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Summer July 14, 2018

Faith Maturity through the Lens of Self-Determination Theory

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/andrea-walker/28/
Faith Maturity through the Lens of Self-Determination Theory: A Mixed Methods Design

ASERVIC Conference, 2018
Dallas, Texas
Rationale for the Project

• The world of education and counseling is becoming more focused on outcomes research = accreditation, “evidence based practice”

• The world of education is becoming multi-dimensional, focused on social, physical, and even religious/spiritual development, along with intellectual/academic.

• In a religious university promoting a specific religious perspective, spiritual development of students can be compromised if students are not aligned completely with the university’s perspective.

• To help these universities become more effective in fulfilling their mission, and to assist in students’ development, related outcomes need to be evaluated.
Purposes of Today’s Presentation

• Familiarize attendees with Self-Determination Theory as a possible framework to explain religious development.

• Provide attendees with an example of mixed methods design research and how results might be gleaned for use in counseling settings.

• Help attendees better understand the experiences of students, in terms of religious environment and related goals, in Christian Evangelical universities.
Why does religious development matter?

• It relates to higher quality of life, life satisfaction (Krok, 2016; Zullig, Ward, & Horn, 2006), and coping skills (Johnson & Armour, 2016; Wortmann & Park, 2009).

• Emerging adults with spiritual resources have positive psychological outcomes (Krok, 2015; Yonker, Schnabelraunch, & DeHaan, 2012).

• Undergraduate college students’ want their universities to tend to their spiritual and religious needs (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011).
How does environment affect religiosity?

• Relate to religious development, especially for Christians (Barry, Nelson, Davarya, & Urry, 2010; Ma, 2003; Regnerus, Smith, & Smith, 2014).

• Can lead to positive outcomes for students (Morris, Beck, & Smith, 2004; Morris, Smith, & Cejda, 2003; Patten & Rice, 2008).

• Makes students more committed to Christian faith (Mayhew & Bryant, 2013; Small & Bowman, 2011).
Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

• Rationale for use in measuring religious development:

(a) Highlights the role of autonomy (Baumrind, 2005; Bowlby, 1988; Chirkov, Ryan, & Sheldon, 2010; Magolda, 2008)

(b) Emphasizes internalization (Bryant, 2011a; Mayhew & Bryant, 2011; Sanders, 1998)

(c) Recognizes the importance of relationships and community (Barry & Christofferson, 2014; Bryant, 2005; de Souza, 2006; Yonker et al., 2012).
SDT: Individual Needs and Motivation

- Psychological need fulfillment governs the process of internalization
  - Competence
  - Relatedness
  - Autonomy

- Impacts both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation
  - Intrinsic motivation – pure interest and enjoyment (“internalization”)
  - Extrinsic motivation – obtaining contingencies
SDT’s Theoretical Continuum of Internalization

- Competence
  - External Regulation
- Competence + Relatedness
  - Introjected Regulation and Identified Regulation
- Competence + Relatedness + Autonomy
  - Integrated Regulation
SDT: Contextual Factors

• Controlling aspects = pressure toward a specific outcome; contribute to extrinsic motivation.

• Informational aspects, events and communication = positive feedback; contribute to intrinsic motivation (internalization).

• These two elements synthesize to form an overall experience or “sum total” of internalization (Ryan & Deci, 2002).
Application to Evangelical Environments and Religious Development

• Since internalization is also a known outcome in religious development of Evangelicals (Bryant, 2011a; Mayhew & Bryant, 2011; Sanders, 1998), we would expect that students’ religious development would improve with greater internalization, as constituted by a surplus of autonomy support relative to pressure from the environment.

• SDT research that supports this notion

• The challenge with Evangelical environments regarding psychological need fulfillment
Faith Maturity as a measure of religiosity?

• There has been some controversy about it (Avery, 1990; Fowler & Dell, 2005; Streib, 2001; Streib, Hood, & Klein, 2010).

• Faith Maturity was conceptualized and FMQ developed with several Christian denominations. The shortened version was standardized with Christian Evangelical church members.

