

## Article

# Believers, Attractiveness and Values

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**Abstract:** Societies are undergoing an intensive process of transformation, and the role that religion plays in guiding such rapid changes remains underexplored. In recent decades, postmodern discourse has hindered the attractiveness of involvement in religious affairs and reading sacred books, highlighting how “uncool” and useless these practices are in responding to current daily life challenges. Decades of research have evidenced the positive impact of reading the most precious universal literary creations. Since sacred books are considered universal texts, this study explores the potential of dialogic interreligious gatherings (DIGs) focused on sacred books to enhance the attractiveness of key values such as love, kindness, humility, and generosity. These spaces are grounded in strong principles that guarantee the freedom of participants. This context opens up a possibility of discussing sacred books in a dialogic and egalitarian space where everyone’s voice is heard. In this context, especially in times where freedom is jeopardized in many spheres, believers from different faiths and nonbelievers engage in dialogues and relate sacred book content to their personal experiences and current social challenges. The communicative analysis conducted shows that DIGs drive the attractiveness of fundamental values present in sacred books, creating possibilities to enhance their effects in spurring personal and social change.

**Keywords:** dialogic interreligious gatherings; sacred books; human values; attractiveness



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## 1. Introduction

The current society is immersed in an intense process of transformation, in which globalization has a key role in increasing resistance to national identity, secularization, and postsecularization processes (Höllinger and Muckenhuber 2019). For example, in reference to pandemics and adverse health and psychosociopolitical effects on people (Mukhtar 2020), the literature has evidenced how such historic moments can nurture a new culture that integrates spirituality with science. According to recent research, the current pandemic has affected not only the health sphere but also the cultural and social realms (Boas 2020).

At this particular point, social support manifested in values such as solidarity and friendship has already been shown to play a key role in overcoming the challenges of current society (Anderson and Fowers 2020; García-Yeste et al. 2020; Giner 2011; Leon-Jimenez 2020; Merodio et al. 2020; Umberson et al. 2010). Although such values have been widely demonstrated to have a positive impact in a range of social spheres and in terms of wellbeing, postmodern discourse has actively argued how useless love, kindness, and solidarity are in response to current daily life challenges (Hooks 1999). By doing so, such empty discourse has highlighted the “unattractiveness” of fundamental human values, taking a clear stand against kindness, love, humility, and generosity, among other values (Roubal 2014). An example of this dynamic is found in the catchphrase “be yourself”, which, according to postmodern authors, encourages the self-realization of the subject by emphasizing its individualistic nature (Marchuk and Yatsyna 2020). Far from this discourse, other authors have stated that this process might be strongly grounded in

values linked to religiosity, since it might provide meaning to one's life from its strong empowering and motivational functions (Ciarrochi and Heaven 2012; Emmons 2005).

When values such as love, kindness, and generosity, among others, are seen as unattractive, double standards in human relationships flourish. As Torras-Gómez and colleagues (Torras-Gómez et al. 2020) stated, egalitarian values are seen as convenient but lay far from desire, which pushes young people to have coerced and even violent interpersonal relationships. In this vein, individuals' health and society in general are negatively affected by these dynamics (Racionero-Plaza et al. 2020), which appear in numerous daily interactions, TV shows, popular songs, and social media (Fedele et al. 2019). In other words, individuals are constantly receiving messages about what is fun, exciting and cool as opposed to messages focused on values such as love, kindness, or generosity, as these are seen as moralistic and unattractive (López de Aguilera et al. 2020; Puigvert et al. 2019; Sierra and Martín-Alonso 2019).

However, research has widely demonstrated how actions grounded in values such as love, friendship, or solidarity have the potential to enhance social cohesion; to provide emotional, economic, or other kinds of support; and to promote health and the public good (Gill 2020; Leon-Jimenez 2020). At the individual level, neuroscience has also evidenced how kindness fosters a healthy brain (Galante et al. 2014) and leads to relationships characterized by pleasure and desire (Racionero-Plaza et al. 2020). When Racionero-Plaza and colleagues studied a specific intervention focused on supporting the free reconstruction of mental and affective models of attractiveness, they found dialogue to be an essential tool for achieving this aim (Salceda et al. 2020).

