

ATHEISM, AGNOSTICISM, AND NONBELIEF:

A QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE

STUDY OF TYPE AND NARRATIVE

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## ABSTRACT

Extensive research has been conducted in exploration of the American religious landscape, however recently has social science research started to explore Nonbelief in any detail. Research on Nonbelief has been limited as most research focuses on the popularity of the religious “nones” or the complexities of alternative faith expressions such as spirituality. Research has been limited in exploring the complexity of Nonbelief or how non-believers would identify themselves. Most research assumes nonbelievers are a monolithic group with no variation such as Atheism or Agnosticism. Through two studies, one qualitative and one quantitative, this study explored identity of Nonbelief. Study one (the qualitative study) discovered that individuals have shared definitional agreement but use different words to describe the different types of Nonbelief. Moreover, social tension and life narrative play a role in shaping one’s ontological worldview. Through thematic coding, a typology of six different types of Nonbelief was observed. Those are Academic Atheists, Activist Atheist/Agnostics, Seeker Agnostics, Antitheists, Nontheists, and the Ritual Atheists. Study two explored the empirical aspects of these types related to the NEO Domain, RYFF Psychological Well-Being, Narcissism Personality Inventory, Multidimensional Anger Inventory, Dogmatism, and intersections related to religious and spiritual ontology. The research team observed that empirical measures can show significant differences and measure domain uniqueness. Study two

seems to suggest there are unique as well as high and low scored empirical characteristics between each of the measures when comparing the different types of Nonbelief.

## DEDICATION

To my wife Laura and my son Jamison, your love and support gives me the motivation to push through even the most difficult of times. Laura you bring out the best in me. To Ralph W Hood Jr. whose un-relentless support and motivation helped me to actualize my ability beyond an uneducated simple southerner. To my parents Frank and June Silver whose support of me from childhood to adulthood must have certainly been challenging and difficult to raise such a stubborn and arrogant child. To my brother Shawn whose dreams of going to college will never be realized because of the challenges of his Autism. May my work and dedication to academia at least give you some sense of pride and strength that a part of you (your brother) excels in academia. Shawn you deserve a doctoral degree simply for overcoming so much in your life.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Atheism, and by proxy Agnosticism, is an emerging research focus within psychology of religion literature. While a commonly used term to identify a variety of non-believers, the term *Atheism* does invoke a variety of reactions. For example, the term itself – while indicative of those who reject belief – does not adequately provide distinction among the variety of forms of non-belief. It is expected that complexity can be observed in non-belief as is found in various forms of religious belief (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). While literature and critical discussion exist on Atheism in a variety of academic publications and social commentary, social science literature has been limited. Much of the social science literature that does exist focuses on percentages of self-identity. That is, those who identify as atheists versus those who do not, as well as the familial conditions that produce belief rejection.

There is popular interest as well. As an example, comedy personalities such as Bill Maher are open about their atheistic identity and include their opinions and ideas in their comedy routine. Maher has even produced a documentary called “Religulous” about the religious landscape of America from an atheist perspective (Schaeffer, 2009, pp. 16-17). In some regards, this debate can be against Christianity particularly or religion in general. For example, Maher focuses on Christianity in politics but at various intervals in his show “Real-Time with Bill Maher” he also challenges religion as a whole. The popular view may be helpful in providing social context in the evolution of non-belief adjectives. Other famous atheists include George

Carlin, John Lennon, Henry Rollins (a musician and speaker), and Howard Stern, to name a few (Atheist Activist, 2011). Media personalities have a strong influence on the general public, an observation that Edward Bernays, the father of modern propaganda, made (Tye, 2002). These types of conversations fall within common discourse. Their perspective appears to validate the academic and philosophical exploration as it provides social and popular exploration of Atheism “on the ground.” From the philosophical, historical, and common discourse, these perspectives provide the social impact and connection for modern understandings on non-belief. The limited research on Atheism offers a wide variety of options for research on Atheism and Agnosticism.

Within the United States, non-belief is growing. Even as early as the 1980s, Roozen (1980) discovered that 46% of American’s were relatively uninvolved in religious services for 2 years or more. Teenagers and young adults were the predominant group, comprising a portion of the American population at 24.6%. Of those who dropped out, a larger number of males than females believed that church was irrelevant to life. Age seemed to be a factor for those who re-engaged in active religious participation. The older a participant is, the more likely that individual is to rejoin and actively participate in religious services. Roozen’s (1980) research is helpful as it provides evidence of a corollary connection between age and religious involvement. What is missing from his research is an exploration of those who continued to stay unaffiliated and their reasons for doing so. From age 55 onward, as much as 2.5% of the population continued to stay unaffiliated (Roozen, 1980). Roozen did not explore why this was so. It is likely this was a population of atheists and agnostics who had no interest in religious affiliation, providing early trends of non-belief within social science data. One criticism of Roozen’s work is that more people believe than attend services, just as there are likely individuals who attend who do not believe.



More recently, research has shown that forms of religious non-belief have begun to resonate with a sub-segment of the population. In the International Social Survey Programme's (also known as the ISSP) 2008 survey data, 2.8% agree with the statement "I don't believe in God," while 5% agreed with "I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe that there is a way to find out," and 10.3% agreed with "I don't believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind," appearing to confirm an agnostic viewpoint on the existence of God. Similar trends in data were observed in the American Religious Identification Survey results. Additionally, 2.3% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that "there is no such thing as God" while 4.3% agreed that "there is no way to know." While 12.1% agreed with the statement "there is a higher power but no personal God" authors assumed a lack of belief in a higher power (Kosmin & Keysar, 2007, pp. 101-105). Such an observation is ambiguous, as this question would indicate some type of transcendence. A qualitative item here would help in an explanation of the respondent's intention in responding to the item. The Kosmin and Keysar items, while useful in shedding light on the phenomena of non-belief, would have benefited from a description of the items in terms of respondent meaning. Such response leaves the reader perplexed as to the purpose or meaning of particular items. It does indicate a growing shift in the belief dynamic.

The above literature review is a small sample of the literature showing both increased interest in non-belief by Social Scientists and also a growing trend in public religiosity, or, in this case, the lack thereof. These studies do not explore the variety of adjectives used in identifying non-belief. They simply provide a response landscape for those who vary in their opinions on the existence of God. An excellent complement to these studies would have been a qualitative exploration of how these individuals identify themselves. One can see from these studies that

non-belief exists in the American religious landscape. What is lacking is the exploration of the various forms of non-belief and the terms used to define them.

### **The Definitional Frame of Non-Belief**

This report will discuss and utilize the term “non-belief” at length throughout the document. The term non-belief is being used to designate a sub-segment of the American population that has shifted away from religiosity in lieu of more post-modern forms of life meaning that fall outside of formalized belief. Self-descriptive phrases such as “spiritual and not religious” and “neither spiritual nor religious” have emerged in psychology-of-religion literature (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). This empirically indicates that there is certainly a social shift away from formalized religion. More specifically those who identify as “spiritual and not religious” and “neither spiritual nor religious” could be lacking belief, however they may also vary in the degree that theological and ethical values still are incorporated within their own lives. Therefore, research should explore the length and depth of non-belief. Those who are considered non-believers for this study are classified as individuals who have no individual allegiance to any specific faith tradition. Their lack of allegiance could simply be social disagreements with their former religious community to those have no belief in a high power. This study attempts to survey the continuum from those who do not consider themselves religious to those who consider themselves Atheist or individuals who have no belief in the transcendent. These individuals are an emergent and growing section of the population and may yield interesting data as a subsequent of the overall population.

## **Non-belief and Examples of Leadership**

As a new social movement, one could discuss Atheism and specifically non-belief in terms of leadership. In some cases, non-belief movements are formalized in meetings of individuals who seek fraternity among others of similar ontological perspectives. In other words, individuals join groups that facilitate and sustain their shift away from religious traditions. In some cases they may have been raised an atheist and seek to find a similar social dynamic to that of a church where they can gain social capital through networking with likeminded individuals. While this may not hold true for all those who are not religious, the social networks are certainly there for them to connect with others.

For example in Chattanooga Tennessee, the Chattanooga Free Thought Association or CFA exists to provide a social medium to share ideas and discuss the differences between religiosity and non-belief. While the majority of this group is Agnostic or Atheist, there are others who also comprise membership as well. For example, the group also has some Christians and Buddhists. While they use these terms to identify themselves, they may not attend church. or they may have unanswered questions that religion does not address. The CFA provides a forum for such questions. At the time of this study, the CFA had a formal board of directors that loosely governed the group. This was led by a couple who are the founding members of the CFA. It is through their leadership and vision that the group flourished and expanded. Moreover, the CFA holds public events to gain additional awareness about non-belief in the Chattanooga area. These events can range from intellectual talks to political rallies. One of the missions of the group is to ensure that church and state continue to remain separate. The CFA is one example of how leadership takes a variety of forms in the social and psychological domains. Therefore, by

exploring the complexities of these domains the reader has a better understanding of how new social movements emerge and how those that are already present sustain their existence.

### **Ambiguous Use of Defining Terms**

Terms like Atheism, Agnosticism, apostasy, or un-churched are commonly used in the field of social science of religion to describe non-belief. Some scholars have attempted to theoretically define these terms using broad strokes of overarching inclusive definitions while others take a minimalist approach. Even more such terms can be used as socially accepted classifications for a group of people with no definitional framework by which to gauge inclusion versus exclusion of the Nonbelief community. Moreover, Atheism in some parts of the United States may be more controversial than in others. Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann (2006) observed that Americans are less likely to accept atheist groups over other groups such as ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. The researchers observed that while America is becoming more religiously tolerant, this same tolerance is not being extended to those of non-belief. For example, 47.6% responded that they would not want their child to marry an atheist as compared to Muslims at 33.5% (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann, 2006). While the terms of non-belief are ambiguous, they are controversial in how non-believers interact with believers. Simply by group membership alone, one can find difficulty in socially connecting with the larger social norms of believers. Outsider perception is powerful as it forms social reality around those whom society deems as being the out-group. Some of these interpretations can use terms of identity to stigmatize others, even if those terms are used within academia to classify or provide distinctive meaning. An excellent example of academic terms used as socially projected stereotypes are found within the new religious movement community.

The term *cult* was used within the academic community as a sociological term to identify new religious groups that were founded or emerged within a recent time period. While social science researchers were using the term to observe the dissemination of “new religious movements” or NRMs within American and European society, the term was adopted by the media and society as a stigmatizing pejorative to separate cult members into an out-group all their own, in a sense alienating them from the larger religious landscape. In this case, perceptions of social control, mind dominance, and loss of personal freedom (as opposed to the social science interpretations of new belief and adherence) became the defining characteristics of the term “cult” (Pfeiffer, 1992; Dawson, 2005, pp. 33-36; Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009, pp. 259-277). One set of social science literature explored new religious movements as a danger to the social wellbeing of American society, citing psychological and social control, loss of individual freedoms, and absolute adherence to authority. These researchers sought to stigmatize these groups even further by highlighting those who exit-and-escape from these types of traditions. Such an exit was deemed deconversion, and those who left new religious movements labeled them as apostates. Moreover, the research also explored outsider examinations of these groups and their perceived threat of NRMs to destabilize society.

Other researchers sought to take a more explorative approach, being much more apologetic to NRMs, focusing research on each tradition without making collective judgments holistically. These researchers sought to provide factual information about NRMs based on observation, but without advocating a particular social agenda. Also, these researchers found that through cooperation and exploration within these movements, they were able to resolve social misconceptions about NRMs. While the latter group of researchers highlighted various

misconceptions, the term “cult” still carries with it a negative social and political connotation (Dawson, 2005; Richardson, 1993).

This is a classic example of how terms of identity can change over time. These terms can empower or disqualify legitimacy or authenticity of belief. It is no surprise that social science research has confirmed negative perceptions of traditions labeled cult (Pfeifer, 1992). The overarching result was a shift by apologists in academic literature from the use of the term cult to the phrase “new religious movements” out of respect for new adherents and systems of belief. Many devotees followed in the adoption of this new term in their identity (Richardson, 1993). Belief identity becomes a vast informational gate as well as a social statement that opens the door to one’s expression of belief as well as to their agenda of how they wish to be viewed. Terms of identity can be both liberating and stigmatizing. Identity is not simply a method for categorization; it is a projection of the self onto society. To use an inclusive term within the proper empowered group may be appropriate, while using the same term within an out-group can carry different meanings. Equally socially controversial are the perceptions of non-belief. Non-believers are no different in that the politics of the term or terms that non-believers use to identify themselves create multiple layers of meaning within society. Unlike the research on new religious movements and religions in general, the various terms of non-belief are vague even though one can find them commonly used in popular discourse and social science research (Streib & Klein, 2011).

The politics of the use of the term cult is useful as it shows how an academic descriptive term can shift to be a stigmatizing term when adopted by other social systems. In this case, the social system is the media where the term was used to set new religious movements aside from mainstream religious traditions. This certainly is further evidence of the power of language.

Humans as social animals intersect with, commune with, or contradict other social networks in the formation of identity. Language is not simply a necessity of utility but a cognitive map of human social structure, both perceived and shared. The use of the terms and words are multifaceted, with various layers of meaning both implicit and explicit (Berger, 1990). Nowhere is this more obvious than in individual identity. The term Atheism is commonly used to classify a spectrum of non-believers, from those who question the existence of God in theological terms to those who aggressively attack theistic positions. Atheism has a variety of interpretations not only in social and personal belief or lack thereof, but also in philosophical complexities not generally recognized within common discourse. Such philosophical positions discussed between early and modern philosophy peel away the complexity related to ontology and epistemology in asserting not only issues of reality related to Atheism but also the nature of belief or lack thereof in the divine (Bremmer, 2007). The complexity of the use of the terms of non-belief and Atheism – particularly in academic, religious, and social circles – is perplexing at best. The term “Atheism,” while a commonly used adjective to identify a sub segment of the population, is vague in the sense of who qualifies and who does not (Streib & Klein 2011). Obviously the term is vague, but what are the popular perspectives applying Atheism within society?

### **Common Discussions in Atheism**

Modernist and popular philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche believed that God was simply dead culturally. Concerned with his perception of religion as a corrupt and ugly social manifestation, he saw adherence to religious institutions as detrimental to society. Nietzsche’s solution was to accept the growing common view that God – if he exists at all – is likely uninvolved in the world. For Nietzsche, the salvation of society was to accept modernist views in

social and material innovation. Through the social and technological progression of human kind, people would find liberation beyond dogma and belief. While this view was not a new perspective, it had elements of the philosophical contemporaries before Nietzsche, such as David Hume who asserted that philosophers could only speak to that which is observable by the senses. Nietzsche's view was what he termed the "superman" of moving forward. While his writings occurred prior to Freud and the advent of Psychology, as well as two world wars, Nietzsche's position assumed that society's enlightenment was a product of social and material evolution. Religion served as a socially developmental impasse for Nietzsche (Hyman, 2007, p. 32; Joshi, 2011, p.89). To be a non-believer was to be one who recognized the positivist values of science and reason beyond the unempirical nature of religious view (Johnson, 2010). Nietzsche was an advocate for social change. To be an atheist in his mind was to be forward thinking and socially aware – addressing the repressed human nature and experience. Such observations of the repressed human nature had implications for later Freudian theory.

Almost 100 years later, Nietzsche's theories emerged during the 1960s within the God-is-dead theological movement also known as Radical Theology (also known as Christian Atheism). While the movement was primarily short lived and centralized within the counter-cultural radicalism, it lacked unified expression and was centralized to particular charismatic personalities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The phrase "God is dead" was more of a representative term for a growing social perception of God's absence from direct human experience. For some theological positions, God was not dead but simply removed from discourse due to lack of experiential and sensory material representation (Žižek, 2009).

Theologians like Paul Tillich believed discourse was so limited in the explanation of God that by attempting to classify and describe God, one was simply denying his existence through



the verbally representative exercise. Tillich, like many of his contemporaries of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, was concerned with the psychological implications of religious belief. Tillich specifically addressed much of the anxiety produced by belief in conflict with modernity. Tillich termed these anxieties fate and death, emptiness, and guilt. Tillich believed that Christianity required a radical shift from traditional systems of thought to modern systems, which addressed the social and psychological concerns of humanity (Tillich, 2000). Tillich's work was useful as it showed how the theology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century addressed the growing culturally relative nature of post-modernism.

Tillich's work could be considered a response to Hegelian existentialism. Hegel saw existence of personhood as a continued changing process of incompletes informed by historical and cultural perspectives. Eventually the person rises above the social and historical aggregates that form his or her ideals to form a notional and hypothetical worldview. The individual is part of a social or familial community and therefore part of a socially conscious experience. In other words, each era of history builds on the previous one, processed and synthesized in the social conscious. Tillich's view saw the existential perspective as what he terms "ultimate concern." In this concern is life's meaning. One aspect of ultimate concern is doubt, in which Tillich accepts the existential consideration that one's god may not be the real God (Unhjem, 1966). While such a perspective may be considered destructive to individual faith, Tillich saw such doubt as helpful since all who claim to have faith must accept the possibility of the alternative to their faith. For Tillich, such an existential crisis of one's faith has the potential to become idolatrous as a misrepresentation of the ultimate, or, in Tillich's case, God (Morrison, 2011). Morrison here is asserting that one's beliefs, or lack thereof, in a sense can become God. For example, if one is concerned with the theological differences between one's faith, as compared to another, the

difference has become an existential concern – therefore the “god” of the devotional focus rather than the actual higher power. In the case of assertive non-belief individuals, such focus against belief in many respects become the object of devotion, in a sense that person’s god, according to Tillich.

Other theological thinkers took a more direct and affirmative position in the “Death of God,” seeking empirical positions to the discussion of the ontological nature. For example, Paul Van Buren explored God as language construction. Van Buren asserted that God existed within language; however, language itself is experiential and empirical. God’s existence is dependent on the linguistic constructions assigned to him. In this assertion, if all language is empirical and experiential, then by the nature of language, God is meaningless since no one can directly perceive him. These are samples of the varying opinion of the Radical Theological movement. As one can see, the atheistic ontological view has profound theological as well as sociological implications. In the examples provided above, proponents of the radical theological movement attempt to build a theological system absent of God. In some regards, this would have been a social experientially confirmed system that gave meaning and addressed psychological necessities of being. While the existence of God can and will be disputed, the conversation has shifted to mainstream popular thinkers. Nowhere is this more evident than in the April 8, 1966, edition of *Time*. In this issue, the central theme of the magazine addressed the radical theological agenda to remove God from theology. Citing theologians such as Tillich and Van Buren, the magazine addressed the changing landscape of theology in America (Elson, 1966). While radical theology gained media popularity, its viewpoint and message did not gain a large following within theological circles (Caputo, Vattimo, & Robbins, 2009).

The complexity of the ontology of Atheism is not limited to theological discussions. Within the popular and current view of Atheism, the rational view of religion has a wide variety of discussion points regarding the social applicability of atheistic thought. The most well-known atheistic apologist is Richard Dawkins, who has written a variety of books on the topic of Atheism. Dawkins, a Biologist, recognized the power and social influence of religion. From Dawkins' devotion to his academic work on evolutionary biology, he has become one of the foremost popular critics of religion. From this criticism Dawkins has become an advocate of humanistic Atheism. Dawkins' belief is that religion and science cannot co-exist. Religion is detrimental to social progression and innovation. He is especially critical of fundamentalism as an arcane force of oppression within society. Dawkins continually presents scientific arguments against religion and particularly monotheism. More particularly his discussions of religion within social theory and philosophy provide arguments of logic and observable reason focusing on the limitations of God and the lack of divine intervention within the world. Nowhere are these arguments more clearly articulated than in his popular book *The God Delusion* (Dawkins, 2008). Dawkins argues that atheists themselves are normal, ethical, and intellectual people much like the wider population. He terms them "brights" or individuals aware of the scientific and modern world. Within this argument, Dawkins is opposing a view that atheists are socially deviant or pathological in their individual rejection or lack of belief. Next, Dawkins takes the role of scientist and advocates for scientific theories over religious theology as being more methodical and naturally comprehensive as a holistic view. Since theories of science both seek observational purism and physical description, they resonate better with human intelligence and are superior to intelligent design theories that are based in theological speculation.

Dawkins (2008) argues that while religion is associated with morality, it is not the sole producer of it. Morality, according to Dawkins, is an inherent trait within the human genome. He also argues from the evolutionary perspective that those who would commit crimes against others would simply be removed from society through their own ill behavior or by social reaction. On the other hand, in scientific terms their genes would experience significant reproductive challenges simply based on their self-destructive behavior. It is likely that criminals would have difficulty breeding if they were continually on the defensive due to their poor decisions. This is an offensive rather than a defensive position against critics, as Dawkins essentially argues that religion is not needed to ensure social moral code. Finally, Dawkins argues that Atheism, as one's belief identity, should create self-esteem and self-respect within the non-believer community. Atheists should be proud of who they are since their values are independent of social influence to the contrary. Essentially, Dawkins is responding to critics and non-believers alike. As noted before and on point one, he is arguing against negative perceptions of atheists as psychologically or socially maladjusted. Second, he argues that scientific theory is far more extensive, observable, and useful than theological explanations. Third, Dawkins argues that morality comes from natural necessity rather than divine intervention. In these perspectives, Dawkins is arguing against the social need for religion in modern society (Dawkins, 2008). In Dawkins' argument is an implicit agenda for a social acceptance of Atheism. This could leave a reader wondering who Dawkins' greatest audience is. It appears he is writing to atheists and religionists alike. At other times, he is projecting an argument to outsiders for the legitimacy of Atheism as individual and social belief. Dawkins clearly challenges belief in not only the Christian God, but also any deity and religious system. Dawkins' view is that humanity can

empower itself to create a better social system. Dawkins' writings have generated a loyal following including popular interest in his writings.

Other atheist authors have also attempted to address issues of Atheism within Western culture. The late Christopher Hitchens (2007) took an almost sociological exploration of religion. Unlike Dawkins, who grounds his work in scientifically informed theory, Hitchens explored the behavioral and theological implications of religion in more detail, focusing on the results of the social movement of religion and the theological passages that inform social order and belief. More specifically, Hitchens' interest focused on behavior and ideology. Rather than directly attacking the idea of religion, Hitchens seeks to deconstruct various social changes that occurred due to religion. For example, he critically explores the Koran, particularly its claim that the Archangel Gabriel dictated the written word to Muhammad. Hitchens states that the Koran was likely pieced together from Jewish and Christian traditional writings and theology. He provides evidence of this, stating that those who are versed in the traditions would recognize the commonalities between the Abrahamic religions, inferring that the Koran was produced not of divine dictation. Hitchens also explored the rise and fall of denominations within religion, focusing on religious groups such as Millerism (an apocalyptic tradition of the 1800s) and Sabbatai Sevi, a 17th century Messianic personality within Judaism. Both cases were organized by charismatic figures.

Millerism is a term associated with the followers of William Miller, who predicted the end of the world in the mid-1800s. Sabbatai Sevi was considered by himself, and within some Jewish circles, to be the messiah. Over time he gained a following until his forced conversion to Islam by the Sultan Mehmed IV of the Ottoman Empire. While some families stayed committed, others were appalled by Sabbatai's conversion. For Hitchens, these examples of denominational

disbanding were examples of what other religions could expect if they could not maintain social adherence to their particular theology. Miller experienced a similar disenfranchisement of some of his followers, while others later formed new denominations (Hitchens, 2007). In short, Hitchens explores a variety of historical, theological, and behavioral examples of how religion hinders human growth. Hitchens insists that social emphasis should be removed from religion and focused on more productive social agendas. For Hitchens, as for Dawkins, Atheism plays a role in helping form a better society. Hitchens believes that the mobilization of atheists can help bring about a better world. The next popular writer attempts a more apologetic approach to religion, at least from an atheist perspective.

Shifting to another contemporary atheist author, Sam Harris' work addresses in detail the relationship between the culturally religious aspects of society – both as religious institutions and at the individual level – as compared to the growing non-belief movement. Harris first explores these in detail in his book *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (2004) where the author discusses the stagnation of religion as a human social system. For Harris, religion has contrasting potential from being a social system of open-mindedness and acceptance to a potentially reactionary and aggressive conservative form of religiosity. Harris' ultimate concern with religious conservatism is violence and hate. The overall critique of religion by Harris is in the lack of hermeneutic methods employed in the interpretation of scripture. For Harris, there is no streamlined rational interpretive method for reading and disseminating religious tracts between the religious authority and devotee. The obvious result of such disagreement in interpretation and method is a crisis of sectarian division. These disagreements forge social discord and a loss of logic and reason, not to mention concerns for social safety in a pluralistic society. Harris sees religion as an archaic worldview that forces outdated social

expectations of adherents. Harris suggests that scripture should be considered within more modern social and rational examinations as opposed to faith alone.

Beyond the issues of hermeneutics, Harris is also concerned with the consistency of personal identity as belief. By describing oneself as a specific faith tradition, they are not only giving their specific ontological position within the world, but they are also creating an expectation in others for a specific worldview and set of behaviors. As an example, by claiming to be a Buddhist, one is asserting their non-violence and ascribe to the ontology of Karma. For others they would expect the Buddhist to meditate and observe and live the behavioral mandates of Buddhism. Harris' specific example uses Islam. Harris sees Islam as a major threat to our way of life, citing examples in the Koran where true believers should aggressively hurt, stop, and potentially kill infidels. He also noted that martyrdom carries with it an automatic bypass of the complexities of judgment by God. For the Islamic adherent, martyrdom is an assured way into heaven and the rewards therein. Harris views Islam as dangerous for western society. Harris sees a Totalitarian view of religion as detrimental to democracy and freedom. With holy texts such as the Koran and Hadith, Harris discerns those as particularly vivid in the torments of the infidel for their lack of reverence or willingness to convert. Harris notes that such violence against the religious other (those of other faiths) is almost condoned where God can be the judge of the non-believers at death.

Additionally, Harris notes the subjectivity of good and evil. Such concepts can be individually or even culturally interpreted. The unfortunate nature of religious belief is that there is not an objective God to provide direct interpretative meaning. In a manner of speaking, God is not physically there to render judgment (not only in the quality of one's life following death but also God does not consult with the priests to explain his rationale). Therefore, humanity is left to

its own devices to make the determination. Such determination is typically attributed to religious authority. Harris addresses the use of the term belief to incorporate all values including the lightly spiritual or those with no religious adherence to religion. He asserts that only real belief should come in the form of observable evidence, which can be observed and tested.

Unfortunately, in most cases, such faith is based on little to no evidence, and therefore the utility of such social systems is circumspect. Harris suggests that human rational methods should be employed to verify the validity of scriptural interpretation. In some cases, it appears Harris is almost asserting a pragmatic approach to scripture where the social welfare of society is determined from the usefulness of religion to serve the whole (Harris, 2004). If there is no social benefit of the text, it should be summarily dismissed as historical. By addressing the relationship between subject and object through the litmus test of rational process, humanity can scrutinize the benefits of ontological worldviews within the larger global culture.

While Harris' work is helpful in suggesting methods for dealing with the increased complexity of social meaning in relation to the temporally anchored nature of religious thought (or in other words texts that were written in a culture and time significantly removed from the adherent), Harris fails to realize the phenomenological perspective of more localized faith traditions. From a phenomenological perspective, it would be assumed that there is a secular rationality that exists separate from the theological bounds of tradition. In many Islamic countries, culture and religion are not mutually exclusive phenomena, and therefore such secular rationalism would fail within most Islamic cultures without a gradual social movement toward pluralism. Harris would certainly need to propose a system that could be inclusive of those cultures where religion and culture are almost synonymous, while also functional within the



cultural relativity he suggests as the highest social value. Obviously, Harris' work leads to further discussion regarding his concerns with religious adherence.

Following his first book, Harris (2006) crafted a letter to America appealing for less fanatical beliefs and rational thought in religion. Borrowing from similar themes of his previous work, Harris attempted to write his book in the form of a letter addressed to the United States as a religious nation. At the cornerstone of his thesis was the premise that there are observable and culturally alien aspects to religion, which may not resonate well with the common masses. Harris sees the structure of religion as an imaginative absurdity, as a social movement where religious values and morals block social benefits, from women's suffrage in history to scientific breakthroughs of the modern day. Unfortunately, while the cost benefit of such social and scientific benefits may be invaluable, the requirement to meet with moral religious resolution in many respects blocks the overall democratic process of such considerations. In other words, while some individuals may benefit and see no moral conflict through embracing or exploring scientific breakthroughs or overall benefits of social freedoms, others see these as challenges to their belief and the moral authority of their faith tradition. Therefore social tension occurs that obstructs overall social development of American society. Harris suggests rationally shown facts should challenge the perspectives of faith. Absolutists should self-examine their values and beliefs, particularly where they live in a much broader pluralistic society.

As noted by Harris, some traditions have the potential to lend themselves to more socially destructive behavior. One prime example of such an observation would be the Jewish law regarding punitive punishments, as stated in the Old Testament. As noted in Deuteronomy, a groom should kill his wife if she appeared to lack her virginity on their wedding night. Following examples of scripture, Harris provides statistics in support of his view. Some statistics noted by

Harris are related to disease, church attendance, belief in evolution, and views of God, to name a few. Additionally, Harris notes observable differences between religious views on the age of the world and scientific observations and prediction. From examples such as this, Harris advocates a more moderate position for religionists to oppose fundamentalist positions. Harris concludes by saying that religion will likely not be removed from the public sphere, but that how it is manifested could be altered. Harris dreams of a world where religion does not impose itself on social and governmental institutions. He accepts that this is unlikely, but is optimistic that religionists and non-believers can find some common ground. For Harris, the catch to finding common ground is a clearly delineated position against fundamentalism, which Harris sees as counterproductive to cultural pluralism and social evolution (Harris, 2006). With Harris's critiques noted, he also asserts some potential in religion to provide alternative experience for human consciousness and inform religious understanding through the scientific method. Harris, in a sense, seeks the commonalities between religious theology and scientific understanding of the world. He proposes a common space in which all the "isms" and "ologies" can connect within their human globally advantageous terms.

Harris is cognizant of the implications of blind religion to influence social behavior. Without rational thought, any behavior can be justified simply through theological authority. While it is likely that those who have an evangelical or fundamentalist belief in religion would likely find Harris's letter offensive since he misses the point of faith (which is devotion and belief by one's duty, not their rational need). Harris may relate to liberal elements with this stern conversation about conservative Christianity while inversely also offending them with his criticisms of Islam. Clearly, the contrast would make Harris controversial for different interest groups since his "ontological" position is vastly different the usual social strings of thought.

The undertone of all three perspectives is the idea that the authors are addressing religion with a big R, religion itself. However, at greater examination, the reader finds the authors speaking to Abrahamic values, ethics and theology. More particularly, the authors appear to be questioning the existence of the Judeo-Christian God. Atheism and its role in society are as ambiguous as the term itself. One perspective is to rally around social humanism, organizing a social morality within the genre of humanistic values and ideas. Another proposal of Atheism's advocates is simply to remove religion from the public sphere entirely, yielding a condition where order and innovation will progress much faster and naturally. Yet even another prospective is not to consider religion and science as mutually exclusive but rather as non-overlapping magisteria. Science is observable replicable facts and religion is the embodiment of values. The two can be intertwined in human experience and social awareness (Gould, 1999). In some cases, Atheism simply seeks a recognized status within society as a common and normal social identity. The overall social awareness of such movements in non-belief is growing with increased popular focus.

Coupled with popular media are academic and theological discussions about Atheism. These discussions are examples of a growing social trend within American society. With cultural and religious diversity increasing, the American sociological landscape is continually changing. One small part of that landscape is Atheism. Unlike religious or social movements with identity cohesion, Atheism is largely a personal identity with varying differences in ideological position, morality, and theological openness. Adjectives are commonly used to identify Americans but such terms lack any common understood meaning in their use. For example, how do agnostics and atheists differ? Do individual atheists have any type of belief or cosmology? Hood, Hill, & Spilka (2009) noted that those who reject God or a vertical transcendence might still find

meaning through ecological or other forms of horizontal transcendence. While there may not be a “divine” consciousness that the horizontal transcendent individual ascribes, their allegiance to issues of nature may still provide the adherent with meaningful experience. Research should explore if such individuals have meaningful experiences, which provide dual identity. Does one’s atheistic view bar him or her from transcendental experience? As one can see, terms of identity are especially perplexing when addressing atheist and agnostic identity.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As noted in the introduction, further research should be conducted on terms of non-belief. More specifically, research should explore terms of non-belief from the position of the non-believer. Due to the limited research but growing interest, Hood, Hill, and Spilka, (2009) and Streib and Klein (2011) have called for more research in exploration of the differences between atheists, agnostics, and apostates. While the call has been recently answered with growing interest, the state of the research appears dichotomous, positioning non-belief with belief and religiosity with Atheism. Streib and Klein (2011) have called for an exploration of Atheism and Agnosticism as a process unto itself, implying that the legitimacy is not in relation to belief but in the identity created by those who identify with non-belief. In some cases, Atheism and Agnosticism may be a product of religious exit or disaffiliation. Streib et al (2009) note that such disaffiliation can occur as a result of social and/or moral tension, as well as intellectual doubt and loss of profound experience. Such experiences may lead to alternative affiliation with other faith communities or to complete disaffiliation from any faith group (Streib et al., 2009). While some may be born into atheist or agnostic families, those who leave religious traditions for a secular worldview may find developmental and social challenges during their exit.

From the process of exit to identity, Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006) explored the characteristics of socially active atheists in Canada and the United States. Individually, atheists' value truth and experientially driven conclusions about religions. Additionally, atheists are less authoritarian as well as being the least racially prejudiced group – eclipsing even their agnostic counterparts. Socially, Hunsberger and Altemeyer discovered that atheists and fundamentalists in the United States were far more dogmatic than their Canadian counterparts. American atheists appear to experience more prejudice as compared with Canadian atheists. This observation was also noted by Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann (2006), who confirmed that atheists generally feel discriminated against in American society. It appears that distaste exists for atheists by the larger theist community and likely informs their perceived prejudice by outsiders. These results appear to indicate that atheists have differing social and psychological characteristics from the larger American and Canadian populations (Hunsberger and Altemeyer 2006). Such differences certainly warrant further study.

The social science research provides examples of the differences that exist between atheists and agnostics as compared with believers within the United States. Theological positions of non-belief can carry complexity and paradoxical ontology. There is no central theme of non-belief and no simple authority as seen within most religious traditions. As seen in radical theology, such social and individual identities are value driven viewpoints of the individual, which likely do not imply philosophical complexity at the psychological level. In other words, ethics are a view of each person as if there is no God. They are projections of the ontological self in relation to the mosaic of social identities that exist within a complex religious and cultural American landscape.

Through qualitative inquiry, descriptive boundaries may provide greater exploration in explaining the differences between atheists and believers observed in social-science research. Certainly, there are geographic differences based on not only local cultural norms but also socialization of belief. For example, the northeast may differ from the southeast United States on the topic of Nonbelief. As is noted by Strieb and Klein (2011), research on Atheism should be for its own purposes with focus on the variability of ontological landscape. However this study would add that Atheism should be defined by atheists within their own words, providing a qualitative and personal ontological position within their geographic locale.

As is noted by Pasquale (2007), unchurched persons use many different adjectives to define themselves, such as naturalistic, agnostic, scientific, humanistic, secularist, atheist, anti-religious, and skeptical. It would be helpful to allow research participants to define these terms in their own language as well as allow them to pick a term that resonates with their own self-identity. In addition to Pasquale's terms, this study will ask participants to include their own descriptive terms, which they feel are meaningful. Adjectives commonly associated with Atheism may assist in providing greater insight into how non-believers connect and identify with atheist ideals. The goal of such an exploration is to determine if a typology of Atheism exists. If a typology emerges from an explorative research model, what inferences can be made for each type within the typology? What are the characteristics that permeate individuals with similar personality and psychological characteristics? It is suspected that different types of Atheism do exist and, like religion, are multidimensional (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). Additionally, it is also suspected that such typologies are not fixed but are changing. It is likely that, over an entire life trajectory, persons change their view of non-belief. It is suspected that this is socially reinforced through extensive atheist social networks, both face-to-face and online, which provide

alternative theories and values about Atheism for adherents (Streib et al., 2009). Therefore, commonality of value and belief may exist between different types of American atheists, suggesting the possibility of loosely defined typology.

To address the need for further research in defining Atheism, the goals of this research are the following: a qualitative exploration of definitions of Atheism including various degrees of Nonbelief, from the qualitative data to create a typology of the different types of Atheists including styles of behavior and centrality of values and beliefs, and to make quantitative comparisons regarding personality attributes, individual dogmatism, and psychological well-being. The typology would be employed quantitatively to determine if such classifications resonate with non-believers and if differences exist between each typology regarding personality, psychological, and open- and closed-mindedness. If there is a varying degree of cognitive and emotional dissonance based on the products of identity, this would provide greater clarity in the form of social and psychological adjustment (Ryff & Singer, 1996). It would be expected that there is plenty of variability in non-belief. For example, those who are former Baptists may be different from those who are former Hindus. It would be expected as well that geographical differences might also play a factor. Those from the Southeast United States may be more assertively atheist or agnostic versus those from a more pluralistic locale such as California. This is why research such as this could help shed light on the possible growing trend of non-belief in the United States.

### **Research Questions**

With an emergent research area such as non-belief, various methods would need to be employed to ensure maximum triangulation of the data to yield clear and applicable results. To

explore the socially constructed meaning of Atheism in the United States, a quantitative methodology would not be helpful unless informed by qualitative data (Flick, 2009). Therefore, to achieve useful descriptive data, interviews with non-believers would need to be conducted to explore the various themes of being an atheist. These themes would focus primarily on self-identity and the perceived meaning of descriptive terms such as anti-theist, atheist, etc. The interview would explore their narrative in how their own evolution as a person led them to the current ontological definition they apply to themselves. The interview would explore the participants' perceptions of being an atheist or agnostic in their community and what that means to them. From the qualitative data, common themes would be sought in creating an American Atheist typology and explored through questions quantitatively. This leads to the first question of interest.

Question One: What are the different terms associated with non-belief employed by non-believers by which they identify themselves?

These adjectives are important, because they will represent the types of the overall American atheist typology. This study will use common adjectives of self-identity as identified by Pasquale (2007) with some additions from the interviews as they emerge. Question one is the primary nexus of this research. All other questions and methodological inquiry are based on this question, because the identity adjectives will provide the basis of classification and comparison for all theoretical and methodological investigation into the topic of non-belief within this study. Other qualitative studies have explored the complexity and variability of atheist narrative (e.g. Blackford & Schuklenk, 2009). This study will attempt to explore how participants came to be non-believers and to identify publically as such. Following the exploration of identity adjectives, the next question is related to narrative trajectory (Creswell, 2009).