• Measures:
  • Vertical maturity – relationship with God
  • Horizontal maturity – relationship with others
Study’s Research Questions

(a) How does the combination of autonomy supportive environment and religious pressures variables predict faith maturity (vertical and horizontal)?

(b) How do students’ responses to open-ended questions regarding their own spiritual development, and the corresponding role of the university, inform the results of the quantitative analysis?
Methods

• Design: Web-based survey
• Recruitment methods: Series of email invitations
• Sample: 36% male, 27% first year undergraduates, 23% sophomores, 24% juniors, and 26% seniors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>African American</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Asian American</th>
<th>Mexican American</th>
<th>Other Hispanic Origin</th>
<th>“Other”</th>
<th>White, not of Hispanic Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n=69</td>
<td>n=25</td>
<td>n=25</td>
<td>n=32</td>
<td>n=32</td>
<td>n=69</td>
<td>n=549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8%)</td>
<td>(3%)</td>
<td>(3%)</td>
<td>(4%)</td>
<td>(4%)</td>
<td>(8%)</td>
<td>(63%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Faith Maturity Questionnaire (Ji, 2004)

• 12-item measure, items rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = a great deal.

• Vertical Faith Maturity (VFM), sample items:
  • “I have a real sense that God is guiding me.”
  • “The things I do reflect a commitment to Jesus Christ.”

• Horizontal Faith Maturity, sample items:
  • “I help others with their religious questions and struggles.”
  • “I feel a sense responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.”

• Alpha coefficients for VFM and HFM were .88 and .77 respectively.
Autonomy Supportive Environment (Williams & Deci, 1996)

• 8-item measure of perceived parental autonomy.
  • Six items that we deemed related to environmental support were selected and slightly modified to refer to the university’s administration as opposed to parents.
  • Each item was rated on Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = a great deal.

• Sample items: (Extent to which university administration...)
  • “Provides choices and options,.”
  • “Conveys confidence in my ability to do well in life.”

• The alpha coefficient for the ASE was .90.
Religious Pressures Scale (Altemeyer, 1988)

• 10-item measure, items rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = a great deal.

• Sample items: Students were asked to rate the extent to which they would experience particular events if they explored alternative religious views
  • “Disappointment, disapproval of parents.”
  • “It would threaten a romantic, love relationship.”

• The alpha coefficient for the RPS was .86.
Spiritual Development Questionnaire

• Perceptions of spiritual growth:
   (a) “Please describe how you have grown spiritually since being in college,”
   (b) “What has happened that makes it obvious that you have or are growing,”

• University’s role in spiritual development:
   (c) “How might you describe (the university’s) role in your spiritual development,”
   (d) “How might [the university] improve in helping to facilitate your spiritual development?”
Design and Analysis

• Design: Sequential explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell, 2015)
Phase 1: Quantitative Analysis

• Two hierarchical regressions to examine interactions and then main effects of ASE and RP as related to both vertical and horizontal faith maturity.

• First the main effects of ASE and RPS were entered, and then the interaction between ASE and RPS was entered. Prior to the analysis each independent variable was mean-centered.

• The assumptions of independent errors, homogeneity of variance, linearity, non-zero variances, collinearity, and no outliers in the data were examined and met prior to conducting the analysis.
Phase 2: Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative Categories

• Participants were separated into groups who scored high ($\geq +1$ SD from the mean) and/or low ($\leq -1$ SD from the mean) on both ASE and RPS instruments (i.e., high ASE & high RPS, high ASE and low RPS, low ASE & high RPS, low ASE and low RPS).

• Responses were coded for internalization (competence, relatedness, and/or autonomy needs).

• Responses were coded for contextual factors (informational and/or controlling aspects).
Coding Systems: One Code Assigned for Each Category

- **Internalization**
  - Competence - Responses were limited to conveying a sense of confidence in one's ability to perform relevant action, desires to maximize rewards, or simply distinguishing self in some way.
  - Relatedness - Responses conveyed connecting with others and/or the introjection of values, whether affective or cognitive, but did not reflect on how this impacted general worldview.
  - Autonomy - Responses described independent thinking and behavior, especially in reference to how participants’ spiritual growth affected their views of others and the world.