The dialogic nature of human beings has widely been argued in the scientific literature. Language, as a cultural and psychological tool, has the potential to construct social meanings, including those related to love, attraction, and values (López de Aguilera et al. 2020; Searle and Soler 2004), since it is the main tool through which human beings interact and exist in society. Language allows us to learn to go further and deeper in thought, learning, and development (Bruner 1996; Vygotsky 1978).

In this vein, love is identified as a key driver in achieving real intercultural dialogue (Burgués et al. 2016), understood as extending beyond a mere tolerance of the Other. Intercultural dialogue situates deep shared understandings, as well as new forms of creative and expressive communication, such as dialogic outcomes (Schneider and Emde 2006; de Botton and Pulido-Rodríguez 2013). In this line, when Yin and Rancer studied the intention to participate in intercultural dialogue programs among 339 university students in the USA, they suggested that fear and a lack of empathy were associated with less willingness to engage in such programs (Lin and Rancer 2003). This fear or anxiety can "discourage" individuals from engaging in interactions with people who are diverse. Less interaction with people who are culturally, racially, or ethnically different may cause individuals to show more contempt for and lack tolerance of those who profess different faiths. Since societies are becoming increasingly diverse, it is necessary to foster effective intercultural dialogues to ensure peace and cooperation over the short and long term, as summarized by the 16th Sustainable Development Goal aimed at promoting peaceful and inclusive societies.

Building on the key roles of dialogue and interaction, a specific intervention contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 4 (focused on ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all) and 5 (aimed at achieving gender equality) involves the use of dialogic literary gatherings (DLGs). Research from diverse fields, such as sociology, education, and psychology, has evidenced the positive impacts of this dialogue-based space. The dialogic reading activity focuses on reading a classical work of literature and then sharing meanings, interpretations, and reflections using the dialogic learning methodology. This specific dynamic fosters interactions that are based on egalitarian dialogue and builds on each person's cultural intelligence (Flecha 2000). Cultural intelligence recognizes that all individuals have academic, practical, and communicative abilities regardless of their culture, language, educational level, or socioeconomic status (Flecha et al. 2011; Ramis

and Krastrina 2010). Dialogic gatherings allow us to seek transformation and enhance knowledge and basic competencies, are based in solidarity, act as sources of meaning creation, and promote equality across differences (Soler 2019).

During dialogic literary gatherings (DLGs), participants engage in meaningful discussions based on previous readings of the most precious universal literary creations. Participants describe the meaning of text by choosing a piece and reading it aloud and justifying their views. Others may agree or disagree, providing justifications and explanations, while a moderator ensures the fair distribution of participation. The entire dynamic is grounded in egalitarian dialogue, which situates the reading experience in the inter-subjective process mediated by language, since participants share their thoughts on the readings and build an understanding of each other's contributions (Soler 2015; Flecha 2000). In DLGs, participants frequently relate the text to their own lives, sharing their personal views, feelings, and emotions. It is noteworthy that dialogic gatherings have been proven successful in all of the contexts in which they have been used, including vulnerable contexts such as those involving children living under institutional care in Spain (García-Yeste et al. 2017), rural schools in the United Kingdom (García-Carrión 2015), or even prisons (Alvarez et al. 2016). Furthermore, DLGs have also been demonstrated to be effective online, particularly in promoting children's wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown by creating a sense of community (Ruiz-Eugenio et al. 2020). Thus, transferability has become a remarkable characteristic of dialogic gatherings since DLGs have been widely and successfully implemented in more than 9000 schools worldwide.

