

“There Isn’t An In-Between Like Me”

The Emerging Adult Experience of Shifting Religiosity

by

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Abstract

Adolescence and young adulthood are periods when an individual typically encounters change in many areas of development. One of these areas is religiosity, where individuals shift in the domains of practices, beliefs, understanding and experiences. Through a qualitative, phenomenological approach, this study sought to better understand how emerging adults experience the process of shifts in religiosity and how they describe the impact. Three undergraduate students participated in in-depth interviews. Results of the analysis indicated an overarching trajectory of religious development, as well as current themes of religious identity, intellectual understanding, and struggle. The impact of this phenomenon on their processes of mental health and protection of well-being, autonomy and agency, disconnection from religious community and changing metaphors of a deity were noted. Results of the study were synthesized in the “River of Religiosity”, a diagram that demonstrates the practical understanding of shifting religiosity as a fluid and continuous process, a construct with appreciable impact on mental health and well-being. The results of this study emphasized the potentially all-encompassing nature of religiosity, highlighting the need for mainstream counsellors and therapists to engage their client’s religiosity, understanding it as a source of struggle and coping, indivisible from the rest of their self.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how emerging adults, specifically those attending university, conceptualize their experience of shifting religiosity. Emerging adult describes the time between teenage years and “full-fledged adulthood” when the individual typically encounters much change (Smith & Snell, 2009). Religiosity refers to the importance individuals place on their religious beliefs and practices (Chan, Tsai & Fuligni, 2015). It is described by Huber and Huber (2012) as the extent to which a person engages in one or more of five separate but interconnected dimensions: public practice, private practice, intellectual, ideology, and religious experience. Research suggests that university students’ understanding of, and capacity to engage with, religiosity may not only shift over time (Byrant, Choi & Yasumo, 2003) but also be intrinsically linked to time (Massey & Higgins, 2011; Park, 2004).

Changes in university students’ perception of their own religiosity and appraisal of their capacity to engage with the dimensions of religiosity continue to attract research attention (Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2005; Clydesdale, 2007; Hartley, 2004; Lee, 2002). The research draws from theoretical frameworks that view the formation of social identities and sense of meaning-making as an ongoing process that is continually shifting, particularly during the emerging adult stage of life (Tale & Parker, 2007; Schaller, 2005). Some studies draw from Erikson’s developmental framework and connect shifts in religiosity to developmental stages (e.g., Tale & Parker, 2007), while others suggest that shifts in religiosity among emerging adults may be better explained by influences of the time period, generational or birth cohort differences (Twenge, Excline, Grubbs, Sastry & Campbell, 2015), or intergenerational value change

(Hagevi, 2017). Indeed, time period, geographical space, and place contribute to people's understanding of, and capacity to engage with, religiosity, in addition to their sense of moral order (Park, 2004). Though changing religiosity may be initiated and influenced by a number of variables, there is strong agreement in the literature that it is common during the emerging adult phase and may impact the life outcomes of the individual. These implications are relevant to Manitoba, a community in which many people draw their life reference from religion. Yet, despite the potential for significant effects of changing religiosity, we have little knowledge of how emerging adults in Manitoba describe their experience of this shift. More still, there is limited understanding about how these individuals experience the significant shifts in their religiosity at critical developmental time-lines (i.e. elementary, middle years, high school and university) and how they describe the potential impact on their lives.

Rationale

Adolescence and young adulthood tend to be periods of increased questioning or change in worldview, identity, and values (Chan et al., 2015). This may be especially true for those encountering others with different and varied worldviews for the first time (Chan et al., 2015), a common experience in a public, post-secondary setting. Precipitated by intellectual, political, social, practical, or spiritual events (Gooren, 2010; Bromley, 1991; Streib, Hood Jr., Keller, Csoff & Silver, 2009), these students may experience significant shifts in their religiosity (Petts, 2009). These shifts may occur in one or more of Huber and Huber's (2012) five dimensions, resulting in mild to profound change. An individual may make minor modifications to beliefs and/or practice without change in affiliation, choose to move toward a religious tradition of different intensity or interpretation, or move towards disaffiliation (i.e., no longer associating oneself with

a religious institution or denomination), agnosticism, or atheism (Chan et al., 2015; Streib et al., 2009). Among other terms, these individuals experiencing shifts in religiosity have been described as deconverts (Streib et al., 2009), apostates (Longo & Kim-Spoon, 2014), or as undergoing religious transition (Fisher, 2017) or spiritual transformation (Paloutzian, 2005). These terms may inadvertently express value judgment about changing beliefs or make assumptions regarding the outcome. The term 'shift' was chosen to describe perceived changes in any of the dimensions of religiosity so that emerging adults may describe their experiences - the impact on the lives they live and supports they may require - while minimizing bias and/or presumption of the result.

Changes in religion often occur in late adolescence and young adulthood (Petts, 2009). Though these changes may result in an increase or decrease in religious participation, there is a general understanding in the literature that participation in religious activities decreases as an individual reaches this developmental period (Petts, 2009). Regnerus, Uecker and Vaaler (2007) found that 69% of young adults attended services less often than they did as adolescents (as cited in Petts, 2009). Other studies indicate that though participation and formal affiliation decline, religious beliefs may remain stable (Chan et al., 2015). Bromley (1991) suggests that the adolescent or young adult's distancing their self from religion may be expected, as many individuals of this age also tend to move away from other (non-religious) institutions at this time in their lives. Emerging adults often use this time to individualize their views, moving away from prescribed traditions or institutions to create their own set of beliefs (Chan et al., 2015). Unfortunately, though behavioural change such as participation in religious activities may be observed, changing beliefs and worldview are not as easily measured.

Though shifts in religiosity during adolescence or young adulthood may be expected, navigating the change may be difficult. Some quantitative studies on the effects of religious transition indicate that religious shifts are related to poorer health and increased emotional suffering (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016). Furthermore, shifts may coincide with significant questioning or doubt about aspects of the individual's religion leading to interpersonal conflicts with other group members or intra-individual struggle with doctrines, actions or beliefs (Hill & Pargament, 2003). People deconverting from a religious tradition likely experience some level of grief, guilt, loneliness or despair (Streib et al., 2009). Emerging adults struggling with doubts may be more likely than their older counterparts to struggle with feelings of depression and anxiety (Kézdy, Martos, Boland & Horvath-Szabó, 2010).

Unfortunately, though individuals may be at risk for poorer mental health, helpful resources may not be common (Fisher, 2017; Lukoff, Lu & Turner, 1992). Streib et al.'s 2009 study of religious deconverts reported that only 16 of the 99 participants accessed therapy during the deconversion process. The authors wondered why this number was not higher, given the emotional turmoil many of the participants expressed during interviews. They suggested that the low level of help-seeking might be due to lack of support structures and clinical specialization. Unfortunately, the impact of shifts in religiosity may not only be overlooked, but dismissed as a minor issue or supernatural superstition. This is compounded by the fact that individuals may become marginalized from their religious community when moving away from their tradition (Longo & Kim-Spoon, 2014). Terms used to describe individuals who have deconverted or disaffiliated, like "drop out" or "coming out", attest to a biased perception and marginalization of people leaving religious traditions (Fisher, 2017). Not only might individuals not have trusted

others or resources outside of their group, terms such as these help us understand why individuals may feel they are unable to ask for help or obtain support from their religious community. Deconverts, especially those from strict communities, have, “a foot in each world, but are at home in neither” (Rothbaum, 1988, p. 206).

The studies described above are not specific to the emerging adult experience. Are university students experiencing shifts in their religiosity also at risk for poorer mental health? If they do experience increased emotional suffering related to these shifts, do they have resources or support that they feel comfortable accessing?

Surprisingly, though the phenomenon and its potential consequences are significant, research into the experiences of individuals questioning and leaving faith traditions remains sparse, and most of this research has been quantitative (Gooren, 2011; Davis et al., 2016). As a result, the research often focuses on only one dimension at a time (for example, an individual’s participation, or their level of connection to the group) (Bromley, 1991) or tends to characterize a religious transition as occurring in only one moment in time (Streib et al., 2009). Of the research that has been done, most has focused on the potential causes, or contributing factors, of change in religiosity (Davis et al., 2016). Because many studies of conversion occur post-hoc, it is difficult to determine how the process actually plays out, as often attributions, reasons and realizations are added as the teller reconstructs their story in light of their current beliefs and understanding (Longo & Kim-Spoon, 2014). For these reasons, researchers have called for further investigation of the process and experiences of change in religiosity (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016; Fisher, 2017).

Significance

Emerging adults experiencing shifts in religiosity may be caught between the values and perspectives of their past and the world with which they are now attempting to engage. If they encounter difficulty as their levels of religiosity shift, to whom do they turn, and how do they begin to renegotiate these areas of their life? We have a group that may be at risk for poorer physical and mental health, about which little is known and little is shared, and yet we are far from possessing even a basic understanding of the experience to help clinicians engage with these clients and comprehend the potential loss and implications that may occur (Fisher, 2017). We are aware that many emerging adults experience shifts in religiosity, but need to better understand how emerging adults in university perceive the process and potential impact of this shift.

This study aimed to begin to address this gap. By exploring emerging adults' experiences of their shifting religiosity, we can better understand a largely overlooked phenomenon. This increased awareness can help clinicians gain insight into the general experiences and themes of this process. Clinicians may then guide and support their clients who are experiencing significant shifts in religiosity, anticipate areas of stress and challenge, and work with clients to explore the potential outcomes of their decisions (Fisher, 2017). As noted above, Fisher (2017) refers to the process of sharing one's change in beliefs as "coming out". The term he chose indicates just how difficult and complex it might be for the client to share their new beliefs or practices with their friends, family and community. With an understanding of how changes in religiosity may impact their client's relationships, the clinician may play a role in addressing the emotional turmoil (i.e., acknowledging the loss and framing it as a grief process), helping their

client anticipate, prepare for, and process reactions, as well as assisting their client to build new social networks and supports (Harty, 1996; Fisher, 2017).

Researcher Positionality

A phenomenological study does not begin with an overarching theory, rather, the researcher uses their observation and perception of the stories of the participants to begin working towards a theory of the phenomenon being studied. In the role of researcher, I am to be disciplined in attempting to avoid bias, but it is idealistic to assume that my prior experiences, ideas and beliefs will not affect my conceptualization of this phenomenon, therefore I will attempt to articulate my positionality in this study.

Part of my interest in this phenomenon lies in my own experiences with shifts in religiosity, including significant questioning, doubt and struggle. My story travels from one of a mild level of Christian ideology, but consistent participation in religious activities, to a place where I self-described as atheist. Though my beliefs no longer lie at either end, I carry with me my own experiences, feelings and understandings of the process of losing a religion, and its impact on my life, including my world-view, relationships, and overall well-being. In addition, I bring with me a strong interest in the academic study of religion, including an undergraduate degree in religious studies, studying both the personal and social aspects of various faith traditions. My other academic training is in psychology, with a focus on quantitative research, clinical assessment and therapy.

As part of a qualitative research course requirement in Spring 2017, I conducted interviews with two individuals who self-described as moving away in belief and practice from the religious tradition in which they were raised. Participants were both female, early 30s and

known to the researcher. Results from this small study revealed the following emerging themes: religious transition was gradual and not initiated by any one factor; identified precipitants of transition included lack of connection with religion of origin and disagreement with beliefs due to recently acquired knowledge (e.g., social justice, academic, intellectual); feelings of loss; making the development of connection with others (individuals, groups and/or divine) a priority; and experiencing freedom to explore religious options due to an accepting response from family and friends (e.g., religious beliefs/practices were not fundamental in relationships). In addition, both participants placed emphasis on action rather than holding specific ideology, and felt free to be flexible in their approach to taking from various beliefs and traditions to create a new belief-system or framework.

Throughout the 2017-2018 academic year, I completed a practicum in therapy in a post-secondary setting. Perhaps due to my previous religious studies education, personal interest, or, more likely, the research I was exploring for this project, I felt more comfortable to ask about, and explore more in-depth, a client's religiosity. To my surprise, three of the five clients expressed significant connection to religion. For two, rediscovery and renegotiations of their early childhood traditions provided personal guidance and a new community with which to engage. For the other, the beliefs and expectations of his family's tradition continued to be a marked source of struggle, separation, and self-loathing, significantly impacting his functioning and well-being.

Though I propose no theories or make strong claims, the information the clients and participants shared with me regarding the causes, process and implications of their shifting

religiosity, and the importance of their current beliefs and practices, may have influenced the questions I asked and the conclusions I drew in this study.

Organization of Thesis

Chapter one outlined the purpose and significance of this research, including potential biases of the researcher. Chapter two explores literature related to developing and shifting religiosity, particularly as it pertains to young adults and well-being. Chapter three includes a detailed explanation of the methodology used for this study, articulating the research question, and explaining participant demographics, recruitment, data collection and data analysis. Chapter four describes the themes identified in the interview data, supported by quotes from the participants. This section is divided into two parts, participants' narratives related to their past, and negotiations within their current context. The final chapter presents, interprets and summarizes the data analysis, comparing it against the extant literature. The chapter includes a proposed trajectory of religiosity, further explores themes associated with well-being, and provides implications for counselling psychology and recommendations for therapists.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As church attendance and self-report of religious affiliation decline in Canada (Pew Research Center, 2013), it may be natural to assume that the impact of religion has decreased and that religion is losing its import and grip on the masses. Yet, though the landscape is changing, religion remains a powerful force in society and an influential aspect in many people's lives (Chandler, 2012). This is certainly true for those that continue to ascribe to a faith, but also impacts those experiencing changes in their religiosity.

This chapter is an exploration of the research related to the phenomenon of shifting religiosity. This section begins by considering the terms 'religious' and 'spiritual', how they are similar and different, and how these concepts apply to the current study. Next, data will be provided that indicates that the religious landscape is changing. The chapter then describes some of the ways individual religiosity has been conceptualized and measured. A brief overview of typical paths of religious development is provided, with particular attention paid to the emerging adult. Included here are possible precipitants of religious shifts suggested in the literature. Following this is a description of a qualitative study that explored the experiences of adults taking part in a religious transition group. Finally, this section includes an overview of the research on the relationship between religion and health, including the possible correlation between shifting religiosity and health. This chapter ends with a summary and considerations for future research.

Religious or Spiritual?

There is much discussion about the distinction, and perceived dichotomy between the

terms religious and spiritual. Generally, religion refers to, “an organized set of beliefs, traditions, and behaviours that relate to some greater entity outside of the self” (Chandler, 2012, p. 578). If people self-describe as religious, they typically mean that they voluntarily hold a set of beliefs and participate in the particular activities that are associated with that religion (Bromley, 1991; Chandler, 2012). The individual is operating, “within established institutional contexts designed to facilitate spirituality” (Pargament, Mahoney, Exline, Jones & Shafranske, 2013, p. 17). Spirituality, conversely, typically refers specifically to the individual, their inner-life and search for meaning or purpose, that is often outside of traditional institutions (Paloutzian, 2005; Chandler, 2012). Hill and Pargament (2017) refer to spirituality as the search for, “sacred beliefs, practices, experiences or relationships that are embedded in nontraditional contexts” (p. 49). This may not include any belief in the supernatural, but it also may overlap with specific religious belief or practice. Pargament et al. (2013) note that religious and spiritual need not be polarized, they “are neither independent nor opposed to each other” (p. 17). For example, individuals who describe themselves as “spiritual not religious” may hold some religious belief and/or engage in private practice but not participate in public practice or accept particular doctrines. However, others who identify as “spiritual not religious” may hold no belief in the divine, but rather, use spirituality to refer to the values, ideas or goals that transcend their individual self (Paloutzian, 2005). Some individuals see no distinction between the two, but opt to use the term spiritual in an attempt to avoid the word religion, a term that can be perceived as divisive or controversial (Chandler, 2012). It is confusing and possibly misleading to attempt to distinctly label each individual’s expression of religiosity. Huber and Huber’s (2012) framework is valuable in that, rather than attempting to categorize each individual, it provides a more

nuanced view to describe the elements of religion to which the individual currently ascribes. For the purposes of this thesis the term religiosity will be operationalized as Huber and Huber's (2012) five dimensions, including private practice, public practice, intellectual, ideology and religious experience. Some of these may be popularly conceptualized as religious (such as public practice or ideology) and others more spiritual (religious experience or private practice).

Context

According to data from the 2012 General Social Survey in the United States, 20% of adults reported adhering to no religion, though 75% of that number had grown up in a religious tradition. From this we can assume that religious change and disaffiliation is fairly common in the United States (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016). In Canada, only four percent of the population reported no religious affiliation in 1971. In 2011, 24% of the population self-described as unaffiliated. The numbers in the prairie provinces are slightly higher, a rise from five percent to 29% during this same time period (Pew Research Centre, 2013). Though the increasing percentage of individuals currently reporting no religion may be in part due to those who at no time subscribed to a religion, Pew Research (2013) indicates that disaffiliation has increased within some generations as they have aged. For example, 10% of Canadians born 1947-1966 reported no affiliation in 1981. This number rose to 20% by 2011 within this same age group (Pew Research Centre, 2013). This suggests that though much of the literature on religious transition comes from the United States and Europe, there are a significant number of people in Canada who go through the process of changing beliefs and practices in regards to their religious tradition.

The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) is a longitudinal study of the religiosity of American adolescents. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, the purpose of the study is to, “research the shape and influence of religion and spirituality in the lives of American adolescents...in order to encourage sustained reflection about, and rethinking of, our cultural and institutional practices with regard to adolescents and religion” (Denton, Pearce & Smith, 2008, p.1). In 2002, researchers contacted a group of adolescent participants (Wave 1: ages 13-17) through telephone surveys. The participants were contacted again in 2005 as part of Wave 2 (ages 16-21). From this data, the researchers developed a report that explained the group’s “level and directions of religious change” (Denton et al., 2008). Results of the study indicated that while most adolescents (57%) did not report change in the religious beliefs or practices, a small, but significant number (16%) experienced shifts away from Wave 1 beliefs and practices (Denton et al., 2008). A closer look at the data suggests a significant decrease in adolescents reporting affiliation with Protestant denomination and an increase of adolescents reporting no religious affiliation. From Wave 1 to Wave 2 more of the participants became unsure about their belief in God, and fewer believed in a personal and involved God, judgement day, or afterlife. In addition, participants reported attending fewer religious services and classes as well as decreased private practice such as reading scripture or praying (Denton et al., 2008). In *Souls in Transition*, Smith and Snell (2009) describe the results of the study further, noting that emerging adults in the United States have become less religious over time. When compared to data from emerging adults in the 1970s, there is an increase in those who report no religious affiliation and a decrease in public practice (Smith & Snell, 2009). Though completed in the

United States, this study indicates that emerging adults are experiencing shifts in the level, content, and direction of their religiosity.