- **Contextual Aspects** – coded with needing more, needing less, or having optimal amount

- **Triangulation and establishment of credibility**
# Results: Descriptives

Table 1. *Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations among Study Variables (N = 797)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Vertical Faith</td>
<td>28.76</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Horizontal Faith</td>
<td></td>
<td>19.23</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3.92)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Religious Pressure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>38.00</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(8.97)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Autonomy Supportive Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(6.12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Means are on the main-diagonal. Standard deviations are in parenthesis on the main diagonal. All correlations were statistically significant at $p < .001$. 
Vertical Faith Maturity Hierarchical Regression

• The combined main effects of ASE and RP explained 16% of the variance in VFM ($F[2, 795] = 76.01, p < .001$).

• A unit change in ASE predicted increases in VFM when controlling for RP ($b=.26, p<.001, 95\%CI [.20, .32]$).

• Similarly, increases in RP predicted increases in VFM when controlling for ASE ($b=.11, SE = .02, p<.001, 95\%CI [.07, .14]$).

• However, the change in R-square from adding the interaction term, though small, was statistically significant ($\Delta R^2 = .012, p=.001; \Delta F[1, 794]=11.279, p=.001$).
Table 2
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Students’ Vertical Faith Maturity (N=797)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>sr²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VFM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASE</td>
<td>.264</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>3.17**</td>
<td>.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.194**</td>
<td>.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASE x RP</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.109**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F for change in R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: VFM = Vertical Faith Maturity, ASE = Autonomy Supportive Environment, and RP = Religious Pressures. ASE and RP were centered at their means. In Model 1, \( F = 76.015^{**} \) for VFM. \( sr^2 \) refers to the squared semi-partial correlation coefficient. *\( p \leq .01 \). **\( p \leq .001 \).
Figure 1. Interaction between Autonomy Supportive Environment and Religious Pressure when Predicting Vertical Faith. All predictors are mean centered. Regression lines are plotted for +1, 0, and -1 standard deviations from the mean of Religious Pressure. Simple slope for +1 standard deviation = .18, SE = .01, p < .001, 95% CI [.10, .25]; Simple slope at mean = .26 SE = .03, t(793) = 9.21, p < .001, 95% CI [.20, .31]; Simple slope at -1 standard deviation = .33, SE = .04, p < .001, 95% CI [.26, .40]. Results suggest that increasing autonomy support has slightly greater implications on vertical faith for those who are low in religious pressure. Increasing autonomy support has slightly smaller implications on vertical faith for students who are high in religious pressure.
Horizontal Faith Maturity Hierarchical Regression

- The combined effects of ASE and RP explained 9.6% of the variance in HFM ($F[2, 794] = 42.301, p < .001$).

- A unit change in ASE predicted increases in faith maturity when controlling for RP ($b = .15$, $SE = .02$, $p<.001$, 95%Cl [.11, .19]), and increases in RP predicted increases in faith maturity when controlling for ASE ($b=.07$, $SE = .01$, $p<.001$, 95%Cl [.04, .09]).

- The change in R-square from adding the interaction term was statistically significant ($\Delta R^2= 0.007$, $p=.011$; $\Delta F [1, 793]=6.517$, $p=.011$), but the overlap among the 95% CI’s suggests that the slopes may not be meaningfully distinct. Increases in ASE result in similar increases in HFM irrespective of RP.

- HFM was removed from further analysis.
Qualitative Analysis

• Responses of only those scoring “high” and/or “low” on ASE and RP were analyzed.

• Responding to open-ended questions was not required, so response rate was less than 100% ($n=99; 86\%$).

• All respondents indicated experiencing beneficial change in spiritual development of some sort.
  • The vast majority reported “growing” in their current faith systems, and a few described qualitative changes in their spirituality.

