rise to particular versions of social analysis. Each yields particular sorts of representation (Atkinson and Coffey 2003).

Additionally, meanings are co-constructed and negotiated, as demonstrated in examples from personal cross-cultural communication (Ryen 2002). Interviews

are exploratory dialogue — not interrogations (Charmaz 2002; Ellis and Berger 2003).

"Collaborative accomplishment", Anne Ryen explains, is negotiated agreement regarding interaction that *becomes* an appropriately acceptable standard of formality and/or intimacy to both parties during their interpersonal communication (2002: 345-348). In the interview context that this research requires, that similar to cross-cultural interviewing, shared meaning-making becomes a "locally collaborative accomplishment" (Ryen 2002: 345) as the interviewer and the respondent adjust to and accommodate each other and meaning unfolds through sensitivity to each others' differing perspectives. As a researcher, one's knowledge is what one knows according to training, experience, fields of interest, epistemological traditions, and personal prejudices and biases (Fetterman 1998); "it is important to recognize that every researcher brings some sort of epistemological assumptions into the research process" (Travers 2001: 9). The range and variety of possibilities in obtaining perspectives and perceptions make interviewing a valuable tool for this type of research project.

Respondents received encouragement to talk — and to take as much time as needed. Generally, one-to-two hours was sufficient talking time. Two interviews, specifically, were much longer, around four hours. Once the topic drew their attention, respondents were enthusiastic and wanted to contribute; they *wanted* to talk and tell their stories and opinions, and wanted to contribute to something they perceived as being worthwhile. Longer interviews, which meant people had time to relax into the interaction, gave more talking time for in-depth questioning and responding, thus opening the way to richer, more detailed, data (Hay 1982).

> Where languages are too diverse, where common values are too few…there the interview based on a standardized questionnaire calling for a few standardized answers may not be applicable (Benny and Hughes 1956, cited in Denzin 1970: 123).

The research topic was confronting in that most respondents had not previously or explicitly considered their perceptions of differing religious 'Others'. The interview process challenged them to think — deeply and sincerely — about themselves, about that which is important to them about their religion, and about 'Others' — about 'what they think' of those 'Others'.

> We need, therefore, to appreciate that interviews are occasions in which are enacted particular kinds of narratives and in which 'informants' construct themselves and others as particular examples of moral agents (Atkinson and Coffey 2003: 116).

The interview conversations helped to clarify issues of importance that influenced their personal perceptions of religious 'Others'. As they responded, often with laughter, they confronted their own (sometimes previously unasked) questions, which facilitated them learning about themselves. For respondents it was a personal journey; as a researcher, I felt privileged as I learnt from and with them.

Sampling Procedures

Initial recruitment of interview respondents was "nonprobability" and "purposive" (Babbie 1992: 292; 2002: 178). Conversations with affiliates during worship gathering observations created interest and connections that yielded willing participants. 'Snowballing' occurred when initial contacts connected me with other potentially-interested affiliates (Babbie 1992: 292; 2002: 179). Additionally, some participants contacted me voluntarily after reading about the research on notice-board flyers where contact details were included. This meant they could convey their interest in participating in an alternative manner — that is, not necessarily face-to-face in the worship setting with others listening. This added another layer of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Respondents met the requirements of affiliation and personal identification with (at least) one of the three religions included in this study. Maximisation of variation in the research population took the form of obtaining responses from affiliates across the observed eight gatherings; by including equal numbers of males and females, and by attempting to obtain a wide range of ages. As such, interviews comprised eighteen

female and eighteen male respondents. I was unable to sample for age, so lacked an even 'age spread' across the interview population: there were four in the 'under 30 yrs' category; six aged 30 to 45; thirteen aged 46-60; ten aged 61-75; and three over the age of 76 yrs. I did not sample for work status, or interview people who could not easily speak English, but I did interview people for whom English is an additional language.

Regarding their major or primary affiliation, there were ten Jews (5F/5M), sixteen Christians (9F/7M), and ten Muslims (4F/6M). However, to categorise them this way exclusively is misleading. Of those interviewed, three categories of pluralist identity emerged (which are numbered 1, 2, and 3, in the table below): (1) Seven identify *as* having plural affiliation in beliefs, attendance, and/or practice with more than one religion. (2) Nine identify *as* plural in affiliation and practice *within* their religion, but with differing denominations/sub-groups. (3) Another three identify *with* more than one religion, where one religion serves as a core identity, but where affiliates identify 'empathetically' or 'in spirit' *with* a different religion, with which they also interact, practice, and appreciate the beliefs: the extra affiliation serves as an *extra dimension* of identification rather than as a core identity. Two further participants, who chose informal conversations rather than formal interviews, also have plural affiliations and add to categories (1) and (2) with one in each category. The distinction here between '*as*' and '*with*' is important. Those who identify *as* plural do so as if they belong in each. Those who identify *with* belong in one but have appreciation for, and/or a leaning or even a yearning towards the 'Other'. Eighteen respondents spoke of experiences with spiritual-mystical encounters (SEs in the table below); one dismisses them as irrelevant and not 'of God'. Nineteen respondents are fundamentalist in their approach to religious practice, which includes some affiliates who are plural in their religious identities. Of the twenty-one converts, some of those had converted more than once — within, and/or between religions. Some affiliates, having been initially socialised into an affiliation, but ceased contact or practice for a period, had returned or 'reverted' to their affiliation for various reasons.

Categorisations of religious identity expressions are based on two sources. The first source is the importance to the respondent of living their religious beliefs in a daily social context, as described by respondents during the interview process. A definition, then, for 'fundamentality' includes both belief and practice; it is the combination of strong convictions about *one's own ways*, and attention to religious beliefs as practical application in daily living and interactions. Believing, intending, and *devotional application* of religious beliefs, at every opportunity in daily life and interactions, in addition to self-identity salience, is categorised as 'extreme fundamentality'. The difference is the *emphasis*, as described by respondents, of their personal application in religious expression. Some pluralists, then, are also fundamentalists, as are the majority of those who experience spiritual-mystical encounters, because of their commitment to live rightly — to practice (as acts and interactions) their beliefs in daily life in the form, for example, of deliberate kindness, generosity, and consideration.

Non-fundamental affiliates cannot necessarily be categorised as 'nominal', because they believe in otherworldliness, they attend worship, and religion is salient to their identity. They *intend* and believe that one *should* 'live the right way', but daily living is without the concerted attention and application of fundamentalists. Religious atheists are those who 'belong without believing' (Davie 1993: 88). Three respondents, specifically, self-identify as atheists, though each have a religious identity and affiliation. One of these, who claimed not to believe in God, but who, throughout the interview repeatedly referred to communications with God, could be better described as agnostic. One 'wondered' about his self-identity and oscillated between the ideas of atheism and agnosticism; one is quite certain that he is atheist and envies those who believe.

Interview Respondents' Information

Interview	Identity (Affiliation)	Status	Plurality Category	SEs	Born/Convert	1-10	Gender M/F	Age Group
1	Jew	Agnostic (Self-rated as a 'Cultural Jew' and Atheist)			Born	n/a	F	(e)
2	Christian/Jew	Multi-faith Pluralist	(1)	Yes	Born/Convert	8-10	F	(c)
3	Christian, Jew, Buddhist, New Age Spirituality	Multi-faith Pluralist	(1)	Yes	Born/Convert	10	M	(d)
4	Muslim	Extreme Fundamentalist			Born	7	M	(c)
5	Christian				Born	5	M	(d)
6	Jew	Extreme Fundamentalist		Yes	Born	10	F	(c)
7	Muslim	Islamic Pluralist	(2)		Convert	Practice 4-5; Belief 10	F	(b)
8	Jew	Fundamentalist			Convert	7	M	(d)
9	Muslim	Fundamentalist			Convert	Practice 5; Belief 10	M	(c)
10	Muslim	Fundamentalist			Born	9-10	F	(c)
11	Muslim				Convert	7	M	(d)
12	Jew	Self-rated Atheist			Born	n/a	M	(e)
13	Christian	Self-rated Atheist (Agnostic)			Convert	6	M	(c)
14	Jew				Convert	9	M	(e)
15	Muslim	Extreme Fundamentalist			Born	10	M	(b)
16	Jew		(3)	Yes	Convert		F	(b)
17	Jew	Extreme Fundamentalist			Convert	8-9	F	(a)
18	Christian	Fundamentalist, Christian Pluralist	(2)	Yes	Born/Convert	"8, 9, 10"	F	(c)
19	Muslim	Extreme Fundamentalist			Born	6½	F	(a)
20	Muslim	Extreme Fundamentalist	(2)	Yes	Convert	10; 8-9	M	(b)
21	Muslim	Extreme Fundamentalist		Yes	Convert		F	(c)

22	Christian	Fundamentalist			Born		M	(d)
23	Jew	Fundamentalist, Jewish Pluralist	(2)	Yes	Convert	"fairly much in the middle"	M	(d)
24	Jew	Fundamentalist – Pluralist	(3)	Yes	Convert	8+	F	(c)
25	Christian-Muslim-Buddhist	Multi-faith Pluralist	(1)		Born/Convert	8-9	F	(a)
26	Christian	Christian Pluralist	(2)	Yes	Born	Unable to ask	F	(d)
27	Muslim	Extreme Fundamentalist	(2)	Yes	Convert		M	(b)
28	Jew-Christian, etc.	Fundamentalist Multi-faith Pluralist	(1)	Yes	Born/Convert		M	(b)
29	Christian-Buddhist	Pluralist	(1)	Yes	Born/Convert	10	F	(c)
30	Christian-Jew-Buddhist-Baha'i	Multi-faith Pluralist	(1)	Yes	Born/Convert	8	F	(c)
31	Christian	Extreme Fundamentalist	(2)	Yes	Convert	Unable to ask	M	(c)
32	Christian	Extreme Fundamentalist			Born	8-9	M	(c)
33	Christian-Buddhist	Multi-faith Pluralist	(1)	Yes	Convert	8	M	(a)
34	Christian	Extreme Fundamentalist, Christian Pluralist	(2)		Born	10	F	(d)
35	Christian		(3)	Yes	Born	8-9	F	(d)
36	Christian	Christian Pluralist Fundamentalist	(2)	Yes	Convert	8+	F	(d)

Interviews comprised 18 female and 18 male respondents; 10 are Jews (5F/5M), 16 are Christians (9F/7M), and 10 are Muslims (4F/6M).
Age groups comprise (a) four 'under 30'; (b) six '30-45'; (c) thirteen '46-60'; (d) ten '61-75'; (e) three 'over 76'
Worship gatherings: four 'small' — less than 100; two 'medium' — around 100; two 'large' — more than 100.

One question I included in most interviews was, "On a scale of 1 to 10, where would you rate your religious convictions?" Self-rating on this scale revealed a large majority of respondents — at least twenty-two of those asked, answered '7' or above, with around fifteen responding with '9 to 10'. The self-rating of at least twelve pluralists was 8-10; at least eleven respondents who encountered spiritual-mystical experiences self-rated their religious conviction at 8-10, and sixteen of these implement religious fundamentals in daily life. I introduced the scale into the interview questioning as a validating check — as an extra means of comparing how people perceive themselves and how they perceive those whom they describe as 'extreme'.

I was interested in three main ideas. The first related to participants' self-perceptions about their own religious identity — that is, how strongly they felt about their personal beliefs. Secondly, I was able to check their self-rated responses with other self-identity and religious importance responses; additionally this related specifically to their perceptions of 'Others' when regarding the word 'extreme'. As such, the idea of 'extreme' became one of the boundaries of difference: one's own 'extreme' is understood to be committed personal religious expression, whereas the 'extreme' of 'Others' became potential threat, intrusion, or violence. Pluralists also have boundaries. For some, it is a belief system that is so alien to their own beliefs that they could not accept it at all, such as New Age understandings (which are accepted and adopted by some pluralists) and practices such as witchcraft. Others cannot accept practices that restrict or physically damage women, such as preventing women from holding positions of authority within the religious context and (especially female) genital mutilation, or religious martyrdom that simultaneously involves the murder of others. Thirdly, I was interested in the question from a methodological perspective regarding how people respond to 'closed' questions. I have frequently experienced frustration where I recognised ambiguity in closed 'either/or' type survey questions and often declined to answer because of researcher's underlying interpretive assumptions.

As such, I was interested to discover how others would respond to closed questions. Most respondents wanted to say more — and even *much* more.

Many wanted to clarify and justify — *contextualise* — their responses. They did not interpret the question as being self-evident, despite its 'simplicity'. The responses had specific meanings beyond the number indicated and participants wanted to *explain* those meanings. They wanted to be sure that I would understand that answers in the range of eight to ten, for example, did not mean they were extremists; that it did not mean they thought they were perfect; that their response was only about their feelings about their own beliefs and not as compared with other differing beliefs. Some separated the question into categories, such as belief (intentions) versus actual practice. They wanted to know that I understood their answers and very few people were happy to answer with just the number without additional contextualising information. Interestingly, although it was not specified, most also automatically assumed that 'one' was the lowest end and 'ten' was the highest rating in the scale; only two people questioned that.

Leaving the Field

Leaving the field was not a deliberate decision on my part. A number of personal life-incidences, including an overseas move, took priority and removed me from what I had been doing. Data collection was complete, but leaving the way it occurred was not my chosen or preferred way.

Textual Analysis

One final source of contextualising data that informs of some global and local happenings derives from textual sources. When considering inter-faith dialogue, and representation and perceptions of others, textual analysis is particularly revealing. I analysed a number of sources, including promotional material (audio/visual/printed) issued by each religion, notice-board messages and posters, mass-media news reports and other relevant material; "one can learn a lot about the world by looking at documents (Travers 2001: 5). Analysis of several issues of an online debate forum — the blog, '*The Religious Write*' on *The Age* news

website, which is organised by Barney Zwartz, the religion editor of *The Age* in Victoria — provides an extra dimension of access to perceptions about religion and religious issues between people of differing faiths and between those of differing religious affiliations and no-faith. The blog creates a forum whereby interested people may respond to an issue or question posed by Zwartz about current religious issues in Australia. This blog has opened a floodgate of responses from people from differing religious backgrounds, atheists, and agnostics. Particularly prevalent is the divide between people of faith and no-faith. The variety of data sources enables a macro-micro-relationship analysis of individual's perceptions regarding those 'Others' of differing faiths as located in the current national, international, and temporal context. It offered a 'wider-world' comparison against which to assess interview data findings. It also allows a variety of 'windows' into the world of religious perceptions and the influences on individuals and their perceptions.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory is an inductive approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). It is a method of organising, structuring, and analysing qualitative data from a range of sources (Strauss 1987). The aim is to generate theory that is grounded in data, that is, to "have an empirical basis" (Blasi 2002: 269) in the social sciences' study of 'humanness', by utilizing empirical methods, and aligning research and theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967: vii). Such grounding avoids speculation and ineffectiveness (Strauss 1987). The foundations of grounded theory derive from pragmatism and symbolic interaction, from which, "two important principles" arise and are incorporated into the method:

> The first principle pertains to change. Since phenomena are not conceived of as static but as continually changing in response to evolving conditions, an important component of the method is to build change, through process, into the method. The second principle pertains to a clear stand on the issue of 'determinism'. Strict determinism is rejected, as in nondeterminism. Actors are seen as having, though not always utilizing, the means of

controlling their destinies by their responses to conditions. They are able to make choices according to their perceptions, which are often accurate, about the options they encounter (Corbin and Strauss 1990: 5).

Grounded theory is a non-linear approach to data analysis that allows points of interest from early data collection to be explored in later data collection and enabling unexpected connections to be made. It "allows for the emergence of concepts out of the data" (Orana 1990: 1249). The importance is that theory must emerge from the data and not be forcibly applied to the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2002; Starks and Brown Trinidad 2007). The cyclical nature of the approach facilitates data and theory to inform each other. Analysis of data includes coding methods (Charmaz 2002), as guided by the grounded theory approach, which uses empirical observations to inductively generate theory that is closely linked to the gathered materials (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Kathy Charmaz offers usefully instructive information about the constructivist direction within grounded theory and makes three specific assumptions: that "Multiple realities exist"; that "data reflect the researcher's and the research participants' mutual constructions"; and that "the researcher, however incompletely, enters and is affected by participants' worlds" (2002: 678).

Although the grounded theory approach appears to focus on sociological aims that are described with words such as 'prediction', 'explanation', 'control' and other positivist-sounding terminology, it is also applicable for research that involves interpretation and meaning:

> "An interpretive analysis of a social setting, like the interpretation of a literary work , has internal coherence and is rooted in the *text*, which here refers to the meaningful everyday experiences of the people being studied. An inductive approach means that more general statements are built up slowly after immersion in specific observations of social life. Generalizations emerge out of the specific details of what a research observes. This is called *grounded theory*, because the theory is grounded or rooted in the specifics of social life" (Neuman 1991: 52).

Anselm Strauss (1987) discusses and explains grounded theory in great depth and detail, offering examples of texts and the associated analyses. Upon perusing some examples, it quickly becomes clear that grounded theory analysis caters for meanings, feelings, interactions, and interpretations. Strauss discusses the different types of coding used in grounded theory, including 'open', 'axial' and 'selective' forms of coding. 'Open coding' begins the process by discovering and naming various categories of a phenomenon during a deconstructive process. Axial coding integrates codes, sub-codes, and categories. 'Selective coding' focuses on core codes and compares them with pre-existing theory. Coding, as a paradigm, Strauss explains, must tell the researcher something about the categories that are discovered and named, and within which all related information is gathered, for example, from "within the same or different interview", fieldwork journals and/or other documents (1987: 27), thus eventually creating a coherent theory. Strauss also discusses the concept of 'saturation' when "nothing new is happening" in the data with a specific code, so one continues scanning "until something new catches the eye" (1987: 31). Additionally, memo writing facilitates deeper understanding of codes, by defining category properties, identifying the context conditions of categories, and considering relationships between categories (Charmaz 2002).

However, differences of opinion and cautions exist. Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith R. B. Morrison refer to Silverman's critique:

> "... that [grounded theory] fails to acknowledge the implicit theories that guide research in its early stages (i.e. data are not theory neutral but theory saturated) and that it might be strong on providing categorizations without necessarily explanatory potential (2007: 495).

These concerns suggest the need for reflexivity during the research process (Cohen et al 2007). Blasi also comments regarding reliable acquisition of any 'new' knowledge:

> With an observational foundation in the formulation of theory, however, one encounters the hermeneutic circle problem: How can we recognise a

social process, e.g. shared doubt, unless we already know a good deal about it? (2002: 269).

Again, researchers choose what to see — choose the position from where or how to see; choose what is reported; and choose how findings are presented. Even if one decides not to analyse data, but only to present it, any choice regarding which data to present is "analysis by *default*" (Lofland 1971: 6 emphasis original). As Lofland explains, to "select some things from a larger body of materials is to make analytic judgements" (1971: 6). Therefore, it is advisable, and useful, to be deliberately analytical, to choose consciously and present one's choices in an orderly way and with clear reasons for those selections.

Writing

Writing becomes an act of representation of 'Others' and so needs an ethically responsible approach. The multi-form character inherent in qualitative research includes the researcher's and respondents' voices (Creswell 1998). Barbara Czarniawska discusses the "multivocal story" — the using of many narratives or voices all telling the story where "the researcher does not have to take a stand on which is 'right' or 'wrong'" (2002: 743). The idea is "not to say which story is correct, but to make the reader understand why the stories differ as they do" (Czarniawska 2002: 743). The other side of this, where relevant, would be to assist the reader to understand why respondent's stories and understandings are the same. Researchers cannot be value *neutral*. We each have a stance based on a background, as detailed above.

One area that can be difficult to negotiate as an outsider researcher is when comparing groups within the same field of interest, as in this project when comparing religious groups. People generally rate their own group affiliations as superior to other groups (Mead 1934/1955; Merton 1972). Such ethnocentrism "becomes intensified under specifiable conditions of acute social conflict" (Merton 1972: 18). As an example, people from religious groups I had not included in the research sent information to me of their understandings, which they hoped I would

include in the thesis; for them, their affiliation is important — more important than any other group. When studying potentially or actually conflicting groups, each group is certain of their own rightness of ideologies and practices, and "want to make their interpretation the prevailing one of how we were and are and will be" (Merton 1972: 19; cf. Dempsey 1990). In such cases, researchers need to implement enormous sensitivity during interpretation and expression of findings.

The postmodern perspective provides several considerations. Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein (2003) advise researchers to be aware of personal reflexivity, power, sensitivities, and representation. Concepts, such as 'grand narratives' and 'absolutes', become problematic when one realises, as Foucault explained, that ideas and concepts are historically situated and "there is no such thing as absolute or transcendental knowledge" (in Travers 2001: 152-154). He also explains that discourses, such as those developed in educational, political and mass media institutions, become an exercise in power — a discourse of scrutinising, discussing, defining, categorising, and reporting (Foucault 1999: 270-271). However, the irony is that whilst denouncing any theorizing, one engages in the act of theorizing (Hutcheon 1997: 279). So, how relevant is postmodernism to everyday life? It is certainly important regarding research claims — especially when findings and interpretations find their way into the 'greater arena' of policy-making, media representation and political announcements, whether those disseminations are about religion, or not. Many social changes resulted through the ideologies of feminism and the deconstructing of patriarchal hegemony. *Findings* are still important, as are *empirical data*. Interpretation is equally important – one must be responsible for one's research presentation. One is, potentially, a *creator* when one's research 'goes public', and on which decisions are based.

