

Fall 2012

Godless Americans: How Non-Religious Persons are Labeled as Deviant in a Religious Society

Damian M. Bramlett
San Jose State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses

Recommended Citation

Bramlett, Damian M., "Godless Americans: How Non-Religious Persons are Labeled as Deviant in a Religious Society" (2012). *Master's Theses*. 4224.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.73ed-qsxu>
https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses/4224

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Graduate Research at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.

GODLESS AMERICANS: HOW NON-RELIGIOUS PERSONS ARE LABELED AS
DEVIANT IN A RELIGIOUS SOCIETY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Justice Studies

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Damian Bramlett

December 2012

© 2012

Damian Bramlett

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled
GODLESS AMERICANS: HOW NON-RELIGIOUS PERSONS ARE LABELED AS
DEVIANT IN A RELIGIOUS SOCIETY

by

Damian Bramlett

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE STUDIES

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2012

Dr. William T. Armaline Department of Justice Studies

Dr. James Lee Department of Sociology

Dr. Mark Correia Department of Justice Studies

ABSTRACT

GODLESS AMERICANS: HOW NON-RELIGIOUS PERSONS ARE LABELED AS DEVIANT IN A RELIGIOUS SOCIETY

by Damian Bramlett

This research examined Atheism, Agnosticism, and secularism as forms of deviance within American society. The focus was on Atheists because research suggests they are stigmatized and more commonly constructed as deviant in comparison to Agnostics and/or secularists. It should come as no surprise that, given the ideological dominance of monotheistic religious narratives such as Evangelical Christianity, Atheists are labeled and stigmatized in the same manner as other nonnormative groups in the United States. Today, Atheists and others who publicly reject religious “faith” are constructed in dominant media and political discourse as morally flawed and often politically illegitimate. Thirty self-identified non-religious persons residing in the San Francisco Bay Area were interviewed for this study. Most participants did not perceive a sense of overt discrimination or deviant labeling within the Bay Area; however, many did point out that discrimination towards Atheists does exist in other parts of the state and nation. Furthermore, all participants recognized a strong religious (Christian) influence on U.S. politics and legislative policies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of Mr. Christopher Hitchens, whose critical thinking, scholarly writing, and tenacity served as a primer during the course of writing this thesis. His courage to stay true to himself and his beliefs, even in his final days, gave me the courage to be more vocal and steadfast about my Atheist beliefs. Mr. Hitchens, your prose and intellect will be missed by many.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	4
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	6
The Dominance of (Judeo-Christian) Theism in U.S. Politics	6
Atheism and Label Identification.....	9
Atheism in the U.S.: A Fraction of a Fraction	11
Atheism.....	12
Agnosticism	13
Secularism.....	15
A Brief History of Atheism.....	16
17 th century.....	16
18 th century	17
19 th century.....	19
20 th & 21 st centuries.....	20
Theoretical Framework and Key Theoretical Concepts	23
Deviance and Labeling	23
Moral Entrepreneurs and the Power Elite	28
Atheists and Social Stigma	35

METHODS	42
Data Collection Methods.....	42
Research Focus.....	44
Data Analysis.....	45
Sample.....	46
RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	48
Becoming Godless	49
Stigma Management: Passing, Withdrawal and Preventive Telling.....	50
Experience with (Regional) Discrimination	56
Fear of Reprisal.....	58
Perception of Religious Dominance and Power	59
DISCUSSION.....	62
Limitations and Future Research	64
REFERENCES.....	67
APPENDIX A: Call for Participants.....	76
APPENDIX B: Interview Consent Form.....	77
APPENDIX C: Interview Guide.....	80
APPENDIX D: Demographics.....	84

List of Tables

Table 1 - <i>Definition of Terms</i>	45
--	----

“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none that does good.” (Psalms 14:1)

Introduction

In the most formal sense, the United States employs a secular approach to governance, built in part on the idea of separating “Church” from “State” and on what are now civil (Hasson, 2008) and human (Tapp, 2008) rights to free religious thought and expression. Specifically, U.S. citizens are free to practice religion in all its forms, and to express opinions about beliefs in an open forum free from ridicule or harassment (Hasson, 2008; U.S. Const., amend. I). That said, as noted in mass media and recent scholarship (Dawkins, 2006; Harris, 2004; Hitchens, 2007), this freedom of expression does not appear to apply to those who self-identify as Atheist or Agnostic—particularly when their expressions critique dominant religious thought, or communicate political messages or positions.

The ideological dominance of monotheistic (namely Judeo-Christian) religious discourse in the U.S. has led to Atheists, in particular, being singled out as illegitimate because of their lack of faith (Bloesch, Forbes, & Adams-Curtis, 2004). In Christian biblical terms Atheists are “corrupt” and “abominable,” purportedly incapable of doing good deeds, and unworthy of trust or inclusion into a society (Psalms 14:1).¹ Fitzgerald (2003) reported that as late as 2002, 61% of Americans believed that Atheists had a

¹ In Psalm 14:1, the Hebrew words for “fool” designate a person as “morally deficient” (Henry, 2012).

negative influence on U.S. society. Indeed, the dominant perception is that the strength of United States society rests on the religious faith of its citizens.

An obvious expression of Evangelical Christian ideology in elite political discourse came from President George H. W. Bush, who stated in an impromptu news conference during his 1987 presidential campaign, “I don't know that Atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God,” (O’Hair, 2009). This phrase alone raises many questions about the power relationship between political discourse and religious ideology; Bush appeared to be using his position of influence to aggressively state his Christian stance towards Atheists. It also served as an example of the modern moral entrepreneurship that helps to construct Atheists as deviants. These conservative moral entrepreneurs have even claimed that Christians are somehow being persecuted in the U.S. (Carl, 2012; Timbol, 2012) and on the world stage (Press Association, 2012) as a means of gaining sympathy while delegitimizing non-religious persons and groups.

The dominance of religious discourse and the particular influence of organized religion on policy and practice in the U.S. are now easily illustrated thanks in part to investigative journalists such as Jeff Sharlet and Rachel Maddow. Jeff Sharlet’s (2008) book, *The Family*, offers historical documentation of a tangible political relationship between church and state within the confines of the United States. He found that ties between political elites in America, U.S. - partner states, and Evangelical Christian organizations runs deep. Further, in a purely instrumentalist sense, numerous Evangelical Christians now occupy powerful seats within the government, as they have for some

time—particularly since the conservative backlash of the Nixon era (Sharlet, 2008). In 2001, Christian televangelist Pat Robertson relinquished his position as head of the American Holy Christian Church in order for George W. Bush to take over as de facto leader once he became U.S. President (Milbank, 2001; Yurica, 2004). It was an inconspicuous ploy to show Christian Americans that President Bush’s administration was in place to do God’s will (Yurica, 2004).