• More than 2/3 perceived the university’s role as facilitative in their development.
  • Spiritual development was at times accompanied by a perceived dissonance with environment.
**Table 3**

*Frequencies and Percentages of Codes for Fulfillment of Basic Needs of Competence, Relatedness, and Autonomy (N=83) by group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes for Level of Regulation</th>
<th>High ASE, high RP</th>
<th>High ASE, low RP</th>
<th>Low ASE, high RP</th>
<th>Low ASE, low RP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence (External Regulation)</td>
<td>5 (15%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>5 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatedness (Introjected and Identified Regulation)</td>
<td>21 (62%)</td>
<td>13 (76%)</td>
<td>4 (40%)</td>
<td>8 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy (Integrated Regulation)</td>
<td>8 (24%)</td>
<td>4 (24%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Codes were assigned only to participants scoring ±1 standard deviation or more above or below the mean on both Autonomy Supportive Environment (ASE) and Religious Pressures (RP) scores, resulting in the four groups. All percentages were calculated from the total number of responses in that group provided for that question.
Table 4
*Frequencies and Percentages of Codes for Informational and Controlling Aspects Reported in the Christian Evangelical Environment (N=63) by group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes for Environmental Aspects</th>
<th>High ASE, high RP</th>
<th>High ASE, low RP</th>
<th>Low ASE, high RP</th>
<th>Low ASE, low RP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informational Aspects – Currently Helpful</td>
<td>18 (69%)</td>
<td>7 (54%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational Aspects – Need More</td>
<td>4 (15%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (13%)</td>
<td>4 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling Aspects – Endorsed</td>
<td>3 (11%)</td>
<td>1 (8%)</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling Aspects – Need Less</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>5 (63%)</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>13 (62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Codes were assigned only to participants scoring ±1 standard deviation or more above or below the mean on both Autonomy Supportive Environment (ASE) and Religious Pressures (RP) scores, resulting in the four groups. All percentages were calculated from the total number of responses in that group provided for that question. Those indicating Controlling Aspects were helpful and more needed were collapsed into “Controlling Aspects-Endorsed” Category. No participants indicated needing less support in terms of Informational Aspects of the environment.
High ASE and High RP
(total $n=40$, 35 [88%] meaningful responses)

- **Internalization**
  - Majority ($n=21; 62\%$) were coded as operating within relatedness need fulfillment.
    
    *I also notice life through compassion. I can relate and care for people in a deeper way than when everything was well for me.* (22 year old woman).
  
  - Fewer ($n=8; 24\%$) were coded as operating within autonomy.
    
    *I have grown to understand that people are culturally different and I cannot judge them by my beliefs and values...God has put that love in my heart and I am progressing in being selfless.* (18 year old woman).
High ASE and High RP (cont.)

• Environmental Aspects
  • Majority \((n=18; 69\%)\) reported positive views of informational aspects of the environment

    \([\text{University}] \text{ does a good job of setting a solid Christian environment.} \) (19 year old man).

  • When mentioned \((n=3; 11\%)\), controlling aspects also tended to be viewed positively

    \(\text{Having chapel twice a week has made my spiritual life grow tremendously.} \) (19 year old man).

• Taken together, these participants appear to be experiencing some degree of internalization of faith systems while continuing to rely somewhat on external regulations.
High ASE and Low RP
(total $n=18, 17$ (94%) meaningful responses)

- **Internalization**
  - Strong majority ($n=13; 76\%$) were coded at the relatedness level.
    
    [University] provides a beneficial environment when it comes to exploring my religion. I am spiritually challenged every day in many of my classes, and this helps me to refine and alter my spiritual views. (21 year old woman).
  
- A few ($n=4; 24\%$) were coded at the level of autonomy.
  
    Through questioning my faith, I have grown immensely...I have gained the ability to empathize with others’ views. (20 year old).
Environmental Aspects

- Generally, positively disposed to informational aspects of their environment ($n=7; 54\%$)
- $5(63\%)$ described external regulations as actually inhibiting their growth

\[\text{[There are limits to]}\ \text{the freedom students have to make personal, independent efforts to grow. (20 year old man).}\]

- Taken together, these students’ responses suggest higher levels of internalization of faith systems and lower levels of need for the structure of external regulations than the first group.
Low ASE and High RP
(total n=12), 8(58%) meaningful responses

- Internalization
  - Half of this group (n=4) was coded at the relatedness level.
    *Since being in college, my spirituality has been augmented with understanding, and (this) has given greater meaning to my spiritual endeavors.* (21 year old woman).
  - Half of this group (n=4) was coded at the competence level.
    *My faith and knowledge of God has increased, delivering me more confidence.* (19 year old man).
Low ASE and High RP (cont.)