Conclusion

Because the aim of this thesis is to explore perceptions of the religious 'Other', the underlying methodological assumptions must relate to that aim. The choices, of adopting an interpretive approach of inquiry, symbolic interaction as a framework, qualitative methods of data collection and grounded theory as an analytic strategy, result in a cohesive and coherent approach to the research questions. All of these relate to using language to facilitate access to individuals' thoughts, feelings, opinions, and perceptions. Additionally, with this approach, I am able to locate myself in the research, reflectively, as the 'driving force' from the inception, but as 'taking a back seat' by prioritising participants' responses and understandings.

As Neuman advises that:

> Important questions for the interpretive researcher are: What do people believe to be true? What do they hold to be relevant? How do they define what they are doing? Interpretive researchers want to discover what actions mean to the people who engage in them" (1991: 52).

The way to find answers to such questions is to go to the heart of the matter — and ask the people.

Section II: Dimensions of religious identity

Introduction

For this thesis, one's religious self-identity is assumed to be only *one* of several conceptual frameworks through which respondents operate in their daily lives; for some respondents it is *the* most salient conceptual framework, but for some religious affiliates other perspectives will take priority. As with other areas of life, the development of one's religious self-identity begins early in life if born into a religious context. When relevant, conversion from one belief and value system to a different religious perspective occurs as secondary socialisation. Dimensions of religious identity discussed in this section include 'living a religious life' (chapter 5) that includes discussion of the concepts of intentions and intentionality, 'plurality as religious identity' (chapter 6) where individuals affiliate with multiple religions and/or religious sub-groups, and 'fundamentality as religious identity' (chapter 7) that suggests that living fundamentally is more flexible than normally represented. Chapter 8 considers spirituality as a dimension of religious identity that gives a new meaning to the term 'the Other'.

Chapter Five: Living a Religious Life

*... in moral matters it is easy and pleasant strictly to adhere to the ideal —
when judging the conduct of others or expressing an opinion in general.
When it comes to the application of morality and ideals to real life,
however, things take on a different complexion.*

(Becker 1963: 11)

The strongest theme in the whole of this research that arose from participants'
responses, and which relates to religious identity, is that affiliates are concerned
about living correctly according to the teachings of their religion. This revolves
around the *ideal* of 'living the right way'; it is a moral intention that is about God
and God's expectations, as understood by individuals, and is about social
interactions. It also concerns group interpretations of beliefs and meanings — of
how groups make sense of living in the world and, in co-operative engagement,
achieve social cohesion. At the individual level, it includes following doctrinal
teachings, presenting oneself modestly, engaging appropriately in interpersonal
interactions, attending worship, participating in worship, and attending to other
practices as called for by the specific religion or religious sub-group, which may
also mean adhering to religious imperatives and absolutes. The group-level
consequences include achieving commitment to affirming and supporting the
moral and value understandings and practices specific to one's group affiliation,
the sharing of meaningful symbolic communicative gestures, and overall
agreement regarding the right way to live, that is collective and in-common
understandings and practices orient people within a group towards each other.

The Concepts of Intentionality and Intention

I address this aspect of religious experience in this chapter using the concepts of
intentionality and intention. 'Intentionality' was developed by phenomenological
philosophers, but goes further than Mead's (1934/1955) concept of the
'generalised other'. Intentionality is about 'aboutness' — it concerns ideas about
ideas, not of physical things (Bruce and Yearley 2006). Bruce and Yearley's

summary (below) sparked my 'sociological imagination' and inspired an attempt to develop the concept in the context of this thesis — it seemed to have merit.

> This is a term from the discipline of philosophy that is often used loosely by social scientists. Philosophers use the word intentionality to refer to what is sometimes called 'aboutness'. Novels can be about London but London is not about anything. More generally, mental states are about things while physical phenomena lack the property of 'aboutness'. Some philosophers have used this point to argue that mental phenomena are thus radically distinct from physical ones and that the mind must therefore be different from the brain. Given that the social world is partly made up of people's ideas, beliefs and perceptions, intentionality is a property of part of the world investigated by sociology. People's awareness that they have beliefs and ideas about the world means that there is a widespread awareness of the phenomenon of intentionality even if people are not generally interested in its philosophical ramifications. When symbolic interactionists or ethnomethodologists study how actors make sense of the social world, they are therefore studying intentionality empirically. It should be noted however that intentionality does not mean simply that people have intentions (in the sense of purposes or objectives); intentionality refers to a much wider range of mental phenomena (Bruce and Yearley 2006: 155-156).

Although relevant to social science research, the need for caution about the application of the concept of intentionality becomes apparent. In this research, the 'aboutness' is ideas and perceptions about individuals' conceptions and perceptions of God, the ideas of believing in and living according to what are perceived to be God-directed and God-inspired teachings; about perceptions that bring about such acts in daily life; and about *whose* ideas and perceptions of God and God's teachings are ultimately correct. As such, individuals have ideas about ideas that are interpreted to be God's expectations, as described in religious doctrines, which lead to God-inspired attainment aspirations, or intentions, about how one should live. Intentions, then, regard right living — the 'doing', but intentionality offers the 'according to what' — the reference ideal or reference point against which acts are evaluated and defined as either right or wrong.

Doctrines and teachings prescribe the way to live and act. Intentions, then, involve how closely one follows what is written and taught, which teachings one

emphasises in one's life and actions, and how doctrines and teachings are interpreted in order to implement them in one's life. Intentions influence both aspirations and then social actions. Intention is also directly linked to purpose and meaning in individuals' lives. Religious conviction is related to both intention and intentionality: people intend (intention) to 'do what is right' and 'live the right way' according to their interpretation and understanding of God (intentionality) and God's expectations.

Intentionality becomes a necessary focus in this thesis, given the emphasis on cognitive processes as connected with symbolic communication and physical acts; the focus is about people's perceptions, of personal religious self-identity and beliefs, and of perceptions of religious 'Others' who have different beliefs. Scientific proof of the existence of God is unavailable; the important point is that believers believe and act in the social world accordingly: it is a different way of knowing. W. I. Thomas (1921) noted that if people define something as real, that it is real in its consequences. As such, any belief that God exists is 'bracketed' in the phenomenological way, because the acts of believers reflect that belief, making the consequences real and often explicit in the social world. Additionally, to recognise that people believe in and act towards God, locates and grounds the concept of intentionality in participants' lived religious lives, so justifying its application in religious symbolic interaction research.

Whereas intentionality is the way one thinks 'about' God and about one's belief in God, intentions, instead, refer to and operate as direct symbolic acts that convey intended messages to those around oneself in one's given social world. In *Mind, Self, and Society*, Mead (1934/1955) emphasised that mental processes are integral in interpersonal communication. In any interaction, there is a 'mind' component — the *internal* act of processing information from the environment in the form of interpretations and definitions — from which acts follow. This mental or cognitive process involves intention — regarding one's own intentions about one's

life, and intentions toward 'Others'. This includes interpreting and defining the potential or inferred intentions of 'Others'. Tagiuri explains it thus:

> ...when we speak of person perception or of knowledge of persons, we refer mostly to the observations we make about *intentions, attitudes, emotions, ideas, abilities, purposes, traits* — events that are, so to speak, inside the person (Tagiuri 1958a: Introduction x, emphasis original).

Surveillance of self and others is part of the act of perceiving intentions, ideas, purposes, and so on, and also of the interactive process. Tagiuri explains that each person mentally holds a representation of the environment and that each person knows, or assumes, that another "is capable of watching, perceiving, remembering, and waiting for opportune circumstances. On this basis we can experience the other person as directing himself to *us*, with intentions, attitudes, and feelings" (1958a: Introduction xi). Tagiuri also explains that people act towards and about others, according to the perceptions they hold about those others.

> ... the opinion of others may, in fact, be the all-important consideration in someone's evaluation of a person. For what people think of a person unquestionably influences their behavior toward him as well as, in the long run, the behavior of the very person himself (1958b: 329).

If we love another, we will act in a loving way that indicates our feelings and intentions; if we dislike another, we let that person know of our dislike in our acts towards and about that person. The *perceptions* one has about another, influences one's *intentions* towards that other. Tagiuri's description suggests that another not only responds to immediate conditions, but also that some actions may be premeditated. Goffman describes it as impression management, whereby people attempt to influence others' inferences and perceptions by managing their visual presentation and social acts (1969). Some religious affiliates also attempt to manage the (good) reputation of their affiliation, where possible, by being an example to outsiders of the right way of living according to the teachings of their affiliation.

Living Intentionally

All participants in this research demonstrated intention in their observable worship acts and in interview responses: they all intend to live the right way according to their understanding of God, of God's teachings, and/or their religious and moral understandings. When religious people act towards God in, for example, the act of prayer or worship, their symbolic acts refer to their referent — God — through the cognitive process of intentionality. Their mental and physical symbolic actions are about their religious beliefs and understandings of God. For those sincere and committed believers, daily acts towards God, however small and apparently insignificant, refer to those beliefs. This was clearly expressed by respondents who intend and attempt to live their lives correctly. The following response is illustrative of affiliates' intentions:

> Respondent: And it's showing a clear intention for what you're doing. So everything in Islam is based on your intention, everything, even if you fail miserably, you're judged on your intentions. So, um, even if you intended to do something really, really wonderful for somebody and you weren't able to do it, it's written down for you that you *did* do that thing. Whereas if you intended to do something *bad*, to harm somebody, and you didn't do it, it's not written down at all, because you didn't do it, but if you actually *intend* to do something good, and you're *able* to do it, it's written down as good actions.
>
>   So everything you do is *watched* and written down … And even if you do a bad thing, you've got 7 hours to ask for forgiveness so if you ask for forgiveness within that 7 hours, it's not written down. I always remember about 8 hour's later (laughter by both).
>
> Interviewer: Oops! (More laughter by both.) You need an alarm clock or something: 'Hmm, I've just done something bad, I must remember to ask forgiveness within the next 7 hours'.
>
> Respondent: Yeah, I know, yeah — 'when I'm not feeling angry I'm gonna ask forgiveness about this' (laughter by both) (21: 6-8).

For the people who attend, fundamentally, to devotional acts at all times through the day, their worship environment is *within* themselves, regardless of the external environment and expectations; *they carry their worship with them at all times.*

This is beyond 'going to church' or attending a worship gathering once a week on a designated day. They *intentionally* create and maintain the internal devotional environment, and *intend* that it will manifest in all their 'external-world' social environment actions and interactions. They observe their own behaviours because God or God's helpers observe them. They live correctly for God, for themselves, and by preventing harm-doing, for their group affiliation. This 'carried and lived' intentionality is enacted symbolically and referentially, and affects adherents' social world around them through their intentions and acts. I am particularly indebted to the above respondent (Interview 21) for her in-depth sharing and insight into her lived religiosity, but the responses of at least eleven other interview respondents supported her 'story' in their own responses — they expressed the same sort of sentiments and commitment.

From one's religious self-identity that is based on one's understanding of one's own 'right way to live', arises one's perceptions of and intentions about and towards God, living, and/or otherness. Other than God, the religion itself and the guidelines offered for 'right living' are of major importance for respondents.

> Well, religion for me is a way of life, for me, and is my relationship with my creator God — I am His *creation*. I have to be — in tune with what he has ordered us to do as a human being, so, I have tried to do my best ... to *show* that *Islam* is a way of life, a religion of peace, and submitting to the will of God. So whatever has been ordained to *me*, it's very, very important — it's just my way of looking at myself as a tiny little piece in the whole of — the creation, of the Creator. ... [Islam is] a way of life, it's a guidance, because a man needs to be guided and we can't think for ourselves — that's why over a period of time, God sent *messengers*, from Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, Moses, Jesus — Prophet Mohammed peace be upon them *all*. So, we follow — we cannot think for ourselves sometimes, like school, cheats have to go to see a teacher to be taught certain things, they can't be smart by themselves. So likewise, as a Muslim, we have to follow all the great prophets — and then we can be — we cannot be *like* them but at least we can be part of it, or try to emulate the life of the prophets, you know, the prophet Mohammed, the life the prophet Jesus — how they live to be good to humanity, to be good to ah, all of God's creation, the plants, the trees, the animals. So that's why *Islam* teaches all this (4: 1-2).

> Love others as you love yourself — how Jesus went to the communities that the communities had rejected, like the prostitutes and people with disease. Like, that's also a good example. No discrimination, that's also very nice (25: 4).

> Ah, just trying to be as loving as Jesus taught us to, and I don't think it's necessarily — completely connected with being a Christian, because I had that base of being Jewish, and I think that there's a lot in the Jewish tradition that's the same as far as being loving and doing, um, for lack of another term – good deeds or helping people and doing things for others who are less fortunate — being supportive for people and that sort of thing, that's always been something that I was interested in (2: 4-5).

> I have to believe in the possibilities of love and caring of all people regardless of religion and faith (1: 10).

Here we find not only 'reference group' as described by Shibutani (1955), but 'reference God', 'reference significant others' (such as prophets, saints, and similar) and 'reference religion' with the relevant doctrinal teachings and examples of how to live rightly. This is similar to the reference point that William Powers (1973a, 1973b) describes in his model for understanding the link between perceptions and behaviour. One's religion first *teaches* how to live, and then offers a way of living, a path to God and the heavenly realm in the afterlife. The structure and teachings become the guidelines towards which one *should* strive in daily life; it is a world of familiarity, security, reassurance, and safety though which one can 'make sense' of one's life and personal 'God-intended' life-path. The foundation for each religion is the 'inspired word', the belief that God has spoken directly stating moral codes, expectations, and sanctions in the form of rewards and punishments. Prophets, saints, and other worthy representatives are also understood to communicate God's direction of the right way to live through examples and words, and represent the *ideal* for people to imitate as best they can, but, as noted by respondents, one is only able to *aspire* to — never *achieve* — these examples.

One important point is that the central focus is *not* God for all religious affiliates. Some explain they do not believe in the existence of a God. They are examples of Grace Davie's cautious point about "*belonging without believing*" (1993: 88, emphasis added). The identities of three self-rated atheists in this research are linked to their religion with its traditions, heritage, and/or community. 'Living rightly' and 'living intentionally' suggests, instead, being true to one's identity by upholding the traditions and heritage rather than religious beliefs of the existence of a God:

> I did not want to *leave* my Judaism, even though I wasn't an active participant in it, because, it was like links in a chain — I was link — a link in a chain that goes back over 5,000 years and I did not want to break that link (1: 3).

> I like the traditions. I mean, I wish it were all true. It would be nice. I envy, in some ways, people who are religious; their life is cut out; they know that this is right, this is wrong, this is black, this is white, but unfortunately, I mean, it's very difficult in a world full of grey to pick out black and white. Why don't I just leave Judaism? The reason is, so many people have given their lives because of Judaism. I feel that I would be desecrating their memory if I were to stop practising, sort of, give it up, become something else. I don't know if that makes sense.
>   [And even though people have been martyrs for other religions] I can't join theirs, just — sort of swap my martyrs for somebody else's martyrs, no. You've got to be religious, I think, to want to change, and I've never had that strong feeling that something is better. I believe — in fact, I often think that the world would be a better place if we didn't have religion, if we had a code of morality only. I think that's the main thing about religion, is the code of morality (12: 2, 3).

These respondents feel 'duty bound' to pass on and continue the line of which they are a part. Belief in God is less important than 'doing the right thing', according to their interpretation of rightness, as non-believers. Living the right way includes a moral code of right-doing, where lying, cheating, killing, stealing, and other such actions are wrong-doing. Their intentions are similarly related to intentionality, in that they think about thoughts — they think about ideas of right and wrong. In so

doing, they also support the continuance of the religious social world values and teachings and contribute to the inward orientation of group affiliates.

The following responses make explicit the personal interpretations, perceptions, and emphases *about* God, which indicates the significant reference toward or about which one intends to act. For some, God is the sanctioning authority who rewards or punishes depending on one's compliance; some perceive God as the foundation of meaning — as the incentive or motive to continue throughout difficulties. Individuals act in the social world according to their perceptions, of what God is, expects, and intends (Armstrong 1993).

> He's the one who give you reward; He's the one who will give you lots of reward if you do good things, and He's the one who will punish you if you do bad things (10: 5).

> The presence of God in everything makes life meaningful. It's kind of like an internalisation in such a way that is part of me, in such a way that even in the darkest places, you see — 'this too is from God' ... because I could not believe in any other being than God. ... Love of God is love of His creation; you don't just love God, you love Him in every thing and in every person that exists, because we are all being created and re-created every second. The life-force that keeps you going, the life-force that keeps me going, the life-force that keeps this — what we call *inanimate* object — going, this life-force, *everything*. I think Stephen Hawkings put it — the Mind of God — we're all in the mind of God; God's in us, but we are in God (6: 9-10).

> I put God first in all things, you know, so you have the vertical dimension of your life that's constantly there, so we do everything in the presence of God as if God were there — God being omniscient and omnipresent. He sees everything and he is everywhere. That's the nature of God. So everything we do God sees. So anything — if I sin against God, that is, if I break his law, it's as if I'm doing it right in front of God — as if God's sitting there on the chair watching me, you know. So this helps me to behave (31: 1-2).

Sanctions become the incentive for right behaviour, yet, choice, with its attendant consequences, is an option. Although reference groups influence people, some

will choose their personal course of actions according to circumstances. Silverman summarises Harvey Sacks argument:

> Sacks shows that behaviour is *not* rule-governed but rule-guided. In this sense you can do what you like but you will be held accountable for the implication of your actions ... social order is merely a *by-product* of social interaction (2004: 353).

Bauman (2001) discusses this condition as the tension between freedom and security. When one locates the word of one's God in the form of doctrinal decrees — and obeys or submits to those directives, one (freely) chooses to renounce one's freedom of choice beyond choosing to follow those words. In exchange, according to Bauman's (2001) exposition, one receives and/or experiences security. Security is order, which in turn relies on co-operation and conformity in practice. Citing Freud, Bauman explains that order is

> ... a kind of compulsion to repeat which, when a regulation has been laid down once and for all, decides when, where and how a thing shall be done, so that in every similar circumstance one is spared hesitation and indecision (2001: 41).

Thus, security for the believer arises as belief that one is doing what *is* right and living the way God intends, that one only needs to continue enacting the same responses under any similar circumstances without hesitation or indecision, and though living in an orderly and predictable social context where others subscribe to the same beliefs, decrees, and practices. By prohibiting some acts, such as killing another person, theft, or abuse of alcohol, religious proscriptions contribute to humanity's safety and security, and as such has become the basis of many laws. The experience of security is perceived to compensate for any loss of freedom.

> I'm very sad when aah, a religion is not life-affirming, because that's one of the basic tenets of our religion, you put — almost everything — aside for life [and] you put everything aside for somebody else's life. With your own life you're allowed to martyr yourself, you cannot martyr another person. You can yourself, give your life, rather than renounce — there are a few things: you can give your life for God; you can give your life — if someone forces you to commit adultery; and the third, you can

give your life to protect a third party. If someone says to you, 'you kill him or I'll kill you', you don't have to kill him, you can be killed, *or*, actually can kill — 'him' — you're allowed to kill in self-defence (6: 14-15).

... there are a lot of things that are *forbidden* to us. For example, you cannot gamble, you cannot drink [alcohol] — there is some good in alcohol, but there's a lot more *harm* for you, 'cause we know that when people drink sometimes they get happy, but more often — they lose their senses, and become violent, and they do things without thinking, alright? They do things that they would not normally do if they're not intoxicated. Once they're intoxicated their faculty of reasoning has diminished. So, in Islam, we know that these things are forbidden, so — we try to steer clear of it. We know stealing is forbidden, so we don't steal, when we lie it's not good for you — for your soul, so we don't lie, um, coveting your neighbour's wife is wrong so you don't do it, so Islam is a guide, you know, to live as a good human being. As a servant of the Creator we have to follow the way we've been taught and been guided by the Qur'an, which is our constitution and the Sunna, which are the tradition of prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, so that's why religion for Muslims is very, very important. It more or less, um, controls your everyday doings, right? ... so all this is guidance for mankind to live a good life (4: 2).

Respondent: Well, you may ask 'what is a mortal sin?' A mortal sin is any serious offence against the Law of God and the laws of the church, for example, grand larceny, rape, murder, missing Mass on Sundays, eating meat on Fridays (chuckles), then you get the Irish element in it and with particular emphasis on '*sexual sins*' [whispered], probably the only sins that most of us weren't into, though one or two — at least one of my school brothers may have murdered somebody, I'm not too sure, but anyway, um.... (chuckles). The main thing was that we were probably all attracted to sexual sins, so it was [constantly] pounded [into us] — dreadful, it was the easiest way to get to hell.

Interviewer: So you're talking about like, sex outside of marriage?

Respondent: Oh yes, yes. Impure thoughts too, humph, yes. Those impure thoughts...... Oh, dreadful..... (laughter by both) (5: 2).

Some guidelines or laws are clearly instrumental, such as those concerned with bodily hygiene and the risk of food contamination when refrigeration was unavailable. Additionally, one's ability to function — to work and to stay out of

trouble — is easier, for example, when alcohol is not clouding one's judgement; restrictions on stealing, lying, and killing, create an environment and social interactions that are relatively safe and based on trust. Sexuality, 'purity', and 'blood lines' are strictly controlled in some contexts. Social order, as intended, is thus maintained. Circularity occurs as the macro and micro levels intersect through individuals: by living 'the right way', individuals create the patterns of behaviour that may be seen in their social world, and then, in turn, follow those patterns because it is perceived to be 'the right thing to do' and 'the right way to live'.

