



Interfaith Dialogue: The Exposure of Former-Catholics to Non-Catholic Religious Practices and Beliefs



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Abstract

Fifty percent of Catholic-raised individuals under the age of 30 identify as former Catholics (Manhlos-Weber & Smith, 2018). This group usually transitions to identify as: “Nones”, Atheists, or Agnostics, while others convert to other organized religion. As such it is important to explore the non-Catholic religious exposure of Catholic-raised individuals. This study explores the exposure of former-Catholics to non-Catholic religions during their experiencing being raised Catholic. To name a few, this exposure could be from a teacher in the classroom, friends, classmates, or the internet.

Participant Demographics

		n	%
Gender Identity	Female	3	25.0
	Male	8	66.7
	Other	1	8.3
Racial Identity	White	6	50.0
	Latinx	3	25.0
	Multi-racial	2	16.7
	Black	1	8.3
Religious Identity	Agnostic	3	25.0
	Atheist	3	25.0
	Christian	1	8.3
	None	1	8.3
	Not Religious	1	8.3
	Spiritual but not religious	2	16.7
	Unsure	1	8.3
Immigrant Status	Immigrant	8	66.7
	Non-immigrant	2	16.7
	Second generation	2	16.7

People & Settings

Family: Siblings, Grandma, Parents

Home: Friends’ home, Relatives’ home, Grandparents’ home

Family Friends: God Mother

Media: TV, Internet videos, Blogs

Peers: Classmate, Roommate, Friend

School: Class, Fieldtrips, Projects

Teachers: Theology teacher, World Religion teacher, Biology teacher, CCD teacher

Experiences Outside the US: Vacation, Living Abroad, Immigrating, Study Abroad

Interfaith Themes

Comparing to Catholicism

•The Sikh religion is more open than Catholicism
“It was really cool...they...opened up the doors...on their busiest day, and um, they have kitchens on-site where anyone, not just Sikh’s, can come in and help prepare the meal, as well as serve it, um, and eat there.”

•Buddhism is more spiritual and less forced
“That you don’t really—cause like Buddhism you don’t believe in God, and you don’t need to believe in God to like, be spiritually fulfilled.”

•Learning about Catholicism in relationship to other denominations of Christianity
“Catholicism in certain Christian circles is not considered Christianity. Um I – like I literally been confronted with people even in like my adult life saying like, oh well you mean Catholicism not Christianity.”

•Bonding over doubts about Catholicism
“When I came to college I had a roommate who had identified as Catholic all her life... she was the first one that told me about...Agnostic, what it meant to be Agnostic... through those conversations...I was able to...say that this fit better than any other label I’d been given before.”

•Realizing that not everyone believes there is one God
“It has been incredibly limiting and our understand of the world around us, because we have always thought that...God is the ultimate alpha and omega that everybody needs to follow, but that’s completely false.”

Learnings On Their Own

•History/Culture
“We are made in God’s image. And I’m like, well we all don’t get along, and we all have different views, so it made sense when there were multiple Gods that there are multiple people, and multiple viewpoints, and so kind of opening that up was really refreshing.”

•Beliefs
“Yeah I- you know when I was younger I was always really fascinated with like, um, Greek gods and things like that.”

•Holidays
“I went to a public school, but we would do class sessions on what Hanukkah was, and what Kwanza was.”

•Art
“I just thought it was cool to learn about the history of these different Islamic countries and how their history and culture directly impacted art.”

•Practices (Bar Mitzvah, Spirit Houses, Mediation, Mediums, Temples)
“My dad especially know- like had explained that like, the church doesn’t believe in mediums, um...but if I believed that there is a heaven, then why can’t I believe that someone has the talent to speak to them?”

Discussion

- Most of the participants exposed to other religions have been exposed through teachers or family members.
- Participants have mostly been exposed through or because of a classroom setting.
- In comparison, most participants thought of other religions as being less structured, less organized and less judgmental.
- Most participants were attracted towards other religions because Catholicism was “too harsh”.
- Other times in which former Catholics experienced other religions outside the classroom was over meals.

Implications

- World Religion classes are often participants’ first in-depth exposure to religions other than their childhood religion.
- Given former Catholics remember their Catholic education as harsh and focusing too intently on sin and Hell, Catholic educators should be aware of the implications of how they teach.
- Interfaith dialogues may benefit from the act of more food sharing.

Future Directions

- A study that focuses on former Catholics who have converted to other religions and what attracted them to their current religion.
- Is classroom exposure enough for former Catholics to leave their religion for another?
- Benefits of the act of food sharing in interfaith dialogues.