Identity Style and Spirituality in a Collegiate Context

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Though exploration of religion has been considered an important part of identity since Erikson's original work, little research has explored the connection explicitly. This study investigated the relationship between identity and faith development in undergraduates ($N = 153$) from a private, Catholic university and a public college. Participants completed measures of identity style, identity distress, spiritual exploration (willingness to question beliefs, valuing doubts, openness to change), and strength of faith. Higher informational identity style scores related to stronger faith and higher scores on all measures of spiritual exploration. Higher normative style scores related to stronger faith and less value placed on religious doubts. Identity distress was related to greater questioning of beliefs and expecting future change in those beliefs.

The development of a unified, mature sense of identity is a primary task of the adolescent and young adult years (Erikson, 1963, 1968). Erikson (1963, 1968) argued that this stage of identity versus role confusion involves shifting away from the beliefs and values of one's parents and toward self-chosen ideologies, exploring religion, politics, and vocation. An integral part of this process is the examination of religious beliefs as adolescents begin, perhaps for the first time, to think critically

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about their faith, questioning their beliefs and attempting to determine whether or not their personal life experiences and developing ideologies coincide with the beliefs they have always had.

From the days of Erikson's (1963, 1968) first explorations of identity, issues of spirituality and/or religiosity have played a central role in identity theories (Hoare, 2002). In fact, for some adolescents it may be that religious or spiritual beliefs are at the very core of their identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Sviedqvist, Joubert, Greene, & Manion, 2003). Regardless of the extent to which faith is the defining element of identity, spirituality is considered an important part of the identity process by a wide variety of theorists (e.g., Berzonsky, 1989; Erikson, 1963, 1968; Kroger, 2000; Marcia, 1966), and identity research typically uses scales that include an assessment of an individual's degree of religious and ideological commitments (e.g., Adams, Bennion, & Huh, 1989; Berman, Montgomery, & Kurtines, 2004; Berzonsky, 1989; White, Wampler, & Winn, 1998). Surprisingly, however, in spite of the theoretical and methodological importance of faith in identity models, faith development continues to be studied primarily as a distinctly separate area of research from identity, though in recent years this has begun to change (e.g., Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Duriez, Soenens, & Beyers, 2004; Fulton, 1997; Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2001; Watson & Morris, 2005). Thus, it was the purpose of the current study to add to this understudied area of research by investigating the ways in which approaches to identity exploration relate to faith development.

Berzonsky (1989, 1990) delineated three primary identity styles—informational, normative, and diffuse/avoidant—with which individuals approach the identity versus role confusion crisis. These identity styles are differentiated from each other based on the way individuals process information relevant to their sense of identity, cope with and negotiate conflicts between identity elements, and make personal decisions in their attempts to resolves identity issues. People with the informational identity style are introspective and engage in a great deal of exploration, actively seeking out, processing, and utilizing self-relevant information in exploring their identities (Berzonsky, 1989, 1990; Soenens, Berzonsky, Vansteenkiste, Beyers, & Goossens, 2005; White et al., 1998). College students with an informational style take a deliberate, problem-solving, and problem-focused approach to coping (Berzonsky, 1992) and tend to be open to new experiences (Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Duriez et al., 2004). With regard to religion, it is likely that adolescents with the informational style will actively explore issues of faith in an attempt to determine their own religious identity. For example, they may look for, read, and reflect on materials of a religious nature.

Adolescents with a normative identity style tend to be close-minded and conform easily to the beliefs of others (Berzonsky, 1989, 1990; White et al., 1998). They are concerned mainly with the desires and expectations of significant author-

ity figures, defining themselves in terms of the norms and expectations that others set for them (Soenens et al., 2005). They are hesitant to challenge or speak out against the authority figures in their lives and thus are unlikely to explore alternate belief patterns, and tend to have inflexible attitudes and commitments (Berman, Schwartz, Kurtines, & Berman, 2001). They are less open to new experiences compared to those with an informational identity style (Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Duriez et al., 2004). With regard to matters of spirituality and religion, adolescents with a normative identity style are unlikely to question the beliefs taught by parents or to be open to exploring new religious faiths (White et al., 1998).