Intentionality, however, as noted above, concerns *aboutness*, in the case of this research, about beliefs in what is perceived as a reality that differs from the tangible material reality in which one's physical self is located. *Because* the physical self is located in the material world, *that* is where one must express the sacred and transcendent; one must link the two 'realms' through one's (intentional and symbolic) actions. The acts are what one *must* do because they demonstrate and express the beliefs, and the material world is the only place in which to act, even when acting mentally.

> So, religion to you means — the, the beliefs and practices but spirituality to me also is beliefs and practices. I don't think you can have spirituality without acting it out. I believe that ritual *is* manifestation of spirituality *in this world*. On the highest sphere spirituality is manifested in angelic beings, who knows what, ok? Here, how can you manifest spirituality but through action, and this is the world of action, of material things, of physicality. Spirituality needs to be expressed — through physicality, and this is where Judaism, which you call religion — Judaism gives the framework for the expression of spirituality in a Godly way and I believe it's tailor-made to my soul. My soul — *resonates* to it (6: 11).

> It gives me a very good standard of basic moral principles. I have to understand the basic moral principles involved in Islam. Okay, I make the declaration of faith; pray five times a day, fast, give alms or Zakat and perform the Hajj, if it is within my capabilities. These are the things — the five basic principles of Islam, which I have to try and identify with, fully understand, and I hope these five principles make me a better —

> firstly, a better Muslim, and secondly, I hope they make me a better human being (9: 1-2).

> I have a set of factors that I run over in my mind — recite to myself, if you like, that ah, kind've help me to focus [on God] in the morning, or re-focus every morning, and sometimes during the day if there's a lull or quiet spot I'll do that again and it helps bring me back — into that [God awareness] frame of mind (3: 2).

The three examples above demonstrate intentions. Two also explicitly illustrate intentionality where respondents perform mental acts about mental beliefs, understandings, and meanings. Intentionality is further demonstrated where observance of ritual acts reminds people about the intentionality commitment. What people believe they *should* do, in practice, underlies the choices believers make in daily acts and interactions. The 'little things' as well as bigger decisions are all part of respondents' lived experience and understanding of the way they *ought* to live. There are religious imperatives for individuals and social implications for the religious group and the wider social world in which the group is located.

Respondents in this research were mindful of their religious beliefs, of their impact on the lives of people around them, and of their reputation — as people around them interpret, define, and so, perceive them.

> Live the life, yes. Just that sense that I was making the choices all along (13: 3).

> Well, as I say, *who* I am doesn't matter; *what* I am does (14: 3).

> … it's quality, not quantity: it's not how long you've been Muslim, it's what you've actually done with the time (21: 2).

> I feel that doing good things is kind of part of my faith. I guess it's just a guide, as you said (25: 3).

Respondents believe in their beliefs and practices, which indicate something beyond everyday life, something transcendent. In *A Rumour of Angels*, Peter

Berger (1971) uses a purely observant sociological approach to demonstrate that transcendence is intrinsic in certain everyday social acts and interactions that indicate — contain and express — a 'beyond'. This beyond is a reality that suspends and transcends the existentialist despair, angst, fear, and Heidegger's idea of "living unto death" (Berger 1971:81). Berger's approach rests on his term "inductive faith", which he defines as follows: "I use induction to mean any process of thought that begins with experience ... By 'inductive faith', then, I mean a religious process of thought that begins with facts of human experience" (1971: 75). The interactions to which Berger refers are order, play, hope, damnation, and humour, each of which signals transcendence toward an understanding of betterment of and in a future existence, and each of which has an intention. The human actions and interactions point to a dimension — a reality — that lies beyond the physical context in which the interactions occur and to which affiliates ultimately subscribe.

Respondents are, however, also aware of and realistic about their limitations. They are aware of human weaknesses that at times defy even the best of intentions. Becker states: "When it comes to the application of morality and ideals to real life, however, things take on a different complexion (1963: 11).

> I won't say I greatly enjoyed going to Mass overall, but I don't like missing Mass on Sundays (5: 2).

> ... and incidentally, we don't want to be challenged — I'd rather just believe — rely on faith: 'please, I don't want to be tested', it's one of our prayers 'please don't test us God' (laughter) because we can't understand really fully until we've really been tested, so 'I do understand, please!' (laughs), that sort of thing, [Interviewer: 'don't test me too hard'] yeah, that's it, yeah, that's it (6: 10).

> Jihad — it's inside the person, like someone who doesn't want to wear the hijab because they — prefer the world to God. Jihad — is about attacking that non-believer [inside of oneself]. It's just saying you don't believe that God's reward is better than the world ... like non-believers will go to hell and ... I think that — when I'm too focused on the world,

and on being a 'non-believer' [by not doing what God wants], then I *am* in hell, because I'm — not at peace (7: 14, 15).

... in my own case, if you have a set of beliefs it is very hard to act from day to day without that set of beliefs underpinning your actions. It is very, very difficult for me to go out and do evil. Yes, I backslide on malicious times and I talk about people behind their backs and I shouldn't be doing that, but I know I shouldn't be doing it, though I think it's the difference (29: 33).

Life isn't fair. Life is a challenge, and it's a challenge just as much for Christians as for anyone else, and I think our world has become too much — feeling that life is meant to be easy and the world owes us a living, and I think we're actually becoming very soft, me included. I'm not nearly disciplined enough, and when I say "disciplined" it doesn't mean that you don't enjoy yourself and do all sorts of lovely things, but you're also willing to pay the cost. If I have something that I have to do that I don't like and feel comfortable doing, I'll stick my head in a book and try and forget that it's there (35: 3).

Respondents are honest and realistic about their failure to achieve all their intentions. They observe their inner conflict and ambivalence, the times when they are distracted or not sufficiently disciplined and committed. In a sense, they are speaking of the inner-self contestation between what Mead (1934/1955) refers to as the spontaneous and unpredictable 'I' and the socialised and conforming 'Me'. Bauman (2001) locates such feelings, generally, in the larger context, as did Mills (1959) in his statement about private troubles being the result of public issues. Bauman discusses ambivalence as a "'private enemy'; an adversary, perhaps the most frightening among many, for the human individual in his or her unstoppable effort of identity formation" (2001: 69). He also explains that although experienced because of social conditions, ambivalence is *alleged* to be a "*personal problem*" and even, to the delight of those who livelihoods depend on such experiences, an *ailment* (Bauman 2001: 69).

As market forces encourage people to feel inadequate, as if they are 'missing something', the disharmony results in ambivalence. Market forces continuously suggest that 'something better' awaits the consumer, that one should be

dissatisfied until that 'something better' arrives to cure one's apathy or ambivalence, and that there are so many self-help and religious options that one can always choose differently (Bauman 2001; Heelas 1996; McColl 1989). Thurow states that "Religious fundamentalists don't believe in free markets in goods and services any more than they believe in free markets in ideas" (1997: 310): to accept choices outside of one's religious dictate is to 'think differently' and so place oneself outside of the boundaries of right living, to make oneself 'Other'. In a context of that type of religious-conviction surety, the acts of renouncing choice and complying with religious prescriptions reduce ambivalence. The collective affirming of certainty and rightness about one's chosen way of living — that one chooses God's way — *reduces*, though does not necessarily eliminate, the influences of fashions and choices in the wider social world.

> Give you an example, a Muslim delayed a prayer because there's a beautiful program, you know, *Days of Our Lives*, or something on tv, ah, whatever program you watch. So you delay and delay, delay, delay — eventually the time's up 'Oh no, prayer time is up, I haven't done my prayer, I totally missed it' you know, with your friends — you talk too much, you have a drink, laugh, and then 'Oh, prayer's gone'. So, to have peace, we have to get rid of Satan, and I don't think we can, because this is his *aim*, to misguide us. The Qur'an says quite clearly 'I'll mislead all the children of Adam — '*all*, not just Muslims, non-Muslims, *all* — *except* those who believe — who *sincerely* believe in Allah, and that is not an easy thing, who **sincerely** believe in Allah, 'cause what is 'sincerely believe in Allah'? Sincerely believe in Allah means there is *only God* — to be worshipped, no-one else. So [for example] I'm a good Muslim, I like beautiful cars, I'm partly worshipping a car; I like money, I like richness — I'm not a good Muslim, alright? Then the poor people, then the stubborn people, as long I'm richer — I'll be fine. See, this is the way we are, always we have in our heart — we've got this desire — to all be better than — people 'below' you, all of us, and me included — me included. So, I could have my car — but I've driven my ute to come here — it'll take me from A to B — *but* — I get a new car, just to feel better! So, in some way I'm tempted by Satan, in small ways, but we all are like that. You know, I've got the money — and rather than give the money to the poor, I just [spend the] money on the car. So you can see how it's not easy to bring peace to the world, no I don't think we can — we can't — we can't have utopia until we go to the other side, and this is our testing, you

know, because we are being tested and we all to some degree fail in our tests, to a degree (4: 23).

As such, freedom of choice in one's lifestyle, which detracts from religious intentions, is perceived to encourage immorality and should be repressed and "denounced as evil" (Thurow 1997: 236). What and how one chooses indicates one's priorities and also what one believes to be the 'right way'. Implicit in this is the choice one makes regarding *which* social-group influence one follows, one's own religious affiliation or the wider secular and/or differently-religious influences. If one fails to follow one's religious-affiliation teachings, one is perceived to have failed to follow God's directives, but one has, in fact, failed to comply with group conformity and expectations. The following little story, told by a respondent, indicates both her perception of God as central to her life and intentions — a (contextual) reference-influence from which she draws inspiration, and the intentionality ideal that supports her position regarding her intentions:

> ... there's nothing — that I could do [to contribute to peace in the world], only Allah has might or power. But there's a movie in Iran, an Iranian movie about a young woman, who falls in love with her driver, but her job is to try and convince all of the Iranian people that [they] should vote for democracy, and everywhere she goes, she loses a little bit more hope. Why? Because each person she talks to — she — she starts off being very diligent, and the more people she meets and the more people who come up against democracy, the more she gives up hope, and eventually she marries her driver and they just don't worry about democracy any more. But, one man, she goes to try and convince him to democracy, he says "Yes! I'll do it! I'll do it, I think it is a good idea" and he takes the paper, and he says "I'm going to vote for *Allah*" — and she said "I'm sorry, but Allah is not one of the candidates", and he's going "*What*? Allah is *not* one of the candidates? Then I can't participate" (laughter) and so, I don't know, I would vote for God. God should be the boss. So I guess that would — make everybody at peace (7: 18-19).

She *believes* that only God has the power *and* the authority to effect changes; she appears to have forfeited any autonomy, ability, or responsibility, for the direction that change may take. The locus of power and authority becomes outside of and beyond oneself.

Conclusion

At the personal level, affiliates' sincere conviction is hope and belief that their beliefs are the right beliefs, that those beliefs *are* God's expectations regarding the right way to live. Individuals practice intentionality and intentions as a part of their religious self-identity. At the social group level, religions teach and socialise individuals regarding how to live, about living rightly versus wrongly, and that their own affiliation is the way God directs people to be. Conformity to these teachings attributes legitimacy to the group standards and expectations, which then become the standards by which affiliates believe they *should* live. The philosophical concept of intentionality becomes a relevant concept in the theoretical discipline of symbolic interaction. Intentionality is lived in the internal interactive cognitive state and also in the collective participation and beliefs in the religious social world; God and God's directives become the reference ideal.

Religious affiliates in this research confirm Mead's hypothesis of the interrelationship between mind, self, and society. The related concept of intention is an extension of intentionality, whereby respondents intend to practice — enact — the religious beliefs and teachings of their religious affiliation, to the best of their ability, as the right way to live. Intentions and intentionality, then, are integral with religious self-identity and to group-identity as affiliates' inward orientation supports group directives. As such, perceptions of 'Others' are influenced by religious identity, which includes the associated understandings of 'living rightly'. Hence, their judgements of how 'Others' live, with attendant evaluations, interpretations, and definitions about another's rightness or wrongness. Where their perceptions indicate 'wrongness' in affiliates' environment, affiliates will attempt to reinstate that which they perceive to be the right way.

Chapter Six: Plurality as Religious Identity

This section introduces a different type of religious identity, which challenges the usual conceptions of affiliation, belonging, and commitment. This religious identity concerns individual respondent's plural approach to religious beliefs and practices. Of the thirty-six respondents interviewed for this project, nineteen can be understood to be religiously plural in varying degrees. Seven affiliate with at least two religions and nine with at least two sub-groups or denominations within their religious affiliation. Three each affiliate with one religious group that serves as their core identity, but lean towards 'Other' religious teachings and practices; they occasionally participate in worship gatherings with these 'Others' and adopt some of the teachings in their own lives. Two additional pluralist individuals spoke of their experiences in informal non-interview conversations, one is ecumenically plural within Christianity, and one is a multi-faith pluralist.

The intentions and intentionality of pluralists refer to multiple reference groups, which differs markedly from those with a single religious affiliation. As such, they also relate to affiliations differently. Their perceptions of otherness are generally inclusive rather than exclusive, as are their perceptions of what God is and expects of humans. Despite their commitment, those known to be pluralist in either affiliation may be perceived *as 'Other'* or even as traitorous, by affiliates in either, or each, group. Perceived lack of loyalty and commitment to a single affiliation can also raise issues of trust. A more positive alternative possibility is that they may be perceived as mediators. With their multiple affiliations, they have insider knowledge, skills (such as being multi-lingual), and connections, and are 'at home' in each context, all of which make them potentially valuable in a mediation capacity (Bauman 2001; Furnham and Bochner 1986).

Whilst analysing data, I realised I needed to interrogate the concept of 'plurality' or 'pluralist' (rather than 'pluralism') in order to be certain of the definition. This is especially relevant as those involved with plural religious affiliation are not

those who, to use the vernacular, 'cherry pick' from differing beliefs, or, as Davie (2007) described it — 'believe without belonging'; they believe and belong, but identify with and participate in more than one religious gathering and identity. Plurality, in the context of this thesis, is an example of the multi-value orientation, as described by Samuel Hayakawa (1964) in his seminal work, *Language in Thought and Action*, which is similar to the "both/and" idea proposed by Ulrich Beck (2004: 442, 449). This differs from the majority of fundamentalists who became examples of the 'two-value' either/or orientation described by Hayakawa (1964), and differs also from the few fundamental respondents in this research, who also adopt a multi-value orientation in their perceptions of 'Others'.

The Rise of Religious Pluralism

At its most basic, the definition of 'plural' is multiple — the existence of more than one. Religious diversity, or plurality, in the social context is not new (Machacek 2003). Around the world, religious adherents with differing affiliations and beliefs have lived side-by-side with various degrees of tolerance and/or co-operation. Such religious diversity arises when people migrate for economic or humanitarian reasons, into social worlds that differ from their homeland. In previous times, change generally occurred more slowly, allowing time for adaptation and integration. Changes in Australia have resulted in the appearance of multiple religions, rather than only multiple denominations of one major religion (Bouma 1995). This contributes to what appears to have become a 'new normal' with the obviousness of difference.

From the time of white settlement, Australia was religiously plural with, at the very least, Aboriginal understandings, Christianity in various forms, and any spiritual beliefs practiced by the early Chinese migrants. It was not until the introduction of the post-war mass migration program that Australia's population become noticeably diverse and plural, and particularly with the addition of Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus in the 1970s and 1980s (Bouma 1995). With

religious diversity arises pluralism, which concerns the diversity of opinions, values, and beliefs: "...it refers to the increasing fragmentation of belief systems already identified as one of the likely manifestations of religion in late modernity ... [which] is explained by the loss of control on the part of the historic tradition" (Davie 2007: 155). Grace Davie suggests that religious pluralism results in "a persistent confusion between what is and what ought to be" (2007: 159), as people contest for prioritisation of their own ways and legitimacy. In addition to the existence of diversity within a society is a perception of parity, "the quality or state of being equal or equivalent" (Merrigan 1997). In countries where Christianity was the prevailing religious perspective, pluralism and the accompanying perceptions of parity now challenge Christian truth claims (Massanari 1998).

To 'know' that one's own understanding is 'the ultimate truth' is also to 'know' that other understandings must be less than absolute, whereas, if all religions are equally valid or offer something beneficial, then none may claim a place of superiority above others. Mead discussed the way people perceive the superiority of their own religious group as compared with other 'outsider' groups (1934/1955: 207). Many affiliates believe in the absoluteness of their own religion — of doctrine, practices, values and morality; they would be unable to recognise equivalence between their own and others' understandings, especially when they perceive acts that they interpret as intolerable. Meanwhile, both inter-faith conflict, and the practice of 'live and let live', occur around the world. Not all people feel comfortable with the 'invasion' of difference. Others actively, and perhaps, it could be argued, subversively, embrace the opportunities to learn and experience more widely, to the extent that they adopt and identify with multiple belief systems and identities — they become *plural*.

Some Christians are ecumenically plural but not religiously plural; and likewise, some Jews and Muslims are plural within their own religious context. Some become religiously plural because conditions of diversity exist in their immediate environment, such as within their families. For example, Greg Noble, Scott Poynting, and Paul Tabar (1999) studied the fluidity of identity as practiced by

Lebanese youth. The youths in their study were able to position themselves either as Lebanese, Muslim, or Australian, according to the context and usefulness, which enabled an extra dimension of choice of personal identity expression. In the religious sense, plural-identity people may have the potential to communicate in ways that 'single-identity' people are unable to achieve:

> ... some persons seem to be able to synthesize their various cultural identities, the equivalent of integration at the personal level, and acquire genuine bicultural or multicultural personalities. Such individuals are relatively rare, and Bochner has referred to them as 'mediating persons' (Furnham and Bochner 1986: 29)

For some, inter-faith initiatives take religious interaction a step further as people negotiate religious beliefs, practices, and doctrine, various languages, and cultural diversity. David Lyon suggests that some people no longer automatically conform to a single religious identity but instead question, "how do I choose" (2000: 43). One may ask further 'need I choose?' As people learn more about 'Otherness' at an interpersonal interactive level and learn about 'real people', the barriers relax, one step may lead to another quite comfortably as they move from interaction to worship participation; "... an increase in the range of religious choices necessarily undermines the taken-for-granted nature of religious assumptions" (Davie 2007: 61). R. Stephen Warner (1997) discusses the ease that can develop during collective bodily participation, which may involve acts such as singing, the Islamic salat, or eating. As 'tolerant attitudes' lead to interaction, which leads to changes in perceptions of the 'Other', so do acts change towards those religious 'Others', which includes, for some, plural religious affiliation.

Some people are unable to accept the idea that only one single path to God exists and that all others will be condemned to eternal damnation for having not followed that single pathway. Additionally, the beliefs of some people are not necessarily stable over the course of a lifetime: one's commitment to a single religion may wax and wane according to life stages and transitions, experiences, and other influences such as encountering difference. Believers may move through a series

of religious associations as they seek truth that 'makes sense' for them (e.g. Heelas 1996; Hanegraaf 1999). Some believers will come to discount religion entirely, whilst some atheists or agnostics will 'discover' religion or spirituality after some life crisis or other encounter (cf. Hardy1979; Hay 1982; Barbato 2000; Miller and C'de Baca 2001). Some choose to become plural after a spiritual-mystical encounter (see Chapter 8). Plurality as a choice for participants in this research also appears to be a form of resistance against the expectation that must be permanently 'for or against' a single religion. Instead, plurality of practice provides flexibility, for personal religious expression, in and for changing social conditions, and for evolving understandings and personal need through one's life. Belief, itself, may be stable, but the understanding and expression of that belief may change throughout one's life and at any given time.

Lived Plurality

During my observations, conversations and interviews, I met and spoke with many people — some of whom *actively participate* with 'Others' not of their own religion of affiliation, but also, some who *identify* as affiliates and adherents of two or more religions; these people are religious pluralists. Bouma (1995) explains that only societies are plural and that plurality is not a characteristic of communities or of individuals. Yet, plurality of religious expression is normal in some contexts. When analysing religious practices of individuals in Zambia, Thomas Kirsch found a "high mobility in religious affiliation and the tendency to be simultaneously engaged in a variety of religious forms" such as Christian "prophet-healing churches ... 'traditional' herbalists ... "possession cults" and ... in ritual offerings to ancestors (2004: 699). Amongst those, though not exhaustively, who experience and live religiously plural lives are those who are bi- or multi-lingual, those who have diverse ethnic heritages, and those whose parents adhered to differing religious affiliations within the family home. For some individuals, Buddhism offers a 'somewhat neutral' context as an 'optional other' for expanding one's religious understandings. Six interview respondents read Buddhist

philosophies and teachings and five of these participate in Buddhist activities and gatherings in addition to their own usual affiliations. As the number and type of religious expressions increases within a social world, so does the potential for investigation of difference and 'Otherness'.

For those who are interested, searching, or both, and/or who have too few vested interests to declare that only one religion or sub-group has all the truth, the opportunity to explore multiple and diverse religious and sacred expressions increases with the extending opportunities for interpersonal interaction with increasing cultural diversity. Non-conformity or non-compliance offers more choices and forms of expression than conforming to the normal expectations. One single-affiliation respondent comments about another person he knows:

> Oh, I do know a Jewish friend that lives not far from here actually, just up on top of the hill up here. But he's not a practising Jew. I think he goes to a — a Catholic — I think he's into the Catholic business, but he goes to church sometimes on a Sunday. But, I mean, he's not *right* into it. He's a Jew. He's all right (11: 15).

This respondent acknowledges that plurality of practice occurs, but indicates ambivalence about the possible extent of identity-commitment, yet also suggests that the pluralist is an acceptable person. Not all affiliates are as generous in their evaluation.

