In this project we explored the relationship between personal religious narratives, epistemological orientations and religious and spiritual struggle in emerging adulthood.

Research has documented declines from adolescence to early adulthood in religious salience (Koenig, McGu & Iacono, 2008) and outward religious expression (Barry & Abbo-Zena, 2014). This decline could reflect a change from a religiosity assigned by parents during childhood socialization to one chosen as an outcome of individualization and other identity processes (Templeton & Eccles, 2006). By asking participants for religious narratives regarding various turning points, we explored this question and the extent to which the experience of religious struggle has an epistemnic source.

Recently McGinnis has developed an assessment that measures dimensions of personal epistemology - absolutism, multiplicity and evaluativism (2016). Absolutists tend to focus on one conclusion to a question and seek authority for that conclusion. Individuals with a high multiplist view believe that various opinions are equally correct. Finally, evaluavists believe that evidence must be examined, and the conclusion with the most evidence is the most likely.

We anticipated that religious individuals would show the highest absolutism scores, and lowest evaluativist scores. We also anticipated differences between high religious and low religious absolutism scores, and lowest evaluativist scores. We chose a group of religious narratives to explore religious change.

Participants for religious narratives regarding various childhood socialization to one

turning point with respect to

is to say I have come to see the Catholic point of view, but rather the overwhelming number of Catholics has made me really have to think critically about why I disagree with certain aspects, and which parts of my faith and spirituality I identify with."

We saw this illustrated in participants’ stories:

○ "Coming to college was a big turning point in my spiritual life. Because [my school] has an aura of spirituality surrounding it, faith became a larger part of my life."

○ "Being in a community of peers... and being able to participate in prayer services and mass could explain why “less religious” participants were more absolutist; exposure could be a source of struggle for those who turn away from religion and may be unique to a faith-centered environment. This could explain why “less religious” participants were more absolutist, they may find it necessary to have an unwavering mindset in contrast to their religious environment.

○ "I think [my religious beliefs] have been formed a lot due to such a religious atmosphere...."

 RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT SHAPES EPistemological ORIenTATIONS IN EMERGING ADULTS

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BACKGROUND

● In this project we explored the relationship between personal religious narratives, epistemological orientations and religious and spiritual struggle in emerging adulthood.

● Research has documented declines from adolescence to early adulthood in religious salience (Koenig, McGu & Iacono, 2008) and outward religious expression (Barry & Abbo-Zena, 2014). This decline could reflect a change from a religiosity assigned by parents during childhood socialization to one chosen as an outcome of individualization and other identity processes (Templeton & Eccles, 2006). By asking participants for religious narratives regarding various turning points, we explored this question and the extent to which the experience of religious struggle has an epistemnic source.

METHOD

Participants: Participants (N = 129) were undergraduate students at a private Midwestern university. The sample was 62% Catholic, 8.5% Protestant, 7% no religion, and 4% Buddhist or other. Approximately 63% were female, and the mean age of the sample was 18.8 years old.

Procedures: Participants filled out the survey online, and were given course credit for their participation.

RESULTS

Quantitative answers were coded for whether they indicated that the participant was becoming more religious, less religious, showed no change, or had ambiguous change. Inter-rater reliability amongst three independent raters was achieved via group consensus whenever there was disagreement. Additionally, an iterative approach was used to categorize the participant’s reason for religious change. These are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, below.

Figure 1: Reason for Religious Change Over Time (Question 1)

Figure 2: Reason for Religious Turning Point (Question 2)

Qualitative data was analyzed with two omnibus ANOVAs based on these coding groups. Results are summarized in Table 1, below.

Table 1 Significant ANOVA Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1 Grouping</th>
<th>Question 2 Grouping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RSS - Doubt 6.64***</td>
<td>RSS - Doubt 3.36*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSS - Ultimate Meaning 7.59***</td>
<td>RSS - Ultimate Meaning 3.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality 15.67***</td>
<td>Spirituality 18.57***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q1. How have your religious/spiritual beliefs and practices changed over time? How have they remained stable?

Q2. Please write about an important transition or turning point with respect to your personal faith.

RESULTS CONT.

Post-hoc tests on Question 1 indicated that the “ambiguous” group differed significantly from the other groups on doubt and ultimate meaning, and all groups differed significantly from the “more religious” group on spirituality and religiosity.

Post-hoc tests on Question 2 indicated that the “more religious” group differed significantly from the “ambiguous” and “less religious” groups on measures of spirituality and religiosity. The “more religious” group differed significantly from the “ambiguous” group on measures of religious and spiritual struggle. The “more religious” group differed significantly from the “less religious” group on personal epistemology as it relates to theology. The “less religious” group differed significantly from the “ambiguous” group regarding epistemological orientation toward absolutism. [A Bonferroni correction was used to control for multiple tests.]

DISCUSSION

We anticipated that those becoming less religious over time would be more evaluativist, perhaps because they are faced with scientific and theological claims and choose based on evidence. Instead, we found no difference between Question 1 groups on their epistemological orientation or their confidence in theology and the natural sciences. Qualitative answers confirmed this:

○ "I feel that I have changed greatly in my understanding of the Universe as science has gained more prevalence in my life. I have...always felt that there is some greater power controlling it all - e.g. a God."

○ "Question 2 groupings were more specific, and here we found those with a turning point away from religion were more absolutist, more distrustful of theology, and higher in conflict with other religious persons. We saw this illustrated in participants’ stories:

○ "I discovered fantastic writers... such as Christopher Hitchens... They verbalized my feelings and legitimized them, too... When everybody in my school was going on a Jesuit retreat...I refused after much struggle and that was the start of when I became comfortable not being religious."

○ "Relationships and religious environments mattered more than epistemnic reasoning to our participants. These particular emerging adults are studying at a religious institution. The constant religious exposure could be a source of struggle for those who turn away from religion and may be unique to a faith-centered environment. This could explain why “less religious” participants were more absolutist, they may find it necessary to have an unwavering mindset in contrast to their religious environment.

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