Measures of Religiosity

Generally, religiosity is measured through self-report. These may be as brief and blunt as, “How religious are you?”, or “How important is spirituality in your life?” (Vittengl, 2018). Questions also may be more complex and nuanced, often grounded in a religious or developmental theory. For example, connection to a deity measures may draw on a relational theoretical framework such as attachment theory (Hill & Pargament, 2017). Conceptualizing religion as multi-dimensional stems from theories of religion developed in the early 1900s that were revised throughout the century (Pearce, Haward & Pearlman, 2017). Psychologists of religion developed measures of religion and spirituality in an attempt to gain scientific legitimacy, emphasizing that the measure be grounded in theory which increases the likelihood that it will be reliable and valid (Hill & Pargament, 2017). Hill (2013), suggested that a measure show internal consistency above .70 in at least two studies to be considered reliable (as cited in Hill & Pargament, 2017). In 1999, Hill and Hood published a compendium of 125 scales measuring religion and spirituality (Hill & Pargament, 2017). Self-report measures may be categorized as either substantive (the substance or content of an individual’s faith) or functional (how religion operates in that person’s life) (Hill & Pargament, 2017). Substantive measures may include scales for general religiousness or spirituality, religious/spiritual commitment, religious preferences/orthodoxy, relational measures such as god concept, god image, attachment to the divine, and religious or spiritual development (Hill & Pargament, 2017). An example of a functional measure is Gordon Allport’s (1950) intrinsic-extrinsic theory of religious orientation,

which has significantly impacted the research (as cited in King & Crowther, 2004). This scale taps into the motivations for an individual's behaviour. For an individual with an intrinsic motivation, religion is their "integrative framework from which all of life is lived" (Hill & Pargament, 2017), a "goal in itself" (King & Crowther, 2004). Whereas, for those driven by an extrinsic approach, religion is motivated by the possible personal benefits such as belonging, security or community (Hill & Pargament, 2017). In other terms, intrinsic may refer to what is popularly conceptualized as spiritual, with extrinsic referring to what is often understood as religious. Later researchers suggested that one's orientation need not be polarized and that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation may occur in the same individual. That is, religion is not necessarily an end goal, but rather a process, or search. The "quest orientation" (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991) is a response to this critique and encompasses a broader conceptualization of religious motivation by assessing three dimensions including, "a) readiness to face existential questions without reducing complexity, b) self-criticism and perceiving doubt as positive, and c) openness to change" (as cited in King & Crowther, 2004). Other functional scales measure fundamentalist religious orientation, religious coping and religious struggle (Hill & Pargament, 2017).

There are a number of concerns regarding the use of self-report to measure religiosity including self-report bias (misrepresentation due to social desirability), limitations to an individual's introspection ability (Jong, Zahl & Sharp, 2017), and the tendency of the participant to respond as their chosen identity rather than what they actually do (Brenner, 2017). For these reasons, some researchers suggest using indirect or implicit measures of religiosity. This type of measure avoids self-assessment, involving "inference about participants' mental states and traits

from some other behaviour” (Jong et al., 2017, p. 79). These measures may include: partially structured measures which rely on the researcher’s subjective interpretation of the participant’s responses (e.g., the Rorschach (1927) test), assimilation/confirmation bias measures, response-latency-based measures, property verification, which measures the link or association (content, and more significantly, speed) between stimuli and a property of the object, and sequential priming measures (Jong et al., 2017).

Lee (2011) writes that there is little agreement in religious scholarship about how religious change might be measured. However, religious conversion research has tended to focus on four dimensions of religiosity in which change might occur: institutional involvement, experience, discourse, and salience, to which Lee would add one more, religious identity (Lee, 2011). The most common and reliable of these dimensions has been measurements of involvement, such as religious service attendance and group membership (Lee, 2011).

The measures described above have been used in quantitative studies of religiosity and possess both strengths and drawbacks. Unfortunately, the typical method of measurement, self-report, brings limitations and concerns regarding self-report bias; however, the significant strength of these evolving measures is the understanding that the measurement of religiosity must be based in theory. These theories have led us to understanding that an individual’s religiosity is not comprised of only one element. Rather, research has identified several distinct but interrelated dimensions that interact, shift and affect each other over time. Researchers have given these dimensions the overarching term, religiosity. A quantitative study provides only a snap-shot of religiosity at distinct points in time. The advantage of a qualitative study is that it

allows us to make sense of the ongoing interplay between these dimensions, providing us with a better understanding of the process of shifting religiosity in the lives of emerging adults.

Religious Development

Several theorists have provided propositions regarding faith development. Most common among them are Allport's (1950) development of religious sentiments, Fowler's (1981) stages of faith, and Jung's (1958, 1973) individuation theory (Worthington, 1989). Many of these theories draw from earlier work in the development of cognition and moral reasoning. Though there are many differences, the theories have in common a general trajectory of the child who moves from holding their caregiver's beliefs, unquestioned, towards the more independent, tested, organized and conscious faith of the adult. The individual's developing faith tends to move from literal understanding, holding the assumption that there are correct answers and right ways of doing, to a more symbolic interpretation of beliefs and practices (Kézdy et al., 2011). Fowler suggested that faith is a meaning-making process that moves through a series of stages beginning with concrete systems towards more abstract and autonomous understandings; however, not every individual will move through all stages (Hill & Pargament, 2017).

We can see that religiosity is conceptualized as a developmental process that changes over time. Religion is not merely present, or not present, in an individual's life, but rather morphs and evolves in content, understanding, and intensity as the individual develops. We expect, therefore, that most individuals exposed to religion will experience shifts throughout their lives. These changes may be more common or significant during emerging adulthood as it is a phase of life that often includes questioning one's worldview, including values and identity (Chan et al., 2015). An adolescent's increasing complexity of thinking has an impact on their

developing religiosity (Kézdy et al., 2010) which is likely even more encouraged in post-secondary students due to their increasing interaction with differing world-views (Chan et al., 2015).

One influence on a young person's developing religiosity is their early religious exposure (Petts, 2009). Children raised with high levels of religion tend to remain religious, while those raised in homes without religion tend to not participate in religious activities later in life (Petts, 2009). In addition, the type of tradition in which a child is raised may play a role. Traditions with more opportunities for socialization, such as conservative denominations that include youth groups and higher probability of friends within their religious community, support higher rates of religious participation among young people. This is compared to mainline denominations, where 75% of Catholic and mainline Protestant young adults report lower participation as compared to their adolescence (Petts, 2009).

These statistics indicate that the stronger the religious exposure and socialization as a child, the more religious the adult. Small shifts as the individual develops may be expected, and draw little concern as long as the changes generally reflect the views and practices of their family or community. But what if the young person, raised with strong religious exposure, begins to experience shifts that are contrary to the expectations of their community? These individuals may encounter more struggle with this process and experience more impact. Additionally, what might these shifts mean for other areas of their development such as relationships with family and identity?

Precipitants of Religious Shifts

A number of quantitative studies have identified potential precipitants of shifting religiosity.

These include changes or struggles in intellectual, moral, social or personal realms. Individuals may experience increasing intellectual doubts about beliefs or practices (Gooren, 2010). These questions or doubts may be the result of higher education or exposure to other information and beliefs (Gooren, 2010; Bromley, 1991). Individuals may experience moral criticism or cognitive dissonance, particularly if they feel that there are conflicts between their religion and science, politics, or their views on social justice (Vargas, 2012; Fisher, 2017). Changes in family and relationships may influence religiosity, such as the addition or loss of a partner, friend or family member, or changes in the community (Gooren, 2010). Religiosity may shift in conjunction with personal matters such as an attraction to a new type of religious experience, a search for more intensity, guidance or structure, pursuit of autonomy, critical life event or stressor (Streib et al., 2009), ongoing personal suffering (Fisher, 2017), or simply lifestyle incompatibility or a loss of habit (Gooren, 2010).

The NSYR study reflects many of the precipitants noted above. When asked about possible causes for their religious change, adolescents who experienced a decrease in religiosity after Wave 1 responded with reasons that fit within the following categories: dissatisfaction with, or a negative evaluation of religion (for example, lack of interest or perceived hypocrisy of their community); intellectual skepticism regarding claims of religion or existence of God; religious participation decreasing in priority (often the result of a life change, such as a move or attending school, gaining religious autonomy, or a traumatic event); and, the most common, a general disinterest, “drifting away”, or becoming too busy to continue private and public practice (Denton et al., 2008). For those adolescents who experienced an increase in religiosity, they cited reasons such as better understanding of religion, having meaningful religious experiences,

important others, perceived benefits of religion, or life changes such as moves or changes within their family (e.g., birth of a child, illness or death) (Denton et al., 2008).

Contrary to the classic model of conversion as occurring in a single, profound moment, religious transition tends to be conceptualized as, “a rational process, an acquisition and testing of a new behaviour and new beliefs” that takes place over time (Streib et al., 2009, p. 20). Yet, most studies have sought to identify specific precipitants to shifting religiosity, indicating that these variables, alone or in combination, cause the transition. This suggests a cause and effect scenario, rather than a complex process. In fact, it may be argued that the reverse is true, that it is the transition that is creating or influencing the so-called cause(s). Or, there may be an interplay of several variables that come and go over time. If religious transition is described as a rational process, we cannot assume causation by any variable if we do not know what the process looks like. The NSYR study has made attempts to understand the factors that influence shifting religiosity. Through regression analysis, the researchers identified the significant predictive power of an adolescent’s parental religion, importance of faith, and private practice (prayer and scripture reading) on their level of religiosity as an adult (Smith & Snell, 2009). However, though this is an intriguing glimpse into the potential influence of some of the factors at play, we are still missing studies of how this process plays out in lived experience of the emerging adult.

An Illustrative Qualitative Study

One small study, completed as a PhD. dissertation in 1996 gives us a glimpse of these experiences as they are lived. Wendy Harty’s study of Latter Day Saints members explores the nature of individuals’ described experiences concerning their changing beliefs and practices, without concern for the specific outcome of the struggle. She asks the question: “How do

individuals who have joined a religious transition support group describe their religious experiences?” noting that some members eventually disaffiliate and some do not. For this reason, Harty described the process as one of transition rather than disaffiliation. Participants in the study explained that their shifting religiosity significantly affected their lifestyle and identity. Generally the participants noted a “lack of fit” with their religion, a realization that something was amiss, or that the belief and/or practice was not working for them. This led to questioning and information gathering to begin to address these questions. Changing beliefs were common and included thoughts about religion, thoughts about their self, and general shifts in their thought processes. The transition often included significant feelings of fear regarding the consequences of challenging authority or changing their affiliation, such as being shunned by family and friends in this life, or separated from them in the next. One of the most difficult aspects of the process was the sharing with, and reaction of, spouses, parents, children and friends. Other feelings included guilt, shame and lower self-valuing, isolation, sadness, grief, anger and feelings of betrayal. For participants that arrived at a resolution regarding their beliefs, they often experienced emotions such as relief, joy and peace (Harty, 1996). Results also validated the importance of the role of a group or counselling experience. Participants hoped that counsellors had received training in religion and religious transition, and “to be informed but unbiased about different world religions” (Harty, 1996, p. 79).

Harty’s study is one of very few that seeks to explore the individual experience of shifting religiosity. Though Harty presents religious transition as a process, it is presented with a defined beginning and end. Though the intention of the present study is to focus specifically on the emerging adult experience, by conceptualizing this as just one point on a developmental

timeline, this study presents shifting religiosity as a continual process that is not limited to one transition period. Furthermore, the present study's focus on student participants emphasizes mental health in a university context, aiming to better understand the specific experiences and needs of this population.

Religiosity and Health

An individual's religiosity impacts their intra-personal experiences like meaning and identity (Paloutzian, Richardson, & Rambo, 1999), as well as subjective well-being (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016). It is also linked to the quality of individuals' inter-personal functioning including feelings of belonging, relationships, social supports, and behaviour (Paloutzian et al., 1999; Oman & Thoresen, 2005). In addition, though not all experiences with religion are positive - such as the potential for increased bigotry, homophobia and intolerance (Miller & Kelley, 2005) - those who self-describe as religious may experience better mental and physical health and lower death rates than their non-affiliated counterparts (Oman and Thoresen, 2005; Gillum, King, Obisesan & Koenig, 2008).

Why might religion be associated with increased health? The mechanism is not clear. Oman and Thoresen (2005) suggest that religion and spirituality might protect against stressful life events by encouraging positive physical and psychological health behaviours (such as drug and alcohol abstinence, help-seeking and service to others), improving coping (for example, through meditation or forgiveness), and providing systems of meaning and social support (Oman & Thoresen, 2005; Williams & Sternthal, 2007). Religious individuals also generally exhibit better physical health and express higher levels of mental well-being and happiness (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016). Fatima, Sharif and Khalid (2018) show that religious coping, mediated by

self-efficacy and perceived social support, predicts personal well-being in adolescents. The authors suggest that coping resources are more beneficial than obligatory practices in supporting individuals through what can be a particularly stressful life stage. In addition, older individuals who attend a religious service at least once per week exhibit lower death rates (Gillum et al., 2008). Chan et al.'s (2015) longitudinal study of the effects of religion and the well-being of young adults found that higher levels of religiosity were associated with a stronger sense of meaning and purpose in life, though they did not necessarily protect against depressive symptoms. A 2006 systematic review of the research on adolescent religiosity and mental health indicated that the majority of studies (90%) reported positive relationships between the two variables (Wong, Rew & Slaikeu, 2006).

Wallace Jr. (2008) notes that there is little research specific to the relationship between religiosity and physical health in adolescents. The few studies that exist tend to conceptualize religion as a “social control” that appears to protect against risk-taking behaviour (especially higher risk sexual involvement, alcohol and drug use, and delinquency) and support health-promoting behaviour (Wallace Jr., 2008; Wong et al., 2006). Wallace Jr. (2008) writes that this body of research, “gives relatively little attention to the potential health preventive, promotive, or enhancing aspects of religion identified in the adult literature” (p. 6). Beyond the impact religion may have on certain behaviours, the relationship between health and religiosity in emerging adults remains unclear.

Shifts in Religiosity and Health

Though the research on shifting religiosity is not extensive, there is some evidence to indicate that changes in religion or spirituality impact one's physical and mental health.

Religious deconverts in particular may experience higher costs than they anticipated, particularly during and immediately after the transition process, including negative emotions and loss of relationships with friends and family (Fazzino, 2014). Deconverts often report poorer health and lower subjective well-being than those that remain in the tradition (Fenelon and Danielsen, 2016). With the loss of religion, an individual's resources for emotional coping and strength are lowered, while feelings of guilt, fear, loneliness and anxiety may impact well-being (Fisher, 2017; Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016). These effects may be particularly prevalent in converts from evangelical denominations due to the tradition's emphasis on sin and divine retribution (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016). In addition, a deconvert's health may be negatively affected due to decreased behavioural regulation (e.g., an increase in smoking or drinking) (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016). In Robert J. Marriott's 2015 study of Christian deconverts to atheism, interview respondents described significant negative consequences socially, existentially and in terms of their employment. This effect may be further exacerbated when leaving a high-cost religion, that is, a tradition that requires greater commitment, defined social structure and/or specific behaviours. Scheitle and Adamczyk (2010) found poorer health amongst individuals leaving groups such as Latter-Day Saints (Mormonism) and Jehovah's Witnesses. In Streib et al.'s (2009) study on deconversion in the United States and Germany, 16 out of the 99 individuals interviewed sought therapy.

Though not specific to religion, there is extensive evidence regarding the negative health effects of losing social support, that is, those relationships to which we turn in times of need (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016; Anderson & Saunders, 2003). With this in mind, Longo & Kim-Spoon (2014) suggest that loss of social and familial support is one of the largest costs of shifting

religiosity. This may be particularly true for individuals who eventually identify as non-believers or atheists. Smith (2011) suggests that in some groups, the adoption of an atheist identity is akin to a rejection identity. The perception is that the individual has consciously rejected the values and norms upon which society, or a community, is built. Whether the deconvert perceives it as such may not matter to the larger group and this may affect an atheist's relationships with friends and family and have implications for employment or engagement in the community (Longo & Kim-Spoon, 2014).

It may not be religion per se that offers mediating effects on health, but rather a strong belief system, religious or not. Galek, Krause, Ellison, Kugler & Flannelly (2007) reference Antonovsky's (1987) assertion that people who feel that there is "coherence and order" in their lives generally enjoy increased mental and physical health. Ellison (1991) calls this "existential certainty" (as cited in Galek, et al., 2007). The authors suggest that religion can be a significant source of that order, where beliefs and practices provide cognitive frameworks for making sense and meaning in life (Galek et al., 2007; Kézdy et al., 2011). What happens then, if one begins to question or doubt elements of this coherent worldview? Religious doubt may be operationalized as uncertainty or questioning of beliefs, teachings or practices (Galek et al., 2007). Many religious teachers suggest that religious doubt can have positive outcomes, in fact, may be required for deeper religious growth and development of personal meaning and understanding (Galek et al., 2007). However, Fisher (2017) notes that doubt can have negative effects on health, in particular when it robs an individual of a solid faith or worldview that provides meaning during times of difficulty. Individuals experiencing significant religious questioning or doubt may express feeling less satisfied with their health and report more depressive symptoms,

especially amongst those most invested in their faith (Krause & Wulff, 2004). In a study of expanded mental health measures, Galek et al. (2007) discovered that religious doubt is associated with depression, general anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity, paranoia, hostility, and obsessive-compulsive symptoms. Though not necessarily the cause of these symptoms, the authors suggest that religious doubt threatens an individual's existential certainty, the worldview that helps them make sense of life. In doing so, those experiencing religious doubt are left without an important coping resource as well as the loss of their social support network (Galek et al., 2007). This may be particularly true for young people (Krause et al., 1999). Though the doubts they experience may be due to expected increases in questioning as they reach this developmental stage (Kézdy et al., 2011), emerging adults may struggle more because they are less comfortable than older adults with existential uncertainty (Galek et al., 2007). In fact, Fowler (1980) suggests that these doubts are a necessary precursor to a more mature faith that is able to tolerate uncertainty (as cited in Kézdy et al., 2011). Younger adults are in a faith stage where they are working to make meaning of their experiences, but do not yet possess the wisdom of age to deal with this uncertainty (Galek et al., 2007). However, though questioning may be expected, it is not necessarily easy. For those emerging adults who consider religion important, doubting is still associated with increased levels of depression and anxiety (Kézdy et al., 2011).

Summary and Future Considerations

While individuals are not abandoning religion at the rate that might be popularly perceived, data from the United States and Canada indicate that people are disaffiliating from religious traditions at a higher rate than in the past (Pew Research Centre, 2013). This is especially true for adolescents and young adults who are reexamining their beliefs, values,

identities and worldview as realms of experience expands (Denton et al., 2008). Religious shifts are impacted by the adolescent's increased complexity of thinking as their religiosity moves from the concrete, literal understanding of the child, to a more abstract, symbolic understanding of the adult. Emerging adults may find themselves making changes to their beliefs or practices, or choosing to disaffiliate, if the doubting causes too much dissonance or the questions become too difficult to answer. Indeed, though religious doubts may be expected, they still may pose a significant struggle resulting in negative effects on the individual's physical and mental health.

The literature on religious transition provides a glimpse into some of the more common elements associated with shifts in religiosity. These shifts tend to increase during the emerging adult phase, and are often precipitated by intellectual questioning, life events or social experiences. Unfortunately, there is little consensus in the literature as to how to measure changes in religiosity, though we do know that conceptualizing religiosity as comprised of several distinct but interrelated dimensions is essential to beginning to understand these shifts.

Though the literature has proposed several possible precipitants or causes of religious change, it is difficult to determine causation from these correlations. If we conceptualize religious transition as a process, a gradual reworking that takes place over time, we cannot assume the causes if we do not know what the process looks like. Quantitative studies give us only snapshots of possible contributors, variables and consequences - they are not able to help us understand the interplay of these variables and how emerging adults negotiate these changes.

This literature review incorporated a number of studies that identify the links between an individual's religiosity and their mental health. Perhaps more important to this paper is the body of work that links shifts, or doubts, in religiosity with poorer health. Because shifts in religiosity

are common in the emerging adult population, and due to the potential for decreased health, it is essential that we gain more knowledge about the experience of shifting religiosity. There is little understanding of how this process plays out, and the effects it has on the emerging adults in our community of Winnipeg, Manitoba. This study aimed to address this gap by asking the question: How do emerging adults experience the process of shifts in religiosity and how do they describe the impact?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Purpose

Through a phenomenological approach, this study aimed to begin to address the gaps in the literature by gaining a deeper understanding of the many facets of the shifting religiosity phenomenon - perceived causes, experiences, consequences, feelings, reflections - and how they interconnect. The purpose was to investigate the process and impact of shifting religiosity. The study approached shifts in religiosity as a process, not a one-time event or outcome. For some individuals shifts may lead to religious struggle and eventually disaffiliation from the tradition; however, process-of-leaving researchers engaged in studies of other phenomena such as marital separation, suggest that “leaving” is not a single decision or action (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). An individual may experience shifts, move away, and return many times, psychologically and physically. If research focuses only on the moment or event of leaving, much rich information is missed (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

Huber and Huber’s (2012) religiosity framework was used to operationalize the dimensions of religiosity. To provide a general frame of reference for the purpose of this study, religiosity was operationalized as consisting of five, theoretically defined dimensions. Huber and Huber (2012) proposed these dimensions as the psychological “channels or modes” by which religious constructs are shaped (p. 710). Taken together, the measurement of the activation of these constructs provides a representation of an individual’s level of religiosity.