Question Two has subparts that inform the whole. A variety of narratives may exist that plot a non-believer's life trajectory. For some non-believers, there may be no ontological shift at all residing in a similar belief or lack thereof since birth. For others it could be that dogmas have shifted over life, resulting in their current ontological position. Such shifts may provide some contextual evidence in how concepts of non-belief are created and sustained.

Question Two: How did participants come to be non-believers?

Question Two, Part A: Did particular life events result in their current ontological position?

Question Two Part B: Have they identified with other belief or non-belief adjectives over the course of their life trajectory? If so, what are those adjectives and what do they mean for them in retrospect and definition?

These questions not only clarify the participant's life experience but also help determine if the adjectives are descriptively autonomous, socially constructed classifications or products of experience and narrative. One's social connections and their relationships may also shed light on that individual's religious or non-religious identity and use of adjectives to describe that identity (Berger, 1990). Understanding the narrative connections between present day individuals and the past events that have shaped the person, may give some indication if a developmental model may fit with ontological identity or if shifting patterns exists as styles of belief in adjective meaning (Streib et al., 2009). Again, the use of the adjectives reconnects with research question one above.

From questions one and two, a typology will be constructed to quantitatively explore what characteristics can be ascribed to each typology. By quantitatively exploring the differences between each type, the applicability of the typology on a national level can be explored and confirmed. Additionally, the scales presented to participants in the following questions provide

richness of description and the types of people who identify with each non-belief typology.

While this is an explorative exercise, it may shed some light on the types of non-believers that identify with particular ontological positions.

The first aspect of the typology that will be explored is personality type and behavioral characteristics. Non-belief typologies may be tied to particular personalities. In exploration of the possible connection between personality and non-belief typology, The Big Five Personality type will be used (Costa & McCrae, 1985). The Big Five measures personality on five traits. Those traits are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. Extraversion is defined as one's sociability by directing his or her emotional assertiveness externally with others. Agreeableness is the how socially trusting and kind one is with others. Agreeableness is related to aspects of interpersonal altruism and human affection. Conscientiousness is awareness of goals and being a detail-oriented individual. A conscientious person has control of his or her impulses and desires. The next personality trait, Neuroticism, relates to the individual who is highly neurotic and experiences a lack of emotional stability, psychological irritability, and anxiety. In this type, the individual has difficulty coping emotionally. The last personality type is Openness to Experience. This type of individual is willing to seek new experiences. These experiences inform his or her insight and imagination as a person.

Personality traits within the Big Five are useful as they represent modes of behavior that people prefer when interacting with their environment. Some perspectives recognize that the Big Five may not only be universal among varying cultures in modes of behavior but also biological, hence the trait perspective. Since behavior is central to social interaction and relationship building, it could also be indicative of ideology and, in particular, ontological positions within

non-belief (Costa & McCrae, 1985). Obviously, the most utilitarian perspective for personality research would be to use the highly reliable and valid NEO-PI-R or NEO-PI-3 scales of personality assessment. However, due to limited financial resources, this project will apply the theoretical aspects of the Big Five within the use of International Personality Item Pool or IPIP. Within this pool is a variety of survey instrumentation that measures various aspects of personality. Of those measures, the “NEO Domain” measure appears to be the most psychometrically sound and applicable to this type of research. While not as optimally reliable and valid as the paid versions of the NEO, the NEO Domain certainly has acceptable reliability limits and has been used in research. It has been applied in other similar projects (e.g. Block, 1995; Ghorbani, and Watson, 2004) and can provide useful personality metrics to this study (Goldberg et al., 2006; International Personality Item Pool, 2012). Therefore, the question posed here is the following:

Question Three: Does Personality Type and, in particular, the Big Five, relate to different types of non-belief? Can characteristics be drawn between different types of non-belief and the personalities that identify with those forms of non-belief?

Exploration of this question could shed insight into what particular personalities identify with specific ontological positions within non-belief. Extensive research has been done in the area of personality and religion (e.g. Saroglou & Muñoz-García, 2008; Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). For example, agreeableness and conscientiousness appear to be related to religion. Openness to experience appears to be negatively related to religion (Saroglou & Jaspard 2000). Hood, Hill, & Spilka (2009) have suggested that rather than exploring the personality characteristics of the five-factor model, other models using the Big Five may exist. Streib et al. (2009) discovered a two-factor model of traditionalism versus transformation. Traditionalism is

the sum factors of emotional stability (Neuroticism reversed scored), agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Transformation is the sum of the big five factors of openness to experience and extroversion. This research seems to indicate that personality may have relationship to religion and belief.

Non-belief may be tied to specific aspects of personality type as well. For example, a person who scores high on openness to experiences may be more open to co-existing with religionists than someone who scores low on openness to experience but high on neuroticism. In addition to the Big Five, the study would also suggest an examination of two additional aspects of personality. This study would further expand on question three to consider the aspects of narcissism and anger. Since the Big Five does not relate to self-image and to the specific emotionality of research participants, it would be helpful to see if this study could distinguish those with high anger from other emotional domains that would only be observable as overall neurotic phenomena (Emotionally Stability reverse scored) within the NEO personality domain. Additionally, it would be expected that narcissism would likely relate to neuroticism

Question Three, Part A: Are there particular emotional and personality styles that can be ascribed to particular non-belief types?

To distinguish these behavioral aspects, two additional scales will be used. To measure anger, the Multidimensional Anger Inventory (MAI) will be used to measure not only frequency of anger but also duration, magnitude, and hostile outlook. It is expected that some non-believers may use anger as a coping mechanism when challenged about their values and beliefs. Anger may also be an emotional reaction for those who are dogmatic regarding their non-belief. Some of the social tension that exists between believers and non-believers could also explain anger. Quantitatively exploring the degree of anger as one facet of non-religion could explain why some

non-believers experience stigma related to their reactionary behavior to others of faith. While it is not expected that all non-believers have higher anger, there may be a small sub-segment that react with anger to adversity. The MAI has been heavily used in the field of psychology within a variety research conditions mainly due to its multifactorial nature (Siegel, 1986; Musante, MacDougall, Dembroski, & Costa, 1989).

The second additional factor is narcissism, which can be defined as the love of oneself to the detriment of others. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition* defines narcissistic personality disorder as “A pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; pg. 685). In a sense, a person sees himself or herself as having a higher value than other people and is willing to sacrifice others to achieve his or her goals and sustain such narcissistic tendencies. A significant amount of research has explored this area. One of the most classic studies, by Raskin and Terry (1988), explored the reliability and validity of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) seeking a more complex measure beyond the measures present within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders (DSM). Raskin and Terry’s research observed the various factors that may be present in addition to psychiatric concerns. In other words, they explored milder and additional forms of narcissism which may not contribute to a personality disorder but do create some tension for individuals. Additionally, Raskin and Terry (1988) proposed that various factors of narcissism exist that may lead to a personality disorder. Using the NPI, the authors observed seven first-order components, identified as Exhibitionism, Authority, Superiority, Vanity, Entitlement, Exploitativeness, and Self-Sufficiency.

Two subsequent studies conducted by Raskin and Terry observed acceptable construct validity within the NPI measuring narcissism (Raskin and Terry, 1988). Additional research has

supported the claims to reliability and validity of the NPI (e.g. Soyer, Rovenpor, Kopelman, Mullins, and Watson). This study will use the NPI to determine specific typologies of non-belief that show higher scores of narcissism versus other typologies. One issue is the perception of non-believers and, particularly atheists, by believers. As is noted by studies such as Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann (2006), researchers have observed outsider perceptions of atheists as not trustworthy or detrimental to society, it could be that there is a sub-segment of non-belief that – through their behavior – creates stereotypes of atheists as arrogant and/or angry. This study would make the determination of whether anger or narcissism is present within specific forms of non-belief. By examining aspects of personality, this study can determine if types of personality and behavior influence how non-believers self-identify.

The next quantitative aspect of non-belief is the issue of closed-mindedness. Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006) observed that American Atheists, in many respects, were more dogmatic than Canadian atheists. Additionally, while they may have some progressive characteristics, such as less prejudicial attitudes toward outsiders, a value for truth, and less zealotry; some appear dogmatic within their ideological position. Therefore, such observations create an interesting challenge for quantitative research as most scales of closed-mindedness typically include authoritarian, fascist, or prejudicial variables as part of the measurement. The most appropriate scale for this study would be the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale.

The Dogmatism Scale designed by Milton Rokeach (1960) differentiates between open and closed-minded individuals based upon the process of belief rather than the content of belief. Before 1960, the most widely used scale to measure authoritarianism was the California F-scale. Those who had higher scores typically would score higher on ethnocentrism scales and a variety of other scales that measure prejudice. Research on authoritarianism typically found it to be a

phenomenon primarily of the political right only (Silver, 2011). Dogmatism, as theorized by Rokeach (1960), is a reluctance to accept new ideas outside of one's own beliefs or disbeliefs. Three basic characteristics of dogmatism are absolutism, conditional acceptance, and a high degree of differentiation between belief and disbelief systems. In absolutism, one's own beliefs are absolute and those deviating from it are wrong. Absolutism requires that one's belief system is unquestioning in acceptance of a single or centralized authority. Conditional acceptance is the rejection of others based upon the degree to which their beliefs appear to differ from one's own. Differentiation refers to the relative ratio between belief versus disbelief equates to their level of dogmatism. In words the level of knowledge about one's own belief system to knowledge about other disbelief systems (Rokeach, 1960).

Question Four: Dogmatism – Are certain non-belief types more closed-minded than others? Does closed-mindedness relate to one's ontological belief and self-identity?

The more dogmatic an individual is, the higher the belief/disbelief ratio. Studies find that dogmatic individuals prefer an anti-democratic and intolerant philosophy, which can define their perceptions and segregate them from the world around them (Vacchiano, Strauss, & Hochman, 1969). They make clear distinctions between those who they identify with and those they perceive as outsiders.

Another issue that has emerged in recent literature is the issue of psychological wellbeing and non-belief. Popular opinion assumed that many atheists must be maladjusted due to the lack of any centralized morality or social connection. Research exploring this area discovered otherwise. Beit-Hallahmi (2007) discovered that, individually, atheists appear as psychologically adjusted as others. They are also more likely to be male and educated. Additionally, research shows that Atheists appear to be as moral as their religious counterparts, discounting the

perception that somehow they lack morality (Beit-Hallahmi, 2007). An additional factor to consider is not only the individual being an atheist but also having the social psychological qualities of Atheism. A paradox exists within atheists and psychological health. Some countries have institutionalized Atheism. Those countries experience low levels of economic development and depression. Others have what Zuckerman (2007) calls organic Atheism where the ideological position is ubiquitous within the society. In this case, countries with large populations of atheists are some of the most psychologically stable and wealthiest locations on earth (Zuckerman, 2007). Other research has proposed that non-believers are less psychologically adjusted than those of faith, especially those of established traditions. Ross (1990) observed that those with greater religious conviction experienced less psychological distress. Conversely, those who identified as being less dogmatic and as a particular example of this category of less dogmatism namely the atheist participants described greater psychological distress. Ross' research seemed to indicate an inverse correlative relationship between religious belief and psychological stress (Ross 1990). While Ross' research shows the alternative perspective view of non-belief connected with maladjustment, research on psychological health and non-belief has primarily focused on males and their fathers (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009).

Saroglou (2002) observed that a variety of psychological constructs relate to personality type. These include psychological wellbeing, need for closure, religious fundamentalism, as well as religiosity. Saroglou's observations suggest that fundamentalism relates to need for closure while measures of spirituality appear to relate to openness to experience. The applicability of Saroglou findings relate to the convoluted nature of participants and their beliefs. Since Saroglou uses western Europeans, it could be that such findings relate to the social tension of being religious in a secular society (Saroglou, 2002). While this criticism is observed, Saroglou's work



does shed light on the complexity of personality and psychological wellbeing research in relation to religion.

What these studies fail to address is if different types of non-belief experience and different levels of psychological distress. Since many of these studies explore Atheism or Agnosticism holistically and by voluntary self-report, its variance in research observation could be explained by the various differences in non-belief and the geographic location of the non-believer. Since this study is a study of American Atheism and is nationwide, the variation in psychological well-being and non-believers may have a greater possibility of being explained. Therefore, in exploration of area, the study would propose the use of Ryff (1989) Scales of Psychological Well-Being. This scale has six distinct areas of psychological well-being; those are Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance. Autonomy is the ability of individuals to be self-motivating and independent, and to make determinations for themselves without subscribing to social pressure. Environmental Mastery is illustrated by the ability of individuals to have control over social conditions and their interaction with them. Individuals who have high environmental mastery can make effective use of their external activities to ensure their values and personal needs are met or in balance. Personal Growth assesses if the individuals have a feeling of continued development retrospectively and psychologically assessing their change over time. Those who score high on personal growth are also open to new experiences. Positive Relations with Others has a social quality as it relates to how the individual connects and forms relationships. For those who identify with Purpose in Life, they find that their lives have meaning and believe in their aims and objectives for living. Self-Acceptance is defined as positive attitude toward one's own abilities and an acceptance of who they are both in terms of

their strengths and weaknesses. The Ryff scale is one of the better measures, as it explores not only psychologically adjusted cognition, but also psychologically adjusted behavioral aspects (Ryff & Singer, 1996). Therefore, employing the Ryff scale in this study facilitates asking the following question.

Question Five: Psychological wellbeing – Are there differences in psychological well-being between the various typologies of non-belief? While non-belief may create conditions for maladjustment, it could be that certain types of non-believers are more amenable to maladjustment than others (Ryff & Singer, 1996).

This question provides particular insight as it may relate to the typology of non-belief regarding psychological well-being. If non-believers are finding it difficult to co-exist with believers, then it may create some maladjustment (Ryff & Singer, 1996). Additionally, by looking at the different types of non-belief, this research may discover that maladjustment is related to particular types of non-belief.

The final question relates to one's demographics and who he or she is. The "who" discussed here gives a general snapshot of the geographic, socio-economic, gender and racial/cultural background that the research participant has experienced. It may also shed greater light on demographical differences and trends as particular non-belief typologies may be more prevalent in one demographic versus another. As a hypothetical example, anti-theists, or those who are aggressively against religious belief and practice, may be more common in largely Christian communities such as those in the rural South as opposed to urban centers. Therefore, this typology might be more observed in those geographic locales. Demographics can further the research of Zuckerman (2007) in how culture and geography can shape Nonbelief communities.

Therefore, the last question is one of demographics and exploration of kinds of people who identify with non-belief.

Question Six: What are the demographics that relate to the different types of non-believers? In exploration of demographics, do particular types have a particular demographic profile more than others? In other words, would we find more males in one type of non-belief than another? Would there be a socio-economic variation by non-belief type?

Both the qualitative and quantitative portions of the study will explore demographics. The qualitative portion of the project will use demographics in creating a diverse group of interviewees. The quantitative portion will employ demographic questions to make additional explorative comparisons regarding the typology of non-believers including wherever they are from in the United States. It could be that geographic location may also be a factor in how non-believers identify themselves ideologically.

While no study of non-belief could be entirely holistic in design – simply due to the multiple perspectives available for academic examination – it is important to note that this study has the potential to explore non-belief beyond the philosophical complexities of epistemology, the historical considerations of religious evolution in the United States, and the debate among believers and non-believers as to the political implications of one's ontological position. While these areas provide an excellent backdrop and context, this study seeks to explore the psychological and sociological identity inherent to non-believers in their own words. Research could shed light on the complexity of non-belief, not only for those within academia, but also for those within the non-believer community.

## CHAPTER II

### BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The topic of Atheism is represented within a wide variety of different types of literature within academic discourse. It can be found within discussions of Theology, Religious Studies, Philosophy, and Psychology. The frequency of such texts is indicative of the popularity of such discourse (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). As noted before, there are plenty of secular and public discussions on social phenomenon of belief and, by proxy, non-belief in society. In some cases, these debates are in dialog between non-belief and religion in general or with specific reflexivity such as a non-belief versus Christianity debate (e.g. Harris, 2006). This can also include a particular group of Christians, such as the fundamentalists, that are perceived as a threat (e.g. Hitchens, 2007). The vast amounts of dialog are diverse and complex in theme and context. For example, Richard Dawkins publishes and speaks on a wide variety of topics regarding non-belief. Social commentary books also address the difficulties of being atheist in today's society (Dawkins, 2008).

While a variety of discourse exists, much of it falls within theological, philosophical, and common (popular) discourse. This study uses the term common discourse to include independent thinkers like Dawkins and Harris, who aspire to highlight the Atheist position within common dialog and mainstream media. Besides the rational approach against religion, common discourse can also include non-belief rights both political and social (Gey, 2007). Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens are all voices in a larger growing popular movement of non-belief. In America, this

movement appears to be gaining adherents as noted before. Data appears to indicate that non-belief is gaining as a collective ideology, not only among the well-educated, but also among common Americans (Leuba 1934; Larson & Witham, 1998). It is no surprise that research on non-belief is gaining academic focus within social science and academic circles.

While there is a plethora of possible foci in writing this proposal, the following pages will explore non-belief psychometrically and qualitatively, applying methodological and theoretical interpretations from sociology and psychology of religion. With this said, the literature overview will expand on the academic discourse already presented in this proposal in previous sections. This section will discuss some of the prevalent themes that have emerged in social science literature and relate it to the focus of this research. Some of those particular foci are social trends within non-belief and the characteristics of social trends, apostasy and religious exit, psychological wellbeing and Nonbelief, and data trends for non-believers.

### **Socio-Historical Trends in Non-belief in God**

This section is called social trends in non-belief as there are a variety of ways to approach the social implications of being a non-believer in America today. In one regard, non-belief may be a self-report trend within data noting changes in the American religious and cultural landscape. When one considers the social power inherent in self-identity, the caution that some place on making a public declaration of their absence of faith in religion is no surprise. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the social and cultural contexts of early America. In her work on this historical exploration of non-belief in America, Susan Jacoby (2004) plotted non-belief as far back as the American Revolution. Jacoby provides some historical context for the emergent movements of non-belief. For those who were enlightened and educated, discussion of non-belief

and Atheism were reserved for private dinner parties and closed social events. Some of the founding fathers of the United States themselves were known to express their distaste for organized religion. Jacoby (2004) shows that during the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, non-belief existed within social movements such as the deist movement. Some personalities such as Thomas Paine were assertively and publically anti-religious, opting for reason over faith in their writings. While progressive within a progressive new republic, Paine found himself disliked by most as a non-believer. Friends such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson advocated for Paine socially. However, his lack of popularity ultimately kept him in France for a large part of his life. Eventually, he was welcomed back to the United States by Jefferson, but not with the hero's welcome, he had expected. Paine died a social loner and outsider. Paine is cited here as an example that non-belief, and particularly Atheism, existed in early America, although even less popular then than now.

Those educated individuals, while likely non-believers and some atheists – Jacoby (2004) cites evidence that Franklin was likely agnostic or an atheist – sought refuge in ambiguous social contexts and shared their opinions through auspicious social writings where only others of similar education would detect their point to spark further conversation behind closed doors (p. 17). Over time in the United States, movements such as the freethinkers' movement gained interest socially. Between 1874 and 1914, freethinker organizations began to gain adherents focused on non-belief and social liberation from religion (Jacoby 2004). Paine went from being a socially inconvenient personality of history to being the innovator of rational free thought movement, placing non-belief at the beginning of the founding of the nation (Jacoby 2004). Leuba and Kantor (1917) appear to confirm Jacoby's observation between education and non-belief. Leuba's work observed that an increasing number of established and respected scientists

appeared to lack a belief in God as compared to the common every day individual. This is not to say that Leuba (1916) detected a large number of atheists or agnostics, but significant enough to raise eyebrows. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 25% of Scientists did not believe in God (Leuba, 1916). For Jacoby (2004), only a small number of individuals identified with the Freethinkers movement – some agnostic, some atheist, and some humanist. It is unfortunate that research was not conducted on the demographics of the Freethinkers movement at the turn of the century.

While no actual numbers are reported, Jacoby notes that Freethinkers, much as their religious counter parts, did attempt to convert populations to their movement. Fighting against religionists who would seek to rewrite history, the Freethinkers attempted to show that rational and secularist thinkers were some of the founding fathers of the United States. For the Freethinkers, America was not a religionist or Christian nation, but rather a pluralistic society in which secular and religionists worked together for a greater purpose of creating and sustaining a free society. For the Freethinker, plurality was about not only freedom of religion but also freedom from religion.

As previously noted, Leuba observed non-belief first in 1916, when 25% of respondents of the US National Academy of Sciences survey identified with atheistic tendencies, and again in 1934 when a total of 53% identified as lacking a belief in immortality (Leuba, 1916; 1936). Such observations regarding the educated elite are not farfetched. Even the father of psychoanalysis perceived religion to carry neurotic implications. In his writings published between 1913 and 1927, Sigmund Freud saw the need for God as having two parts. First, he saw religion, and more particularly the dependence on God, as a need for parental replacement in coping and seeking security in one's life. Believers talk to God as their father and apply personality attributes to God as if he was a parental figure (Pals, 1996). Freud believed that a psychologically adjusted individual could bring their *id* and *superego* into balance without needing an overarching deity to

regulate their behavior. According to Freud, believers need God due to a psychologically developmental deficiency (Freud, 1927; Silver, 2010). An additional component of Freud's argument is anthropological in that the father also represents the unconscious symbol of tribal leader. The God replaces the absent father. Inherent within his argument was a primitive notion of need for fatherly acceptance. Rituals such as those in religion had no utility beyond perpetuation of maladjustment of the populous (Freud, 1913). The father was the agent of social centrality organizing and perpetuating the values and rituals of religious life. In effect, the religious devotee has a psychological need through the persona of the protective biological father represented in God. The social implication is the need for fatherly control and organization through symbol and ritual. Both parts require an outside force to bring order and security to those who adhere to the social system of religion (Freud, 1913; Pals, 1996). While this is a simple representation of a deeply complex theory of religion which spans a variety of texts and writings, the reader can see that Freud – a highly educated and celebrated psychological thinker – perceived God as first an illusion and then as a delusion, and therefore perceived religious belief as symptomatic of a pathological mind (Hood, 2010). Implicit to this argument is the belief that religious devotees are weak minded, using religion as a coping mechanism. Even more implicit to Freud is that the atheist viewpoint is superior to that of the theist position, as those who accept religion are weak minded and require clinical intervention.

Freud's writings are an example of an early view many psychologists held toward religion. Some psychologists such as William James and Carl Jung were apologetic of religious experience and legitimacy of personal belief (Wulff, 1997). While much more indicative of the overall view of religion among psychologists of his time, Freud's theories provide an interesting example in showing how psychologists at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century viewed religious belief as



potentially neurotic or psychotic. A shift in view has certainly occurred today with religious belief seen as part of everyday human experience that is accepted in the social and psychological sphere.

While scientists appeared to have proportionally higher non-belief self-declarations, Vetter and Green (1931) attempted to understand what causes individuals to become self-declared atheists. This is another example of social trends in non-belief; except, in this example, parental involvement and rearing are the factors that inform the socialization of non-belief developmentally. Focusing on questions of the childhood of research participants, Vetter and Green discovered that 42% of American Atheists parents were American born indicating that 58% were not native to the US. Of the overall religious traditions that contribute to atheist offspring, Methodism and Judaism comprised 82.5% of the overall sample. It could be that these were more liberal traditions within the northeast sample taken by Vetter and Green. An interesting finding of Vetter and Green's research was that more than half of the atheist survey had lost at least one parent prior to his or her 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. Additionally, Atheist participants showed twice as many older children than younger children assuming there might be a potential birth order effect. Finally, in social connections with religion, the largest percentage of atheists left religious traditions between the ages of 15 and 24 (Vetter & Green, 1931). Vetter and Green's research highlights the finding that social factors appear to have a strong relationship with non-belief identity, especially from a developmental perspective. This suggests that the experiences that non-believers have as children could explain their ideological choice as young adults. Vetter and Green's research would have likely been more robust had they considered a qualitative and, more particularly, a narrative approach to the discussion of childhood factors in

the exploration of non-belief. Further research should be conducted in exploring the implications of one's individual narrative in plotting his or her life trajectory.

The small subgroup defined as atheist has also been included within the social science "nones" category (Vernon, 1968; Pasquale, 2007). Vernon (1968) notes that most psychology-of-religion research was primarily interested in belief and affiliation, using the subcategory of "nones" as a means to round out a sample or population of 100% participating. In a sense, researchers had to explain their population descriptively while deliberately neglecting those who did not self-identify with a particular religious orientation. Vernon's (1968) research results revealed that it appears that there is a negative perceptive quality to those who do not self-identify within a particular religious or belief structure. The "none" category as a negative perceptive quality is unwarranted and not productive of future research. Vernon (1968), notes that there appear to be complex characteristics to those who identify as "nones." Some of those observations include that some nones do attend services, have a humanistic worldview of transcendental and human experience, have additional characteristics that should be developed, based on the diverse profile that exists, and that there may be latent social norms within religious and secular membership not yet understood (Vernon, 1968).

Vernon's work noted that there was emerging complexity of those who did not affiliate with particular religious identities. As we know from later research, the nones were likely a combination of emerging spiritual individuals combined with agnostic and atheist individuals. This would likely explain the complexity of the "none" category that Vernon observed. This research continued discovering individuals who were disaffiliated or unaffiliated with religion. The historical and social science research certainly show a growing trend, but this leads to the

next perspective that examines the overall sociological phenomenon of growing trends in secularization versus open market theories in religion.

### **The Secularization Phenomena and Sociology of Religion**

In discussing the sociology of Atheism and Agnosticism, one cannot exclude the secularization conversation. As society continues to transition to a more pluralistic, culturally relativist, and a post-modernist era, much of the academic conversation has shifted to the role of secularization in modern social change. As noted in previous sections of this paper, self-identity continues to become more complex in a variety of ways. Terms such as religious, spiritual, agnostic, and atheist have sociological as well as psychological implications. While non-belief can be described psychologically, secularization appears to be more attuned with sociological discourse as it is concerned with the separation of church and state. With this said, there are varied uses of the root word secular within sociological literature such as secularization, secularism, and the secular (Bruce, 2011).

Congruently, Swantos and Christiano (1999) assert similar terms of “secularization, secularity, or the secular” as do other authors (e.g. Casanova, 2009). Swantos and Christiano note that secular rooted words appear to be used interchangeably as a related religious term – most typically its opposite. The term has its first use in the social sciences by Max Weber (1930), who used the term “secularization” to define the shift in individual affiliations from religious sects to high social status organizations such as fraternal societies and distinguished clubs. Weber (1946) later used the term secularization as a synonym with intellectualization, indicating that he expected a shifting social focus on epistemology beyond the ontological reaches of religious interpretative meaning. In other words, Weber saw that social intelligence, in many

respects, was shifting social, political, and economic concerns away from religious and theological interpretations. Weber's concerns with social allegiance and knowledge certainly show that sociologists have been aware of an emergent social shift within the interpretations of religion in society.

It is no surprise that Emile Durkheim was also just as concerned with such social shifts as Weber. Durkheim (1933) observed that the origins of morality began within smaller social groups. These morals or rules ensured that the members could work together, avoiding conflicts and ensuring trust. These issues were encompassed in social solidarity, common consciousness, morality and its systems, and types of law. As social boundaries widened and became more inclusive of more diverse populations, morality became more abstract and spoken of in analogous terms. Durkheim termed this traversing in morality "culture generalization," where society shifts from the social concerns of one particular group's morality to abstract forms of morality that can be applied to the larger populous (Durkheim, 1933). In a sense, abstract morality becomes a product of social diversity.

Allen (2010) provides commentary on Durkheim's work, noting that the greater the diversity of the society, the greater the need for alternative systems of social reinforcement to create compliant social identity. Diverse groups begin to share a common geographical or ideological identity, which can then create a collective consciousness with which the population can identify and can feel part. As an example, people begin not to speak in terms of Christian values according to Allen – in an interpretation of Durkheim – but rather American values. American values may encompass Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian values – all contributing a greater social ideology and ideological terrene of the greater society (Allen, 2010). Worded differently, people identify with their country or political ideology versus a smaller

cultural or religious group. Such a shift from culture and religion to socially diverse identities could be defined as secularization. It appears that Durkheim, like Weber, was aware of the nationalistic shift and move toward cultural and religious diversity. It is clear that early social theorists were already detecting social changes in western societies toward more pluralistic and culturally relative states, which could explain the social shift to secular ideals.

While many assume that secularization is an evolutionary process or, in a sense, a linear building toward the removal of religion entirely from society, other forms of secularization theory exists as well. Goldstein (2009) argued that Secularization has three additional theoretical forms. The first is a cyclical or spiral theory of secularization. This model is based on Pareto's cyclical pattern where social movements reoccur over human history. The cyclical model asserts that social movements rise, fall, and repeat themselves over time with minor variability. The next form of secularization theory is the dialectical, which is determined by conflict-informed social change (Goldstein, 2009). In dialectical secularization, social shifts occur as a product of counter movements to the mainstream. Society is continually in tension between groups as shifts in the social consciousness are produced through antagonism, negotiation, and conflict. There is no predictive quality to dialectical secularization except where social movements gain adherents in a democratic system. Adherence to new ideas in large movements can assure change. The third and final theoretical form of secularization is called paradoxical secularization. This theory assumes the structure of post-modernism in that paradoxical secularization both attempts to incorporate modernity while also attempting to disregard its linear quality of change. Paradoxical secularization assumes change but, unlike the linear model, asserts that it is inconsistently radical in one moment and docile in another. Paradoxical secularization assumes that change can be observed, but not predicted (Goldstein, 2009). With the varied theoretical positions proposed in

secularization theory, social scientists are concerned with a shift toward the socially irreligious in social, political, and economic interests.

There is no universal agreement about secularization. In some theories of secularization, modernization becomes the catalyst through which religion is challenged as an integrated social system. Secularization appears compartmentalized and fragmented, pushing religion away from the civic institution. Additionally, in some cases religious traditions rely on the state to ensure their operation (examples such as Germany and United Kingdom), while in others, religion is simply outside of the broader sphere of public and social life (Sweden). In any case, shifts in the interpretative meaning of the phrase “separation of church and state” are certainly at the forefront of sociology of religion. Conversely, issues of authentic “religiousness” or belief also become one component of the secularization argument. For some sociologists of religion, genuine commitment goes beyond simple self-identity of calling oneself “religious” or “Christian” to encompass monetary, resource, or attendance-based commitment. Some researchers also look at the daily and weekly behaviors of self-described religious individuals such as prayer, ritual, and a self-educating process in one’s faith as indicators of religious commitment. Unfortunately, disagreement still exists as to the level of commitment one must achieve to be considered “religious” (Bruce, 2011).

For prominent secularization authors such as Taylor (2007), modern unbelief is simply a reaction to the cognitive dissonance created by the irrationality of belief and modernity (p. 269). Taylor believes that secularization is a natural progression of the society. In a sense, secular means modern in its modus operandi as a sociological theory (Taylor, 2007). While Taylor’s work is rooted in the phenomenological, it certainly has psychological implications for the individuals in a secular society of a secular society. As secularization shifts society away from

the primitive aspects of religious belief to embrace modernism (social reinforcement), so does the individual shift (psychological) away from religion by embracing more individualized forms of faith such as spirituality, Agnosticism, and even Atheism (e.g. see Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009 on horizontal versus vertical cosmology). It is unclear what the reinforcing factor may be for the individual. It might be society in the form of cultural relativism/post-modernistic thought. It could be pluralism of religious options within the society. Alternatively, it simply may be Taylor's assertion that subtraction theories account for the social strata left when a social movement dies (Taylor, 2007). In other words, when religion is removed from the social equation, secularization is the social system left in which humans function. This is why Taylor asserts that our age has become a secular age in that science is slowly and indirectly addressing the inconsistency posed by religion. To use psychological terms, we have become a society of coping where the social connections between culture and religion continue to become compartmentalized.

Some faith traditions attempt to create their own religious cultures within which to address the divergence between the social and the religious (e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses), while others attempt to function with the society as a "mainstream" group (Methodists, Anglican), adapting and negotiating the changes and progressions which manifest over time (Streib et al., 2009). It is likely that Taylor, much like the other scholars discussed, would disagree about how secularization functions. Nevertheless, whether it is a linear, cyclical, dialectical, or paradoxical proposition, it is likely they would all agree that it is certainly not a utopian idea. Secularism and similar terms such as secularization are tied to the phenomena of non-belief as the social backdrop for the ever-changing social nature of ontology.

Certainly, the concept is loaded with a variety of interpretations as to the function or nature of the social system. Secularization is one of two theories to explain the interplay between the religious and civic domains (Dobbelaere, 1999). The key modern theorist within the secularization argument is Steve Bruce who asserts that secularization is inevitable. The other argument is the religious open market theory proposed by Rodney Stark and Roger Finke (2000), where religious belief will flourish given a truly free market with open competition by religious traditions for adherents. The next two subsections discuss these theories as proposed by the principle authors.

### **The Theory of Secularization According to Steve Bruce**

One of the most celebrated works on secularization is Steve Bruce's (2002) work "God is Dead: Secularization in the West," where he provides an operational definition of Secularization:

In Brief, I see secularization as a social condition manifest in (a) the declining importance of religion for the operation of non-religious roles and institutions such as those of the state and the economy; (b) a decline in the social standing of religious roles and institutions; and (c) a decline in the extent to which people engage in the religious practices, display beliefs of a religious kind, and conduct other aspects of their lives in a manner informed by such beliefs. (p. 3)

Additionally Bruce (2002) sees secularization as a result of modernization and technology. What is more, as diversity increases, so does the need for secular systems to ensure a level playing field within democracy. No one group has a monopoly on truth. All groups are equal within the state and, hence, cultural relativism is born. In terms of new religious movements, such groups that Bruce terms as "Sects" eventually find some means of adjusting to mainstream social norms. Bruce terms this means of self-adjustment as "self-corrupting." Secularization for Bruce is not



simply a smooth transition from religious to the secular society but rather may occur in a series of gradual and radical shifts. Bruce believes that science and particular rational formalized thought processes undermine religion as they challenge faith and theological perspectives through empirical testing and scientific theory. With science, no priest or religious authority can interpret formalized information, but rather individuals have the processes and formal understanding to interpret reality and the world for themselves. Finally, Bruce argues that while there appears to be a temporally linear component to the secularization of society, in fact secularization is cyclical as much of those social shifts to and from religiosity and end with a stronger secular social focus and a weaker social adherence to religion. Conservative religiosity is an example of religionists digging in as the world becomes more secular. Bruce would argue that while they are creating firm religious and cultural bounds within which to address the social movement toward the secular; they, like religion as a whole, are becoming more secular – hence the perceived threat.

Related to the issue of Atheism, Bruce explores the ontological position of Atheism as related to religion. Bruce states that questioning the nature of reality is rooted within the philosophical debate in secular humanism. Bruce also cites the literature on those who self-describe as religious “nones.” This is a popular topic within the social-scientific literature on religion, within both psychology and sociology. Bruce argues, much the same as this paper, that the nones are a diverse category with a variety of individuals who self-identify with the term. For example, some may be opposed to organized religion but still have belief in a higher power; others may find the idea of religion repulsive – indicating an anti-religious ontology. Bruce questions the ambiguity of the term in its application to social-science research. Additionally, Bruce takes note of methodological issues of construct validity in research. In those cases,

researchers who have a pro-religious reflexivity may word questionnaire items in such a way as to assume that atheists and non-believers have behavioral and cognitive dissonance as a result of faith. The result of such dissonance is perceived to cause their religious deconversion. An example might be asking atheists if they are mad at God as a reason for their deconversion and exit from faith. The motivation in such constructions is to assume that the research participant's deconversion is an effect of said disillusionment and psychological distress versus a rational choice (Bruce, 2002). This is much like asking a panel of men "how much do you beat your wife," and assuming that they are just in denial when they respond that they do not engage in such behavior. Such methodologies of inference lack the objective scientific inquiry required in a new and growing social science field in non-religion.

In Bruce's (2011) work "Secularization, In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory," he argues that secular progression is by no means a simple phenomenon, but rather derives from a variety of social, cultural, and psychosocial factors. First, Bruce positions secularization within the Christian history of Europe, citing four major historical shifts within the socio-cultural fabric of European religion. He cites the following as key shifts in cultural and religious Europe: Conversions of Kings and Princes of Early Europe, Religious purification by the friars of Medieval Europe, Martin Luther, and the Protestant Reformation. He states that these movements eventually led to individualism and a shift away from forced belief that then spawned cultural relativism. Cultural relativism is one of the factors that Bruce sees as indicative of his secularization model. Since no particular tradition can claim absolute truth within society, everyone has beliefs and values that are equal. This inevitably leads to liberal democratic ideals.

Religious commitment becomes another factor that Bruce states is indicative of the social shift to Secularization. Bruce argues that intense commitment – in the form of attendance and

personal sacrifice – is the true quantifiable measure of religiosity. As is observed in Europe and in North America, commitment is waning in lieu of other more socio-political secular agendas. In the case of the United States, Bruce states that the religious right is forced to use secular language to express its devotees' political ideas. Therefore, instead of saying that God wants American society to protect Israel, they might say that Israel is a strategic partner in the region and therefore a strong ally and must be protected. Another challenge that Bruce makes is to the open-market theory of religion. In this, Bruce argues that methodological impotence, as well as a lack of methodological consistency and complexity, has resulted in the mistaken academic perception that countries like the United States have become more religious and not less.

Bruce argues that many theories of religious belief and commitment are based on self-report and therefore too inclusive of those who may only be self-described loosely affiliated religionists. When proper methodological processes are applied in research, social quantitative data trends show that there are decreases in religious belief and commitment across westernized and modern countries. Bruce calls for more longitudinal studies of religion to be conducted. He suspects that these would further confirm the influx of secularization within western countries. For those countries that are not modern, religious commitment is much higher. This indicates a positive relationship between modernity and secularization. Bruce also addresses spirituality, which he states lacks any true commitment on the part of the participant. Again, this is another indicator that secularization is increasing since spirituality is simply self-description with no indicators of individual sacrifice for one's faith or in giving to a religious organization as a means of reinforcing spiritual ideals (Bruce, 2011).

With Bruce's historical sociological comparative position, faith and belief are forms of individual behavior and self-sacrifice. In this theory, Bruce sees society as shifting away from

social manifestations of public faith to more individualized and less-authentic forms of private belief such as spirituality. For example, religious language in the United States is increasingly lacking any true social commitment on the part of the adherent or the society – thereby indicating a secularizing effect on American society. Such shifts in the European context are much easier to ascertain, based on individual self-report and clear recognition by participants that faith as a whole is in decline within the society. While there are examples of proactive secular political processes at work in some governments in the world (e.g. Communist countries like China and the former Soviet Union), Bruce would argue that the natural tendency, through social evolution and modernization, is to shift away from religious institutionalization and moral enforcement towards secular manifestations of humanism as a common social ethic. Many of Bruce’s critiques of methodological inquiry and calls for more objectivity in social science research do require further consideration.