Sharlet (2008) reported that many political and religious leaders share membership in “The Fellowship,” which is a secretive organization that operates as a council for powerful decision-makers. They meet to discuss how to apply their particular Christian ideology. Their ideology anoints captains of capitalist industry and U.S. political leaders as the new apostles—destined for rule (Sharlet, 2008). In short, The Fellowship (A.K.A. “the Family”) serves as an incredibly powerful social club and network for global elites. Among their few publicly accessible events is the now well-known Presidential Prayer Breakfast.

This alliance allows these particular “moral entrepreneurs²” to force their religious values/morals onto others in the form of policy and practice that ultimately affect the lives of all Americans, regardless of religious or non-religious belief. Primary among these historical influences, according to Sharlet’s work, have been (1) an effort to break labor unions in the United States since the early 20th century, (2) an effort to win foreign despots into the favor of U.S. politicians, and (3) the creation of powerful networks between Evangelical moral entrepreneurs (Family members) and heads of state.

² Moral Entrepreneurs: A person or group that seeks to create or influence the creation of rules or norms that are then applied to other groups, societies, etc. (Becker, 1964).

In the Christian Evangelical pursuit of power and control, an emphasis is placed on converting non-theists and religious “others” into the Christian fold via missionaries, mega-churches, and even the implementation of morals and values that only the pious are capable of obtaining (Sharlet 2008; 2010). The implications here should be troubling for those who are concerned with the strength of our democracy. It is also reasonable that, within this context, non-religious perspectives and representatives would be constructed as deviant in and through mainstream political discourse.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the plausible social construction of Atheists, Agnostics, and other non-religious persons as deviant in the United States. How do Atheists and Agnostics interpret the apparent power of religious organizations, moral entrepreneurs, and discourse in the United States? Do the narratives of Atheists and Agnostics reflect the experience of those labeled as socially deviant, as seen in such qualitative research? How do they perceive and/or respond to this experience, if at all?

In this study, I hypothesized that Atheists, Agnostics, and other non-religious persons within the San Francisco Bay Area would report facing social sanctions for openly expressing their religious position, to include the perception of being politically silenced or socially excluded. Since the San Francisco Bay Area is politically quite liberal (Bay Area Center for Voting research, 2012), one might have expected my research findings to yield little evidence of anti-Atheist activity. However, if I were to find that even a small set of Atheists are discriminated against or constructed as “deviant

outsiders” in the S.F. Bay Area, then there would have been evidence to suggest that discrimination was more probable in other, more religious regions of the country (such as the Bible Belt, Deep South, etc.).

Personal interviews were employed to identify and investigate any processes through which Atheists, Agnostics and other non-religious people in the U.S. are constructed as deviant, and how, or whether, they internalize and react to a “deviant” label. Moving beyond exploring the social construction of deviance, research on the experience of Atheists may help to understand broader power relationships that both cause, and are affected by, the interaction between non-religious people and dominant religious ideology, moral entrepreneurs, and organizations. To be clear, I am not implying that Atheists are an extraordinarily oppressed social group, but that they could experience institutional discrimination in some form(s) given the dominance of monotheistic ideology and political discourse.

Research into the prevalence of non-theist populations and the ways that such groups might be disenfranchised may help with understanding and protecting civil and human rights to free expression—a fundamental component of a functioning democracy with secular governance (Kesavan, 2003). To date, there have been very few studies in which the internalization of a deviant label among the Atheist/Agnostic population has been investigated, nor has there been any research into reactions (internally and externally) to such a label. The research questions here sought to address the lack of social scientific studies on non-theists. They help us to understand the experiences of

Atheists, Agnostics and other non-religious persons within the United States and the process through which such beliefs and identities are constructed (or not) as deviant.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The Dominance of (Judeo-Christian) Theism in U.S. Politics

The presence and influence of Judeo-Christian churches—particularly Christian Evangelicals—within our own political system has recently become newsworthy, primarily from the journalistic efforts of Jeff Sharlet (2008, 2010) and mainstream editorial personalities such as Rachel Maddow (2010) who investigated The Family and the related “C Street” house in Washington D.C. It turns out that Evangelical organizations have operated in the shadows for nearly 80 years, and they have created networks through which politicians and businessmen can collaborate on shared interests (Sharlet, 2008; 2010). In an effort to exert influence on American business and the American government, Evangelical leaders such as Doug Coe (director of the International Christian Leadership) went to great lengths in “pursuing a God-led government without recognition” (Sharlet, 2010, p. 67). Even President Barack Obama (a self-affirmed Christian) has been known to attend The Family’s Prayer Breakfasts (Phillips, 2009). Under these circumstances it is likely that Atheists and Agnostics are at a political disadvantage, especially with the recent elections of members of the Christian based Tea Party into political offices (Maddow, 2011, Taibbi, 2010).

Non-religious persons, at the outset, have almost no political representation. As of this writing, there is currently only one openly Atheist politician in congress:

Representative Pete Stark of California (Associated Press, 2007; Starobin, 2009). There was even a time in American history when Atheists were not allowed to hold a political office in at least seven states (Cimino & Smith, 2007; Wald & Calhoun-Brown, 2007). While this was ultimately found to be a violation of the First Amendment (Torcaso v. Watkins, 1961), it highlights a form of social disadvantage that Atheists experience in the U.S., where Atheists and other non-religious citizens are not allotted equal democratic representation and political voice.

Because they do not conform to religious/societal standards, Atheists are targeted as problematic and untrustworthy since their beliefs conflict with dominant religious ideology in the U.S. (Downey, 2004). The Boy Scouts of America (BSA), for instance, bars Atheists and homosexuals³ from membership in their group (Downey, 2004) but tolerates known pedophiles in their ranks (Martinez & Vercammen, 2012). One should keep in mind that this is a group that is tax exempt (Boy Scouts of America, 2005) and has a long history of strong political ties to the Office of the President of the United States⁴ (Boy Scouts of America, 2011) and the Mormon Church⁵ (France et al., 2001).

Yet another example of the targeting of Atheists comes from the work of blogger and influential Christian pastor, Mike Stahl. In September, 2010, Pastor Mike (as he refers to himself) gained notoriety when he posted an article suggesting the founding of a national registry of Atheists, by way of a grassroots Christian organization that he

³ See the court case *Boy Scouts of America v. Dale* 530 U.S. 640 (2000) for more information.