Individuals with a diffuse/avoidant style procrastinate, putting off or avoiding altogether issues of identity (Berzonsky, 1989, 1990). They are reluctant to confront problems and make decisions (Berzonsky, 1989, 1990; White et al., 1998). They either avoid exploration of identity issues or approach exploration unsystematically (Berman et al., 2001). Because these individuals are likely to avoid dealing with important identity relevant tasks, they often end up confused and uncertain about themselves (Soenens et al., 2005). Someone who has a diffuse/avoidant identity style is likely to either procrastinate or make disorderly attempts at examining religious issues.

The search for an identity can be a stressful process (Berman et al., 2004), and these identity styles are associated with a wide variety of psychosocial outcomes. Individuals with an informational style tend to fare better on a wide variety of measures (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Boyd, Hunt, Kandell, & Lucas, 2003; Nurmi, Berzonsky, Tammi, & Kinney, 1997; White et al., 1998) including a tendency to be more agreeable when compared to peers with other identity styles (Duriez et al., 2004), being better off academically (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Boyd et al., 2003), and having higher self-esteem (Nurmi et al., 1997). However, some research suggests that these individuals experience greater identity distress, perhaps because of the amount of questioning they engage in (Berman et al., 2004). Although the diffuse/avoidant identity and normative identity styles experience fewer feelings of identity distress (Berman et al., 2004), these styles are generally associated with less healthy outcomes (Berzonsky, 1992; Fisherman, 2002; Nurmi et al., 1997), including poorer coping strategies and social problems (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000) and less happiness in life (White et al., 1998).

Just as there are different ways of approaching the identity crisis, there are different ways of approaching spirituality. Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis (1993) argued that there are three orientations to religiosity: extrinsic, intrinsic, and quest. The first two dimensions are based on Allport's (1966) distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic orientations. For people with an extrinsic orientation, religion is utilitarian, useful because of what it does for the believer. Intrinsic people, on the other hand, value faith for itself, not just for what it does for them. For the extrinsic person, religion is a means to some end, whereas for the intrinsic person religion is

an end in and of itself (Allport, 1966). Batson and colleagues (Batson, 1976; Batson et al., 1993) argued that this dichotomy does not adequately capture Allport's ideas of mature religion, proposing a third orientation they label "quest." A quest orientation involves questioning religious ideas, engaging in a search for answers to questions of ultimate meaning, while recognizing that such answers may never be definitively found. People for whom religion is a quest readily confront existential life questions and find value in religious doubting. They are also open to, and in fact expect, change in their belief system.

An abundance of research has investigated the relationship between religiosity and mental health. Although much of this research suggests that strength of religious faith is related to positive mental health, the relationships depend on how both religiosity and mental health are conceptualized (see Batson et al., 1993, for a review). In general, the extrinsic dimension of religiosity is associated with poorer mental health, whereas the intrinsic and quest orientations are associated with positive mental health outcomes. For example, religious commitment (akin to the intrinsic dimension) is associated with greater life satisfaction (Levin, Markides, & Ray, 1996), enhanced psychological well-being (Steger & Frazier, 2005), better quality of life (Mytko & Knight, 1999), lower levels of anxiety (Harris, Schoneman, & Carrera, 2002), better physical health (George, Ellison, & Larson, 2002), more effective coping strategies (Courtenay, Poon, Martin, Clayton, & Johnson, 1992), and higher self-esteem (Plante & Boccaccini, 1997).

Strength of faith and spirituality are related to a variety of variables that seem intuitively to be related to conceptualizations of identity. For example, adolescents who consider themselves to be religious tend to report having more personal meaning in their lives and also report more prosocial personality traits (Furrow, King, & White, 2004). Those with stronger religious beliefs also report more purpose and commitment (Fisherman, 2004; Tzueriel, 1984) as well as a greater sense of meaningfulness and genuineness in their lives (Fisherman, 2004). Among African American adolescents, having more of what Scott (2003) calls a "spiritual orientation" toward life allows them to face discrimination with more self-reliance and problem-focused coping strategies when met with these challenges. King (2003) argued that as religious institutions offer an ideological worldview and guidance, they are important contexts within which identity formation takes place and, as such, can play a very significant role (positive and negative) in the identity process.