Two specific individuals who traverse the boundaries between religions or denominations do so despite opposition from those inside at least one of their affiliations. These two people are reminded by some concerned affiliates of their 'incomplete' — because plural — conformity. That is, they are perceived as being 'insufficiently committed' to one group because they are affiliated with another group that is defined as 'opposing' or 'different'. Both of these individuals, neither of whom was formally interviewed but spoke at length in confidence, have family connections to two or more affiliations and have chosen to attend and identify with two differing sets of beliefs and practices.

> One was told by a fundamentalist co-affiliate to denounce Jesus as being the Christ, the Son of God, or the Saviour of all people; acceptance of Jesus in that sense is incompatible with their shared belief, and so unacceptable (Observation Notes 2006).

People who oppose their pluralist participations question their social loyalties and challenge their ability to accept and commit to contesting doctrines and beliefs. These oppositionists attempt to convince the pluralist to commit to only one affiliation to prove their commitment; of course, the affiliation to be chosen *should* be the religious persuasion of the oppositionist. It is challenging for both of these pluralists to know that other affiliates question their sincerity, loyalty, and commitment because they choose more than one form of expression of devotion to God. Verbal sanctions condemn their choice, thus informing that it is defined as *socially* unacceptable.

This situation is not the same as someone being embarrassed about an 'alternative' identity where identity characteristics appropriate to one group would not be appropriate in another social context (Shibutani 1955). The characteristics and sentiments are essentially the same, but the underlying meaning assumptions and social form of expression are questioned. Opportunities for encounters with religious difference offer the chance to question and explore one's own religious affiliation in light of differing beliefs, or, more explicitly, to express the sacred in various ways through direct personal participation. Those who choose to engage with multiple affiliations do not seem to recognise boundaries as bounding, but instead, they negotiate loyalties and commitment. As one incorporates otherness into one's own life and identity, otherness ceases to be 'Other' because it becomes part of oneself and oneself a part of it; integration occurs to the point where separation and division cease to exist for that individual.

In the Australian context, being plural — specifically in the context of identifying with and practicing two or more differing *religions*, not only subgroups of one religion — challenges what it means to have an identity and to belong. Normally,

a religious affiliate or member categorises oneself and is categorised by others as *being* of that religious persuasion. The 'both/and' (Beck 2004) approach to religious identity undermines another's ability to stereotype and categorise and so to behave in response accordingly. Plurality is akin to the 'not fixed' liminal state of being neither one nor the other, as discussed by Tom Driver (1991).   It undermines perceptions of normality and predictability. For some people, when confronted with plurality, issues arise of security and risk, trust, loyalty, and betrayal, and of 'certainty' concerning meanings during interactions (cf. Bauman 2001; Strauss 1991; Weber 1970; Mead 1934/1955).   Some people become religiously plural because of their diverse heritage, such as those whose parents are from different religious affiliations. These people are sometimes unable to choose between the two parts of their identity. The following quote comes from a respondent whose family heritage was 'mixed-Christian' and who converted to Judaism, but then partially 'reverted' to Christianity without denouncing her Jewish identity. She continues to maintain her identity with both.

> My parents — my dad was Episcopalian, my mum Christian Science, so they didn't want to raise us one or the other because — they were afraid that we would side with that — whichever it was — person. And that wouldn't be good, so they kinda just figured well, once we had that grounding then we could decide on our — what we were gonna be, do, or whatever (2: 5-6).

Some respondents are plural within a religion and so identify with the generalities rather than the details of sub-group interpretations and emphases of doctrine and/or practices:

> [I identify with] a Christian truth … So, in terms of categories, it's theology that gives you a little snapshot of — my history, yes … I attend a congregation and identify as a member of a local congregation, and I've done that whenever I've moved. I have tried to define a church and then join a congregation and attend a church on a regular basis, and other activities when I have been able to; I've participated in the life of the congregation, yes. And have identified as a Christian in conversation when it comes up if it seems appropriate (18: 1, 3).

> Aah, that sets me up as a Christian — but the particular type of Christian — I guess all my life I've been sincere to my own heart, if you like, what I feel inside as to whether I'm an Anglican or whether I'm a Catholic you see, theoretically I was still confirmed in both churches. I've always regarded that; I hold my head up high now — because I have worked out inside my self in my own heart, that my relationship is with God, so I persisted with calling myself an Anglo-Catholic because that was my roots (26: 1).

One's (single) affiliation can become a marker, signifier, and/or indicator for one's relationships and interactions within and beyond one's religious boundaries (cf. Weber 1970). However, Durkheim states, "the greater concessions a religious group makes to individual judgement, the less it dominates men's (*sic*) lives, and the less its cohesion and vitality" (in Giddens 1972: 243). Berger (1973) discussed the need for an ordering of social interaction and the interpretation of knowledge; without some agreed-upon basis of knowing how to act and what something means, order deteriorates and disruption threatens. In contrast, being plural — especially with two or more *faith* affiliations — contradicts the normality of symbolic interaction where a set of symbols pertains to a specific cultural context within which people who belong operate. Berger argues, "the most important function of society is nomization" that is, the establishing of a meaningful order (1973:31). Basic to any social order is a commonly understood language, through which communication and the realness of the cultural world exist as "collective recognition" (Berger 1973: 20). Collective recognition also implies agreement.

Although many people prefer to identify with, and loyally practice and defend, a religion of choice or inheritance, the idea of being *categorised* according to a single religious expression does not suit all people. The following quote indicates that multiple religious expressions can cater for differing personal needs. This can include the need to adapt to one's partner's religious affiliation where it differs from one's own, or the ability to appreciate and/or reconcile differing parental affiliations and inheritances.

> When you say my religion, I don't see myself as being *categorised* into any

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particular religion. Um, religion, I think without any spiritual base, man is basically losing the plot, and I think that's what's wrong with much of our world today, they do not have a spiritual base, whether it be God, whether it be Buddha, whether it be Mohammed, it doesn't matter … [In addition to a specific Christian denominational affiliation] I also attend Buddhist gatherings, I go to the synagogue also; I go to the Catholic church, I also do meditation, so it's a — whatever makes me feel good at the time. You really have different [needs] — some days you need to sit in a pew, other days you can just walk into a place and light a candle and stand there, sit there for half an hour — participate, it's lovely. We're very fortunate that we *have* a choice … the freedom to do so (30: 1).

One's religious affiliation, then, becomes one's identity and category, upon which people depend for reliable indicators for interacting. However, plurality does not exclude a fundamental approach to religious observance. Some pluralists, including the respondent whose comments are quoted immediately above, have daily religious routines and rituals that hardly differ from single-affiliation fundamentalists, except that the practices and related beliefs derive from two or more religious heritages. Of the nineteen pluralists identified, ten can be categorised as 'fundamentalists' and the rest 'live fundamentally' by attending to the religiously-inspired details of life. Pluralists intend to 'live the right way' according to the beliefs they adopt and implement from their multiple affiliations. Further, although their boundaries are more extensive, pluralists, like others, have boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Many would not include, for example, Pagan and Wiccan ideology and practices in their religious observances, or beliefs of some religions or sub-groups.

Being plural questions the normally accepted plausibility structures, the ideas of belief and knowing, and basing one's life on specific knowledge, to the exclusion of other knowledge. If God is the Creator of all the diversity that exists on Earth, it would appear to be improbable that God would then privilege only one way and reject the rest of creation as 'wrong', as the following respondents indicate:

How could any small group of people possibly know more than the collective? How could they — how could *we* possibly be *so privileged* to be

in that — that rarefied air — have that esoteric knowledge that — only the elite know? It was *so unlikely*, so therefore — I had this knowing, that I wouldn't end up in *any* religion, as beautiful as I found every religion in different facets (28: 7).

I — tend to — see that all the religions tend to one point and — I feel that I have — an understanding of that point, and so I see all religions from that point of view and see where they gather ... I identify with the teachings ... sometimes you get the group thing and the focus, but ah, all too often, I find that the churches kind of — they deal in fairly mundane and boring stuff ... I feel it's like — sitting in on everlasting kindergarten ... I can see the — Divine input in all of them and that's what I'm *for* — is the Divine input, not so much the manifestation in religion, but where it's coming from and when I see in it — in religion — I can read a book, the Qur'an, the Bible, or the Torah, and see that — yes — that's it, yeah, that's just *wonderful* God-inspired stuff ... I see the parallels and I think **'oh yes**...' so — I'm sort of Eastern and Western, and I see where they come together and it's what I *dig* (3: 2-4).

The assumption for many religious affiliates is that only one source of knowing can be the true source. Some insist that their own way is superior to the ways of 'Others' (cf. Mead 1934/1955: 204-209), and defend that position absolutely. The focus remains on division and separation rather than on acceptance, unity, and co-operation.

Yet, at least ten respondents explicitly noted that religions tend to result from or emphasise similar essential teachings, one example being what is known as 'the Golden Rule', which suggests the existence of a common source or religious frame of reference, but with diverse social expressions of what may be referred to as the 'essence' of religion. David Harvey explains how writers such as Lyotard and Foucault rejected the existence of totalizing meta-narratives, Universals, and eternal truths and, insisted instead on "the plurality of 'power-discourse' formations" (1990: 44-45). It may be interesting to explore further, the adoption and support of an overarching and unifying principle, by pluralist individuals who, at least within themselves, seek to unite religious sentiment under one God, and the degree to which they simultaneously represent a formation of plural discourses.

Those who learn about and affiliate with more than one religion — reading, attending, and practicing — express appreciation for increased awareness and understanding. They are inclusive of diversity.

> There are two rules, and you'll find with most religion is that you honour the god or the gods of your religion, and I've found through many religions have a common thread: 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. Now whether I were Buddhist or Jewish; whether I was of any Abrahamic faith, whether I were of any Indian religion — I think almost out to even Shinto religions in Japan, and probably some of the more animist religions, there seems to be that thread in there of 'don't do to others unless you want the same done to you'. It's what's called 'The Golden Rule' and the Golden Rule determines how *I* would like to be treated throughout the day. 'What goes around comes around' is another common saying and another way of putting it — 'you only get back what you give' is a more selfish way of putting it (29: 1).

> … but just trying to be ah, as loving as Jesus taught us to, and I don't think it's necessarily — completely connected with being a Christian, because I had that base of being Jewish, and I think that there's a lot in the Jewish tradition that's the same as far as being loving, and doing — for lack of another term — good deeds, helping people and doing things for others who are less fortunate, or that sort of thing, and visiting people in hospital, being supportive for people and that sort of thing; that's always been something that, you know, I was interested in. I mean, what Jesus taught wasn't all brand new, it was already there, I mean, they already had the basis, it's just that he taught it in kind of a very different way than had been, by getting rid of — or trying to get rid of some of the hang-ups that people had, like that being tied down to the Law, ah, you know, that's — that's what appealed to me, and you know, I love the Jewish people — I still do, and I, you know, identify — I still like going to Seder (2: 4-5).

> I've visited all types of different churches, even when I was a practicing Jew, I ran into these folks who were — a Japanese [group] which was sort of formulated by a Japanese lady back in the 1800 and something, and they invited me to their church, and it was very — extremely interesting … it was really beautiful, really lovely (2: 13).

> With Buddhism, well, I feel that it's still a good part of — I really like

> Buddhism. I really, really like it, and it's a very good influence and it's very good guidance ... a very interesting way of how to look at life ... it just kind of filled a gap a bit sometimes. I don't know how to describe that. It's just their philosophies seem very interesting ... [with] a lot of depth. Buddhists' philosophy has a lot of depth (25: 4)

Appreciation of two differing positions may also result in ambivalence. When one is able to see the beauty and truth in more than one set of doctrines, beliefs, and practices, it is difficult to state that only one religion holds all truth; it is difficult to choose, and some are unable to do so:

> I've gone back into reading ... the Tibetan tradition quite closely and seeing that these things are very coherent and very persuasive. But at the same time I'm going, 'yes, but' — I have this tendency to say, "Yes, that's very true," but I also still feel that very strong relationship with God expressed through Christ ... So because of that I've become a lot less certain about saying, "Okay, God is this," or, "God is" — whatever. Because you just think, "Well, it's not as clear cut as I thought or as I represented it to be." I thought, "Well, yes, Christianity is blatantly superior" and then I would go, "No, actually Buddhism thinks that that's much" – actually in my own life it was reversed: Buddhism was much more superior then it went to Christianity, as it were, and then it changed. But really, you know, they're both very interesting. They both say very beautiful things if you really get into it (33: 7-8).

In addition to affiliating and identifying with Christianity and Buddhism, this respondent also has strong links with and interest in Sufi Islam and is interested in Judaism.

Ethnicity and Religious Plurality

Although many people remain religiously committed to a single major religion, other factors influence their acceptance of 'Others'. The ability to speak two or more languages contributes to appreciation of difference. Nineteen of the thirty-six interview respondents in this research are at least familiar with two or more languages. At least nine of these people fluently speak at least two languages. Many people I spoke with use at least three languages: the language of their country of birth, their religious language (Arabic, Hebrew, or Latin) and English;

languages of countries neighbouring their birth country are extras for some. This multi-lingual ability facilitates the ability to 'think differently' and, for some, an appreciation for social plurality, though not necessarily a preference or even tolerance for religious plurality. Yet, where people comfortably live side-by-side with religious diversity, and without obvious discrimination, plurality is normal. Any competition within the social world is not necessarily related to religious affiliation. Religious competition in Australia, however, is apparent to some who perceive Australia from their outsider's perspective:

> I have never accused any Christian because of what he is believing because the population of Egypt — we have approximately one third of our population Christian, and before Islam came to Egypt, it was a Christian country. So, we have a lot of Christian people there and we live — together very friendly, there is no conflict, so, I didn't have the intention or the desire to know about other religions. And then I came here [to Australia], and in my first days at the university, I saw a lot of um — announcements ah, about a Christian group ... and they wrote their name on everything — on ground, on walls, on everything. So I just get interested in — why these people are so powerful and they want to talk — to announce about themselves — in this extensive way (15: 3-4).

> I was brought up in a community with non-Muslims a lot, and I think there's — I believe that it's good to be among — to be with other nationalities and other religions, because you learn a lot from them as well, in my opinion, because I grew up to be with Buddhists, Christians — all my life. I find this very interesting because you learn about their life and their culture as well. You learn about their beliefs, and you learn a lot from them as well, as much as they learn from us. I think we learn a lot from them, too, in whatever they think, or their attitudes, or their way of life. I think it's good to interact with different religions, because I think there's a lot of harmony there, and you accept people more in that way and you're more tolerant with people if you interact with other religions, because you'll be more accepting of their beliefs and of their opinions, and you tend to give and take with them as well ...
>
> To me we [in Australia] should broaden our relationship with the rest of the world, because in Singapore, it's multicultural. We believe in multicultural harmony, togetherness. It's not that you're a Chinese, Malay, Indian — they're all Singaporean, and I always believe in that, because where we come from, we don't have so much racism — what you call racists, in Singapore, because we believe that, even when we were

> young, we were in school, all Chinese, Indian, all in one class and we have to stand in front of the class, all of us together, we were Singaporeans, as one, united. You know, we had to believe in that wholeheartedly, so it's really in us ... There's no such thing, "Oh, you're a Christian, or you're a Hindu." There's no such thing there. They're neighbours. We're just one people (10: 7, 8).

The perceptions of these respondents are that in other plural contexts the religious and ethnic boundaries exist but appear to be without obvious conflict and division. The nationality identity took priority over other identity forms. Both respondents also exhibit an interest in those who differ from themselves, and are interested in an exchange of information and understanding. Further explanation by two respondents suggested that the idea of 'tolerance', as it is understood in Australia, is unknown in the Singaporean context; instead, people *accept* otherness. Perceptions of 'Others' are nuanced differently, with less separation than appears to exist in Australia, especially according to many news items.

Plurality as Interest in Otherness

Some respondents are committed to their own religion because it is right for themselves, but they are interested in otherness — they want to learn about difference and even practice some of what they learn in addition to the teachings of their own affiliation. The following respondent studies and practices Christianity and Buddhism, and has a further interest in Islam.

> I have gone away — I mean, I'm not actually withdrawing from my traditions. I've always come back to my traditions, but I've always looked at other religions *as well*, just to see what it's about, and talked to other people about their religions ... I went [overseas] and studied Buddhism, so some people thought I was kind of weird about that because I'm a [Christian] and I'm studying Buddhism. But, yeah, I'm really interested in other people's views as well (25: 1-2).

However, the opinions and imposed sanctions of those in one's own close circle, such as family and friends, attempt to regulate and influence one's choices because of *their* own perceptions. By judging and defining one's choices or actions as

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inappropriate, they remind one of the expected boundaries. The mother of the above respondent reacted with concern when her daughter became 'involved' with Muslims generally, and specifically with *a* Muslim.

> INTERVIEWER: ... why did you choose to continue with being a [Christian] rather than, say, following through with Islam or whatever?
>
> RESPONDER: My mum got pissed off at me, with Islam.
>
> INTERVIEWER: What was her response?
>
> RESPONDER: She was angry with me. She wasn't very happy about that.

Because the respondent was experimenting with *Islamic* difference, her mother was concerned; no concerns were mentioned regarding Buddhism, which the respondent still attends and continues to read about. Difference, then, is not all the same difference; some difference is acceptable. Islam has a specific meaning for some people, who interpret it as potentially threatening. Additionally, when travelling in Malaysia the respondent visited a mosque: her boyfriend was unhappy that she was *obliged* to veil herself. His interpretation was that "They were expecting us to follow their religion as well ... they're trying to Islamatise the place or something (25: 6, *sic*). Her boyfriend objected to the obligation on her part to comply with Malaysian Islamic social expectations, that there was a requirement for her to adopt the religious symbolism within the context of that country, and for which the travelling couple did not share the same meanings.

One respondent describes the social perceptions that create division and separation with the following example, which he also places in a much larger context:

> I like the Indian description of — maybe 7 blind men surrounding an elephant, an animal they've never seen before and each describes what they can perceive of that animal — and all hold it up — 'this is the truth'. So, yeah, 'the tail I've got the tail, I've got the tail'; 'I've got the tusk'; 'I've got the ears, so *this* is the truth' and — there is the most *sincere* — and beautiful — adoration for truth amongst true Muslims, true Christians, and I *love* them. I love people who are *so sincere*, and I *envy*

them, because their life is so full of *clarity*. They — *really believe* that they *know*, they really believe that *they're* on the right path, that they could lay down their life with true purpose — that they'd actually done something good — towards Allah, towards Jesus. And, they believe that they hear Allah speak to them, or they believe that they hear Jesus speak to them and he's given them this *wisdom* or this *instruction*, or that, or that he's revealed through the scriptures ... For me — I want to be *free*. I want to *choose* to do things that would bring life to others and to bless others, and I don't want to be under this — *weight* of concrete that man would place on you. And I *do* believe it's man, it's not — God, it's not Allah, it's not Jesus ... It's *so unlikely* that the universe would work that way, that it would *reward* you, for the way you spent your life here, for the rest of time. It would be such an arbitrary random way of determining eternity, that what you do for 60 or 80 years determines — a hundred trillion years or more (28: 8, 9).

His is an apt description of people being blind and groping with something unknown, unobservable, and too large for individuals to grasp fully, but knowing also that what they are able to access *is* truth — it is something that exists. Those whose single affiliation insists that theirs is the whole truth are unlikely to accept the idea that what they believe is only a part of something larger. Mead explains that people want to assert that their own affiliation is somehow superior: during religious wars, for example, "One belonged to one group that was superior to other groups and could assert himself confidently because he had God on his side" (1934/1955: 207). The safety/equality balance that Beck (1992) describes may relate to the "essential self-consciousness" that Mead refers to in this context (1934/1955: 207): safety may seem less secure, for some, who find equality threatening. For pluralists, however, assuming the existence of something larger offers the possibility of inclusion and appreciation of 'wholeness'.

Conclusion

The complex and culturally-diverse social conditions appear to support the emergence of plural religious identities in individuals, as well as religious diversity — or pluralism — in the wider Australia social world. These respondents may be

ecumenically plural and/or religiously plural. Their plurality encompasses acts that range from reading widely, learning about, and accepting teachings from 'Others'' doctrines, to simultaneously participating and belonging in more than one religious worship group; they are to be found across all three religions. This goes beyond the religious pluralism of multiple forms of religious affiliation and practice within a bounded social world, such as within a town or country, as discussed, for example, by Berger (2005) or Bouma (1995, 2006).

In recent years, the political emphasis on people adopting the Australian national identity as their primary identity, in a largely secular context, may have the effect of reducing the salience of a primary religious identity for some people. The accompanying emphasis on what was previously known as 'multiculturalism' also contributed to acceptance of difference, at least superficially, in the form of, for example, experimenting with foods from diverse cultures and sharing in some activities, such as the Chinese New Year celebrations. The possibility of plural religious self-identity, then, has some support in this secular context where encountering difference within one's own social world opens opportunities for choice. Additionally, some individuals have diverse ethnic, linguistic, and/or religious heritage, which facilitates internal reconciliation and integration of that diversity. When differing meaning systems exist within one's socialising world, the experience becomes normal, natural, and familiar. The either/or boundary ceases to exist for some individuals — they are unable to separate the differing influences within themselves. Plural religious affiliation offers an extended identity.

Not all are born into a home of diversity. Some adopt a plural stance after some sort of spiritual-mystical encounter, which alters their perspectives and perceptions. The experience may be so profound that such people connect with what they perceive to be a transcendent truth — an understanding that transcends religious boundaries (see Chapter 8 for a full exposition of this). Some, from curiosity and appreciation, explore difference, and after a period of learning about

the religion and interacting with other affiliates take the step from interest to attachment — but without renouncing previous affiliation commitments. They become plural by enlarging their perspective and knowledge, and by sufficiently reconciling differences within themselves. The appreciation that comes with learning from that which differs from one's own bounded social world enlarges their sense of place in the world, their perspective, and their respect for the wisdom of those who were not previously of 'their own kind'.