⁴ The U.S. President acts as honorary president of the BSA while in office. George Bush, Jr., was a Cub Scout at one point.

⁵ The Mormon Church (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) has a long history of promoting the BSA (13% of scouts are Mormon) and have threatened to withdraw from scouting should homosexuals be given the right to join (Eddington, 2000).

created. His reasoning: “for the same purpose many states put the names and photos of convicted sex offenders and other ex-felons on the I-Net [internet]... to inform the public!” (Stahl, 2010). Such ideas, especially if they were to become policy or law, have the potential to infringe upon the civil liberties and human rights that all Americans enjoy and deserve. As an example, one only need look at Harvard’s purge lists used to force gay men from their university in 1920 (Wright, 2002) or Senator Joseph McCarthy’s “black-listing” of communists during the 1940s and 50s.

The notion and substance of rights are easily shaped by religious ideologies when they become part of dominant political ideology that ultimately frames “acceptable” political discourse. As a well known example, gay marriage in California was challenged by outside influence from the Mormon and Baptist churches (McCraw, 2008; Mormons for Prop 8, 2009). These churches also financially backed overturning of a ruling that removed “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance (Egelko, 2010). In this last instance, the (Atheist) man who brought forth this lawsuit also sued the government regarding the use of the motto “In God We Trust” on U.S. currency (Egelko, 2010). He ultimately lost both cases, citing "To be a real American, you believe in God, and the judiciary unfortunately sometimes can't be trusted to uphold our constitutional rights when you're a disenfranchised minority" (Egelko, 2010, p. C1).

It may come to some surprise that Atheist/non-religious parents can lose custody of their children based solely on their religious preference (Cline, 2006; Volokh, 2007). In a 2005 Mississippi custody case, the mother prevailed because “while [father] is an agnostic and testified that religion is not important to him, [mother] testified that religion

is very important to her” (Cline, 2006). In 1998, a South Carolina court denied custody to a father who was described as being Agnostic based on the grounds that, “although the religious beliefs of parents are not dispositive in a child custody dispute, they are a factor relevant to determining the best interest of a child” (Cline, 2006). This pattern of denying non-religious parents child custody stretches back to at least the 19th century when author Percy Shelley (eventual husband of author Mary Shelley) became one of the first fathers in England to lose custody of his children because of his Atheistic beliefs (Volokh, 2007). It is likely that under these conditions Atheists and Agnostics experience psychological stress as they cope with the social dominance of monotheism. In the next section, I explore the psychological stress of coping with religious exclusion, albeit in a limited scope due to the lack of empirical research in this area.

Atheism and Label Identification

When profiling godless persons, Galen (2009) explored the mental well-being and social relationships (characteristics) among non-theistic Americans. Exploring labels that non-theists may use to self-identify, he asked participants to select a single term from a list of self-designations (Atheist, Agnostic, Humanist, etc.), that best described them. Four preferred labels emerged: Atheist (57%), Humanist (24%), Agnostic (10%) and Spiritual (2%) (Galen, 2009, p. 43). The survey results suggested that those who self-identify as “spiritual” (a term not generally viewed as negative) are more likely to be viewed as more “agreeable” (willingness to attempt to get along with others) than Atheists and Agnostics (Galen, 2009, p. 44). This is in stark contrast to Atheists who

express the willingness to “go against the grain” (p. 44). Overall, it suggests that Atheists place less value on trusting and pleasing others. When one considers that Atheists are usually regarded and treated as outsiders or deviants by organized religion, it should come as no surprise if they take on the exclusionary behaviors that they experience as adherents to non-dominant beliefs.

While Galen (2009) provided intriguing data on the personalities and self-identifying labels among the non-religious, there is still minimal (qualitative or quantitative) research that discusses ways in which Atheists/Agnostics may internalize and react to negative labels. The research does suggest, however, that Atheists are more likely to go against established societal norms (“the grain”), yet it is unclear as to what they experience when they openly question religious norms. In fact a few questions still remain: 1) Do Atheists and other non-religious persons consciously identify being labeled? 2) If non-theists do recognize the stigma of these labels, how do they react, both internally and externally? 3) Do non-theists (Atheists in particular) feel that they are being discriminated against as a result of being labeled a deviant? While an exploration into the mental aspects of deviance and Atheism offers a prospective of religious dominance at the individual level, it does little to explain how such dominance comes about. Before the relationship between Atheism and deviance can be fully explored, we must more clearly define the population under study.

Atheism in the U.S.: A Fraction of a Fraction

Current evidence suggests that approximately 14-18% of the U.S. population is Atheist/Agnostic/“none” (Edgell et al., 2006) with some reports estimating self-reported Atheist populations as low as 1-6% (Lu & Chancey, 2008; Meacham, 2009; Newton, 2008). Conceptualization issues are likely the reasons behind statistical disparities. Atheists are singled out as the focus of research because they tend to be vilified more so than Agnostics or secularists (Jacoby, 2004). The estimates, however, indicate that while the precise number of Atheists and Agnostics within the United States is not known, these groups are at a numerical disadvantage. Numbers are important because of evidence that suggests a positive correlation between the perceived numbers of Atheists and reduced anti-Atheist prejudice (Gervais, 2011). The converse, of course, is that the smaller the perceived Atheist population size, the more likely they are to experience prejudice (Gervais, 2011).

In America, Atheists tend to be viewed as a “group” instead of merely as non-religious individuals—although this designation is debatable since there is no real centralized unification among this population, beyond that of social clubs (Galen, 2009). There are also other non-religious persons in the U.S. who do not identify as either Agnostic or Atheist, and therefore remain unclassified (Galen, 2009). While terms such as Atheist and Agnostic are widely used, each label seems to have imprecise definitions which have led to them being used interchangeably (Galen, 2009; Muehlhauser, 2010). What follows is a brief exercise in laying out definitions of non-theistic labels that are

commonly used in relevant research and in public discourse. This research also adheres to these definitions.

Atheism. The word Atheism derives from the Greek word *atheos*; *a* meaning “without” and *Theos* meaning “god” (Smith, 1979). While this is a basic definition of the word, there are many other definitions that go into more specific detail. Some scholars would even argue that the definition of Atheism stretches to include lifestyle and political views; an entire way of life (Thrower, 2000; Watts, 2009). It should be clarified that Atheism is a lack of belief in a god(s), and not necessarily a belief system (Hitchens, 2007).