- Private practice: Individual participation in ritual or practice within a private space.
- Public practice: Belonging to a religious community and active participation in ritual and communal activities.

- Ideology: Acceptance of the belief system, degree of personal devotion or centrality of the faith.
- Intellectual: Knowledge of, and ability to explain, the belief system.
- Religious experience: Subjective, emotional, experience with the transcendent.

These core dimensions provided a conceptualization of religiosity that guided the interview participant selection process, but did not determine specific questions for the interview. Consistent with phenomenology, this study sought to address the one question and the structure of the interviews followed the participants' line of thought.

Results from this research begin to fill a critical void in our understanding of religious change so that supports may be developed. Indeed, for some individuals, the study interviews might have been the first time they expressed their thoughts and feelings about their questioning or doubt. In this way, the research process may have been both information gathering and participant help and support.

In summary, the purpose of this study was to explore and describe the process of religious shift among emerging adults. Interviews with three participants highlighted common themes and processes of shift in religiosity, leading to a discussion of the implications these had on the lives the participants live, including their intra-personal and inter-personal life experiences.

Research Question

The following general research question synthesized the aim of this study: How do emerging adults experience the process of shifts in religiosity and how do they describe the impact?

Participants

To aid in recruitment, the principal investigator administered a survey of religiosity, Huber and Huber's (2012) Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS), to a group of undergraduate students. The purpose of the CRS was to screen for individuals who met criteria to participate in the semi-structured phenomenological interviews, the focus of this study. The survey included developmental timelines to capture the process and intensity of shifts in religiosity. The CRS was used only for recruitment purposes and not analyzed as part of the final data.

Three participants meeting criteria engaged in phenomenologically framed interviews with the researcher. Inclusion criteria for the interviews included indication of: (1) moderate to significant shift in intensity of religiosity in at least one of the core religiosity dimensions (i.e., private practice, public practice, ideology, religious experience, intellectual) at at least one developmental timeline (i.e., elementary, middle years, high school, university), (2) identification of Christian background, and (3) interest to participate in the interviews.

Each participant (for both the questionnaire and interview) was provided with written, detailed information regarding the project (see Appendix C). Signed, informed consent was required of participants before questionnaires were completed and before interviews (if applicable to participant) began (see Appendix D). Participants were not selected on the basis of any characteristics that may make them especially vulnerable or require extra precautions. All participants were over 18 years of age and possessed a reasonable level of autonomy.

Population

Participants were undergraduate students enrolled in a religious studies class at the University of Manitoba.

Recruitment Measure

The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) (Huber & Huber, 2012) measures the intensity of five core dimensions of religiosity (see Appendix A).

Reliability

The internal consistency measured in the total sample of the International Religion Monitor is 0.85 (Chronbach's Alpha) for the CRS-5 and 0.93 for the CRS-10. Data is as yet unavailable for the CRS-15 (Huber & Huber, 2012).

Validity

There are high correlations between the CRS and self-reports of the salience of religious identity: 0.83 in a students' sample, and 0.73 in the international Religion Monitor. Huber & Huber (2012) also cite high correlations between CRS results and self-reports of the importance of religion for daily life (0.78 in students' sample and 0.67 in the International Religion Monitor (Chronbach's Alphas). This measure was used only for recruitment. Data was not analyzed.

Additional questions were added to this standardized questionnaire: demographic information, one question for each religiosity dimension that asks the participant to rate the degree of importance of the dimension at four developmental points in time (elementary, middle school, high school and university), a question at the end of each dimension that provides space for the participant to expand on their answers if desired, and a final question which asks participants if they consent to be contacted for follow-up interview by the researcher.

Design of Study

This study employed a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology identifies an event or happening and asks: What is this experience like? (Laverly, 2003). The goal was to study the

lived experience, focusing on an individual's understanding of their world, rather than conceptualizing the experience as separate from the person. Because there is little research on the experiences of, and the effects on, individuals in the process of religious transition, phenomenology's emphasis on *epoche* (setting aside prior assumptions or biases) and building understanding from lived experience rather than predetermined theory made it a particularly appropriate methodology to gain initial knowledge of this subject. The phenomenological approach allowed the participant to share their experience in-depth, which in turn allowed the researcher to better understand the meaning of the experience for the participant, and the phenomenon in general.

Method

The researcher conducted one, 80-90 minute interview with each of the three participants. Participants declined follow-up interviews, however the researcher included some clarification questions to each participant with their transcript. All of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. To encourage trustworthiness, the researcher provided the transcribed copies to the participants and they were given the opportunity to revise or edit their transcripts if they desired. One participant added information at this point. None of the participants made changes. Though the researcher had some prepared questions (see Appendix B) to initiate conversation, the interviews were informal, open-ended and guided by the participants' responses.

Data Collection

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) offers a non-prescriptive approach to data collection through the use of structured and semi-structured interviews. Structured interviews, where the interviewer does not deviate from set questions, aim to provide the

researcher with control, reliability and speed (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Unfortunately, this approach often constrains the participants' responses, thereby compromising the depth and breadth of the data. Instead, Smith and Osborn (2008) suggest using semi-structured interviews that allow the researcher to prepare questions in advance to guide the interview rather than dictate the process. Questions are prepared with the intent to encourage the participant to speak about the subject with as little interference (or 'leading') by the interviewer as possible (Smith & Osborn, 2008). One way of doing this is to use 'funneling', a technique that begins with broader questions in the hopes of eliciting general responses from the participant. From here the interviewer can follow up with more specific questions that probe the areas of interest of the research (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The major research question that guided the collection of data was an exploration of the process and impact of shifting religiosity. To do this, the researcher generally began with questions asking the participant to describe their past and present religiosity, with follow-up questions that further explored any changes and struggles the participant expressed.

The researcher maintained ongoing notes with observations, thoughts and reflections, completed after interviews, while listening to the recordings, and while researching and writing the final report. Some of these notes were incorporated into the results and discussion chapters. To begin the analysis, hard copies of the transcripts were printed and worked through line-by-line in the manner suggested by Smith and Osborn (2008) described below. This process was completed initially by the researcher alone. After this, the researcher and thesis advisor worked through the transcripts together, again line-by-line. Points of commonality and difference were

discussed. This process resulted in identification of the connections, commonalities and themes that emerged from the data.

Data Analysis

Smith and Osborn (2008) offer a general guide to analyzing the primary data using IPA. This process was used in this study. First, the researcher read the interview transcript from the first participant a few times to become familiar with the text and get a sense of the person. The researcher looked for significant pieces of information, such as insights, themes, particularities of language, and similarities and differences. Second, the researcher collected the themes, and the phrases that support them, looking for connections. The researcher then created words or short phrases to describe these clusters and checked the transcript to make certain the themes connected to the source material. Smith and Osborn (2008) note that the difficulty at this stage is, “finding expressions which are high level enough to allow theoretical connections within and across cases but which are still grounded in the particularity of the specific thing said” (p. 68). The above process was recreated a number of times as the researcher compared their understanding with what the individual said. Next, the researcher ordered the emerging themes and dropped those that did not make sense with the overall emerging structure or lacked strong basis from the transcript. The researcher then began analysis of the other cases, beginning the analysis and identification of themes in each case anew. Finally, the researcher created a table of ‘superordinate themes’ and prioritized which themes on which to focus by their prevalence, quality of their supporting source material, and connections with each other. The transcripts were then reread with these superordinate themes in mind (Smith and Osborn, 2008).

Delimitations

The scope of this study is limited to undergraduate students from a religious studies class in a public Canadian university. For the purposes of this Master's thesis, the study focused on the qualitative experience and IPA analysis. The survey (CRS) was used only for participant criteria screening. Consistent with phenomenology, the study used no guiding framework.

Limitations

This study sought to better understand the experience of shifting religiosity in whatever way, and whichever content, the participant chose to share. As such, this research does not claim to answer specific questions regarding change in religiosity, rather, the intent was to shed light on the phenomenon. In addition, this study focused on the experiences of a few undergraduate students reporting a Christian background. The results may not be generalizable to individuals in other religions or in other ages or stages of life.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction and Themes

The researcher conducted interviews with three individuals whose results on the recruitment questionnaire indicated shifts in religiosity in one or more dimensions over time. Religiosity is defined as the extent to which the individual engages with each of the five domains: private practice, public practice, ideological, intellectual and religious experience (Huber & Huber, 2012). Though the term shift may refer to a specific moment or event that leads to change, the participants generally did not describe changes in their religiosity this way. Shift, as it is operationalized in this study, refers to small changes over time, a continuous and gradual process. Each participant engaged in one, 80-90 minute interview and did not indicate interest in a follow-up interview. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the analysis was guided by Smith and Osborn's (2008) IPA method. The grand question that guided the interviews and analysis was: How do emerging adults experience the process of shifting religiosity, and how do they describe the impact?

To better guide the exploration of this topic during interviews, participants were asked to begin with their early life experiences within their religious tradition, with follow-up questions regarding possible changes over time with regard to beliefs, practices, and ideas. That is, questions such as, "Please tell me about the religious tradition in which you were raised" and "What was the deity (or term participant used) like to you then?", encouraged participants to describe their early experiences, illuminating significant moments and themes that reflected the environmental influences on their developing religiosity. Participants described people, events, and institutions that impacted the dimensions of their religiosity. Funnelling of the questions

then led participants into explanations of their current practices and beliefs, as well as difficulties and growth, prompting participants to share how they currently understand their religiosity, and their negotiation of it in their world.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify significant themes expressed in these narratives, both in terms of the commonalities they share, and where they diverge. To accomplish this, direct quotes from the three participants, as well as observations of their tone and emotion from the field notes, will be included. Organizing this data proved a challenge, as the participants shared a lifetime of stories alongside their evolving understanding and current attempts at making meaning. Indeed, early life experiences influence present reasoning and functioning, and current understanding influences the meaning and expression of past events. In an attempt for increased clarity, this chapter is divided into two categories. The first section focuses on the participants' explanations of their past and explores participants' explanations of the process of their developing religiosity during the developmental periods of early, middle and high school years. The next section explores the present context and the impacts of these continued negotiations on their current functioning. The chapter will close with a brief summary of each participant's current religiosity.

Participant Demographics

Avina is an undergraduate student in her early 20s. She was raised in a religious home that incorporated both Christian and Hindu traditions. She does not consider herself affiliated with a particular tradition currently, but retains a number of religious beliefs and practices. She lives with her family in an urban setting.

Quinn is an undergraduate student in his early 20s. He was raised in a Christian home that included both Lutheran and Unitarian traditions. He no longer considers himself affiliated with a religious tradition or belief system. His parents separated when he was a child and attended different churches. He moved away from his family to attend university.

Rachel is an undergraduate student in her early 20s. She was raised in a Christian home within a highly religious community. She currently identifies with the Christian tradition. She lives with her family in a small rural town, commuting to university.

The Past: Developing and Shifting Dimensions of Religiosity

Religiosity is not a single entity, but comprised of number of elements. For this reason, Huber and Huber's (2012) identification of five dimensions of religiosity is essential to better understand how an individual's religiosity changes and grows. This section presents the participants' narratives about how they experienced shifts in these five dimensions of religiosity which include public practice, private practice, intellectual, ideological and religious experience (Huber & Huber, 2012). The participants in this study described their experiences as fluid movement in, out, and within each of these dimensions. They expressed experiencing these dimensions behaviourally (such as changing public practice), cognitively (such as questioning beliefs), and affectively (for example, feelings of disappointment in religious teachers or teachings). Though they identified some moments of specific change, generally participants did not describe a history of concrete points of shift. Rather, they articulated their shifting religiosity as a continuous, fluid process, without a particular pattern or direction, a process that was integrated into their narratives of growth and development.

Participants often related their experiences with changing religiosity to different stages of life. This section takes a closer look at three developmental periods the participants described in this study: early years, middle years and high school. Organizing the data in this way highlights the developmental trajectory, reflecting specific stages of an individual's life, though shifts in religiosity do not necessarily follow these markers. As a cautionary note, however, though it makes sense that as an individual develops so too will their religiosity, a possible pitfall of presenting changing religiosity as a developmental trajectory is that it may give the illusion that it is a linear process. Indeed, the term "development" itself may be misleading. Richert and Granqvist (2013) are quick to note that development simply means change that is more than temporary. This study does not assume individuals are exhibiting religious development that is a steady or consistent growth toward an expected or ideal end. However, presenting the data in this way helps to better understand the changes, dilemmas, and experiences the participants encountered as they engaged the different dimensions of religiosity over time.

Considering participants' narratives over the course of their early, middle and high school years illuminates a possible trajectory of shifting religiosity dimensions. In this study, all participants described a religiosity that began with public practice, and over time started to include private practice, ideological, intellectual and finally religious experience dimensions. As the participants developed, their personal experience of a deity moved from distant and unknowable, to present, personal and accessible. Social capital played a large role as participants moved from a religiosity influenced primarily by family to exploring communities that reflected their respective shifts. Middle years appeared to be a particular intense period of changes in all five of the dimensions of religiosity.

When describing a superhuman being or force all of the participants often used the word “god” in their interviews. Other terms included: higher power, him/he, something, someone, the almighty, the divine, Jesus, Kali, Ganesh, and gods. Though the participants were asked to define their choice of term(s) in their interviews, it is very difficult to operationalize god for research purposes. The most common and consistent term the participants used was “god”, in addition, they all generally used this term as a proper noun. However, the following discussion will use the term “deity” as the term “god” tends to elicit a preformed image of the Christian God, which may not always be the participants’ intent.

This section will divide the participants’ narratives of their past into three time periods: early years, middle years and high school. Each of these periods will include three themes that consistently emerged that showed change over time: participants’ experiences of shifting religiosity dimensions, shifting personal experiences of a deity, and significant social influences on shifting religiosity.

Early Years

The participants’ narratives of their childhood and early years emphasized public practice and teaching private practice (such as prayer) in a public setting. In addition, religion appeared to be equated with family, activity, and community.

Participants’ experiences of shifting religiosity dimensions. The participants’ explanation of their early religious experience focused on “doing things”. When asked to describe the religious tradition in which she was raised, Rachel explained:

I grew up very Christian, so I come from a small town, they are all Christian, there are like eight churches for 3000 people, everyone goes to church. I’ve been in church my

entire life, through Sunday school, kids' theatre programs, singing in bands, stuff like that, going to church every Sunday, so it's kind of been part of my life for as long as I can remember.

All three participants described public practice as the primary, and often only, dimension of religiosity emphasized in their early years. The participants engaged in public practices such as religious services or religious community activities (such as bible study or Sunday school), or engaged in public forms of private practice, such as prayer or rituals with family members.

Rachel described a religious environment that was meant to be "fun", "interesting" and placed within "a modern context". For Quinn, his early religion was "associated with the good, with the larger community, with the cartoons that I liked, with playing in the bible study basement".

When asked about her religious upbringing, Avina stated:

I'm one of the weirdos of the world, my dad was born and raised Catholic - not strict or traditional..just the kind of people who go to church on like Christmas and stuff.. and then my mother, she's from the (Caribbean), she was born and raised Hindu and like her religious tradition is very much strict, like they were just very, they revolved around like prayer and worship every day.

As a result, though Avina described some elements of Catholicism, such as attending mass occasionally, the Hindu focus of her early years emphasized public practice of discipline and devotion to deities through public practice rituals. She explains, "it was more so Hindu, like a Hindu background, because my mom was the traditional one so it was more so on her end by like her, my grandparents, pushing that".

Family as significant social influence on religiosity. Inextricably tied to public practice during early years was the social environment in which the participants grew up. When asked about his early religious experiences, Quinn explained, “for my parents, their main social group was the local church group..for me that was very much my gateway to organized religion”. All participants described being immersed in religion, which tended to be about doing things, going places, and meeting family or community members. As Quinn explains, “spirituality was less important than having people in the area - friends were inexorably linked to religion”. The participants generally spoke about religion as the normal way of life during their early years, with little personal choice or awareness of other practices. Avina explains that, “in elementary school I was just following my parents, following my mom... obviously I was like devout because I didn’t have my own brain, I was just a child”. Quinn notes, “I don’t think I ever had a moment of coming to my faith..it went hand in hand with my friends and my larger community.. it was just, this is how it is.” Rachel’s experience reflects this as she notes, “I grew up very Christian”. Religion was inseparable the rest of life. For the participants, their parents’ religion was their religion.

Shifting personal experience of a deity. Participants used several metaphors for how they experienced a deity depending on their developing understanding and life-experiences. The participants described the deities of their youth as concrete, personified, and powerful, but also distant and uninvolved in daily activities. When asked about his conception of a deity during his early years, Quinn described:

Just God as this like all-powerful, all-loving entity, you know, God is the, the reason and force behind all things. Yeah, just like that very mid-western, very generic approach to God.. What is God? God is everything.

In addition, relationship with a deity was marked by a distinct power differential. Avina noted:

If you pray to Kali wrong or mess up the puja, like a ritual, it's known that she'll like mess up your life because she'll be mad at you... that's why I would never really pray to a Hindu god because I would be afraid that I would mess up and that somehow that would backfire on me".

Engagement with the divine also tended to be transactional. That is, the participants described doing, believing or praying through public or private practice in order to receive from a deity.

Rachel described prayer when she was a child as, "very short, and it was usually like thank God for food, for clothes and like your family, you know, pray that there was no school tomorrow."

Avina's story echoed this, as she noted her mother would perform puja when Avina had an academic exam in hopes of influencing her grades. Though Rachel's community encouraged a relationship with a deity, she did not report religious experience at this age, explaining that "God" was a being that was "not really involved in your life but was just kind of there".

Both Rachel and Quinn spoke about their early religious experiences somewhat matter of fact, but also, with a positive tone. Though Quinn's narrative quickly takes a turn into struggle in middle years, during this period religion remained directly connected with positive experiences of connection to family, friends and community, without coercion or struggle. Alternatively, Avina's tone is somewhat harsher, describing being "pushed" into "traditional" and "strict"

practices; however, she too speaks positively of her early years, explaining that, when it came to religion, her family generally gave her “the freedom to decide what we wanted to do”.

Middle Years

All participants noted an emphasis on ideological and intellectual change during their middle years. In addition, they noted a greater focus on peer relationships, institutions, and negotiating their relationships within these groups. For two of the participants, this was a period of intense social, emotional and intellectual struggle.

Participants’ experiences of shifting religiosity dimensions. The participants described middle years as a period of growing awareness of specific ideology alongside growing intellect. Avina explains:

When I was thrust into the junior high environment I was no longer following just aimlessly.. you know, cause I was like this is f-, what, no, I’m not going to follow that, I had my own brain at that point, I was able to identify I don’t like that.

The increase in intellectual questioning initiated struggle with the religious beliefs and knowledge that were taught and coincided with particular life events. Avina attended a Catholic middle school whose values clashed with her own values and worldview:

This school was very regimented and I was very progressive, like I came from a public school and I was like yeah pro-choice, and gay, like homosexuality is a great thing, like woo express yourself and they were very much so like homosexuals are wrong, abortion is horrible.

She generally met these questions head-on, speaking her mind when she disagreed with religious teachings, and at times being met with discipline. She recounted one instance of this value clash when debating her pro-choice views with her teacher:

(The teacher asked) if the baby has a deformation, if they were going to die the second they got born or something like, would you terminate it? And I was like absolutely, why would you want to put a child, an infant, through that shit if they're just going to die anyway?... so I say that and the teacher blatantly told me, 'well, you know you had a heart condition, what if your mom aborted you?' and I literally straight up looked at her and was like then I wouldn't have to be here sitting listening to you, so I would thank Christ for that - that got me in a lot of shit.