Further, plurality does not detract from, but facilitates *fundamental* religious expression, and the intention to live the right way according to one's understanding of what that means. The experience of accommodating difference within oneself is an integrating process and a process of growth — of thinking, knowing, and understanding differently. Instead of separation, division, and exclusion, those with a plural religious self-identity focus more on inclusion, integration, and transcendence. Otherness offers an enlarged perspective for understanding to cater for extended personal religious self-expression.

Chapter Seven: Fundamentality as Religious Identity

This chapter compares the differences between academic definitions of fundamentalism and fundamentalists' self-perceptions of their *lived* fundamentality. This research acknowledges the correctness of the general academic definitions, but argues that there is more to the story, that not all fundamentalists fit into the general definitions. I observed radical fundamentalists in action during the data-collection period, who insist that their way and only their way is the correct way to believe and live. I also observed and interviewed those who would not necessarily be identifiable *as* fundamentalist, but who have strong convictions about their beliefs and quietly live the fundamentals of their religious teachings in every moment of every day. The word 'extreme', which is commonly linked with 'fundamental' in media and political disseminations to indicate violent acts, is questioned by respondents: 'why does 'extreme' only refer to extremely bad and not extremely good — and what is 'extreme'?' Additionally, the thesis finds that some pluralists are also fundamental in their religious approach to life, living rightly, and their actions and interactions. The chapter begins by discussing the various definitions of the concept 'fundamentalism'. It continues with examples about the way respondents live *fundamentally*, and a discussion about fundamental living as extreme.

The Concept of Fundamentalism

The rise of fundamentalism in the major religions has awakened a new awareness of religion as a major factor in intra-cultural, intercultural, intra-national, and international relations, in response to modernist and secular influences (Thomas 2005; Armstrong 2001, 2004; Bouma 1992, 1995, 1999; Castells 1997; Lawrence 1998, Thurow 1996; Barber 1996; Fields 1991). Present-day fundamentalism is understood through stereotypes and generalisations. Some perceive it as a religious backlash of 'resacralising' intentions, against the non-religious secular, scientific, and rational discourses, which undermine religious standards, authority,

and hegemony in the private and public spheres of social life (Shupe 2009; Armstrong 2004). Thurow states that people "retreat into religious fundamentalism whenever the uncertainties of the physical world become too great" (1997: 233). Encountering and engaging with difference, then, is as threatening for fundamentalists, as can be the threat of fundamentalism for non-fundamentalists; affiliates privilege their own way as the right way of living. Differing religious perspectives contribute to the many current world conflicts.

> Fundamentalism refers then to religious groups which are intensely committed to their world view and are prepared to expend a great deal of energy shaping themselves and their world according to their beliefs. This inevitably brings them into conflict with both those who share their faith orientation but not the same intensity of degree of commitment to that faith and with those of other faiths. When a new fundamentalism emerges, like Islamic or Hindu fundamentalism it disturbs the established order and entrenched vested interests resulting in a loud protest against the 'insanity' of these new movements (Bouma 1992: 61).

However, not all religious people with high levels of conviction and commitment become fundamentalist but adapt to the changing social conditions and influences and co-exist peacefully, despite religious differences. Fundamentalists, instead, it is argued, develop a new fervour in order to defend and protect their belief systems and way of life, by either retreating from the world in a mode of isolationist defence, or by militantly attempting to impose, and convert all others to, their own ways (Armstrong 2004; Thurow 1996; Bouma 1992). Based on *intentions* regarding their right way to live, they attempt to reinstate traditions, heritage, and rules of behaviour, with a view to the future state of the religion, and to implement the widest possible adherence to God's Word, as they understand and accept it to be.

Various understandings of the word, 'fundamentalism', exist, but it essentially refers to religious interpretations and expectations regarding right living. Yet defining 'fundamentalism', as a working concept, is as difficult and elusive as defining other words that are relevant to this research, such as 'religion', 'spirituality', and 'culture'. Common mass media usage, which influences the

general population's perceptions, suggests that fundamentalists are synonymous with extremists, and both are 'extreme fanatical terrorists'. Part of the problem is the connotations and use of the term pejoratively rather than as description (Bouma 1992; Appleby 1993). Christian fundamentalism began in Protestant U.S.A. where fundamentalism concerned living and worshipping according to the *fundamentals* of the religion's teachings (Shupe 2009; Armstrong 2004; Bouma 1992). Anson Shupe explains:

> The thrust of American Protestant fundamentalism aimed at defending the narrower boundaries of conservative Christian orthodoxy. In so doing the fundamentalist movement became associated with the pre-millennial expectation of Jesus Christ's imminent return to Earth, superpatriotism to the point of xenophobia, rural lifestyles and values, individual piety, a rationalistic suspicion of charismatic (or Holy Spirit-filled) enthusiasm characteristic of the emerging Holiness and Pentecostal movements, and anti-intellectualism (2009: 479).

Such a narrowing of perspectives would result in the rejection of liberal modern developments, such as mass entertainment, medical interventions — including oral contraception and abortion, and permissiveness (Shupe 2009: 479). Echo Fields (1981), who writes about "activist fundamentalists", describes how Wilcox (1986), in the North American context, suggests two types of fundamentalism. They are "Denominationals...the larger category who attend fundamentalist churches but espouse some political beliefs that are relatively liberal" and "Doctrinals ... [who] may not attend fundamentalist churches but hold political attitudes that are consistently conservative ... tend to be better educated, earn more income from higher prestige jobs, and live in more urban areas" (Fields 1991: 180). Bruce Lawrence offers another perspective by identifying three types of fundamentalism — "literalist, terrorist, and political activist" (1998: 89). Where these theorists converge is in an understanding that fundamentalists have strong convictions regarding the rightness of their own religious beliefs and perspectives — that they each believe they have the *only* truth — and that many of them want to change and shape the social world according to *their* way.

The project, *Fundamentalisms Observed*, that Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby co-ordinated during the 1980s, explores the understandings of fundamentalism across "seven religious traditions" (Appleby 1993: 71), including the three Abrahamic religions. It expands on the definitions, practices, and understandings of fundamentalists, and the interpretations by the many scholars who undertook the challenge of investigating the complexities of fundamentalist groups. Each example in the project is context based; the whole addresses a variety of fundamentalist sources and expressions across various parts of the world. Scholars involved in the project

> ... discovered that fundamentalisms were not hidebound, but innovative, dynamic, constantly adapting forces. Their essential feature is not that they are reactionary but that they are reactive: They 'fight back' — a key element — in the name of God or the sacred, against modernity, relativism, and pluralism (Marty 1993: 6).

Further, they discovered that fundamentalists cannot be simplistically stereotyped, as was common, they argue, in academia prior to the inception of the project. Fundamentalists are not necessarily "the voice of the hopelessly poor, deluded, or power-mad; the refuge of those who cannot live with ambiguity or paradox; the haven for the fearful and the fanatical" (Marty 1993: 6-7). At that level, the findings of this thesis concur with Marty and Appleby's findings. In his review of the first part of the project, James A. Beckford outlines the project's findings, including the commonalities shared by most fundamentalisms:

> There is clearly a family resemblance among such things as fundamentalist concerns for personal and communal identity, dualistic worldviews, ideological purity, heightened awareness of enemies, sense of urgency about impending crises, aspiration toward a totalizing social system, selective borrowing from both tradition and modernity, and authoritarian leadership (Beckford 1993: 185).

The caution in their work is that fundamentalism scholarship draws conclusions that may not be recognised in all 'lived fundamentalisms' (Marty 1995; Appleby 1993). That is, those who peacefully *live* their fundamentals will not necessarily relate to the descriptions of militancy and other threatening intentions; neither will

'self-perceiving-as-peaceful' fundamentalists from one religion appreciate a comparison with 'Others-perceived-as-threatening' fundamentalists from a different religion. To this end, "Project participants use the term 'fundamentalism' as a *comparative construct* rather than an essentialist label" (Appleby 1993: 72).

Living Fundamentally

In this research I uncouple 'fundamental' and 'extreme' — words that currently have 'new normal' meanings by being conflated and associated with Islam. Although social institutions, such as political and mass media representation, use the words synonymously and link them with terrorist acts, respondents, especially those who *live fundamentally*, have quite different ideas about the definitions of these words. Respondents differentiate between fundamentalists and extreme fundamentalists, not all of whom are perceived as violent. They categorise terrorist extremists as violent or fanatical fundamentalists rather than 'fundamental'. The focus of this section considers the lived 'quiet' fundamentality of respondents and the contrasting expressions of fundamentality that are perceived as extreme.

'Quiet' Lived Fundamentality

The following response clearly discerns the difference between perceptions of violent extremists and fundamentalists who live, peacefully attending to the details of their religious lives; it also discerns between the original meaning of the word as compared with current common usage.

> If there are people who are extreme, say like being ah, a suicide bomber, I wouldn't like it. Because we're *all* fundamentalist — here's something that — the word 'fundamentalist' is not being used properly by the media. I'm *a fundamentalist* — in the sense that I follow the Qur'an and the Sunnas, the tradition of the prophet Mohammed, because it's our *constitution* — so, in *that* respect *I am* a fundamentalist, you know, and I pray, I fast, and *do* as much as I can at being good too (4: 14).

This reflexive response highlights the awareness of some respondents of the *assigned* attributes and stigmatising that categorises them collectively with terrorists when they intend to live peacefully and to be an example of peacefulness in their daily lives and interactions. Living life according to the fundamentals of religious beliefs means *being* a certain way; it is a deliberate ontological decision and commitment. A Christian fundamentalist tells of daily intentions as instructed in doctrine that is understood as the inerrant word of God:

> I suppose to sum up my religion would be, you know, is a verse in the scriptures, 1 Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 31, and it says "*Whatever you do, do all things to the glory of God.*" So my religion is God-centred, it's not a humanistic, mind-centred religion; so everything I do I'm supposed to be striving to do to the glory of God, so I put God first in everything, and in every situation, I strive to put God first. It's not a religion that means church first, and then family, and then self, politics, or whatever, it means *God* first in family, *God* first in church, *God* first in science, *God* first in recreation, *God* first in my personal dealings. So it's *God first* in every situation so, whether you're eating, or drinking, whatever you do you're to do it to the glory of God (31: 1).

This respondent intends to live the right way, fully and fundamentally, according to intentions and intentionality, in that his orientation refers to thoughts about thoughts of God and God's expectations.

> [I]ntentionality involves more that simply paying attention to a thing. Intentional objects are perceived in the fields of actions and relationships. Because intentionality places the individual in an action mode toward the object, meaningful objects end up being reflexively constructed (Allan 2005: 337).

His orientation and intentions influence his acts *towards* others in his social world relationships, to which others will respond (Mead 1934/1955). We each bring our understandings into our interactions with others, even if others are unaware of our intentions.

Other people may never know one's internal intentions; there may be no observable actions to inform them. It is about doing one's best to live according to

God's laws, following a path according to Divinely-inspired instructions, and attempting to *be worthy* before God in every moment of one's life:

> It's not just 'wow, I'm up there with the fairies' it's 'I'm right down here on this earth, cause that's where I'm meant to be', and so, learning that kind of — how to put — Godliness — into practice, well, how to live a Godly life, I mean, you know, (chuckles) or *try* to live a Godly life (laughs) (6: 10).

This respondent, as acknowledged by many respondents, recognises her human frailty and inability to always achieve her ideals, which provide the goal and purpose for her intentions. She attempts to live every moment of every day according to the religious beliefs and practices that guide her choices, decisions, actions, and interactions; she implements these rituals and beliefs as often as she is able. She intends — and tries — always to be mindful, even in the midst of daily life challenges, such as during interactions with others, illness, hardship, and other difficulties:

> ...to recognise there *is* only *God*, even in the negative things, to recognise that there's Godliness in that too, and even in pain and suffering — what may seem to be. *So* that everything within the kernel of the most negative, negative thing — within the very, very centre is the Godliness keeping it alive, so there must be good, even in the bad, so that's something that is a daily challenge (6: 10).

Living as a religious fundamentalist is an endeavour that is invariably community-supported with like-minded affiliates (Berger 1971) — one's reference group, with whom one celebrates, commemorates, participates in daily or weekly rituals, and practices other group affirming gatherings (Shibutani 1955).

When one's reference group is a minority in a wider population, there may be insufficient support with few associates and resources. More importantly, the *contrast* becomes greater between one's religious self and the differently-religious and non-religious 'Others' (cf. Peak 1958).

Respondent: Well, I guess because living in such a place that has such a small Jewish community, it actually makes you sort of identify more in some ways. Like I've heard people who've gone to Israel, and they barely identify as being Jewish anymore because they're surrounded by it all the time, but because here, you're — almost swallowed up by everything else that's going on. So it just makes you sort of cling to everything a bit harder because you don't want to lose it because it's all you've got really.

Interviewer: Alright, so, in a sense, do you assert your Jewish identity more, do you think?

Respondent: Yep, I think so. Some people go the opposite way I guess; some people try to blend in more, because it's easier, but, I know for me it's more — affirming it because I don't want to lose it (17: 4).

Additionally, if a group tends towards orthodoxy and fundamentalism, perceptions and expectations exist that one will make more effort, be more attentive in one's religious life than would be normal in a more relaxed or 'liberal' context. Perceptions here are 'two-way': fundamentalists perceive that they should attend to the fundamentals, and they perceive that other fundamentalists expect this of them. Self-surveillance and perceived surveillance of self by others contributes to attentive compliance.   Expectations within group norms may or may not be explicit and will vary in degree according to the personal emphases of those with whom one interacts:

Progressive Judaism doesn't seem to have *laws* so much as *recommendations*, whereas in the Orthodox community, if you don't keep kosher, if you don't keep shul, no-one's going to *shun* you or turn you away or anything like that, but there is a sort of *expectation* that — it's like *disappointment* if you don't (17: 3).

A major emphasis in fundamentalism is modesty in one's personal presentation, which exists in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Personal presentation is not restricted only to what one wears and looks like, but also includes modesty —

... in speech and actions ... and thoughts (17: 1).

> ... if your husband walked through the door and here's this gorgeous looking man and I felt 'ooooh', I'd lower my eyes, because I don't want to be ogling your husband. So, it's that self-control. If you walk into a newsagents and your kids see all these disgusting pictures on magazines, they're told 'you lower your eyes, the first look's for you, the second look is against you'. So, it's the same if you're walking down the street and you see someone — you know you're a married woman and you see somebody you're attracted to, you get that first little glimpse and go 'wow, very attractive' and then you look away, it's because after that you're answerable for your reaction (21: 14).

Fundamentalist respondents continually reflect, in the form of self-surveillance, about how their acts relate to their reference ideal — and about reward and punishment. Goffman refers to these embodied presentations as 'moral decorum', which "are ends in themselves and presumably refer to rules regarding non-interference and non-molestation of others, rules regarding sexual propriety, rules regarding respect for sacred places, etc." (1969: 93). The fundamentalist religious communicate their affiliation, values, and morality through enacted and embodied statements. For example, fundamentalist Jews and Muslims believe it is inappropriate to physically touch one of the opposite sex, who is not of one's own intimate family, so will enact the embodied modesty to these ends by not shaking hands with those of the opposite sex during introductions to unknown people, and/or by lowering their gaze during such encounters.

From a sociological perspective, each form of clothing choice is a form of 'embodied' symbolism in the social context, as describe by Goffman (1969). One's personal presentation and practices are perceived according to the context in which one lives, and are evaluated accordingly; people whose standards and values *differ* from one's own also evaluate them. In a context of alleged freedom of choice, where female bodies are readily visible, religious ideas about covering and disguising one's body and body shape differ from the perceptions of those who are less modestly inclined — and may be perceived as 'extreme'; those who disregard such modesty considerations may be perceived by some fundamentalists as somewhat immoral.

> Ultra Orthodox women never show their arms and legs. They wear long skirts, not necessarily to the ground, but below the knee. They've always got below the knee skirts and long sleeves. The married women for instance ... She has her hair shorn off and wears a wig when she goes out anywhere special. Normally she will wear a head scarf because nobody sees her hair; nobody should — it's to stop them being attractive to other men (12: 16).

However, at times the appeals of the secular and differently-religious world override religious commitments, despite intentions, as people succumb by conforming to the norms of that wider society. Women, particularly, do this by enhancing their visual presentation, whether for vanity or for concerns about how others will perceive them and their religious practices, which also, then, prevents them from being explicit about those practices. In Goffman's terms people 'give off expressions', even if not communicating directly with them (1969: 94). To negotiate two social worlds with differing values, standards, and norms, affiliates may re-interpret the beliefs and practices for personal expedience — to facilitate fitting in with others:

> But on the other hand, I've seen photographs of [her] at a wedding in Israel, and she looked most glamorous with her wig; a most glamorous wig, far more than — her own hair wouldn't have been as nice, I'm sure. So that defeats the purpose. During the war we had a family of ultra-Orthodox evacuees ... refugees ... and one of the women ... had a baby whilst they were staying with us, and she wore — it was known as a *sheital*, this wig, and it was a very glamorous one, and she never let on, and when she went into hospital to have the baby, she was most insistent that nobody touch her hair, that none of the nurses could comb her hair; she'd do it herself, because they would have been shocked with the whole lot coming off in their hand. So they're quite vain with it. It's meant to stop all that (12: 16-17).

Applying and abiding by religious rules, laws, or recommendations in daily life not only takes conviction, commitment, and discipline, but also determination as one negotiates what is often a non-accommodating non-religious secular world. The practicalities of finding, for example, kosher or halal foodstuffs may be less

difficult than contending with outright contestation from those who object to one's presence based on religious affiliation and expression.

Another respondent describes some of the finer details in daily living regarding the commitment and complexity that is potentially involved for those whose concern it is to be truly fundamental and *constantly* mindful of God and of one's purpose in life:

> So, the things that are absolutely forbidden are pig meat and alcohol, and a lot of Muslims would choose to eat ordinary meat, but just avoid those things, and then there's those who would choose to find halal meat and eat that. I prefer halal meat because everything — *everything* counts. So, it sort of incorporates — when you take a mouthful of food you say [Arabic words] which is 'in the name of God' — and you eat with your right hand, so *every* time you take a morsel of food, every time you take a step towards something, even when you put clothes on — there's so much blessing if you put clothes on and you say [Arabic words] you're saying 'in the name of God I thank you for giving me these clothes'. I mean, you don't always remember, but — if you *make* these things a habit then — it's *amazing* how it does change your — mental thinking, it's like *you are walking with God* in your daily life (21: 15).

Bouma describes fundamentalism as behaviour that is perceived by outsiders as "fanatic devotion to the cause of their religion" (1992: 58). Such attention to detail in one's daily activities would certainly be perceived as extreme, when compared with a non-religious or relaxed religious approach to life, yet those who participate base their actions on generations of legitimate (from their own perspective) traditions and reasonings, which they understand and appreciate. Their community, which is their own plausibility structure (Berger 1971), supports their acts. In a like-minded and supportive community, where people share the same meanings, intentions, and symbolic understandings, those context-specific ways are normal. One's reference group environment, which includes values and meaning, influences one's social-self construction (Mead 1934/1955; Shibutani 1955).

A further point concerns Goffman's (1969) observations of the 'make-work' form of decorum that occurs in, for example workplace environments. When workers know that a supervisor, leading hand, or similar will be 'doing the rounds' and checking status and progress, they suddenly become alert and attentive, find things to do, and 'perform' whilst under surveillance (Goffman 1969: 95). Fundamentalists take this much further; they perceive themselves to be *always* under surveillance and that they *must always* be acting appropriately, because, as I was repeatedly told, 'God is always watching'. God, then, becomes another type of 'Other'..... The acts and values are maintained by the reciprocal and mutually reinforcing imposition of sanctions and compliance with those sanctions. For those who believe in the teachings, believe in imperatives, and believe that God prefers us all to meet challenges in such a manner, there is no satisfactory alternative. They identify with the traditions and symbolism, and, to them, it makes sense; it is their normal.

Extreme Religious Expressions

'Religion is a private matter and it should stay that way' (Interview 1). People symbolically and visually present their affiliation-identity physically, through any garment, accessory, or practice, which relates directly to or indicates religious beliefs. These embodied and observable religious affiliation symbolisms about beliefs, affiliation, and associated values, are intended or unintended communications. When a minority group presents themselves differently from the majority, their presentation attracts attention; they become noticed and noted for their 'out-of-context' difference, which may be perceived as extreme and even as provocative. Embodied presentation, with attendant implications, is defined and *perceived* as an invitation for a *response action* that *indicates* their interpretation and definition of the situation. It elicits sanctioning acts indicating acceptance, respect, appreciation, antagonism, or rejection of one's identity-presentation, or as an interpretation of one's moral or other boundaries. Responses differ according to interpretations of alleged or inferred beliefs and values, and the connotations related to the messages that are allegedly implied (Mead 1955; Goffman 1969).

One's (religious) expression may conflict with wider social world associations and interactions (Shibutani 1955). Most respondents in this research are accepting of personal and private religious conviction and commitment, and even displays of fundamentalist or 'extreme' sentiments — *providing* there is no imposition onto themselves or others in the form of conversion attempts, and no violence or violent displays in the name of God/Allah or in the name of the religion. It is a conditional acceptance — that the chosen practices remain private and non-intrusive in the wider world.