Alternatively, the critiques of methods and definitional theoretical boundaries should be delineated. In other words, calling an adherent “truly religious” in Bruce’s model requires a level of commitment, which may not be possible in the fast-paced capitalistic and production-focused world of Modern America. Within this assertion is the idea that Americans have become so busy in their daily lives between work and family, that religious devotion becomes an afterthought to more mundane and worldly concerns. While many ascribe to some form of belief within the United States, such behavior is limited in their weekly routine if it is there at all. By these operational definitions, only those of the clergy might be considered religious. Conversely, it may be helpful as those defined in relative terms like the “nones” – or in specific terms like atheists and agnostics – may simply operate within religious institutions or spiritual social circles; but, for themselves, lack a personal ontological position or even any in-depth

understanding of the theological complexities within the American religious landscape. It is possible that such individuals exist and would need to be sought in order to identify a more definitive statistical construction of the nature of American religious landscape. While secularization is a popular theory within the field of sociology of religion, it by no means is the only social theory to explain the changes in western society.

### **Market share and religious adherents – The Stark and Finke perspective**

The other alternative popular theory to secularization is the open market of religion. In this theory, religious organizational success (including the propagation of a particular ontological and theological message) relates to the tension in the society to recognize and permit the competition between faith traditions to gain adherents. If tension is high in the host culture against religious traditions, which are not considered normative (by normative, meaning state recognized religions), then religious diversity and commitment will be low. In societies where tension is low and competition is permitted for new adherence between faith traditions, religious adherence and self-identity is more likely to be high. As an example, a Pentecostal individual in the American context is considered normative and her faith tradition is just as valid as the Methodist, which might be considered more mainstream.

According to Stark and Finke (2000), the Pentecostal individual can invite others through her familial and social relationships to attend and eventually join her religious tradition. From the networking and connections she has with society, she is able to grow her religious tradition – progressively moving it towards being perceived as a mainstream faith tradition. This split between low- and high-tension traditions has its origins in the church-and-sect theory and – or more properly termed – classification. Churches have a low degree of tension while sects have a

high degree of tension. In some regards, new religious movements might be considered a sect. The Hare Krishna movement (also known as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness), on the other hand, has multiple generations of devotees and immigrant followers. It also has a high degree of tension (theological and cultural) and, according to the theory, would be considered a sect. This is not always the case, though, as traditions like Pentecostalism are relatively new but are also typically accepted by the mainstream community. Regardless of the level of tension, these traditions still compete with each other for adherents. For some within the sect category, inclusion also requires a high level of behavioral adherence. Those unable to comply with the requirement may be excommunicated or shunned as worldly. For those in the church category, such behavior may not be sanctioned by the faith, but removal of the tradition is highly unlikely (Stark and Finke, 2000).

The market model also assumes a typical economic system of supply and demand. In this the supplier – in the form of the tradition or deity – and the demand of the devotee or adherent assumes an exchange of services rendered between the two parties. The supplier can give assurances to the devotee regarding rewards for behavior such as prayer, worship, or ritual. The devotee gains the benefits of his or her lifelong payments in whatever form is considered acceptable by the tradition or canon (Stark and Finke, 2000). Implied in the Stark and Finke model is an assumption of mercantile exchange between deity and devotee. While the sociological perspective can only speak to collective shifts and changes within religious groups (whether emergent, isomorphic, or classical in nature), psychology can speak to the particular components of said groups within the adherent's perspective. In any case, Stark and Finke's model appears to be a model of exchange. This exchange allows individuals to gain social capital within their tradition. By seeking, proselytizing, and converting new members, groups can gain

complexity and grow – eventually assuming mainstream status within the modern society. The adherents also gain benefit not only from the divine, but also social benefit through membership. Alternatively, the individual's commitment and sharing of the faith is reinforced through their connection with others of the same faith.

Nevertheless, the greatest limitation of the Stark and Finke model is that it ignores the quality of experience. For those within faith, they may find their religious experiences meaningful; adding a layer of value to their lives. Besides the experiential aspects of faith, the cognitive is also ignored. Stark and Finke assume that there may be a new message or theology which gains interest by members of the populace, but they fail to admit the possibility that the message may resonate with people better than more traditional modes of faith. For example, Western Buddhism is gaining popularity in the United States and Europe. This popularity is not due to social connections of Buddhist converts, but through agreement with Buddhist ideology and the use of media such as the internet to make social connection between people of like mind (Lopez, 1998). The mode of social connection shifts from face to face networking to internet-based networking with mediums like Facebook or online chat rooms. This type of emergence and gain is not accounted for in the Stark and Finke model.

Buddhism as a whole certainly carries behavioral and ideological differences from the mainstream society. As is noted by scholars such as Lopez (1998), it is growing in popularity. Within the Buddhist movement are also adherents who appreciate the tradition and ritual as well as the psychological benefits of Buddhist practice, but may not adhere or ascribe to the cosmological perspectives represented in the belief in Karma or enlightened beings. Buddhism, as a social system, still fits the category of a religious tradition according to Stark and Finke, and yet it also undermines their theory due to the way it is growing in the United States. Buddhist

adherents are educated and show interest in the environment indicating a concern for social awareness. Such awareness has prompted a social shift for many adherents to and from protest movements to Buddhism (Kent, 2001). However many come to Buddhism through intellectual engagement. It appears that the social networking proposed by Stark and Finke seems to happen later. Further research would need to be conducted to determine to what frequency such intellectual-to-social shifts occur. Finally, Buddhists share many characteristics with non-belief (such as the concept of no God) and yet the movement grows without the social connections required by the Stark and Finke Model. Certainly, the social aspects likely reinforce the adherent's values following their conversion. For example with Buddhists, the Sangha is one of the three foundations providing religious community. While Sangha is in addition to the Buddha (the teacher) and Dhamma (the message) – it appears not to be the starting point for many new devotees, at least in North America. The literature and message appear to be the points of origin (Lopez, 1998).

If one examines non-belief and its ideological absolute of Atheism within sociological terms, one can see the social tension created between a culturally religious society and non-belief – both from the psychological perspective in the form of cognitive dissonance and within the sociological perspective in the form of social compliance/adherence. From one perspective, non-belief could be perceived as a sect in that it is a loosely affiliated group that experiences social tension with the larger population. While the concern with behavior is questionable, it certainly carries some degree deviant belief. It is unclear if authors such as Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris provide central authorities for a growing movement. Additional research would be required to determine the social structure of non-belief and how individuals cope with the varying levels of social tension, which may or may not exist in their society.



## **Secularization versus the market share model**

While other sociological theories exist in relation to sociology of religion, this review address the secularization theory and market theory as they can explain how non-belief is growing as a social movement. Is Atheism a product of secularization or is it simply another form of spiritual market share as noted by Stark and Finke? One perspective that the reader could presume about the secularization argument is that such social conditions can create the appropriate context for the emergence and sustainability of Atheism and Agnosticism. This is particularly the case in social and political systems that assert freedom of religion, which can also be understood as freedom from religion. While geographic locations such as Europe (particularly Sweden or the United Kingdom) may contain a high proportion of self-described non-believers, the United States in particular asserts more people who self-describe as being religious and spiritual (Stark, 1999). Swantos and Christiano (1999) assert that the term secular indicates a depreciation of religious commitment over time. The problem in determining secularization on the ground is determining at what point religious behaviors and commitment depreciate. What are the variables a social scientist must observe longitudinally to determine depreciation of belief within a society? What is the threshold where a society can be considered secular? These questions must be answered in any definition of “authentic” religious commitment versus authentic secularization. While Bruce, as well as Stark and Finke, have their theories related to such “thresholds,” both parties appear to be very ideologically different in their perspective.

Another perspective to consider is that Atheism or Agnosticism is a reactionary belief system which has its own ethics, theological or metaphysical principles (with some aspects

juxtaposed against the culturally religious perspective as assumed in conservative American media), and behavioral norms that would be found within other social “belief” systems. Since non-belief is gaining adherents and is concerned with the nature of the transcendental; or, in this case the lack thereof, it might be useful to speak of non-belief using the sociological language of religion. Cultural relativism and post-modernism certainly create a theoretical paradox for social scientists. In one regard, democratic societies with no state-recognized religion have the social space for competition between faith traditions. The social trend of this competition is unclear, For Bruce, any emergent gain in the faithful is simply irrelevant to the overall social trend of secularization. For scholars such as Stark and Finke, such trends are telling of a market economy where opportunity meets the charismatic innovator in the form of new faiths. This might explain the theoretical paradigmatic differences between sociologists such as Stark and Finke versus Bruce.

That said, reflexivity might play a role here as well. It appears that the geographic origin of the author plays a crucial role in how they perceive the secular phenomena. Those from Europe may see secularization as the eventual result of a long process of social change, while some American authors see secularization as a product of restrictive governmental influences unwilling to accept openly and institutionally new and different faith traditions within their country. The United States is perceived as a religious nation with a high level of self-reported faith versus western European nations. As the social context and residence of Stark and Finke, this may explain their inability to embrace the secularization argument. Conversely, Bruce may also suffer from socialization as well, as he is from the United Kingdom where non-belief is on the rise. Bruce sees the increasing use of secular language, even by politically religious and conservative elements within American society, as an indicator of movement of American

culture toward secularization. It could be that Bruce, as well as Stark and Finke, cannot objectively step outside of their own cultural contexts. The data – while objectively collected – is interpreted through the bounds of each author’s culturally relative position, with each subconsciously relying on their reflexive positions to look for patterns in social trends. The question left from the secularization debate is that of what defines belief versus non-belief. What defines a legitimate devotee versus a non-believer? For Bruce, church attendance becomes the measurable independent variable while self-described belief is the variable for Stark and Fink. Therefore, the current argument is juxtaposed between the eventual disbanding of traditions over time in favor of cultural relativity versus the open market concept of religion where all traditions have an equal opportunity to gain converts and believers, and therefore more people identify with belief. This leads to the next topic related to non-belief narrative. The topic is religious apostasy and exit.

### **Apostasy and Exit**

Another concept that has emerged in non-belief research is the concept of Apostasy. Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009) define apostasy as “the degree to which it is a permanent abandonment of faith” on behalf of the former devotee. Typically associated with terms such as “unchurched or “religious nones,” apostasy has been explored in terms of childhood transition and changes in commitment (pp.132-133). Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977) proposed a theory of apostasy asserting four factors that may contribute to one’s exit and disaffiliation. Those four factors are: poor parental relationships, neurotic tendencies or maladjustment, extreme leftist political views, and commitment to intellectual ideals (pp. 51-76). Caplovitz and Sherrow’s research was an attempt to construct a typology of apostasy, which could be applied to various

types of exits from religious belief (Caplovitz and Sherrow, 1977). Following this research, Hunsberger (1980; 1983) attempted to explore similar factors in understanding how one becomes an apostate. Hunsberger's (1980) research found little to no evidence in support of the Caplovitz and Sherrow four-factor model. Particularly, Hunsberger (1980; 1983) found that neurotic or maladjustment and radical leftist political orientations had no quantitative support. Hunsberger discovered that the apostates and their parents shared a poor relationship with each other (Hunsberger, 1983). This either was caused by or was a result of their apostasy.

Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993) asserted that apostasy was part of two factors. Those factors were psychological and sociological components of religion. The authors also noted a four-part sociological typology of belief. Those four aspects or careers are Stalwarts, Converts, Apostates, and Switchers. Stalwarts are defined as those who continued their religious belief and affiliation with no change over time. Converts are defined as those who are not affiliated with a religious belief or denomination noted as the "religious nones." Apostates are those who were affiliated with a tradition as a child but are no longer connected emotionally to a tradition. Switchers are those who were part of one tradition but have switched to another. Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993), while exploring all four of the belief typologies, focused particularly on apostasy. They discovered that those in the apostasy group appeared to be "less happy" than their religiously affiliated counterparts. They also observed that, while apostates may have disaffiliated within their mind and heart, they might still participate socially within religious groups and traditions. They are just less likely to hold beliefs or participate in religious practices than their religious counterparts. Apostates are more likely to question perceived theological inconsistencies, with religious doubt as the driving force for emotional and cognitive exit from religion (Brinkerhoff and Mackie, 1993). Brinkerhoff and Mackie's research is helpful in

exploring apostasy in the context of other forms of belief. Their typology helped to identify smaller populations of apostasy as a specific type of one's belief as opposed to the larger populations of the affiliated and converted. This gave greater social and ideological context in relation to apostasy.

Another concept and area of research that has emerged within the literature is deconversion. While Apostasy is a term descriptive of one who has exited a religious belief tradition, deconversion is the process of exit. This includes all of the cognitive, social, and psychological factors that change as part of the process of exiting tradition. Within some types of academic discourse, religious conversion is presented as a process of switching of one tradition or belief system to another. Deconversion is the process of disaffiliation and all that it entails. In Barbour's (1994, pp. 1-30) narrative research on religious exits, he asserted that deconversion was distinguished by four characteristics. Those characteristics are intellectual doubt, moral criticism, emotional suffering, and disaffiliation. These characteristics appear to prompt the deconvert to leave his or her religious tradition. Streib notes that religious deconversion is one theme for understanding why non-believers leave their former religious traditions. Such research has discovered that there are a variety of exits motifs such as forced exit, cognitive dissonance with theological principles, or social disagreement (Streib et al., 2009). Each of these motifs is some form of crisis. The resulting process includes a variety of characteristics. Those are review with reflection, disaffection, withdrawal, and transition to a reorganization of cognition. The process results in social and psychological change (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009).

The Streib et al. (2009) study showcased that deconversion was not a process solely limited to new religious movements. While the two-part study explored new religious movements as a component, it also explored deconversion from normative religious groups

within Germany and the United States. Particularly, the study sought deconverts from particular religious traditions and compared their quantitative and qualitative interviews with that of those residing within the tradition they exited. From this extensive international project, Streib and colleagues identified four types of deconvert narratives. The first type is “pursuit of autonomy,” where the individual seeks freedom, independence and personal growth (pp. 113-136). The next type is “debarred from paradise,” where crisis compels the adherent to deconvert. This type usually causes the individual to be disillusioned or to feel abandoned (pp. 139-169). The third type of deconvert is called “barred from paradise.” In this type, the individual finds increased self-reflection on their former belief and association, characterized through their continued exploration of those experiences. The fourth and final type is “the finding of a new frame of reference.” In this type, the deconvert begins to reshape his or her values and beliefs into an alternative perspective, seeking new ideas and concepts that he or she can patch into a mosaic of belief. The persons exemplifying this type are typically more open-minded and typically consider themselves “spiritual but not religious” (pp. 171-192). The study discovered that cultural differences do exist. For Americans, deconversion can be a time of growth and reorientation to the world where experience is fruitful in creating an adjusted person. For Germans, deconversion is a time of crisis and difficulty. This is likely due to the limited marketplace of belief that permeates the German religious landscape (Streib et al., 2009).

Borrowing from Stark and Finke’s (2000) spiritual capital model, American believers are the market share in which each tradition and belief system is competing for additional adherents (Stark & Finke, 2000). Through this competition, the populace is going to be more receptive to different belief systems, and religion is going to be more socially accepted due to its equal competitive position within society. Streib et al. (2009) uses this model to explain the

psychological differences in deconversion between the American and German samples. Bruce would likely see Streib's research as additional confirmation of the social shift away from religious commitment. The fact that either various individuals shift from tradition to tradition or they leave religion altogether for an individual spiritual quest would – in Bruce's theory – further confirm that religion is socially dissipating.

Apostasy and Deconversion are both pieces of the overall narrative of non-believers. Apostasy and deconversion both assume an exit from belief or social association, which might not hold true for all non-belief individuals. Other non-believers may have been raised in atheist or agnostic homes by atheist or agnostic parents, excluding them from an exit narrative based in apostasy or deconversion. Hunsberger (1980; 1983) asserts that their life experience would obviously be different from those raised in religious belief, even if that belief was marginal. Those from a strict religious upbringing may find their deconversion a traumatic and misadjusting experience, shifting from belief to non-belief.

### **Psychological Implications of Non-Belief**

One might assume that religion provides a meaningful structure to explain difficult times in one's life. In many cases, religion provides for many people an interpretative template in which to structure their suffering and therefore derive meaning and growth through difficult times. For Kenneth Pargament (1999; 2001), religion can be a useful system of meaning along with therapy to abet individuals beyond simply secular therapeutic practices. Moreover, Pargament notes that for many, crises help people learn their limitations and strengths in the face of adversity. Citing McCrae's (1984) work on coping mechanisms, Pargament notes that out of 28 coping mechanism presented to participants, faith was the second most commonly used

method for dealing with threat (72%) and loss (75%). In this, religion can be a mechanism in coping. In a sense, those who believe and find religion meaningful may also interpret their suffering within the bounds of their ideology (Pargament 2001).

For others, belief serves no clinical benefit. What about those who have no religious beliefs? What about those who experience suffering and have no religious template or context to apply to their life? Pargament (2001) notes that non-believers find meaning in suffering, much like their believer counterparts. He cites examples of Jews who were agnostic before, during, and after the holocaust. While some saw the holocaust as a theological uncertainty or, worse, a radical theological juxtapositional event; others simply saw it as an event in human history outside of the bounds of anything theological or religious. When offered a choice for those who are marginally religious, they more often prefer religious methods of coping versus non-religious. However, while values of religious belief have some viable application for dealing with crisis, trauma and stress can also cause individuals to shift away from religious belief. For these individuals, Pargament notes that religion fails to address traumatic experiences within the non-believer's purview and therefore lead them to more secular explanations of suffering (Pargament, 2001).

As noted, religiousness is associated with psychological well-being, providing context and meaning for suffering and distress. Catherine Ross (1990) observed that individuals that are deeply religious showed lower psychological distress levels than those with a weaker faith. Identifying with institutions may be a factor in individuals coping with distress. A surprising finding of Ross' (1990) study was that individuals without a religious belief also exhibited low levels of psychological distress. Ross notes that perhaps a choice of belief or lack thereof could be one important factor in addressing distress, while those who identify with a religion but lack



commitment or belief may be the most self-estranged (Ross 1990). In addition to strong belief and lack of belief, Ross observed that individuals with higher education and a willingness to express feelings and emotions also exhibited lower levels of distress (Ross, 1990).

Ross's research highlights that there can be variation in psychological adjustment and distress for those of belief and those without. Interestingly, it may be that non-belief may still look to social institutions for comfort and belonging. Further research would be required to determine if secular institutions provide social meaning. Nevertheless, what is evident from Ross' research is that education appears to be a factor, which seems to confirm Leuba's position that academics represent a larger amount of atheist identity than the regular population. What is apparent is that religion can be helpful, but is not required to deal with distress and traumatic events in life.

Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann (2006) observed that intermarriage was an excellent predictor of attitudes toward religious and cultural groups. Americans were far more likely to discriminate against non-belief individuals as opposed to Muslim populations. During research interviews, one set of participant's perceived Atheism as being associated with immorality and drug use threatening American communities. Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann posed implicit connections between religious community, belief in immortality, and the variability in perceptions between in-groups and out-groups. The researchers assumed that religious community membership is perceived as an indicator of morality. Immorality was tied to improper behavior as perceived by believers about non-believers. Research participants saw non-believers as not sharing their concerns about certain behaviors, whether moral or immoral. Such differences created the perception of in-group/out-group tension, which caused believers to distrust non-believers. While drug use may be considered appropriate within particular religious

communities, believers in the study considered it as a notable immoral characteristic through which a non-believer could be identified. Other research participants perceived atheists to be cultural elites and rampant materialists. In both qualitative examples, participants perceived atheists as ego-centered individuals only concerned with themselves and not with social or common good (Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, 2006). Such social perception may create the necessity for non-believers to come together for social and moral support. If Pargament (2001) and Ross's (1990) assertion is correct in that non-believers experience less distress, even when social perception is primarily negative, then it would stand to reason that non-believers are finding comfort in some type of social system.

What about the applicability of counseling and non-belief? D'Andrea and Sprenger (2007) observed that the growing community of non-belief requires counseling and clinical professionals to reevaluate therapy styles. Actually, many clinicians are incorporating religion and belief in their work with clients. For those who have no belief, this creates a unique problem of interpreting life experiences – especially issues of suffering. D'Andrea and Sprenger (2007) note that an extensive amount of academic literature exists on incorporating belief with therapy as a potential useful treatment. However, little to no critical work has been done on non-belief coupled with therapy. D'Andrea and Sprenger explored a variety of case studies of non-believers who were addressing critical points in their life. In one case, the client experienced the death of her young daughter. The counselor chose to shift from religious themes of forgiveness and meaning to the client's perception of morality and value. By the therapist shifting to focus on the issue of bad luck in the mind of the client, they assisted in self-assessment versus transcendent meaning.

In another example, a clinician attempted to assist a dying cancer patient. In this, the counselor offered to pray with the patient as a means of dealing with the cancer. The patient, an adamant non-believer, asserted her belief that God did not exist. While she believed she was part of something greater in the universe, she did not believe in a creator God. The two talked about the patient's non-belief and the life events that lead her to this path. The clinician was later present during the passing of the patient. While his beliefs differed from those of his patient, he learned that individuals do not necessarily need religion to deal with non-existence. D'Andrea and Sprenger assert that there are suggestions that clinicians can follow to work with those of non-belief. First, ask if the client observes any celebrations or traditions. Second, honor the differences between patient and clinical professional. Third, validate non-religious experience as those who do not believe may experience social prejudice and pressure. Fourth, focus on personality responsibility and the reality of empowering the client through personal choice and self-determination. Fifth, respect the privacy of the client, as they may be protective of their beliefs and views due to social stigma. By allowing the client to guide the process of discussion, they will talk, as they feel safe. Sixth, engage in self-reflection. Counselors should consider exploring their own experiences and beliefs and decide what can help or hinder the growth of the client. Seventh, be sincere in their interactions with patients. If the counselor is having difficulty connecting or understanding their client's experience, they should be honest and consider referring them to another therapist who is more equipped to hand their case. The eighth and final suggestion is to seek consultation with other professionals regarding troubling cases of a spiritual and/or religious nature. In some cases, seeking professionals, either religious or secular, can assist in treating the client (D'Andrea and Sprenger, 2007).

D'Andrea and Sprenger's (2007) research highlights the importance of additional research on non-belief and the challenges of being a non-believer in the context of a predominately religious America. From their case studies, one can see that non-belief creates a series of clinical and therapeutic challenges. It also shows how much clinical practices have been married to religious ideology in treating patients, requiring counselors to consider alternative practices in addressing client concerns.

Exline, Park, Smyth, and Carey (2011) observed that relationship with God is omnipresent in many people's minds. Particularly for religious individuals, their relationship with God can create comfort and meaning. For some who experience traumatic events, a resulting attitudinal dimension can be anger toward God. In a series of five studies, the authors explored social-cognitive dimensions of anger toward God. Their populations of exploration included college students, bereaved individuals, and cancer survivors. Their research discovered that those who have anger toward God, such as those who perceived God to be responsible for severe harm like complications of cancer, might also have a perception of God as cruel. This observation is also coupled with the perception that the participant may see himself or herself as a victim. Such negativity was not only harmful physically but psychologically. Religiosity and age negatively correlated with anger toward God, while some atheists and agnostics reported anger toward God. Exline et al. show that anger toward God has a psychological component, as it is related to depressive symptoms and maladjustment. In this, it could be that some non-believers and atheists experience greater psychological symptoms of their non-belief, indicating that there may be a sub-segment of the non-belief population who still holds negative attachment to belief and God; thus creating mal-adjustment. Further research is needed to explore this dimension of non-belief.

This section provides two observations: First, that non-belief is a social phenomenon all its own with perceptual and attitudinal perspectives distinctive to non-belief ideology. To what extent those perspectives are monolithically central is yet to be determined. Second, that for non-believers, tragedy and issues of distress are just as meaningful as for those individuals who are within belief. This indicates that non-believers may have an advanced coping mechanism, which furthers their adjustment during difficult times. One perceived flaw of these studies is that they do not address the pluralism and variation of non-belief. In afore-mentioned studies, Agnosticism and Atheism in all their various forms were lumped together as one group. It could be that there may be a larger variance of responses that is not accounted for in their perception of psychological wellbeing and coping.

### **Data Trends in Non-Belief**

In the early days of research on non-belief, discussions followed a couple of factors. Examples include the “religious nones” and “unchurched” (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2010, pp. 145-148). The nones were an ambiguous group in that it was unclear to what extent they adhered to non-belief. In other words, were they true atheists, agnostics, or did this include some aspects of emerging spirituality made apparent by research at the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Those that were included within the unchurched description represented individuals who no longer attended church, mosques, and synagogues. While equally ambiguous as the nones in representation, at least the distinguishing factor was related to church attendance, setting them apart from those who attended services semi regularly or regularly. Pasquale (2007) at least was able to make attributable associations to unchurched individuals as noted earlier in this proposal.

Godin (1964) noted that the difficulty in studying church membership relates to three factors, which must be considered in analyzing self-report and observation. First, that behavioral aspects and cues are signs of one's experience of religious and experiential meaning. Second, that motivation for membership is over-determined and interpreted (meaning misreported through church rosters, not through observation) by the participant both consciously and unconsciously. Third, that in studying church membership, psychologists of religion should explore the simultaneous and contradictory attitudes toward the sacred, coupled with love and community membership beyond simple issues of guilt. In a sense, researchers should explore the mechanisms that inform membership and why members belong (Godin, 1964). In context, Godin was advocating for research beyond the psychoanalytic processes, which inform belief, to examine the psychosocial tendencies of individuals to belong. Godin recognized that there are a variety of factors that would explain why people attend church and why they leave. While Godin expresses the theoretical position researchers should take in exploring church attendance, he should have also considered the narrative trajectory as well as shifts and milestones that inform participant perception and worldview. Additionally, Godin should have considered more clearly defining church attendance operationally.

Fortunately, Roozen (1980) defined observed church attendance as a dichotomous variable proportional to those who drop out. Roozen notes, "A church dropout is someone who has stopped attending religious services for a period of two or more years" (p. 427). Accepting a developmental perspective on church attendance, Roozen (1980) discovered that the disengagement from church attendance occurs more frequently during teenage years than later in life, slowing dropping in frequency with age. This seems to indicate that decreased parental involvement has an effect on church attendance during teenage years. Between ages 25 to 35, a

homecoming occurs where individuals reconnect with religion. Additionally, 80% of those who stop attending church return later in life. Males drop out more than females, indicating a gender difference in church disengagement. Finally, in exploring the temporal factors on dropouts, Roozen observed no significant increase in church disengagement during the 1930s, 1940s, or 1950s. An increase was observed during the 1960s. Unfortunately, the research design was not able to discern why this occurred. It is likely due to the social shifts that came during the 1960s in America. In the 1970s, the dropout rate was lower than in the 1960s. It is also unclear if this was more prevalent in the early 1970s as opposed to the late 1970s. Re-entry rates into church engagement appear to increase in mid-life between the ages of 25 to 35, including that disengagement is a temporary youthful phenomenon (Roozen, 1980).

Roozen's (1980) research shows that the church dropout process appears to be developmental. For teens, disengagement appears to be a developmentally normal process of growing older. What is unclear is if the disengagement by teens is an attempt to gain independence or if it is a response to theological disagreements within the church organization. Roozen's research is informative as it helps to juxtapose both the developmental and historical factors that apply to church membership within America. Roozen was primarily interested in the membership shifts into and out of congregations. It would have been helpful to track non-belief as well. It would also been interesting to explore whether belief continues for teens even when disengagement occurs. What is apparent is that disengagement during the teenage years may also be a starting point for those of non-belief. This leads to the question, what about the proportion of the population who have no religious preference?

In exploration of politics and no religious preference, Hout and Fischer (2002) sought to examine the demographic changes of individual rearing during childhood. In some cases, the

authors observed more individuals who were raised outside of religion as opposed to previous statistics. Moreover, Hout and Fischer (2002) noted that the number of Americans who have no religious preference have increased from 7 to 14 percent between 1991 and 2000. The small number of individuals who were raised without religion and are no longer joining churches later in life increased from 2% to 6%. The authors also discovered that parents who delayed their marriage or parenthood increasingly contributed to their children's lack of religious preference. This seems to indicate that parental factors play a role in the children's religious preference. While some of the no-religious-preference population may not attend or ascribe to a particular religious group or congregation, most still hold some type of beliefs.

Hout and Fischer (2002) also confirmed Roozen's (1980) findings that those raised during the 1960s have left religions. This finding included their children, indicating a growing generational phenomenon of non-belief passed from parent to child. A political observation of Hout and Fisher (2002) noted that some individuals were disillusioned by their religion's political allegiance to conservatism. Political moderates and liberals shifted from identifying with a religion to holding their own individual beliefs. One possible interpretation was the close bond between their former religion and political conservatism. Hout and Fisher's research shows that there is a social movement where a decrease in religious allegiance is in fact a social phenomenon. Their research is unclear as to whether these individuals are spiritual but not religious or if they are neither spiritual nor religious (Zinbauer et al., 1997; Pargament, 1999). What is clear is that individuals are shifting from traditional religious identity to alternative identity. While it was noted that one-third of those in the sample are agnostic or atheist, it is unclear to what degree they consider themselves non-believers and if they believe in any type of transcendence at all.



In a rare empirical focus on non-belief, Bainbridge (2005) asserted that Atheism can be explained within the context of social compensation theory. According to Bainbridge, social compensation theory composes two theoretical factors. First, that primary compensation substitutes as a compensator for a benefit that people desire for themselves (Bainbridge, 2005). For example, this is an agreement of performing an action or investing himself or herself in a process now for compensation later, such as a religionist performing rituals and enacting beliefs in hope of achieving the afterlife later at death. They receive comfort now for the fear of what is to come later. The second form of compensator is social where one person is unable to deliver to the other what the latter person expects and wants at least in an observable form. The former individual represents for the latter person the benevolent potential and medium of the primary compensator. The hope is that the medium is committed to the relationship and willing to provide rewards in the future (Bainbridge, 2005). The best example of this would be the Pope as the representative of God. While the Pope himself cannot guarantee heavenly transcendence, he can provide direction and representation of God for Catholic followers. This explains individual psychological need for religion and the sociological need for religious organizations. While Atheism can potentially provide a primary compensator in the sense of science and reason, it lacks the sociological factor in organization as atheists — according to Bainbridge — lacks the social connections with other atheists and therefore has no individual or social medium in which to interpret their beliefs.

Applying social compensation model, Bainbridge (2005) notes the difficulty of studying non-belief. In best-case scenarios, the population is small and is either cost prohibitive or sample-restrictive in statistical power to make inferences. Fortunately the Bainbridge Survey2001 web-based data set has a sophisticated design and extensive population N=9043 of

which n=461 atheists and n=606 agnostics. Additionally, Bainbridge also examined the General Social Survey for additional data cues to inform analysis. From this data, Bainbridge was able to confirm previous findings that parental rearing – particularly single parent rearing – appears to be related to offspring non-belief. One additional observation that is useful in discussing Atheism as an operative quantitative concept is whether factors contribute to Atheism or Atheism contributes to other social and psychological factors. In some regards, the Bainbridge findings appear to confirm Freud’s interpretation that God may be a divine father-figure substitute. For those without fathers or potentially mothers, there is no archetype parental model in which to apply to the divine figure.

Additionally, Bainbridge (2005) asserts that Atheism and non-belief may not be a dependent variable; they might in fact represent an independent variable. In this assertion, it could be that atheist and agnostic belief may contribute to familial cohabitation versus marriage. In other words, those who are atheist may have no interest in “holy matrimony.” In this assertion, it may be that Atheism is a more descriptively demographic term such as those that define ones gender, race, or the like. Further research needs to be conducted to see how self-described non-believers and in particularly atheists define themselves within the larger religious landscape.

Some limitations of Bainbridge’s study are online use of the Survey2001. The vast majority of participants were young or educated. Bainbridge argues that this group would likely make up a large population of atheists as previous research indicates they are more educated than the common populace, thus confirming Leuba’s observations noted earlier in this paper. Secondly, it is unclear how comparisons were made between the Survey2001 data and GSS data (a paper-based questionnaire). While Bainbridge’s interpretations are striking and his theoretical position is profound, additional methodological clarification and sophistication would aid in

explaining non-belief as a psychological phenomenon. The interesting conclusion of Bainbridge's work is that atheists have socially weak connections within the Nonbelief community, indicating a decline in social cohesion due to the secularization. Bainbridge, in a sense, is suggesting that when popularity of Atheism increases so too does a secular social agenda within post-industrial countries. In a sense, individuals in such an environment lose interest in social connections and interest in connecting with other people.

Addressing the need for further research in reflection of Hout and Fischer, Baker and Smith (2009) explored the consistency of non-belief within the American social sphere. Expanding on the issue of political-religious connection within congregations and the disenchantment of moderates and liberals with congregational conservative allegiance, more individuals are identifying as not associated with a religious tradition. Baker and Smith (2009) observed three types of non-believers within the United States. Those are Atheists n=66, Agnostics n=93, and Unchurched n=77. Atheists are anti-religious. They are reactionary and political, aware of connections between religion and government. Agnostics are not as opposed to religion. While they may share a more moderate and liberal orientations, agnostics are not as vehemently against religion as their atheist counterparts. The unchurched have higher levels of individual belief in the form of religiosity or spirituality. Much like the atheists, the unchurched individuals oppose the mixing of political and religious domains in public life. Baker and Smith's research is one of the first at attempting to categorize various forms of non-belief.

The variety of non-belief research is helpful, as it shows that non-belief is not a monolithic or singular social phenomenon without psychological and sociological complexity. In fact, this research shows that there are variable social, political, and religious orientations that should be accounted for when studying non-belief. Research by Baker and Smith (2009) also

appears to confirm the assertion by Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2010) that non-belief is likely as complex as belief. It is also interesting that Baker and Smith call for additional qualitative research to inform how the three types of non-belief perceive socio-political perspectives in America, as well as how they perceive the changing religious landscape. Additionally, there appears to be a transcendent factor that can relate to non-believers. In a word, non-believers could be spiritual but not religious.

Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009), as well as Streib and Klein (2011), suggest that while most research focuses on vertical transcendence—one where the individual looks to religious belief or practices for meaning—there may also be other forms of belief and commitments which provide meaning. Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009) state that these commitments may fall within the issues of environmental awareness, social justice, and advocacy. Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009) term this type of transcendence “horizontal transcendence.” The authors suggest that spirituality may be much more complex and inclusive than they originally predicted and would include individuals who would be termed “atheists” or “agnostics.” Horizontal transcendent non-believers could be another form of spirituality (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009, pp. 282-283; Streib and Klein, 2011).

Lois Lee (2012) considers non-belief beyond the ontological position to consider systems of meaning, which affirm and support secular ritual and the socially symbolic. In other words, scholars can easily point to and observe examples of social values and meanings which are separate from any religious structure and provide meaning to those who ascribe to the value and rituals practice in the public sphere. Lee notes that this is readily apparent within the British context in which she works. She uses the term non-religion to signify those systems of meaning

that have moved beyond the religious. Lee states that non-religion has three essential components within the core terminology. As noted by Lee:

1) those which take religion as their root (non-religion, irreligion, a-religion, anti-religion), 2) those which take theism as their root (Atheism, non-theism), 3) those which take the secular as their root (the secular, secularity, secularism) (Lee, 2012, pg. 130).

Lee states that non-religion is by its essential nature a contrast to religion. She also states that non-religion should not be considered spirituality or a new age movement as it has its own distinctiveness. Lee challenges academics to consider non-religious phenomena beyond the limited vocabulary of current literature citing the complexity of human systems and the meaning they exhibit. She notes that such systems are historically reliant on religion as its reference point and are beginning to formalize their own value for the purposes of culturally relative identity. Just as non-religion provides additional foci for academic examination, Lee also warns against only thinking of non-religion as an atheist phenomenon. While Atheism can be related to non-religion, it is only one small part of a much larger perspective. Therefore based on Lee's proposal the field is the undiscovered country of new possibilities. With each new emerging human system comes a variety of cynosure for examination. Lee's work on non-religion shows that there is support and a need for terms in defining non-belief and the various facets that relate to non-belief experience.

As society has progressed, the bounds of religious and secular identity have been blurred. In many respects, cults and secular organizations stand in opposition to perceived ritualistic and theological norms. In some cases, organizations mix religious and secular beliefs and rituals in the creation of their own beliefs and values. Such systems confound the natural tendency to rely on identity as an indicator of one's behavior and belief (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). Even more complex are terms such as the spiritual and the not religious, which create individual theological

belief outside of the bounds of theological adherence to religious values and tradition. Spirituality, a salient term coined within the 20th century, has gained popularity within the United States and has been employed as a demographic question in a variety of social-science research projects on belief (Zinbauer et al., 1997; Pargament, 1999). Additional research would be required to determine what is inclusive and exclusive to the term spiritual and what intersections exist between spirituality and non-belief. Within social science research, there are plenty of calls for further examination of non-belief, but no literary critical commitment to address these needs for further clarification of terms or for adjectives to be employed in research. Identity carries with it powerful implications. In formulating the social science section, it was recognized very quickly the multifaceted nature of the term “atheist” in the American context. As an individual perspective or social movement, Atheism has no central leadership or authority. A number of movements exist within the United States alone. Some of these movements work in tandem, raising awareness issues about church and state. Others are simply loosely affiliated related to Nonbelief rights or for social interaction of like mind.

The only way to position adequately the term “Atheism” within the vastness of social reality was to borrow from and juxtapose within a variety of other fields such as philosophy, history, and popular culture in describing the social function of words and their meaning. Even then, Atheism transgresses the normality and generative nature of religious identity. It is likely that a variety of manifestations exist within non-belief and that this research would attempt to address the complexity, seeking to plot the various manifestations within the social and psychological contexts of research.

## CHAPTER III

### STUDY ONE QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF NONBELIEF

#### **In Exploration of a Theory**

A study of non-belief in many respects is a new field, and warrants a variety of methodological strategies in exploration of this new theoretical landscape. The overall design of this study (including both the qualitative and quantitative aspects) is a mixed methods approach. This study used qualitative methods as a means of juxtaposing the social and religious theoretical strata in terms of the overall landscape of the United States. The richness of qualitative methods allows a researcher to parcel out specific aspects providing measureable structure for more empirical and scientific inquiry. However, it is a theoretical and philosophical misapprehension to assume that empirical or positivist/post-positivist structures of examination are properly coupled with any method. On the contrary, qualitative methods are typically useful with alternative philosophical systems of epistemology. These systems of meaning are termed paradigms in the social sciences, particularly the fields of Sociology and Education (Flick, 2009).