Avina also questioned some of her family's Hindu practices through her growing intellectual lens. She noted: "Some of the traditions are stupid to me, like if a girl's on her period, she's not allowed to offer to the gods". The intellectual struggles she encountered in middle school led to a significant point of shift for her. She explained that this environment:

Turned me off (of religion) and made me agnostic and the fact that I was sitting here listening to people who had such whack views of like what God was and what God expected and like what to do and what was wrong, and then like Hinduism is kind of the same it's like this is wrong, this is right, these are the only ways to do it.

Intellectual and ideological struggles during middle school were also a significant point of shift for Quinn. He noted that, "until the age of like 10, the idea of Christianity I had was very sanitized, very positive". He shared a significant moment when he discovered the "more accurate version of biblical text" that ran counter to what Christian media and his community

had taught him about the Christian deity. He noted in particular the ending of the Hebrew bible story of Jonah and the Whale:

I always wondered what, what happened after that? They kind of leave it on a cliff hanger, so then I found out that God destroyed Gomorrah, just everyone died... God still killed them. I'm not sure what the point of this story is, of like, I don't know why God would do that... I couldn't reconcile it with what I had been brought up with for my entire childhood.

This realization left him uneasy, and with questions with which the adults in his life would not engage. He shared that he wanted to learn more about this story, but was told by church leaders and family members, "what you should do is read the Bible". Failing to find answers that satisfied his intellectual and emotional needs, he gave up the search:

I remember the moment of, of just like, (the pastor confirming) yeah, God killed them all, because they were heathens, and I was just like, oh ok, I'm gonna go back to playing with my friend now. That's heavy.

Though middle years appeared an intense period of change for both Avina and Quinn, Rachel made no mention of significant struggle specific to the middle years period.

Peers as significant social influence on religiosity. All of the participants described movement from religion being primarily family-oriented toward more significant interactions or relationships with peers in a religious setting. Rachel described her parents' encouragement to participate in the religious aspects of her community beyond the religiosity of her family, including teaching Sunday School, leading theatre programs and singing in bands. Two of the participants, Avina and Quinn, experienced distinct difficulty navigating these relationships.

When asked about how he tried to work through his religious struggles in middle years, Quinn described a distinct desire to fit in with his religious peers. A significant shift occurred when Quinn attended a Christian camp. He described a dramatic reenactment of Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection where the camp staff and participants were highly and visibly emotional:

A bunch of camp counsellors (were) on their knees, (making) that like, guttural, screaming cry - and I remember at the time being like, this is a lot, this is a whole lot of a lot, umm yeah, so that was a very, for me that felt like a very intense, I'm in over my head experience. It didn't make me feel closer to my faith, it made me feel like, oh, well, maybe these people just care more about this than I do.

Though the expectation was that he engage, he did not feel these same feelings, noting "I felt very overwhelmed socially, but not spiritually." Failing to connect to that level of emotion had a significant impact on Quinn. When asked if he wanted to experience this level of outward emotion, he replied: "Yeah, I did, I did, I wanted to fit in". He also appeared to equate his disconnection to his religious peers as a disconnection to religion. He explained: "You know, I'm looking around, everyone is having this, basically an epiphany right now - I'm not. Maybe that means something.. so I was like, maybe this isn't for me." As a result of becoming disillusioned with some of the teachings and expectations of his religion, Quinn started to distance himself from the one dimension he possessed, public practice.

Shifting personal experience of a deity. All of the participants linked personal experience of a deity with their well-being. As their experience of a deity changed during middle years, two of the participants described a distinct and significant shift in their mental health.

Avina explained it was a dark time, describing loss of faith in many areas of her life, as well as withdrawal and isolation:

There were a lot of issues there going on as well so just all of that, and you know I would like turn to God or you know whoever it was and I was seeing no positive outcome whatsoever in my life.

Though not necessarily the cause of low mood, both Avina and Quinn linked struggles with depression with high levels of religious questioning. Quinn developed suicidal ideation and encountered his religion's teachings regarding suicide. He explained why this moment was so significant for him:

Suicide is considered a sin since God made you, so for you to kill yourself is, in effect, rejecting God's love... It was not the first time I had sinned, but it felt like the first time I had sinned and I did not know how to ask for forgiveness.. (it) felt like there is something intrinsically wrong with me - something about the meaning of that was incompatible with what God demands, and if I cannot give what God demands, then what does that mean for me?

This was a time both Avina and Quinn started to call out to a deity in times of distress or in need of catharsis, though neither described it as a religious experience. Indeed, their language choice indicated distance from a deity.

For two of the participants, the middle school years were a period of struggle as their internal world changed, while their external world generally remained the same. This was a period of significant shifts in religiosity. When recounting these events, Quinn's tone was generally matter of fact. Avina expressed more anger. She explained:

I was so disgusted by how (the school teachers) were portraying religion, I mean I was appalled and same with Hinduism I mean it wasn't helping me...Religion as a whole within those years in my life I was like I don't think that there's like, like if there is a God, I don't think this is worth it, going through all this shit.

As a result, Avina described becoming agnostic, defined as believing in a "higher power" without the religious practice. Citing the extremely difficult school environment and the specific (at times unattainable) expectations of both the Catholic and Hindu faiths, she saw no reason for maintaining her religiosity. When asked how he reconciled his struggles with religiosity, Quinn said simply, "It was leaving my faith".

High School

The participants described high school as a time of growing religious agency and autonomy, particularly in relation to searching out a like-minded community and beginning to create a religiosity that is more their own. The dimension of religious experience became important at this time.

Participants' experiences of shifting religiosity dimensions. The participants explained that the dimensions introduced in their earlier years, especially private practice, public practice and ideology, morphed and changed with their growing agency. That is, the participants' narratives revealed continuous intersections between their developing sense of ideological agency and shifts in the way they engaged with the five dimensions of religiosity.

Developing ideological agency, taking control, and shifting religiosity. With their growing intellectual understanding during this time period, the participants started to consciously pick and choose the beliefs and practices they wished to retain and the environments in which

they wished to remain. Avina's experience in the Catholic middle school was such a source of distress that she changed schools in search of an outer world that more closely reflected her inner evolution: "I knew in my heart what I believed in, I was ready, and I left in grade 9". Her new school provided her with a "fresh start", chance to explore, and the "progressive education" she sought. The impact of Quinn's previous experiences became clear. His ideology shifted significantly as he chose to become an apologist for non-belief, "getting into arguments" with religious peers at school. Even Rachel was encouraged by her family to make her faith "her own".

Evolving public and private practice return. Though two of the participants exhibited significant changes in their religiosity, for all participants the strongest religious dimension in high school continued to be the public practice of their early years. Avina recounted that her religious practices started shifting again as she settled into high school:

In high school I was actually like, well I kind of like mass now, so that's when I started to go to mass on Christmas... and that's when I thought maybe I should pray the rosary like once a week so I started to do that.

Rachel continued to teach Sunday school and guide other church activities. Even Quinn, though he no longer engaged in most other practices, including the decision not to attend summer camp, continued to attend church with his mother and sister.

Community as significant social influence on religiosity. The participants noted a fairly settled connection with their community during the high school period. Avina was the most vocal about finding a supportive environment during her high school years:

It opened me up to kind of like exploring (Catholicism and Hinduism) again, because I was like wow this is great, like you know, someone who is not criticizing my beliefs and like people who agree with me... I was able to actually grow from it and by the time I graduated I was like a whole different person and it was just a lot better, just a lot better.

Rachel's beliefs and practices still matched those of her community and Quinn replaced his Christian community with engagement with other arts and cultural groups.

Shifting personal experience of a deity. By their high school years, all three participants described a deity very differently than they did when they recounted their childhood images. When asked how her conception of the deity changed throughout her development, Rachel explained that in her high school years:

I definitely have more a personal relationship, like God isn't so far away now, ummm, someone like you can pray to at any time of day... he has a plan for your life, this is like the course it has to take, he's designed it this way.

Her explanation reflected less of a power differential than what was perceived when young. The deity became more accessible, closer and even friend-like. Private practice, particularly prayer, was used to support this relationship. The dimension of religious experience started to appear, and tended to focus on relationship with a deity, though it was not restricted to this. Rachel explained:

For me God doesn't physically talk, like I don't hear a voice of God talking to me, for me it's like, you know, like a moment in church and like singing praise and worship with a bunch of people and just being in that community and like - that's God.

That is, at the same time as the deity was being perceived as more personal and friend-like, the deity was also less personified. Avina explained: “the almighty is what I believe in and whatever it takes form in whatever day that I’m chilling, I just go with it”. She used language referring to both “*someone*” and “*something* higher”. Quinn cited “something bigger than me”.

Generally the high school period was not a period of significant religious shift in any of the participants’ narratives. For Avina and Quinn, who had undergone intense struggle during the middle years, the high school period appeared to be a time of reorganizing their outer environment to better reflect their internal change. The relief in Avina’s voice was evident as she described her high school experience. Quinn too expressed positivity about the non-religious group connections he made as he explored other aspects of his identity such as his cultural background, connections he explained that continue to remain important to him. Intriguingly, no matter the significance or intensity of the shifts in their religiosity, all participants retained at least some aspect of public practice that had been introduced in their early years.

Summary

Through the participants’ narratives of their past experiences, a general trajectory of developing religiosity emerged. Religiosity that started with only public practice gradually developed to include the five dimensions. In addition, personal experiences of a deity evolved from distant to personal, and religion expanded from primarily a family affair to the larger community. In the following section that explores the present context, participants’ religious histories continue to play significant roles.

The Present: Context and Shifting Religiosity

The first half of this chapter explored a possible overarching trajectory of developing religiosity and the significant themes within. This section turns to the participants' continuing development, and the interaction between the present context and shifts in their religiosity. Though still drawing from, and acknowledging the impact of, their past on current functioning, this section explores the themes identified in participants' present negotiation of their shifting religiosity. The present context includes the current roles, choices, adaptations and interactions in which an individual engages as a result of the interplay between personal (such as needs and values) and situational (for example, family or location) factors (Niles, 2001). Considering the interaction between present context and shifting religiosity conceptualizes the adult as a continuously evolving individual, influenced by developmental, intra-psychic and social factors (Niles, 2001).

This section identifies and describes the common themes in the participants' narratives of their current context and religiosity. These themes include: religious identity growth, impacts of shifting religiosity, and participants' development and negotiation of shifting religiosity. Religious identity growth explores the influences of family dynamics, including family loyalty, family expectations, and proximity to parents. Religious identity growth also includes shifting religiosity as part the process of individuation which is influenced by encountering "the other", developing moral identity, and growing intellectual understanding and struggle. Impacts of shifting religiosity include: shifts in religiosity as protection of well-being, and the relationship between shifting religiosity and social connection. The latter includes two sub-themes: social connection as a result of being part of a religious community, and identification with

intellectually like-minded peers as social connection. Participants' development and negotiation of shifting religiosity includes developing agency as a way of making meaning through the shifts, developing autonomy that promotes and constrains shifts in religiosity, and developing personal experiences of a deity.

Religious Identity Growth

Family dynamics. Participants explained that loyalty to their family as well as family members' religiosity, opinions, expectations, and proximity continued to impact how they engaged the different dimensions of religiosity (Huber & Huber, 2012).

Family loyalty influences expression of religiosity. Rachel retains the religion of her family, noting that "being Christian" fundamentally connects her to her family. Though Avina described herself as a "weirdo" and that her situation is "odd" and possibly "heretical", her tone was one of pride about her identification with both Christian and Hindu traditions. Indeed, her ability to blend the traditions eventually becomes part of her identity. It is important to Avina to incorporate elements of both of her parents' religious traditions. Though at times she spoke with longing about becoming a "true" member of one religious tradition, to do so would align herself with one parent or the other. Indeed, though she is considering attending Catholic mass again, she avoids it, anticipating her mother's response: "oh you go to church but you're not at temple?". Avina's explanation captured the implications of her religious choices on family dynamics:

I know that (my dad) would be very happy if I got baptized, but my mom though would be probably a little bit offended that she tried so hard to raise a Hindu child... just because it's that (Caribbean) pride and the fact that she'd have to deal with her mother

who would be like, 'fine okay you want to be white', because again Christianity in the (Caribbean) is identified with white people because who colonized them.

The influence of family loyalty also involved grand-parents. Avina's maternal grandmother relates religious identity with her birth country's colonial past. Avina's description of her grandmother's opinion reflected her discomfort with participating in Christian practices:

She says, 'you know you're the Jesus, I'm proud that you're Christian, I'm proud' and I was like Grandma I'm not even, I mean like, I'm, sure, if you want to call me that, I mean, I just let her because she's 85 and and you can say whatever you want to say but, ummm, she kind of goes on like she's so proud and I'm like really though, are you?

Because would you really be kind of taunting me with this?... you can tell the sarcasm.

As a result, there is passivity in Avina's language choice when describing her Christian or Hindu beliefs or practice. She will say "I do" or "I have" but not, "I am".

Parental expectations influence ideology, public practice and private practice. Though each participant is in the process of taking ownership of a religious identity that is becoming distinct from their family of origin, their professed beliefs and actions appear to remain within the boundaries or models set by their parents. Rachel noted:

It's not enough to sustain belief just because mom or dad say I have to or should...you need to maybe not find your own proof, but like decide that this is what you believe, or find something that makes sense for you.

Her narrative reflected this. She spoke about developing an individual relationship with a deity, outside of the faith of her parents. Though her beliefs remain similar to her parents and community, she refers to "my beliefs" when describing her current faith. Though Rachel's

intellectual and ideology dimensions have shifted since attending university, she has worked hard to maintain her core Christian identity. Indeed, she has observed shifts in the church community, providing her with models that allow some shifts, while remaining Christian. She explained:

I remember having this fight, because I wanted to wear dark jeans (to church), I did not want to wear a skirt, and I had to wear a skirt, and then, you know, even for my parents, we've evolved to like it doesn't matter what you wear... I think that shifted with the church too of going through different phases, and it also depends on the pastor, like the people in charge, what kind of beliefs or rituals that are set.. we've kind of like, adapted, modernized it.

Avina echoed the recognition of the influence of parental expectation on her religious identity.

When asked whether she feels pressure from her family to choose one tradition or the other, she explained:

I think all they wanted was for us to identify with something, they just didn't want us to be agnostic or atheist... they don't care as long as there is something that we like worship or something that we, you know at the end of the day, pray to or ask for guidance from other than like our parents.

This is what Avina is actively doing. Though she encountered much intellectual struggle, she worked hard to incorporate elements of both traditions throughout her life, such as attending Catholic mass, personal prayer, and following a vegetarian diet based on Hindu beliefs. Avina has the model for blending elements of different religions from her grandmother. Although her grandmother is strongly committed to her Hindu faith, she incorporates icons of Christianity in her prayer room.

Quinn does not speak of religious belief as an essential element to his connection with his family, either in terms of family loyalty or expectations. Indeed, his father also decreased his engagement with religiosity over time, which provides a model, and perhaps acceptance, of decreasing religiosity within his family.

Parental proximity influences shifting religiosity. The two participants who still live in their family home anticipate shifts when they move away. Rachel explained, “that was also 18 years of (the teachings) being ingrained, whereas this (university) has only been a few years of exposure, so you know in five years I might change my mind”. She also has a constant connection to a particular in group that is comfortable and immersive, noting, “there’s always some form of it around me, it’s always there”. She has not had to find another community. In contrast, Quinn’s engagement with most elements of religiosity ceased when he moved away from his community to attend university.

Shifting religiosity as an individuation process. Carl Jung describes individuation as an ongoing, life-long process wherein the individual develops a greater awareness of their self, both as separate and connected to their community (Fordham, 2018). The participants in this study expressed their shifting religiosity as part of the overall process of individuation. Themes that contributed to individuation included: encountering “the other”, developing moral identity, and growing intellectual capacity and struggle.

The influence of encountering “the other” on shifting religiosity. The three participants noted the influence of encountering individuals with beliefs and practices different from those they were taught. Avina describes this experience first occurring in middle years at school, while Quinn notes his experiences at summer camp. When asked about her transition

into university, Rachel's tone was one of genuine surprise at the “culture” shock she encountered, noting “I never really knew what was out there”. She explained further:

I think it was a psych’ class, and somebody asked, ‘who knows the story of Moses?’ I think there was me and someone else who raised their hand out of like 200 people, and I was like, how do you not know? Like, doesn’t everyone know? But no, if you’re not raised with it, it doesn’t occur to you.

Rather than diluting her religiosity, her encounter with diversity appears to have strengthened many of the beliefs and practices taught to her in her youth. She explained that upon attending university she realized, “there are many different things, so you need to decide for yourself what you believe in”. Though she presents her religious identity as fairly crystallized, she is also eager to expand her knowledge of other practices and ideas, sharing that her concept of religiosity has expanded as a result. She noted her realization: “there’s a little more to ok you’re a Christian or you’re not and that’s the defining feature”.

Moral identity development and shifting religiosity. All three participants explained struggles they encountered with particular religious or community teachings that countered their sense of what they believed a deity to be, how they thought religious people should act, or how the ‘other’ should be perceived and treated. Avina struggled with views she encountered in middle school around pre-marital sex, abortion and homosexuality that differed significantly from her own. Quinn became concerned with biblical stories that countered his childhood view of a loving and compassionate deity, as well as religious teachings that allowed no space for thoughts or feelings that he felt were intrinsic parts of his self, such as suicidal ideation. Rachel experienced difficulty with the lack of openness and understanding of the other by her religious

community. She explained her changing views as compared to her community, “they would recognize yeah they’re not saved, but they would think that would be worse than I would think - to me, it’s just like oh, ok, it’s cool, we can talk about it.”

These moral oppositions do not appear to stem from the specific religious teachings, but rather the participants’ own views interacting with the teachings as part of a process of developing a moral identity.

Avina and Rachel also noted a growing emphasis on developing and practicing the qualities of a religious person that may or may not be guided by ideology. For Avina, without the public practice that she was typically used to (such as attending a Catholic mass or doing puja), these actions, or ways of being, appear to validate her sense of self as a developing religious being. She explained this in the context of a particularly difficult experience with a relationship this past year:

The fact that I was able to love somebody and I was able to care so much about them shows that I am a product of some almighty figure.. . that I could go so above and beyond even when somebody is so horrible.. it probably means that I can do it for a lot of other people which is what the entire thing of what faith based love is, you know just like looking out for, you know, your brother, your neighbour, like all those things, so I think it did show me like, oh wow, this is what they talk about.

For Rachel, her increasing understanding of others allowed her to become more inclusive of other ways of doing, being and believing. She explained this change in her way of relating:

I guess I’m more compassionate to (others’ experiences and perspectives) and understanding of why people believe what they believe, and not really set on changing

someone's mind, like I probably would when I was younger. I would be like ok try and make them a Christian or something. But I don't think that's the point, I think just love people - that's the main message there.

At a young age the participants' religious identity was indistinguishable from their parents' beliefs and practices. Their religiosity shifted over time, influenced by development, family, exposure to other people and ideas, and their own morality. As a result, their religious identity became more separate and distinct from their parents and community. However, family members' perspectives, opinions and religiosity continue to play a significant role in negotiation and expression of their own religious identity. This is uncovered in participants' narratives which indicate that they tend not to stray too far from parental expectations and models.

Growing intellectual understanding and struggle as influence on shifting religiosity.

All three participants used an intellectual lens to process their narratives about questioning and struggles with religious identity. For Avina, questioning of practice and ideology appeared to be a valuable element in her religious journey. She noted, "I try to figure out like why and how and all that", considering explanations and critiques of religious practices and beliefs as important elements to her own understanding. She cited popular psychological or philosophical theories for the existence of religion, for example, Freud's understanding of religion as a cognitive necessity, but illusion, or Marx's theory of religion as social control. However, as she is uneasy actively questioning the existence of a deity, she avoided considering the implications of these theories.