This 'acceptance' or tolerance is problematic regarding some religious practices. For example, when Islamic women wear explicit full-body coverings in the public realm, some people find it objectionable for various reasons, such as for public safety — such garb could be concealing anybody, male or female, and anything, such as weaponry or explosives — and because, for themselves, the clothing symbolises oppression of women regardless of the wearer's perceptions. Two of three articles from media sources follow as examples of the debates in Australia. Reverend Fred Nile, who is the leader of the Christian Democratic Party in New South Wales, introduced a private members bill into the NSW Parliament calling for the burqa to be banned in Australia. The following is Nile's argument in his own words:

> The time has come for Australia, and particularly NSW, to catch up with the rest of the world concerning the concealment of a person's face, whether male or female, for any purpose such as terrorism, anarchism or any discrimination against females.
>
> ... Italy has had a ban since 1975 from wearing the face-covering burqa. Recently a Muslim woman, Amel Marmouri, was fined $A650 for wearing a burqa. Her husband has stated he will now lock his wife up in the house as he will not let any man see his wife's face. This confirms the widespread belief that women are being forced, in Islamic countries such as Afghanistan, Iran etc, and non-Islamic countries to wear the burqa.
>
> ... The rise of Islamic terrorism is another important reason for banning the burqa as it has been used to conceal terrorist attacks in nations such as Israel, Russia and Britain.

One notable occasion occurred in London when an Islamic terrorist wore his sister's burqa and took her identity card so he could pass through Heathrow Airport security and flee the UK.

In Moscow, a number of female Islamic terrorists wearing the burqa entered a crowded theatre filled with families and children. Under the burqas they concealed rifles and explosive belts.

There is also a need to ban any face coverings used by terrorists and anarchists from security cameras. The police need this extra power so they can prevent these attacks by suspicious persons (Nile 2010).

This third attempt by Nile to introduce a bill failed "by three votes to 29" (Hall 2010).

Cory Bernardi, a Liberal Party Senator, argued for the same action in an earlier article, after a thief wearing a burqa and sunglasses attempted robbery. He argues thus:

In my mind, the burqa has no place in Australian society.

I would go as far as to say it is un-Australian. To me, the burqa represents the repressive domination of men over women, which has no place in our society and compromises some of the most important aspects of human communication.

It also establishes a different set of rules and societal expectations in our hitherto homogenous society.

Let me give you a couple of examples.

As an avid motorcyclist I am required to remove my helmet before entering a bank or petrol station. It's a security measure for the businesses and no reasonable person objects to this requirement. However, if I cover myself in a black cloth from head to toe, with only my eyes barely visible behind a mesh guard, I am effectively unidentifiable and can waltz into any bank unchallenged in the name of religious freedom.

Little wonder bank bandits in the UK are now becoming burqa bandits.

The same can be said for any number of areas where photographic

identification is required. How many of us would ask for the veil to be dropped so we can compare the photo with the burqa wearer's face? I suspect the fear of being called bigoted, racist, Islamaphobic or insensitive would prevent many from doing what they would not think twice about under normal circumstances.

Put simply, the burqa separates and distances the wearer from the normal interactions with broader society.

But there is a greater reason the burqa needs to be binned.

Equality of women is one of the key values in our secular society and any culture that believes only women should be covered in such a repressive manner is not consistent with the Australian culture and values (Bernardi 2010).

Informal news polls accompanied two of the articles. One accompanied Hall's (2010) article, with the question 'Do you agree with the bill to van the burqa?', to which 12,439 people responded. Sixty-one percent voted 'yes' and 39% voted 'no' (in Hall 2010). The second accompanied Bernardi's article with the question 'where do you stand on the wearing of the burqa in public in Australia?' Of the 10,140 responses, 19% voted 'For' and 81% voted 'Against' (in Bernardi 2010). Superficially, there appears to be a perception of the burqa as being alien to Australian values and public support for banning it in Australian society. However, both polls contain a disclaimer about their unreliability. People participate by choice, and some respondents may have voted in a poll more than once from different computers. Additionally, many of the same people could have voted in both polls, so the numbers do not necessarily indicate a wider range of responses. The issue, here, is that such media attention influences perceptions of some Australians about affiliates' personal religious expressions. Although no violence or direct imposition occurs in the lives of people around them, these affiliates are represented *as* 'Other' and *as* extreme by the media, regardless of their nationality, morality, or commitment to Australia. However, some people perceive the wearing of the burqa as an affiliate's demonstration of religious convictions, which is no more intrusive than some fashion statements and does no

harm to others. Banning an item of clothing in one group also begins a precedent that has wider and long-term implications for other groups.

Fundamental Living as Extreme

Most interview respondents and other affiliates in informal conversations questioned common usage of the word 'extreme'. Questions included 'how extreme is extreme' and 'does extreme only refer to extremely bad, or also to extremely good'? Definitions of extreme also altered according to context, whether defining one's own extreme or 'Others'' extreme. Whether living moderate or fundamental religious lives, extreme is relative to context: one's own normal is likely to be extreme for others — as more or less observant (Heilman (1998).

> Extreme in a positive sense or a negative sense? (20: 15).
>
> [We are told, and] this is meant to be illustrative: 'I'm just right — anybody who keeps anymore is a fanatic; anyone who keeps less is a heretic; I'm just right' [laughs] you see, that's what we tend to think. What is *extreme* — how extreme is extreme — extremely good? I have *beautiful, beautiful* writing about extremism and extremists — what about extremely *good* people — is there *extreme* — is there a level of 'you'd better start — you're extreme — you know, being good here' — there's actually a balance between ... kindness and strictness like giving and receiving that needs to be in balance, and there's certain things in which you can be quite zealous and I think it's for the good of all (6: 16-17).

To what degree are people sanctioned for 'doing good' or sharing kindness in a community, for committing their resources, such as time, money, energy, sensitivity, caring, and more, to help others? Dedicating one's life to help others is usually described as a vocation, which is praised for its altruism and the level of commitment; it is rarely perceived as 'extreme' as the word is currently used. Yet for those who live committed fundamental religious lives, social sanctions by non-fundamentalists suggest that their practices are extreme. The above response

indicates that every act is relative to the context in which it is enacted and relative to others' acts.

> Fundamentalists, you know — they're totally offended by the godlessness of most Jews, they consider them godless — like me, I'm godless, I really am [but] God and I — I have conversations with God. I usually ask the Socratic 'Why; why; how could it be?' (1: 8).

The respondent explains that an extreme and fundamentalist group of Jews are outsiders amongst their 'own kind' — amongst Jews. She also notes that as a secular and 'Godless' Jew — despite her loyalty to her traditions, she is perceived as offensive by the extreme fundamentalists. Yet, the fundamentalists and the godless can be understood as two extremes of expression within the same overall context of beliefs.

This *extreme* fundamentality may be observed, even by affiliates, in intra-faith division and contestation, where, within that context, the question may be asked 'how good is good?' when deciding the level of necessary emphasis on any given practice. If both groups attend to the details and generally accepted requirements of daily religious practice, though with differing levels of enthusiasm and emphasis, who may be understood as 'fundamental' and to whom is the label 'extreme' to be applied? It is possible that one group will be interpreted as being 'extreme' for 'doing too much' or the other group for being 'extremely lax' in their commitment to religious practice. In fact, people from both groups may be 'fundamentalist' in their attention to detail according to *general*, though not *specific* group expectations. In each context, adherents identify and act according to their own familiar intentions, obligations, norms, and conventions; 'extreme' is relative to each differing context, and may even occur within a context where one person differs in his or her greater or lesser emphasis and/or enthusiasm. The difference is in the interpretations, understandings, meanings, and perceptions regarding the level of necessary striving, attentiveness, and emphasis.

> And if we don't stick or adhere to *their* precise interpretation of the Koran, then we are wrong. And if we are together at a celebration or

something like that it's fine because we are all praying next to each other and we are all eating halal meat together and we are all doing these things together, so everybody feels the oneness, the connectedness. But when we start talking about deeper yearnings, our philosophical beliefs — the drive that's within us — *that's* when some people become threatened ... Some people are quite happy with who they are and not wanting to go any further and that's fine, and I have no problem with that. What *I* have a problem with, is anybody telling anyone else that they shouldn't do certain things (20: 10, 12).

I know that people that are friends of ours who ran a Kosher home, they are Orthodox, and tried to run their home *really* Kosher, and yet other *extreme* Kosher people of the same sort of group, supposedly — *they wouldn't eat in their home*, and I think [the husband] feels a little hurt by it because — he's going to the effort of making his home Kosher and somebody else can come there and — *it's saying they're not good enough* — and they did this amongst themselves. In [one place] we had one rabbi go to a cheese factory and pronounce that the cheese was Kosher. The other rabbi had to go from the other group; he wouldn't accept [the other rabbi's] judgement. And even within their own group, sometimes one rabbi isn't good enough for the other one when it comes to koshering ... to me, it's making a thing a burden instead of a guide for life (24: 15-16, emphasis original).

Whose norms prevail, or *should* prevail? Both groups have their own values and standards that are *normal for them* and for those with whom they associate. Each contests the interpretations, perceptions, and emphases of the others — as too little or too much. To be constantly attentive to religious practice, every moment of every day, is incredibly demanding and time- and energy-consuming; one must be continuously focused and aware during all of one's daily activities, both in what one does and how it is done. The expectations regarding 'normal behaviour' differ between the groups. George Van Pelt Campbell describes this as 'relativization of tradition', where tradition refers to "the set of assumptions passed from one generation to the next by which people make sense of the world and establish their sense of identity" (2004 online). Seeing one's own tradition relative to another tradition means being confronted with comparing one's own taken-for-granted ways with 'Other' ways and so "calling into question such things as the definition,

boundaries, categories and conclusions" through which one understands the world (Campbell 2004; cf. Berger 1973; Gergen 1991).

Aggressive or Intrusive Fundamentality

Almost every respondent appreciated extreme (non-violent) demonstrations of conviction by affiliates of their own religious group, but perceived extreme demonstrations of conviction by affiliates of differing religious groups as potentially threatening: another's known and familiar ways are not their own. Additionally, the types of extreme fundamentalists that all respondents object to are intrusive and/or violent and perceived as wanting to change everyone to their own ways. The two ways they are perceived to do this is through terrorist-type violence — and so fear and domination; and through intimidating and aggressive conversion attempts.

Some fundamentalists *are* imposing, aggressive, intrusive, and intentional as they attempt to stigmatise certain 'Others' and create the impression of their own alleged superiority. These people are both fundamental and extreme. One Christian fundamentalist leader explicitly spoke to congregation affiliates about the risk of differing-religious 'Others' in Australia. This influential speaker, who is convinced that the power of the Lord works through him, was keen to disseminate a strong message, and is well-practiced at countering attacks against his arguments. From his perspective, Australia should be a 'white' Christian nation. He opposes multiculturalism, religious diversity, homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, prostitution, gambling, and "the interfaith movement" — basing his beliefs on (*his interpretation* of) Biblical doctrine. He argued that the Howard government was insufficiently Christian that Australians "paid the price" for voting in the 'wrong' political party.

I recorded the following quotes and my responses during observations where he and his wife were guest speakers for a gathering:

- "There is a need for Christians to take back the nation" — when referring to the multicultural and religiously diverse immigrants. He seems to be unaware that he is one of them, and that 'his people' appropriated the country from the indigenous people.
- "Christianity is the heritage and foundation of Australia"; Australia was intended by early white settlers to be a Christian colony. Now, the Christian heritage is being destroyed; "the walls are broken down" (with reference to the Biblical story on which the sermon was based).
- He told of a minister in England who spoke of the "white ants" in Christian churches in England and who stated that "the roof is falling in" as these 'white ants' undermine the church with "their humanism" and "insistence on interfaith dialogue"; therefore, Christians should prevent the same thing happening in Australia.
- "We have people moving in from all over the world — we should be evangelising them, then send them back to their countries to evangelize others" (Chittock 2009).

The irony was that he used the sincerity of a Jew as an example for Christian behaviour, and objects to any forms of Christianity other than his own. He wants to change 'Others' to *his* ways so he and his kind will not need to risk changing to the ways of 'Others': attack becomes a form of self-defence. As fundamentalists of a specific type, his wife was not allowed to speak to teach male congregants; instead, her own powerful offering was listed as 'the children's presentation' in the proceedings, which, of course, also delivered her message to the adults who accompanied the children.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the difference between definitions of the concept 'fundamentalism' that are commonly used in academic writing and mass media disseminations and fundamentality as understood in the lived context by affiliates. Political discourses and mass media news items link fundamentalists with extremism and violence. Academic writing includes the same ideas when describing the intentions of fundamentalists to change social systems to their own way of believing and practicing. Perceptions of non-fundamentalists include interpreting fundamental living as extreme, as intrusive, and even as threatening.

Especially, *being visible* as fundamental, because of personal presentation, influences or elicits perceptions, as any public display of affiliation is perceived by some to invite a response. One's religious self-identity, then, is threatened, as 'Others' perceive and evaluate one's own ways. This research supports those general arguments — provisionally, but argues for a more complex understanding of the concept of fundamentality and the peaceful living of fundamentalists who even accept difference — who 'live and let live'.

Although I observed aggressive and confrontational fundamentalists in gatherings, not all are violent or aggressive in their attempts to achieve their own ends: however, they *do* intentionally attempt to define boundaries and standards concerning the right way to live regarding (the truth and legitimacy of) their own beliefs in a world of 'Otherness'. During encounters with difference and the occurrence of social change, fundamentalists seek to control and maintain their own 'right ways of living'. Some retreat into religious lives from the 'ungodly' wider secular social world. Non-fundamentalists perceive fundamental living as 'extreme'. Yet, extreme, as respondents in this research advise, may be extremely good or bad, or, extremely observant or lax. Extreme is context specific and relative. People also perceive extreme differently when considering their own kind compared with the extreme of 'Others'. One's own extreme, providing it is not violent, is a positive demonstration of convictions about one's own faith. Extreme demonstrations by 'Others' of *their* religious convictions is perceived as a reason for concern.

This chapter discussion further links fundamentality with intentions to live rightly according to interpretations and understandings of God's directives; those who live attending to the fundamentals of their religious beliefs perceive that way as the right way to live. Fundamentality is not necessarily exclusive or confrontational. Many times, 'Others' would not be aware of fundamentalists' practices in their daily life as they attempt to remember God in all they do; many of the practices are internal, not observable, and may not necessarily be recognised as religious.

Additionally, fundamentalists are particularly reflexive and sensitive regarding surveillance — by self, others, and God. God, especially, is *always* watching.....

Chapter Eight: Spirituality *as* Otherness

The supernatural, mystical, and spiritual underpin most religious beliefs, particularly with belief in a Supreme Being or God. As such, this chapter introduces another type of 'Other' — those respondents who encounter spiritual-mystical type experiences. They are 'Other' because, as with those who differ from one's own beliefs because of affiliation, or convert between beliefs, they 'think and know differently'. Their knowing is based on personal experience. Each of the religions considered in this thesis has at least one mystical branch or sub-group where affiliates deliberately study mysticism and/or the spiritual. Although referring to spirituality as "psychological parallels", Blasi suggests "that we should attend to the realm if we are to study religion adequately" (2002: 270). Most religions and religious affiliates assume that an otherworldly dimension exists. However, that 'ordinary' individuals can directly experience personal spirituality is a more contentious issue. Ideas of God, angels, and other beings or entities with various degrees of intelligence, are the stuff of religious writings worldwide, and include stories of prophets, saints, and others — authority figures — who deliver the word of God, communicate with otherworldly beings, and produce miracles. In the western context, the rise of Spiritualism became the catalyst that renewed awareness of mystical-type encounters for 'ordinary' individuals:

> "... people no longer need[ed] psychic power or long training to communicate with the noumenal world. Everybody is now considered able to contact the spirit of the dead and there is no longer a need for the presence of an intermediary" (Possamaï 2005: 78).

In the context of this thesis, experiences known as 'spiritual', 'mystical', or 'the supernatural' occurred in various forms for eighteen of the thirty-six interview respondents. Additional participants spoke informally of belief in angels, messengers from heavenly realms, and of other beings or spirits in other non-physical dimensions.

Despite the large numbers of people who spoke about supernatural-type beliefs and occurrences, some were hesitant when sharing their experiences; ambivalence exists in many religious contexts regarding independent personal experiences. Unless their religious affiliation explicitly supports such encounters, affiliates are unsure of the way people will respond if told. As previously researched, perceptions of otherness can occur with people who experience mystical encounters, with social constraints restricting the telling of the experiences (Hay 1982; Chittock 2004). Such experiences are often rejected or dismissed — from the secular perspective, as being a psychological imbalance (Hay 1982; McColl 1989; Chittock 2004); or, in the context of some (conservative or orthodox-type) religious expressions, as the work of the devil (Chittock 2004). Rather than reveal their experiences, many people will reflexively sequester their stories for fear of negative social sanctions (Chittock 2004).

When they speak about their encounters, these people are perceived by some as 'Other' because they believe and understand differently — because their beliefs and/or experiences deviate from the normal and conventional beliefs and practices within their religious affiliation and within the wider social world. They are 'Other' in a non-believing secular world, and to varying degrees within the religious world. The boundaries of otherness discussed in this thesis apply to those who 'are different', who 'do things differently', and/or who 'understand differently' from the general group around them. Affiliates who experience the mystical may be perceived as deviant, or as overstepping the boundaries. They generally differentiate between religion — the structure, versus that which is known as the spiritual or mystical — an 'otherworldly' dimension or something that is *beyond* the generally taken-for-granted physical world in which people normally operate. This dimension affords experiences or encounters that are often ineffable and have nothing in the everyday physical world with which to compare the experience.

Because of their experiences, these people understand differently. Their faith is no longer based only on acceptance of text and conventional practices, but contains an added experiential dimension of belief because of what, for them, is proof, or something they perceive as 'tangible' — actual experience, rather than only the hearsay of (even authoritative) others. Their knowing may be perceived as 'wisdom' or "an active knowledge that is fully understood and lived by the spiritual seeker" (Possamaï 2005: 63). However convincing another's story may be, it is *another's* story, whereas the individual *owns* personal experience. Some people become pluralistic if they accept that spirituality is the essence of all religious *expressions* and that truth exists in every religion that is based on an understanding of this spiritual essence. That is, they accept 'Others' because otherness is perceived as a different expression of a same or similar understanding. Some, instead, will insist that their encounter or experience is directly the result of *their own* beliefs and worship practices, that it is special to their own religious affiliation and is an outpouring and/or extension of that. Either way, spiritual mystical-type encounters provide another way of knowing. People who experience such encounters also provide another category of difference, and so, religious 'Otherness' — those who believe, know, and practice, differently from oneself.

Spirituality and Religious Identity

Drawing from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Values Study Survey (1983), Bouma (1992) discusses religious beliefs and religious experiences amongst the Australian population. During the 1980s, an overwhelming majority (84.8%) believed in a God of some sort; only 6.8% of those interviewed claimed no god or afterlife exists (Bouma 1992: 99). Additionally, around 55% affirmed that they pray: nearly 33% stated they prayed frequently, with a further 22% praying occasionally; 35.8% claimed they never pray, and 9.1 prayed rarely (Bouma 1992: 100). In the 2006 census, approximately 70% of Australians report having a religious affiliation (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS hereafter)

2006a). This does not include people who responded as 'Agnostic', those who responded as having no religion, or where the religion was not stated. Additionally, a number of people chose not to respond to the question, and around 11.2% of the population did not complete the census (ABS 2006b). It is realistic to speculate that some of these people may also believe in some sort of spiritual dimension, though may not have any religious affiliation. These figures appear to support the 'believing without belonging' thesis researched by Grace Davie (1993), which, it would seem, has become prevalent throughout the Western world and which is likely to be relevant also in Australia. In reporting data from the Australian Values Study Survey (1983), Bouma includes graphs illustrating (a) 'gender differences in awareness or influence by a presence', and (b) 'gender differences in feeling close to a spiritual life force' (1992: 120-121). Both suggest that women are more likely to encounter religious experiences than are men. In (a), the figures are 50/50 for women and, for men, around 40% were 'aware', with around 62% 'not aware'; in response to (b) approximately 78% of men answered 'never' with approximately 22% reporting 'at times', and, approximately 70% of women report 'never' with the other 30% affirming 'at times' (Bouma 1992: 120-121). Despite the impossibility of reconciling data from differing surveys, the overall trends, demonstrated in the differing results, indicate that despite secular and individualistic influences, religion and/or spirituality is a part of Australian heritage and remains important in Australia overall, including into recent times.

Studies of Religious Experiences

Extensive studies of religious and spiritual experiences are documented in Britain and the United States of America. A history of investigations into mystical-type religious experiences includes research by Edwin Starbuck in the 1890s (Hay 1982), and William James, whose seminal work *The Varieties of Religious Experiences* was originally published in 1902. James drew upon Starbuck's data collection for his own work. Starbuck "started asking people about their experience of religious conversion" (Hay 1982: 101). This method has continued to be used and useful by various researchers, and into the present context.

Researchers such as Charles Glock and Rodney Stark (1965, in Hay 1982), Alister Hardy (1979), David Hay (1982), and William Miller and Janet C'de Baca (2001) have used the same principle in their approaches to this topic with surprisingly similar and consistent findings. Adam Possamaï's ethnographic study that explored understandings of the concept 'New Age', and which was inspired by his Ph.D. project, was published in 2005 and became a valuable resource for raising awareness of spirituality in Australia generally, and in Australian academia. Christine McColl (1989) conducted a study in Australia, using sixteen life history case studies, and Michael Barbato (2000) studied near-death experiences and death-bed visions.