Although the research is sparse, there are indications that identity processes relate to faith outcomes in ways consistent with various conceptualizations of identity. For example, those with an informational identity style tend to take a more symbolic than literal approach to understanding religion (Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Duriez et al., 2004). They can critically evaluate whether certain religious beliefs correspond to what they believe and how they define themselves. Utilizing the identity status model (Marcia, 1966), Hunsberger et al. (2001) found that identity

achievement (which is strongly correlated with the informational style; Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994) is related to seeking out information that validates and confirms one's beliefs as well as information that challenges and threatens those beliefs. Identity achievement is also related to a more intrinsic religious orientation (Fulton, 1997). Moratorium is related to a less intrinsic orientation and higher quest scores (Fulton, 1997). Foreclosed (strongly correlated with the normative style; Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994) individuals are more religiously committed and less doubtful of religious teachings, generally consulting only sources that confirm their beliefs when experiencing religious doubts (Hunsberger et al., 2001). Some research suggests that normative individuals are more religious than others in the sense that they have strong religious traditions that they adhere to without questioning (Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Duriez et al., 2004; White et al., 1998). Fulton (1997) found that foreclosed individuals were more extrinsic and low on the quest dimension. Finally, those in the diffusion status experience greater religious doubts, are religiously uncommitted, and avoid all forms of consultation (those that confirm and those that challenge their beliefs) when dealing with religious doubts (Hunsberger et al., 2001). Not surprisingly, they are low on intrinsic religiosity (Fulton, 1997). Diffuse/avoidant individuals who do have religious beliefs are more likely to interpret the religious teachings in a literal rather than symbolic way as this allows them to avoid answering difficult questions about their faith (Duriez et al., 2004). Thus, it appears that ways in which young people struggle with and resolve religious issues are linked to broader personal identity development.

Clearly there is a need for additional research that investigates the links between identity and religiosity traced above. Identity has been studied intensely, as have spirituality and religiosity, however, despite the theoretical links, the two topics are often studied independently with little crossover. The current study involved the investigation of the relationships between (1) identity style and distress and (2) religious exploration and commitment. In addition, as religious institutions provide a context that can have significant effects on the identity development process (King, 2003), these relationships are investigated in two groups of participants: a group of college students at a faith-based institution and another at a public institution. Both are small (3,000–5,000) residential institutions whose mission statements emphasize a liberal arts education and focus primarily on undergraduates (each has only a small number of master's level graduate programs).

Two measures of spirituality were used. The Santa Clara Strength of Faith Questionnaire (Plante & Boccaccini, 1997) assesses degree of faith and religious commitment. The Quest Scale (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991) includes three subscales of spiritual exploration: Questioning Beliefs, Valuing Doubts, and Expecting Change.

As the informational style is associated with a deliberative, exploratory approach to matters of identity (Berzonsky, 1989, 1990), Hypothesis 1 predicts that

the informational identity style will be associated with stronger faith and high levels of religious exploration (on all three quest subscales). The normative style, on the other hand, is associated with a lack of exploration and unquestioning acceptance of the expectations/beliefs of others (Berzonsky, 1989, 1990). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 predicts that the normative identity style will be associated with stronger faith and low levels of the three religious exploration variables. Because the diffuse/avoidant style is associated with an avoidance of and uncertainty about identity issues (Berzonsky, 1989, 1990), Hypothesis 3 predicts that the diffuse/avoidant identity style will be associated with low strength of faith and low religious exploration. Finally, because identity distress is associated with greater questioning (Berman et al., 2004), Hypothesis 4 predicts that identity distress will be correlated with high religious exploration, in particular, more questioning of beliefs and expecting future change in those beliefs.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 153 undergraduate students attending a small Catholic university in the Pacific Northwest ($n = 82$) and a small public college in the Northeast ($n = 71$). Both schools market themselves as small, teaching-focused liberal arts institutions. Although the private institution draws from a slightly higher socioeconomic group, they are similar in terms of other demographic characteristics.