Rachel's intellectual perspective of religion has expanded to include other traditions, influenced by her higher academic learning (especially class readings and diverse courses) and

exposure to other people and worldviews. She generally approaches the ‘other’ with interest, viewing knowledge as a bridge to building understanding and compassion for other people. She explained the intersection of her own growing engagement with the intellectual dimension of religion with her community’s wariness about the academic study of religion, “there was this idea in smaller towns that university is out to trick you and get you to be an atheist”. Despite her community’s cautions, she views science as a way to illuminate a deity’s work. As she explained:

I find the science like, what it does, what religion does for people that’s interesting, how it affects the brain.. you are human, there’s still like those cognitive elements that have to occur, and the endorphins that are released because of this experience, so there is like a scientific element to it, and I don’t think that’s wrong.

Quinn’s intellectual questioning played a significant role in his shifting religiosity. He cited intellectual critiques (such as Stephen Fry’s ‘Why do bad things happen?’) as the beginning of his questioning of religion. He also noted the dissonance between the “sanitized” religious stories with which he was presented as a child, and the “accurate” information he discovered later. His intellectual questioning peaked in high school as he began arguing the non-religious side with his religious peers. Presently, Quinn noted that he no longer engages in much questioning of religion.

Simply put, all three participants emphasized the necessity and impact of the intellectual dimension of religiosity as a source of interest, change and stress, both in the past and present.

Impacts of Shifts in Religiosity

Shifts in Religiosity as Protection of Well-Being. A significant and intriguing theme that appeared in all three narratives was the apparent maintenance of certain dimensions of religiosity as a way to protect the individual's mental health and well-being. This belief, or need, was described as a core, non-negotiable, element of the participant's self. The participants' narratives reflected a non-willingness to intellectually debate this core element with anyone. The participants' narratives also indicated that this core could be protected by maintaining at least one religious dimension, typically religious experience. As this may seem somewhat abstract, a more detailed explanation of each participant's experience is included here.

Avina. Though Avina values the intellectual element of her religiosity, she seeks control of the process and resists questioning that may lead to doubt of the divine or loss of faith. She explained, "I have a lot of friends that are philosophical and they just make me depressed, cause I'm like wow there's no point to life." Avina appears to have made a connection between the low levels of religious faith and the feelings of depression she experienced in middle school. She explained that if her current questioning or doubts lead to a loss of faith, she is concerned that she will return to that place:

I myself would be a little bit scared if I stopped (religion) 100% because then I would be reverting back to that state where I was, I just gave up on everything... I don't see myself never being devoted to something, or never talking to something, or never having faith in something.

She is aware that lack of divine presence has negative consequences for her well-being and therefore does not question the existence of a deity. As a result, she has developed boundaries

about the types of questions she will allow about her own religiosity and maintains control over what the final answer should be. To do this, she avoids deep conversations with nonbelievers. Instead, Avina chooses to affiliate with individuals who engage difficult questions but are still willing to conclude the existence of a deity. She has discovered a source for satisfying the need for this type of affiliation in internet lectures by Jewish Rabbis. She explained:

They go from a logical perspective but they are also very mystical, so Rabbis, I actually really enjoy hearing them talk, because they went through the Holocaust and obviously they've had to grapple with that, like with the fact of, why did God allow that to happen and they still have to have faith in their lord after all that shit happened to them.

Rachel. Rachel expressed her enjoyment of higher education and the exposure to diversity that she experiences in university. These experiences have altered her perspective somewhat; however, she carefully ensures that her beliefs and practices do not change too much. For Rachel, a significant shift away from the religious beliefs and practices of her community would affect her whole self, presenting negative consequences for her well-being. She explained:

At this point it's not just a religious tradition.. to lose that, you'd lose that support system of a church, and church family, and that identifying factor that you can relate with someone, so that you can talk about, or having that idea that someone is watching out for you, to lose that, yeah, that would not be good, I think that would be like very like, I guess detrimental for me anyways, because there's always this peace knowing that there is something watching out for me, and knowing that I have that support system, and then to be like, I'm on my own, this is all I have.

That is, shifts that are too divergent come with a high cost and may result in significant loss of family, community and self. To negotiate potential shifts that may result from university attendance, Rachel separates her two selves: her student self that negotiates the new information, and her religious self, which appears to remain relatively unchanged. She said, "I think starting out, I was very conscious of separating them. At school, I'm a student, the fact that I'm a Christian is in the back, but I'm here to learn." The student self protects the religious self, keeping its core beliefs protected, secure in a Christian identity:

I'm not scared of (other religions), and I don't think that it will take me or change my beliefs because I know what I believe, that's just something I've learned about, it's not something that's trying to change me.

Typically these selves serve their purpose. For example, when asked about the concept of ultimate truth, Rachel made a clear distinction between her religious self and student self:

My personal belief would say that (Christianity and other religious traditions) are accessing something different, and like it's not the same as what I am, because mine is more right than there's, whereas the student in me would be like, they're accessing divine being or like intervention the same way that a Christian is, so in that way they are the same.

There are, however, some areas that elicit discomfort, such as an anthropology course that presented the concept of evolution as widely understood fact. In this case, Rachel's intellectual interest appeared to wane, noting that the information was "interesting", but preferring to avoid the topic. Whereas her neuropsychology classes will help to understand the cognitive basis of religion, the theory of evolution is more challenging:

I don't know.. I mean like, there's supposedly scientific evidence, but you know, the whole big bang, that doesn't match what I believe...the fact that we are monkeys just sounds so like, just doesn't make sense to me cause like to me we've got a Bible story that lays it out - that makes sense to me and that was ingrained in my brain, and then coming here I was like, I don't know.

These ideas appear non-negotiable and are currently closed to questioning or change. Indeed, during the interview, it took a number of questions for Rachel to share her feelings on this topic. When probed, Rachel exhibited some avoidance and unease, which contrasted with her general demeanour of openness to questioning. Presently, her student and religious selves remain separate, but to maintain this, she avoids intellectual examination of some topics.

Quinn. Quinn presented a history of quickly and easily putting many ideas and thoughts to the intellectual test. However, like the two other participants, there are some areas that he will not approach intellectually. Quinn shared that he will soon be undergoing hormone therapy to transition genders. Though his general tone throughout the interview was matter of fact, at this point his affect changed significantly. In response to a question about the existence of the soul, he initiated the topic about his impending gender transition. He became hesitant and teary when he spoke about the upcoming process:

I still don't think there is some metaphysical essence to my being, I don't think that if you stripped everything down you could, you know with whatever power you have, I don't think you could be like, ah there's your quintessential essence of being a woman, and that's scary since that means that, well, I don't know what I'm doing, but there is

also a similar idea of well, it also has a faith component of I need to do this, I need to take this leap of faith.

Quinn shared that if there remains an element of religious belief within him, his decision to transition falls in this realm: “I cannot prove this through any metric, any attempt to articulate it would simply undermine my conviction, but there is something that I know with all my being to be true”. Unable to understand it intellectually, he leaves this decision in the realm of religious experience.

Each of the narratives revealed an element that the participant actively protected. To examine this piece too closely could result in loss of family, community, self and/or well-being. Often this piece was held in the realm of religious experience, or faith. As Quinn explained, “it cannot be articulated and it does not need to be explained”.

Relationship between shifting religiosity and social connection. A common theme among the three participants was the impact of their shifting religiosity on their social connectedness, both within and outside of their religious community. All participants explained that social connection was important, but described their sense of belonging in unique ways. Specifically, participants described social connection or disconnection as relating to physically being part of a religious community as well as intellectually identifying with like-minded peers.

Social connection as a result of being part of a religious community. Rachel described her social connection as being physically within a religious community. She was surrounded by family, friends, and community members who held similar religious beliefs and practices and she felt connected to this group through these elements. Avina and Quinn no longer felt this social connection in this way. In fact, in their descriptions of their interactions today, Quinn and Avina

tended to describe religious people as the ‘other’. Avina consistently referred to “religious people quote unquote” as individuals separate from herself. She is hesitant to attend church because she is not baptized and so is, “not an actual Christian”. Entering a church, therefore, is scary because it is, “like walking into someone else’s community”. Quinn often described feeling disconnected from the religious community, perhaps most prominently after the summer camp experience which left him with, “that feeling of maybe I don’t belong here”.

Identification with intellectually like-minded peers as social connection. When feeling separate from the religious community, all three participants engaged in a search to find intellectually like-minded peers, whether they were a subset of the religious community or outside of the religious community. Throughout his life Quinn looked to connect intellectually with members of his religious community. Denied these peers, he left his faith tradition to search for more like-minded communities elsewhere. Rachel remains part of her religious community, but still experiences disconnect from some of her family members and community as her ideas shift. She explained that she is not “able to directly talk about this at home, because they may take offence”. In addition, asking particular questions may be seen as “attacking” the faith. Fortunately she describes relationships with two friends from her community who are also attending non-Christian post-secondary institutions with whom she can engage her intellectual struggles in a safe space.

Avina is experiencing more difficulty finding like-minded peers. She appears caught between the religious and non-religious and neither side feels comfortable. She explained:

I don’t want to talk to the overly religious side because then I just get thrown back into my junior high of like orthodox people that are scaring me and I am like stop, I don’t

want to hear your crap, and then the nothing people scare me because then I'm like you believe in nothing, what?.. so it's like, both ends make me nervous so I don't want to talk to either of them.

Avina's frustration was evident in her tone as she described her disconnect from her peers. She has little tolerance when difficult life issues are processed solely through simplified religious ideology and therefore does not seek help from religious sources, but her only other option to engage life's big questions is her philosophy friends and she is wary of their godless answers. Her loneliness was apparent in her explanation.

My generation? It's very limited, it's either that you're one or the other, you're either very religious, you have certain views, or you're nothing, like, there really isn't an in between like me.

Fortunately she has discovered an intellectual connection to Judaism, noting with relief, "thank God for the Internet, YouTube, so I can watch Rabbis explain".

Though all three participants currently have distinctly different connections with religious communities, they all made a distinction between their relationship with a deity and their relationship with people in religious traditions. Quinn noted a distrust in institutions and authority that can lead to blind faith. Avina explained her fear of entering a community where she feels she does not belong. Indeed, even Rachel, who has been part of the close knit community throughout her life noted the difficulty an outsider might experience entering the church.

Participants' Development and Negotiation of Shifting Religiosity

A significant theme that appeared in all three narratives was that of the participants' ongoing personal development in relation to continuous shifts in the dimensions of their religiosity. Specifically, the participants articulated how their sense of developing autonomy and agency allowed each them the freedom to explore and make choices about their changing religiosity. In addition, their developing personal experience of a deity influenced changes in their religiosity over time.

Developing agency as a way of making meaning as religiosity shifts. Agency is popularly conceptualized as the capacity to act. As the participants began to interpret their various faith traditions through their own developing sense of agency they were able to choose practices, beliefs, ideas and experiences to create a religiosity that was meaningful for them. As Rachel explained:

I didn't really know what was going on (when I was younger), and it wasn't until later that I kind of understood that ok, maybe I know what he's talking about, and then being able to form my own beliefs with that. And then especially coming to school and realizing how much more there is to know and how many different beliefs there are, and then taking what I learned in school and then coupling it it with my own religious experience.

Avina also described her agency to choose the beliefs and practices that work for her and to discard the others. This involved reframing religious expectations on her own terms:

When I went into university I was like, I want to further my faith, I want to be like better, so I was a vegetarian for three years, so I was like Hindus, they are vegetarian,

they want to respect the environment, respect the animals because they believe that every living thing has a soul and we all reincarnate.. but then I stopped because I was like this is getting expensive and hard and it was like too much. One day I hope to go back to being a vegetarian.. I did feel more in tune with my spirituality (and) like I had that kind of connection, so I felt closer to God.

Quinn's developing agency allowed him to question religious teachings and experiences, which eventually led him to identify as non-religious. This growing agency allows him to continue to engage in the dimensions of religiosity that he requires, as well as make decisions about his upcoming transition.

Developing autonomy promotes and constrains shifts in religiosity. Though growing individual agency is apparent in all of the participants, their autonomy, or freedom to act, is both encouraged and restrained by family dynamics.

Avina noted requiring choice and a sense of freedom, using words such as “fresh” and “exploration” to describe positive experiences with religiosity as compared to those that “drag me down to a hole” or places where they “grind it into my head”. Yet, her family dynamics and desire to appease both parents' traditions place significant restriction on this autonomy. This has created hesitancy to become a “true” member of a religious tradition (such as receiving Christian baptism) and attend religious services.

Quinn's autonomy becomes extremely important to him. Even as he is aware of some of the potential gains that come with a religious faith, such as safety and security, he is wary of any return to religion fearing it could compromise his “sense of agency”:

There is something I find scary about any, any organization, this time more in terms of churches than like spiritual or personal belief, that can make you hate your neighbour...

I need to know that this is my life and that these are my decisions.

Quinn may have also experienced greater freedom than the other participants when making choices about his religious tradition in that his relationships with his family do not appear contingent on him maintaining certain practices or beliefs.

To a certain extent Rachel's parents have supported her growing autonomy by encouraging her attendance at a non-Christian, post-secondary institution, which is not common in her family and community. She did, however, tend to use language associated with a more external locus of control, often referring to her beliefs as "ingrained" or "indoctrinated". Her tone when using these words was neither negative nor accusatory. Rather, her expression appeared neutral, using these terms as rationale for her current beliefs.

Throughout their development, all participants experienced a growing capacity to act, encountering environments that often allowed increasing freedom to act. As a result, the participants are constructing their own sense of religiosities, within certain restraints.

Developing personal experiences of a deity. As the participants developed, their conceptions of a deity became more personal and helpful to them. This section highlights two of the common metaphors, or attributes, of a deity described by the participants.

Deity of well-being. When asked about her current conception of a deity, Rachel described a relationship that is closely tied to her well-being:

Being able to have God near to you and being able to access him, and like becoming older and knowing how like, beneficial that is and how much better I guess that is, for like, having a personal relationship.

Interestingly, though their description of religiosity differed considerably, the three participants' current views of a deity are remarkably similar. Attributes of a deity described in the narratives include provider, safe, holding space, catharsis, confidante, reliable, counsellor, comforter, resource for coping, emotional connection, and support. Indeed, no matter the level of belief in the existence of a deity, all participants sought a religious experience with a deity when other options had been exhausted. For example, Quinn, expressed that he generally believes deities are constructs created by people for use as solace, and espouses no desire to engage in the various dimensions of religiosity. Yet he acknowledged occasionally seeking a deity as a form of coping or resource, noting, "I've had moments of great distress where I've prayed".

Deity when needed. Though a self-described non-believer, Quinn noted current feelings of faith akin to religion, and desire for religious experience as he was dealing with initiating his upcoming transition. However, he perceived a deity as somewhat expendable, picking up it up as needed. Indeed, he referred to his relationship with religion as something that, "I use". As compared to the other participants, he expressed his religiosity as more of a momentary "need" than a "want". When he prays, it is, "because I need that, I need that sense of structure, I need to know that there is something bigger than me". Both Avina and Rachel also noted that they sought more intense engagement with a deity in moments of distress or need.

Intriguingly, no matter the participants' espoused belief in the existence of a deity, all participants attempted to engage with a deity for catharsis or solace, particularly when other options were unavailable.

Summary

Each participant began life immersed in their family's religious tradition. Through developmental and social influences their religiosity shifted throughout their childhood and adolescence. They continue to negotiate their changing religiosity within their current life context, influencing and interacting with their religious identity, intellectual processing, protection of well-being, growing autonomy and agency, understanding of a deity, and engagement with religious communities. Each participant's current belief and practice signifies three different perspectives and experiences.

After much intellectual and emotional struggle, Avina explained that she understands her shifting and growing religiosity as a longterm, ongoing process, one that currently focuses on private practice, intellectual understanding and religious experience, specifically, a calling out to a deity when in need of catharsis. She expressed concerns regarding common critiques of religion, and anger with a deity for events in her life, but actively seeks out religious guides to help her wrestle with these questions. More recently, she has started to desire a religious experience of another kind: a moment of enlightenment or spiritual realization, beyond intellectual reasoning, that will change her and put to rest her doubts:

I want to be enlightened, I want to like have that realization one day, I'm still trying to get to that when no one is forcing me to, I think it shows that there is that like, inherent nature within humans to look for something.

For Rachel, her university experience is her first time encountering other worldviews and is a significant source of challenge and change in her religiosity: “I think university is probably the biggest shift for me. Just going outside my comfort zone and not being in my little Christian family bubble”. Her separate religious and student selves allow her to maintain a religious identity, while enjoying the intellectual and diverse environment of the university. There is some concern, however, as she realizes that further education and exposure outside of her community may bring more significant shifts.

Quinn generally describes religion as a purely intellectual experience. His shift away from most of the dimensions of religiosity has a more permanent tone to it. He is not actively seeking engagement with the dimensions of religiosity, describing himself as, “open-minded and uninvested”. However, he maintains some element of religious experience as he anticipates, and attempts to cope with, a major life change.

Conclusion

This chapter presented data provided by the participants regarding their religiosity. These narratives, and the themes that arose, bring us toward an understanding of how emerging adults experience the process of shifting religiosity, and how they describe the impact. The researcher divided this analysis into two major sections, the past and the present, in an attempt to capture both the dynamic developmental trajectory as well as the contextual processes impacting the participants’ narratives. Specifically, the developmental periods (early years, middle years, and high school) highlighted three themes: participants’ experiences of shifting religiosity dimensions, shifting personal experiences of a deity, and significant social influences on shifting religiosity. Analysis of the participants’ present life context identified additional themes:

religious identity growth, impacts of shifting religiosity, and participants' development and negotiation of shifting religiosity. In summary, the participants' sense of the process and impact of shifts in religiosity was described through their ongoing development, relationships with others, developing intellectual ability, increasing agency and autonomy, and the needs of their mental health and well-being.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Summary of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to better understand how emerging adults describe the process and impact of shifts in their religiosity. To do this, three interview participants were recruited through a screening questionnaire administered to an undergraduate class. All three participants reported change over time in one or more dimensions of their religiosity (Huber & Huber, 2012). In an attempt to capture these shifts, the researcher developed semi-structured interview questions that explored the participant's religiosity during their past, their perception of any changes over time, and their current negotiations. Each participant's interview was transcribed and analyzed through Smith & Osborn's (2008) IPA method. For this study, religiosity was defined as the extent to which individuals engage in Huber and Huber's (2012) separate but interconnected dimensions: public practice, private practice, ideology, intellectual, and religious experience. Though not meant as an imposed framework, Huber and Huber's (2012) operationalization aided the researcher's understanding of religiosity throughout the analysis process, from coding and identifying shifts within specific dimensions, to eventually developing a potential framework for an overarching trajectory of religiosity. Data analysis revealed that shifts occur as a process and not an event. It is fluid and integrated into the conceptualization of both the individual's past and their everyday identity and ways of being. Specifically, analysis identified three main themes within participants' explanations of their changing past: participants' experiences of shifting religiosity dimensions, shifting personal experiences of a deity, and significant social influences on shifting religiosity. Analysis of the participant's narratives of their current functioning noted the following themes within the present

context: religious identity growth, impacts of shifting religiosity, and participants' development and negotiation of shifting religiosity.

The literature review for this research cited a number of studies that conceptualize adolescence and young adulthood as a period of increased questioning and shifting religiosity (Chan et al., 2015; Petts, 2009). No matter one's satisfaction with their religious tradition (or lack thereof) times of questioning and religious struggle can be difficult, with implications for the individual's well-being (Fenelon & Danielson, 2016). The results of this study show that the process of shifting religiosity adds another layer of complexity onto the overall process of development and growth. The three participants appeared aware of these challenges, that shifts in religiosity can be a difficult process within an already complex process of moving from childhood to adulthood, and that their changing religiosity was and is inextricable interwoven into their development. That is, though shifts in religiosity may be anticipated, it does not mean the process will be easy. The narratives of the three participants reflected this developmental struggle and in doing so, revealed what is interpreted here as an overarching trajectory of changing religiosity. What the study did not anticipate, however, was the broad and all-encompassing nature of religiosity. Much more than a separate set of beliefs and practices, the data highlighted issues related to family relations, connection with peers and community, interpersonal and intra-personal struggles, mental health and well-being, autonomy and agency, morality, identity, and ways of being in the world. Religiosity is not one discrete element of the individual - either present or not present - rather it is inseparable from the rest of life, interacting with both the elements of the self and the individual's present context. As a thesis situated in the

discipline of counselling psychology, implications for the therapist are important and included in this chapter.

