LATIFAT AFOLABI & OLUWATOBI ODELEYE, Dept of Chemistry, West Virginia University, WV 26506. Exploring the relationship between religious identity and Sense of belonging in STEM.

Understanding how different groups experience STEM environments can reveal unique challenges and opportunities, informing strategies to create more inclusive spaces in the STEM fields. This is why this study examined the sense of belonging among students from diverse religious backgrounds. This study explores how students who self-identified as religious or non-religious experience a sense of belonging within STEM fields. To understand this, the study examined two forms of belonging: academic belonging, which reflects how confident and supported students feel in their learning experiences, and social belonging, which reflects how included and connected they feel with their peers and community. The study used a structured survey with Likert-scale items to measure participants' sense of belonging. A quantitative approach was applied, and statistical methods were used to analyze the data to identify patterns, relationships, and overall trends.

Overall, both groups reported a relatively positive sense of academic and social belonging in STEM environments. However, a notable difference emerged in social belonging. Students who identified as religious reported feeling more socially connected than their non-religious peers. Further analysis reveals a statistically significant interaction between social belonging and religious status, as determined by multiple linear regression, indicating that the association between academic belonging and social belonging varies depending on individuals' religious status. Specifically, the strength of the relationship between academic belonging and social belonging differs across religious groups.

These findings suggest that students, regardless of their religious identity, tend to experience a positive sense of belonging in STEM fields.