The field of Psychology typically routinizes the positivist/post-positivist frame of interpretative reference within quantitative methods. When a student studies Psychology, it is presented as a science. Inherent to that study is the scientific method that attempts to isolate, investigate, predict, and test. Knowledge is gained through a system of rules and tests, and when properly administered can be replicated under similar conditions. While this is a gross overgeneralization of Psychology as a science, this type of intellectual inquiry into the human

condition is simply not the only way to structure the examination of human phenomena especially when that phenomenon is new or emergent. There are a variety of other philosophical and epistemological paradigms which, when coupled with the correct method, can elicit detail and disquisition in terms of human experience. This study will apply one of those alternatives coupled with post-positivism.

### Paradigms of Inquiry

A variety of paradigms exists in the social sciences in which to structure research inquiry. These paradigms provide the template to order and interpret information such as academic literature and data through qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Flick, 2009). One position to consider as a theoretical inquiry and a position of paradigm is social constructionism. Rooted in Sociology and Social Psychology, social constructionism attempts to capture socially constructed reality (Burr, 2003). Social constructionism accepts socially created meaning and shared symbolism. These characteristics provide order and definition for those who identify with them. The meaning comes from shared experience and becomes embodied in the group's collective narrative and language. Members of a small collective group can create their own "micro" reality that provides meaning, which is just as real as anything agreed upon within the larger society (Gergen, 1999). Such social constructs can be agreed upon within the group and disputed outside of the group. For the social constructionist, that reality is enough and is useful in research. In the case of non-believers, it is useful in understanding self-identity and worldview. While social constructionism as a paradigm can be helpful in providing social contexts for shared human experience, it is not without controversy.



In a recent chapter on methodological paradigm, Hood (2011) debated the applicability and theoretical pitfalls of particular paradigms. Hood (2011) explains that particular theoretical paradigms exist within the social sciences of religion. One of those considerations is that of social constructionism, which limits reality formed through social agreement between two or more people. The social constructionism paradigm is applied within Sociology of Religion and focuses on research from within the discipline. Hood (2011) asserts that Psychology of Religion and spirituality uses more psychoanalytic forms of exploration where the object of study is religion as noted in the experience and as described within the research participant's purview. In a word, those experiences are supra-experience which could be attuned to divine intervention, not simply socially-agreed-upon experience. Hood's work uses four conceptual processes taken from Dittes' (1969) theoretical placement and methodological interpretation. The first two are reductionist in nature.

Observation One is that operation of variables observed in religion are the same as those that operate within Psychology. Under this observation, religion requires no special methodological foci in its exploration. The second observation is that while not unique per se, a variety or specific variables may stand out more in the study of religion and therefore have a greater effect than those phenomena noted outside of the context of religion. The next observation of Dittes (1969) is that conceptualizations regarding the study of religion assert that psychological variables have a unique interaction with religion in context, shedding light on much of the unexplainable variance within religious research. The final observation within Dittes' model of psychological study of religion is that there are variables operating within religion that may or may not function within other contexts or are simply ignored by mainstream Psychologists.

Hood proposes that Dittes' position moves well beyond the social constructionist paradigm, as it can account for complexities of the universe and all potential phenomena observed between individuals and their world. The psychoanalytic position opens up the potential for a varied reality of experiences that are limited within the frame of social experience as noted within social constructionism. Hood's (2011) work goes on to argue that in many regards, traditional methodological exploration in Psychology can also be limited as it may focus on measured features within the bounds of natural sciences. It does not take into account experiential components of human experiences that cannot be independently validated – only observed through the self-report of the perceiver of such experiences (Hood, 2011). Hood's work is helpful as it shows the theoretical limitations of social constructionism as applied to research. Simply, research explorations within social constructionism are limited to the observable social world and cannot take into account potential experiences that may exist outside the domain of the social sciences. Alternatively, it also shows that as the field of Psychology of Religion and Spirituality expands in research, additional paradigms should be considered in methodological plurality. By considering such plurality of method, additional research possibilities can become manifest.

Non-belief, while posed within the context of religious and spiritual America, is an emergent phenomenon socially. In some cases, it is within the backdrop of a traditionally religious America with countless articles exploring multiple facets of human "religious" experience. In one regard, such empirical and social science explorations should include the beliefs and values of the majority (in this case, religious believers) in relation to the minority (those who do not believe in a higher power). Much of the minority may speak in relation to the majority. In other words, if the minority feels overarching control from the majority, the minority

may find that education is an excellent strategy for preparing a defense. Therefore, to speak of Nonbelief in terms of a typology says more about the conflict and in-group/out-group boundaries of social identity as much as an ontological worldview. This is the purpose of focusing on an American sample. While regional differences certainly exist, one can continually see religion as a deeply rooted topic in American political and social life. In that regard, inter-group identity can be defined within two methods. Alternatively, the researcher can assume the role of learner and the participant as teacher. By letting participants define themselves in relation to their community and using their narratively constructed definitions of identity, the researcher is more likely to assume a position of validity for a much wider empirical inquiry. This is a difficult proposition, as research would need to be sensitive to non-believers and their own identity. As thinking and social creatures, humans ascribe multilayer meaning and value to the adjectives we use to identify ourselves. For example, to call one's self a republican has a variety of political, social, and economic values tied to the self-identity term. To accept simply the self-assertion, without researching and exploring what the term means, limits the applicability of said term to the social movement that identifies with it. Fortunately, for us, there has been plenty of research on republicanism in America and a variety of republicans exist in American politics. Atheism and non-belief, on the other hand, require deeper exploration.

Qualitative methods can assist in constructing those meanings into a useful typology. Following the criticism noted by Hood (2011) and applying the theoretical and methodological template noted by Creswell (2007; 2009) and Burr (2003), this study will blend social constructionism and post-positivism as a paradigm all its own. The project will use social constructionism, as non-belief is a growing social movement and an interest psychologically. As noted earlier, non-belief has cultural and social implications. One of those implications is the

secularization movement. Therefore, understanding the particulars through the social and psychological connections is helpful in further research in this field. While there are challenges to the social order of non-belief as noted here in the literature review, there are certainly social patterns and language that seem relevant to the non-belief movement in America. To address the criticism of Hood (2011), this study will employ a mixed methods approach using the qualitative methods coupled with a loosely applied social-constructionism theoretical-template. Social constructionism asserts that knowledge and reality is constructed between humans through language and shared experience. The qualitative portion of the study will look for agreement regarding those constructions. First, it will examine the shared language of non-belief and what that means for the participant. Second, it explores the narrative progression through and to non-belief within one's life history (Burr, 2003; Creswell, 2007). This narrative provides a theoretical position in which to place the research inquiry, thus providing the background and context of the phenomena of non-belief socially.

The second paradigm employed is post-positivism. This will be in examination of the quantitative data collected following the coding and creation of the non-belief typology. Post-positivism assumes that measurement can be descriptive of much larger population from a small sampling across America. A post-positivist expects replicable results in their research as they accept that research indicates some type of truth in objective reality. Unlike its strict ontological and epistemological cousin positivism, post-positivism accepts that while some truths about the universe can be approached through research, a flawless understanding of those truths will always elude us. Positivism asserts that all can be known through scientific and human exploration. Post-positivism still attempts to know all that is knowable and through the proper method, we approach truth, while we may never come to know its essence holistically. The post-

positivist paradigm will be applied to scale construction from qualitative data and will seek to determine if socially agreed-upon adjectives of non-belief relate to other nonbelievers in the United States. Additionally, accepted scales of measure will also be employed in comparison of samples collected online through non-belief networks. Comparisons between non-belief types can further confirm whether differences can be empirically tested and validated.

### **Study One – Qualitative Exploration of Nonbelief**

This study begins with a qualitative component in examination of non-belief. For some within American Psychology, qualitative methodology may be considered controversial, while others within the discipline of Social Psychology may use a variety of methodologies in exploration of new or emergent fields. Other academic fields use qualitative methods in exploration of a variety of topics. Within the introduction and beginning of the methods sections, there are certainly philosophical reasons for a mixed methods approach. This study applies a mixed-methods approach in the study of Nonbelief first through qualitative interviews in juxtaposing themes into common categories and uses those themes for a quantitative study. The most applicable reason for qualitative methods in this case is time. Qualitative studies provide not only rich data but, where structured, properly can save time in informing quantitative explorations and ensuring greater validity of quantitative studies.

#### **Method**

##### *Recruitment and Sampling of Geographic Regions*

For the following section, those who ascribe to Nonbelief as an identity can also be described as atheists, agnostics, and anyone else who considers themselves nonreligious. Potentially, individuals may consider themselves spiritual; however, divine truth or concern with

some type of transcendent ultimate reality must come into question on the part of the participant to fit the sample wished to explore. Primarily, the population sought for examination consists of those who consider themselves atheists or agnostics in some way. The Principal Investigator for this study has worked within the Nonbelief community for a couple of years. He served as a board member for the local Free Thought organization within his community, as well as providing advisement to a variety of community initiatives. The Principal Investigator also sought the input and insight of others within the community in design and implementation of this study. Fortunately, for this project, one of the research assistants Thomas J Coleman III was also nationally renowned for his lawsuit against the Hamilton County Commission regarding their opening prayers to meetings in Jesus name. The combination of the Principal Investigator's experience in recruitment and the social network connection of Mr. Coleman contributed to the large participant pool for both the qualitative and quantitative portions of this project. While a variety of others contributed feedback and volunteer labor in interview coding, Mr. Coleman's assertiveness in making contacts with non-belief individuals and organizations around the country made this is into a much larger study similar to large grant funded projects.

The Principal Investigator and Mr. Coleman contacted organizations and discussion groups via phone, email, and private messages, notifying individuals about research in Nonbelief hosted at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC). One concern that this study attempted to overcome was related to the geographic location of UTC. There was concern that potential Nonbelief participants would perceive this study to have an ulterior agenda in conducting research on such a controversial topic as Atheism, Nonbelief, and the like. Fortunately, Mr. Coleman's reputation and the recruitment process (including a website and Facebook page) helped to overcome much of those concerns by potential participants. The principal investigator

was very clear regarding the purpose and point of this study. The principal investigator also provided detailed reflexive information regarding who he was and his background to gain the trust of participants. Moreover, the study wanted to show that the research agenda was to be as objective to participant data as possible. Within 72 hours, more than 125 individuals with ages ranging from 18 to 74 expressed interest in participating in the interview. These individuals were from various parts of the United States including states from Washington to New Hampshire.

To set the context of this study in relation to the American religious landscape, one must first understand the general religious layout of the United States. To provide contextual data related to the interviews, as well as analyze statistical trends in a later section, geographic boundaries must be drawn and described. Therefore, to make geographic inferences, this study separated the United States into four regions. This followed US census information regarding population trends and reporting (US Census report, 2012). By separating the Country into geographic locations, the study can also make comparisons of responses and demographics regarding research participants. The Northeast consists of states from Maine to Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The Southeast region is from Maryland south to Florida to as far west as Texas. The Northern boundary of the southeast is Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, Arkansas and Oklahoma. The Midwest region consists of Ohio to the east to North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas to the west. The Midwest also includes Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin to the north and Missouri, Illinois and Indiana to the south. The final region is labeled the West region which includes all states west of the Rockies and including Alaska and Hawaii. While this study will use the regional geographic boundaries of the United States census, some aspects of religious identity can also be applied.

One particular exploration this study explored is related to social tension of Nonbelief as measured by believer's commitment to religious practice. Particularly, if the community around the nonbeliever is actively religious, this could create additional social tension for those in Nonbelief. This study used the geographic data as provided by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public life (2009). Specifically, religious importance is defined through four characteristics: importance of religion in citizen's lives, frequency of attendance at worship services, frequency of prayer, and absolute certainty in belief in God. In relation to this research, these characteristics would also provide an indicator of potential social tension related to the nonbeliever experience. In other words, those nonbelievers living in a state identified as higher religiously may experience more tension and concerns of identity than those who live in a state with low religious identity. By separating these into regions, this study can also make certain geographic assertions regarding data. For example, in the Southeast region all the states either meet or exceed the national average for religious importance as reported by the Pew Research Center Forum on Religion and Public Life (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2009). All the states of the North region fall below the national average. The Midwest and the West regions are dispersed above and below the national average with states like Utah scoring above the national average and states such as Alaska scoring well below (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2009). These examples provide comparative samples of religious and geographic landscape in which to compare participant responses within the qualitative portion of the study as well as empirical statistical comparisons for the quantitative aspect of this study.

### *Participants*

One of the first observations during the recruitment process observed was that many participants were concerned about anonymity of their interview and participation, so much so



that researchers did not push for demographic information if they did not want to share it. For those who did, this section will provide some overall demographics of the interview participants. For those who did not provide demographics but provided useful and insightful data, this study simply report them as “non-declared” out of respect for their concerns. It was a common theme that many of the participants hide their ontological position or simply did not discuss it for fear of some type of retaliation from family, friends, co-workers, employers, or their community. From the themes observed within the data, participant responses were converted into frequencies for overall data trends. Of the 125 individuals who expressed interest in the qualitative portion of the study, fifty-eight (n=58) interviews were conducted with various individuals from around the United States. Thirty-seven of the interview participants were males, leaving 22 female participants. Participants were sampled from the four geographic regions of the United States.

As shown in Table 1, the largest number of interview participants was from the South region at 32.8%. The next largest majority of participants (25%) either did not indicate their state or hometown or refused to respond when asked. The other three regions were relatively close in percentage of participation with the North at 12.1%, the Midwest at 13.8 percent, and the West region at 15.5% respectively. While recruitment efforts attempted to achieve equal participation rates across each of the geographic regions, timing and willingness to participate may have been factors in individuals wanting to participate in the qualitative portion of the study. In regards to race, the largest majority of the participants were Caucasian at 67.2% of the participant pool.

Table 1

Frequency of Participants by Geography

		Region			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Midwest	8	13.8	13.8	13.8
	North	7	12.1	12.1	25.9
	Not Declared	15	25.9	25.9	51.7
	South	19	32.8	32.8	84.5
	West	9	15.5	15.5	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

As shown in Table 2, it appears that more Caucasians were willing to participate in the interview process than other racial identities. The average age of the participants was 37.39 years (SD=12.143) with the youngest participant being 21 and the oldest at 68 year of age.

Table 2

Racial Identity Frequencies

		Race			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Asian Indian	1	1.7	1.7	1.7
	Caucasian	39	67.2	67.2	69.0
	Hispanic	2	3.4	3.4	72.4
	Not Declared	16	27.6	27.6	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

*Materials and Procedure*

To address the need for further research on different types of non-belief posed by Hood et al. (2009) and Streib and Klein (2011), this study attempted to capture and define the various adjectives of non-belief in describing one's ontological position and social identity. Since this is new territory in research, qualitative methods were employed in capturing the adjectives and

their meaning. A standard operating procedure in the study was created to ensure methodological consistency among interviewers. From the recruitment process, participants were given a pre-interview to determine if they met a loose definition of Atheism or Agnosticism and if there were variations in age and geographic location. This was to exclude those who were religious or who had strong theological ontological juxtaposition, but may simply not attend church. If their pre-interview responses indicate variation from others, a full interview was scheduled with them. The full interview included semi-structured interview questions.

The qualitative data were transcribed, in part, by the Principal Investigator. All interviews were captured as electronic files with the ability to track and note time intersections regarding important content regarding the research questions posed in this study. The Principal Investigator listened through each interview three times. The first was what would be termed the priming process where the researcher listens to the interview for narrative and reflection. This is particularly useful in comparing interview data from one participant to the next, allowing the participant's narrative to settle into the frame of mind of the participant. During the second listening, the researcher makes extensive notes about time markers and common themes among the participants. This is in reflection of the social constructionist paradigm as applied to the data's overall message. What are the participants trying to say? How do they say it? How do they linguistically structure the world in which they live? What are the meanings they ascribe to their experience? Where is the common language of description, the intersections of narrative and meaningfulness? These questions slowly become answered over the course of the interviews. In the third and final review of each interview, the researcher transcribes those portions that provide an excellent example of the common codes they have observed in prior listening runs. These passages become the data results as exemplars of the interviews.

The data can be presented in a variety of ways depending on the research question and the type of inquisition required of the research process. In this study three types of explorations occur. One is in relation to narrative trajectory describing life stories as a progressive changing dynamic of ontological fluidity, in other words constructing the narrative in such a way to observe the key points of one's life and the transformations that occur in their worldview. The next looked at frequency of codeable statements as reported as quantitative data. This provides a general sense of the overall participant pool. Finally, the last portion of the study explored the qualitative themes of Nonbelief adjectives and attempted to build a common definition from repeated themes throughout the interviews. Those definitions are constructed and presented as data in support of study two, the empirical exploration of Nonbelief.

The interview format shifts from self-identity and adjective meaning to exploring the social networks that sustain the non-believer ideologically and intellectually. Informed by Berger's theory of social construction and borrowing from Stark and Fink's (2000) work on market theory, the interview explored how the individual's social reality confirms and sustains his or her current belief (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Berger, 1990). Informed by these theories, the interview contained three parts. The first related to issues of Nonbelief identity. Questions regarding common terms of Nonbelief identity were included, asking participants to provide their own definitions regarding each word presented. For example, the questions would ask participants to define "anti-theist." Some would immediately define the term in detail while others may not have heard of the term. This gave the study the ability to determine if some definitional themes were more socially constructed and agreed upon than others. Thirteen terms were used, and if a participant was vague, the interviewer was trained to probe further into their

answer in the attempts to elicit greater depth of answer. If the participant simply did not know, the interviewer was instructed to move on rather than probe to avoid frustrating the participant.

The researcher also asked for any additional terms which may not have been included, as well as the definitions, which delineate them beyond other terms used in the study. The researchers also explored if there terms would be better suited as a combined phrase. In this way, the definitional aspects of Nonbelief were explored beyond the use of a single definitional term in exploration of the common definitions themselves as agreed upon by research participants. The second portion of the interview explored participant's narrative themes and related symbolism. This section is the life experience section. Researchers asked participants to segregate their lives into life chapters and provide information regarding significant beliefs, relationships, and perceptions they may have had at each segment. These questions were similar in structure to the Fowler Faith Development Interview in relation to narrative and symbolic themes of one's life, but were obviously altered to be more palatable to Nonbelief participants (Fowler, 1981). This provided insight into individual changes in ontology if any were observed. Finally, the third and last section of the semi-structured interview looked at social tension and capital. In other words, it looked at how the participant views the world around them and those who benefit or hinder their perceived ontological autonomy. This section included questions regarding their connections with others of similar belief and if they perceived society as beneficial or a hindrance to their ontological worldview.

Prior to participation, participants were provided with an interview worksheet. This provided a roadmap of the topic to be discussed during the interview. It also included the terms the researcher was asking to ensure clarity of the adjectives being asked. For example, the monosyllabic term "Bright," a term coined by Dawkins, may lack clarity in a video conference

when spoken from researcher to participant. The worksheet also included a life tapestry exercise. This is a worksheet where participants can organize life chapters and related themes into a chronological format similar to a spreadsheet. This also allowed them the means to organize the information into a useful format for their narrative and the themes asked of the participant during the interview. The life tapestry exercise structure was modeled after the Fowler, Strieb, & Keller (2004) Manual for Faith Development Research. As used in other projects, this helped participants provide order and structure to their life narrative – cuing insights and reflection on important life chapters. The structure of the tapestry was adapted to be more appealing to the Nonbelief community, as well as to match the narrative questions regarding the participants' ontological life changes or lack thereof.

Interviews were formally scheduled and conducted either face to face where geography would permit or via Skype online video conferencing software. The Principal Investigator formalized a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and interview process for interviewers to ensure methodological consistency. This also included instructions for semi-structured interviewing and directions for how to address single response answers or descriptive vagueness. Additionally, as issues such as demographic disclosure arose, addendums were developed to the SOP to ensure methodological consistency and continuation of the project. Interviews lasted between 20 minutes to 2 hours depending on the age and verbosity of the research participants. Each interview was audio recorded through Skype or face to face. While interviewers were asked to follow the interview question format, if a participant addressed a question early or in detail explored other concepts meant to be covered by later questions, the interviewers were instructed to be mindful of the questions to be asked and not ask the same question later. This would ensure professionalism and avoid redundancy with participants. Following participation in the

interview, researchers disclosed the project website to the participants and an estimated period of when the results would be published. The results of the study were described as being published to <http://www.atheismresearch.com>. All data reported in the result section has had identifiers removed and the names have been changed to protect participants.

## Results

The data collected as part of the qualitative portion of the study was coded by theme and organized by participant responses. While it would make intuitive sense to follow the interview scheme in writing the results, this study would like to discuss first some general trends as observed and conclude with the belief definitional themes observed. Study two uses the results of study one to construct a post-positivist statistical survey design using data from the qualitative section to inform questionnaire item construction and therefore the common definitional themes would be far more fitting at the end of this section. Therefore, the results section will explore the narrative themes of the interviews first, followed by social tension and capital and finally common definitions of Nonbelief as expressed by the research participants.

### *Narrative Concerns with identity.*

In exploration of the development and changes of participant perceptions over their life narrative, a number of themes emerged regarding their experience. While many of the participants describe a clear experience of religious deconversion or leaving of faith, this was not true for all participants. Some of the research participants were raised without faith. For them, religion simply was not part of their religious identity or childhood experience. The following section explores five distinct narratives taken from the interview pool. The individuals involved have agreed to allow their stories to be shared. Each of the participants has been assigned aliases

to protect their real name and the cities and towns included in their narrative have been removed. Each theme has a unique story related to the social tension and development of their worldview. Following the narrative, a general discussion will be included to deconstruct the possible implications of these narratives to the general project.

### *The Narrative Experience of Jenee*

The narrative of Jenee was short but interesting. She appears to be an introvert, and the researcher attempted to use follow-up and clarification questions to tease out additional content. Her narrative is included here as she experiences a cultural shift by moving from western United States to the Midwest. Jenee was raised in California and was raised by atheist parents. While they did not believe in religion themselves, they gave Jenee the opportunity to explore faith and spirituality on her own. She was allowed to attend church with friends. We asked if there was a specific event or change in her worldview. She explained:

Maybe when I decided I was definitely atheist but I cannot pin it down to one particular instance more like a lot of little things. As I learned more about the world and traveled, met new people and learned from them, it made less and less sense to me that there would be a God or something.

Jenee stated that religion was not in the forefront of her mind in high school or college. She stated that it really did not enter into her mind until she returned to Nebraska. Upon her return, she experienced more social awareness of religion labeling Nebraska as a “Bible belt state” stating, “there is a lot of religion there.” She stated that the discrimination by those in her community makes her angry. She does not understand how people can believe what they believe. She states that her oppositional position to those in her community and the push by others of religion on her has helped to solidify her position as an atheist. She has lost family members over the years, related to her position.



Jenee has had to make adjustment to how she publically identifies. In one respect, she is an open person with others about her belief, but after moving to the Midwest she discovered that she has to be careful and mindful of with whom she discusses her beliefs. Certainly, Jenee's experience supports this paper's assertion by way of the Pew Forum and US Census geographic boundaries that some areas have higher social tension between religionists and atheists than others.

### *The Narrative Experience of Tuan*

Similar to Jenee, Tuan was also raised in a non-religious household in Ohio. He notes that while his family was not particularly religious, his Grandmother suggested that he be baptized in what he termed a "backup plan." Tuan attended a Lutheran preschool. When the children went around the room discussing their beliefs, Tuan remembers very vividly the reaction of his fellow children when he told them he did not believe in God. He states that in that moment, he lost his friends. He states:

The reaction people have to it (the disclosure of being an Atheist), kind of stuck with me. At the same time I asked my parents if we were Christian or Catholic, a kind of binary question .... which is weird as we grew up in a Jewish area. I think the Jews keep to themselves.

Tuan says he liked being a loner and believed that, while Atheism did not have an impact on his interaction with others, he does state that it did not help either. Tuan was a member of the Boy Scouts, which he eventually quit due to cognitive dissonance created when his father told him to lie about being a Christian. Tuan stated that he never had a problem with others' beliefs until he found that some arguments for cultural practices such as gender oppression were offensive for Tuan. This was further confirmed with the abuses of the Catholic Church and pedophilia. As a comparison, Tuan states that many of his nontheistic friends sought some type of religious or

spiritual experience within their childhood to reconnect later with their nontheistic roots. Other friends were raised in nontraditional religions such as paganism, where they too experience a crisis of identity with their Christian peers.

Tuan states that he found himself on the side of many of the non-Christian traditions when debate arose. Not that they all agreed, but rather in recognition of the social dominance the Christian faith exerted socially over his fellow peers. Most of his friends at that time were atheists, and Tuan found that those were the individuals he would connect with best. Tuan states that many of his peers perceived him as a guy who would come to shoot up the school, reflecting on others' perception of him and his atheist views. This perception of Tuan obviously shows the negative perception of him by his peers. It could also mean that he dressed differently and sought to stand out from the social norms of his school peers. Tuan stated other examples of "prejudice" existed as well. Tuan applied to the Naval Academy and was denied admission because his senator refused to sign his admission letter due to Tuan's Atheist views. Letters of support by public figures was traditional for that time and in Tuan's home state. While this might make some angry, Tuan stated that "he did not give a flying f\*\*k." However, it did make him lose his patriotism up to and including his inability to cheer at US sporting events. In his late teens, Tuan felt that the United States was the worst Country in the world because a patriotic teen could not serve his Country. Since college graduation, Tuan is social with co-workers but is not an active atheist. Tuan notes that in his life now Atheism is simply not that important. He does participate in online chats but does not participate in activism for Nonbelief rights.

These are two examples taken from a pool of interview participants like Jenee and Tuan who speak in terms of their interactions with peers and disenfranchisement of society when their ontology came into question. In each case, they speak of not only their own experience, but of

the observation of others like them related to the social tensions with the dominant majority. Certainly these themes relate to in-group and out-group dynamics, well as to politics of identity for those considered the out-group. As each of these examples indicate, both participants while raised in nonreligious families must still address their ontological worldview with others, further reinforcing research on Nonbelief as a form of identity. In other words, those who are nonreligious are juxtaposed against an inherently religious culture in which belief is not separate from identity. Therefore, modal identities of religious and/or spiritual and “I” may be perceived as the same for religious individuals but diametrically different forms of identity for those who identify with Nonbelief. Another important distinction to note here is that in both cases the interview participants are speaking more to the Christian majority. Tuan, for example, spoke positively about Jewish individuals in his neighborhood in how “they leave others alone” and in appreciation for their noninterference with others who are different.

### *Islam and Heather*

Heather’s narrative could be given a title; it would be an outsider in his or her own homeland. Heather was raised in the Western United States to a Muslim family. From as early as she can remember, Heather was made aware by her parents that she was a Muslim and different from others. As a three year old, she was “hyperaware” of her religion and was surprised to find that most of her schoolmates had no awareness of their faith tradition. It made Heather realize that other children were not so concerned with religion as she was taught within her family. At the age of five, Heather’s parents became more religious and began to practice more than before. At the age of seven, Heather’s family moved to Europe to immerse within an Islamic School. Heather found herself different from not only other Muslims but Europeans as well. Heather states:

My parents wanted me to go a religious school there and I did. And I did not feel religious enough as everyone seemed way (more) developed than I was. And also I used to compare myself to much older girls. So at age 6 I would compare myself to age 12 and 13 year olds on how religious they were. Uh then when I moved back to the US in 97, other people saw me as, even though I went to religious school, my Muslim classmates and Muslim cousins saw me as crazy or too fundamentalist or religious. They would make fun of me and I would be rejected a lot which made me realize that many Muslims were not as Muslim as they should be or so I thought. Then in 2001 I entered public school for the first time. And it was reiterated to me that I was an outsider. It also worried me that I got along with my non-Muslim classmates versus my Muslim classmates. From 2002 to 2005 I really really worked hard to educate myself about my religion especially because of 911. The more I learned, the less I liked.

In the beginning Heather felt she was different from her extended family as being more religious than most of her fellow Muslim students. It appears in the beginning that Heather's journey was to be a model practitioner of Islam. In many respects, she reflects on her family's commitment to the religion as causing her to stand apart from others within their religious community. Moreover, Heather found herself in public school where she connected more with Non-Muslims than Muslims. She experienced further cognitive dissonance related to her identity in an attempt to be a good Muslim. Her ontological view came further into question following the events of September 11, 2001. Heather found herself explaining and defending her ontological position intellectually. Her self-directed and critical study of Islam caused her further cognitive dissonance and eventually to leave Islam as a faith.

Heather sought out other atheists and struggled with her exit, but has come to a comfortable place with ontology. She states that her "apostasy" has even prompted her to write about her experiences. She appears to be a contentious individual concerned with others. She appears to want to connect with others to share her experiences. Heather is active both online and in person connecting with others of Nonbelief. She seeks to make those connections and share her experiences. She seeks out conferences as a means of mingling with others of a similar perspective. She also enjoys social events to connect with others Nonbelief. Heather also speaks

to advocacy and social justice and concerns with raising awareness not only related to Nonbelief but also in relation to gender issues.

Heather's experience confirms the work of Streib et al (2009), that deconversion does create social identity confusion and loss of psychological wellbeing. It further confirms here that some with a nonreligious worldview may seek a community of support from others in Nonbelief. The community may be a mediating factor in assisting the transition from one identity to another.

### *Thomas – Catholicism and Anti-religion*

Thomas came from a divorced household. He notes that he looked too much like his father, someone his mother despised. Thomas felt that this created tension between him and his mom. From a young age, Thomas was raised in a Catholic home in the Southeast United States. While he grew up in a largely and highly protestant part of the south, Thomas identified his community as the "buckle of the Bible belt." Thomas states he never completely bought into the entirety of Catholicism as a theology. For example, he asks, how can someone go to hell for one misdeed and yet the rest of his or her actions and beliefs are moral or upright. Such rational discontinuities were perplexing for Thomas.

Thomas states that he was forced to go to mass every Friday and every Sunday, noting that he would do other things during services such as "learning to cross his eyes". He would attempt to teach himself things during mass and did not pay attention due to the "fantastical stories" such as Noah's Arch. How Noah could fit all the animals in a small space is a paradox as noted by Thomas. Thomas saw this as an early example of stories not making rational sense in his mind. Thomas states that the lack of consistency "never set well," and that he could not "rationalize" God, heaven, or hell, even at the age of eight. He states that there had never been a major shift in his view.

Childhood socialization was also constrained. Thomas notes that many of his childhood peers were “just mean and I do not know why,” He attended catholic school until the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and transferred to public school. Thomas also noted that about this time he stopped attending Catholic Church and started to visit other churches such as those of the Baptist faith. Thomas tried really hard to study as a Christian, both from social pressure and concern that he was going to hell for lacking faith. He felt constrained by the social environment (of the South) to consider any other possible explanation for metaphysical details of life. Thomas experienced a difficult family life as well where his mother hated his father. Thomas sought a relationship with his father. The tension became so bad that he would pray to God each night that God would take his life to save his mother the pain that Thomas felt he caused. Thomas’ childhood was one of torment emotionally and could not find peace.

For ten years, Thomas tried to force himself to be serious about religion and continually found himself naturally shifting his focus to other things. He saw this as a consistent flux back and forth of being a better Christian to shifting to mundane interests such as video games. The age of 19 was a major milestone for Thomas. Not only did he finally lose interest in religion, but also his mother (due to their strained relationship) kicked Thomas out of the house. This is an event he speaks of with emotion and it appears to be a major point in his life.

Thomas felt tension between the social norm of Christianity of the South and his rationalization about the existence of God. This caused internal emotional agreement for Thomas. Thomas notes an exchange from one of his friends.

One of my friends said to me when I was 26. You know ‘Thomas’ I wholly believe in the Bible. Everything in the Bible is the word of God. If you do not believe that, you are not a Christian. I thought about that. There are several denominations that believe that everything in the Bible is not true. You have to look at the Bible, where it came from, and the time it was from. That was a revelation for me, a big tipping point. I never had any religious moments in my life except that night when it forced me to think outside the box.

Thomas notes this was the moment when he became an Atheist and questioned the existence of God. As was noted throughout Thomas' narrative, Thomas sees himself as a rationalist and one who participates in self-discovery. His narrative begins with a child who accepts the religious teachings of his parents but when those teachings lacked rational consistency, he turned his attention to other things to protect himself from the possibility of not being Christian. As he grew older, he continually attempted a personal revival of belief off and on, eventually losing interest in religion and then experiencing a milestone of deconversion as a result of a conversation with a good friend. Thomas notes that to be nonreligious in the southeast is considered "weird," as religiosity is the social and cultural norm. It could be that social norm continually placed conflict between Thomas' rational continuity and Christian theology. This conflict eventually led Thomas away from religion to antireligious.

Thomas' narrative is an excellent example of how the social tension and potential alienation of outsiders by an in-group can create additional social strife. For example, Thomas identifies as antireligious. Based on his narrative, it appears this is a reactionary statement of ontology related to social and cultural tension Thomas experiences in his daily life. Thomas' Nonbelief ontology is a relatively new position and it could be in a point of transition as noted by Strieb et al (2009) where he is dealing with anger as a result of his transition away from the boundaries of religion. That anger could be amplified additionally due to the cultural norms of Christianity within the south United States, further supporting the need for empirical comparisons geographically within the United States. Moreover, it could be that the Christianity presented to Thomas was not the reality he saw socially, intellectually, or personally. Such massive disconnects might certainly explain Thomas' deconversion. Thomas is frustrated that he cannot have a real and deep conversation about the limitations of religion with others. He states

that in his social setting such discussions are considered “taboo” as they create hostilities. While Thomas speaks in terms of his frustration with the status quo, he also appears optimistic within his own life regarding career and family. Fortunately for Thomas’ narrative, it appears things are much better in his life than before. Thomas is now married and graduated with a successful career. While he still has an estranged relationship with his mother, his family life is positive and he is happy with his values and secular morality.

### *Joey and Secular Activism*

Joey notes that many outsiders view him as a troublemaker particularly where religion is concerned. Joey is a college student in the South United States where religion is considered a cultural norm. As a social activist, Joey has been involved with his local Secular Student Alliance in the removal of prayer from college functions. Joey notes that his concern over the prayer is not that he is anti-religious but certain types of prayer exclude other religions and nonbelievers from participating in University functions. Also Joey is involved in other types of activism as well, including environmentalism and gay-lesbian transgendered rights. For Joey, human rights should be extended to all, not simply a specific group of people. Joey sees himself as a social activist.

Joey grew up in a liberal family. He attended church with his grandparents, and his own parents considered themselves Methodist when he was younger, although they were not particularly religious. Joey states that his grandparents were the example of good Christians; they believed “Jesus is love” and attempted to be kind to all regardless of who they were. Joey shares that some could call that a form of communism, but this standard of life worked for his grandparents. While Joey respected his grandparents’ beliefs, he could not understand why it required a visit to a church on Sunday morning. “Why did they (the church) care about me and



why would I care about them.” Religion appeared alien to Joey. At the age of 13, Joey began to distance himself from religion. He felt that by gibing or mocking religion he could further distance himself from it. Joey never considered himself religious. This distance further removed him from the social and cultural perspectives of religion. In reflection on God, Joey states that as a child he at least knew his uncle who existed then but not now. Joey appears to be skeptical related to what he can see and directly experience. He appears to be inferring that he has never had a direct experience of God like he did with his uncle, so how can one speak to the validity of religious experience.

As Joey grew older, he found himself reading intellectual books about Atheism. Joey also struggled with drug addiction which following his rehabilitation gave him the time and opportunity for real study of Nonbelief. Joey continued self-education about Nonbelief and religious skepticism, exploring the various aspects of Nonbelief and the counter theories to religion. Joey read Dawkins, Hitchens, and other popular atheist authors at the time. Paradoxically, in Joey’s early 20s he gained an interest in religion but through skeptical inquiry versus a theological ontological confirmation. He started to understand the social connections of religion, particularly the control and political connection that religion has around the world. Joey started seeking others like himself but never connected. Joey experienced a relapse in his struggle with drugs. At that time, Joey explored various aspects of parapsychology and the occult related to the existence of ancient knowledge, alien existence, and the like, in search of alternative knowledge. The limitations of such a study led Joey to consider the hard sciences. Joey considered being a Biologist. Joey experienced a second reclamation from drugs and finally reached out to others of Nonbelief. As he connected with his local freethought association, he began to have a profound realization of experience. He started to have worthwhile friendships

with others of similar view. Moreover he came to evaluate his new “spiritual awakening” of connections with others in sharp contrast to his old drug-addict life. Joey became a very active individual in the Nonbelief movement. Moreover, he considers himself a humanist, which in definition for Joey is concerned about social issues and justice. At the time of this interview, he spoke in detail about his pleasure in being socially engaged and active in the Nonbelief community.

Joey’s narrative is profound as it is not only a story of struggle, but also of pilgrimage. Joey’s narrative has three specific perspectives of interest. One is that while religion was remotely present in Joey’s life through his grandparents, he was not particularly involved in religion. Second is that Joey experienced a dark time where drugs were of paramount interest. The drugs represented his primary concern, more than anything else. The third theme is one of rebirth as a drug-free social agent of change. He seeks to change the world and make it a better place for everyone, not simply the religious majority. While he appears to be very concerned with social issues and fairness to minorities, – religious and otherwise – Joey appears to have a profound respect for religion and the meaning inherent within. In one sense, Joey is interested in the study of religion to show the absurdity that exists within the theological structure; but in the same respect, Joey’s profound respect for people leaves him short of actually attacking the beliefs of people. Joey’s worldview is concerned with irrationality more than the individual behavior of others. He is a proactive intellectual in many respects as he seeks to learn about his movement, studying the various aspects and layers regarding the Nonbelief message and community. He wants to be informed related to his social activism.

The narrative portions of these interviews provide evidence of the intersections between the psychological and the sociological in how individuals form identity. In each of these cases,

the participants have developed their own identity from that of their family. Their individuality emerges from the conflicting views of their family or social setting. They have to adapt to survive in their own skin of who they naturally are. At some point, they gain the self-confidence to make decisions for themselves. In some cases, those decisions are made against the geographic and cultural boundaries of their community. In each case, those tensions are related to the how they publically identify and relate to the world around them. Some seek comfort in finding others like them. In some cases, the social tension is synthetically placed in the individual. For example, Heather was reminded everyday of living in California that she was Muslim. While she lived in a social setting, which would have less social religious tension than, say, the South; her parents felt the need to place those cultural conditions on her as immigrants. In the case of Joey who lives in the South, he mentions very little of the social tension he lives within but rather attempts to act as a change agent within the various networks in which he affiliates. Thomas speaks to the tension, but finds his solace within a new immediate family with his wife. In many respects, he severed the unhealthy relationship of his mother. It would be interesting to know if his mother was the proponent of his faith as a child. Even for those born within nonreligious households or self-declared atheist households, there the social tension of religion is present. Certainly, these individuals speak of their belief against the backdrop of the social norms in which they live. For example, in low-tension sections of the Country, such identities may not be as pressing while in others such identities can cause hostility. Jenee is an excellent example of a participant who moved from a low-tension to a high-tension geographic community. She had to adapt to the social situation there not to discuss her beliefs. While these individuals make up but a small sample, almost all the interviews speak of social and personal growth as they progressed through their lives. Many of them speak of the world in which they

live and how they address their minority belief position against the majority. Some were open with all those in their lives about their Atheism or Agnosticism as identity. Others were strategic in who they told. Some would tell everyone but immediate family. Others would avoid telling in-laws or coworkers for fear of reprisals. Some were completely open. While religion may not be part of their individual lives, most spoke of religion in relation to their social setting. Many talk about their lack of belief in the context of belief. This further supports the claim that Nonbelief in the United States has a unique identity and a complexity similar to other social systems and affiliations.