Organization of the Chapter

This chapter will present, interpret and summarize the data analyzed in Chapter 4. Direct quotes will be minimized as this has already been done. The data will be explained further, and will also be compared against existing literature. This section will begin with a closer examination of the overall trajectory of shifting religiosity, relating it to the developmental literature. Historically, developmental theories of religiosity tended to be organized in stages; however, Roehlkepartain, Benson, Kind and Wagener (2006) critique this emphasis on stages which imply, “a certain amount of discontinuity in religious and spiritual development, whereas it may actually be a reasonable continuous process” (p. 10). In this line, the stages are included here not as rigid markers of progress, but rather to provide an understanding of the general abilities and perceptions of typically developing children at different ages, which provides context for this process. Next, two strong themes identified in Chapter 4 will be explored further: religiosity as protection of well-being, and developing personal experiences of a deity. The chapter continues with implications of this study on counselling and therapy. Limitations of this study and implications for counselling will follow. The chapter will close with specific recommendations for the therapist.

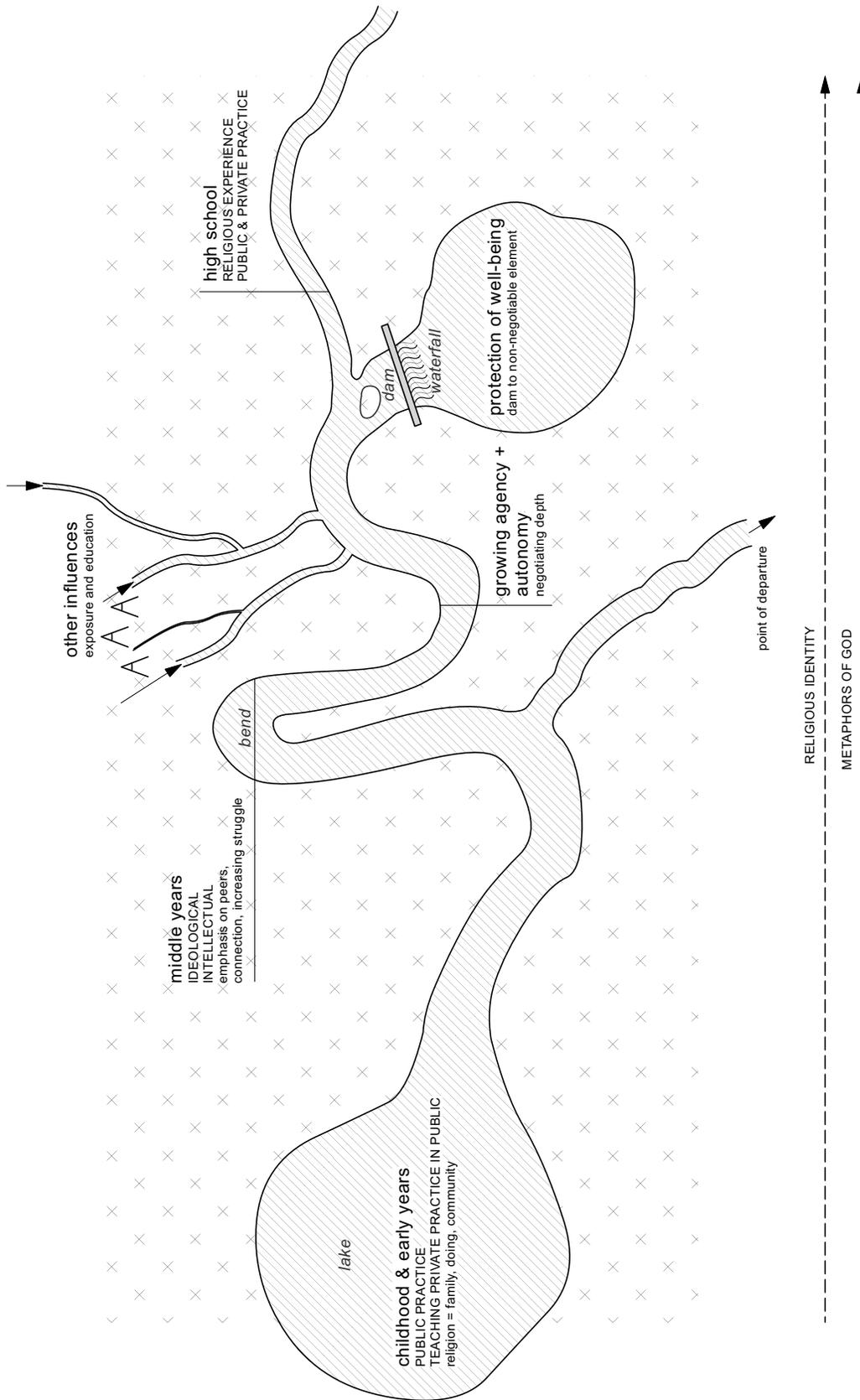
River of Religiosity

When the researcher was reflecting on the data, one element that stood out was the dynamic and fluid nature of shifting religiosity. While exploring literature related to well-being, the researcher discovered Eriksson and Lindström’s (2008) “Health in the River of Life”, a visual

representation of salutogenesis, which refers to factors that contribute to an individual's quality of life and well-being. In this diagram, some factors, such as health promotion and education help the individual to swim along the river of life. Other factors, such as protective or curative, are put in place to keep the individual from falling over the waterfall into disease and death. Though the content of salutogenesis as described by Eriksson and Lindstrom (2008) is not specifically related to this study, the researcher would like to acknowledge the source for this helpful metaphor, and build upon it. The image of a constantly flowing and changing river, influenced by obstacles and incoming streams, may be an excellent way to conceptualize how individuals navigate dynamic engagement with changing religiosity within the context of their unique developments. See Figure 5.1 for the researcher's representation of changing religiosity as a river. Perhaps most important is the concept of the waterfall, and the dams participants create within their religiosity to prevent falling into darkness and isolation. This image of the river of religiosity will help to conceptualize and guide this discussion.

Figure 5.1. The River: Trajectory of Religiosity (graphic by M. Rajfur, 2019)

(see following page)



Trajectory and Themes

The Past: Early Development

An individual's religiosity does not begin as a river, it starts out in a great lake, indistinguishable from the water around it. In the participants' narratives, this is early childhood. At this time the participants described a religiosity that was woven into the fabric of their lives, part of the structure, people, routine and traditions of daily life. The participants did not describe religion as a separate construct or a distinct piece of their self. Rather, religion was life and therefore there was no need to question it. What the parent does, the child does, and this was echoed in the participants' narratives. They engaged in public practice (Huber & Huber, 2012). They attended services, participated in community events, and joined their families for ritual activities. Religious instruction need not be explicit. As Boyatzis, Dollahite and Marks (2006) explain, parents influence their child's religiosity through speech, discipline, rewards, punishments and modelling. Simple activities such as saying prayers and engaging in traditional rituals at home influence religiosity (Boyatzis et al., 2006). In addition, the participants' description of their early years' conception of deities were simple and literal, anthropomorphic, but also unknowable. As Rachel explained: God is a being that is just kind of there.

It is helpful to understand the participants' explanations of their changing religiosity over time through a developmental perspective. Approaching the data in this way is interesting, as Huber and Huber (2012) did not associate the dimensions of religiosity with particular developmental stages or consider the effects of the individual's context. This is a missing piece in Huber and Huber's (2012) conceptualization of religiosity. The narratives of these three participants indicate a common trajectory as they move in and out of the dimensions over the

course of their development. Indeed, this makes sense if we consider the developmental processes that are occurring concurrently. Certain dimensions of religiosity may not be yet accessible to the developing individual given their capacity to understand, express and engage. In addition, the individual's environment and context will affect which dimensions are available for engagement.

In elementary school, children are generally in Piaget's stage of concrete operational thinking. Operation refers to a child's ability to hold an object or idea in thought. At this stage, a child can only use their imagination to construct an image they have experienced (Shelton, 1983). The child is not yet able to construct a personal deity because, not only have they not seen a deity, they are unable to attribute a complex theory of mind to an abstract other (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006). As a result, they are unable to engage in the dimension of religious experience (Huber & Huber, 2012) and rely on their parents' explanations. Fowler (1981) describes this as the intuitive-projective stage of faith, where important others, particularly parents and family, are the religious authority. This is consistent with the data from this study that indicates that participants mirrored their parents' patterns of engagement with Huber and Huber's (2012) five dimensions of religiosity. Alongside cognitive, social and emotional development, parents and caregivers guide, encourage and even dictate the religious dimensions available to the child.

The Past: Ongoing Development

To become a river, water must break from the lake. It does this through constant movement, addition, and subtraction. The participants were not necessarily consciously constructing their own religiosity at this time in their lives, but the process involved dynamic

negotiation of their present context and understanding with what had come before (Nile, 2001). The narratives from the participants reflected how extant literature describe children's processes as they enter adolescence and formal operational thinking (Shelton, 1983): They develop the ability to imagine thoughts that have basis in both reality and possibility, allowing them to imagine the abstract as well as develop the ability to question and critique previously held beliefs and new information. It makes sense, then, that two of the participants found middle years to be a time of deep questioning. It also explains why the intellectual and religious experience dimensions of religiosity (Huber & Huber, 2012) begin to appear at this time. Previous to this, the participants were simply cognitively unable to think critically or possess an abstract concept of a deity. These dimensions of religiosity only become accessible to the participants as they develop this capacity.

As Quinn's ability to think critically increased, he became concerned that the Bible stories he was taught were overly "sanitized" and took it upon himself to discover the "accurate" versions, for example, Jonah and the Whale. He encountered a distinct difference that led to significant intellectual struggle. Roehlkepartain et al. (2006) explain that as adolescents and adults enter Fowler's (1981) synthetic-conventional stage of faith they realize that their simplistic and fair answers do not hold up to life experience. This brings increased questioning as the individual realizes that beliefs, previously thought to be unalterable, can be changed. For both Avina and Quinn, this growing intellectual ability facilitated their questioning of their family, church, and school's beliefs and practices, often resulting in frustration as they met resistance. However, the realization that beliefs may change brought a potentially stronger blow:

the deity they had been taught to believe in may not exist. As noted by Roelkepartain et al. (2006), reexamining one's beliefs, and the reasons they are held, can be a painful process.

To return to the river metaphor a moment, adolescence appears to be a time when the individual is actively trying to determine what their religiosity looks like, how far to wade in, and how deep to go. Through their developing sense of agency, the participants began to define a religiosity that made sense and had meaning for them. Their stories highlighted the intersections of developmental and contextual factors (Nolin, 2001). The participants spoke at length about the social influences of family, peers, and institutions on their growing individual religious identity. For example, the influence of Rachel's family and peers from her community reinforced her engagement with the private and public practice dimensions of religiosity that mirrored her community (Huber & Huber, 2012), but her university attendance started to influence the ideological and intellectual dimensions that resulted in shifts from her parents' tradition. This process may be understood by the "synthetic" aspect of Fowler's (1981) synthetic-conventional stage of faith. This is a time when interpersonal aspects of religiosity are emphasized as the individual negotiates conformity and their own identity in an attempt to synthesize various influences into a coherent identity (Gollnick, 2005). The results of this study shed light on the "how" of this process. For example, Avina struggles with the disparate pieces of her religiosity, specifically the desire to keep some of the beliefs, practices, and emotional connection of her religious tradition, contrasted with the intellectual struggle influenced by peers and university. To lessen this dissonance, through her growing individuation she seeks out lectures by Jewish Rabbis that help her reconcile these seemingly contradictory elements into a coherent identity.

The participants decided which aspects of the great lake they kept while choosing the pieces that were left on the banks. They also continue to seek control over the elements of incoming streams they wish to incorporate. These streams are essential to the flow, but can be difficult to absorb. All three participants described encountering ‘the other’. If the encounter happened too early in their development, they may have been unable to adapt. However, as they moved into adolescence and adulthood, the exposure to other ways of doing and believing began to affect their own religiosity. The participants experience shifts in religiosity through assimilation, which refers to taking new information into one’s person, and accommodation, which involves changing one’s understanding to allow for these new beliefs (Shelton, 1983). All three of the participants described active engagement in this process; however, perhaps most intriguingly, though Rachel was able to assimilate much of the information she learned at university, it was only her student self that accommodated, leaving her religious less affected. This contrasts Huber & Huber’s (2012) understanding of the five dimensions as they considered the dimensions occurring within one, unified person, whereas Rachel presented a dual way of describing herself.

For Quinn, his accommodation was to such an extent that he no longer felt that he fit within the parameters of his religious tradition. Quinn’s movement away from his faith tradition may be understood through the lens of the person-environment fit model (Paloutzian, Mucken, Streib, & RoBler-Namini, 2013). This model explains that, “strain or stress develops when there is a discrepancy between the motives or needs of the person and the supplies of the environment, or between the demands of the environment and the abilities of the person to meet those demands” which can have negative social and emotional consequences (Paloutzian et al., 2013,

p. 405). Quinn experienced both. Dissatisfaction with what he was presented in the intellectual dimension (Huber & Huber, 2012) created a gap. He was motivated to engage in questioning, however, the environment was unable to supply the answers he needed to satisfy his needs. Quinn experienced a strain in relationships as a result of the discrepancy between his ideological needs for social justice and belief in a loving deity, and the explanations the pastor was able to provide. In addition, his religious tradition's understanding of suicidal ideation, and a deity that would not forgive such thoughts, left him unable to meet the required demands. Quinn's religiosity could no longer fit within the private practice, intellectual, and intellectual dimensions (Huber & Huber, 2012) of his tradition. As a result, this time period became a significant point of shift and he left the tradition. In contrast, though Avina experienced similar intellectual and emotional struggles in middle years, she was able to find an environment (a "progressive" high school) that was able to meet her needs. Had she not made this switch, her trajectory may have been similar to Quinn's. She notes, "if I had stayed at that (middle) school I would either be like dead or a cynical person or I'd be, like, just not who I am today".

Quinn may be described as a religious deconvert. Streib et al. (2009) describe five criteria of religious deconverts: loss of specific religious experiences, intellectual doubt, denial or disagreement with specific beliefs, moral criticism, emotional suffering and disaffiliation from a religious community. With the exception of retaining some religious experience, Quinn meets all criteria. His exit may be understood as a pursuit of autonomy, described as a "long-term gradual process of stepping out of the previously taken-for-granted religious environment that one was born into or raised in" (Paloutzian et al., 2013, p. 413). Generally these are individuals who, in their search for individuation and increasing intellectual struggle during adolescence or early

adulthood, decide on a secular exit to maintain their autonomy. In this study, these are conceptualized as crucial processes in shift in religiosity rather than deconversion.

Present Context: Participant Development and Impacts of Shifting Religiosity in Relation to Well-being

Often the river of religiosity is steady and straight. At times, it might encounter rapids, or bend to accommodate a particularly heavy obstacle. At times there are points of departure, yet, generally, all three narratives showed that the individuals could encounter struggle and adversity and adjust their religiosity accordingly. However, there can be a specific cost with growing intellectual development. Riegel (1975) explains that as intellectual critique increases, the individual is in danger of losing synchrony (as cited in Templeton & Eccles, 2006). If an individual is able to negotiate an encountered difficulty, their identity will incorporate this reconciliation. Generally, this is how the participants recounted their experiences, as an ongoing interplay of challenges and resolutions that resulted in small changes over time. Templeton & Eccles (2006) explain that as a result, an individual's religious identity, "may look like a patchwork quilt, including bits and pieces of many different religious belief systems" (p. 259), possibly without claiming affiliation to any one of them. The contents and direction of the river may have shifted slightly, but it keeps flowing. If, however, the individual is unable to reconcile the conflict, they may experience negative mental health consequences. Herein lie the potential waterfalls. This section describes these waterfalls and the relationship between religiosity and protecting well-being. The section goes on to explore further the developing religious experience dimension (Huber & Huber, 2012), specifically the personal experience of deity as

attachment figure, that was used by all participants to support their mental-health and well-being in times of difficulty.

Avoiding waterfalls: Religiosity as protection of well-being. The participants protected their well-being by carefully avoiding certain intellectual critiques. To examine these non-negotiable beliefs too deeply could send them over the waterfall into isolation and loss of meaning, support and well-being. To protect themselves, the participants created dams within their religiosity. Avina would not question the existence of a deity, Rachel's religious self would not change too much, and Quinn placed his decision to transition in the realm of faith, clinging to religious experience when needed. By avoiding intellectual examination of these topics, the dam could hold the non-negotiable aspects of their selves secure. Keeping them unmeasurable, unexplainable and not open for debate allowed this part of the river to remain unchanged. This is an essential finding in this study, shedding light on the deeply, and likely unconsciously, held beliefs and needs that must remain untouched by intellectual inquiry or initial clinical process. These needs are protected and held in place by the other, conscious aspects of an individual's religiosity. Change can occur, but shifts too large can mean too much to lose.

Deity as attachment figure: Developing personal experiences of a deity. One of the significant and common changes in the participants was their evolving concept of the divine. Simply, the participants' concept of a deity moved from the ideological dimension to include the dimension of religious experience (Huber & Huber, 2012). Deities in their childhood were all-knowing, but separate from humans. The deities were powerful, but disinterested in daily affairs and not easily accessed. Further along the river, the deities had moved closer, becoming a source of comfort, safe place for catharsis, and counsellor that could be accessed in times of need or

distress, with significant implications for well-being. Indeed, the participants appeared to relate to a deity as one would a secure attachment figure. Attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) suggests that infants develop attachments to their primary caregivers to maintain proximity to a protective figure (Richert & Granqvist, 2013). When this attachment is secure, the attachment figure provides a base from which the child can explore, and safe haven to which the child may return to find comfort and calming when in distress. The three participants in this study sought religious experience with a deity during difficult times, when requiring comfort or safety. They are not alone. Kirkpatrick (1997) suggests that this type of relationship is often expressed in many individuals' understanding of a deity. In fact, when perceived as available, responsive and loving - as generally noted by the participants in this project - a deity may be the ideal attachment figure (as cited in Bradshaw, Ellison, & Marcum, 2010). The participants noted a distinct motivation to call out or connect with "someone" or "something" when they were in distress, particularly when other options were unavailable or had been exhausted. This is echoed by Granqvist & Dickie (2006) who discovered that the more distressing the event, the more likely individuals were to seek a deity. The participants explained that connecting with a deity in these times of need supported their mental health, providing them with an outlet and sense of security. Though we cannot assume this link is causal, Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992) showed that individuals with a secure attachment to a deity reported higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of anxiety and depression (as cited in Bradshaw et al., 2010).

In summary, this section described the overarching trajectory of religious change as one that is closely tied to the individual's overall development and context. Truly, the participants' religiosity could not develop without the cognitive growth and social influences they experienced

as they matured. This is not to say, however, that religiosity is at the mercy of these changes. The river of religiosity is one that accommodates and assimilates in response to elements within and without. The participants navigated rapids and turns, as well as points of entrance and departure. They took care to avoid waterfalls, using the river to protect their well-being, and actively negotiate just how deep they would go. In turn, the river touched upon numerous elements in their lives.

Implications for Counselling and Therapy

The majority of this paper considered the identified themes within the context of the participants' narratives and the larger body of psychological literature. The chapter will now shift to a discussion of the broader implications of these findings on the field of counselling psychology. These include: moving beyond labels, expanding the definition religiosity, understanding religious coping, and understanding metaphors of a deity.