Since fundamental human values are illustrated in sacred books, it is essential to explore how believers from different faiths and nonbelievers can come together and build a dialogue based on respect and empathy to ultimately enhance intercultural dialogue where all freedoms and choices are supported (Ganesh and Holmes 2011). To this end, dialogic interreligious gatherings (DIGs hereinafter) (de Botton et al. 2016) follow DLG mechanisms around sacred books. In a DIG, people of different faiths and traditions engage in meaningful dialogues once a month online and share their thoughts and beliefs about the particular extracts or sections that the group has previously agreed to discuss in sessions. While these features may lead to higher-order interactions, no research has explored the extent to which this dialogic dynamic can foster intercultural dialogues that enhance the attractiveness of values such as love, kindness, humility, or generosity. Especially in times where freedom is jeopardized in many contexts (Gil 2020), this study opens up new horizons for intercultural dialogues that nurture fundamental human values, which might bring renewed hope for future generations.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Given the current period of intense transformation that society is facing, this study follows a particular methodology that aims at achieving social impact even under the most challenging circumstances. Thus, the present research is grounded in communicative methodology, which seeks to identify barriers and drivers of a certain social issue (Gómez et al. 2006). According to this approach, everyone has knowledge, and thus participants and researchers are on the same epistemological level. Specifically, the communicative approach is grounded in the universality of language and action (Habermas 1987) and understands individuals as transformative social agents. Consequently, the method considers language as a vehicle for dialogue and understanding on an equal basis (Gómez et al. 2019). The communicative methodology involves the voices of the participants in the entire research process (García Yeste et al. 2011; Puigvert et al. 2012). This egalitarian dialogue with all participants creates conditions for enhancing the social impact of the research (Redondo et al. 2020; Gómez et al. 2011; Gómez et al. 2012). These principles are crucial, especially in regard to research on highly personal issues such as religion.

In this vein, this study seeks to understand to what extent dialogic interreligious gatherings can enhance the attractiveness of fundamental values illustrated in sacred books and drive personal and social change in participants. This study used the focus

group technique as the main approach to data collection since it allows participants to engage in fruitful exchanges focused on a particular topic. Following the communicative approach, we invited 12 believers from different faiths and nonbelievers to participate in the focus group, which was conducted online in December 2020. The participants' main characteristics and the research procedure and analysis strategy used are detailed below.

### 2.1. Participants

Twelve participants took part in the focus group held online in December 2020. All of the participants engaged in dialogic interreligious gatherings. Three of the four authors of this article often or sometimes participate in DIGs, and two participated in the focus group. As explained above, these spaces are characterized by an egalitarian atmosphere in which the freedom of individuals to choose and follow different religions is respected. For this reason, it is common for Catholics, Jews, Orthodox followers, Wiccans, atheists, and agnostics to come together to discuss the Holy Bible or the Quran. The ages of the participants and their faith backgrounds were also diverse, as detailed in Table 1. Due to the inclusive atmosphere of DIGs and the principles that underlie each session, all of the participants were used to sharing their opinions through egalitarian dialogue. Table 1 summarizes key information about the participants, who are named with pseudonyms to protect their identities.

**Table 1.** Overview of the participants.

Participant	Age	Faith/Religion
Rita (female)	36	Wiccan
Teresa (female)	30	Orthodox Catholic
Rosa (female)	43	Atheist
Ingrid (female)	43	Jewish
Victor (male)	45	Catholic
David (male)	37	Catholic
Maria (female)	26	Atheist
Jon (male)	47	Agnostic
Susana (female)	46	Agnostic
Amanda (female)	40	Christian
Eugenia (female)	27	Agnostic
Sofia (female)	31	Agnostic

### 2.2. Research Procedure and Data Collection

Ethical issues were addressed throughout the study in line with the CREA Ethical Code (Community of Research on Excellence for All). It was ensured that all participants involved in the study were fairly and sensitively treated with dignity and without prejudice and with respect for their religion, language, race, ethnicity, national origin, or culture. Once the CREA Ethics Committee approved the study design, the research objective and potential benefits for the participants and society were explained to the participants. All participants agreed to participate and signed informed consent forms, and none withdrew from the study.