There were 88 women and 65 men. Participants were primarily first-year students ($n = 109$), with a smaller number of sophomores ($n = 27$), juniors ($n = 15$), and seniors ($n = 2$). The average age was 19.0 years ($SD = 1.45$). Ethnically, the sample was 1.3% African American, 9.2% Asian, 82.4% White, 3.3% Hispanic, and 3.3% Other (primarily bi- or multiracial). The predominant religious affiliation was Christianity (73.9%), with the majority of the Christians identifying themselves as Catholic (73.6%). A small minority reported that they were Jewish (2%), Buddhist (1.3%), or Islamic (0.7%). Agnostics and atheists made up 10.4% and 5.2%, respectively, of participants reporting no religious affiliation. Finally, 58.2% of the participants reported that they considered themselves to be religious. See Table 1 for a demographic breakdown by type institution. Chi square analyses show that the only background variable that differs by institution is ethnicity. There are more Asian participants at the faith-based school and more White participants at the public school, $\chi^2(4) = 13.87$, $p = .008$.

Participants at the faith-based school were enrolled in an introductory psychology course and completed the study to satisfy a research requirement. Those at the public school were also in an introductory-level psychology course, though as that class has no research requirement they participated on a volunteer basis, complet-

TABLE 1
Demographics by Type of Institution

	Faith-Based Institution	Public Institution
Gender		
Male	37.8%	47.9%
Female	62.2%	52.1%
Mean age	18.91 ($SD = 0.98$)	19.11 ($SD = 1.85$)
Class level		
First-year student	70.7%	71.8%
Sophomore	14.6%	21.1%
Junior	13.4%	5.6%
Senior	1.2%	1.4%
Ethnic background		
Asian/Pacific Islander	14.6%	2.8%
African American	0%	2.8%
White	74.4%	91.5%
Hispanic/Latino	3.7%	2.8%
Other	6.1%	0%
Religious affiliation		
Agnostic/Atheist	12.2%	8.4%
Buddhist	2.4%	0%
Christian	75.6 % (71.2% Catholic)	71.8% (76.6% Catholic)
Islamic	1.2%	0%
Jewish	1.2%	2.8%
Other	6.1%	14.1%
Consider self-religious		
Yes	64.5%	50.7%
No	35.4%	49.3%

ing the surveys at the end of a class period. The surveys took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Measures

Participants completed a questionnaire consisting of background and demographic information including gender, age, year in school, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and whether or not they considered themselves to be religious persons (answered *yes* or *no*). They also completed four previously validated self-report questionnaires.

Identity Style Inventory (White et al., 1998).   This is a 40-item inventory that asks about the extent to which the respondent has made firm identity decisions and how the respondent approaches such issues. Statements are rated on a scale of

1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The measure consists of four subscales, one for each of the three identity styles and a fourth that assesses the extent to which the respondent has made firm commitments to an identity (this scale is not used in assessing identity style; White et al., 1998). The informational subscale consists of 11 items (e.g. "I've spent a lot of time thinking about what I should do with my life"). The diffuse/avoidant subscale consists of 10 items (e.g. "When I know a problem will cause me stress, I try to avoid it"). The normative subscale consists of 9 items (e.g. "I like to deal with things the way my parents said I should"). Participants received a score for each of these three identity styles. The commitment subscale consists of 10 items (e.g. "I know what I want to do with my future"). Internal consistency for the scales was generally in the acceptable range (Cronbach α's .64 for informational, .63 for diffuse/avoidant, .55 for normative, .74 for commitment).

Identity Distress Survey (Berman et al., 2004).   Ten   Likert-type   scale items assess the degree to which participants have worried over issues in their lives that are critical to the identity process. The first nine items are rated on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very severely*). Seven of these address specific concerns (e.g., career choice, religion) and two address overall discomfort. The 10th item asks how long these concerns have been present and is rated on a scale of 1 (*never or less than a month*) to 5 (*more than 12 months*). Responses to all 10 items were summed to create a composite score for overall degree of identity distress. Because the current study focuses on religious concerns, the topical measure of religious distress (item five – degree of concern specific to religious matters such as changing/stopping beliefs) was also analyzed. Cronbach's α for the overall scale was .83.

Santa Clara Strength of Faith Questionnaire (Plante & Boccaccini, 1997).   This 10-item scale measures the degree to which faith is an important, influential factor in the respondent's life (e.g., "I pray daily" and "I look to my faith as a source of comfort"). Responses are rated on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The internal consistency was strong (α=.83 for entire sample), for participants who considered themselves religious (.90) and those who did not (.93).