When attempting to define religious experiences and encounters, Weber's substantive approach becomes more relevant than Durkheim's functional understanding for several reasons. Firstly, people do not intend to 'have' or 'do' these experiences. Many such experiences are spontaneous and unsolicited; they take people by surprise, and, despite opinions to the contrary, do not necessarily, or even usually, result from using alcohol or other drugs or substances (James 1902/1996; Hardy1979; Hay 1982; Miller and C'de Baca 2001). Secondly, there is no necessary connection with religion as such; spiritual or supernatural-type encounters may occur at any time with any individual regardless of their religious affiliation or lack of (James 1902/1996; Hardy1979; Hay 1982; McColl 1989; Miller and C'de Baca 2001). Additionally, such encounters are real to those who experience them, are important and significant, and often have the power to change the understandings, beliefs, and life-directions of the individual who encounters that which defies explanation by those who have not experienced the same (James 1902/1996; Hardy1979; Barbato 2000; Miller and C'de Baca 2001).

Alister Hardy (1979) advertised, through newspapers and radio shows, for stories about spiritual-type encounters from individuals. Hardy's research, conducted in England, (1969-1976) resulted in over four-thousand responses, many more than he had anticipated, thus revealing a range of personal spiritual experiences of

transcendental, supernatural or mystical types. These experiences convinced individuals of "another dimension to life" and "a deep awareness of [the presence of] a benevolent non-physical power" (Hardy 1979: 1). The range of individuals affected included children, atheists, agnostics, institutional members and non-institutional believers (Hardy 1979: 1). Upon receiving these responses, Hardy categorised the varieties of religious or spiritual experiences according to type. "People felt guided; encountered audio, visual, olfactory and tactile experiences; were healed of afflictions; experienced telepathy, precognition, dream experiences, clairvoyance or communication with the dead; and, or, were 'converted', developed new vocations, or received clarity and understanding of 'the meaning of life'" (Chittock 2004: 8).

David Hay, who worked in England with Hardy, continued with the analysis, and undertook his own study, the findings of which he disseminated in a book, *Exploring Inner Space* (1982). After several unsatisfactory attempts, Hay "approached National Opinion Polls Ltd and arranged to put some questions in one of their 'omnibus surveys'" through which random interviews with approximately 2,000 people occur around the country (1982: 113). Hay also compared his own data with data from research undertaken in America by Andrew Greeley and Bill McCready around 1976. Previously, in 1965, Glock and Stark had published their findings from questions to some 3,000 church members in Northern California (Hay 1982: 115). Glock and Stark's main question asked if respondents had ever experienced 'a feeling that you were somehow in the presence of God'; the result was that "more than two thirds of this group of church members ... thought they had been in the presence of God" (Hay 1982: 115). In a study using similar data collection methods, William Miller and Janet C'de Baca (2001) analysed the results and implications of such experiences in the lives of the fifty-five respondents who have experienced such encounters, the in-depth interviews of which were obtained from advertising with a request for people to offer their stories. Miller and C'de Baca refer to the results as 'quantum change' and epiphanies. The changes that occur and result from these experiences often

include the following characteristics: "ineffability, revelation, transience of the original experience (although the effects last for decades), passivity, unity with the cosmos, transcendence, awe, joy-love-peace, and distinctiveness" (Vaillant 2002: 2).

The point indicated in these research projects is that spiritual encounters and experiences appear to be more widespread than may be generally appreciated: "The rich assemblage of stories represented in this volume [their book] has persuaded us that quantum changes are not only real but occur much more often than one might imagine" (Miller and C'de Baca 2001: 7-8). Despite the New Age movement and its many associated publications encouraging openness about such experiences, many people are still hesitant to divulge their personal experiences openly without a supportive social context (Berger 1971; Hay 1982; McColl 1989; Barbato 2000; Chittock 2004). 'Others', in this context, are 'on each side of the fence': those who refuse to accept the possibility and plausibility of experiences from what is perceived to be a non-tangible (in their minds) otherworld, versus those who experience spiritual encounters but who may become 'Others' if they attempt to describe them. *Others* are those who think and/or know differently from oneself — those who believe, practice, and act according to a different understanding.

For those who have never encountered and do not believe in the spiritual, mystical, or paranormal, an account of such an experience "is deemed unreasonable ... [and] cannot be 'normalized' in terms of the background expectancies of what 'everybody knows'" (Scott and Lyman 1976: 417). Without an established discourse, there is no plausibility structure or legitimacy for the story, thus leaving people feeling isolated — *as if* they differ from those around them and thus exist outside of *unspoken* boundaries (Berger 1971; Gergen 1991). For plausibility and legitimacy to exist, there must be a supportive community, where agreement, confirmation, and affirmation contribute to the conversation or discourse. Additionally "there are likely to be organized practices designed to still doubts and

prevent lapses of conviction ... There are also likely to be more or less systematized explanations, justifications, and theories in support of the conceptions in question" (Berger 1971: 50-51). The experiences are more easily explicated, discussed, and accepted when supportive groups exist, where all affirm the existence and reality of the phenomena.

The formation of general movements, such as the New Age movement, and of organised groups such as the Theosophical Society, Spiritualist Churches, and Spiritual Fellowship groups, contribute to the plausibility and legitimising of mystical experiences in the social world. In some cases, these understandings offer an alternative for those who believe they are unable to share their experiences in their normal social context. Ironically, it took the development of secularisation to free religious mystical experiences from religious institutional control. Hanegraaff argues that rationalisation and secularisation are among the conditions that were "crucial…for the emergence of New Age religion" (1996: 406). Despite this, some people are reluctant to discuss such experiences openly; those who responded to research questions were relieved and grateful to discover that other people had similar experiences, and that their own experiences are not isolated and abnormal cases (Miller and C'de Baca 2001). Some people fear being different, being an outsider. Yet, as Miller and C'de Baca write:

> The truth, however, is that such experiences do not occur only in fiction. They happen to real people, and not infrequently. They constitute a kind of experience with distinctive characteristics. Because contemporary psychology has no name (let alone explanation) for this phenomenon, we chose the term *quantum change* to describe it, drawing on both the concept of a quantum leap and the unpredictability inherent in quantum mechanics (2001: 4).

Additionally, the ineffability of such experiences makes it doubly difficult to explain to those who have never encountered them; not only are there often no words to suitably describe the experiences, there is also no common point, or frame of reference, for understanding difference that is so far removed from

ordinary everyday life and interactions. Such experiences are incomprehensible for the uninitiated.

Bouma also discusses how language and cultural contexts filter such experiences (1992: 40-41). Bouma claims that "People do not usually have religious experiences entirely on their own" (1992: 40). Hay, instead, finds that at the time of any such encounter, 61% were completely alone, 9% were alone, but in a public place, and a further 9% were with one or two uninvolved friends (1982: 145). This indicates that nearly 80% of individuals have the experience alone; only 7% experienced their encounter in a communal setting, and 13% with one or two involved friends (Hay 1982: 145). Bouma would certainly be correct if his statement is to suggest that people express their experiences through their religious (when relevant), linguistic, and cultural heritage, using known and familiar terminology and symbols; people can only use the tools they have at hand — that is, the context-content of the social world in which they are socialised and belong.

If an individual has learnt about another belief system and accompanying language, that learning has extended that individual's personal world and 'tools at hand' so one's expression may also be extended — that person then 'thinks differently' and 'knows differently'. Thus, one's social connections become the basis of one's form of expression when attempting to understand and communicate spiritual, mystical, religious experiences. Yet, although a definition of such experiences is elusive, clarity is available in the results: "*quantum change is a vivid, surprising, benevolent, and enduring personal transformation*" (Miller and C'de Baca 2001: 4, emphasis original). Spiritual and mystical encounters are "not comprehensible as ordinary responses to life events" and are "predominantly inner transformations, which often occur in the absence of any salient external event" (Miller and C'de Baca 2001: 5).

Change

Permanent change is one major characteristic of such experiences; it permeates every part of one's life (McColl 1989; Barbato 2000; Miller and C'de Baca 2001). Change occurs through exposure to difference — something that differs from one's normal and conventional life context. During social interactions, exchange or 'flow' occurs each way between the differing understandings, thus altering both (Berger 1971; Bauman 2001). Spiritual transformations, which are inner experiences, are underpinned by "an overwhelming sense of loving kindness" and are permanent — "a one-way door through which there is no going back" (Miller and C'de Baca 2001: 5). Barbato explains that some of the changes included are "a more humanitarian view of life, a less materialistic way of life, reduced fear of death, and greater spiritual awareness" (2000: 212).

> You are changed forever. Many of the people we interviewed in preparing this book still remembered the exact date and time when their experience began and had vivid recall of their surroundings and circumstances, even though the events had occurred, on average, eleven years earlier. It is plain to such people that they were markedly and permanently altered by the event. They were confident that what had happened would remain. Their understanding, their perception, had shifted markedly" (Miller and C'de Baca 2001: 17).

Neither do these experiences necessarily lead to commitment in organised religion (McColl 1989; Miller and C'de Baca 2001), nor are they confined to those who are religiously affiliated (Hardy 1979; Hay 1982). That the experiences become a 'different type of knowing' is emphasised by those who lives are changed because of the experiences, and which is noted in this project as well as others.

The following is one explanation offered for this change in knowing, though it is an explanation that may not be readily accepted by a religious affiliate who believes that God has spoken to him or herself personally in order to resolve a crisis or redirect one's life path:

> James E. Loder in *The Transforming Moment* described a general pattern for experiences of this kind. They begin with the person being in a state of conflict and what Loder called "a rupture in the knowing context."

Something disrupts the way in which the person has been perceiving reality and making sense out of life. This triggers the inner search for a new way of organizing reality, and sometimes in this circumstance "an insight, intuition, or vision appears on the border between the conscious and the unconscious, usually with convincing force." The experience is frequently accompanied by a great emotional release and a deep sense of relief. Then, with time, the person integrates and interprets the experience through language and symbols, and new patterns of thought and action emerge (Miller and C'de Baca 2001: 7).

Change, evolving, and renewed understanding continue beyond spiritual encounters; for some people, spiritual or mystical-type encounters become a part of one's spiritual life journey where people live their spirituality, fundamentally, and with far more daily emphasis than many who attend weekly religious services (McColl 1989). In his seminal work, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, William James (1902/1996) described two types of change — that of incremental change that occurs through socialisation and learning; and that which occurs suddenly, unexpectedly, and discontinuously. Supernatural spiritual encounters are obviously of the second type, and become catalysts for a reviewing of values, priorities, and one's approach to everyday situations and interactions. The experience of 'knowing differently' also leads to 'thinking differently', and so, behaving differently.

These changes, which inevitably require one to question issues such as the relevance, accuracy, and/or applicability of one's previously-held beliefs, have social implications. They may disrupt one's normal interactions, relationships, and belonging, in one's social world amongst family and friends. "Changes in longheld values may impose an intolerable strain on relationships, with resulting emotional and/or physical separation" (Barbato 2000: 212). Encounters with difference alter one's perceptions, their way of defining situations, their interpersonal communicative interactions, and thus, the way others perceive and respond to them. Cherie Sutherland makes this point in her research into near-death experiences and related publications, which she recounts for an interview:

Sutherland says many people who survive a near-death or serious illness often have trouble fitting back into normal life afterwards. "It's very common for relationships to break down in the aftermath. This happened to me. What you find is that relationships are based on common goals and then one partner has this experience and wants to explore new ways of living in the world, but their spouse may be reluctant to be a part of that.

"Surviving death can make a person feel very alienated and out of kilter with society and its thinking. Family and friends can look at you like you are a lunatic because you've changed so much.

"Suddenly you want to move away from materialistic goals and concerns and you feel you have no choice but to change — you have changed because of what has happened to you" (in *The Age* 24th November 2003).

Whenever difference is encountered, one must (re)organise one's response. Such changes can threaten the unquestioned normality, security, and trust in relationships, when one undergoes transformation in which others are unable to participate or understand.

Contention exists also regarding the changes in social conditions relating to the influences of the New Age and self-help human potential movements, neither of which are organisations or religions. Paul Heelas (1996) discusses the emphasis on 'self' that has developed through what Giddens (1991) refers to as the 'disembedding' of traditional practices and values. 'Self' becomes the source of authority, authenticity, guidance, and wisdom, all of which are accessed through personal experiences rather than from external sources (Heelas 1996; Sutcliffe 1995). Possamaï (2005) also finds that people engage with personal change when they deliberately integrate practices, such as the use of crystals, the Tarot, astrology, numerology, and similar, as tools to facilitate the development of self-knowledge. This change in perception from institutional to individual guidance undermines the traditional institutions, such as religions, upon which people have ordinarily and traditionally relied for answers about life's challenges.

Because of his perceptions of otherness, Douglas Groothuis (1986), in *Unmasking the New Age*, launches an argument against the New Age movement and its

influence because he perceives it to be based on the philosophical concept of monism. He perceives it to be dangerous to Christianity as an institution and to Christians who may be seduced into following the ideas. Groothuis (1986) argues about the perils of adopting the monism-inspired Eastern religious beliefs because they differ from Biblical teachings and, perhaps, reveals his own fears. He warns about the lack of distinction between humanity and a deity; he explains that if God is 'all' then God must be evil as much as good; he makes explicit that the New Age movement is a challenge to Christianity; he warns that "As Christians we must examine this new force acting on our society or face the possibility of succumbing to a non-Christian (sometimes even anti-Christian) philosophy" (Groothuis 1986: 36). Regarding mystical or paranormal experiences, he states:

> If the paranormal world is courted without the protection and guidance of Christ, what began as romance may end as psychic violence ... Despite the scientific respectability sometimes given to the paranormal, apart from the lordship of Christ it is nothing other than the occultism prohibited throughout the Bible. It is the search for power in the wrong place (Groothuis 1986: 109).

Although he accepts spiritual experiences in principle — "the Christian world affirms the existence of supernatural entities (both good and evil) who can and do influence the natural realm", he soundly condemns any such involvement unless it occurs in a Christian context and fails to suggest *how* this is to occur (Groothuis 1986: 108). Neither does Groothuis explain how individuals are to know the difference between experiences that may come from a godly realm or those that arrive from the devil in disguise.

In contrast, McColl, whose perceptions of spirituality differ markedly from Groothuis' perceptions, describes the uniqueness of the current Western social world context, with the enormity of religious and cultural exposures, influences, opportunities, and choices:

> Our chance to pursue spiritual development in the framework they provide is one of the unique spiritual opportunities available in the West today. The human potential movement, too, will permanently enrich our spiritual

landscape ... none of this [the cautions] should blind us to the fact that, as so many of these interviews show, the ideas and techniques of the human potential movement have touched the lives of people of all classes and spiritual persuasions, and touched them for the better. Access to the inner realm, tools for making positive changes in our lives, a belief in the individual's ability to grow are the gifts of the human potential movement ... [which is] for all its imperfections, an innovative and healing social force (1989: 39-40).

The cautions referred to in the above quote include lack of information about the constraints of class, sex, and race on one's lifestyle choices, the simplification of ideas and techniques, and about movement being used for "profit, to express middle-class values [and that it] is mass produced and over optimistic to the point of hubris" (McColl 1989: 39). People perceive change and difference according to their own conceptual frameworks and according to the way they perceive that change and difference to affect themselves, their normality and familiarity, and their beliefs and values.

Living with Spiritual Encounters

In all cases, spiritual-mystical experiences are perceived by respondents to be life-changing. Michael Barbato cites William James (1902) who, when commenting about spiritual or mystical encounters, stated: "something in you absolutely knows that the result must be truer than any logic-chopping rationalistic talk, however clever, that may contradict it" (2000: 209). Respondents in this research discuss the life-enhancing changes they experience after spiritual encounters. Although not dealt with fully in this thesis, analysis reveals at least four themes that are fairly consistent among those who encounter spiritual-mystical experiences. They are frequently pluralist *and* fundamentalist in their daily lived expression of their religious understandings; they are more likely to attend and/or know more about differing religions and/or denominations within religions, will feel 'at ease' and appreciate diversity of knowledge sources and understanding. They have a strong sense of responsibility — for doing the right thing, caring for others, caring for nature, and for co-operating rather than competing; they denounce acts of

deliberately harming others. They tend to believe that communication with God—however they interpret that — or the spiritual dimension is direct and does not need an intermediary; spirituality is transcendent and is available to people, generally, regardless of religious affiliation. They also tend to differentiate between religion and spirituality — religion is mostly man-made with regard to the 'rules and regulations' — and between the word and the deed: although religious doctrine is perceived to be important, what one actually does is more important. Additionally, they tend to be cautious about declaring 'truth' and would suggest they 'believe' rather than 'know', which is not to suggest their lack of conviction, but their respect for many belief institutions and reluctance to be confrontational. This *combination* of qualities and characteristics is more common amongst respondents who have encountered spiritual-mystical experiences, than amongst respondents who have not had such experiences or who dismiss them as irrelevant. The experiences influence the way these respondents think, know, and act in daily life, which results in them being different and 'Other' when interacting with non-experiencing believers.

Experiences related by respondents in this research, also, are diverse in their forms or manifestations (cf. James 1902/1996; Hardy1979; Hay 1982; Miller and C'de Baca 2001). Although encounters related in this research are generally perceived to be pleasant and positive, unpleasant and upsetting encounters may also occur; two people mentioned an unpleasant incident each, but each also had pleasant and positive experiences. In several interviews, respondents related their spiritual or supernatural experiences, without specific prompting, as part of their religious identity or relating to what is important about religion to them.

Difference exists between 'belief in' and 'experience of' mystical encounters. It is possible to believe in God, angels, miracles, ghosts, spirits, and the like, without ever having encountered any such phenomena. However, experience of encounters with something that appears to come into those categories underpins a different sort of knowing that extends from and beyond 'belief in'. Some spoke of

the presence of the 'normally unseen', including angels and other spirits that differ from visitations by or presence of deceased human entities or human-form 'guides', which were also spoken of. Those discussing non-human spiritual forms still emphasised the need to be aware, mindful, respectful, and considerate, of the consciousness of these entities, affirming that they live around us all in all places, though are not to be worshipped.

Explicit Personal Encounters

In this account, a traumatic experience — the death of a very dear friend — was the catalyst for the spiritual experience.

> [He] had been driving his car in his usual manner [and] had an accident and he died. It was a *tragic* death because he had a young daughter, he had a happy relationship, he was — well 'peak-reaching' at that time. [He had] a *wonderful* understanding in Tibetan Buddhism — of what he would call his path in life, and through that tragic accident, it was terrible, it really upset me.... So I bought some Chai tea, and I picked out and pulled down the Tibetan Book of the Dead, and made the tea one day, and sat down and started reading it for [*him*], to try and work out — and work it through, 'cause there was a *lot* of grief in losing [him]. About half-way though that, I felt the most *wonderful* sense of peace come over, and [he was] saying 'it's ok, I'm ok' — and I didn't read any further, I just put the book down, and I put it away, and that's one of the *stronger* experiences I've had of what I call Creator God (29: 2-3).

This personal 'healing' encounter enabled the respondent to recover from the loss and trauma, and to perceive it differently. Instead of absolute death and finality, this encounter arrived in a form whereby the deceased reassured the respondent of his wellness. An exchange or interaction of sorts appears to occur here. The respondent was reading the death rituals *for* the deceased to help him through his transition experience — which presupposes a belief that death is not final. During the reading, she senses that *he has responded* to let her know he is well in a communicative form that is familiar to them both, by directing or informing her that she has no need for concern.

The next example also includes hearing a voice, but which is differently directive; it instructs the respondent to take action, the result of which changes his life direction and religious understanding completely.

> Respondent: It came from a long time of seeking where I belonged and feeling if I had an attachment to something or not and I believe that I had an amazing experience in my life that sent me in this direction and ever since I've been there it's been a learning curve and I've enjoyed the journey so far and I feel that it's the kind of thing that you can learn about and always cause to be a learning until the day you die and that's what I'm interested in.

> Interviewer: Okay. Are you happy to share the experience?

> Respondent: The experience? Yes, okay. I don't share it with many people, but I will. I'd been out of home since I was 15, had a pretty tough life, joined a bike gang and that was my existence; that was my family, we all looked after each other … I needed something, more substance in my life. I worked for a Christian organisation at the time and I had friends from many different backgrounds.   I had friends that followed the Buddhist path, workmates that were from the Jewish faith; I had friends that were from all different walks of life.

> Interviewer: Including Islam?

> Respondent: Not including Islam. And through a lot of soul searching and a lot of isolation and meditation, one night I was sitting up on a rock overlooking a vast amount of water and bush-land and just a voice came to me that said, "You need to pick up the book and read." And I didn't really understand what the voice meant and so more nights I sat and I contemplated, and again another voice came to me several nights later and it said, "You need to now follow your heart." [... and later I had another experience that said, "Now, you're reading the book, read between the lines" (20: 6)] …. As soon as I started my course I met my wife, and she accepted the way I was, she accepted my lifestyle and she understood what I was going through, the process I was going through and she seemed to walk through it with me. And when I would get more interpretations, voices or messages or whatever, she would tell me what they meant and give me guidance though we had only been together a short period, and we met a sheik and the sheik asked me a few questions and said, you know, "You've obviously been a Muslim all your life." … For the first time in my life I felt all the answers were there and more and the further I've gone down this path — there's been times where I've

been disturbed about certain things, but the answers have always been there and it's just astounded me that everything has just fallen in place. The more that I follow the path one door may shut and the next one opens and I step through that door and the next one opens and that's the way my life has been ever since I took that step.