### *Frequency Trends in Themes*

The following section explored specific themes related to all N=59 interviews conducted including those who did not include specific identity or chose to not answer some questions due to fear of reprisal by those in their community. This section coded common themes related to answers generated from the pre-questionnaire as compared to semi-structured interview data collected. The data was then entered into SPSS for simple frequency analysis. Researchers asked what their beliefs were as a child. Sixteen participants did not identify. The largest group was former Catholics at 10.3%. The next largest were Baptist. One individual identified as a secular Catholic meaning that he or she followed the rituals and participated in Church but did not believe in God.

Table 3  
Interview Participant's Childhood Beliefs

<b>Childhood Beliefs</b>				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	16	27.6	27.6	27.6
Agnostic	1	1.7	1.7	29.3
Assembly of God	1	1.7	1.7	31.0
Atheist	2	3.4	3.4	34.5
Baptist	4	6.9	6.9	41.4
Catholic	6	10.3	10.3	51.7
Christian	2	3.4	3.4	55.2
Church of Christ	1	1.7	1.7	56.9
Episcopal	1	1.7	1.7	58.6
Fundamentalist Christian	1	1.7	1.7	60.3
Humanistic Judaism	1	1.7	1.7	62.1
Jewish	3	5.2	5.2	67.2
Methodist	3	5.2	5.2	72.4
Mormon	1	1.7	1.7	74.1
Muslim	1	1.7	1.7	75.9
New England baptist	1	1.7	1.7	77.6
Not Religious	2	3.4	3.4	81.0
Pentecostal	1	1.7	1.7	82.8
Presbyterian	3	5.2	5.2	87.9
Quaker	1	1.7	1.7	89.7
Secular Catholic	1	1.7	1.7	91.4
Seventh-Day Adventist	1	1.7	1.7	93.1
Southern Baptist	1	1.7	1.7	94.8
Various Churches	1	1.7	1.7	96.6
Worldwide Church of God	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	58	100.0	100.0	

In exploring the participants' openness about their ontological position as noted in table 4, researchers asked participants if they were open with their friends and family about their lack of belief. The results are telling as 55% said no and 43% said yes. One person stated that he or she shifted his or her answers back and forth over time, meaning that sometimes they are open other times not.

Table 4

Openness with Others about Beliefs

<b>Open About Beliefs</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	32	55.2	55.2	55.2
	No/Yes	1	1.7	1.7	56.9
	Yes	25	43.1	43.1	100.0
Total		58	100.0	100.0	

We explored this theme further by geographic region of the United States. Some interesting trends emerge in table 5. Obviously, those who were reluctant to report their data, 100 percent were not open with others about their ontological position. Within the Midwest 87% or N=7 participants were open; only one was not. The north region was split almost half-and-half with 57.1% who were not open and 42.9% who were. Interestingly within the South, more individuals were open at 52.6% than those who were not at 42.1% indicating almost a half and half observation as well. The West region was also almost split with those not open at 44.4% and those who are open about their ontological position at 55.6%. While this may seem to challenge the earlier assertion regarding social tension, one perspective might view this data as indicating that some participants are open to the sharing of their view regardless of social tension while others are private in their perspective. Interestingly, even those who are not open or not declared still want to share their story. This indicates a need to connect with others about their ontological worldview.

Table 5

Openness with Others about Beliefs by Region

Open About Beliefs by Region						
Region			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Midwest	Valid	No	1	12.5	12.5	12.5
		Yes	7	87.5	87.5	100.0
		Total	8	100.0	100.0	
North	Valid	No	4	57.1	57.1	57.1
		Yes	3	42.9	42.9	100.0
		Total	7	100.0	100.0	
Not Declared	Valid	No	15	100.0	100.0	100.0
South	Valid	No	8	42.1	42.1	42.1
		No/Yes	1	5.3	5.3	47.4
		Yes	10	52.6	52.6	100.0
		Total	19	100.0	100.0	
West	Valid	No	4	44.4	44.4	44.4
		Yes	5	55.6	55.6	100.0
		Total	9	100.0	100.0	

Finally, in examination of social connections with others of non-belief, the qualitative portion of the study inquired if participants connected or participated with others of similar ontological view in organizations, online, or face-to-face. Examples of such organizations are secular societies, freethought groups, or Atheism support networks. Interestingly, 60% of the participants were involved in some type of social networking with others of Nonbelief, while 29.3 were not. Sixteen participants did not respond to this specific question. Therefore, it appears some participants do feel the need to have connections with others of Nonbelief. Others may participate in more private ways, meaning that they connect with others over the internet or simply prefer to read and study.

Table 6

Nonbelief Organization Affiliation

<b>Nonbelief Organizaiton Affiliation?</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	17	29.3	40.5	40.5
	Yes	25	43.1	59.5	100.0
	Total	42	72.4	100.0	
Missing	System	16	27.6		
	Total	58	100.0		

This observation also ensures that the team reached those of Nonbelief beyond Nonbelief organizations.

Typology of Nonbelief

The final section of study one explores the potential for creating a typology of Atheism. As was noted in the literature review, many respectable academic articles have discussed the need for further delineation of types of Nonbelief and research that is more sophisticated on Atheism and Agnosticism. As a growing group within the United States coupled with the increasing popular literature in discussion of issues of Atheism and Agnosticism, more research that is sophisticated should be encouraged in the study of Nonbelief. Using a series of semi-structured interview questions, this study attempted to detect if those who consider themselves nonreligious would have agreement in the types of definitions used in self-identity as related to atheists and agnostics. First, a list of terms was compiled for Nonbelief taken from a variety of sources, including academic literature and popular atheist literature such as Dawkins and Hitchens. Researchers then asked participants to give us their definition for each term presented. Interestingly, a number of people gave contrary definitions regarding each term. Within some



descriptions, some agreement among participants was observed, for example in relation to the terms Atheism, Agnosticism, and anti-theist. Participants agreed on a general sense of what each of the three terms mean. In other cases, definitional agreement could not be met in relation to specific terms. Alternatively, while looking for themes in the data, it was realized that while there was disagreement regarding the terms, we did observe similar definitions across terms. This meant that most participants had similar definitions for the different types of Nonbelief even though they may not use the same “term” as a vocabulary word. Using social constructionism and taking these definitional commonalities, the definitions were organized into a typology and then labeled them by generated terms that captured the common idea conveyed by the definition. A typology of six characteristics emerged within the data.

#### *Intellectual Atheist / Agnostic (IAA)*

The first and most frequently discussed type is what could be termed The Intellectual Atheist / Agnostic or IAA. IAA typology includes individuals who proactively seek to educate themselves through intellectual association, and proactively acquires knowledge on various topics relating to ontology (the search for Truth) and non-belief. They enjoy dialectic enterprises such as healthy democratic debate and discussions, and are intrinsically motivated to do so. These individuals are typically versed in a variety of writings on belief and non-belief and are prone to cite these authors in discussions.

IAAs associate with fellow intellectuals regardless of the other’s ontological position as long as the IAA associate is versed and educated on various issues of science, philosophy, “rational” theology, and common socio-political religious dialog. They may enjoy discussing the epistemological positions related to the existence or non-existence of a deity. Besides using textual sources such as intellectual books, IAAs may utilize technology such as the Internet to

read popular Blogs, view Youtube videos, and listen to podcasts that fall in line with their particular interests. Facebook and other online social networking sites can be considered a medium for learning or discussion. However, not only is the IAA typically engaged in electronic forms of intellectualism but they oftentimes belong to groups that meet face to face offline such as various skeptic, rationalist and freethinking groups for similar mentally stimulating discussions and interaction. The Modus operandi for the Intellectual Atheist / Agnostic is the externalization of epistemological orientated social stimulation.

#### *Activist Atheist / Agnostic (AAA)*

The next typology relates to being socially active. These individuals are termed the activist atheist and/or agnostic. Individuals in the Activist Atheist typology are not content with the placidity of simply holding a non-belief position; they seek to be both vocal and proactive regarding current issues in the atheist/agnostic socio-political sphere. This socio-political sphere can include such egalitarian issues, but is not limited to: concerns of humanism, feminism, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered (LGBT) issues, social or political concerns, human rights themes, environmental concerns, animal rights, and controversies such as the separation of church and state. Their activism can be as minimal as the education of friends or others, to much larger manifestations of social activities such as boycotting products, promoting legal action, or marching to raise awareness. Activist Atheists / Agnostics are commonly naturalistic or humanistic minded individuals, but are not limited to these types of ethical concerns. It is not uncommon for AAA individuals to ally themselves with other movements in support of social awareness. The Activist Atheist / Agnostic's are not idle; they effectuate their interests and beliefs.

### *Seeker-Agnostic (SA)*

The third typological characteristic is the Seeker-Agnostic. Seeker-Agnostic typology consists of individuals attuned to the metaphysical possibilities precluding metaphysical existence, or at least recognizes the philosophical difficulties and complexities in making personal affirmations regarding ideological beliefs. They may call themselves agnostic or agnostic-atheist, as the SA simply cannot be sure of the existence of God or the divine. They keep an open mind in relation to the debate between the religious, spiritual, and antitheist elements within society.

Seeker-Agnostics recognize the limitation of human knowledge and experience. They actively search for and respond to knowledge and evidence, either supporting or disconfirming truth claims. They also understand, or at least recognize, the qualitative complexities of experiences in the formation of personal meaning. Seeker Agnostics do not hold a firm ideological position but always search for the scientifically wondrous, and experientially profound confirmation of life's meaning. They may be intrinsically motivated to explore and seek understanding in the world around them. The diversity of others is accepted for the SA and co-existence with the "others" is not only possible, but also welcomed. Their worldly outlook may be mediated by science; however, they recognize current scientific limitations and embrace scientific uncertainty. They are comfortable with this uncertainty and even enjoy discussing it. Some Intellectual Atheist / Agnostics or Anti-Theists may accuse the seeker agnostic of avoiding responsibility or commitment to a more solid affirmation of Atheism. In other cases, outsiders may see it as an ontological transitional state from religion or spirituality to Atheism.

In some cases, Seeker-Agnostics may generally miss being a believer either from the social benefits or the emotional connection they have with others such as friends or family. At times, their intellectual disagreement with their former theology causes some cognitive

dissonance and it is possible they may continue to identify as a religious or spiritual individual. However, taking those exceptions into account, the majority of Seeker Agnostics should in no way be considered “confused.” For the Seeker-Agnostic, uncertainty is embraced.

### *Anti-Theist*

The fourth typology, and one of the more assertive in their view, termed the Anti-Theist. While the Anti-Theists may be considered atheist or in some cases labeled as “new atheists,” the Anti-Theist is diametrically opposed to religious ideology. As such, the assertive Anti-Theist both proactively and aggressively asserts their views towards others when appropriate, seeking to educate the theist’s in the passé nature of belief and theology. In other words, antitheists view religion as ignorance and see any individual or institution associated with it as backward and socially detrimental. The Anti-theist has a clear and – in their view, superior – understanding of the limitations and danger of religions. They view the logical fallacies of religion as an outdated worldview that is not only detrimental to social cohesion and peace, but also to technological advancement and civilized evolution as a whole. They are compelled to share their view and want to educate others into their ideological position and attempt to do so when and where the opportunity arises. Some Anti-Theist individuals feel compelled to work against the institution of religion in its various forms including social, political, and ideological while others may assert their view with religious persons on an individual basis. The Anti-Theist believes that the obvious fallacies in religion and belief should be aggressively addressed in some form or another. Based on personalities, some Anti-Theists may be more assertive than others; but outsiders and friends know very clearly where they stand in relation to an Anti-theist. Their worldview is typically not a mystery. The Anti-Theist’s reaction to a religious devotee is often based on social and psychological maturity.

### *Non-Theist*

The fifth typology termed the non-theist. While not many individuals identified themselves as this type, they did have experiences with others who indicated themselves as being non-theists. For the Non-Theists, the alignment of oneself with religion, or conversely an epistemological position against religion can appear quite unconventional from their perspective. However, a few terms may best capture the sentiments of the Non-Theist. One is apathetic, while another may be disinterested. Non-Theist is non-active in terms of involving themselves in social or intellectual pursuits having to do with religion or anti-religion. A non-theist simply does not concern him or herself with religion. Religion plays no role or issue in one's consciousness or worldview; nor does a nontheist have concern for the atheist or agnostic movement. No part of their life addresses or considers transcendent ontology. They are not interested in any type of secularist agenda and simply do not care. Simply put, Non-Theist's are apathetic non-believers. They simply do not believe, and in the same right, their absence of faith means the absence of any thing religion in any form from their mental space.

### *Ritual Atheist/Agnostic (RAA)*

The sixth and final type was one of the most interesting and unexpected. This exploration termed this type The Ritual Atheist / Agnostic or RAA. The RAA type holds no belief in God or the divine, or they tend to believe it is unlikely that there is an afterlife with God or the divine. They are open about their lack of belief and may educate themselves on the various aspects of belief by others. One of the defining characteristics regarding Ritual Atheists/Agnostics is that they may find utility in the teachings of some religious traditions. They see these as more or less philosophical teachings of how to live life and achieve happiness than a path to transcendental

liberation. Ritual Atheist / Agnostics find utility in tradition and ritual. For example, these individuals may participate in specific rituals, ceremonies, musical opportunities, meditation, yoga classes, or holiday traditions. Such participation may be related to an ethnic identity (e.g. Jewish) or the perceived utility of such practices in making the individual a better person.

Many times Ritual Atheist / Agnostics may be misidentified as spiritual but not religious, but they are quick to point out that they are atheist or agnostic in relation to their own ontological view. For other Ritual Atheist / Agnostics, it may be simply that they hold respect for profound symbolism inherent within religious rituals, beliefs, and ceremonies. The Ritual Atheist / Agnostic individual perceive ceremonies and rituals as producing personal meaning within life. This meaning can be an artistic or cultural appreciation of human systems of meaning while knowing there is no higher reality other than the observable reality of the mundane world. In some cases, these individuals may identify strongly with religious traditions as a matter of cultural identity and even take an active participation in religious rituals. While Ritual Atheists may celebrate their association with ritualistic organizations or call themselves cultural practitioners of a faith-based practice, they are open and honest about their ontological position and do not hide their lack of belief in the metaphysical or divine. Ritual Atheist /Agnostics may identify ritualistically or symbolically with Judaism, Paganism, Buddhism, or Laveyan Satanism to name some examples.

#### Typology Description in Simplicity

While the qualitative portion of this study found incredibly rich definitional information, it became apparent that the definitions would need to be simplified for the quantitative study. This study attempted to simplify the language to a high school level in the attempt to create

greater accessibility by the reader. While most of the participant pool for the qualitative study was college educated or higher, this study attempted to ensure that these typology descriptions would translate into a variety of socio-economic and cultural identities within the United States. Additionally, to create more of an experiential context to the descriptions and infuse statements of ownership, this study worded the descriptions within the first person. In this, participants could attempt to find the behaviors, values and beliefs that best suited them. Finally, within the interview data, these observations also discovered that some values or behaviors might be self-described with some participants but not others. These statements are termed “conditional” statements, meaning that they may be a part of someone’s experience and they may not. In either case, the study did not want some statements to exclude participants if they could not identify with them within their own experience. For others, they may find those statements of confirmation if the typology describes them. Therefore, this study included them in the empirical analysis. The following are the simplified language typology descriptions that were derived and used within the quantitative “second” study.

One of the difficulties in formalizing a complete typology or a system of types of Nonbelief, the study required descriptions which could be applied quantitatively. Therefore, the qualitative informed the construction of common themes in the form of self-descriptions. These self-descriptions include common statements made by the qualitative participants looking for common statements related to their worldview and perceived stress between them and others who disagree with them (e.g. believers and various religious devotees). The following section provides the descriptions which were used in the quantitative study.

*Intellectual Atheist / Agnostic (IAA)*

“Many of my friends consider me the perpetual student or the group intellectual. This is due to my ability to discuss critically issues related to the social, psychological, political, scientific, and/or ontological value of religion. In some cases, I may use philosophy and skepticism in my analysis of others’ thoughts and ideas as well as my own. I take delight in discussing intellectual topics and issues of defining truth with believers as long as others are open to intellectual democratic debate and conversation. I respect others opinions.

In my free time, I often read books relating, but not limited to science, philosophy, and in some cases popular writings on Atheism and other similar themes. I find that I am typically more educated on religious issues than those who consider themselves religious. I am confident in my view however; I also have a great respect for others. While debate can occur with others, I always attempt to listen and respect their ideas. As an intellectual, one must ensure they have the social maturity to respect others even if I disagree with them. I enjoy and actively pursue discussions and healthy debate. One or all of these statements may agree with the Intellectual Atheist / Agnostic”

Those who identify with description may participate in online discussions regarding issues of truth and science. “Online forms can be following and writing about my concerns with society, chatting in discussion forums, and/or blogging.”

Those who identify with this description may also participate in face to face intellectual discussion groups (such as theology or skeptic discussion groups) as they enjoy intellectual debate. These groups can be impromptu or formal groups who meet face to face.

“I may even be known to use science and reason as evidence in support of my claims.”

#### *Activist Atheist / Agnostic (AAA)*

“Society needs to heal and activism is a great way for this to happen. I consider myself a social activist. One of the challenges of being a person like me is that my values and belief may be different from others. I celebrate diversity. I have been known to ally myself with concerns of humanism, feminism, LGBT issues, social or political concerns, human rights themes, environmental concerns, animal rights, and/or controversies such as the separation of church and state. I see value in civil disobedience if the laws oppress minority groups. If there is a concern or issue that is important to me, I speak up about it, and seek others to help act on it. I am primarily concerned with equal representation in society for all and/or ensuring the continuation of the earth through protecting the environment and social change. While I may be a self-identified agnostic or an atheist, I encourage other non-believers to be aware of such social inconsistencies for all minority



groups. Atheism and Agnosticism is just one group of many who deserve equal rights in this country.”

Those who identify with this type may wish to be an activist but due to social or geographic limitations are unable to be a social activist. They would still identify with this description, as their intention is to make a difference. Those who identify with this type may be highly involved in protest or advocacy movements beyond simply non-belief.

### *Seeker-Agnostic (SA)*

“My friends may be sure of their view on religion and God (the divine) however I am not so sure. Some may see this as a move to avoid defining myself as totally atheist, but for me it is a comfortable position. I simply cannot speak to the existence of a god or the divine. That is ok and those who question my view should not be concerned about my uncertainty. There are many things in this life that we cannot definitively speak about. I find science and/or philosophy interesting and educate myself in seeking some type of truth for myself.

If I socialize, I love to surround myself around all kinds of people including those who may be deeply religious or an assertively atheist. Simply, I am open to and in search for metaphysical and scientific possibilities of truth. Human experience and the world in general is complex and full of things we just do not know yet.”

Those who identify with this type may accept it as a philosophical position since God cannot be defined or objectively observed. “I may even call myself agnostic as it is a statement of knowledge that I cannot directly know if god or the divine exists.”

Those who identify with this type may generally miss being a believer from either the social benefits or the emotional connection they have with others such as friends or family. At times, their intellectual disagreement with their former theology causes some internal disagreement within their own mind and it is possible they may continue to identify as a religious or spiritual individual. Those who identify with this type may be in transition from religion or spirituality into more agnostic or atheist forms of belief. They recognize the power of identity and are careful to identify to certain types of people.

### *Anti-Theist*

“Agnostics and Atheists are some of the most hated people in the world today. Yet the religious attempt to limit the rights and freedoms of atheists in many countries. This inexcusable move will not be without reaction. I feel I must share my discontent with such oppression. I am openly against religion and religious ideals and I take pride in my opposition. Someone has to stand up for non-belief. Religion is outdated and does not make any sense. I simply cannot understand how any rational person would believe such nonsense. It is my duty to address this ignorance in each situation where it is appropriate. So many intellectual systems have shown definitively that the events and teachings of religion have no basis in reality. If we are going to evolve as a society, we have to move beyond religion as it is holding us back.

I find myself angry and uncomfortable at the level of ignorance and hate spouted by religion. I know more than they do about their religion, which is sad when you think about it. Truth is not relative, as science can confirm what is true and what is not through the scientific method. While we may not be able to know everything through science, we can be confident that religion is an outdated system of thought. It is oppressive and offensive. Bring me a devote believer and I will show them how wrong they are.”

Those who identify with this type may find they offend people regularly. They may find them in aggressive arguments on topics of religion. “Hey, the truth hurts when you are on the wrong side of history.” Those who identify with this type may find themselves inherently frustrated with the status quo and seek to show others the limitations of religious thinking. They may assert themselves in open conversation with others either face to face or online.”

### *Non-Theist*

“Who really cares about this religion and spirituality stuff anyway? Religion is an outdated system of thought which brought meaning to ancient people. Today there is no need for religion hence it has no bearing on any aspect of my life. I do not like the word atheist or agnostic as it assumes a dialog on religion. It is not part of my thought process and I simply do not care, period. Do not call me atheist or agnostic.”

Being against religion, deities, or the supernatural is the same as being for them. “I simply don’t care about that stuff.”

*Ritual Atheist/Agnostic (RAA)*

“I am firmly an atheist or agnostic and certainly question the existence of God or the divine. I find the human element of religion fascinating in how it structures symbols to provide meaning about the world. I appreciate meaningful rituals, and in some cases even religious ones. Humans are profoundly intelligent and creative in how they structure their world. Religious or secular symbols are powerful and meaningful to me and I find them interesting. I am not a believer in the divine or transcendent but I certainly have an appreciation for holidays, symbols, and/or rituals in some way. My interest is in the element of connection with these profound aspects of human experience.

I am of a specific ethnic or cultural group for which these rituals help me connect with others of my group or with the past.

I see these rituals, symbols, or holidays as performances which provide additional life meaning for me. They provide an additional context of thinking about the world. God or the divine does not exist.”

Ritual Atheist/Agnostics see these rituals, symbols, or holidays as psychologically beneficial.

They do not believe in any transcendent aspect of these practices only that they are profound examples of culture and psychology.

These descriptions were taken and organized from the combination of similar responses to the words presented. Some of the participants identified with many of these definitions as matching their own identity. Others found that, while some of the descriptions match their worldview, they found that others were a better fit. It appears that these types are more behavioral and cognitive preferences than inherent genetic or biological traits. For example, many of those who self-identified with the antitheist typology were also recently deconverted or socially displeased with the status quo, typically in high social tension-based geographies. This further yields evidence that the pool of participants may experience different behavior patterns based on context. The typologies posed here are simply a dominant preference of social and cognitive meaning. Since the quantitative portion of the study required qualitative coded data for the typologies, the quantitative study explores the empirical applicability of these typologies to a much larger population. Of course, the definitional structure and grammatical complexity may

not be applicable to all within the Nonbelief cohort; the definitions presented above were simplified for greater accessibility to a much wider research participant audience.

## Discussion

For the discussion section, this will explore the qualitative questions of this study. Question One inquired into the nature of Nonbelief and if specific terms could be defined and commonly used. As noted in the results section, this study found that participants could not agree upon specific terms. However, it was discovered that they did have similar definitions in theme and behavior. The study took these similar definitions and constructed a typology from those similar definitions. This study sought to sum those definitions into a word or phrase that would capture the overall essence of the definition. The definitions were then converted into self-description vignettes for application in study two of this dissertation. The data provided an interesting perspective on the types of individuals who call themselves nonbelievers. For example, many of the “type one academic atheists” were verbose and long-winded. Many of them were well read in a variety of different authors on the topic of Atheism and Agnosticism. In fact, many of them considered themselves practical atheists but philosophically agnostic, a distinction rooted in philosophy. For example, those who were philosophical agnostics believed that likely there is no god but had to yield to the fact that they cannot prove or disprove the existence. For all intents and purposes they were classified as academic atheists/agnostics for that reason. These individuals are different from Type Three Agnostics as their ontological position is assured even though they recognize they cannot empirical prove or disprove the existence of God. The Type Three Agnostics were more experiential – almost spiritual – in their view. Some of them were in the process of a deconversion experience, while others were happy

with the mystery truth. Some indicated they were not comfortable with the stigma of being an atheist, while others were very clear that their Agnosticism was a conscious ideological choice. For those concerned with the ideology of Agnosticism, many of them stated their distaste with other nonbelievers attempting to force them to identify as atheist. This appeared to be a point of contention. Even still, other agnostics were concerned with the judgment of both believers and atheists alike, and felt that the ontological position of Agnosticism provided them a bridge between the delineated communities of each.

Another type to emerge was the Atheist/Agnostic Activists. Many of these individuals were the humanists of the group concerned with equality, social justice, and minority rights. Their activism was not solely focused on the plight of Nonbelief, they were also concerned with others rights such as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered issues (LGBT), environmental awareness and concerns, health, politics, protest groups and the like. This group is not simply defined by action, but also concern and intention. In many of the interviews, these individuals stated they had social concerns, but considering the negativity of their Nonbelief position were concerned that their activism might have the reverse result. So in some cases they may donate to causes but did not want to publically be outed (notice we are using LGBT description of experience here) not in protection of themselves, but concerned that the movement may gain a negative stigma with their open membership. Others saw their Nonbelief as yet another example of social prejudice and attempted to raise awareness of stigma and prejudice. For example, Joey actively worked to raise awareness of Christian dominance within his community. He even protested his local college to get them to stop Christian prayer prior to university events. No surprise, Joey was also involved in other social movements as well include the LGBT movement in his community although he is heterosexual himself. Joey is but one example of many where

the participants identified themselves either as an activist or where they talked about the characteristics of their activist friends.

The next interest typology to discuss was the Antitheist. First, this is one of the few terms that participants all most all recognized and commonly identified. Even more interestingly, many participants noted that they knew an antitheist in their life or for some of the interviewees even identified themselves as such. The Antitheist individuals were very passionate about their views; and, much like the Atheist / Agnostic Activists, felt discrimination. However, what makes them different is that they take a much more oppositional perspective. Some of them dubbed themselves new atheists while others simply wanted to remind aggressively their religious friends about the “stupidity” of their faith. At times during many of these interviews, these individuals were not only negative and condescending to believers regarding their theological beliefs and ritual, but also were almost as equally critical of Nonbelief apologists who attempted to find some middle ground with believers. Many of the interviewees who fit this description seemed to be angry at the status quo of society. Many of them perceive there to be high social tension regardless of their location in the Country. It appears that the way they address their cognitive dissonance was through spirited and emotional debates with believers. This is not to say these individuals are maladjusted (a claim that cannot be made in study one due to methodological limitations), but certainly their behavioral preference for addressing disagreement is interesting nonetheless.

The next type was the Non-Theists. They were the smallest group and a few participants noted knowing someone like this. This group was very difficult to classify as only a couple of people either identified someone they knew like this with little detail or identified himself or herself as a Non-Theist. They are simply uninterested in religion or the discussion of religion,

atheist or theist conversations. As one interviewee stated, they were like a person who does not like soccer in a Country where everyone loves soccer. How can you speak to their disinterest in relation to a social phenomenon? There is very little to describe other than the paradox of their disinterest in anything to do with religion even if they live in a culturally religious segment of the country.

The final group to emerge, unexpectedly, is the ritual atheist. These individuals call themselves “culturally religious” or “ritualistically religious” but hold no ontological position particularly to vertical transcendence. They go through the actions and find solace in the practices, but do not believe in a higher power. This is a diverse group as well. For example, some participants were Jews who continued their practices out of the importance for cultural identity and tradition, but simply did not believe in God. Some were Buddhists who were interested in the psychological benefits of meditation and the philosophical teachings of Buddhism and the like. In some cases, individuals found meaning in ritual – seeking a way to connect with sacred space without the theological underpinnings of transcendence. The best examples of ritual meaning participants were Pagans or Satanists. This group also spoke of community and connecting with others. Many of them talked about the profound respect they had for the religious, but simply could not come to terms with the lack of evidence for God and/or in some cases, the authenticity of holy texts and teachings. Sum up the ritual atheists, would be best described in meaningful purpose and performance without theology.

Certainly the first research question “What are the different terms associated with non-belief employed by non-believers by which they identify themselves” of this study is addressed by the data presented. The related question is how definitively. The terms were borrowed from popular and academic literature. People certainly identify with them, but most cannot agree on a

common definition. When looking simply at definitions without focusing on the descriptor word, common themes do emerge. This led the team to organize these responses into the common phrases and definitional frames used by the participants. Certainly, it has been shown that individuals have a variety of definitions to describe their complexity. The empirical confirmation of study two will determine if typological constructs can be empirically delineated.

Research Question Two asked “How did participants come to be non-believers?” Question Two was interested in the narrative trajectory of participants and how they came to their current ontological position. In the narrative exploration, we see examples of various narrative trajectories with continued reflection on specific milestone and turning points in their lives. Moreover, these narratives show that critical events and relationships certainly have a profound impact on a person and their ontological identity. For example, Jenee was raised atheist with no particular deconversion story as we saw with other participants. However, her shift in geography certainly played a role in bringing her ontological position to mind. She moved from the Western United States to the Midwest into a religiously conservative community. This shows that she moved from a low to high social-tension situation. Others, such as Tuan, describe the concern his family had with religion as almost like an insurance policy, but Tuan certainly lost interest or value for religion as a whole. Certainly outside influences have a profound effect. For example, Tuan’s story of attempting to join the Armed Services reflects the social pressure of living in the Midwest and the difficulty of being different. Tuan and Jenee both show evidence in answering Research Question Two Part A, regarding life events which shape their ontological position. Moreover, within deconversion stories we see the intersection between rational consistency of theology and the social pressure of conformity. Their stories vary, but the theme is similar; the search for truth and the risks and implications of finding truth in a sea of social



adherence and conformity. These stories are fascinating, as in many respects, the Nonbelief seekers could be described as truth seekers – individuals concerned with the ontological and epistemological complexities of human experience. Many of them speak as theologians seeking to learn the true essence of existence, looking for the face of God himself or some evidence that the world has a spiritual reality. Unlike their religious contemporaries, these seekers use science, reason, rational thought, and critical analysis as their tools. By making this statement, it is not to say that religionists or theological adherents are not critical, but the nonbelievers find themselves seeking formalized objective evidence in support of theological claims. The bumps and roadblocks in their quest come from a variety of sources, from social tension and outsider prejudice to familial tension and the need to appease relatives.

For many of the interviews, self-reflection was not a positive event. Many of them reflected back in anger or resentment to the response of friends and/or relatives to their ontological shift away from religion. Even for those who were self-identified nonbelievers in their youth, their childhood certainly shows shifts in their view thanks in large part to their classmates, family, and other intersections with various networks of people. In relation to Research Question Two Part B, the question of identity is a profoundly complex and political issue for many. The process of identification is both an implicit and explicit exercise. Inherent to identity is a variety of social and psychological projections between the individual and the social network around them. For those situations where the lines of social networks are clearly delineated, such identities can push an individual out of the social norm and thereby they continually must prove the value of their presence. For those who seek less problematic identities, such as agnostic, they may find themselves able to transverse between social groups much more freely than their atheist counterparts. Certainly, this could create tension between

atheists and agnostics as well (as noted in the agnostic interviews). So how do these relate to the theories presented earlier regarding market theory and secularization?

As noted in the theoretical portion of this paper, there are two possible social theoretical observations that can be made. One is related to Stark and Fink's (2000) religious open market theory and the other is related to Bruce's (2011) secularization thesis. Either can fit this narrative. For Stark and Finke, this may simply be a new emergent movement, much like religion, which gains social adherents and an infrastructure to maintain itself. Since there is a rational social agreement and there are individuals who are encouraging others to consider their movement, including charismatic leaders such as Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens, certainly spiritual market share applies here. It could be seen as reverse marketing: encourage people to think that there is no value in the product of religion and offer an alternative, which is Nonbelief. The key to Stark and Finke is that social movement drives the adherence and conversion, not so much the truth of the message.

Alternatively, in Bruce's (2011) perspective, we could talk in terms of social progression or evolution. In some geographic locations, religious identity is less problematic related to the technological innovation as well as religious and cultural diversity. Therefore, for those locations, Atheism is a progressive identity and one eventually the society will shift to over time. Moreover, if Bruce is right, Sociologist and Psychologists are more likely to see a social shift over time to Nonbelief and more political concern with issues such as separation of church and state. With diversity of a society, a division of culture and religion occurs. Certainly, issues of religion and culture are apparent here in a variety of interviews. Within the Bruce paradigm, he speaks about the divergence of culture from religion. In a sense, slowly religion and culture become detectable residual constructs in which they may share social space but they each are

unique within their own right. According to Bruce, the division of culture and religion continues to expand as indicated in the secularization paradigm. The data of this study may suggest that psychologically and at least for the participants here, there is divergence between the identity of self and religious identity. The more individuals move away from organized religion, the more they compartmentalize their belief as something they do versus something they are.

Certainly, this conversation also yields to the spirituality rhetoric – however this was not a component of this study. Case in point, for example in Afghanistan Islam is tied within the culture. To be Afghani is to be Muslim. The cultural identity is wrapped into the religious identity. While social theorists can speak in terms of Afghan culture and its differences, say, to Jordanian culture; certainly for Afghani culture there is no difference. Now take a dynamic shift to the United States where we live in a pluralistic society. The culture of being American is compartmentalized from being, say, Christian. While there may be religious elements within American rituals and practices, non-Christians can identify with the components that are American. For those who are Christian however, they are still interested in presenting this Country as a Christian nation despite the census data in support of the obvious pluralism that exists. All this is said to set the context for the next assertion.

From the qualitative data, it was observed that atheists and agnostics continually make clear distinctions between the self and their ontology. For those who spoke of the wider and larger religious or Christian majority, the self and one's ontology were termed one in the same or "I am Christian" versus "I believe in Christianity" just like I am Chris Silver. Even in Heather's narrative related to her childhood in Islam, we see her parents attempt to present her as different and Muslim. In other words, it is not that Heather believes in Islam, it is that she "IS" a Muslim. The compartmentalization is a function of critical discussion and a defensive process. By those

in Nonbelief being on the outside, and because their ontological position presents the appearance of being the antithesis of the Christian other, they continually must educate themselves on religion and must defend their own view in terms of a lexicon of terms, values and ideas that juxtapose their view within logic and reason. For those in Nonbelief, the conversation here is inconsequential. The conversation is pointless as absence of faith means it does not exist. Why discuss something that is not pertinent to the human conversation. Alternatively, such a position may be a defensive mechanism of social pressure. For nontheists, he who cares the least wins. Alternatively, the academic typology may not be that they are assertively interested in education and learning; it is because they must stay prepared to defend themselves. The Antitheist requires no explanation; they simply want to react to the world in which they live. Activist atheists want to change the world and nontheists simply do not engage it. So the discussion here becomes between one's cognitive dissonance created by the rational explanation of the world and the social pressures outside of the participant to follow the theological status quo.

## CHAPTER IV

### STUDY TWO – EMPIRICAL CONFIRMATIONS OF TYPE AND EXPLORATIONS IN NONBELIEF PARTICIPANTS

#### Method

The design of this study sought to focus solely on a cohort of Nonbelief from across the United States. Obviously, this cohort is a small sub segment of the overall ontological landscape of the USA, spanning 7% to 15% of the overall American population depending on research the reader consults in exploration of this phenomenon. Considering the nature of Nonbelief and the small representation of Nonbelief within the American religious landscape, purposive sampling was employed, focused specifically on groups of American nonbelievers from the United States and overseas. Included in this sample were foreign nationals living within the United States, since they also contribute to the overall cultural and ontological makeup of the country. This study also included Americans living abroad as many of them may be in military service or business with the plan to return state side. This was to be sure that the American cultural boundary was not limited to geography and included those who plan to return home in some capacity. These individuals were tracked and designated within the demographic data.

Following the qualitative exploration of Study One, Participants were solicited for participation through social networking both face to face as well as through the internet. Webspace and a webdomain were created for greater accessibility to the survey implementation. The domain was called <http://www.atheismresearch.com> and was shared through flyers, at

Nonbelief meetings, and through a variety of internet mediums. Participation was voluntary and participants were provided detailed information regarding the length of the survey as well as time to completion. Upon completion of data collection, the data were cleaned and formatted to only include Americans and foreign nationals living within the United States. Since the survey was internet-based, roughly 40 international participants took the survey. They were removed from the dataset. Additionally, a number of individuals started the survey but many did not complete it. Many of them returned later to restart and finish the data. This observation was confirmed by the ip address captured by Survey Monkey. Those duplicates and the individuals that did not complete the survey were also removed. This was to ensure that analysis represented a complete dataset. For a couple of items not complete throughout, a value of 3 was assigned to null data to permit parametric and summative analysis. Additionally, 11 participants were removed as they self-reported being under the age of 18. They were removed in compliance with Institutional Review Board protocols at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. This left the study with N=1153 participants. Hood et al. (2009) proposed that Atheism likely has a broad spectrum of values and beliefs about the universe, comparable to the diversity of religious beliefs and values observed in social science literature. This study confirmed that more than 500 participants were needed to satisfy statistical power and make comparable inferences.