• Environmental Aspects
  • None reported that current informational aspects of the environment were sufficient, but only 1(14%) suggested more was needed.

[They don’t] trust their students. [University] should actually listen to the students and let them develop their own walk with God rather than holding their hand through unnecessary rules like the honor code. (21 year old man).

• Responses reflected ambivalence toward controllers, with 4(50%) describing comfort with controllers and 4(50%) a need for them to be eliminated.

[University] does a great job of imparting knowledge so that I am able to make my own choices...but [University] could improve by becoming more unanimous and not giving conflicting statements. (19 year old man).

• Taken together, these responses generally reflect conflict from the pressure to own their own faith while concurrently needing more support. Participants’ faith appears contingent upon external regulations.
Low ASE and Low RP
(total $n=32$), 28 (88%) meaningful responses

• Internalization
  • Participants reflected an individual question-based approach to their spiritual maturity, and this process related to greater internalization for many in this group.
  • More in this group ($n=11; 46\%$) were coded at the level of autonomy than at any other level.

  *I feel like I’ve been confused and then strengthened in beliefs that I didn’t have before coming here.* (21 year old woman).

  *I’ve believed, doubted, believed again, stopped believing and now stand in between faith and reason, having come to terms with my questions and being okay with not knowing immediately.* (22 year old man).
Low ASE and Low RP (cont.)

• Environmental Aspects
  • Participants reported needing more informational aspects ($n=4; 19\%$) with only $4(19\%)$ indicating that current levels were sufficient
    
    There isn’t a role in my spiritual development, unfortunately. [University] has a cookie cutter design and doesn’t attempt to reach out to unique cases. (21 year old man).

  • Participants reported needing reduction in external regulations, with $13(62\%)$ suggesting that controllers existed that inhibited their spiritual growth, similar to the low ASE, high RP group.

    [University]...should be more welcoming of beliefs that differ from their own. (21 year old woman).

• Taken together, many of these students wanted greater autonomy support from the university and, according to the interaction, would benefit from it in terms of greater VFM.
  • Considerable internalization of faith systems, coupled with unwanted controllers in the environment, despite the lowest VFM scores of all!
Discussion: General Observations of Data

• Students seem to experience plenty of faith-related environmental regulations that could potentially lead to internalization.
  • This corroborates a past study, which found higher RP (Walker & Hathcoat, 2015).
  • Thus, this sample may have higher levels of extrinsic motivation toward faith-related goals than others do, at least initially as their faith begins to mature.

• Students also seem to experience some opportunities, through competence and relatedness need fulfillment to move these regulations, or controllers, toward greater integration.

• Importance of autonomy support as related to faith maturity seems clear.
Research Question 1: Quantitative Analysis

• Increased autonomy environmental support had different implications on participants’ perceived relation to God depending on their level of religious pressure.
  • Enhancing autonomy predicts a slightly higher increase in one’s relation to God for students who are relatively unafraid to explore religious alternatives.
  • The same increase in autonomy support has positive, but smaller, results on one’s perceived relation to God if students are high in religious pressure.

• Religious exploration is a typical behavior in emerging adults (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Barry et al., 2010; Sanders, 1998).
  • Fear of negative consequences can act as a controller, which may serve to reduce self-determined faith (Deci & Ryan, 2002).
  • Universities with an evangelical mission may facilitate stronger relations with God by providing an environment in which religious exploration and questioning is supported.
  • Without such support, basic psychological needs may be thwarted, and faith goals may remain extrinsically motivated. This, in turn, relates to lower well-being (Williams, Hedberg, Cox, & Deci, 2000).
Research Question 2: Qualitative Analysis

• Qualitative trends across the four groups confirm them to be at differing levels of internalization based on perceived levels of support for autonomy and pressures in the environment.

• Corroborated quantitative findings:
  • The two high ASE groups seemed to be in the process of internalization; this is reflected in VFM scores.
  • Most troubled group (low ASE, high RP), according to SDT, also had low VFM

• Supplemented quantitative findings: Majority of participants described the environment as helpful to their spiritual growth.
Qualitative Challenge to Quantitative Results

• Initially, results aligned. Those in the low ASE-high RP group, had low VFM scores and also the lowest levels of internalization (external regulation).