Some research has listed upwards of seventeen different types (views) of Atheism (Muehlhauser, 2010). However, there are only a select few that stand out as being the most relevant to the research at hand. Such categories as militant, implicit, explicit and closeted/open, tend to be common terms found in current research (Dawkins, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2003; Muehlhauser, 2010; Smith, 1979). Of the numerous other “types” of Atheists, none of them currently appear in empirical journal articles and/or have clear definitions. For this reason, the descriptions of varying Atheism categories are limited to a handful of common/critical definitions.⁶

Implicit Atheism involves the "absence of theistic belief without a conscious rejection of it" (Smith, 1979, p. 15). In other words, the notion of a god has not been considered because Atheists are not aware of the idea of a god(s) (Smith, 1979).

⁶ For a full list of the varying types of Atheists, please refer to: <http://commonsenseatheism.com/?p=6487>

Conversely, **Explicit Atheism** states that no evidence for god exists (Smith, 1979), meaning the idea of a god has been considered and rejected. **Militant Atheism** is a term used to describe those who use violence towards religious groups/persons in an effort to destroy organized religion (Muehlhauser, 2010). This term has also been used to describe those who are considered by religious persons to be more aggressive (yet nonviolent) in their Atheistic beliefs, and are sometimes known as Atheist Fundamentalists (Dawkins, 2006; Muehlhauser, 2010). Atheists can also be **closeted** or **open** about their beliefs (Muehlhauser, 2010). This last distinction is important because it exposes a delimitation of the study at hand: I am most likely to interview open Atheists. Therefore, the research may miss issues related to labeling and stigmatizing because these processes may be self-masking, whereby those who are more affected by them may choose self-protective engagement strategies, including being closeted in their Atheistic beliefs (Fitzgerald, 2003).

Agnosticism. Agnostics, in a general sense, are persons who hold the view that any ultimate reality (such as God) is unknown and most likely unknowable (Miovic, 2004). To wit, Agnosticism does not focus on belief. Rather, it focuses on knowledge. There are numerous sub-categories of Agnostics as defined by various sources. The following is a list of some of the current types of Agnosticism coupled with a brief description for each term.

- Agnostic Atheists: Since Agnosticism has to do with knowledge, it is possible to be either an Agnostic Atheist or an Agnostic Theist. Agnostic Atheists can

believe in the non-existence of a higher power, yet claim to have no solid evidence that deities do not exist (Cline, 2011).

- **Agnostic Theists:** State their belief in a deity without factually claiming that such a being definitely exists (Cline, 2011).
- **Apathetic:** With this type of Agnostic, centuries of intellectual discourse have proven little if anything. Furthermore, if a higher power does indeed exist, it would appear they (it) have no interest in humans and deities should therefore be of marginal interest to people (Robinson, 2008).
- **Ignosticism:** An individual that follows this line of thinking believes that a coherent definition of theism needs to be created before it can be questioned. In other words, if the definition is not coherent or plausible, then the existence of god (or any deity) is irrelevant (Brody, 2011).
- **Strong and Weak:** Strong Agnosticism contends that the question of the existence of a god(s) can never be known since it would require the use of a subjective experience to define another experience. No one, it would seem, can know if a deity exists or not. Conversely, Weak Agnostics proffer that a deity's existence or non-existence is unknown, but may be knowable. A decision is withheld until further proof has been made apparent (Cline, 2011; Galen, 2009).

Secularism. Secularism is a term that was first coined in 1851 by George Jacob Holyoake, who defined it as belief in a system wherein religion and social order are separate (Holyoake, 1896). In other words, secularism does not mean anti-Christian; it is

the promotion of ideals that are non-religious for the betterment of society (Holyoake, 1896; Jayne, 2000). This separation of church and state is also known as “state secularism.” Holyoake (1896) even took his definition one step further by stating that secularism should be separate from Atheism; people should do good for the sake of humankind and not for a higher power.⁷ Secularism, in sum, is a way of thinking and living wherein the betterment of society through democratic means should be the driving force behind all political decisions.

In modern times, secularism is also known as Secular Humanism; it is a type of philosophy that rejects religious dogma as the basis for human morality (Cimino & Smith, 2007; Jayne, 2000). It should be made clear that a secularist is not necessarily an Atheist or Agnostic; it is possible for religious persons to believe in and support a separation of religious and political ideologies (Cimino & Smith, 2007; Holyoake, 1896). On the other hand, one could plausibly suggest that all Atheists believe in a separation of church and state. Since secularists support a means of keeping religion and politics separate, one would think that they fly well under the Evangelical radar. To the contrary, secularists, religious and non-religious alike, are now viewed as a serious threat to the current subversive Christian Evangelical political movement (Sharlet, 2010).

⁷ George Holyoake was imprisoned for six months in 1842 for making a statement against the construction of chapels in England. Holyoake’s comment was in response to a local priest who asked him why he had not told audience members of their duty to god, but only to their duty to man. (Lewis, 1946).

A Brief History of Atheism

While Atheism has existed since the times of ancient Greek philosophers (Thrower, 2000), not much was written on the topic by Western historians and scholars until the seventeenth century. The seventeenth century is used as a starting point of contemporary Atheism since there is tangible evidence on the existence of Atheists (in the form of published books and papers), to include their persecution. As the following section explains, it was not long ago when Atheists (also called “heretics” by the Catholic Church) were arrested, tortured and killed for denouncing or questioning God.

17th century. The first notable evidence of modern Atheism dates back to the 17th century. It was during this time that books such as *Theophrastus redivivus* (c.1650) and *Symbolum sapientiae* (c. late 1600’s) were published anonymously (Thrower, 2000; Watts, 2009). The fact that both books were published anonymously, speaks to the seriousness of writing such works. It must be understood that during the 17th century (and earlier) it was a crime to speak out against God or to even question God’s existence and was even punishable by death (Thrower, 2000). Documents such as the aforementioned, were usually written and copied by hand, and were only discussed within educated circles of men (Watts, 2009).

At this time Atheism was mostly discussed by religious apologists (a person who defends Christianity), and no “true” Atheists were known to exist during the majority of this century (Thrower, 2000; Watts, 2009). Philosopher Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) did not call himself an Atheist, but had suggested the possibility of a “virtuous society of

Atheists” (Watts, 2009). Later in the same century, Matthias Knutzen would become known as the first self-avowed Atheist in Europe (Thrower, 2000; Watts, 2009).