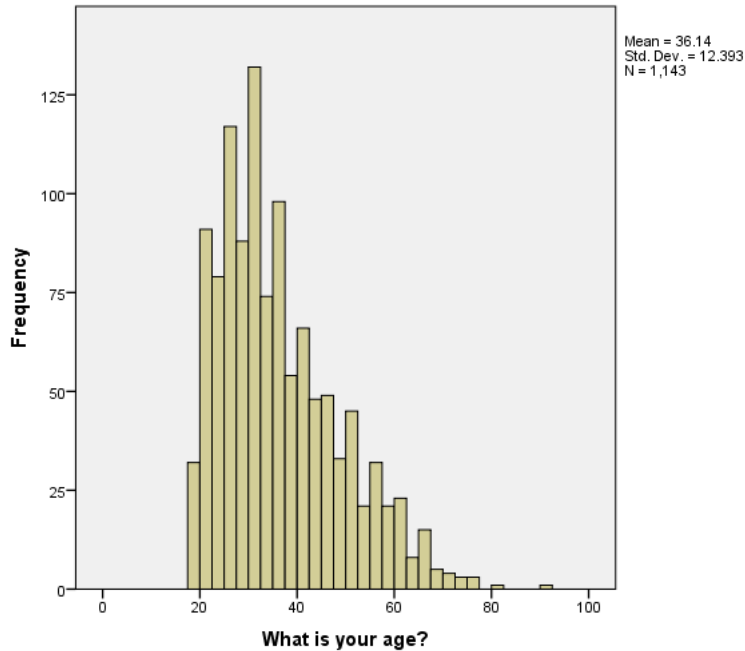


Figure 1 Distribution of Age

Of the 1153 participants, N=564 or 48.9% identified as male and N=578 or 50.1% identified as female. Moreover, N=11 or 1% identified as a genderqueer or agendered. It is unclear what the participants meant by these terms and unfortunately we did not inquire with participants following the study. The ages represented in the dataset ranged from 18 to 90 with a mean age of 36.14 (SD=12.939). As the reader can see in Figure 1 the largest number of participants is below the mean of 36.14 indicating that the median may be a better measure of central tendency regarding age. The Median age is 33. Comparison to the mean confirms a positively skewed distribution of ages. The skewed nature of the data may be a product of using an internet-based survey instrument. In regards to racial identity, N=1037 or 89.9% of participants identified as white, 2.2% identified as Hispanic or Latino/Latina, 2% identified as mixed racial or ethnic identity, and 1.7% identified as African American. The rest either did not identify or were offended by the question and noted so on their survey. In relation to education,

1% had less than a high school education, 13% had received their high school diploma or equivalent (e.g. GED), 29.3% received their associates or trade degree, 31.4% had achieved at least a bachelor’s degree or equivalent, 18.9% had achieved at least a master’s degree or equivalent, and 6.6% received a doctoral degree or equivalent.

In exploration of the geographic differences by regions – applying the geographic regional boundaries as defined in study one of this paper, study two asked participants to indicate where they live. This allowed the study recruiters to track their progress regarding their sampling strategy and ensure that statistical comparisons could be made regarding geographic region and potential social tension between the nonbeliever and their community to be assessed.

The largest participant pool by geographic region was the South at 51.7% (N=592) followed by the Western part of the United States at 21.8% or N=250. The next lowest was the Midwest United States at N=147 representing 12.8% of the sample. Lastly the Northeast was the smallest sample at 11.4% with N=132. As noted before, researchers also asked if the participant was an American living abroad. 2.2% or N=25 participants identified as an American living abroad.

Table 7  
Regional Frequency of Participants

		What region do you live in			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Northeast	132	11.4	11.5	11.5
	South	592	51.3	51.7	63.2
	Midwest	147	12.7	12.8	76.0
	West	250	21.7	21.8	97.8
	American Living Abroad	25	2.2	2.2	100.0
	Total	1146	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	7	.6		
Total		1153	100.0		



Certainly, since the study is based in the Southeast United States, and much of the face to face networking occurred there, it explains the large number of participants from that area of the country.

Lastly, Table 8 shows the demographics of the participants. The researchers asked the participants which Nonbelief description best described them based on the qualitative simplified descriptions from Study One. The largest group consisted of Type One Academics with 37.6% of the sample or N=434. The next largest was Type Two the Activists at 23% or 265 participants. The next largest was the antitheist group at 14.8% or N=171 of the sample. Further the fourth largest group self-identified as Ritual Atheists at 12.5% or N=144. This is followed by the agnostic group at 7.6% or N=88. The smallest group to identify was the Non-Theist group at 4.4% or N=51.

Table 8  
Frequency and Percentage of Nonbelief Types

<b>Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Type One Academic	434	37.6	37.6	37.6
	Type Two Activist	265	23.0	23.0	60.6
	Type Three Agnostic	88	7.6	7.6	68.3
	Type Four Antitheist	171	14.8	14.8	83.1
	Type Five Nontheist	51	4.4	4.4	87.5
	Type Six Ritual Atheist	144	12.5	12.5	100.0
	Total	1153	100.0	100.0	

*Materials and Procedure*

To provide a more holistic view of the Nonbelief in the United States, a variety of demographic questions including the typology description described in study one were coupled with a variety of psychological measures. These measures were assembled into a complete

survey and placed within the online domain of Survey Monkey. Survey Monkey also employs an item randomization procedure that randomizes the question order to avoid method effects that could occur by presenting subscale items together or in a certain order. Moreover, each research participant receives the items in a different order as well, to avoid method effects. The design of the study is not complicated. First it reports general demographic information regarding the participants including the general geographic location of the participant in the study, based on the Pew Forum Religious Identity and Church Attendance demographic study, as well as the US Census regional boundaries applied in study one. Next the survey utilizes the nominal variable of the type from study one and makes scale score comparisons between each typology looking for significant differences in empirical conformation of the uniqueness of each type. While the study would hope to detect unique significant differences for each type, it is mainly looking to detect if differences exists and if observed trends can be drawn about these specific groups. Quantitative participants were asked to first determine to what degree they agree with the statements on a Likert-type scale. This is to provide a measure of construct and criterion validity in testing the types for theoretical consistency. Moreover, this project applied the same Likert range for most surveys to ensure participants did not detect when scale transitioned between one to another. Since this is an explorative study of detection and comparison, no specific hypothesis was devised related to data trends or differences only research questions explored. The main purpose was to detect and test any qualitative/quantitative interactions in regard to Nonbelief identity and ontology.

In analysis and exploration of other potential statistical effects, the adjective portion of the survey was coupled with demographic questions regarding the participant's background. This is to give greater insight into how the Nonbelief types might be related to demographic

information. In effect, this explored the participant specific demographic statistical effects as related to one's demographic identity.

Another perspective of exploration related to personality traits and human behavioral preference. This study explored those connections that may be present by applying the Big Five Domain from the International Personality Item Pool (2012; Goldberg et al., 2006). Next the RYFF psychological well-being scale was used to determine if different types of non-belief, as sorted by the adjectives as predictors of type, experience varying degrees of psychological well-being (Ryff and Singer, 1996). As an extension of Psychological Well Being, Narcissism and Anger were also explored. Narcissism was measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, this was to determine if one or more groups may be concerned with egoism and self-importance (Raskin and Terry, 1988). Within that same perspective, this study also employed the Multidimensional Anger Inventory to determine if one or more typologies may have more anger than other types (Siegel, 1986; Musante, MacDougall, Dembroski, & Costa, 1989). This again may explain why Nonbelief may receive a negative stigma with some individuals and not others.

Finally, in exploration of open and closed mindedness, this study used the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale (Rokeach, 1960). While it is an older measure, it is useful here as the participant's political leanings or potential for authoritarianism is not measured; it simply looks at the participant's open or closed mindedness regardless of the ideological position. This scale was slightly modified to reflect more current events in the questions, as it dates back to the 1960s. Of the various scales on open and closed-mindedness, Rokeach's (1960) work is one of the few where the individual's closed-mindedness is not a product of his or her religious or political leanings; but rather how open he or she is to ideas or values (Silver, 2011). The overall final product was a randomized scale of 310 total items.

In analysis of the quantitative data, simple frequencies were generated to explore the trends in the data observed from the various groups. In making comparisons and looking at significant interactions, an analysis of variance was conducted to observe the statistical interactions. In this case the Nonbelief types are the dependent variable and the scales and subscales are the independent variables. Inferences can be drawn about shared or unique characteristics regarding the scale differences by type (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 2003).

### *Ethics and Participant Protection*

The Principal Investigator of this project has more than 10 years of experience in quantitative and qualitative research methodology. Coupled with this experience are multiple successful applications for ethics approval at different universities across North America. The data was gathered using the online survey program called Survey Monkey. This service uses Secure Socket Layer (SSL) based technology with encryption applied throughout the system. Survey Monkey's hosting platform is located in a SOC2 Type II regularly audited facility. The systems are both virtually and physically in a secure server hosting facility. Data extractions are also secured via data encryption.

For the data extracted, all participant data was kept confidential. Qualitative data were stored electronically in a secured 128-bit encrypted location as a compressed file, which is password protected. Additionally, when working with the data, this storage computer is a standalone machine. This means that it would not have network or Internet access – thus precluding the possibility of hacking or outside participant-data access. Since two studies were employed, two consent forms were also used. The consent form for the qualitative portion of the project listed the risks and contained information on how to express dissatisfaction with the research process should the participant wish to report a grievance or have concerns, as well as a

timeframe required for participation. This information included contact information for the Principal Investigator, Doctoral Advisor Co-chair, and the UTC IRB chair’s contact information. The second form was a standard quantitative informed-consent form that discusses the time frame required and contact information for questions or concerns.

## Results

All scales were tested for inter-item reliability. All were within acceptable limits of reliability above  $\alpha=.70$  or higher as noted in Table 9.

Table 9  
Cronbach’s Standardized Alpha Scores of Measures and Submeasures

Scale	Standardized Alpha
RYFF Psychological Well Being Scale	0.959
RYFF Autonomy	0.821
RYFF Environmental Mastery	0.883
RYFF Personal Growth	0.84
RYFF Positive Relations with Others	0.887
RYFF Purpose in Life	0.895
RYFF Self-Acceptance	0.912
Narcissism	0.705
Rokeach Dogmatism Scale	0.831
Multidimensional Anger Inventory	0.907
NEO Domain	0.762
NEO Neuroticism Subdomain	0.903
NEO Extraversion Subdomain	0.905
NEO Openness to Experience Subdomain	0.758
NEO Agreeableness Subdomain	0.817
NEO Domain Conscientiousness	0.873

In exploration of how the participant’s identity has changes over their life span this study used the four nominal criteria from the work of Zinnbauer et al. except researchers also asked

participants to reflect back on their beliefs at the age of 6, 12, and 16 (Zinnbauer et al., 1997; Pargament, 1999). This exploration examined how their belief changed over time and if a data trend existed between these aspects.

Note in Table 10 for the age 6 category the high number of more religious than spiritual is at 50%. This is a number that appears to decrease as the participants become older, down to 0% among study participants. It is also important to note that this category in empirical research has been difficult to study and define. This data seems to suggest that there may be a developmental characteristic in the more religious than spiritual category. At 9%, the more spiritual than religious category is the smallest percentage at age 6, but as the participants progressed in age this number appears to increase – indicating that some who define themselves as nonbelievers do define themselves as spiritual. This seems to indicate that there is some type of belief system in place even if traditional ontology is not appealing. For the equally religious and spiritual category, there is virtually no change from age 6 to 12 and a small drop from 17% to 15% at age 16. This group then completely drops for to 1% by the present day. This could support the qualitative data that for some participants, an event of deconversion caused the participants to shift away from religion. In the neither religious nor spiritual category, age 6 still shows that 25% of participants considered themselves neither spiritual nor religious. This number only increases by 1% at age 12 but then jumps at age 16 to 38% and then finally jumps to 80% by the present day. Again, this seems to support a life experience that caused participants to shift to Nonbelief from belief.

Table 10

Percentage Differences of Belief Self-Identity over Time

Self-Identity	At Age 6	At Age 12	At Age 16	Today
I am more religious than spiritual	50%	45%	31%	0%
I am more spiritual than religious	9%	12%	16%	19%
I am equally religious and spiritual	17%	17%	15%	1%
I am neither religious nor spiritual	25%	26%	38%	80%

In further exploration of the Zinnbauer et al. (1997) categories, this study examined the “Spiritual but not religious” groups with the “neither spiritual nor religious” group comparing the Nonbelief typology scores. The analysis focused on these two groups for two reasons: first chi-square analysis requires five or more recorded frequencies per cell, and second because of the four groups, only two observed an increase. A Chi-square test for association was conducted to determine if a relationship existed between nominal variables. There is very strong statistical significance for the relationship between the Zinnbauer categories and Nonbelief typology identification from Study One. This 2x5 observation is further supported by  $\chi^2(5, N=1146) = 115.902, p = .000$  showing that spirituality and Nonbelief are related to the typologies providing first evidence in this study of empirical support. It appears that spirituality and Nonbelief appear related.

Table 11

Percentages Comparing Spiritual Not Religious to Neither Spiritual nor Religious

		Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?											
		Type One Academic		Type Two Activist		Type Three Agnostic		Type Four Antitheist		Type Five Nontheist		Type Six Ritual Atheist	
		Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count
Mark the statement below that most identifies your beliefs.	I am more spiritual than religious	12.7%	52	21.8%	55	58.8%	50	8.0%	13	11.8%	6	22.5%	31
	I am neither religious nor spiritual	87.3%	359	78.2%	197	41.2%	35	92.0%	149	88.2%	45	77.5%	107
	Total	100.0%	411	100.0%	252	100.0%	85	100.0%	162	100.0%	51	100.0%	138



In table 12 the column proportions test table assigns a letter key to each category of the column variable. The column proportions are compared using a z test and are indicated within the table.

Table 12 shows the significant proportions as indicated by Z proportion tests and Bonferroni adjustments are used to adjust the significance values. In this case, Type Two Activists have a higher proportion of “more spiritual than religious” individuals as compared to Type One Academics and Type Three Agnostics. Moreover Type Three Agnostics have the highest proportion of “spiritual but not religious” as opposed to any other types. Finally, the ritual atheists have a higher proportion of “spiritual but not religious” as opposed to the antitheists.

Table 12

Chi-Square Analysis Comparing Spiritual Not Religious to Neither Spiritual nor Religious

		Comparisons of Column Proportions <sup>a</sup>					
		Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?					
		Type One Academic	Type Two Activist	Type Three Agnostic	Type Four Antitheist	Type Five Nontheist	Type Six Ritual Atheist
		(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)
Mark the statement below that most identifies your beliefs.	I am more spiritual than religious		A D	A B D E F			D
	I am neither religious nor spiritual	B C	C		B C F	C	C

Results are based on two-sided tests with significance level .05. For each significant pair, the key of the category with the smaller column proportion appears under the category with the larger column proportion.

a. Tests are adjusted for all pairwise comparisons within a row of each innermost subtable using the Bonferroni correction.

In comparing the proportional differences among the “neither spiritual nor religious” nominal category, a couple of significant differences in proportion were also observed. Type One Academics had a significantly higher proportion of “neither spiritual nor religious” individuals as compared to Type Two Activists and Type Three Agnostics. Type Two Activists also observed a significantly higher proportion of “neither spiritual nor religious” individuals as compared to Type Three Agnostics. This study also observed a higher proportion of Type Four Antitheists

“neither spiritual nor religious” as compared to Type Two Activists, Type Three Agnostics, and Type Six Ritual Atheists. In relation to nontheists, their group showed more “neither spiritual nor religious” individuals as compared to Type Three Agnostics. Finally, in comparison with Type Six Ritual Atheists, they have a higher proportion of “neither spiritual nor religious” individuals as compared to Type Three Agnostics. Again, this model supports the assertion that at least two of the Zinnbauer et al. (1997) criteria can be applied to the Nonbelief criteria. In this case, Agnostics have the largest number of “more spiritual than religious”. All other typologies have a higher proportion of “neither spiritual nor religious” as compared with the agnostics. This observation supports that agnostics have uniqueness about them in that many of them may be seeking some type of experience beyond the mundane.

Next in confirmation of the geographic differences regarding social tension as posed in study one and to confirm empirically that tensions do exist by geography, study two explored these through a series of individual questions regarding the participant’s perception regarding their community and how they would react based on their Nonbelief ontology. Since each question is a 5-point ordinal Likert scale, a Kruskal-Wallis H test was performed with pairwise post-hoc testing. First in examination of each question, the Kruskal-Wallis analysis determined if there were significant differences between the ordinal distributions.

As the reader can see, there were significant differences for 5 of the seven questions regarding perceptions of open-mindedness related to outsiders. The following will explore each question and the potential interpretation of post-hoc pairwise testing. As multiple comparisons increase the risk of a Type I error, SPSS has adjusted the significance levels using a Bonferroni correction. In addition, the pairwise comparisons are calculated as in Dunn (1964), which relies

on the data as a whole versus 2 way comparisons. In ordinal data, the median is the best measure of central tendency. Therefore, for this portion of the study, that is what shall be reported here.

Table 13

Kruskal-Wallis Hypothesis Comparison Table for Questions of Social Tension

Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of In my city/town most people would aggressively disagree with my beliefs and values. is the same across categories of What region do you live in.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of I have experienced prejudice or discrimination related to my beliefs and values where I live. is the same across categories of What region do you live in.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of I do not share my beliefs or values with my coworkers. is the same across categories of What region do you live in.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.014	Reject the null hypothesis.
4	The distribution of I do not share my beliefs or values with my friends. is the same across categories of What region do you live in.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.072	Retain the null hypothesis.
5	The distribution of I feel open to share my beliefs and values with new people I meet. is the same across categories of What region do you live in.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.001	Reject the null hypothesis.
6	The distribution of If my children were interested in joining a religious tradition, I would be open to them exploring their faith. is the same across categories of What region do you live in.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.100	Retain the null hypothesis.
7	The distribution of I feel that the city/town in which I live is open minded to my moral and worldview. is the same across categories of What region do you live in.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

For question one as represented in Table 14, the participant was asked “In my city/town most people would aggressively disagree with my beliefs and values.” This project attempted to

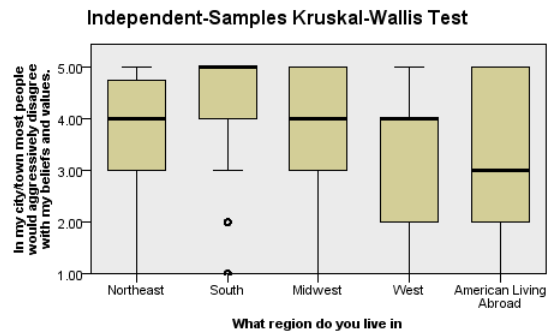
determine if participants of one's geography perceives a higher stigma by their community as compared to other geographies.

Table 14  
Median Comparison between Social Tension Questions by Region

**Report**

Median							
What region do you live in	In my city/town most people would aggressively disagree with my beliefs and values.	I have experienced prejudice or discrimination related to my beliefs and values where I live.	I do not share my beliefs or values with my coworkers.	I do not share my beliefs or values with my friends.	I feel open to share my beliefs and values with new people I meet.	If my children were interested in joining a religious tradition, I would be open to them exploring their faith.	I feel that the city/town in which I live is open minded to my moral and worldview.
Northeast	4.0000	4.0000	3.0000	1.0000	4.0000	4.0000	3.0000
South	5.0000	4.0000	4.0000	2.0000	3.0000	4.0000	2.0000
Midwest	4.0000	4.0000	3.0000	2.0000	3.0000	4.0000	2.0000
West	4.0000	3.0000	3.0000	1.0000	4.0000	4.0000	3.0000
American Living Abroad	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000	2.0000	4.0000	4.0000	4.0000
Total	4.0000	4.0000	3.0000	2.0000	3.0000	4.0000	2.0000

Figure two shows the overall range of responses to the first question. Note there is a significant difference within the data  $\chi^2 (4) = 109.908, p = .002$ .



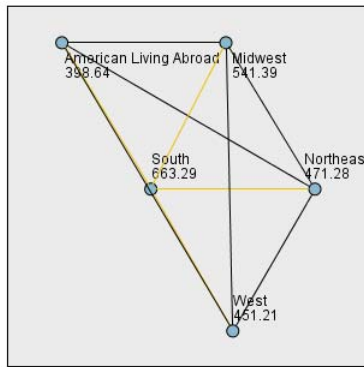
<b>Total N</b>	1,146
<b>Test Statistic</b>	109.908
<b>Degrees of Freedom</b>	4
<b>Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)</b>	.000

1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Figure 2 Box Plot Comparing Regions on the Question related to Outsider Perception of Participant Beliefs

Figure three shows the result of the pairwise post-hoc test. Participants in the south clearly rate the south as having higher tension than other parts of the United States. The next question posed to participants was related to perceptions of prejudice and discrimination. The question reads “I have experienced prejudice or discrimination related to my beliefs and values where I live.” This was to see if there was a perceived active agenda against nonbelievers related to their various social networks. This was also created as an empirical confirmation of the theme of perceived prejudice by qualitative participants in studies one.

Pairwise Comparisons of What region do you live in



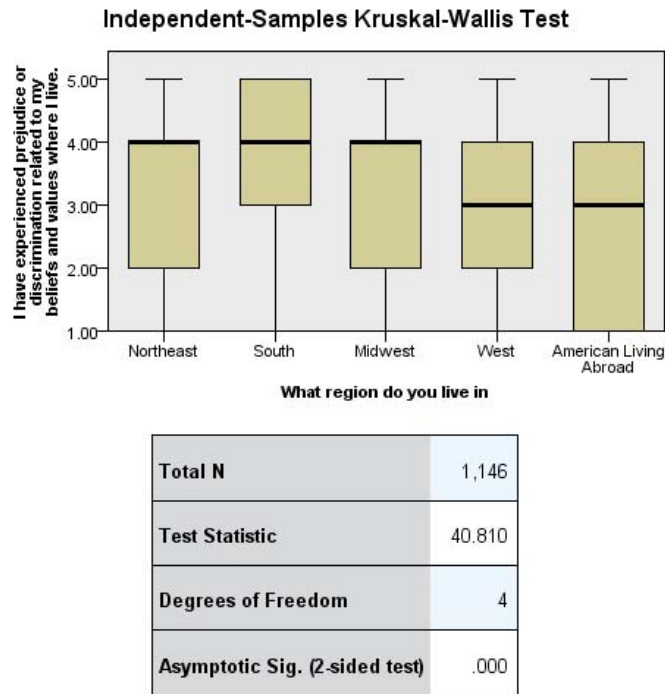
Each node shows the sample average rank of What region do you live in.

Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
American Living Abroad-West	52.570	65.775	.799	.424	1.000
American Living Abroad-Northeast	72.640	68.396	1.062	.288	1.000
American Living Abroad-Midwest	142.755	67.838	2.104	.035	.353
American Living Abroad-South	264.651	64.025	4.134	.000	.000
West-Northeast	20.070	33.737	.595	.552	1.000
West-Midwest	90.185	32.591	2.767	.006	.057
West-South	212.081	23.652	8.967	.000	.000
Northeast-Midwest	-70.114	37.600	-1.865	.062	.622
Northeast-South	-192.011	30.183	-6.362	.000	.000
Midwest-South	121.897	28.896	4.218	.000	.000

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 3 Post-Hoc Analysis for Outsider Perception of Participant Beliefs

Figure four shows the overall range of responses to the second question. Note there is a significant difference within the data  $\chi^2 (4) = 40.810, p = .000$ . The following figure, figure five shows the post-hoc analysis.

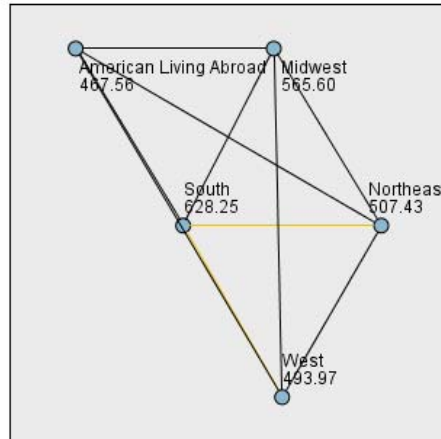


1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Figure 4 Box Plot Comparing Regions on the Question related to Perceived Prejudice within the Participants Community

Figure five shows that the South is significantly different in perceived prejudice from the Western as well as the Northeast United States. Note that there is not a significant difference between the Midwest and the South. The next question “I do not share my beliefs or values with my coworkers” was a question to determine how open participants are about their Nonbelief. Obviously, the workplace is a space that most people spend their time. Moreover, it is also the root of one’s livelihood and success. For many if their ontological view deviates beyond the social norm, a question regarding workplace would be a great way to detect such a difference.

**Pairwise Comparisons of What region do you live in**



Each node shows the sample average rank of What region do you live in.

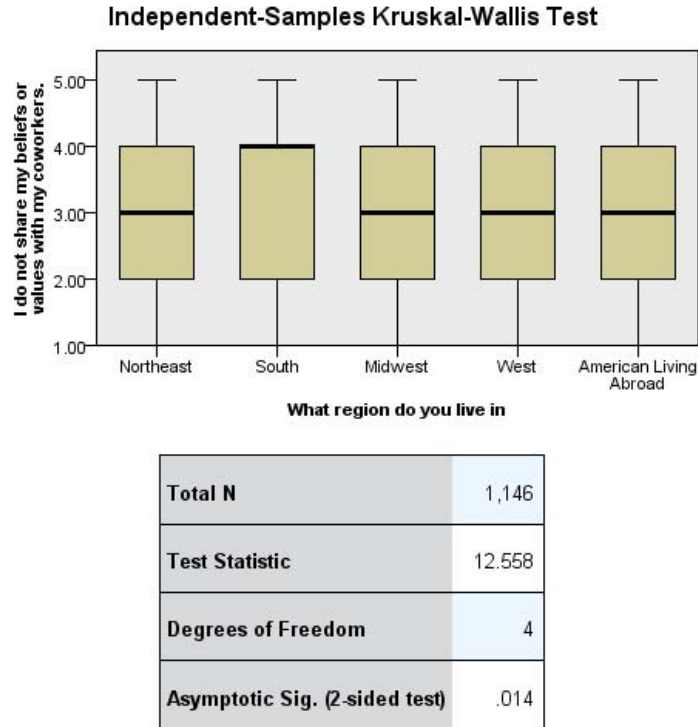
Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
American Living Abroad-West	26.406	67.471	.391	.696	1.000
American Living Abroad-Northeast	39.868	70.159	.568	.570	1.000
American Living Abroad-Midwest	98.042	69.586	1.409	.159	1.000
American Living Abroad-South	160.694	65.675	2.447	.014	.144
West-Northeast	13.462	34.607	.389	.697	1.000
West-Midwest	71.636	33.431	2.143	.032	.321
West-South	134.288	24.261	5.535	.000	.000
Northeast-Midwest	-58.174	38.570	-1.508	.131	1.000
Northeast-South	-120.826	30.961	-3.903	.000	.001
Midwest-South	62.652	29.641	2.114	.035	.345

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 5 Post-Hoc Analysis for Perceived Prejudice within the Participants Community



Figure six shows the overall range of responses to the third question. Note there is a significant difference within the data  $\chi^2 (4) = 109.908, p = .002$ . Figure seven shows the post-hoc analysis.



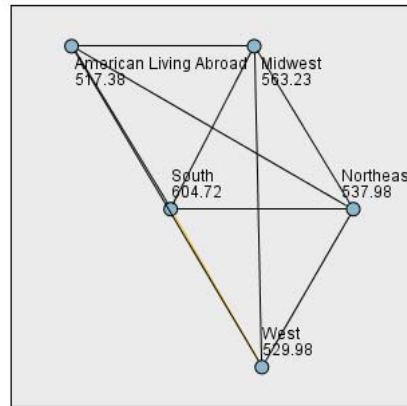
1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Figure 6 Box Plot Comparing Regions on the Question related to Sharing One’s Values with Coworkers

There is only a slight difference in relation to the comparison between groups. This slight difference was observed between the South and Western United States that have a statistically comparable difference. This would likely mean that for most regardless of geographic region, participants do not talk about their views on religion or lack thereof. Certainly, this would be an intuitive result as no one wants to risk judgment by making a declarative statement to coworkers.

It would be unprofessional. Still the result seems to indicate that maybe in the Western United States they may be more willing to have a workplace discussion on religion versus the South. In a similar frame the following question attempted to see how open participants would be with outsiders they meet for the first time.

**Pairwise Comparisons of What region do you live in**



Each node shows the sample average rank of What region do you live in.

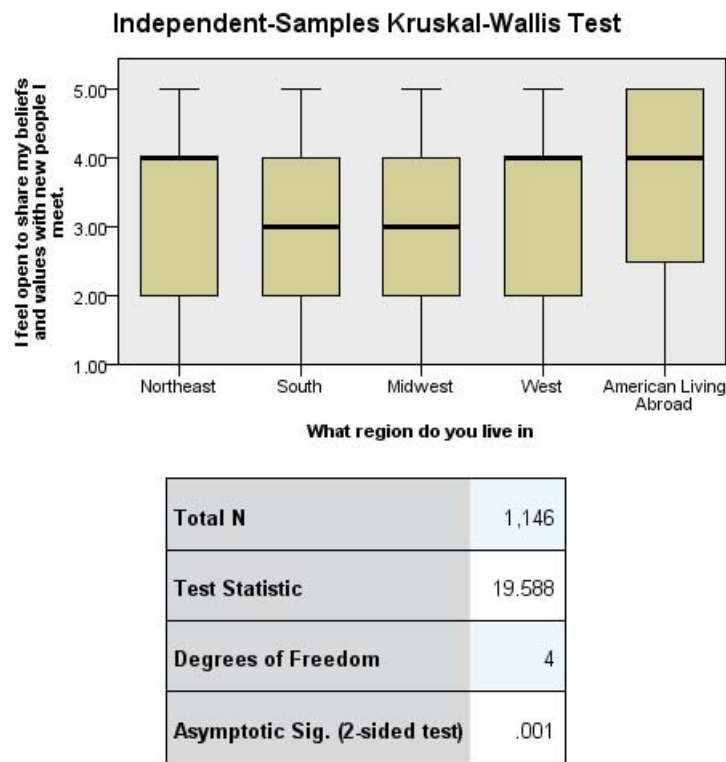
Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
American Living Abroad-West	12.602	67.781	.186	.853	1.000
American Living Abroad-Northeast	20.597	70.481	.292	.770	1.000
American Living Abroad-Midwest	45.848	69.906	.656	.512	1.000
American Living Abroad-South	87.339	65.977	1.324	.186	1.000
West-Northeast	7.995	34.766	.230	.818	1.000
West-Midwest	33.246	33.585	.990	.322	1.000
West-South	74.737	24.373	3.066	.002	.022
Northeast-Midwest	-25.251	38.747	-.652	.515	1.000
Northeast-South	-66.741	31.103	-2.146	.032	.319
Midwest-South	41.491	29.777	1.393	.164	1.000

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

**Figure 7 Post-Hoc Analysis for the Question related to Sharing One's Values with Coworkers**

The question is phrased as such “I feel open to share my beliefs and values with new people I meet.” This was to see if there was any perceived threat by participants by being open about their values and beliefs.

Figure eight shows the overall range of responses to the third question. Note there is a significant difference within the data  $\chi^2 (4) = 19.588, p = .001$ . Figure nine provides a detailed post-hoc analysis.



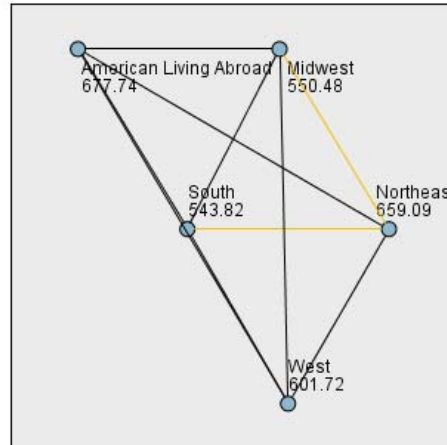
1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Figure 8 Comparing Regions on the Question Related to Sharing Beliefs and values with New People

As shown in figure nine, the Northeast has significant differences with the South and with the Midwest United States. This could indicate that Northeasterners have less stigma in

identifying themselves as agnostic or atheist as opposed to other parts of the country particularly the Midwest and the south.

Pairwise Comparisons of What region do you live in



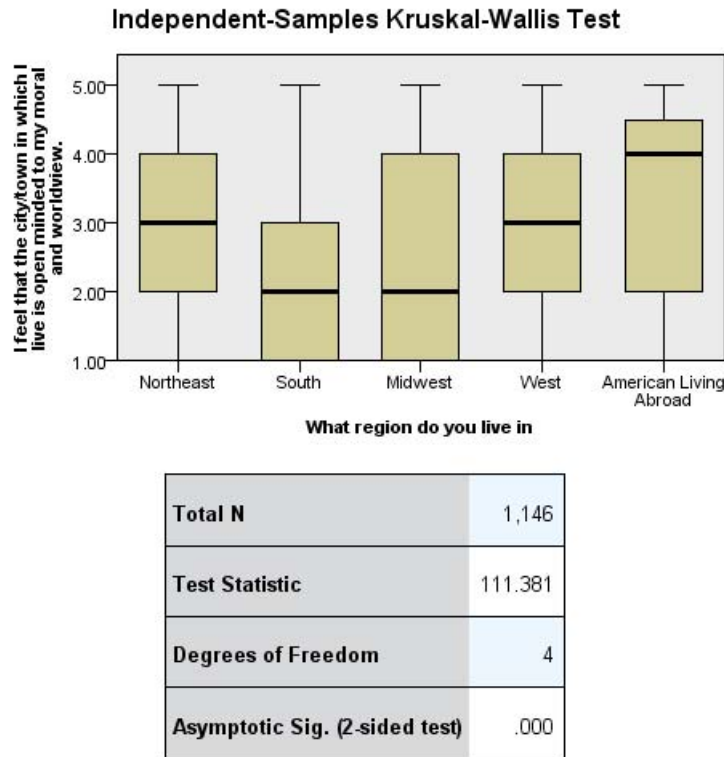
Each node shows the sample average rank of What region do you live in.

Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
South-Midwest	-6.660	29.718	-.224	.823	1.000
South-West	-57.900	24.324	-2.380	.017	.173
South-Northeast	115.271	31.041	3.713	.000	.002
South-American Living Abroad	-133.924	65.846	-2.034	.042	.420
Midwest-West	-51.240	33.518	-1.529	.126	1.000
Midwest-Northeast	108.611	38.670	2.809	.005	.050
Midwest-American Living Abroad	-127.264	69.767	-1.824	.068	.681
West-Northeast	57.371	34.697	1.653	.098	.982
West-American Living Abroad	-76.024	67.646	-1.124	.261	1.000
Northeast-American Living Abroad	-18.653	70.341	-.265	.791	1.000

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 9 Post-Hoc Analysis for the Question related to Sharing Beliefs and values with New People

Figure ten shows the overall range of responses to the third question. Note there is a significant difference within the data  $\chi^2(4) = 111.381, p = .000$ . Figure eleven shows the post-hoc analysis for comparison.



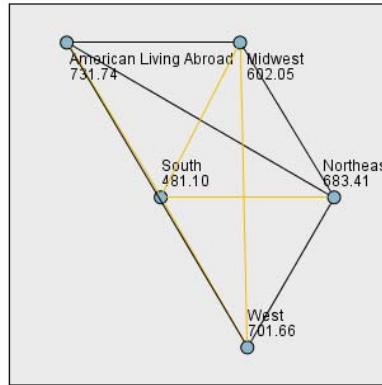
1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Figure 10 Box Plot Comparing Regions on the Question related to Perceived Open-mindedness of the Participants Community

This question was originally written as a reverse item comparison to question one. As one can see in Figure eleven, the South is significantly different from the other groups meaning that Southerners more negatively respond to this question. Moreover, the Midwest also responds

more negatively than participants in the Western United States. Certainly, this and the other questions provide insight into the perceptions of outsiders views on Nonbelief.

**Pairwise Comparisons of What region do you live in**



Each node shows the sample average rank of What region do you live in.

Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
South-Midwest	-120.951	29.612	-4.085	.000	.000
South-Northeast	202.309	30.930	6.541	.000	.000
South-West	-220.560	24.237	-9.100	.000	.000
South-American Living Abroad	-250.640	65.611	-3.820	.000	.001
Midwest-Northeast	81.358	38.532	2.111	.035	.347
Midwest-West	-99.609	33.399	-2.982	.003	.029
Midwest-American Living Abroad	-129.689	69.518	-1.866	.062	.621
Northeast-West	-18.251	34.573	-.528	.598	1.000
Northeast-American Living Abroad	-48.331	70.090	-.690	.490	1.000
West-American Living Abroad	-30.080	67.404	-.446	.655	1.000

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

**Figure 11 Post-Hoc Analysis for the Question related to Perceived Open-mindedness of the Participants Community**

Next, the study explored if the Nonbelief typology was related to geographic differences. Again this applied the geographic nominal classifications of social tension as posed in study one.

As observed in Table 15, if Nonbelief should be a national phenomenon unrelated to geography. There is statistical significance for the relationship between the geographic differences of the United States and Nonbelief typology identification of Nonbelief. This 4x5 observation is further supported by  $\chi^2(15, N=1146) = 29.520, p = .014$  showing that geography and Nonbelief typology are related. However based on the Chi Square certainly this proportional difference is localized within a specific row namely the South.

Table 15

Percentage Comparison Nonbelief Typology as Related to Geographic Differences

What region do you live in		Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?											
		Type One Academic		Type Two Activist		Type Three Agnostic		Type Four Antitheist		Type Five Nontheist		Type Six Ritual Atheist	
		Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count
Northeast	13.9%	59	10.0%	26	7.1%	6	14.6%	24	4.2%	2	10.6%	15	
South	54.0%	229	51.4%	133	81.2%	52	45.1%	74	77.1%	37	47.5%	67	
Midwest	13.2%	56	13.5%	35	10.6%	9	16.5%	27	6.2%	3	12.1%	17	
West	18.9%	80	25.1%	65	21.2%	18	23.8%	39	12.5%	6	29.8%	42	

As would be expected, the other regions did not exhibit any significant proportions except the Southern United States. As noted in Table 16 and within the southern United States, nontheist had a significantly high proportion of nontheists as compared to the other types. This is good, as one would not expect significant differences within other regions meaning that the inferences drawn from this study should hold true for the entire United States.

Table 16

Chi-Square Comparison Nonbelief Typology as Related to Geographic Differences

		Comparisons of Column Proportions <sup>a</sup>					
		Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?					
		Type One Academic	Type Two Activist	Type Three Agnostic	Type Four Antitheist	Type Five Nontheist	Type Six Ritual Atheist
		(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)
What region do you live in	Northeast						
	South					A B D F	
	Midwest						
	West						

Results are based on two-sided tests with significance level .05. For each significant pair, the key of the category with the smaller column proportion appears under the category with the larger column proportion.

a. Tests are adjusted for all pairwise comparisons within a row of each innermost subtable using the Bonferroni correction.