The communicative discussion group was the main tool used for data collection due to its potential to address our research question. This technique promotes the creation of new meanings through intersubjective dialogue, through which the researchers and researched contribute equally in building meaningful knowledge (Ramis-Salas 2020). Due to the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the study was conducted entirely online in December 2020 on the basis of the participants' availability and preferences. The objective of the discussion group was twofold: (a) to explore the potential for DIGs to encourage fundamental human values such as love, kindness, generosity, or humility, and (b) to identify which characteristics of DIGs are the main drivers behind achieving such an effect.

The communicative focus group lasted 37 min 40 s. During this time, the participants engaged in egalitarian conversation about the following questions: (a) Do you remember

a case of an attempt made to deny the attractiveness of values associated with a religion or belief? (b) Do interreligious dialogical gatherings favor or hinder the attractiveness of these values? Why? (c) How does egalitarian dialogue between people of different religions (including agnostics and atheists) in such gatherings foster the attractiveness of these values? These questions were proposed by one of the researchers while highlighting the freedom to speak or not at any time during the discussion. With the participants' consent, the focus group was audio recorded, and obtained data were stored using the required security measures. To guarantee the participants' anonymity and protect their identities, we use pseudonyms here instead of their names.

### 2.3. Analysis Strategy

This study followed a two-step analysis strategy to ensure a rigorous qualitative process. First, the audio recording of the communicative focus group was transcribed verbatim. Second, all of the participants' utterances were screened since these utterances were used as the unit of analysis. For the analysis, a specific coding scheme was created on the basis of key issues that emerged from the focus group. This coding scheme was divided into the following three categories identified from the data: (a) attempts to empty the attractiveness of values when associated with a religion, (b) evidence that DIGs highlight the attractiveness of these values, and (c) egalitarian dialogue as a key factor that enhances the attractiveness of values. To ensure the correct interpretation of the preliminary results, we discussed the screening process used with the participants. This last step allowed the researchers to guarantee the reliability of the present contribution.

## 3. Results

This study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the extent to which DIGs can enhance the attractiveness of fundamental human values such as love, kindness, solidarity, generosity, and humility. Following a communicative approach, in this section, we offer more details on some of the barriers and facilitators identified. To this end, this section is divided into three parts; each part lists participants' reflections and thoughts about DIGs. Section 1 summarizes the participants' memories of attempts made to lessen the attractiveness of values when associated with any kind of religious affair. Then, participants' views on the potential for DIGs to enhance the attractiveness of values such as love, solidarity, and kindness reveal to what extent DIGs can be effective in enhancing the attractiveness of such values. Section 3.1 uncovers the key of role egalitarian dialogue in creating the unique spaces that characterize DIGs. The latter two sections also present ways to overcome situations in which freedom of choice and the expression of religion might be jeopardized.

### 3.1. Attempts to Deny the Attractiveness of Values When Associated with Any Religion

Nine of the participants engaged in fruitful dialogues when the first question was shared in the focus group. All of the conversations coincided in pointing out the general social pressures the participants had suffered from peers in regard to taking part in activities related to religion. In explicitly verbalizing how sectarian views have become an engagement in practices organized by religious institutions, Amanda, Teresa, and Jon recalled some of the most vivid experiences from their adolescence:

When I was younger, I went to the Christian youth home (...) and sometimes I was attacked with comments such as "You're going to the sect". It was very common for some people to want to destroy a space where people shared and talked about human and Christian issues and to try to lessen the appeal by asking "Where are you going?" (Amanda)

Then you see that it was not shared, that you were a loser if you went to mass or if you believed in something. (...) You do not mention it, you do not comment on it, because you see that it is not cool (...) You are more traditional if you say that you go to mass (...) and less cool. (Teresa)

In high school, I used to play in a music band, and we would rehearse in the afternoons. Two of the members went to mass and left rehearsal to go to mass. The image they had was unattractive. It was cool to play music, but they were also seen as submissive; they were seen as boring. (Jon)

Such intense attempts to deny attractiveness are even more evident in romantic situations. As David and Rita explain, it is assumed that popular individuals actively attack religion, causing them to hide their views in certain social contexts.