Quest Scale (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991).   Twelve   Likert-type   scale items assess exploration of spirituality. Responses are rated on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). There are three subscales. The Questioning Beliefs subscale consists of four questions that measure the extent to which participants have wondered about their spiritual/religious beliefs (e.g. "I was not very interested in religion until I began to ask questions about the meaning and purpose of my life"). The Valuing Doubts subscale consists of four questions that

measure the importance placed on valuing religious doubts (e.g. "For me, doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious"). The Expecting Change subscale consists of four questions that measure the degree to which respondents anticipate that their beliefs will change in the future (e.g. "As I grow and change, I expect my religion also to grow and change"). Internal consistency for the overall scale was good (Cronbach's α = .72) and appeared slightly higher among those who did not consider themselves to be religious (.84) than those who did consider themselves religious (.63). This general pattern was true for the Questioning Beliefs subscale (Cranach's α overall .51, .72 for the nonreligious, .40 for the religious), and the Expecting Change subscale (.72 overall, .75 for the nonreligious, .69 for the religious). Internal consistency was similar for the two groups on the Valuing Doubts subscale (.54 overall, .54 for the nonreligious, .59 for the religious).

RESULTS

Group Comparisons

Whether or not participants considered themselves to be religious did not vary by whether their institution was faith-based or secular χ^2 (1) = 3.035, *ns*. Scores on the dependent measures of spirituality were analyzed with 2 (institution type) x 2 (religious/not religious) ANOVAs. Not surprisingly, Strength of Faith was stronger among participants who considered themselves to be religious, $F(1, 149)$ = 139.355, $p < .001$. Neither the main effect for institution, $F(1, 149) = 0.165$, *ns*, nor the interaction, $F(1, 149) = 1.995$, *ns*, were significant. Scores on the Questioning Beliefs scale were also higher in people who considered themselves religious, $F(1, 147) = 11.597$, $p = .001$, but did not vary by institution, $F(1, 147) = 0.275$, *ns*. The interaction was not significant, $F(1, 147) = 0.261$, *ns*. The ANOVA for Valuing Doubts showed that neither the main effect for considering oneself religious, $F(1, 147) = 1.50$, *ns*, institution type, $F(1, 147) = 2.367$, *ns*, nor the interaction, $F(1, 147) = 0.807$, *ns*, were significant. Finally, the ANOVA for Expecting Change also showed that neither the main effect for considering oneself religious, $F(1, 147) = 0.863$, *ns*, institution type, $F(1, 147) = 2.636$, *ns*, nor the interaction, $F(1, 147) = 0.792$, *ns*, were significant. Thus, it appears that though considering oneself to be a religious person does relate to some measures of spirituality, these measures of spirituality are not different in the faith-based versus public school contexts.

The hypotheses about the relationships between the measures of identity and spirituality were tested with correlations. The level of significance was set at .0025 using the Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons (.05 divided by 20, the number of comparisons being made). Correlations are reported for the overall

TABLE 2
Correlations Between Identity Style and Spirituality

Spirituality Scale	Informational Style	Normative Style	Diffuse/ Avoidant Style	Identity Distress	Religious Distress
Quest Scale					
Questioning Beliefs	.32***	.08	−.10	.27**	.19*
Valuing Doubts	.35***	−.21*	−.07	.05	.09
Expecting Change in Beliefs	.31***	−.15	.03	.18*	.31***
Santa Clara Strength of Faith Questionnaire	.26**	.36***	−.04	.06	.05

*p < .05, **p< .01, ***p < .001.

sample (see Table 2) as the patterns of relationships were similar in the religious versus nonreligious groups and the faith-based versus public school contexts.[1]

Informational Identity Style

Results of the correlations support Hypothesis 1 (see Table 2). Participants with higher informational identity scores have stronger faith ($r = .260$), engage in more questioning of beliefs ($r = .320$), place greater value on doubts ($r = .346$), and expect more change in their beliefs in the future ($r = .308$).

Normative Identity Style

Hypothesis 2 was partially supported (see Table 2). Participants with higher normative identity style scores had stronger faith ($r = .359$). There was a trend for them to place lower value on religious doubts ($r = −.211, p = .009$), but this was not significant with the Bonferroni correction. Normative scores were not related to questioning beliefs or expecting future changes in those beliefs.

Diffuse/Avoidant Identity Style

Contrary to Hypothesis 3, scores on the diffuse/avoidant identity scale did not correlate with scores on any of the measures of spirituality (see Table 2).