All of these analyses set the final stage in addressing the overall analysis regarding the research questions. As noted before, the purpose of study two is to explore empirical differences if any between the typology of Nonbelief. Therefore, in comparison of the Nonbelief types, a variety of scales and subscales were compared to determine if significant differences exist between the types. Not all scales and subscales observed provided significant differences in parametric analysis. However, some did provide interesting observations regarding the Nonbelief types. Moreover, for those who were significant, a preliminary test of normality was checked by the Shapiro-Wilks test and it was discovered that normality of the distribution was not achieved at  $p > .05$ . Two choices could be made regarding analysis in this situation. One is to remove the outliers causing the issues of limited normality. One could then continue with a parametric analysis. In this case, that would not be advisable considering this is a new construct being empirically tested; therefore, the alternative is to conduct a nonparametric test. To determine significant difference, the most appropriate method of statistical inference requires the Kruskal-Wallis H Test. The Kruskal-Wallis test is the non-parametric alternative to the one-way ANOVA



and is used to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the distributions of three or more independent (unrelated) groups. Table 17 provides the statistical comparisons.

Table 17

Kruskal-Wallis Hypothesis Comparison Table for Significant Differences of Scales by Nonbelief Type

Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of RYFF Autonomy Sum is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of RYFF Environmental Mastery SUM is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.310	Retain the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of RYFF Personal Growth SUM is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.030	Reject the null hypothesis.
4	The distribution of RYFF Positive Relations with Others SUM is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.026	Reject the null hypothesis.
5	The distribution of RYFF Purpose in Life SUM is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.078	Retain the null hypothesis.
6	The distribution of RYFF Self Acceptance SUM is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.219	Retain the null hypothesis.
7	The distribution of Narcissism SUM is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
8	The distribution of Rokeach Dogmatism Scale SUM is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
9	The distribution of Multidimensional Anger Inventory SUM is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
10	The distribution of RYFF Psychological Well-Being Scale is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.184	Retain the null hypothesis.
11	The distribution of NEO Domain Neuroticism SUM is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.007	Reject the null hypothesis.
12	The distribution of NEO Domain Extraversion SUM is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.976	Retain the null hypothesis.
13	The distribution of NEO Domain Openness to Experience SUM is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
14	The distribution of NEO Domain Agreeableness SUM is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
15	The distribution of NEO Domain Conscientiousness SUM is the same across categories of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.310	Retain the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

As can be seen in Table 17 a number of significant differences emerge in the data. They are noted in orange by the statement “reject the null hypothesis.” This test does not provide the

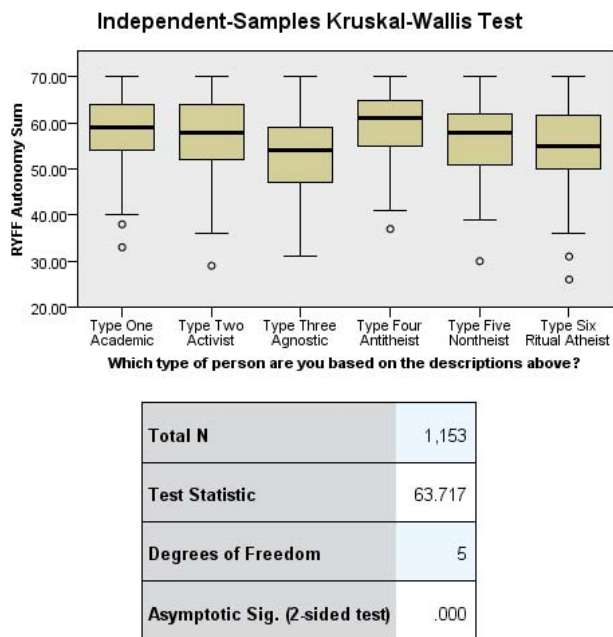
particulars of the significant difference; this will come in the post-hoc pairs. Since the measure of central tendency here is the median for continuous data, Table 18 has been provided as well for comparison

Table 18

Mean and Medians by Scales for each Nonbelief Type

		Report														
Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?		RYFF Autonomy Sum	RYFF Environmenta l Mastery SUM	RYFF Personal Growth SUM	RYFF Positive Relations with Others SUM	RYFF Purpose in Life SUM	RYFF Self Acceptance SUM	Narcissism SUM	Rokeach Dogmatism Scale SUM	Multidimensio nal Anger Inventory SUM	RYFF Psychological Well-Being Scale	NEO Domain Neuroticism SUM	NEO Domain Extraversion SUM	NEO Domain Openness to Experience SUM	NEO Domain Agreeableness SUM	NEO Domain Conscientiou sness SUM
Type One Academic	Mean	58.8618	50.3664	61.9862	53.3041	54.9147	53.1198	4.6774	107.6037	100.6452	332.5530	23.4654	32.3871	44.6659	37.6797	34.9309
	Median	59.0000	50.0000	63.0000	54.0000	56.0000	55.0000	4.0000	107.0000	100.0000	333.5000	23.0000	33.0000	45.0000	38.0000	36.0000
	N	434	434	434	434	434	434	434	434	434	434	434	434	434	434	434
	Std. Deviation	6.80811	10.07074	5.94973	9.95647	9.38943	10.54713	3.16988	16.65932	19.77094	41.29579	8.36301	8.90247	4.45002	6.08684	7.30622
Type Two Activist	Mean	57.1321	49.3811	62.1208	54.0340	54.0264	51.6943	3.8679	106.2717	102.3208	328.3887	25.8604	32.8189	44.4679	38.2679	34.2868
	Median	58.0000	50.0000	63.0000	54.0000	55.0000	53.0000	3.0000	106.0000	101.0000	332.0000	25.0000	33.0000	46.0000	39.0000	35.0000
	N	265	265	265	265	265	265	265	265	265	265	265	265	265	265	265
	Std. Deviation	8.03599	10.26994	6.36579	10.19594	9.96106	11.00727	2.77460	16.49959	19.69750	43.95387	9.16677	8.75147	4.54021	6.16441	7.65699
Type Three Agnostic	Mean	53.0000	49.3750	59.9773	53.9886	52.8636	52.2386	3.8750	106.9659	103.3523	321.4432	25.4886	32.7727	43.0227	38.6705	34.6250
	Median	54.0000	52.0000	61.5000	55.5000	55.0000	54.0000	4.0000	107.0000	101.0000	328.5000	23.0000	34.0000	45.0000	39.0000	34.0000
	N	88	88	88	88	88	88	88	88	88	88	88	88	88	88	88
	Std. Deviation	8.29762	10.86205	7.48942	10.33407	10.57668	11.12106	2.59891	16.82325	15.81651	47.26809	9.44067	9.32150	5.06277	5.53925	7.77753
Type Four Antitheist	Mean	59.9123	48.0409	60.6433	51.4503	52.0702	50.8187	5.2690	115.4971	108.6608	322.9357	26.2924	32.6667	43.3099	33.4971	34.5088
	Median	61.0000	50.0000	62.0000	52.0000	53.0000	52.0000	5.0000	116.0000	106.0000	326.0000	25.0000	33.0000	44.0000	33.0000	35.0000
	N	171	171	171	171	171	171	171	171	171	171	171	171	171	171	171
	Std. Deviation	6.86581	10.76670	6.59913	10.96259	10.69226	11.09780	3.10372	16.42071	20.09395	42.72720	9.35866	9.40901	5.48719	6.56226	7.88623
Type Five Nontheist	Mean	56.3137	51.4314	60.8235	51.9412	53.8235	53.0784	4.5098	108.5882	105.7451	327.4118	23.8431	32.3333	41.7255	37.9216	37.1765
	Median	58.0000	53.0000	62.0000	54.0000	54.0000	56.0000	4.0000	107.0000	104.0000	337.0000	23.0000	32.0000	42.0000	39.0000	38.0000
	N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
	Std. Deviation	8.51937	10.16515	6.68343	11.31090	11.05388	11.51146	3.03561	14.44324	18.95979	49.53794	8.08053	10.31633	5.51390	5.29469	7.15460
Type Six Ritual Atheist	Mean	55.3264	50.3264	61.3819	55.3194	54.7153	52.2500	4.0972	104.8750	101.8194	329.3194	24.6389	33.0000	43.5694	38.9097	35.2986
	Median	55.0000	51.0000	62.0000	57.0000	57.0000	54.0000	4.0000	104.5000	101.0000	333.5000	23.0000	33.0000	45.0000	39.0000	36.0000
	N	144	144	144	144	144	144	144	144	144	144	144	144	144	144	144
	Std. Deviation	8.46038	9.78713	5.91312	10.11241	10.07084	10.79206	2.89551	16.02964	19.27702	42.32569	8.74712	8.49846	5.39315	5.25957	6.79683
Total	Mean	57.6184	49.7615	61.5377	53.4406	54.0590	52.2732	4.4380	108.1223	102.7979	328.6904	24.7528	32.6314	44.0269	37.4345	34.8422
	Median	58.0000	51.0000	63.0000	54.0000	56.0000	54.0000	4.0000	108.0000	101.0000	332.0000	24.0000	33.0000	45.0000	38.0000	35.0000
	N	1153	1153	1153	1153	1153	1153	1153	1153	1153	1153	1153	1153	1153	1153	1153
	Std. Deviation	7.75829	10.26977	6.32597	10.31358	10.00581	10.86242	3.02389	16.70957	19.58244	43.19074	8.88089	8.97800	4.90802	6.23215	7.45410

Figure 12 begins the individual difference comparisons between types. The first significant comparison explored the RYFF Psychological Well-being Subscale of autonomy.



1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

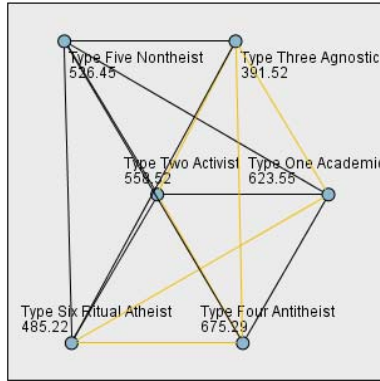
Figure 12 Box Plot Comparing Types on the RYFF Psychological Well-being Subscale of  
Autonomy

Here a significant difference is observed at  $\chi^2(5) = 63.717, p = .000$ . This indicates there is a significant difference between the Nonbelief types. Figure 13 provides additional pairwise post-hoc analysis.

Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Unlike the previous Kruskal-Wallis H test performed earlier in this section, this data is more continuous in structure therefore median values will be reported for all subsequent analysis.

Median values were observed among each of the types. The scores are as follows: Type One with *Mdn*=59, Type Two with *Mdn*=58, Type Three with *Mdn*=54, Type Four with *Mdn*=61, Type Five with *Mdn*=58, and Type Six with *Mdn*=55. Significant differences were observed between the following pairs all at least at the  $p=.005$  level. Type three was significantly different as compared to Type two, Type one, and Type four. Type six is significantly different as compared to Type one and Type four. Lastly, Type two is significantly different as compared to Type four. Type three agnostics had the lowest Median value for autonomy and Type Four Antitheists showed the highest autonomy score. These observed significant differences indicate some specific characteristics regarding autonomy regarding the Nonbelief types.

Pairwise Comparisons of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?



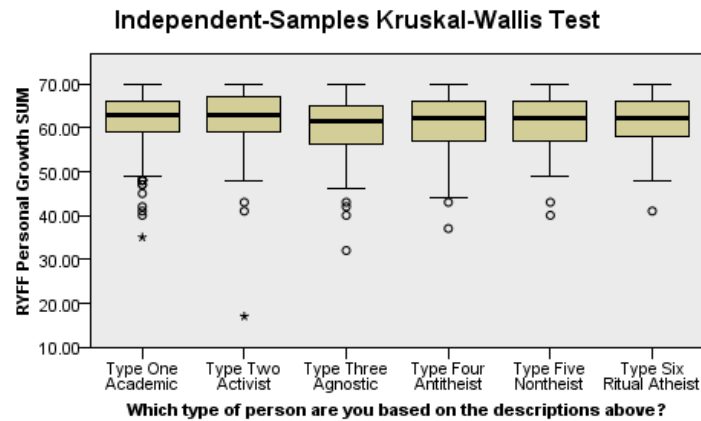
Each node shows the sample average rank of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.

Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
Type Three Agnostic-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-93.699	45.020	-2.081	.037	.561
Type Three Agnostic-Type Five Nontheist	-134.928	58.555	-2.304	.021	.318
Type Three Agnostic-Type Two Activist	167.002	40.936	4.080	.000	.001
Type Three Agnostic-Type One Academic	232.030	38.898	5.965	.000	.000
Type Three Agnostic-Type Four Antitheist	-283.770	43.651	-6.501	.000	.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Five Nontheist	41.229	54.217	.760	.447	1.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Two Activist	73.302	34.446	2.128	.033	.500
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type One Academic	138.331	31.998	4.323	.000	.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Four Antitheist	190.070	37.632	5.051	.000	.000
Type Five Nontheist-Type Two Activist	32.074	50.877	.630	.528	1.000
Type Five Nontheist-Type One Academic	97.102	49.252	1.972	.049	.730
Type Five Nontheist-Type Four Antitheist	148.841	53.086	2.804	.005	.076
Type Two Activist-Type One Academic	65.028	25.939	2.507	.012	.183
Type Two Activist-Type Four Antitheist	-116.768	32.637	-3.578	.000	.005
Type One Academic-Type Four Antitheist	-51.739	30.041	-1.722	.085	1.000

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 13 Post-Hoc Analysis for Comparing Types on the RYFF Psychological Well-being Subscale of Autonomy

The next significant difference relates to the RYFF subscale of Personal Growth. A significant difference was observed  $\chi^2 (5) = 12.379, p = .030$ . Again, notice within Figure 14 that a significant number of outliers exist within the data further confirming the need for the Kruskal-Wallis H test.



<b>Total N</b>	1,153
<b>Test Statistic</b>	12.379
<b>Degrees of Freedom</b>	5
<b>Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)</b>	.030

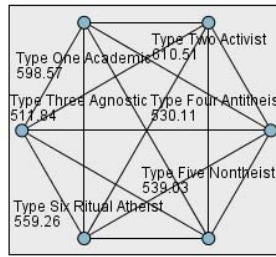
1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Figure 14 Box Plot Comparing Types on the RYFF Psychological Well-being  
Subscale of Personal Growth

While a significant difference was detected within the preliminary analysis, Post-Hoc analysis was unable to detect any between type differences as noted by Figure 15.



**Pairwise Comparisons of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?**



Each node shows the sample average rank of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.

Sample 1-Sam...	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
2-3	-18.276	43.614	-.419	.675	1.000
2-4	-27.194	58.505	-.465	.642	1.000
2-5	-47.425	44.982	-1.054	.292	1.000
2-0	86.740	38.866	2.232	.026	.384
2-1	98.674	40.901	2.412	.016	.238
3-4	-8.918	53.041	-.168	.866	1.000
3-5	-29.149	37.600	-.775	.438	1.000
3-0	68.464	30.016	2.281	.023	.338
3-1	80.398	32.609	2.466	.014	.205
4-5	-20.231	54.171	-.373	.709	1.000
4-0	59.545	49.210	1.210	.226	1.000
4-1	71.480	50.834	1.406	.160	1.000
5-0	39.314	31.971	1.230	.219	1.000
5-1	51.249	34.417	1.489	.136	1.000
0-1	-11.935	25.917	-.460	.645	1.000

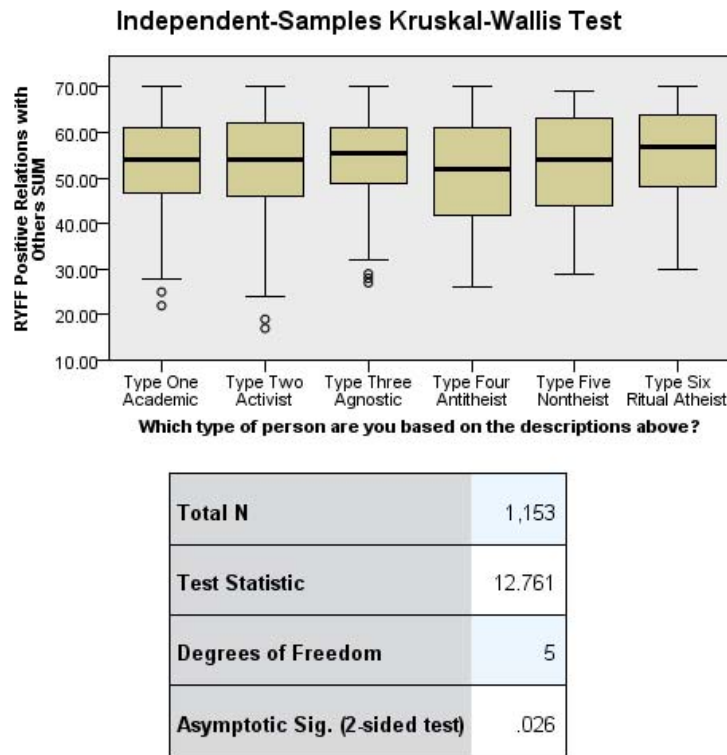
Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 15 Post-Hoc Analysis for Comparing Types on the RYFF Psychological Well-being

**Subscale of Personal Growth**

Such results can be observed when the spread of the responses is greater than the parametric limits.

In exploration of the difference related to the RYFF subscale of Positive Relations with Others. A significant difference was observed  $\chi^2(5) = 12.761, p = .026$  as noted in Figure 16.

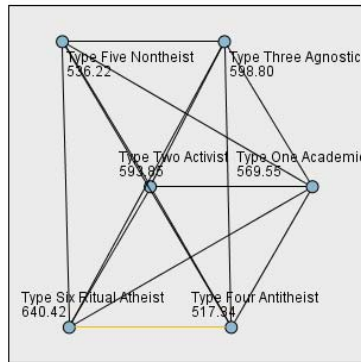


1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Figure 16 Box Plot Comparing Types on the RYFF Psychological Well-being Subscale of Positive Relations with Others

Post-Hoc analysis was conducted in detection of significant difference between the types of Nonbelief. The scores are as follows: Type One with  $Mdn=63$ , Type Two with  $Mdn=63$ , Type Three with  $Mdn=61.5$ , Type Four with  $Mdn=62$ , Type Five with  $Mdn=62$ , and Type Six with  $Mdn=62$ . One false significance was detected however through descriptive analysis was found to be a false positive (Dunn, 1964).

Pairwise Comparisons of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?



Each node shows the sample average rank of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.

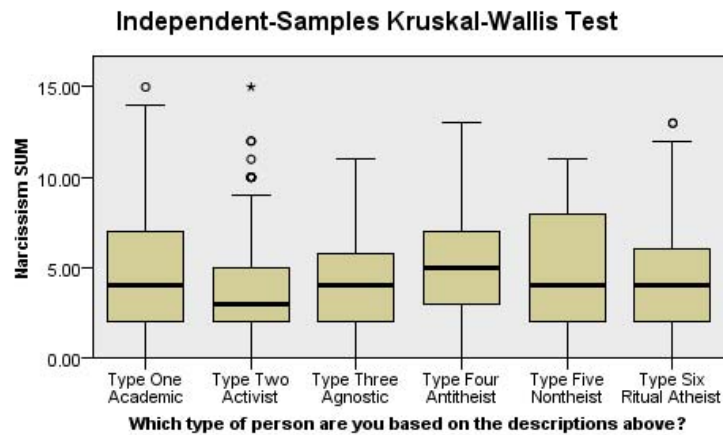
Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
Type Four Antitheist-Type Five Nontheist	-18.877	53.104	-.355	.722	1.000
Type Four Antitheist-Type One Academic	52.213	30.051	1.737	.082	1.000
Type Four Antitheist-Type Two Activist	76.506	32.648	2.343	.019	.287
Type Four Antitheist-Type Three Agnostic	81.462	43.666	1.866	.062	.932
Type Four Antitheist-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-123.077	37.645	-3.269	.001	.016
Type Five Nontheist-Type One Academic	33.336	49.269	.677	.499	1.000
Type Five Nontheist-Type Two Activist	57.630	50.894	1.132	.257	1.000
Type Five Nontheist-Type Three Agnostic	62.585	58.575	1.068	.285	1.000
Type Five Nontheist-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-104.201	54.235	-1.921	.055	.820
Type One Academic-Type Two Activist	-24.293	25.948	-.936	.349	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Three Agnostic	-29.249	38.912	-.752	.452	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-70.865	32.009	-2.214	.027	.403
Type Two Activist-Type Three Agnostic	-4.956	40.950	-.121	.904	1.000
Type Two Activist-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-46.571	34.458	-1.352	.177	1.000
Type Three Agnostic-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-41.616	45.035	-.924	.355	1.000

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 17 Post-Hoc Analysis for Comparing Types on the RYFF Psychological Well-being Subscale of Positive Relations with Others

A small significant difference was detected between Type Four and Type Six however this is a false positive and the difference is detected related to the holistic variance of the data but actually related to the median difference. Note that both Types have a median value of 62.

The next significant difference is related to the Narcissism Personality Inventory. A significant difference was observed  $\chi^2 (5) = 28.630, p = .000$  as noted by Figure 18.



<b>Total N</b>	1,153
<b>Test Statistic</b>	28.630
<b>Degrees of Freedom</b>	5
<b>Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)</b>	.000

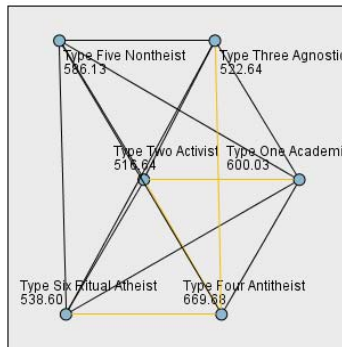
1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Figure 18 Box Plot Comparing Types on the Narcissism Personality Inventory

The median scores are as follows for each type: Type One with *Mdn*=4, Type Two with *Mdn*=3, Type Three with *Mdn*=4, Type Four with *Mdn*=5, Type Five with *Mdn*=4, and Type Six with *Mdn*=4. Pairwise Post-Hoc Analysis was also performed as noted in Figure 19.

In examination of Post-Hoc Pairwise analysis, significant differences were detected. In this case Type Two was significantly different than Type One and Type Four. Additionally Type three was significantly different than Type Four. Moreover, Type Six is significantly different from Type Four. All are significant at least at the  $P=.05$  or less adjusted for Bonferroni correction. In this case it appears that Type Three Activists have the lowest Narcissism score, especially when compared to the other types such as Academic and Antitheists. Agnostic Type Three is significantly lower than Type Four Antitheists. Moreover, Type Six is significantly lower than Type four as well. From this data, one can see that Type Two

Pairwise Comparisons of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?



Each row shows the sample average rank of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.

Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
Type Two Activist-Type Three Agnostic	-5.997	40.753	-.147	.883	1.000
Type Two Activist-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-21.965	34.292	-.641	.522	1.000
Type Two Activist-Type Five Nontheist	-69.488	50.649	-1.372	.170	1.000
Type Two Activist-Type One Academic	83.389	25.823	3.229	.001	.019
Type Two Activist-Type Four Antitheist	-153.042	32.490	-4.710	.000	.000
Type Three Agnostic-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-15.968	44.818	-.356	.722	1.000
Type Three Agnostic-Type Five Nontheist	-63.491	58.293	-1.089	.276	1.000
Type Three Agnostic-Type One Academic	77.392	38.724	1.999	.046	.685
Type Three Agnostic-Type Four Antitheist	-147.045	43.455	-3.384	.001	.011
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Five Nontheist	47.523	53.974	.880	.379	1.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type One Academic	61.425	31.854	1.928	.054	.807
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Four Antitheist	131.077	37.463	3.499	.000	.007
Type Five Nontheist-Type One Academic	13.901	49.031	.284	.777	1.000
Type Five Nontheist-Type Four Antitheist	83.554	52.848	1.581	.114	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Four Antitheist	-69.652	29.907	-2.329	.020	.298

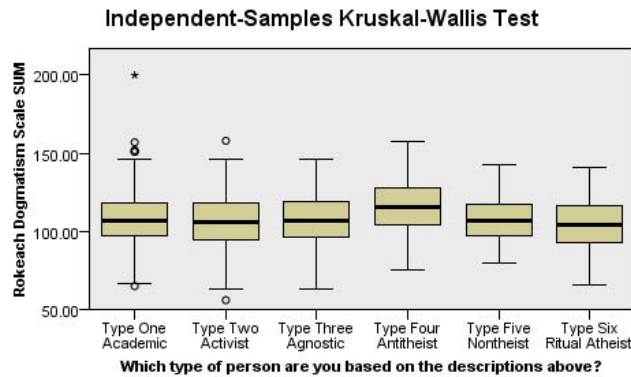
Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 19 Post-Hoc Analysis for Comparing Types on the Narcissism Personality Inventory

Activists are low and Type Four are highest on Narcissism indicating unique aspects to each type. Shifting from Narcissism to Open and Closed Mindedness, significant differences were observed in the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale.

A significant difference was observed  $\chi^2 (5) = 43.367, p = .000$  as noted by Figure 20.

The median scores are as follows for each type: Type One with  $Mdn=107$ , Type Two with  $Mdn=106$ , Type Three with  $Mdn=107$ , Type Four with  $Mdn=116$ , Type Five with  $Mdn=107$ , and Type Six with  $Mdn=104$ . Additional Post-Hoc Pairwise Analysis was conducted in exploration of specific differences.



Total N	1,153
Test Statistic	43.367
Degrees of Freedom	5
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.000

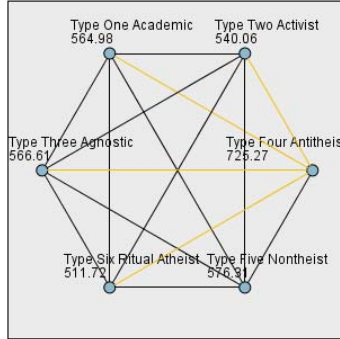
1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Figure 20 Box Plot Comparing Types on the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale

Atheist Type Six as compared with Antitheist Type Four. Additionally a significant difference between Type Two Activist as compared to Type Antitheists was also observed. Type One Academics also were significantly lower than the Antitheists. Finally, Type three Agnostics were significantly lower than type Four. In this model, the Antitheists were uniquely high on dogmatism and the Ritual Atheists were significantly lower than some of the groups but not all.

This is yet another piece of supportive empirical evidence in support of specific typology claims of uniqueness.

**Pairwise Comparisons of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?**



Each node shows the sample average rank of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.

Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Two Activist	28.336	34.467	.822	.411	1.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type One Academic	53.260	32.017	1.664	.096	1.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Three Agnostic	54.891	45.047	1.219	.223	1.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Five Nontheist	64.592	54.249	1.191	.234	1.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Four Antitheist	213.547	37.655	5.671	.000	.000
Type Two Activist-Type One Academic	24.924	25.955	.960	.337	1.000
Type Two Activist-Type Three Agnostic	-26.555	40.961	-.648	.517	1.000
Type Two Activist-Type Five Nontheist	-36.255	50.907	-.712	.476	1.000
Type Two Activist-Type Four Antitheist	-185.211	32.656	-5.672	.000	.000
Type One Academic-Type Three Agnostic	-1.631	38.922	-.042	.967	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Five Nontheist	-11.331	49.282	-.230	.818	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Four Antitheist	-160.286	30.059	-5.332	.000	.000
Type Three Agnostic-Type Five Nontheist	-9.700	58.530	-.166	.869	1.000
Type Three Agnostic-Type Four Antitheist	-158.655	43.677	-3.632	.000	.004
Type Five Nontheist-Type Four Antitheist	148.955	53.117	2.804	.005	.076

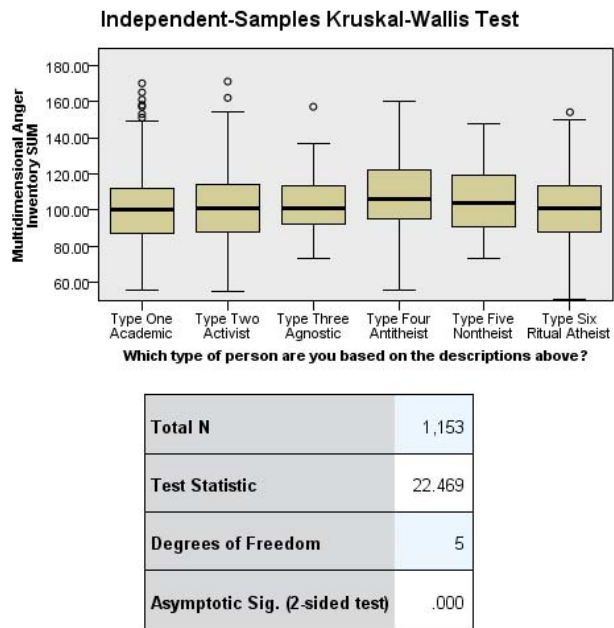
Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 21 Post-Hoc Analysis for Comparing Types on the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale



Post-Hoc analysis indicates some significant differences all at least at the  $p=.05$  level with Bonferroni correction. The first significant difference of interest is related to the Ritual

Another aspect which was of interest to this study was related to measures of Anger. The Multidimensional Anger Inventory was employed to examine if there were products of negative personality that may give Nonbelief an outside negative perception. As indicated by Figure 22, a significant difference was observed  $\chi^2 (5) = 22.469, p = .000$ . The median scores are as follows for each type: Type One with  $Mdn=100$ , Type Two with  $Mdn=101$ , Type Three with  $Mdn=101$ , Type Four with  $Mdn=106$ , Type Five with  $Mdn=104$ , and Type Six with  $Mdn=101$ . Additional Post-Hoc Pairwise Analysis was conducted in exploration of specific differences.



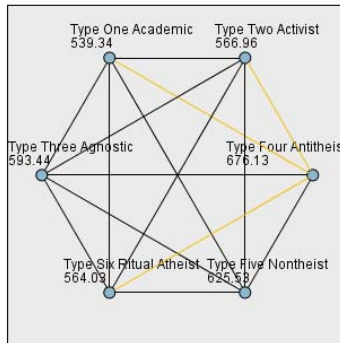
1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Figure 22 Box Plot Comparing Types on the Multidimensional Anger Inventory

SPSS has adjusted the significance levels using a Bonferroni correction as noted by the column “Adj.Sig.” Significant differences were detected between Type One Academics and

Type Four Antitheists. Additionally, Ritual Atheist Type Six were significantly lower in score than Type Four Antitheists. Finally, Type Two Activists were lower in Anger than Type Four Antitheists. It appears that Anti-Theists are significantly higher in Anger than other Nonbelief types. All significant differences were observed at least at the  $p=.05$  or lower. It is also important to note that that Type One Academics had the lowest score but were not uniquely lower except when compared to antitheists.

Pairwise Comparisons of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?



Each node shows the sample average rank of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?

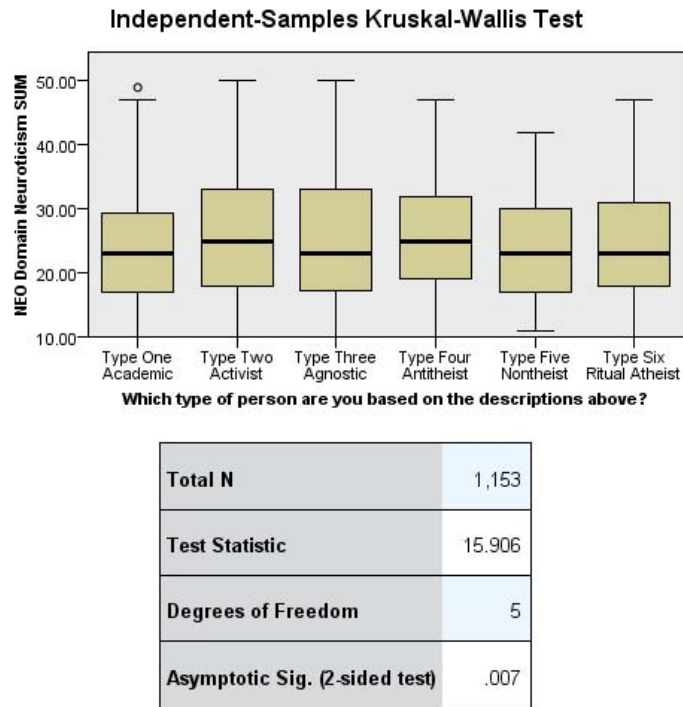
Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
Type One Academic-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-24.694	32.019	-.771	.441	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Two Activist	-27.627	25.956	-1.064	.287	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Three Agnostic	-54.106	38.924	-1.390	.165	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Five Nontheist	-86.192	49.284	-1.749	.080	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Four Antitheist	-136.788	30.061	-4.550	.000	.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Two Activist	2.933	34.469	.085	.932	1.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Three Agnostic	29.412	45.049	.653	.514	1.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Five Nontheist	61.498	54.252	1.134	.257	1.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Four Antitheist	112.094	37.657	2.977	.003	.044
Type Two Activist-Type Three Agnostic	-26.479	40.963	-.646	.518	1.000
Type Two Activist-Type Five Nontheist	-58.565	50.910	-1.150	.250	1.000
Type Two Activist-Type Four Antitheist	-109.162	32.658	-3.343	.001	.012
Type Three Agnostic-Type Five Nontheist	-32.086	58.593	-.548	.584	1.000
Type Three Agnostic-Type Four Antitheist	-82.683	43.679	-1.893	.058	.875
Type Five Nontheist-Type Four Antitheist	50.596	53.120	.952	.341	1.000

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 23 Post-Hoc Analysis for Comparing Types on the Multidimensional Anger Inventory

The last couple of measures are in exploration of the subscales of the NEO-Domain also known as the Big Five measure of personality. The first subscale of interest is Neuroticism Scale as noted in Figure 24. As indicated by Figure 24, a significant difference was observed  $\chi^2 (5) =$

15.906,  $p = .007$ . The median scores are as follows for each type: Type One with  $Mdn=23$ , Type Two with  $Mdn=25$ , Type Three with  $Mdn=23$ , Type Four with  $Mdn=25$ , Type Five with  $Mdn=23$ , and Type Six with  $Mdn=23$ .

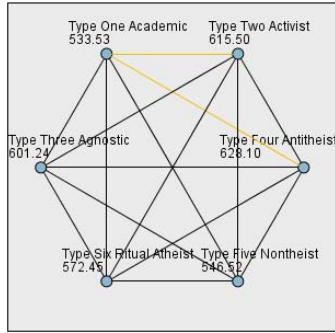


1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Figure 24 Box Plot Comparing Types on the NEO Domain Subscale for Neuroticism

Additional Post-Hoc Pairwise Analysis was conducted in exploration of specific differences. As noted in Figure 25, all significance levels have been properly adjusted using Bonferroni correction. The two significant differences are both significant at the  $p=.05$ . Type one has a significantly lower Neuroticism Score as compared to Types Two and Four. This indicates that The Activists Type and Anti-Theist both have significantly higher Neuroticism scores than the other types.

Pairwise Comparisons of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?



Each node shows the sample average rank of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.

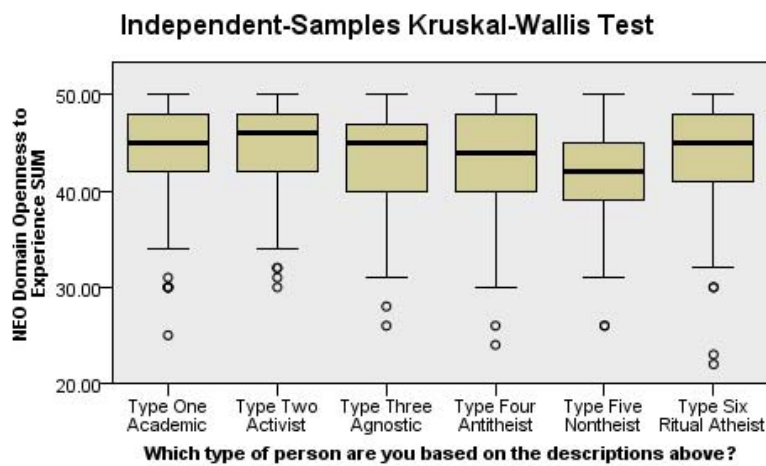
Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
Type One Academic-Type Five Nontheist	-12.989	49.261	-.264	.792	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-38.924	32.004	-1.216	.224	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Three Agnostic	-67.713	38.906	-1.740	.082	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Two Activist	-81.969	25.944	-3.159	.002	.024
Type One Academic-Type Four Antitheist	-94.571	30.047	-3.147	.002	.025
Type Five Nontheist-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-25.935	54.227	-.478	.632	1.000
Type Five Nontheist-Type Three Agnostic	54.725	58.566	.934	.350	1.000
Type Five Nontheist-Type Two Activist	68.980	50.886	1.356	.175	1.000
Type Five Nontheist-Type Four Antitheist	81.583	53.096	1.537	.124	1.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Three Agnostic	28.789	45.028	.639	.523	1.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Two Activist	43.045	34.453	1.249	.212	1.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Four Antitheist	55.647	37.639	1.478	.139	1.000
Type Three Agnostic-Type Two Activist	14.256	40.944	.348	.728	1.000
Type Three Agnostic-Type Four Antitheist	-26.858	43.659	-.615	.538	1.000
Type Two Activist-Type Four Antitheist	-12.602	32.643	-.386	.699	1.000

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 25 Post-Hoc Analysis for Comparing Types on the NEO Domain

Subscale for Neuroticism

The next significant difference of statistical importance relates to the sub-measure of Openness to Experience subdomain of the Big Five NEO Domain. A significant difference was observed  $\chi^2 (5) = 55.991, p = .000$  as indicated by Figure 26. The median scores are as follows for each type: Type One with  $Mdn=45$ , Type Two with  $Mdn=46$ , Type Three with  $Mdn=45$ , Type Four with  $Mdn=44$ , Type Five with  $Mdn=42$ , and Type Six with  $Mdn=44$ . Moreover, Post-Hoc Pairwise Analysis was conducted in exploration of specific differences.



<b>Total N</b>	1,153
<b>Test Statistic</b>	25.991
<b>Degrees of Freedom</b>	5
<b>Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)</b>	.000

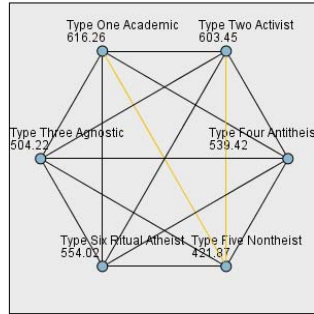
1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Figure 26 Box Plot Comparing Types on the NEO Domain Subscale for Openness to Experience

Post-Hoc analysis indicates some significant differences all at least at the  $p=.005$  level with Bonferroni correction as noted in Figure 27. Type Five Non-theism was significantly lower

than Type Two and Type One. This confirms that nontheists have little to no interest with experiences religious or otherwise. The final significant difference relates to the NEO domain of Agreeableness.

Pairwise Comparisons of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?