During adolescence, whenever you said that you participate in a religious act, directly... in some ways you hid this because you knew that it was going to be condemned and you never said it, especially in situations where there were girls. I recall very specific things. They always told you that you are following a sect. That was super common. I think that denying the appeal was common and you assumed it and responded to it. Many times, it was not even necessary for them to tell you. You hid it before they said something to you. It was already assumed. (David)

Since I knew I would lose status, I did not explain it, because they would see me as a freak. (Rita)

In the same vein, as Teresa recalls, these social dynamics were extremely evident very early in her first high school year. In the following extract, she explains how unfree she felt when she discovered this reality, which led her to reconsider her religious traditions.

And I very soon realized that this (religious views) was not shared. I'm talking about high school, kids and so on. I remember asking myself many things; yes, in this context you did not feel free to say anything. It was a context that valued you more if you spoke about things related to religion with disdain. (Teresa)

The empty attacks also targeted every social initiative that aimed at addressing adversity at the community level. In this sense, participants explained from their different life experiences how people who blindly attacked religion-led action tried to lessen the attractiveness of human acts of helping and solidarity. For instance, when Jon recalls a particular conversation with agnostic friends, he highlights a typical argument used against those who dare to support a social initiative related to a church.

In a conversation between agnostics... when discussing a solidarity initiative (...) the phrase "The little sister of charity is here" is used. It is associated with making what you are saying unattractive. (Jon)

Indeed, even agnostics are attacked when they share their willingness to collaborate with certain social initiatives led by a church. Maria explains how when a friend joined Caritas (the official organization of the Catholic Church in Spain for charitable and social action) to support a particular social action, she immediately became the target of comments such as "What are you doing with these nuns?" Maria notes:

A friend volunteered for *Cáritas*, and she considered herself an atheist, but she wanted to help people from the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in Bilbao [city where the participant lives]. She told me that peers made comments such as "What are you doing with those nuns?" This was intended to decrease the attractiveness of participating in a solidarity movement simply because it was religious. (Maria)

Such attacks seem to be rooted in the ideologies of certain social groups, which apparently should be aligned with various fundamental principles of many religions, which Rosa experienced in a specific trade union in which she was involved. In the following extract, Rosa explains how in this context, being Christian was viewed negatively:

In the union in which I participate, there is a person who is Christian, and sometimes when he has expressed his opinions on issues in assemblies, I hear:

“Of course, he is a Christian”. This phrase is said a lot in reference to “Judeo-Christian morality”, as if it were bad or as if it were not so revolutionary. (Rosa)

In the same vein, while the intellectual atmosphere of universities should create a common ground for some religious principles to flourish, such as those of solidarity or social justice, Amanda’s and Ingrid’s experiences reveal that in some cases, religious people are usually attacked and labelled as less scientific and authentic. In this context, as Ingrid expresses, some students with religious backgrounds choose not to go against these attacks, since they are constant, and they become tired of defending their freedom.

And yes, at the university there are also comments that people who believe are not scientific. They make them less attractive, as... if they are behind or not correct. (Amanda)

At the university, when a criticism of the system is made, the church is immediately mentioned. In general, religion is mentioned and how it subdues and dominates. In addition, it is argued that those who follow these religious traditions are suckers. I have seen faces of people who are believers or practitioners, but it does not occur to them to express themselves verbally. Although I do see their faces of overwhelm and they evidently try to break with the discourse, right? But it is constant. (Ingrid)

### 3.2. Evidence That DIGs Enhance the Attractiveness of Love, Kindness, Humility, and Generosity

The participants agreed that DIGs nurture and reinforce the attractiveness of fundamental human values, specifically of values that have been the target of attacks in postmodern discourse for so long. This unique space emerges as the first space that not only guarantees deep respect for everyone’s beliefs and thoughts but that also allows participants to recover a sense of freedom. Specifically, this framework of freedom and dialogue is identified by the participants as a key facet of DIGs that enhance the attractiveness of love, kindness, humility, and generosity. In Teresa’s and Rita’s words:

[DIGs] are encouraging, no doubt. It is the first space in which you see that nobody questions you, nobody criticizes you, nobody will find anything you think strange. In addition, you can believe or not believe, because freedom and attractiveness are generated both ways. I mean, values are in everything, right? (Teresa)

I think it makes us feel free. It makes us feel that we can contribute. (...) I feel more attractive later. (...) And I think that is also fine. You do not give explanations for what you are or are not, but that... it makes religion more attractive (...) I think that we collectively increase our appeal (... ) (Rita)

When an atmosphere of respect and dialogue is ensured, those who normally never dare to talk openly about their faith start to engage in meaningful exchanges with many diverse people, even with different opinions.