Tangible progress in Atheistic theory and philosophy would not gain serious traction until the next century.

18th century. The 18th century would prove to be the era for Atheistic progression in the West. This was the time of French Enlightenment and the birth of “natural religion” (Watts, 2009). French philosophers such as Diderot, Freret, the Marquis de Sade, and Voltaire were busy during this time developing arguments against the existence of god (Thrower, 2000; Watts, 2009). While most philosophical thinkers (Rousseau, Robespierre, Voltaire, etc.), are considered Atheists, they are in fact “deists”; a person who believes that religious truth can be determined by observing nature without organized religion (Watts, 2009). Only a few free-thinkers during the 1700’s can be considered full-fledged Atheists. Jean Meslier, for example, is the first known author to leave behind writings that were purely Atheistic (Thrower, 2000; Watts, 2009). Baron d’Holbach, another self-affirmed Atheist, printed *System of Nature*--also referred to as the “bible of atheism” (Watts, 2009).

It is important to note that at this time, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, early American colonies were developing their own thoughts on Atheism; specifically secularism. The *Bill of Rights*, perhaps the most referenced document in America when it comes to defending one’s self, initially contained ten amendments (U.S. Const.). It was created by colonialists with the intent of expressing secularism within the confines of a

newly defined nation free from British rule. However, it is important to note that the separation of church and state is not explicitly articulated in the First Amendment. The First Amendment specifically states “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” (U.S. Const., amend. I). That is to say, one religion will not be held as more important over another, nor shall the government infringe upon the individual right to religious freedom.

Over the years, however, this amendment has been reinterpreted into providing that there be a separation of church and state in the U.S. (Library of Congress, 1998). Thomas Jefferson, one of the architects of the Constitution, stated in a letter to leaders of a Baptist church:

I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between Church & State (Library of Congress, 1998)

While the words regarding a “wall of separation” are indeed Jefferson’s, they are nowhere to be found in the Bill of Rights. This interpretation of the First Amendment allows for secularism to take root, as well as ensure that no single organized religion can control or have influence over the American government or its people. Under such interpretations, Christian Evangelicals are one such group (among others) that should not be permitted to have influence or control over our political system. Doing so creates an opportunity for religious politicians to limit the rights of non-religious individuals and “minority” groups. Instead, it should be a shared responsibility wherein all varying types of religious, ethnic and socioeconomic statuses are represented with equal amounts of power.

19th century. During the 19th century, writers such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer and Emmanuel Kant would become prominent in developing and progressing Atheism (Thrower, 2000; Watts, 2009). Emmanuel Kant is perhaps best known for claiming that god cannot be known, but that all persons must act as though there is a god for the sake of morality (Watts, 2009). Although Kant was not an Atheist, he did present the idea that god cannot be proven through pure reason alone (Watts, 2009). While German philosophers did much to progress Atheism/non-theism, a Russian revolutionary would also add to the discussion by openly questioning organized religion.

Mikhail Bakunin is perhaps best known for his writings on anarchism and his sparring with Karl Marx in the First International. However, his work on the troublesome connections between religion and oligarchy (“God and the State”) is well worth noting here. In his collection of essays, *God and the State* (1916), Bakunin discusses topics of Christianity and power as they apply to politics. He points out that while religion and belief in a higher power has existed for centuries, those “who have the misfortune to doubt it, whatever the logic that led them to this doubt, are abnormal exceptions, monsters” (Bakunin, 1916, p. 19). It is at this point that Bakunin begins to illustrate the construction of Atheists (albeit slightly) as social deviants. Bakunin further expands on this topic by claiming that the church and state are one and the same: “Slaves of god, men must also be slaves of Church and State, in so far as the State is consecrated by the Church” (1916, p. 25). The church consolidates power much in the same way governments consolidate power; by controlling humans through physical (i.e., labor

intensive work) and economic (i.e., taxation and diminished wages) exploitation, with the added promise of immortality. To wit, both entities work in conjunction with one another by establishing capitalist and religious norms. If one works hard enough, they too came become capitalists; if they pray hard enough, they can also attain otherworldly immortality. Bakunin's work suggests, as Weber (1998) would later claim in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, workers are more likely to be docile if they believe they will be repaid as capitalists in life or rewarded in heaven after death, so such religious ideals have historically been embraced by capitalists and capitalist states. Further in *God and the State* (Bakunin, 1916), Bakunin argues that the unquestionable compliance demanded by monotheistic religion compliments the unquestionable compliance demanded of workers by capitalists and states.

20th & 21st centuries. In more contemporary times, Atheism has gained notoriety for being associated with ruthless dictators, "militant" critics, and gaining a prominent foothold in American culture. Nineteenth century Marxism was responsible for influencing much of contemporary Atheism. Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin, Mao Tse Tung (among others) would gain infamy as rulers who based their Atheist standpoints on Karl Marx's work, albeit around a bastardized version of Marxism (Watts, 2009). Although these dictators were either self-identified or assumed Atheists (it should be noted that Hitler was in fact a Roman Catholic) (Murphy, 1999), they did so as a means of consolidating political and socioeconomic power (Evans, 2003).

When a dictator seeks to gain total control over a state and its populace, all other forms of power must be removed (Evans, 2003). The church is one such power structure; it controls the minds and bodies of tens of thousands of worshippers. Once organized religion is destroyed, power can then be placed under the control of a single leader/government. As a side effect of the aforementioned despots and the heavily biased cold war ideologies of the West, Atheism became associated with meaning anti-democracy and anti-human rights (Watts, 2009). This of course is nothing more than a negative association fallacy: Hitler's Atheism was inherently assumed; he had millions of people killed; therefore, Atheism/Atheists are inherently evil. What was never mentioned until recent years, was the complicit and enabling reaction by the Roman Catholic Church during the Holocaust; Pope Pius XII has now been branded as "Hitler's Pope" (Godman, 2004). Nazism and communism, it would seem, paved the way for the current vilifying of Atheists and other non-religious persons in American society.⁸

In recent decades, Atheism has taken on a new face with new arguments being presented across various types of media. Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and the late Christopher Hitchens are only a few examples of the many writers who are categorized as "neo-Atheists" (Stenger, 2009; Watts, 2009). Books such as *The God Delusion* (Dawkins, 2006), *The End of Faith*, (Harris, 2005) and *God is Not Great* (Hitchens, 2007) have reignited the discussion and importance of Atheism in American (and global) society, as well as provided a source of resistance against religious control. These neo-

⁸ The "Red Scare" and the "black listing" of supposed communists by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) did much to facilitate this belief, as well as promote the idea of Christianity as a means of fighting communism (Crouse, 2002).