Moving Beyond Labels

Two of the participants were hesitant about the use of labels to describe their religiosity. Their personal difficulty mirrors a greater dilemma when trying to understand the religiosity of an individual. That is, one term is simply not enough. There is confusion in the literature with defining religion and spirituality. Indeed, nearly every article on the subject attempts to define, in the author's own way, just what is meant by these overall terms. This study shows just how difficult, and misleading, even the more specific identifying terms might be, such as denomination or affiliation.

When completing the recruitment survey, both Avina and Quinn identified as currently non-religious, with no affiliation to a tradition. A census would have checked the box "none"

and moved past any follow-up questions. A client or patient-history questionnaire would have done the same, not only failing to capture the complexity of the individual's experience, but prematurely closing the door on a potentially all-encompassing area of an individual's life that may influence both their present difficulty and their path to well-being.

In addition, the participant's initial verbal response to the question could be misleading. Quinn self-described as a non-believer, and easily slid into intellectual arguments against religion; yet, with some conversation, he revealed elements of prayer, religious experience and need for belief in something "beyond himself". Avina also noted no religious affiliation, yet it quickly became apparent that no affiliation meant no one affiliation, as she pulled from various traditions (Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism) to make sense of her life circumstances and developing religiosity. When the participants used labels, they could also be misleading. Quinn chose the term non-religious, and at one point Avina described herself as agnostic, however, these terms do not necessarily reflect the type of religiosity they go on to explain. This also suggests that one's religiosity is not necessarily a stable category.

In summary, the binary of "religious affiliation" or "no religious affiliation" simply does not capture the complexity of an individual's religiosity and its impact on past and present. This is where Huber and Huber's (2012) dimensions of religiosity became essential to this study. Not only did it operationalize the term religiosity, but understanding the five dimensions allowed for a much more comprehensive and subtle understanding of the individual's religiosity. Huber and Huber's (2012) theory highlights the fact that religiosity is more complex than all or none, and in doing so, provides a structure to begin to understand, and ask questions about, the different elements that comprise an individual's religiosity, something a single term cannot do.

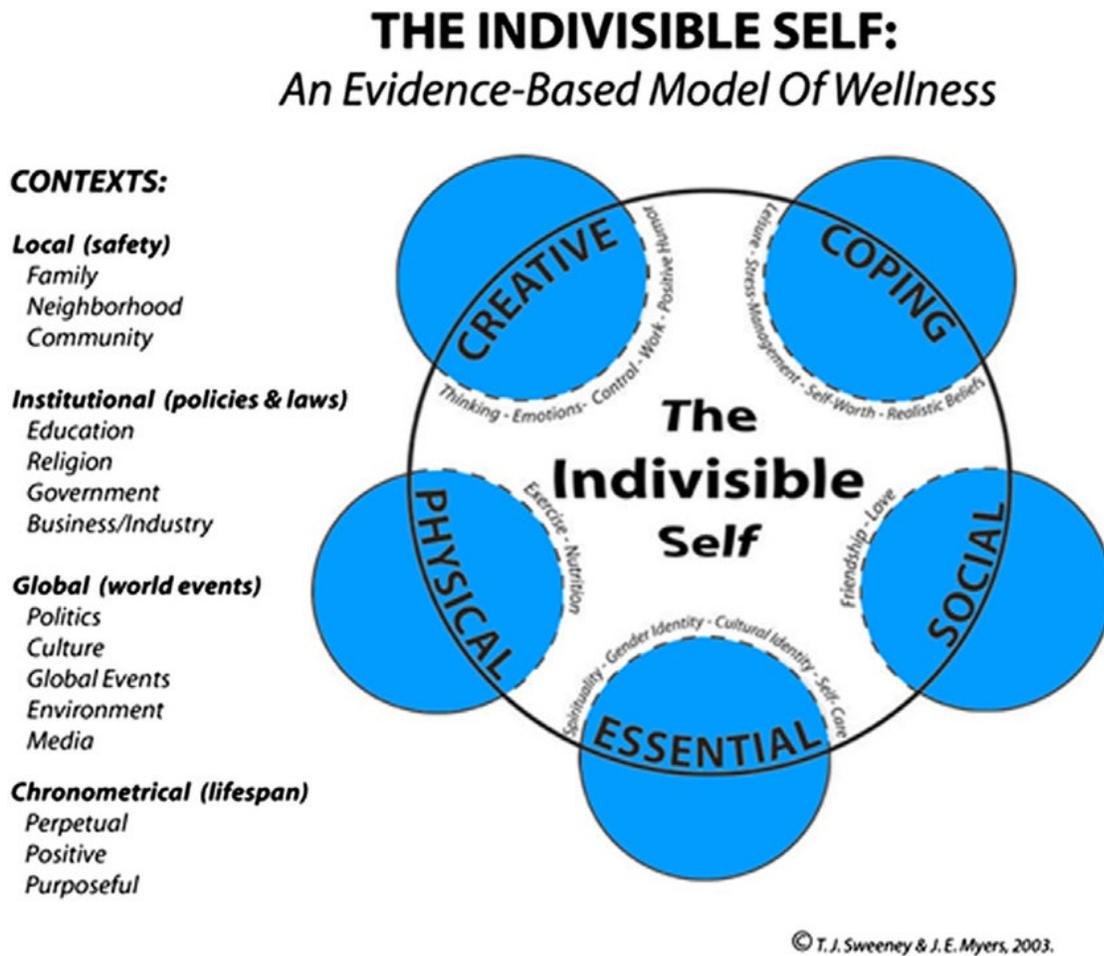
The participants' narratives highlight the need to expand our vocabulary with regard to religion and religiosity.

Expanding the Definition of Religiosity

Though there is conversation in counselling psychology about incorporating a client's religion in therapy (Hayes & Cowie, 2005), it is still conceived as a separate element for which the therapist should carefully consider the pros, cons and ethical implications before including in session. As a result, therapists often do not ask their client about their religiosity, leaving the topic for the client to initiate. Yet this study shows that religiosity may be an integral part of how an individual describes both their self and their well-being. For this reason, exploration of religiosity should be incorporated in mainstream counselling. Counsellors and therapists must move past a conception of religious faith as a separate set of personal beliefs and religious tenets to comprehend the potentially all-encompassing nature of religiosity. Indeed, a number of researchers and historians (Fowler, 1981; Roehlkepartain et al., 2006) understand faith as a verb rather than a noun. That is, faith is a way of living, relating and responding to someone or something, which places it firmly within the realm of counselling psychology.

Myers and Sweeney's (2004) model of the Indivisible Self (Figure 2) helps to understand the effects of religiosity on the whole being, rather than as one element of identity that is either checked or not. This model draws from Adlerian psychology and is promoted as an alternative way of conceptualizing wellness where well-being simultaneously encompasses many interrelated and interacting factors, rather than pathology that may focus on only one aspect of an individual.

Figure 5.2. The Indivisible Self: An Evidence-Based Model of Wellness (Myers & Sweeney, 2004)



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It is clear, even with a quick glance at this model, that simply asking the participants questions about their religiosity resulted in narratives that encompassed most elements identified in this model. Certainly some components may be expected in a study of religiosity, such as

spirituality and friendship; however, the participants' stories illuminated many more, including: self-care, gender identity, cultural identity, thinking, emotions, control, work, realistic beliefs, stress management, self-worth, leisure, love, exercise and nutrition. Failing to engage an individual's religiosity in counselling or therapy may miss many essential elements of the self as well as potential pathways for healing and wellness.

Understanding Religious Coping

The present project does not conclude that religiosity is always healthy and beneficial. Indeed the participants encountered particularly difficult experiences. However, the study highlights the fact that, no matter their professed affiliation, the participants possessed some elements of religious faith they sought in times of need. Religious coping refers to, "a search for significance in times of stress in ways related to the sacred" (Mahoney, Pendleton, & Ihrke, 2006, p. 342). Huber & Huber's (2012) five dimensional model of religiosity provides a framework for the therapist to support the client to 'search for the sacred' in various life dimensions rather than in one event or object. This opens a multi-faceted avenue to initiate conversation about religious coping. There are many types of, and reasons for, religious coping. It is important that therapists have a basic understanding of the methods so they are able to discern which are healthy and which can become maladaptive.

Avina used positive reappraisal to identify the growth she experienced, and to make sense of a particularly difficult relationship experience. Mahoney et al. (2006) report that interpreting difficulty through a positive religious lens is a healthy means of coping as it lowers spiritual and psychological distress.

All three participants used religious coping as a way to gain comfort. One way they did this was through religious experience, seeking a feeling of spiritual connection with the divine. Mahoney et al. (2006) note this is an adaptive method.

At times Avina engaged in religious coping to express her frustration to, and with, a deity. Mahoney et al. (2006) note that this “spiritual discontent” can increase suffering and maladjustment. Avina also described pleading for direct intercession in regards to her difficult relationship which can be maladaptive (Mahoney et al., 2006).

All of the participants noted attempts to engage with others who shared a similar religious tradition during difficult times of need. At times, this helped, such as Rachel’s conversations with her peers from her community. At other times this resulted in a negative experience, as with Quinn’s feelings of separation at his church camp. Mahoney et al. (2006) echo this, noting that interpersonal religious coping generally tends to be a positive experience, but can have negative effects if the individual encounters rejection or conflict within the religious community.

Understanding Metaphors of a Deity

A valuable finding in this study is the potentially all-encompassing nature of religiosity. It is important that counsellors and therapists understand not only this idea, but also how their clients may bring religion into their everyday life without using explicitly religious terms. This section will list some of the main metaphors of a deity used by the participants, along with the predominant stages in which they are used, and examples participants provide to explain their metaphors.

Table 5.1. Metaphors of a Deity

Deity as:	Predominant Stages	Examples
Distant	Early Years	<p>The deity is everything They deity is good “A being that existed but not really involved” “Just kind of there, pray to him and maybe something happens, maybe something doesn’t” “Wasn’t something you could relate to” “Higher being that we just kind of stay away from”</p>
Transactional	<p>Early Years Middle Years High School Post-secondary/Adult</p>	<p>Participant involvement in belief/practice with the expectation of reward (good grades, relationships, healing) Belief in a deity is a lot (too much) work Asking a deity for help Frustration with religiosity not helping social/emotional struggles Anger at a deity for allowing suffering “Confiding in God when you need his help” The deity as the provider Thanking the deity because the deity is in control Relationship with a deity to avoid depression Religiosity as a way to achieve the good life A deity sets limits/restraints on behaviour I “use” religion Expendable, used when needed Asking for attributes such as compassion or forgiveness</p>
Connection to Family	<p>Early Years Middle Years High School Post-secondary/Adult</p>	<p>Attending public practice with family members. Parents expectations that children hold same beliefs/practices Pleasing parents/increasing connection with parents by participating in religious practices Religious tradition tied to culture/race Parental restriction on religious autonomy Loss of religion = loss of family, community, support</p>

Deity as:	Predominant Stages	Examples
Attachment Figure	High School Post-secondary/Adult	Emotional stability when connected to a deity “Consoling in somebody.. I didn’t know who it was and I did not have a specific way to do it” Confidante Counsellor Pray when distressed “Personal relationship with God” The deity is accessible, always there, whenever The deity is engaged in life Can communicate with a deity The deity is relational, and connected emotionally The deity is present Religious experience is calming Safety, “has a plan” The deity is a friend
Last Resort	Middle Years High School Post-secondary/Adult	“Just asking for the pain to go away” “The only person who I can probably confide in is whoever is up there” Praying is better than doing nothing. The deity is something I can try. “I did not care who or what it was, but I needed there to be something”. “Not a matter of faith, but a matter of need” “I need to know there is something beyond myself, because what I am currently experiencing is overbearing” “An outlet when I needed it”

Recommendations for Counselling Psychology

Extended counsellor education. Counsellors require specific training in three areas: information about religious traditions and dimensions of religiosity to increase the counsellor’s base knowledge, methods to initiate conversation and explore an individual’s religiosity, and understanding of particular types of practices and/or beliefs that may be adaptive or harmful to an individual’s well-being.

Creating space for religious questioning. All participants encountered periods where they felt separate from a community with whom they could engage regarding life’s difficult

questions. The participants described lacking relatedness to like-minded peers, and were therefore often left on their own with their religious questions, doubts and struggles. If emerging adults do not have a community or friends with whom they feel comfortable, they likely do not have a place to come together to ask, reflect on, or grapple with their questioning. There may be a place, even a need, for counsellors and therapists to acknowledge, and create space for this type of existential conversation.

Religious history-taking. Huber and Huber's (2012) operationalization of religiosity and Centrality of Religiosity Scale were essential for eliciting conversation and achieving a more in-depth understanding of each participant's religiosity. It is recommended that counsellors become familiar with a more comprehensive operationalization of religion that may broaden both their questions and conceptualization of their client's religiosity. Questions a counsellor might use during history-taking, adapted from Huber and Huber's (2012) Centrality of Religiosity Scale, are included at the end of this paper (see Appendix E).

Use of a deity as secure attachment. The deity as a safe, secure and comforting attachment figure became a strong theme in this study. It is important to note that this is not always the case. Individuals may also experience insecure, anxious and unhealthy attachment to a deity which is related to poorer mental health (Bradshaw et al., 2010). For clients who profess some element of religiosity, Reinert, Edwards, and Hendrix (2009) suggest assessing the individual's relationship with a deity, noting the quality and characteristics, to identify any attachment issues. If a deity is functioning as a secure attachment figure for the client, the counsellor might promote this attachment as a way of coping. Encouraging proximity to a deity

as secure base and safe haven may help the client increase their autonomy and self-confidence when dealing with difficulties and distress (Reinert et al., 2009).

Middle years as sensitive period. Early adolescence appeared to be a period of intense questioning, examination of beliefs, and significant struggles with well-being in this study. As a result, it is particularly important that the therapist is attuned to their adolescent client's religious history and current negotiations.

Understanding the non-negotiable aspects of self. The discovery of protected aspects of the self that were withheld from intellectual questioning emphasizes the need for sensitive and continued exploration on the part of the counsellor. The religious label, or even the espoused views of the client, may be misleading and may have little relation to the religious beliefs the individual holds, or indeed, clings to. Why the client feels they must protect these beliefs may be an avenue for exploration and a path toward increasing understanding of their self and their well-being. Understanding these non-negotiable aspects becomes particularly important when clients are struggling with moving away from beliefs and/or practices, or contemplating disaffiliation. A client may express significant desire and benefit to changing particular beliefs and practices; however, at the same time, there may be strong and deeply-rooted aspects of the self that place restrictions on changes to religiosity. Shifts too large may have significant consequences on coping and well-being.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is its small sample size. The results represent only three voices at similar ages and stages in their lives. As a result, generalization of any of the themes identified may be difficult. In addition, there are no established frameworks for engaging

religiosity in mainstream counselling. This study is an integration of diverse theories, but far more advantageous would be a clear framework to guide the incorporation of religiosity within both counselling psychology research and the therapy session.

Delimitations

The initial scope of this study was both narrow and broad. Narrow, because the researcher chose participants enrolled in an undergraduate religious studies course, ages 18-25. Broad because the guiding research question asked generally about participant experience, open to wherever that might lead. True to phenomenology, the research did not seek to test a theory or hypothesis, and used Huber & Huber's (2012) conceptualization of religiosity only as a valuable lens to make sense of the data. The analysis and discussion are restricted to the themes expressed by the three participants in this study. The scope of the study, then, is limited to the information shared by this group. Had the researcher chosen participants in other ages or stages, or conducted further interviews, additional or different themes might have been revealed.

Conclusion

This study began due to my interest: personal, academic and professional. I was intrigued to explore this topic, as I had experienced shifting religiosity as an adolescent and young adult. Though I recall these changes as somewhat difficult, I remember the significant struggle expressed by a number of my peers, and noted the impact on their lives. I was surprised as I began reviewing the literature for this project by the paucity of data on this topic. It concerned me that the research generally included only quantitative studies concerned with identifying possible antecedents for disaffiliation or deconversion. If my experience, and the experiences of my peers, was any indication, shifting religiosity is a long and complex process,

influenced by many factors, often including significant struggle or difficulty, with lasting consequences for an individual. As a source of individual and interpersonal difficulty, I imagined shifts in religiosity could, and would, present itself in the therapy room. Indeed, this played out in my practicum experience. While I was at the beginning stages of this thesis, I encountered a number of clients whose stories included expressions of their religiosity. Some of the clients drew strength and healing from their religious beliefs and practices. Others noted that religiosity, and their questions and doubts around it, could bring significant struggle and negatively impact their well-being. Yet, there had been no training regarding religiosity in either of my psychology graduate programs. The narratives of the three participants in this study mirror the attributes and difficulties expressed by the clients, but also exhibit just how pervasive and inseparable religiosity may be in an individual's life. This is the most important finding in this study. With only three, 90-minute interviews, the participants' stories included almost every aspect of the self. That is, whether they described themselves as "religious" or not, religiosity is an integral part of many people's lives and how they describe themselves. For this reason it is essential that counsellors and therapists increase their understanding of religiosity, its dimensions, struggles and multitude of expressions, so that they may, in turn, better understand their clients.

The purpose of this study was twofold. The first was to move toward a better understanding of the process of shifting religiosity. In doing so, this study identified a possible overarching trajectory of shifting religiosity, perhaps described best by the flow of water: dynamic, growing and changing, assimilating and accommodating, as it moves from a lake to a river. The second part of the question was to explore the impact of shifting religiosity.

Surprisingly, the answer to this might be quite simple: An individual's religiosity can affect their whole life. This result places religion firmly within the realm of counselling psychology.

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Appendix A: Centrality of Religiosity Scale

Adapted from Huber, S. & Huber, O. W. (2012)

*Additions by researcher for the purposes of the present study are italicized.

Age: _____

Level (year) of education: _____

Were you raised with religious affiliation? _____

If yes, please include the name of the religion/denomination: _____

Currently, do you consider yourself affiliated with a religion?

If yes, please include name of religion/denomination:

Please circle the answer that best describes how your currently think/feel:

How often do you think about religious issues?

5	4	3	2	1
Very often	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never

How interested are you in learning more about religious topics?

5	4	3	2	1
Very much so	Quite a bit	Moderately	Not very much	Not at all

How often do you keep yourself informed about religious questions through radio, television, internet, newspapers, or books?

5	4	3	2	1
Very often	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never

How important was your knowledge or understanding of religion during the following times in your life?

Elementary School (Ages 6-10):

5	4	3	2	1
<i>Very important</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>	<i>Not important</i>

Middle Years (Ages 11-13):

5	4	3	2	1
<i>Very important</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>	<i>Not important</i>

High School (Ages 14-18):

5	4	3	2	1
<i>Very important</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>	<i>Not important</i>

Adult (Age 19+):

5	4	3	2	1
<i>Very important</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>	<i>Not important</i>

If you have further thoughts/explanations about your knowledge/understanding of religion that you would like to share, please include them here: _____ ...

To what extent do you believe that gods, deities, or something divine exists?

5	4	3	2	1
Very much so	Quite a bit	Moderately	Not very much	Not at all

To what extent do you believe in an afterlife—e.g. immortality of the soul, resurrection of the dead or reincarnation?

5	4	3	2	1
Very much so	Quite a bit	Moderately	Not very much	Not at all

In your opinion, how probable is it that a higher power really exists?

5	4	3	2	1
Very much so	Quite a bit	Moderately	Not very much	Not at all

How important was holding beliefs about the existence of a transcendent reality (e.g., existence of god, or a higher power; life after death) at the following ages.

Elementary School (Ages 6-10):

5	4	3	2	1
<i>Very important</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>	<i>Not important</i>

Middle Years (Ages 11-13):

5	4	3	2	1
<i>Very important</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>	<i>Not important</i>

High School (Ages 14-18):

5	4	3	2	1
<i>Very important</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>	<i>Not important</i>

Adult (Age 19+):

5	4	3	2	1
<i>Very important</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>	<i>Not important</i>

If you have further thoughts/explanations about your beliefs you would like to share, please include them here: _____ ...

How often do you take part in religious services?

