

agnostic. Instead of believing in a god, Cossman said he acknowledges the fact that the existence of a god or gods cannot be proven or disproven, remaining indifferent on the fact of whether a god exists or not.

"I know I can't prove or disprove [existence] as of now, so I'm going to work on things that other people are working on now," Cossman said.

According to Esparza, religion's ability to divide people and create strife mainly explains why she chooses not to join or believe in a particular faith.

"I believe in God, and I believe that he wants us not to be separated," Esparza said.

Much of Esparza's non-affiliation also stems from individuals who, according to her, force their beliefs on others. Esparza said she respects people who hold their beliefs in high regard, but when she is pressured into attending religious gatherings, it only backfires. Instead, Esparza said she prefers when religion is taught to her.

"[Religious members] have every right to teach and enlighten people, but I think they should respect other's boundaries," Esparza said.

Cossman said he has had similar experiences, although he said people tend not to force religion on him when he explains that he is agnostic. It was middle school when he said he began to ponder the notion of religion, especially when he saw many of his friends going to church on Sundays. Cossman said his parents are Baptists, and while they don't attend Sunday practice, his sister still does. According to Cossman, his family didn't instill their beliefs in him.

"My parents, they didn't force their religion on me," Cossman said. "They just let me choose my own."

While he doesn't deny or accept the existence of a god, Cossman said that he does take issue with some aspects of

organized religion, especially when dealing with morality and religious doctrines.

"Looking at religious books and literature, ... I don't really agree with [them] morally," Cossman said. "We're a different society completely, so we should look at today's society rather than the pasts."

While the atheistic McMillan doesn't believe in God, he said he does appreciate some aspects of religion, especially the morals that spur from religious teachings. He also said he respects the diverse religious pool in the U.S. and the various opinions that go with it. That doesn't, however, mean he thinks religion is necessary in order to gain a moral code, and he said that he can have his own morals without the influence of religion.

"I look at the world from my perspective and how I affect others, and I base my morals off of that—how I can improve myself, others, society, etc.," McMillan said.

Faith is an aspect of religion that the agnostic Cossman said he hasn't given up on entirely. He said he admits that the existence of a god would be cool, but prefers not knowing. And when faced with a struggle, such as a relative with a life-threatening disease or other traumatic events, hope and faith are more important than scientific fact.

"Sometimes it works better to have faith even though science might say otherwise," Cossman said.

McMillan said he has different thoughts on faith, and that while at times it's something that, inevitably, we look to, it doesn't shake his belief that he is in control of himself and his abilities as a human being.

"I think that's just human nature to believe that we can be controlled by something greater than us," McMillan said. "But

for the most part, I believe in myself, and what I can do myself, every day."

In the end, happiness, according to Esparza, is pivotal. Despite beliefs, opinion and the control some organized religion may hold, she said that if you're comfortable, no matter what affiliation, then that's worth celebrating.

"I think [happiness is] more important—whatever makes you feel happy—and I feel happier not being in a religion," Esparza said.