Atheists tend to be more “militant” in their thoughts and actions, and they tend to have a strong anti-religion point of view (Fiala, 2008; Stenger, 2009).

The sentiment among many neo-Atheists is that organized religion should be completely dismantled for the sake of rescuing and progressing society (Dawkins, 2006; Harris, 2005; Hitchens, 2007). It should be noted that these more militaristic ideals are not shared by all Atheists, and are topics still currently being explored and debated.

Much in the same way that scholars research the past in order to understand and discourage barbarous acts from being repeated, so too must society understand the ways in which Atheists and non-religious “others” have been oppressed, disenfranchised and treated with disdain. Atheism/non-theism has been a “closeted” topic of discussion over the past few centuries and it has not been until recent decades that the topic (or movement) has gained any real legitimacy within the U.S. While the history of Atheism is fascinating, there is a great deal of relevancy to the discussion at hand.

While the history of Atheism may be fascinating simply as a topic, it is also illustrative of the extensive patterns of oppression towards non-theists on the part of religious individuals, organizations, and political groups. The political aspect is even more evident in places such as Iran and Indonesia wherein governments are Theocratic, and no one is allowed to publicly speak out against Islam (Mohsenpour, 1988; Pasandaran, 2012). As previously noted, Atheists were at one time (and still are in certain regions of the world) considered heretics worthy of torture and execution for the mere questioning of religion or the existence of god (Spiegel, 1998).

As a recent example, Alexander Aan (a citizen of Indonesia) received a \$10,600 fine and was sentenced to 30 months in prison for “inciting religious hatred” by posting pro-Atheist remarks on Facebook (Collier, 2012). In countries such as Algeria men of an Atheist or Agnostic background are not allowed to marry Muslim women (Algerian Family Code I.II.31), nor can they inherit property or money (Algerian Family Code III.I.138). In Iran, those who identify as Atheist have absolutely no legal status and are forced to claim a nationally recognized religion in order to attain legal rights (Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l’Homme & Ligue de Défense des Droits de l’Homme en Iran, 2003).

Nonetheless, in the U.S. documents such as the *Bill of Rights* (U.S. Const., amend. I) allowed Atheists, secularists, and other non-theists to speak publicly of their (lack of) beliefs without fear of retribution. While Atheists have much more freedom to express their beliefs, at least in the Western world, equality, democracy, and true secularism are a distant dream. While the past does provide insight into the ways in which Atheists have been treated unfairly, it does little to explore whether and how such treatment manifests at the micro (individual) level. As I will suggest, qualitative methods may be useful in exploring what most social scientists describe as the social construction of deviance, and whether or how such a process plays out in the lives of non-theists.

Theoretical Framework and Key Theoretical Concepts

Deviance and Labeling Theory. Howard Becker (1964) wrote extensively on “outsiders:” those within societies who are socially constructed as deviant and who in

some sense are considered (and often consider themselves) significantly outside the social norm because of how their behaviors, beliefs, and/or perspectives are interpreted in dominant culture. Becker (1964) uses a perspective called Labeling Theory, which he defines as the inclination of a group or individual (normative society) to negatively label groups or individuals that stray from established societal norms or rules. That is to say there is no objective, substantive way to define deviant acts, beliefs or behaviors. Instead, deviance is defined through the social process of labeling particular people, behaviors, or beliefs as such. This process is heightened when persons or groups contradict established norms or values that are codified by “moral entrepreneurs” (Becker, 1964).⁹

According to Becker (1964) it is not the individual being labeled that we should be concerned with; it is those in positions of power that create and apply the labels that our attention should be focused on in order to understand how labeling occurs and to what extent it benefits the powerful. Moral entrepreneurs typically establish campaigns to protect society from a perceived enemy or problem. Being persons who occupy positions of power, they have more influence and opportunities to create and establish rules that are consistent with their interpretation of morals, ethics and social mores (Becker, 1964).

For instance, a state representative, based on his or her own past (perhaps negative) experience, may believe that those who use cell phones while driving provide a

⁹ Deviance has a function within society, and may be viewed as the establishment of an identity that goes against an established norm, as well as the creation of a common cause or unity among a disenfranchised group, among other purposes (Hastings & O’Neill, 2009).

serious risk to others. This politician, through his/her position of power, then decides to campaign for the creation of a new law that bans talking on cell phones while driving. In the absence of empirical evidence, propaganda is used to convince citizens of this point. Through coalition building, the representative uses the elected position to convince voters in the community that this campaign is an effort to protect the safety of voters, while simultaneously making a claim that cell phone users are morally reprehensible. It is at this point that the state representative becomes a moral entrepreneur. Once this piece of legislation has passed and becomes law, a new deviant act has been defined along with the creation of a new type of deviant behavior.¹⁰ What this theoretical state representative (moral entrepreneur) has now done is to legitimize their moralistic interpretation (establishment of a norm) of a perceived wrong (labeling and construction of deviance) through the use of political power.

In actuality, moral entrepreneurs such as pontiffs (the Pope and The Family) and politicians can have a profound effect on society as a whole, regardless of religious belief. For decades, both groups have sought and continue to seek the removal or limitation of specific civil rights such as the right to terminate a pregnancy—among other sexual reproductive rights for women (Adair, 2004; American Christian Lobbyists Assoc., 2009; Bernstein & Jakobsen, 2010), the human right to marry regardless of sexual orientation (McCraw, 2008) or the rights to birth control and protection from sexually transmitted diseases in African and Latin American nations heavily influenced by a history of cultural (religious missionaries) and political economic colonization (Butt,

¹⁰ A more thorough explanation of a “moral entrepreneur” and the influence they have on a given society will be reviewed in the next section.

2009). These arguments tend to be based on specific religious doctrine, rather than empirical research suggesting the dangers of targeted behaviors and/or freedoms (Bernstein & Jakobsen, 2010).

It is important to make a distinction here between deviance and discrimination. When moral entrepreneurs create and apply labels such as deviant, they are setting the stage for discrimination against those who are then treated and viewed in the mainstream as outsiders. Political scientists and human rights scholars often refer to this as the construction of “exclusionary ideologies,” or informal ways to label certain populations as undeserving of the same rights, protections, and treatments afforded dominant populations (Goodhart, 2009).