Interviewer: Okay. So it was spiritual guidance that brought you to it?

Respondent: Yes (20: 1-2).

An initial point in this response is that the experience is not normally spoken of, though no specific reason was given in the telling. The respondent was already open to difference beyond his Christian affiliation at the time, having friends and acquaintances from many cultural and various religious backgrounds. The voice came as a surprise, but he was open to further instruction if it should occur because he continued with his sitting and contemplating exercises. After following the advice, which, he discovered, was to read the Qur'an, he converted to Islam, where he finally *felt* 'at home'. The change was fulfilling, satisfying, 'spirit directed' (that is, not physical), and quite different to anything he had previously considered. He knew nothing about Islam — he knew nothing that could have lead him to conversion without that direction. He trusted the guidance, and so found a new way of living, answers to long-held questions, a community in which to belong, purpose, and a soul-mate wife. The guidance gave him everything for which he had previously hoped.

It would appear that God does not have any favourite religion, but knows that individuals belong in specific religions or that a religion suits a specific individual, because whilst one is told to *leave* Christianity for Islam, another is told to leave Judaism *for* Christianity:

I had a very dramatic experience at age 15, and I became a Christian. I told you I'd listened to the voice of God all my life, and I heard in a *very* loud and clear way: 'You said you'd give your life to me; put your trust in Jesus' — it just spoke into my being, into my consciousness without any other Christians involved. It just was a realisation of being and I started to read the New Testament — and a **huge** change took place in my heart,

> but prior to that for a few years, I'd been in Ananda Marga, and prior to that we'd been in the Divine Light Mission — this is as well as Judaism, and we'd been in the Theosophical Society, and there were various places we used — regular meetings — to go to (28: 7).

This pluralist identifies with at least two religions and several sub-groups and is considered by some to be subversive. Those who attend to convention by committing to and affiliating with only one religious group are unable to understand or accept such diversity within an individual. Issues of trust, loyalty, commitment, and belonging arise.

Some people know they have experienced or encountered *something* but are less certain in their declaration of *what* it is. This next respondent, who has experienced multiple spiritual encounters, is cautious about claims of 'knowing', because 'to know' is, in a sense, an absolute truth claim. To say 'I have experienced' and 'I believe' both leave room for something that is less than absolute, though may still be substantial in their declaration. This does not necessarily imply doubt in one's own mind about one's experience or its meaning, but how it is to be explained and justified to others — if at all. During interaction with another who has no similar experiential framework, 'I believe' is less confrontational than 'I know' if attempting to describe paranormal or spiritual experiences and one's related understanding.

> ... in terms of what I've come to — *know*? — *Experience* — 'know' is a word I'm not sure I want to sort of commit myself to — say '*believe*', but I *have* experiences — *many* experiences — which have just helped me believe that ah, there is more going on than meets the eye and that there's a God behind it all (3: 4).

This respondent is not prepared to trivialise his experiences to make it easier for another to dismiss his claims, but expresses that which is *his own* understanding, cautiously for others, but with *certainty for himself.*

The following respondent's experiences appear to be verified by a relative of the deceased whose presence is felt repeatedly. The respondent begins by asserting her rationality and denying that she is 'the kind of person' (whatever that is) who experiences the mystical-type of thing despite recounting two quite unrelated occurrences. Her comments are to suggest that this is 'a bit unusual — not quite normal' but that she is a sensible person nonetheless. She also reaffirms this later in her recounting.

> It's interesting, because I've had some strange experiences. I do remember, as a little girl, I was quite convinced that an angel had come into my bedroom and my rational sense now says, "Yes, somebody turned the light on quickly and you woke up to this bright light and that's", you know, but, I mean, I believed there was an angel in my bedroom, and that was a very comforting thing.
>
> I've had a really strange experience with this house. When I bought it, it belonged to a young lawyer [who had a traumatic life experience] ... and [although] I sort of grieved for her, the thing that really affected me was that there was a presence here ... it was the previous owner. Now, you know, I'm not the sort of person who has those sorts of mystical experiences, but Amy [pseudonym used for the previous owner] was here and I found myself talking to her; I knew when she was around; any alterations I did I sort of cleared with Amy first. I found myself saying, "Look, Amy, I'm sorry, I can't cope with your brown curtains any longer, I've got to change the curtains."
>
> And it was almost as if until she had overseen what I was doing she wasn't going to disappear. That's the only way I can explain it. And it wasn't threatening at all, it was quite amusing in some ways and I thought, and here's me that's sort of, you know, a pretty *rational* kind of person, and yet, I *knew* this woman was around. He husband was not ... but Amy was. And eventually I met Amy's daughter, and I won't go into all the details, but I said, "Do you want to come and have a look at the house?" ... So I brought her through the house ... and I said, "Now, I must warn you, the kitchen is very different from when your mum was here." And she came in and she just stood and she said, "Mum would've *loved* this but dad would never let her spend any money" ... And I said to her, "Your mother must have had a very strong personality?" And she said, "My word she did." And I said, "Well, I have to tell you that, you know, she's still around. She hasn't gone yet". And she said, "That'd be mum". So that's really — the only mystical experience that I could recount in that way. I

mean, there are other times when you wake up to a glorious morning and you have a very strong sense of spirit but I can't sort of put my finger on it in quite the same way ... but Amy was easy — it just surprised me very, very much, and I don't know whether it was because I needed that sort of reassurance. You know, when I moved here I was a mess. I don't know that she was particularly comforting but she was certainly there. I wasn't alone in my home, you know.

Interviewer: No. But she gave you something to think about?

Respondent: Yes, she did. She did.

Interviewer: So now, do you believe that it wasn't an angel?

Respondent: I don't know. I mean, I rationally explained it, but I actually told this story to [a group she attends] and they all said, "it was an angel; you were right".   [But] I really don't know, I can still sort of see, you know, have that impression of whiteness, and wings and, you know, it *could* be explained by, you know, mum just turning the light on to see if all was right, but - - - (36: 31-32).

She trails off with the last comments, uncertain about affirming or dismissing her childhood memories. Yet her adult experiences in her home are more certain. The presence of the deceased woman, with her strong personality, provided companionship of a type, approved the decorating choices, and became a source of personal healing. The encounter specifically affected the respondent, and some of those to whom she related her experiences in her group affiliation. The supportive context of the group suggests that they, also, at least *believe* in such possibilities, whether they have or have not encountered their own personal experiences.

In another group context, participants are *encouraged* to explore such experiences, and so support both the belief in and the practice of the mystical. Additionally, nature experiences were mentioned as a frequent sub-theme by respondents:

INTERVIEWER: Just before I move on to the next bracket of questions, you mentioned speaking in tongues. What sort of mystical or spiritual experiences have you encountered?

RESPONDER: Well, I do speak in tongues. I don't know what it means. At the time I thought it was the gift of the Holy Spirit. I'm not so sure now. I think for me it certainly, on a secular level, is the ability to express emotions that I don't find easy to express in my intellectual form, so it's a regression to an almost child-like — 'small child' stuff. So there's that. I love the Orthodox faith; that whole praying with icons and all of that. I've been on several Roman Catholic silent retreats and had one most extraordinary experience in prayer that I still can't get my mind around.   There's far more in the world than just scientific knowledge. We were on a three-day silent retreat, and we were led in prayer — in a meditation on Jesus up the mountain, feeding the 5000, coming down, getting in the boats with his disciples, the big storm coming and him stilling the storm, and in that prayer there were 21 or 22 of us, mostly Methodists [with] a few Presbyterians.   And after it we de-briefed, in secular terms.   We each said, if we wanted to, what had happened to us in prayer, and *every one of us* had a *different* experience. It was quite extraordinary.

I still remember what happened to me. I went to sleep, with Jesus, but not with his faith, and that's what I do when I'm under too much stress. The stress of the winds and waves was just too much and I went to sleep, and that's exactly how I deal with life. I just found it fascinating. One person said, "No, Jesus wasn't sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on pillows; he was sleeping on my knee and I tried to stop the disciplines waking him up because he needed his sleep." That was another woman, who obviously was a much more caring person than me.

One of them was very much Peter, you know, "I was about to shake him awake. If Peter hadn't, I would have." Yes, that sort of thing. We each had an *entirely different experience* in the prayer. Now, if that's not mystical, I don't know what is. It was quite - - -

INTERVIEWER: And, of course, relevant to each individual.

RESPONDER: Exactly, exactly. What else? My moments of mysticism tend to be when I'm up on the mountain or down by the river and just sitting. Sometimes I'm just — just time goes and I don't know where it's gone to (35: 15-16).

When one's reference group facilitates such encounters, it becomes easier to engage in and discuss that type of spirituality, in all its forms. One may speak freely, without fear of ridicule, of belittling, or of accusations of mental instability.

Barbato highlights Cherie Sutherland's findings in her publication *Within the Light*:

> Sadly, it is this very fear of being labelled mentally ill that has influenced many to keep their near-death or deathbed experience to themselves. In Sutherland's accounts of NDEs amongst Australians (1993), two of the commonest reasons given for not sharing experiences are the subject's own fear of mental illness and fear the experience will be belittled (2000: 215).

In an interview for *The Age*, Sutherland describes her own near-death experience and the aftermath of such experiences generally, as discovered through her research into the subject:

> "People told me over and over how much more appreciative they were of life, how they wanted to learn, to be of more use to society as a whole, and often (they) had changed beliefs about religion — tending more to a sense of individual spiritualism, rather than organised religion", Sutherland says.
>
> She found that one of the most profound changes for many people was a sense of purpose. "They feel that if they didn't die after coming so close that they must be here for a reason — they just needed to find out what it was" (*The Age* 24th November 2003).

Obviously, not all experiences are related to death, but the results are often similar in individual's lives and reactions. The experiences become reassurance during lifetime challenges, give strength, and help with solving problems:

> Respondent: Yeah, yeah, I've kind of had some wonderful experiences with communities and with people, and kind of by myself — it's different in both ways. I've recently had a wonderful experience of singing in a choir with a group of Christian monks in Victoria, when you just felt this whole identity kind of sink or mould into a whole and you have this sense of totally disappearing in the song, and that was a really beautiful, very amazing experience.
>
> And I've had my own kind of experiences with — you know, by myself, in matters sometimes of choice, making decisions, when I felt that God was particularly strong in that decision, and also, that's come often through some very difficult times in my life, when I've been dealing with personal issues. And meditation, I've had some interesting things with that.

Interviewer: You've never had anything like visions or encounters or like a voice telling you things?

Respondent: Yeah, I don't like to talk about them too much, but I kind of have had visions, but I would regard them as being very strong, extremely strong visualisations. You know, so strong that you really don't have any control over them, and so, yeah, I've experienced those before. Encounter is an interesting thing. I did once have an experience when it felt like I had the air sucked out of my lungs and this, like, total silence enveloped me when I — actually that was when someone was using a Jewish practice, which was kind of saying the name of God in a very particular way, and that was a very profound experience, and I had a very strong understanding of how — of the Prophets in the scripture and how they responded to the appearance of God, because my reaction to that was actually to cover my face — and I don't really know why. Like, it was too much. It was like [drawing in of breath].

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. So how does that affect you? Do you see that as spiritual?   How does it affect you in terms of your religious understanding?

Respondent: Well, you know, it helps me along. It helps me to keep going, but, you know, there's times that it may not happen — I may not have a strong prayer experience or anything like that for months and months, and so you can't really depend on it, but it does help you out, you know. It does keep you going a bit and helps you, but you do have to try to remember, when you're doing things normally, if you can. I try to do that if I can. But those things help you along. They help to keep you going —they help to define you, but you can't stick with them. Because they'll always shift and they'll change, and so they won't — you can't stay with an experience.

Interviewer: Do you talk with other people about those sorts of experiences?

Respondent: Not very often, no.

Interviewer: Not usually.

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Are they encouraged, or discouraged, like in the Catholic congregation, or - - -

Respondent: Well, not necessarily discouraged, but ... these are the things I generally kind of keep to myself (30: 21-22).

Again, there may be reluctance to share one's experiences, yet, as stated, such experiences contribute to defining the person. This may occur two ways: the person may define him or her self through and because of the experiences and others may define the individual according to their acceptance or rejection of spiritual mystical-type encounters, or as they define the individual according to the acts and form of interactions as enacted by the person who experiences such encounters.

Conclusion

Although intimate and unshared in the experience, spiritual encounters have wider social implications. They affect both the individual who experiences them, and the people with whom that person interacts. These encounters are usually life-changing. The experiences are so profound that they invariably influence the individual to question the norms, values, and conventions of their religious social world. People may adopt, leave, or change a religious affiliation or some sort of humanitarian or environmental cause. When they come to 'understand differently' they act differently. Many alter their understandings of life, living, and death after such experiences, which, in turn, confronts and challenges others to change also, in response to the changes in one who was previously 'one's own kind' and who has 'become 'Other''.

For those who do not share or understand the experience, such encounters can become threatening and may disrupt and undermine previous trust and communication. To counter this potential, some individuals who encounter or engage with such experiences will reflexively sequester them, for fear of ridicule, accusations of being psychologically unsound, or for being involved with the devil — or to safeguard close relationships. This reflexive sequestration occurs because although some group contexts support such experiences, many dismiss them as

implausible, illness, evil, subversive, and/or as undermining tradition and convention. In that sort of context, one who encounters spirituality in such a way becomes 'Other' in and to the general group. For loved ones of those who experience the mystical and spiritual, encountering change and difference in this context is similar to those who encounter change and difference with conversion of loved ones to a different religious affiliation. It disrupts the taken-for-granted 'right way of living' and the normal way of communicating. Without ways to communicate and share the experience and the ensuing changed perceptions, separation occurs, thus dividing between self and 'Other'. Where people achieve communication, sharing of extended knowing becomes possible, thus opening further opportunities for understanding.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

Working from George H. Mead's *Mind, Self and Society* and symbolic interaction, this thesis has explored perceptions of the religious 'Other' in an Australian urban context, as those perceptions arise from religious self-identity, which is, in turn, influenced by the social context. Religious self-identity emerges from the socialisation process within one's religious affiliation, which teaches the right way to live according to the group's interpretation and understanding of God's directives. This results in conceptions of normality, familiarity, and the taken-for-granted, even though one may question *some* aspects of the teachings of one's affiliation. A foundational characteristic of religious identity, then, is the surety or conviction that one's own beliefs are the guidelines for living 'the right way' according to God's directions, which then becomes an underlying influence on perceptions of 'Otherness'.

During encounters with different religious 'Others', as occurs in global and local conflicts, people encounter differing norms, values, expectations, symbolism, and communication styles and content. So many types of 'Other' exist, and each is 'Other' to each 'Other'. People evaluate and question their own and 'Others'' ways, and interpret, define, and perceive those 'Others' as compared with their own kind and their own prioritised ways. Some affiliates allow that another's ways are right for that 'Other', but they would not adopt another's ways as their own. In the either/or oppositional context, one's own ways are usually perceived as being the right ways; the ways of 'Others' in contrast, must be at least partly wrong when compared with the rightness that oneself *knows*, and may be perceived as completely wrong, especially when considering religious morals, values, imperatives, and absolutes. There are exceptions to this.

During encounters with 'Others', people also assess the implications of threat or risk to themselves and their own right ways that 'Others' may impose. As 'Others' infiltrate the Australian social world, which was never cohesive and

homogenous, changes occur. As such, when encountering difference and otherness, people *must* (re)organise their responses — in their acts and interactions — to those changes, at the micro-individual and macro-social levels. Political attempts, in response to this change, to 'safeguard Australia' from terrorist risk in the wake of 11th September 2001 fuelled some further conflicts. If otherness is likely to impact greatly and disturb or undermine a group's own perceived rightness, people will then act to maintain or reinstate their normal, familiar, and right ways, according to their reference ideal. Regarding religious identity, this thesis finds that religious identity is more fluid than is suggested by 'either/or' frameworks and stereotypes. Fluidity is not catered for in areas such as census forms and in general academic research.

These identity factors contribute to understanding perceptions of the religious 'Other'. Any recognition that the use of stereotypes and generalisations is not a sound basis for interpreting and understanding otherness is the beginning of understanding. As such, this thesis finds that the words 'fundamental' and 'extreme' are frequently being misused — and even abused. This is particularly the case in mass media dissemination of religious-related news items of issues and events. Of those who are fundamental, some totally reject difference as being wrong in all ways; some, instead, accept and respect 'Others' for their religious conviction and commitment to their own religion. Living fundamentally is more fluid than is generally portrayed.

Plurality of identity extends beyond the normally posited oppositionary 'either/or' perspective and instead demonstrates fluidity, adaptability, and inclusiveness. Pluralists identify and affiliate with two or more religions or religious sub-groups. Those involved, who prefer affiliates of their own faith to be exclusive and to reject 'Others', or hope to convert 'Others' to their own way, do not easily accept plurality. However, the concept, of individuals being plural in their religious identity and expression, offers hope for extended dialogic frameworks that value the enlarged perspectives of those who appreciate difference to the point that they

willingly reconcile and integrate differences within their individual and single body-mind expressions and interactions. Additionally, the thesis finds that pluralists are frequently *fundamental* in their approach to 'living rightly' in daily life actions and interactions. They attend to right-living concerns such as mindfulness of God's directives, and care, kindness, honesty, and thoughtfulness, for example, in their dealings with others.

Similarly, intentionality is useful as a sociological concept for understanding affiliates' orientation of intention regarding 'living rightly'. It is one thing to suggest that people have intentions or motives, but another to explain that individuals and groups have intentions *about* something that is understood to transcend and be greater than them all, and that affects their evaluations, interpretations, and their choice of actions and interactions in their intimate-immediate and wider social worlds. Further testing of the concept may result in the possibility of wider application. 'Living rightly' also results in reflexive perceptions of self *as* the 'Other'. Many respondents reflexively perceive themselves as being representatives of and/or ambassadors for their affiliation. Some also express concern about others within their affiliation who create disreputable perceptions about their religion, including that of (self-) shame, as they imagine how 'Others' must perceive them. The most 'newsworthy' examples include terrorist suicide bombers and the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests.

Interestingly, those people who have encountered spiritual-mystical experiences may belong in all of the previous categories — those of being plural, living intentionally, and of living religious fundamentals during daily life actions and interactions. Most also have among the highest self-rating levels of religious convictions. Those whose experiences assist them to dissolve religious boundaries tend to be more widely encompassing of difference and otherness, which is particularly true of those who perceive a transcending truth, whereby all religions are perceived to be the 'local-context' social expressions of an all-encompassing

God. Such people may offer mediation skills and so contribute to the necessary dialogic building of bridges between differing 'Others', as may some pluralists. This religious 'category' may offer potential for future research, particularly within the context of the topic at hand.

Concerns about the religious 'Other' revolve around interpretations about the right way to live and doing the right thing as taught by one's God, depending on one's religions affiliations. A major concern for non-Muslim respondents is the perceived risk of threat regarding Muslims' intentions: the question being pondered is 'are Muslims trying to take over, and if so how will that change our lives?' An additional concern for non-Muslims and Muslims is that of terrorist suicide bombers: non-Muslims are concerned with the potential risk of terrorist acts occurring in Australia; Muslims are concerned that terrorists will perform terrorist acts, to which they do not subscribe, in the name of Allah and as representatives of Islam.

Issues of 'flexibility' versus taking a stance are also of concern. In a secular country, to what extent should non-religious or differently-religious comply and conform with the expectations of a single group, and alter their own ways of acting and interacting accordingly? This includes Jews Muslims and other non-secular/non-Christian people, who arrive in Australia from other countries, cultures, and social norms. It also includes Christian, secular, and other Australians who are, in turn, affected by the expressed preferences (and even demands) of newcomers who not only do not want to give up their ways when they arrive but also want accommodation of their ways by those whose country they enter.

This thesis suggests the need for more research on religious identity and ordinary religious practices. One theme that was not developed here is the experiences of converts. They may initially be perceived as 'Other' within religious communities until they have acquired a certain degree of religious knowledge. Another topic

worthy of investigation is what happens in formal and informal interfaith dialogue. I was unable to consider these topics more deeply. I was also unable to develop issues surrounding gender as otherness in the religious context, and the extent of mass media influence on perceptions of otherness.

The thesis finds, then, that perceptions of the religious 'Other' relate to perceptions of change that have implications for personal self-identity perceptions of right living as contrasted with wrong living, and so self-identity and social safety, stability, and continuity. People will accept or reject 'Others' according to how those 'Others' are perceived to influence or impact on one's own right ways. Additionally, respondents, such as pluralists, fundamentalists, and those who encounter spiritual-mystical experiences, live *intentionally*, whereby religious and/or spiritual fundamentals are central to all areas of life and living in accordance with their (high) convictions, which arise from their understandings. The thesis demonstrates that religious identity is more complex, and the divisions more fluid than is often recognised, especially by the mass media. It also demonstrates the value of investigating religious experience using qualitative research methods.

At the end of any work, words are written — many more than can be used — which become included or excluded from the final product. Glaser and Strauss discuss the point that sociologists should be sensitive in order to "conceptualize and formulate" emergent theory (1967:46). Theory is subject to ongoing revision and reformulation as further data is collected and tested in a variety of conditions. As I observed gatherings, and listened to interviews where people told me about that which is important to them, I could not have guessed or foretold of the many themes that emerged from the data about religious self-identity and the related perceptions of religious 'Others'. Although much remains unused in this work, I learnt about so much more than I anticipated. As such, I hope that ideas that emerge in this exploratory thesis may develop into something more than the

tentative beginnings offered here, that the information may prove useful for those seeking a new direction in inter-faith initiatives and dialogue.

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