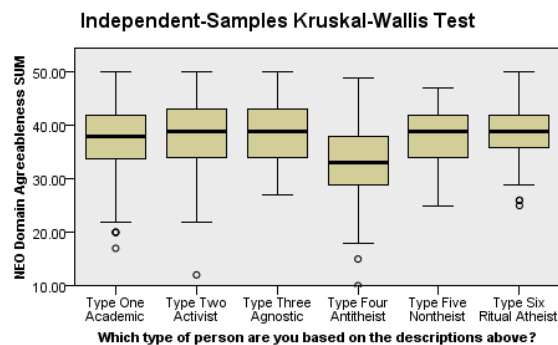
Each node shows the sample average rank of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?.

Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.
Type Five Nontheist-Type Three Agnostic	82.349	58.434	1.409	.159	1.000
Type Five Nontheist-Type Four Antitheist	117.549	52.976	2.219	.026	.397
Type Five Nontheist-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-132.148	54.105	-2.442	.015	.219
Type Five Nontheist-Type Two Activist	181.582	50.771	3.576	.000	.005
Type Five Nontheist-Type One Academic	194.391	49.150	3.955	.000	.001
Type Three Agnostic-Type Four Antitheist	-35.199	43.561	-.808	.419	1.000
Type Three Agnostic-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-49.799	44.927	-1.108	.268	1.000
Type Three Agnostic-Type Two Activist	99.233	40.851	2.429	.015	.227
Type Three Agnostic-Type One Academic	112.042	38.818	2.886	.004	.058
Type Four Antitheist-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-14.600	37.554	-.389	.697	1.000
Type Four Antitheist-Type Two Activist	64.034	32.569	1.966	.049	.739
Type Four Antitheist-Type One Academic	76.843	29.979	2.563	.010	.156
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type Two Activist	49.434	34.375	1.438	.150	1.000
Type Six Ritual Atheist-Type One Academic	62.243	31.932	1.949	.051	.769
Type Two Activist-Type One Academic	12.809	25.885	.495	.621	1.000

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 27 Post-Hoc Analysis for Comparing Types on the NEO Domain Subscale for Openness to Experience

As indicated by Figure 28, a significant difference was observed  $\chi^2 (5) = 75.590, p = .000$ . The median scores are as follows for each type: Type One with  $Mdn=38$ , Type Two with  $Mdn=39$ , Type Three with  $Mdn=39$ , Type Four with  $Mdn=33$ , Type Five with  $Mdn=39$ , and Type Six with  $Mdn=39$ . Additional Post-Hoc Pairwise Analysis was conducted in exploration of specific differences.



<b>Total N</b>	1,153
<b>Test Statistic</b>	75.590
<b>Degrees of Freedom</b>	5
<b>Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)</b>	.000

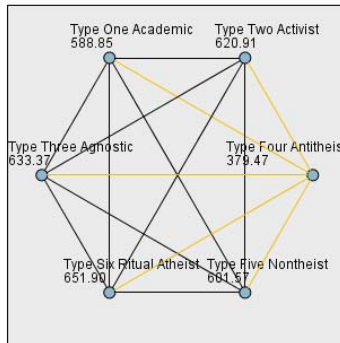
1. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Figure 28 Box Plot Comparing Types on the NEO Domain Subscale for Agreeableness

With Bonferroni correction, Antitheists were significantly lower than all other types all at the  $p=.000$  level. This indicates that their unique characteristic is they are low on agreeableness. No other significant differences were observed within the Agreeableness Subdomain. What are the implications of this analysis?



Pairwise Comparisons of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?



Each node shows the sample average rank of Which type of person are you based on the descriptions above?

Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
Type Four Antitheist-Type One Academic	209.382	30.030	6.972	.000	.000
Type Four Antitheist-Type Five Nontheist	-222.098	53.066	-4.185	.000	.000
Type Four Antitheist-Type Two Activist	241.435	32.625	7.400	.000	.000
Type Four Antitheist-Type Three Agnostic	253.899	43.635	5.819	.000	.000
Type Four Antitheist-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-272.425	37.618	-7.242	.000	.000
Type One Academic-Type Five Nontheist	-12.716	49.234	-.258	.796	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Two Activist	-32.053	25.930	-1.236	.216	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Three Agnostic	-44.517	38.884	-1.145	.252	1.000
Type One Academic-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-63.043	31.986	-1.971	.049	.731
Type Five Nontheist-Type Two Activist	19.337	50.858	.380	.704	1.000
Type Five Nontheist-Type Three Agnostic	31.801	58.534	.543	.587	1.000
Type Five Nontheist-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-50.327	54.197	-.929	.353	1.000
Type Two Activist-Type Three Agnostic	-12.464	40.921	-.305	.761	1.000
Type Two Activist-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-30.990	34.434	-.900	.368	1.000
Type Three Agnostic-Type Six Ritual Atheist	-18.527	45.003	-.412	.681	1.000

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 29 Post-Hoc Analysis for Comparing Types on the NEO Domain Subscale for Agreeableness.

## Discussion

Study two was an extensive attempt at empirically testing the typology of Nonbelief as proposed by study one. Moreover, it also was also an investigative study related to Nonbelief and the types of people who call themselves nonbelievers. In a sense, the author of this study wanted to learn about Nonbelief and see if attributes could be assigned to specific types of ontologies related to Nonbelief. Study two also attempted to answer a series of research questions related to non-belief. Those questions will now be addressed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### GLOBAL DISCUSSION AND PERSPECTIVES

While Study one attempted to answer research questions one and two including the subparts of question two, this study discovered that Question Two, Part B really was not addressed in any detail. Study two attempted to explore the changing ontological perspective – through self-report – of how participants viewed their belief during childhood, preteen, and teenage years. This was in replication and modification of the Zinnbauer et al. (1999) work on spirituality. The study used the four nominal variables related to spiritual but not religious, religious but not spiritual, spiritual and religious, and neither. The modification was to ask participants to reflect back on their childhood at ages 6, 12, and 16 and define themselves by the Zinnbauer nominal variables. What is interesting is the large number of individuals who identified with being religious but not spiritual. Maybe this indicates some type of ritualistic religion without the personal meaningful engagement. Interestingly, this number drops to 0 for their current view and belief.

In addition, the spiritual and religious group starts high but drops during the teenage years to almost 0% at their current age in adulthood. Of course, it was expected to see an increase in Nonbelief over the course of development. The participant pool started at 25% self-declaring neither spiritual nor religious at age 6, increasing to 80% by their current age. This is obviously a substantial increase, but not surprising considering this is a cohort sample of nonbelievers. The other interesting finding was within the spiritual but not religious group. They

identified as low as 9% at age six jumping to 19% at their current age. This means there are still some within the Nonbelief community who consider themselves spiritual but not religious. Certainly this gave us further empirical nonparametric insight into the participants' youth. For some participants, their view has not changed. Roughly 25% of them have ascribed to Nonbelief in some form since early youth. The rest have made transitions into Nonbelief over the course of their youth to adult trajectory.

More in line with Research Question Six, some of the demographics of the study certainly appeared to play a role in identity. For example, the spiritual but not religious and neither spiritual nor religious categories were related to the Nonbelief typology. It appears that spirituality has a relationship to the typology. Particularly, spiritual but not religious appears to have the largest number of self-described agnostics as compared with the other types, giving further empirical support to the uniqueness of the Agnosticism as a specific type. Moreover, for the neither spiritual nor religious group, agnostics appear to have the lowest proportion of individuals. These individuals may be seeking some type of profound ontological experience much like spirituality. Certainly, this supports the claim that some agnostics are spiritual but not religious as seen in the proportional hierarchy. This data would support the idea that the Zinnbauer categories are related to the typology of Nonbelief.

In exploration of geography, study one proposed that geographic tension appeared to play a role in one's ontological position. This is a tricky exploration, as while tension may play a role in forming one ontological position and their narrative construction, certainly typological differences were not sought related to geographic location. This is not an expectation of data, but rather a concern for typological consistency across the United States. Researchers asked a series of questions regarding the participants' perceptions regarding their friends, family, and

community. As was expected, the South appeared to have the highest amount of perceived tension, followed by the Midwest. The Northeast and The West appeared to shift back and forth depending on the wording of the question. It is likely much of this has to do with the high number of “nones” in the Northeast as compared to a large Catholic population. For the West, certainly there is plurality as well, but Utah was included in this geographic area, and Mormonism certainly has a strong influence in some parts of the West. While the geographic boundaries were not perfect, and certainly empirical criticisms can be placed on these boundaries as well as urban-versus-rural measures of faith, it could be argued that they have some validity both in theory and practice. As discovered, certainly parts of the United States do appear to have higher social tension regarding Nonbelief as opposed to others. It is important to measure such tension if the typology of Nonbelief is to be argued as an originally American phenomenon. This study was able to replicate empirically the qualitative data regarding perceived tension. There are varying degrees of tension throughout the United States. Certainly others can do further work as to the complexity of such tension and its relationship to personal and social ontology. The main goal here was to show that it exists and that it must be taken into account in explaining the Nonbelief experience. Since this study has shown the geographic areas of the United States differ, this leads to the next empirical concern.

Are there any Nonbelief types that might be geographic specific? The study explored this question by conducting a Chi-Square test of independence to determine if self-report typologies were independent of region or if they were related. This study found a significant relationship; however, this was the case for only one typology: Type Five (the Non-Theists) in the South. They emerged as a geographically dependent group. This result could be explained a couple of ways. One is that Non-Theists are truly a Southern phenomenon based on a cultural of high

social tension. Their lack of concern with religion spawns out of a culture of religion where self-identity is tied to religious identity. It might be that Non-Theists do not want to engage in debate over their ontological position and therefore simply do not identify. Therefore, their non-theism is a product of self-preservation or a defensive mechanism. Certainly, this would be one explanation, but another possibility is related to the sampling strategy. The study is based out of the South and therefore there is a disproportion of Non-Theists based on recruitment efforts. The study was supervised and administered from the Southeast United States and networking in the South provided a large number of participants disproportionate to the rest of the country. Certainly further works should be done to study Non-Theists with larger samples from other regions as compared to the South. It may be that they are a smaller group of nonbelievers that were detected because of this study.

From the issue of social tension and demographics, this section now shifts to the empirical testing of the other research questions. Question Three asked if personality traits were related to the Nonbelief typology. It appears that three of the five domains of the NEO are related to the Nonbelief typology. Those domains are Neuroticism, Openness to Experience, and Agreeableness. The first subdomain, Neuroticism, was high for Type Two Activists and Type Four Antitheists. This means that the activist type and antitheist types have higher anxiety, irritability, and emotional instability as compared to the other types. In Openness to Experience, Type Five individuals were the lowest in score as compared to all other types, and significantly lower than Type Two Activists and Type One Academics. This could be interpreted that nontheists lack imagination or insight or simply do not have a broad range of interests that include religion. Conversely, this could also mean that Type One Academics and Type Two Activists do have wider reaching interests. The last of the NEO subdomains to show statistical

significance is Agreeableness. It appears that the only statistical significance related specifically to antitheists. Antitheists Type Four were significantly lower than all other types. It appears that lack of agreeableness or lower agreeableness is a specific characteristic of the Antitheists type. Agreeableness is not simply agreement with others, as a psychological construct it also is allied with other aspects such as kindness, affection, and prosocial behaviors. Therefore, inversely in this case, antitheists are stern, loathing, or rancorous regarding their connections with others. Certainly, there is empirical evidence in support of connections between personality traits and Nonbelief types (Costa & McCrae, 1985; Goldberg et al., 2006; International Personality Item Pool, 2012).

Question Three Part A questioned if there were emotional or personality styles, such as anger, which could be attributed to Nonbelief. The Narcissism Personality Inventory and the Multidimensional Anger Inventory were also applied to the empirical model to detect differences. First in examination of Narcissism, the lowest scorers were the Type Two activists. They were significantly lower than Academics and the Antitheists. Additionally the Agnostics Type Three as well as Type Six Ritual Atheists were also lower as compared Antitheist Type Four. In this regard, the Activists were lowest on Narcissism and the Antitheists were the highest scorers. Concerning Anger measures, Academics were the lowest scorers on the anger inventory. They were significantly lower than Antitheists. Congruently, Ritual Atheists and Activists were also significantly lower than Antitheists on Anger as well. Antitheists scored higher on anger than any other group. Measures of Narcissism and Anger appear to be related to the Nonbelief typology (Siegel, 1986; Raskin and Terry, 1988; Musante, MacDougall, Dembroski, & Costa, 1989).

Question Four explored the role of open and closed mindedness regarding Nonbelief. While this may sound similar to agreeableness, it relates to openness to values and outsider ideas. Research shows this measure can relate to authoritarianism, value assumptions and even prejudice (Rokeach, 1960; Silver, 2011). Therefore, a study on open and closed mindedness is certainly warranted here. The Rokeach Dogmatism Scale was applied in exploration of this construct. The lowest scorer on the Dogmatism Scale was Type Six Ritual Atheists and the Highest Score was Type Four the Antitheist. All Types except the Non-Theists were significantly lower than the Antitheists on the Dogmatism Scale. This indicates that Antitheists are closed-minded individuals as compared with other types of Nonbelief. Certainly open and closed mindedness appears to be related to Nonbelief.

The final question to be discussed, Question Five, explored whether there are levels of psychological well-being related to the types of Nonbelief observed in Study One. It was asserted in Question Five that some may be more maladjusted, while others are adaptable to the social conditions of belief around those with a Nonbelief ontology. The RYFF Psychological Well-Being Scale looks at six aspects of psychological wellbeing. In this case, two of the six appear related to the Nonbelief typology. First is autonomy. Type Three Agnostics are the lowest scorers within this subscale. The Agnostics are significantly lower than Types One (Academics), Two (Activists), and Four (Antitheists). Ritual Atheist Type Six were also low as well. They were significantly lower than Type One Academics and Type Four Antitheists. Finally, Activists were significantly lower than Antitheists. Antitheist were the highest scorers of Autonomy. This would suggest that Agnostics are concerned with others' opinions of their views. They rely on the judgment of others to make decisions. This may also apply to Ritual Atheists as well, since they also scored relatively low. The highest scorers were Type Four, the Antitheists. This



suggests they would be the most self-determining and independently able to resist social pressure to conform. They set their own value judgments and evaluate themselves by their own code. The other significant psychological wellbeing subscale is Positive Relations with Others (Ryff & Singer, 1996).

High Scorers on this sub dimension have trusting relationships with others and are concerned with others' well-being. They have empathy and affection seeking human relationships. Antitheists were the typology with the lowest score and the highest score was with Ritual Atheists. This study observed a significant difference between these two types as well. This would indicate that Ritual Atheists seek connections with others. It could be that ritual and symbolism connect Type Six people with others and it provides meaning in their lives. For Antitheists, they are so firm in their view that they do not value synergy with the society around them. No other RYFF sub-dimensions showed significant differences. It appears that there is empirical support for the Nonbelief types as detected in the qualitative data of Study One and further explored by measures of personality, dogmatism, psychological well-being, anger, and narcissism.

Certainly, there is empirical support in addressing all research questions. Nevertheless, what about the typologies themselves? What does it mean, empirically, to be a Nonbelief Type? In addition, what can be said about the sample of this study, if anything? Type One Academics are the largest of the entire sample at over 411 participants – almost 1/3 of the total data. Academics Type One also have a diverse range of scores on each subscale. What can be empirically said about Type One individuals is that they have low anger as compared to the other types. They also appear to be the average group with no highs or lows, simply the average individuals of the Nonbelief community. Many times, if Type One individuals show a low or

high score, it is a characteristic they share with another group. For example, they share the lowest median score for Neuroticism with Ritual Atheists and Agnostics. Otherwise, they are the average scorers. What could be empirically said is that Academic Atheists Type Ones are emotionally stable and mature. This may be a product of academic debate and intellectualization. An individual in intellectual debate is expected to listen intently and with social maturity, and debate in an objective intellectual fashion. This is a social construct of being an intellectual. Beyond this data and interpretation, this study would suggest that further research be conducted to focus on the academic types. It is likely within this group that there are additional subgroups, which may have more unique characteristics. The central tendency of the Type One scores is likely due to not only the sample size but to method error in that the project did not detect or construct additional types beyond the qualitative frame of Study One.

Type Two Activists appear to be some of the most psychologically well adjusted. They were the lowest scorers on the Narcissism Personality Inventory and the highest on Openness to Experience. This means they are interested in diverse experiences, both social and intellectual. They have an appreciation for imagination and art. They are naturally adventurous. It appears that the activist types are less concerned with self-promotion and more concerned with self-development and worthwhile experiences. Their popular literature equivalent would be the humanists. They are concerned with others and attempt to change the world for the better. Their empirical implication is that their activism is related to learning about the world around them.

Type Three Agnostics are also an interesting group. As noted in the results section, they have the lowest Autonomy Score. This means they are concerned about what others think about them. In a sense, they are conformists and seek to ally themselves with social norms and others' expectations. Moreover, from the Chi-Square analysis, they are one of highest spiritual groups

meaning that they still hold on to some type of belief system even if that belief system is an individualized manifestation. While they concern themselves with others, certainly they are a bridge between belief and Nonbelief, both socially as well as ontologically.

Type Four Antitheists are one of the most empirically interesting of the entire typology. They are very unique in a variety of ways. They are highly autonomous in that they are self-determining and able to resist social influences. They regulate their behavior through internal mechanisms and self-evaluate, as opposed to looking to others for an evaluative template. Antitheists are low scorers on most measures of personal growth and higher scores on measures of maladjustment. They simply have few trusting relationships. They find openness and social interconnectedness difficult to achieve. They are uncompromising and typically isolated. They expect others to conform to their will and view. Antitheists are highly narcissistic. They have a high view of themselves and see themselves as almost superior to others. Moreover, they are uniquely closed-minded as compared to other Nonbelief types. In many respects, they may be the purists or fundamentalist nonbelievers. They also have the highest anger of the types. They may find that for anyone who challenges their view, the medium of response is anger. In relation to personality, they are also low on agreeableness— meaning that they not cooperative, friendly or compassionate. If they were to be applied to the popular literature, their closest ontological relative would be the New Atheists. However, certainly this profile here moves well beyond the protesting and socially assertive Atheist. In a sense, they are socially distant, opinionated, closed-minded people who believe they are better than others.

Type Five Non-Theists were a small group mainly observed within the Southern United States. Their typology description was also one of the smallest and simplest to define. The only empirical aspect of Non-Theists is that they are the least open to experience and essentially have

no interest in learning about others or the world. They may also not be interested in aspects generally correlated with openness to experience such as creativity or learning about others. In a sense, they are generally disinterested in most things, not just religion. While they are disinterested, it is also important to note that they have relatively low neuroticism scores meaning they are happy with their view. Certainly, this confirms the type. Further research should be done to detect Non-Theists and explore other factors that may relate to them. It might also be the case that Non-Theists are more prevalent in other parts of the world, such as Western Europe, where religion is becoming less culturally significant.

As was noted in Study One, Type Six Ritual Atheists were an unexpected group to emerge within the qualitative data. Even more so were the empirical aspects of this group. As was noted in the qualitative data, some celebrate holidays and appreciate ceremony and symbolism. They were the highest scores in the RYFF subdomain Positive Relations with Others. This means they long for warm and satisfying relationships with others. They are concerned with the welfare of community and attempt to form lasting human bonds with others. It could be that ritual and performance tie them to community, creating social intimacy with others. They need not believe in God or a divine presence to attempt to connect with others in a profound way. Moreover, Ritual Atheists were the most open minded of the Nonbelief typologies, meaning that they are open to the beliefs and values of others, including those beyond the Ritual Atheists' in-group. As observed with Types One, Three, and Five, Ritual Atheists are also emotionally stable in their views. Further research should be done on Ritual Atheists to determine if other empirical observations can be made, and to what degree they make up the overall population of Nonbelief in America. Table 18 has been included here to provide a general overview of the types and their comparison between high and low scores for all scales

and subscales that showed significant statistical difference. In Table 19, “Multiple” indicates multiple scales, which either shared a high or low median score. This means that a cluster of types may share a score but is still significant to mention.

Table 19  
Nominal Comparison of Scales by Nonbelief Type

Scale	Lowest Score	Highest Score
RYFF Autonomy	Agnostics	Antitheists
RYFF Positive Relations with Others	Antitheists	Ritual Atheists
Narcissism	Activists	Antitheists
Rokeach Dogmatism Scale	Ritual Atheists	Antitheists
Multidimensional Anger Inventory	Academics	Antitheists
NEO Neuroticism Subdomain	Multiple	Multiple
NEO Openness to Experience Subdomain	Non-Theists	Activists
NEO Agreeableness Subdomain	Antitheists	Multiple

## Conclusion

This study identified the problem of researching non-belief and the limitations of current research. While Atheism and non-belief represent a controversial topic, more research should be conducted to explore the complexities of non-belief in America today. From the analysis of the data in this study, non-believers have the opportunity to identify themselves in their words – providing both generality and complexity in exploration of various manifestations of ontological positions in non-belief. Understanding the difficulty in capturing data in a new area of research requires a wide and accurate skill set. This study brings together a variety of academic disciplines and worldviews coupled with methodological plurality. The overall goal is to accurately capture a social phenomena’s perception of the members who identify with the social

construction of a particular reality as it is useful to the larger academic social science discourse. Moreover, such a narrative may also provide useful information to the non-believers themselves in finding commonality among the complex ideological positions within the terms of Atheism, Agnosticism, and horizontal spirituality. The proposal's overall aspiration is to clarify a new research area, provide greater details into a sub-segment of the American religious landscape, and open the door to additional dialog within non-belief and atheist academic discussion. While this study has many positives, it certainly has as many limitations.

### Limitations

While this attempt to explore the potential complexity regarding Nonbelief was certainly fruitful, this study has its limitations. First, the Principal Investigator is not a strong writer. While the principle author of this study had much of the descriptions and questions for Study One and Two proofed and edited, small errors were still detected by participants. One could conduct a study solely on the intellectual complexity of Nonbelief participants. Many of them were hyperaware of social issues, theories related to philosophy and the social sciences, and general social and political knowledge. Certainly, a study of knowledge and intelligence would be warranted, based on this information. This observation was further supported by the participants' cognizance of writing inconsistencies and errors in this study. The Principal Investigator was impressed by the level of education of participants, not only in degree-based education but also in the proactive nature of self-education.

Another limitation would be related to method error, as previously noted both studies have some grammatical errors in qualitative and quantitative questions. Certainly this study benefited in finding both qualitative and empirical results, regardless of these minor errors. Many of the participants were concerned with the nature of the study. Some were particularly

concerned with the questions inquiring about their anger and questions related to narcissism. There were a number of attempts of the survey, which were discontinued completing the survey once they touched the anger or narcissism questions. While the recruitment letter attempted to communicate the objective agenda at studying Nonbelief, and this project rode the shirrtails of Tommy Coleman as plaintiff in a suit against the local government over prayer, it is likely that many participants perceived the study to have a negative agenda. Certainly, there may be other measures that would be better suited to empirically exploring the Nonbelief typology in detail. This study certainly has possibilities for future research.

#### Future Research

Future research should explore in greater detail all the Nonbelief types and other psychometric correlates which may relate. For example, as noted in the discussion section, Type One Academics at second glance are likely more than one type. Further qualitative and quantitative research should attempt to parse out any key factors, which could assist in detecting other forms of Nonbelief. The variability of the data in the academic group would suggest that there are more groups lumped together in some capacity. Next, Type Five Non-Theists should also be explored. It appears from this study that they may be related geographically, but it would be suggested otherwise. It is more likely that they are simply a minor type of Nonbelief, which was detected due the massive sample from the South. This project was severely limited by financial resources and relied on networking. Future studies with proper funding could attempt to collect more diverse data beyond social networking. With a larger sample, the study could attempt a more complex Nonbelief typology. Another consideration would be related to the education of believers about Nonbelief applying this typology. It would be interesting to see if outsider perceptions could be changed, based on education about the types of Nonbelief that

exist. It is likely that Antitheists are one of the negative personas applied to all those in Nonbelief. A study could explore the degree to which a proper education about Nonbelief and the types of people who call themselves nonbelievers may correct misconceptions and prejudice. Finally, a more sophisticated statistician and researcher might replicate this study. They may be much more adept at design and analysis in order to explore even further any implications undiscovered here. Certainly, there is a variety of related topics that could be explored in detail.



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APPENDICES  
MEASURES AND PROTOCOLS

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT LETTERS FOR QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE

**Title of study:** Atheism in America: A Qualitative and Quantitative Study of Type and Narrative

**Principal investigator** Christopher F. Silver

**University Faculty Advisor** Dr. Ralph Hood Jr.

**School:** University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

## **INTRODUCTION:**

You are being asked to participate in a study investigating the various manifestations of non-belief in the United States. For the portion you are about to participate in, researchers would like to explore the trends in the American landscape of those who are not religious or anti-religious. This will be accomplished by an interview with you and will examine, in depth terms you commonly use to express non-religion and your life experiences. The results of this study will be made available to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and to Christopher F Silver.

## **PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY**

This is a new area of study. While many scholars and academics speak in terms such as Atheism or Agnosticism, there has not been research exploring the meaning of these terms which describe non-belief. This study will attempt to explore the variety of perspectives which relate to these terms including your perception of definitional meaning. This interview data will be used to create more empirical measures for a much larger study to follow.

## **PROCEDURES**

In this study we will ask you to participate in a short interview related to questions about non-belief and atheist themes. This interview will last between forty five minutes to three hours depending on the length of your responses. Many people find interviews interesting and fun as they get to express opinions and ideas. Following your participation you will debriefed fully on the purpose of the survey. Your interview will be audio-recorded to ensure your responses are accurate in the final paper.

### **POSSIBLE RISKS OR BENEFITS**

There are no foreseeable risks involved in this study, and you will not be compensated for your time. However, the results of the study will be made available on the following website within a couple of months:

<http://www.atheismresearch.com>

While this interview will be audio-recorded, the data will be stored in a secure computer in the psychology office at UTC, accessible our research team. Your name will not be given in the paper or shared with anyone else. Once your interview has been transcribed, we will remove information which could identify you. Additionally, the audio identifiers of your personal contact information from this interview will be destroyed.

### **RIGHT OF REFUSAL TO PARTICIPATE AND WITHDRAWAL**

You are free to choose to participate or not participate in the study. You will not be penalized in any way, should you refuse to participate. You may also withdraw any time from the study and may also refuse to answer some or all the questions.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information provided by you will remain confidential. Nobody except the principal investigators will have an access to it. Your name and identity will also not be disclosed at any time.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION OR REGISTER A CONCERN**

If you have any further questions you may contact Christopher Silver at (423) 425-2267 or Ralph Hood at 423-425-4274 or to register a concern or file a complaint related to this research you can contact the UTC IRB by email at instrb@utc.edu or through the IRB Char, Dr. Bart Weathington at 423-425-4289. Please note you must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

## **AUTHORIZATION**

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws. Finally I also understand that I must be 18 years of age or older.

Participant's Name (Printed or Typed):

Date:

Participant's Signature or thumb impression:

Date:

Principal Investigator's Signature:

Date:

***The Institutional Review Board of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga  
(FWA00004149) has approved this research project #12-176.***

**Participant Number (AUTOMATICALLY ASSIGNED BY SERVER) \_\_\_\_\_**

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

Project Name: Atheism in America: A Qualitative and Quantitative Study of Type and Narrative

You are being asked to participate in a study investigating the experiences of those who consider themselves non-religious. This study would like to explore the complexity of the non-belief community in detail from your own personal interests to aspects of your personality and the ways you find enjoyment in your daily life. Since this is a new area of study, this survey will cover a wide variety of topics related to non-belief. The results of this study will be made available to faculties of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and to Christopher F Silver. We appreciate your interest in this study.

For your protection, the consent forms will be kept separate from the answers. Only those on our research team will have access to your records. Should you be interviewed, you will be asked to complete a separate informed consent explaining any additional risks involved in participation. We (the research team) will remove any characteristics which could identify you individually. Know that your information will be kept confidential and in a secure location. Your confidentiality is our utmost importance and we will keep your records private to the full extent of the law.

Although all studies have some degree of risk, the potential risk in this investigation is minimal. However, there are a couple of aspects to this study you should consider before deciding to participate. Our online testing elements used in this study are similar to that of normal test taking procedures that one would find in a classroom setting. Moreover, you will not incur any cost for your participation. You have the right to discontinue participation at anytime. Participation is completely voluntarily.

If you have any questions prior to your participation, or at any time during the study, please do not hesitate to contact the principle researcher Christopher Silver (423) 425-2267 or Email [Christopher-Silver@utc.edu](mailto:Christopher-Silver@utc.edu) or research advisor Ralph Hood at (423) 425-2126. Please note you must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

#### **Contact information or register a concern**

If you have any further questions you may contact Christopher Silver at (423) 425-2267 or Ralph Hood at 423-425-4274 or to register a concern or file a complaint related to this research you can contact the UTC IRB by email at instrb@utc.edu or through the IRB Char, Dr. Bart Weathington at 423-425-4289.

**AUTHORIZATION:** I have read the above agreement and understand the nature of the study. I also assert that I am 18 years old to qualify for this study. I also understand that by agreeing to participate in this study I have not waived any legal or human right, and that I may contact the head researcher or research advisor at any time (head researcher: Chris Silver (423) 425-2267 or research advisor: Dr. Ralph Hood (423) 425-2126. I agree to participate in this study and release all responses I make on this study to Christopher Silver. I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any time for any reason without reprisal or prejudice.

**Click here to save a PDF copy of the informed consent!**

**If you wish to continue with the study and authorize the use of your responses following the consent above, please click next.**

**If you do not agree to participate please click cancel or close your browser.**

<p><b>The Institutional Review Board of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (FWA00004149) has approved this research project #XXXXX</b></p>
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APPENDIX B

QUALITATIVE PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW SCHEME

## Instructional Protocol for Conducting Qualitative Interviewing

Instructions for conducting interviews. Please read and follow these instructions in their entirety.

Upon receiving your list of interviewees, please make sure to contact the participants immediately to setup a time to conduct the interview either via Skype or face-to-face. My office is available as needed.

Make sure the participants has completed the informed consent (if in person) or agrees to the informed consent on tape (this is acceptable). They have to say “I have read and understand the informed consent. I agree to be interviewed and the data can be used for the UTC study of non-belief. I also understand that I can discontinue the interview at any time”.

If for any reason you are unable or unwilling to conduct the interview, please contact me immediately to arrange an alternate interviewer. This is important to momentum and keeping the project moving as well as keeping interest in the participant.

Please test technology prior to formal use. If using Skype, make sure the recording software works and works for the entirety of the interview. Some shareware versions only record a set amount of time such as 20 minutes. For audio recorders, please test sound levels and check batteries prior to the interview. Test it with your friends. Badly recorded interviews are difficult to transcribe.

If at all possible, use another backup recording device such as an iPhone.

All mobile phones need to be switched off. Not to silent. They can interfere with the recording and render it unusable.

Make sure the recorder or recording software is actually recording before you begin.

Make sure any cups or glasses are cushioned when being set on hard surfaces during the interview. Also be aware of any background noise from air conditioning, projectors, cars, etc, and take steps to minimize them where possible. Sometimes placing something like the back of a chair to block the recorder from background noise can work wonders. If there is too much noise, move to another place.

At the end of your interview, identify yourself, the participants first name, date of the interview, the medium used (Skype, Google, or face to face).

Instructions for the interviewer

This is a semi-structured interview with a couple of open-ended questions. I have included a worksheet to help the research participant structure their definitions of non-belief and to map their narrative milestones regarding changes in belief over their life. This worksheet is optional for the participant but allows them to make the decision. Do not make it for them. It is also important to pay attention to the questions, if the participant addresses a later question early surely by coincidence, then you need not read it to them to repeat their answer. However, if you find that they could expand on a topic and only lightly addressed it before, go ahead and ask the question. Use your common sense, if you are only getting on word or one sentence answers, ask more probing questions. Draw out their perspective. Ask the “why”, “what does that mean to you”, or “can you tell me more about that”. Again pay attention to the interviewee and make sure you take notes as they go so you can show them you are listening. This will also ensure that you achieve the goals of qualitative portion of the study.

The goals are:

Find terms to define non-belief.

Allow the participant to define these terms as they understand them and use them.

Allow the participants to give us additional terms the author of the study may not be aware of and define them.

Track the narrative of the participant and how their view of non-belief has changed over time

To explore how social connections confirm the participant's worldview

*Please contact me if you have any questions about conducting the qualitative portion of the study.*

Interview instructions to read to the participant

Hi and welcome

This interview is to explore your perspectives on belief versus non-belief. As part of this study, you are the teacher and I am the student. In other words, I want to learn from you about not only your life experiences and those who influence your life, but also I want to understand how you define commonly used terms within your worldview. This interview will include some questions to help me better understand how you see the world. At the end, if you feel there is a question I should ask or a point which would be pertinent to the themes we are discussing, please include them.

I will ask you a series of questions, these questions will be based on your life experience. This interview can take between 45 minutes to a couple of hours depending on how much you want to contribute. We will stay in the same setting and attempt to complete it in one sitting. If at any time you need a break or wish to end this interview, let me know. We want to ensure you are comfortable with the setting and the content of these questions. You have the right to terminate this interview or participation in this study at any time. Data collected for this study will be used

for a study on non-belief and will be used in a student dissertation and potentially academic publications which follow.

**Do you agree to participate in this study?**

Please note your name will be removed later when this interview is used for publication. An alias will replace your real name when referred to within the publication.

**What is your first name to confirm your agreement to be in the study?**

Shall we begin..

In the following section I would like to ask you about what belief is to you. Please be detailed and avoid single or short responses. Explain for me in detail what these questions mean to you.

**Do you consider yourself religious, spiritual, or non-religious?**

**How would you define each of those terms?**

**When your friends or family go around the room and identify as a specific religion or belief, how do you identify?**

**How would you define (insert the term the participant used here) in your understanding.**

**How do your friends or family identify your beliefs? How accurate is this to your actual view?**

**How does their identity of you make you feel?**

**What corrections would you make to their perception of you, if any?**

I would like to present you with some common terms used in identifying non-belief or social systems associated with non-belief, would you define them for me as I present them to you?

**How would you define...**

**Atheism**

**New Atheist**

**Agnosticism**

**Anti-theism**

**Non-theist**

**Freethinker**

**Deist**

**Secularist**

**Bright**

**Humanist**

**Naturalist**

**Skeptic**

**Rationalist**

**What are some terms you would include in this list?**

**Can you define each of them for me?**

**Does one of these terms more accurately define your worldview?**

**Would you combine any of the terms which we have discussed here?**

**Does the definition change with a combined meaning?**

**Does this create a new term which could be used to identify those who do not share religious belief? What would its definition mean?**

**Are there other combinations of terms which would identify those of non-belief?**

**Based on the list we have discussed and any terms you have added, are there any types of non-belief which you agree with their position or worldview? Why?**

**Are there any types you find disagreement or find yourself in conflict with their worldview? Why?**

### **Narrative Exploration**

Next I would like you to think about your life experience and how you have changed and developed over your life span. Specifically I would like you to think about how your worldview has changed in relation to religion. The following questions are themed regarding those perspectives.

**Reflecting back over your life, are there milestones which are significant to your development and worldview? Particularly how has your view of religion changed over time?**

**Are there specific events or specific points in time where you remember a change or shift in your religious or non-religious worldview? Why are they meaningful?**

**How would you identify yourself at those specific points in your life? What was your belief or non-belief orientation at those times?**

**How did others identify you at each of those times? Were others aware of your belief orientation?**



**Was there a point in your life where you experienced dramatic changes in belief? Tell me about those experiences.**

**Are there other perspectives about your life which you think would be important in discussing your worldview and life experience? In other words, life experiences and changes in perspectives which would be beneficial to this research?**

### **Social Capital Perspectives**

**Do you connect with others who share your beliefs and worldview? Tell me about those relationships?**

**Where do you normally connect with others of similar worldview or belief? What is your preferred method of connecting with others (e.g. parties, meetings, having people over, the internet, etc.)?**

**Are you aware of organizations either secular or otherwise which may provide social connections with others who may share your worldview?**

**Do you belong to any organizations which actively promote your worldview and attempt to raise awareness about values you find important?**

**What are those organizations if any?**

(If the participant answers yes they are a member of atheist organizations, ask the following questions)

**Tell me about this/these group(s) and your interest in them.**

**What benefits if any have you gained from being part of these organizations?**

**What do you like and dislike about this/these group(s)?**

**If you were the president/leader of such a group, what would you direct the group to do?**

**How should their primary time and resources be used? Why?**

### **Concluding Questions**

**Are there any themes or ideas that I touched on but should be explored further? If yes, what would you like to say about those themes or ideas?**

**Is there anything else which you think is important to this interview which may not have been discussed?**

Thank you so much for your participation. The research results will be available

[www.Atheismresearch.com](http://www.Atheismresearch.com)

Qualitative Interview Worksheet – Research on Non-belief.

**How would you define...**

**Atheism**

**New Atheist**

**Agnosticism**

**Anti-theism**

**Non-theist**

**Freethinker**

**Deist**

**Secularist**

**Bright**

**Humanist**

**Naturalist**

**Skeptic**

**Rationalist**

**What are some terms you would include in this list?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please define these additional terms for the interviewer.

Narrative Mapping Exercise as part of the interview (Optional to help brainstorm your story)

Calendar Year	Age	Key Relationships	Your worldview and belief at that time	Others view of you and your beliefs	What was learned

Adapted from Fowler, J. W., Streib, H. & Keller, B. (2004). The manual for faith development research. Center for Research in Faith and Moral Development Candler School of Theology Emory University. Atlanta, GA.

## VITA

Christopher (Chris) F Silver was born in East Ridge, Tennessee, to Frank and June Silver of Dunlap, Tennessee. Chris grew up in Dunlap during his childhood and attended Sequatchie County High School. Upon graduation, Chris attended Chattanooga State Technical Community College where he took remedial courses to prepare him for college admission. Upon completion of those remedial courses Chris transferred from Chattanooga State to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC). While at UTC, Chris performed in the UTC Marching and Concert Bands. He was president of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Music Fraternity for two years. Upon graduation from UTC, Chris received a Bachelors of Science in Psychology and a Bachelors of Arts in Religious Studies. Chris continued his studies at UTC completing a Masters in Research Psychology. Chris moved to Ontario, Canada, where he attended Wilfrid Laurier University. Chris received a Masters of Arts in Religion and Culture from Wilfrid Laurier University. Chris returned home to Chattanooga and applied for admission to the Learning and Leadership doctoral program in the School of Education at UTC. Chris currently teaches Research Methods and Tests and Measurements in the Psychology Department at UTC. Moreover, for 7 years, Chris was an Information Technology Project Manager for a government contractor located in Chattanooga. At the time of his defense, Chris was working in the UTC School of Nursing as a Virtual Learning Coordinator. Mr. Silver has published in a variety of academic peer-reviewed journals. He also was a co-author on a book exploring religious

deconversion comparing the United States and Germany. Chris' aspiration is to be a full time professor at a college or university.