I did not explain that I was not a believer nor my religion until I found the super safe environment of DIGs. No friend knew about it and that was where I started talking about it. (Rita)

As one participant highlights, DIGs emerged from the dream of having an open space that makes it possible to discuss key human issues related to religion. By doing so, people of different faiths start engaging in deep exchanges while feeling authentic freedom and not fearing attacks or prejudice. On these grounds, DIGs flourish.

That is, (... ) in DIGs, one begins to flourish with greater freedom and everyone (whether agnostic, Christian or pagan) strengthens that freedom within this particular environment. (Amanda)

Under the particular conditions of DIGs, the attractiveness of the values discussed above increases. It is noteworthy that this attractiveness is not only related to a single faith,

since it emerges from a willingness to share different understandings among those with different religious backgrounds.

And the appeal is more in the value, right? This not because you are more or less of a believer ( . . . ). In addition, then you take it to other spaces. (Amanda)

The moment you come into contact with the text but also with dialogue with people with such diverse views, the attraction not only increases, but it is multiplied to infinity. That such different people awaken so much attractiveness, love, and compassion... makes the attractiveness much stronger than in other spaces where these values are attacked. (Amanda)

The data reveal that among the key features of DIGs, egalitarian dialogue emerges as the most essential. The following subsection shows in detail the participants' thoughts about how this element is at the heart of DIGs.

### *3.3. Egalitarian Dialogue as a Key Factor That Enhances the Attractiveness of Values*

Egalitarian dialogue is fundamental to how DIGs work. Notably, contexts in which everyone has a chance to talk and freely express provide an opportunity to learn from others. This is precisely what Victor and Ingrid identify as a major reason for taking active part in DIGs, as all participants learn while valuing the attractiveness of values such as love, solidarity, or kindness.

You know that you are in an egalitarian space where everyone listens to each other and appreciates what others say and where you feel appreciated when you speak (...) and everyone grows together in that space. It is also original and ground-breaking when we talk about DIGs; it is very special, and since it is that special, it is very appealing and generates appeal. In that horizontal space, you want to listen to others, and you know that others also want to listen to you. (Victor)

The space allows, on the one hand, for you to learn more (...) and precisely because of these conditions, security increases the attractiveness of people. You feel safe, and they also see you as more attractive.

(Ingrid)

Thus, a key aspect identified in the communicative focus group is an ability to engage in egalitarian dialogue with people of different faiths and views. Indeed, if there were no diversity in terms of participants' religious and social backgrounds, it would be difficult to achieve this outcome in DIGs. In this context of pluralism and diversity, the attractiveness of fundamental values arises from the certainty that everyone's voice can contribute in a unique way.

And I think it is a space without that pressure, of freedom, in which you can share with very different people outside of your scope, right? Because if you participate in a movement or community, it is of the same religion. However, to engage with people outside of your circle and safety zone, having this safety is key. In addition, this is only achieved through egalitarian dialogue because it gives you that freedom. This is what I have felt in DIGs, and feelings of attractiveness. (David)

I think that another important thing is how this egalitarian dialogue makes people with different views feel at all times very respected in the gatherings. (...) It makes the egalitarian dialogue materialize into concrete things: into feeling respected, feeling that it is an environment of safety, feeling that what you are going to say counts. (Sofia)

For me it has been a first space where I can speak... about values that are different, values of equality and respect... and as long as there is that... any view that a person has from their background, not only is it not criticized, but it contributes



and is valued. In addition, it is considered positive and enriching, and you have more respect for what it contributes, not for its drawbacks, and for what you contribute. (Teresa)