- A) Several times a day
- B) Once a day
- C) More than once a week
- D) Once a week
- E) One to three times a month
- F) A few times a year
- G) Less than a few times a year
- H) Never

How important is to take part in religious services?

5	4	3	2	1
<i>Very much so</i>	<i>Quite a bit</i>	<i>Moderately</i>	<i>Not very much</i>	<i>Not at all</i>

How important is it for you to be connected to a religious community?

5	4	3	2	1
Very much so	Quite a bit	Moderately	Not very much	Not at all

How important was it to feel engaged with a religious community at the following times in your life?***Elementary School (Ages 6-10):***

5	4	3	2	1
Very important	Moderately important	Neutral	Slightly important	Not important

Middle Years (Ages 11-13):

5	4	3	2	1
Very important	Moderately important	Neutral	Slightly important	Not important

High School (Ages 14-18):

5	4	3	2	1
Very important	Moderately important	Neutral	Slightly important	Not important

Adult (Age 19+):

5	4	3	2	1
Very important	Moderately important	Neutral	Slightly important	Not important

If you have further thoughts/explanations about religious services you would like to share, please include them here:

Between a and b, answer the question that pertains more to your life (answer one).**a: How often do you pray?**

- A) Several times a day
- B) Once a day
- C) More than once a week
- D) Once a week
- E) One to three times a month
- F) A few times a year
- G) Less than a few times a year
- H) Never

b: How often do you meditate?

- A) Several times a day
- B) Once a day
- C) More than once a week
- D) Once a week
- E) One to three times a month
- F) A few times a year
- G) Less than a few times a year
- H) Never

Between a and b, answer the question that pertains more to your life (answer one).

a: How important is personal prayer for you?

5	4	3	2	1
Very much so	Quite a bit	Moderately	Not very much	Not at all

b: How important is meditation for you?

5	4	3	2	1
Very much so	Quite a bit	Moderately	Not very much	Not at all

Between a and b, answer the question that pertains more to your life (answer one).

a: How often do you pray spontaneously when inspired by daily situations?

- A) Several times a day
- B) Once a day
- C) More than once a week
- D) Once a week
- E) One to three times a month
- F) A few times a year
- G) Less than a few times a year
- H) Never

b: How often do you try to connect to the divine spontaneously when inspired by daily situations?

- A) Several times a day
- B) Once a day
- C) More than once a week
- D) Once a week
- E) One to three times a month
- F) A few times a year
- G) Less than a few times a year
- H) Never

How important were private/individual rituals or practices at the following times in your life?

Elementary School (Ages 6-10):

5	4	3	2	1
<i>Very important</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>	<i>Not important</i>

Middle Years (Ages 11-13):

5	4	3	2	1
<i>Very important</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>	<i>Not important</i>

High School (Ages 14-18):

5	4	3	2	1
<i>Very important</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>	<i>Not important</i>

Adult (Age 19+):

5	4	3	2	1
<i>Very important</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>	<i>Not important</i>

If you have further thoughts/explanations you would like to share about rituals or practices, please include them here: _____...

Between a and b, answer the question that pertains more to your life (answer one).

a: How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that god or something divine intervenes in your life?

5	4	3	2	1
Very often	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never

b: How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that you are in one with all?

5	4	3	2	1
Very often	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never

Between a and b, answer the question that pertains more to your life (answer one).

a: How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that god, deities, or something divine wants to communicate or to reveal something to you?

5	4	3	2	1
Very often	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never

b: How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that you are touched by a divine power?

5	4	3	2	1
Very often	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never

How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that god, deities, or something divine is present?

5	4	3	2	1
Very often	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never

How important was it to experience an emotional connection with the transcendent at the following times in your life?

Elementary School (Ages 6-10):

5	4	3	2	1
Very important	Moderately important	Neutral	Slightly important	Not important

Middle Years (Ages 11-13):

5	4	3	2	1
Very important	Moderately important	Neutral	Slightly important	Not important

High School (Ages 14-18):

5	4	3	2	1
Very important	Moderately important	Neutral	Slightly important	Not important

Adult (Age 19+):

5	4	3	2	1
Very important	Moderately important	Neutral	Slightly important	Not important

If you have further thoughts/explanations you would like to share, please include them here:

_____ ...

The study researchers are interested in further exploration of individual experiences of religion. If you are interested in sharing your thoughts or experiences in conversation with the researcher, please indicate your consent below.

_____ Yes, I consent to be contacted by the researcher for potential follow-up in this study. I understand that I may withdraw consent at any time. Please include preferred method for contact:

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

_____ No, I do not wish to be contacted by the researchers.

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview

Review limits of confidentiality.

1. Please tell me about the religious tradition in which you were raised.
2. What kind of religious beliefs were you taught and in which kind of activities did you participate?
3. Did you identify with this tradition? If not, why not? If so, in what ways?
4. How have your beliefs and/or practices changed over time?
5. Are there any events or experiences that might have precipitated these changes?
6. What are your beliefs/practices now? Do you have a religious affiliation?
7. Have you noticed any changes in your well-being during these changes? If so, please give some examples.
8. Do your family members and/or friends maintain membership in your childhood tradition?
9. (If changes) How have they reacted to the changes in your practices and beliefs?
10. To who do you turn for support? Has this changed over time?
11. Do you have any other insights to share?

Appendix C: Study Information Form



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Research Project Title: The Emerging Adult Experience of Shifting Religiosity

Principal Investigator: Angela Rajfur

Dear Participant:

The purpose of this study is to better understand how emerging adults, specifically those attending university, conceptualize their experience of shifting religiosity. “Emerging adult” describes the time between teenage years and “full-fledged adulthood”, when the individual may encounter much change. Religiosity refers to the importance individuals place on their religious beliefs and practices and may be described as the extent to which a person engages in one or more of five separate but interconnected dimensions: public practice, private practice, ideology, religious experience and intellectual.

Adolescence and young adulthood tend to be periods of increased questioning or changes in worldview, identity and values. This may be especially true for those encountering others with different and varied worldviews for the first time, a common experience in a public, post-secondary setting. Changes in one's religiosity tend to be most significant during this time period. Though these shifts may be expected, navigating the change can be difficult, with implications for an individual's mental health, relationships and help-seeking behaviour. There is much research to indicate that shifts in religiosity occur often; however, research into the experiences of individuals questioning and leaving faith traditions remains sparse.

We are aware that many emerging adults experience shifts in religiosity but are without an understanding of how this process plays out, and the effects it has on the emerging adults in our community of Winnipeg, Manitoba. This study aims to address this gap by adding to our understanding of this lived experiences and identify the possible needs and challenges of those going through this experience. This way, individuals providing care, such as counsellors or doctors, may possess a better understanding and provide better treatment and care for their clients or patients who may be experiencing shifts in their religiosity. The following research question will guide this study: How do emerging adults experience the process of shifts in religiosity and how do they describe the impact?

The research design includes a survey for recruitment and qualitative interviews with a smaller number of participants. Participants will be asked to engage in two interviews of approximately one hour each over the course of a month. These interviews will be audio recorded.

Please note that you are under no obligation to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw your participation and data without penalty. Consent may be withdrawn verbally or in writing and your data will be destroyed and not included in any reports generated by the study. The exception is that once you have provided your edits to the transcript of your interview the data will be included in the study. When results are written and presented, information that could be used to identify you will be excluded and a pseudonym will be used. You will receive a \$5 gift card for each interview during the study.

Though there are no anticipated risks of participating in this study, at times sharing meaningful information or difficult experiences has the potential to be distressing. Before interviews begin you will be provided with contact information for on-campus and community supports that you may access for followup support. You will receive a copy of the transcript of your interview and be provided with the opportunity to revise or edit your responses. Once the written transcript is complete, the audio recording will be deleted. Only the principal investigator and Dr. Grace Ukasoanya (University of Manitoba thesis advisor) will have access to the audio recordings.

If you decide to participate, please sign the consent form. I will provide you with a summary of the research findings within three months of the end of the data collection phase (by September 2019). I am a University of Manitoba student in Counselling Psychology conducting this study to fulfill the requirements for a Masters of Education thesis under the supervision of Dr. Grace Ukasoanya, thesis advisor.

All data from the study will be destroyed 5 years from thesis completion (December 2024). This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about this project, you may contact:

Principal Investigator: Angela Rajfur - umrajfur@myumanitoba.ca

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Grace Ukasoanya - 204.474.9010 - grace.ukasoanya@umanitoba.ca

Human Ethics Coordinator - 204.474.7122 - humanethics@umanitoba.ca

Sincerely,

Angela Rajfur, M.A.
Principal Investigator
University of Manitoba

Appendix D: Informed Consent Forms
(Survey Questionnaire)



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Research Project Title: The Emerging Adult Experience of Shifting Religiosity

Principal Investigator: Angela Rajfur

Study Purpose: The purpose of this study is to better understand how emerging adults, specifically those attending university, conceptualize their experience of shifting religiosity. “Emerging adult” describes the time between teenage years and “full-fledged adulthood”, when the individual may encounter much change. Religiosity refers to the importance individuals place on their religious beliefs and practices and may be described as the extent to which a person engages in one or more of five separate but interconnected dimensions: public practice, private practice, ideology, religious experience and intellectual.

Adolescence and young adulthood tend to be periods of increased questioning or changes in worldview, identity and values. This may be especially true for those encountering others with different and varied worldviews for the first time, a common experience in a public, post-secondary setting. Changes in one's religiosity tend to be most significant during this time period. Though these shifts may be expected, navigating the change can be difficult, with implications for an individual's mental health, relationships and help-seeking behaviour. There is much research to indicate that shifts in religiosity occur often; however, research into the experiences of individuals questioning and leaving faith traditions remains sparse.

We are aware that many emerging adults experience shifts in religiosity but are without an understanding of how this process plays out, and the effects it has on the emerging adults in our community of Winnipeg, Manitoba. This study aims to address this gap by adding to our understanding of this lived experiences and identify the possible needs and challenges of those going through this experience. This way, individuals providing care, such as counsellors or doctors, may possess a better understanding and provide better treatment and care for their clients or patients who may be experiencing shifts in their religiosity. The following research question will guide this study: How do emerging adults experience the process of shifts in religiosity and how do they describe the impact?

This consent form is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. Please feel free to ask if you would like more detail about anything mentioned here, or information not included here.

I agree to take part in the study: The Emerging Adult Experience of Shifting Religiosity

- I understand that my participation will involve completion of the questionnaire: Centrality of Religiosity Scale.
- I understand that my participation in this survey will be held in the strictest of confidence.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and is in no way connected to this course or its requirements.
- I understand that my name/identifying information will not be included in any report or presentation that may arise from the study.
- I understand that the findings of this study may be presented to academic audiences (including thesis advisor and committee, workshop and conference presentations, reports, and refereed/nonrefereed journal articles).
- I understand that there are no repercussions for non-participation. I may withdraw my participation and data at any time until data collection is complete (June 30, 2019) by speaking, or written communication, with the principal investigator.
- I understand that though there is minimal risk to participating in this study, it is possible that in sharing meaningful or difficult experiences I may experience some distress. Should I wish to pursue followup support, the following resources are available to contact:
 - Student Counselling Centre - 474 UMSU University Centre - 204.474.8592
 - Klinik Crisis Line - 204.786.8686
- I understand the potential benefits to participating includes the opportunity to share experiences with changing religiosity in a confidential environment. Generally, a better understanding of shifting religiosity will help clinicians gain insight into the general experiences, potential struggles and themes of the process.
- I understand that there is no cost to completing this survey.
- I understand that the University of Manitoba may look at the research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.
- I understand that should I choose to include my name my identity will only be known by the principal investigator. Consent forms will be housed in a separate location from the surveys. Data will be stored in a password-protected computer and/or locked cabinet in the principal investigator's home. All data from the project will be destroyed 5 years from thesis completion (December 2024). Dr. Grace Ukasoanya (University of Manitoba thesis advisor) will have access the data.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the principal investigator or involved institution from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's signature: _____

Principal Investigator's signature: _____

Date: _____

If you would like to receive a non-technical summary of the findings once the data collection phase of the study is complete (September 2019), please check yes and include your email address.

Yes: _____ Email: _____

Notice Regarding Collection, Use, and Disclosure of Personal Information by the University”
Your personal information is being collected under the authority of *The University of Manitoba Act*. The information you provide will be used by the University for the purpose of this research project. Your personal information will not be used or disclosed for other purposes, unless permitted by *The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA). If you have any questions about the collection of your personal information, contact the Access & Privacy Office (tel. 204-474-9462), 233 Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB, R3T 2N2.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board and is being conducted to fulfill the thesis requirements for a Master's of Education and under the supervision of the thesis advisor. If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please contact:

Principal Investigator
Angela Rajfur
umrajfur@myumanitoba.ca

Thesis Advisor:
Dr. Grace Ukasoanya
204.474.9010
grace.ukasoanya@umanitoba.ca

Human Ethics Coordinator
204.474.7122
humanethics@umanitoba.ca

(Interviews)



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA | Faculty of Education

Project Title: The Emerging Adult Experience of Shifting Religiosity

Principal Investigator: Angela Rajfur

Study Purpose: The purpose of this study is to better understand how emerging adults, specifically those attending university, conceptualize their experience of shifting religiosity. “Emerging adult” describes the time between teenage years and “full-fledged adulthood”, when the individual may encounter much change. Religiosity refers to the importance individuals place on their religious beliefs and practices and may be described as the extent to which a person engages in one or more of five separate but interconnected dimensions: public practice, private practice, ideology, religious experience and intellectual.

Adolescence and young adulthood tend to be periods of increased questioning or changes in worldview, identity and values. This may be especially true for those encountering others with different and varied worldviews for the first time, a common experience in a public, post-secondary setting. Changes in one's religiosity tend to be most significant during this time period. Though these shifts may be expected, navigating the change can be difficult, with implications for an individual's mental health, relationships and help-seeking behaviour. There is much research to indicate that shifts in religiosity occur often; however, research into the experiences of individuals questioning and leaving faith traditions remains sparse.

We are aware that many emerging adults experience shifts in religiosity but are without an understanding of how this process plays out, and the effects it has on the emerging adults in our community of Winnipeg, Manitoba. This study aims to address this gap by adding to our understanding of this lived experiences and identify the possible needs and challenges of those going through this experience. This way, individuals providing care, such as counsellors or doctors, may possess a better understanding and provide better treatment and care for their clients or patients who may be experiencing shifts in their religiosity. The following research question will guide this study: How do emerging adults experience the process of shifts in religiosity and how do they describe the impact?

This consent form, a copy of which will be given to you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. Please feel free to ask if you would like more detail about anything mentioned here, or information not included here.

I agree to take part in the study: The Emerging Adult Experience of Shifting Religiosity

- I understand that my participation will involve two interviews with the principal investigator (approximately 1 hour each).
- I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded. I will receive a written transcript within three (3) weeks of my interview. I will have two (2) weeks to review the transcript and make changes if I choose. The audio recording will be deleted.
- I understand that my name/identifying information will not be included in any report or presentation that may arise from the study.
- I understand that direct quotes may be used in the final written project and/or presentations but that my name will not be published.
- I understand that there are limits to my confidentiality. If the researcher becomes aware of immediate harm to me (the participant), intention to harm others, or harm to a child/vulnerable person, she is required to report this information to law enforcement and/or child protection.
- I understand that the findings of this study may be presented to academic audiences (including thesis advisor and committee, workshop and conference presentations, reports, and refereed/nonrefereed journal articles).
- I understand that there are no repercussions for non-participation. I may withdraw my participation and data at any time by speaking, or written communication, with the principal investigator.
- I understand that once I return the transcript with any changes or decline to make any changes during the two weeks I have to review the transcript it is no longer possible to withdraw my participation and data from the study.
- I understand that I will receive a \$5 gift card (choice of Starbucks or Tim Hortons) for each interview.
- I understand that the University of Manitoba may look at the research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.
- I understand that though there is minimal risk to participating in this study, it is possible that in sharing meaningful or difficult experiences I may experience some distress. Should I wish to pursue follow-up support, the following resources are available to contact:
 - Student Counselling Centre - 474 UMSU University Centre - 204.474.8592
 - Klinik Crisis Line - 204.786.8686
- I understand the potential benefits to participating includes the opportunity to share experiences with changing religiosity in a confidential environment. Generally, a better understanding of shifting religiosity will help clinicians gain insight into the general experiences, potential struggles and themes of the process.
- I understand that there is no cost to participating in the interview.
- I understand that audio recordings will be available only to the principal investigator and thesis advisor. Pseudonyms will be used for participants in all written records/presentations generated by the research and consent forms will be housed in a separate location from the data, from which all identifiers will be removed as soon as the interviews are transcribed. Data will be stored in a password-protected computer and locked cabinet in the principal investigator's

home. All data from the project will be destroyed 5 years from thesis completion (December 2024). Dr. Grace Ukasoanya (University of Manitoba - Thesis Advisor) will have access to recordings, transcripts and data.

- I understand that a non-technical summary of the findings of the study will be sent to me via e-mail or mail within three months of the end of the data collection phase of the project (by September 2019).

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the principal investigator or involved institution from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's signature: _____

Please initial if you consent to receive a written transcript of your interview to review and/or make changes _____.

Please check preferred method to receive transcript (include address):

Email: _____

Mail: _____

Principal Investigator's signature: _____

Date: _____

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board and is being conducted to fulfill the thesis requirements for a Master's of Education and under the supervision of the thesis advisor.

Notice Regarding Collection, Use, and Disclosure of Personal Information by the University” Your personal information is being collected under the authority of *The University of Manitoba Act*. The information you provide will be used by the University for the purpose of this research project. Your personal information will not be used or disclosed for other purposes, unless permitted by *The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA). If you have

any questions about the collection of your personal information, contact the Access & Privacy Office (tel. 204-474-9462), 233 Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB, R3T 2N2.

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please contact:

Principal Investigator

Angela Rajfur

umrajfur@myumanitoba.ca

Thesis Advisor:

Dr. Grace Ukasoanya

204.474.9010

grace.ukasoanya@umanitoba.ca

Human Ethics Coordinator

204.474.7122

humanethics@umanitoba.ca

Appendix E: Religious History Questions

Adapted from the Centrality of Religiosity Scale: Huber and Huber (2012)

Intellectual

How often do you think about religious issues?

- What kind of religious issues occupy your interest?

How interested are you in learning more about religious topics?

- Which topics, why?
- What do you do to learn more?

Ideological

To what extent do you believe that gods, deities, or something divine exists?

- What kind? What do they look like, feel like, how do they act?
- How probable is it that a higher power exists?
- Would you like a higher power to exist?

To what extent do you believe in an afterlife? (such as immortality of the soul, heaven, resurrection of the dead, reincarnation)

- What does it look like? Is it accessible? Who is there?

Public Practice

How important is it to take part in religious services?

- How often do you take part?
- What kind?

How important is it for you to be connected to a religious community?

- What does that community look like? What do they do?
- Who is in it?
- Do you feel connected to the people in this community?

Private Practice

Do you pray?

- How often?
- Is it important to do? Why?
- What does prayer look like, feel like?

Do you meditate?

- How often?
- Is it important to do? Why?
- What does meditation look like, feel like?

Do you try to pray or connect to the divine when needed or inspired by daily situations?

- When?
- What kind of situations?
- Why?

Are there other practices, traditions, rituals in which you engage?

Religious Experience

Do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that god or the divine is present or that you are connected to god/divine?

- When?
- What does that look like? Feel like?
- Do you feel as though god or a divine power wants to communicate with you?
- Do you feel as though the divine is intervening in your life?
- Do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that you are one with all?

To better understand religious development/history across the five dimensions: elementary school, middle years, high school, and adult:

- How important was your knowledge or understanding of religion during the following times in your life?
- How important was holding beliefs about the existence of a transcendent reality (e.g., existence of god, or a higher power; life after death) at the following ages?
- How important was it to feel engaged with a religious community at the following times in your life?
- How important were private/individual rituals or practices at the following times in your life?
- How important was it to experience an emotional connection with the transcendent at the following times in your life?