• After that, results began to diverge.
  • First, the two high ASE groups, coded to have a moderate level of internalization, had the top two scores on the VFM; (introjected and internalized regulation).
  • Second, whereas qualitative analysis found internalization to be higher for those with low RP, the VFM scores gave preference to those high in RP when ASE was both high and low.
  • Finally, the most internalized group of all, the low ASE-low RP group, came in dead last in terms of VFM scores (integrated regulation).
Why did the most internalized faith systems have the lowest VFM scores?

• Low ASE and Low RP group seemed to need to engage in some degree of religious exploration despite not feeling support from the environment to do so.

• Perhaps these participants experienced spiritual struggle from the dissonance between earlier faith-related beliefs and new developmental experiences and, though the environment did not assist in navigating the new experiences, were still able to negotiate the resulting tension. Spiritual struggle can have a positive outcome of greater ecumenical worldview (Bryant, 2011b).

• Even though many in this group reported their own spiritual struggles, they also continued to describe their spiritual growth in terms of the Christian faith.
Suggestions for Christian Evangelical Universities

• The university seems to focus efforts toward students with less developed faith systems and away from more internalized faith (a likely tendency for other environments promoting specific religious expressions as well).

• Focus effort on promoting autonomy (and greater internalization of faith systems) without compromising competence and relatedness:
  • Develop student government committees
  • Promote supportive relationships among administration, faculty, and students
  • Facilitate public interviews of individuals with diverse faith backgrounds
  • Cultivate warm and safe environment to voice personal questions about faith
Implications for Religious Development Research

• More fuel to the controversy around how to conceptualize religious development!

• Two perspectives on religious development:
  • Acceptance of commonalities one’s faith has with diverse faith systems, accompanying ecumenical worldview development, increases maturity (Fowler & Dell, 2005; Streib, 2001; Streib et al., 2010).
  • Commitment to a singular faith system, leading to the integration of that faith’s values into lived realities, results in maturity (Benson et al., 1993).

• Proposition about the role of life span development:
  • Older adolescents and emerging adults explore religiously (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Barry et al., 2010; Sanders, 1998)
  • Middle and older adults may grow deeper roots within a particular faith system.

• Remaining question: How do college students in Christian Evangelical environments mature in their Christian faith while also exploring religiously and valuing truths in various faith systems?
Implications for Religious Development Research (cont.)

• Potential utility in SDT framework to further investigate religious development!

• Based on the qualitative results, and scores on the ASE and RP, our findings reflect what was initially suggested from SDT.
  • Those who had the least internalized faith perceived low autonomy support and high religious pressures.
  • Those who were progressing in internalization perceived high levels of autonomy support.
  • Those with the most internalized faith seemed less occupied with environmental factors altogether.
  • The ASE and RP instruments identified high and low scorers that had the expected levels of faith internalization and served to accurately capture informational and controlling aspects in the environment.
Limitations

• Correlational design prevents development of causal explanations for results.

• No comparison groups with public, or otherwise religious, universities, were employed.

• No objective measures of university environment were included; these variables were measured through students’ perceptions, which could reflect a myriad of other influences from their subjective experiences.

• Qualitative analysis was based on students’ responses to open-ended survey questions
  • Researchers were not able to ask follow up questions or employ member-checking of coded responses.
  • Response quality was inconsistent; in some cases, responses were vague or omitted, and in other cases, lengthy and detailed.
Conclusions

• The primary finding, that support for autonomy is a strong predictor of faith maturity and that it predicts more efficiently when religious pressures are lower, corroborates prior research underscoring the value of autonomy support in the environment (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Reeve, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2002).

• If students in Christian Evangelical universities do not experience competence, relatedness, and autonomy need fulfillments, they may simply answer faith maturity questions in a socially desirable way.

• The FMQ may not capture the faith development of some who may have begun to internalize their faith, so other ways of measuring faith in Christian evangelical universities should be examined in future research.
References