Deviance and discrimination are not one and the same; discrimination is at times a social sanction that often reinforces deviant labels. In Joe Feagin’s (1978) expansion of this definition, he discerns two specific types of discrimination (among others): direct and indirect. Direct institutionalized discrimination involves the intentional suppression of a subordinate group by a dominant group, whereas the latter is less obvious with an outward appearance of being fair for all (Feagin, 1978). For example, State laws that once forbade the occupation of political offices by Atheists would be viewed as direct institutionalized discrimination (*Torcaso v. Watkins*, 1961). A place of work that observes Christmas while ignoring other religious beliefs (or lack thereof) would be considered indirect institutionalized discrimination. Atheists, as previously mentioned, can and have experienced both types of discrimination resulting to some extent from their construction by the religious majority as deviant.

While Becker's (1964) labeling theory of deviance reflects a social construction process that centrally considers power, he never explains how or why moral entrepreneurs become powerful in modern society. That is to say, Becker's analysis lacks a clearly fleshed out conceptualization of power on a larger structural level, and the ways that moral entrepreneurship manifests in and through large institutions.

Joel Best (1995) offers an extended view of Becker's work through the use of Constructionist Theory, which combines the perspectives of both conflict and labeling theories of deviance. With the constructionist viewpoint on deviance, sociologists take their examination one step further by observing the "claims-makers" and not just the claim itself (Best, 1995). This viewpoint is somewhat similar to Becker's moral entrepreneurs, with one exception; particular attention is paid to the person or group making a claim about a perceived problem or societal issue. Returning to the previous example of the state representative and his/her creation of a law banning cell phone usage while driving, the focus (from the constructionist framework) would pay close attention to the context of the state representative's claim(s). What prompted this politician to create this particular law? Was it based on personal experience or the experience of someone he or she knows? Was there an outside influence, such as an insurance company lobbyist, that played a role in developing the claim? Answering questions like these helps to reveal that definitions of deviance are socially constructed (Best, 1995) by actors in social networks who are guided by their own set of interests and values.

As this theory applies to Atheism, studying those who make claims and accusations of deviance about Atheists is as important as studying the definitions

themselves. Christian author Dinesh D'Souza provides an example of the construction of deviance; he made a claim against Atheists by accusing them of wanting to make Christianity “disappear from the face of the earth” (as cited in Stenger, 2009, p. 11). While there may be some Atheists with such militant beliefs, this is a dangerous assumption and sweeping generalization. These types of comments (claims) vilify individuals who self-identify as Atheists, while at the same time proffering little to no substantial evidence to support such claims. Even the aforementioned quote from George Bush Sr. (regarding Atheists as not being patriots) lends a great deal of validity to this argument. As he sees it, Atheists are not worthy of citizenship within the United States (O’Hair, 2009). Such claims damage the image Atheists that other hold.

Moral Entrepreneurs and the Power Elite. As discussed in the previous section, Becker (1964) believes that moral entrepreneurs are those responsible for the creation and application of deviant labels. However, he separates moral entrepreneurs into two types; “rule creators” (those who hold power) and “rule enforcers” (those subservient to the latter) (Becker, 1964).

Rule creators do exactly that; they formulate rules, laws, legislations, etc. based on their own moral beliefs and then apply them to society as a whole (Becker, 1964). Persons who act in this role hold a great deal of power; judges, lobbyists and elected officials are a few examples. Once a rule creator has decreed a new rule/law, they have simultaneously created a new type of deviant and established a new obligation for rule enforcers to maintain. Using the example from the previous section, once legislation has

passed that outlaws the use of cellular phones while operating a vehicle, it is up to local and state police to enforce this law.

Rule enforcers, such as the military, federal, state or local police,¹¹ ensure that these same rules are followed by all persons within a given society (Becker, 1964). As Becker (1964) further notes, rule enforcers (such as the police) use the enforcement process as a means of gaining favoritism from those they “protect” and to justify their paid position as an enforcer.

It is even possible for an individual that has committed a deviant act to take on the role of rule enforcer; that person may brand him- or herself as a deviant because of an act he or she committed, and in turn, serve as punisher of self for such behavior (Becker, 1964). Atheists, for example, may internalize their non-belief in a god(s) into guilt, shame, or a multitude of other emotions and feelings (Fitzgerald, 2003). As a result, Atheists may punish themselves further by believing they are inferior when compared to someone who is religious, and in turn hide their actual beliefs from others (secret deviance) (Becker, 1964).

C.W. Mills’ (1956) seminal work on the “power-elite” allows the reader a glimpse into the privileged world of moral entrepreneurs and the power they wield—particularly in constructing *their* beliefs as hegemonic—or as the *only* acceptable beliefs. As Mills (1956) claims, the power-elite are individuals placed in powerful hierarchical institutions (the executive branch of the government, military leadership, private sector banks/corporations) in the United States. It is from these positions that the power-elite

¹¹ It should be noted that the concept of a rule enforcer can stretch beyond mere law enforcement agencies and include such people as school teachers and midlevel managers within a corporation.

maintain the control of capital (critical/Marxist influence) and the command of the most influential and effective bureaucratic organizations (Weberian influence). The power-elite often also enjoy influence over financial, civic, educational and social/cultural institutions (religious organizations are one such example). In sum, the power-elite are not in their positions of dominance by chance alone, but through the establishment of strong social and professional bonds. These politicians, military leaders and businessmen/women have learned to work together, as well as share a common view on life in order to consolidate their ascendancy (Mills, 1956). It is these moral entrepreneurs (the power-elite) that often control the creation of policies, rules and the establishment of values that subsequently affect all citizens.

The existence of the power-elite suggests that only a relatively few privileged people share significant influence over policy and macro-economic decisions, and thus exert significant influence on a large portion of society (Mills, 1956). For example, those who have high political positions and are of a specific religious faith, have the ability to have religious influence over the masses (Baigent, 2009). The term “under God” did not appear in the Pledge of Allegiance until 1954 when Senator Homer Ferguson (R-MI) and Congressman Louis Rabaut (D-MI) (as well as the Catholic Knights of Columbus) championed a bill to add the phrase (Hatcher, 2008), yet another example of moral entrepreneurs doing what they feel is right for the masses. Members of the power-elite also tend to share similar lifestyles; they read papers such as the Wall Street Journal, become members of specific clubs or groups (Pacific Union Club and the Bohemian Club, to name a few) (Domhoff, 2005), send their children to the same affluent schools

(Mills, 1956), employ one another within powerful corporations (Domhoff, 2005), and attend the same churches/church groups (Domhoff, 2005; Sharlet, 2010). That is to say, they help one another by socializing and working together, hiring one another and intermarrying. These mutually reinforcing experiences give those brought up within the power-elite a commonality through which to view the world, politics, economics, and religion (Domhoff, 2005; Mills, 1956). By the time the power-elite reach their positions of power, they are like-minded in religious (largely Christian), political and social ideologies; a commonality that is difficult to discard.