Moreover, important agreements are reached in DIGs, such as agreement on the universality of certain human values. For instance, as Sofia explains, taking part in a dialogical space grounded in egalitarian dialogue motivates her to keep reading and discussing sacred texts with people from diverse faiths. She notes the following:

Therefore, what truly motivates us to read the text and read it together is to identify those shared values and discuss them and give examples and, above all, look for how to interpret them from an agnostic, Jewish, or Muslim vision. (Sofia)

Although egalitarian dialogue is crucial in DIGs, participants identify further venues for many other fundamental features. In this sense, solidarity, respect, and cultural intelligence are identified by Ingrid. In the following extract, she highlights how the combination of these factors makes it possible to express one's feelings and emotions freely:

I was thinking that in addition to egalitarian dialogue, which is a basic condition, there are other conditions such as respect, solidarity, and cultural intelligence. In terms of freedom and the free expression of emotions and feelings, sometimes it is difficult to find spaces where you can express yourself freely. (Ingrid)

#### 4. Discussion

David, Rita, and Amanda stated that it is well known that being involved in any activity led by a religious institution can become a target of attack. Their experiences reveal that in adolescence this is especially prevalent, since all of the participants root such attempts to lessen the attractiveness of such values to the high school period or adolescence. According to the literature, the experiences teenagers have regarding values and attraction play a critical role in their socialization towards engagement in egalitarian or violent relationships (Gómez 2015). This situation should urge us to address such issues through transformative actions by creating safe spaces in which young people—and people in general—can come together and engage in authentic intercultural dialogue (Ganesh and Holmes 2011).

As the literature points out, intercultural dialogues do not emphasize consensus as an outcome since they leave room for understanding the potentially dialogic roles of conflict, consensus, and collaboration. In this vein, DIGs serve as an excellent example of how this concept can become a reality by including the principles of dialogic reading in discussions of sacred books. Previous studies have already demonstrated how taking part in religious-related debates has a wide range of discernible social outcomes, safeguarding health and well-being in some instances (Ellison et al. 2008) but also nurturing attitudes that are dangerous and sometimes criminal (Jang and Franzen 2013). However, our analysis reveals the potential for a dialogue-based space to enhance the attractiveness of universal values such as love, kindness, generosity, or humility. As Sofía stated, what truly motivates participants to take part in DIGs is to identify such shared values and discuss them on the basis of examples and, above all, to expand their understandings from the opinions of others.

This egalitarian dialogue is very delicate and difficult to fully achieve. Moreover, there are issues that have historically resulted in discrepancies and even conflicts (Jang and Franzen 2013). Our results show that people feel free to share their deepest thoughts and beliefs among those with diverse faith backgrounds when such a space is grounded on egalitarian dialogue, such as a DIG. This space creates an ideal atmosphere, and in this setting, a young person such as Rita feels, for the very first time, safe enough to express herself and participate in debate with her Wiccan knowledge.

In a dialogical space where no one is coerced, attacked, or judged and where every contribution is acknowledged, the attractiveness of love, kindness, generosity, or humility is strongly nurtured from a wide range of perspectives. Since all views are considered

equally important, the results reveal a potential pathway to enrich intercultural dialogue (Ganesh and Holmes 2011), which might contribute to achieving the 16th Sustainable Development Goal focused on achieving peaceful and inclusive societies.

When individuals are no longer attacked for taking a stand in favor of values or for participating in activities related to religion, we grow closer to achieving the freedom to believe, think, and love in the ways we wish. The experiences of Rita, David, Ingrid, Maria, and the rest of DIG participants show hopeful horizons for an equal, respectful, and free diverse society.

The authors acknowledge some limitations of the present study that future research could address. First, data collection was conducted at a single point in time, and a longitudinal design could contribute more insights to this area. Since the participants of DIGs change, future studies may benefit from conducting multiple focus groups to ensure the participation of the maximum number of people. However, the aim of this study was to explore to what extent DIGs are effective in enhancing the attractiveness of certain values, and the current research design allowed us to confirm this hypothesis.

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