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[1]Potential differences between the correlations in the religious/nonreligious and faith-based/public school groups were tested with Fisher's r-to-z transformations. None of these was significant at the .0025 level.

Identity Distress

Hypothesis 4 was partially supported (see Table 2). Participants with greater total identity distress engaged in more questioning of their beliefs ($r = .274$). Those with greater religious identity distress were more likely to expect their beliefs to change in the future ($r=.313$). Neither of the identity distress measures was related to strength of faith.

DISCUSSION

The current study found that identity and religiosity are related in ways consistent with identity theory. As hypothesized, having a more informational identity style related to having stronger faith and engaging in more spiritual questing. Participants with higher informational scores reported more questioning of their beliefs, placing greater value on doubting those beliefs, and expecting those beliefs to change in the future. These results are consistent with work that shows informational individuals engage in active search and questioning of identity matters and are open to change (Berzonsky, 1989, 1992; White et al., 1998). Individuals with an informational identity style approach matters of spirituality as they approach any matters of identity: They question, search for information, and understand that change is likely.

Also consistent with the hypotheses, and consistent with theoretical understandings of the normative identity style, these participants reported stronger religious faith. This is consistent with prior findings that depict normative individuals as highly religious (e.g., Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Duriez et al., 2004; White et al., 1998). Additionally, there was a trend for people with higher normative identity style scores to be less likely to value religious doubts. As normative individuals are focused on rising to the expectations of significant authority figures (e.g., parents), they show high levels of conformity (White et al., 1998) and tend to harbor dogmatic attitudes (Berman et al., 2001). Consequently, valuing religious doubts might seem unnecessary, perhaps even taboo, to those with a normative identity style. For these individuals, doubts are likely antithetical to the very idea of faith.

The hypothesis regarding the diffuse/avoidant identity style was not supported in the current study; being diffuse/avoidant in style was not associated with scores on any of the spirituality variables. Although some research has suggested that diffuse/avoidant people tend to be less religious and engage in less questioning when they experience religious doubts (e.g., Hunsberger et al., 2001), it is possible that these results reflect the unsystematic, haphazard exploration that diffuse/avoidant people do (Berman et al., 2001; Berzonsky, 1989, 1990).

As hypothesized, identity distress was also associated with spiritual exploration. Participants who reported more distress engaged in more questioning of their

spiritual beliefs and expected them to change in the future. This is consistent with previous research showing that identity distress is related with general identity exploration (Berman et al., 2004) and suggests that people experiencing stress about the identity process are, in fact, engaged in a search for answers and recognize that this search will necessitate eventual change in their beliefs.

When comparing the relationships between the identity and spirituality variables at the faith-based and public institutions, it is interesting that scores on the measures of spirituality did not vary by institution. This is particularly important to consider given the different natures of the two institutions. There is no emphasis on faith and spirituality at the public school in the current study. Rather, there is an understanding that faith belongs outside of the classroom and off the college campus. In contrast, at the faith-based institution in the current study students are encouraged, even pushed, to considered spiritual matters. Matters of faith development are an important part of the school's mission and are an everyday part of campus life. We hesitate to claim this finding suggests that there is no difference in spirituality in the two contexts. Rather, we suggest that this may reflect a limitation of the study. The participants in this study were primarily first-year students and, as such, can be expected to be early in the processes of identity exploration and spiritual development. Perhaps when students are further along in the identity process and more firmly embedded in their particular institutional contexts, differences in spirituality might emerge. Furthermore, it may be that as the process continues, the relationships between identity and spirituality might be affected by the institutional context. For example, might developmental trajectory of diffuse/avoidant first-year students differ depending on whether they are in a faith-based or public school context? Perhaps those in a faith-based school will eventually be pushed to consider matters of faith, whereas those in a public school context, without a pervasive institutional emphasis on spiritual exploration, can continue to put off confronting identity and spirituality issues as long as they see fit. More research, particularly longitudinal research, is needed to address these questions.

Although this study has shown that identity style is related to spirituality in ways consistent with identity theory, clearly more research is need. Future research needs to be done comparing other types of institutions and looking at these relationships in a sample that includes a number of students who are further along in their academic careers (and likely further along in the identity process), not just those who are primarily first-year students.

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