

## ABSTRACT

### RELIGIOUS IDENTITY FORMATION AND OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE

Historical changes in postmodern sociocultural contexts present new challenges in identity formation. Religion as a specific domain of identity and its potential link to such personality traits as openness to experience and the phenomenon of “religious questing” have yet to be investigated by researchers. This exploratory study examines the relationship between overall and religious identity status, openness to experience, and religious quest in 235 college students. Participants were given the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status, the Openness to Experience subscale of the Big Five Inventory, the Religious Quest Inventory, and a set of questions assessing religious exploration. The findings imply that personality traits like openness to experience may mitigate religious identity formation processes, especially for those individuals who view religion as open-ended and revisable. Participants’ qualitative written responses exposed the varied emotional, cognitive, and social dynamics that take that place in the process of religious identity formation.

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