Within American politics and society, politicians and church leaders act as rule creators. They formulate and establish laws/rules based on religious ideology, such as the gay marriage policies previously discussed in states like California (McCraw, 2008). Once these laws are created, they are applied to the populace through the control of local police, the court system, federal law enforcement agencies and the military (rule enforcers). Policies such as Don't Ask, Don't Tell (10 U.S.C. § 654) were created by politicians and enforced by the military, who in turn forced LGBTQ military personnel to keep their sexuality a secret while serving the interests of the United States (Marshall, 2011).

As mentioned above, the military can act as rule enforcers and rule creators to a certain extent. In evidence of this claim, the U.S. Army (as of this writing) require all soldiers to complete a "spiritual fitness" portion of a mandatory questionnaire that pertains to a soldier's belief in a "purpose to life" and asks if they are a "spiritual person" (Banks, 2011). Those that receive a low score also receive an assessment stating

“spiritual fitness is an area of possible difficulty for you. Improving your spiritual fitness should be an important goal” (Banks, 2011). While test results are confidential, it has the possibility of creating a negative self-image for non-spiritual/Atheist soldiers who believe they do not meet Army standards. In terms of religious influence within the military, this is just the beginning.

In 2005, news stories about Christian proselytizing within the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, emerged (Goodstein, 2005; White, 2005). Colorado Springs is known as the center of the current U.S. Christian Evangelical movement (Brady, 2005). Approximately half the cadets claimed to have heard “derogatory religious [based] comments or jokes” while at the academy (Goodstein, 2005; White, 2005). Even more disconcerting is that some officers, senior cadets and staff members, were reported to have used their positions of power to promote their Christian Evangelical ideology and to create a “discriminatory climate” (Goodstein, 2005; White, 2005). These are the very same people that train and control the most powerful military force in the world and serve as one of the largest U.S. employers. It raises further concerns about the use of Christianity to influence and transform the military into a religious force used in modern-day crusades. Yet, the extent of Christian influence does not stop there.

Christian Evangelicals within the United States have obtained power (and continue to do so) within the confines of the political stage through the construction of “mega churches” (Maddow, 2011; Sharlet, 2008; 2010), the commanding of powerful military forces (Associated Press, 2011; Banks, 2011; Hersh, 2011) and the occupation of

key political positions (Preston, 2010) by way of the Tea Party (Taibbi, 2010). The growth of the Tea Party faction of the GOP highlights this point; Politicians, military leaders and business leaders have learned to work together as well as share a common view on life in order to covertly consolidate power (Domhoff, 2005).

Jeff Sharlet's (2008; 2010) work on the subversive C Street evangelical organization known as the International Christian Leadership (herein referred to as The Fellowship), stresses the need to maintain a watchful eye on their attempts to gain centralized political power. The Fellowship is headed by Doug Coe and is charged with the mission of turning America into a Christian nation and to fight the "infection of secularism" (Sharlet, 2010, p. 34). Mr. Coe's power reaches far into the American political system; as mentioned before, his National Prayer Breakfasts are attended by top politicians, to include Presidents Carter, Bush senior, Bush junior and Obama (Collins, 2009; Sharlet, 2010).

Sadly, the deeds of this group of social and political elitists does not cease with their semi-ludicrous ramblings of support for ruthless dictators. It has been well documented by journalists such as Jeff Sharlet (2008; 2010) and Rachel Maddow (2010; 2011) that subversive attempts by The Fellowship and the Tea Party have been made to gain significant control and influence over U.S. government and policy discourse. Even author Michael Baigent noted in 2009 that Evangelicals (also known as Christian Reconstructionists) have been making attempts to slowly gain seats of power within American politics in order to guide the nation down a Christian path. Their driving motivation is their "God-given assignment to conquer in His name" by any means

necessary (Baigent, 2009, p. 155). To that end, Doug Coe decided to recreate The Fellowship into a not-so-obvious organization that actively pursues a god-led government by using secretive tactics (Sharlet, 2010).

As briefly mentioned before, journalist Rachel Maddow has documented both The Fellowship (2010) and the Tea Party (2011) as being nothing more than a front for the Evangelical Christian political movement. A Los Angeles Times article discovered Evangelical pastors, funded by donors, were mobilizing their church congregations to become politically involved for the 2012 elections (Hamburger, 2011). In 2010, Tea Party Republicans won a resounding number of seats within state legislatures, the House, and governorships (Maddow, 2011; Srikrishnan et al., 2010). As an example of their power, the largest amount of state-enacted anti-abortion acts (within any given year) topped out at 34; only a portion of the 80 anti-abortion laws passed in 2011 (Guttmacher Institute, 2011; Maddow, 2011; USA Today, 2011). The Tea Party, apparently, is nothing more than a rebranded version of the religious right wherein theocracy based laws (constructed by moral entrepreneurs) allow Evangelicals to control the minds and bodies of all Americans (Hallowell, 2011; Maddow, 2011; Sessions, 2011). To top it all off, numerous sex scandals and other immoral wrongdoings have been reported to have taken place in and around the C Street house operated by The Fellowship in Washington D.C. (Maddow, 2010; Sharlet, 2010). Still more disturbing is the American Evangelical link to the anti-gay movement in Uganda; a movement that helped to ignite the creation of a bill that imposes the death sentence to gay men having sex while infected with HIV/AIDS (Gettleman, 2010). Remember, these moral entrepreneurs are the ones who

create faith-based laws that control all Americans, and in some cases people outside of the U.S.

Keep in mind that the Religious Right has made it abundantly clear, as evidenced above, that non-theistic individuals will not be tolerated within a Christian version of America. While journalists have just begun to explore and uncover the political intentions of Evangelical Christians, they have largely ignored the effects such subversive groups have on individuals. The negative labels created by these moral entrepreneurs can have an adverse effect on a person's mental and emotional fortitude in the form of stigma.

Atheists and Social Stigma. When examining the mental state of persons affected by negative labels, Erving Goffman (1963) provides a micro-level perspective on stigma in everyday life. Stigma, as defined by Goffman (1963), is an attribute that tarnishes an individual's identity while at the same time reaffirming the "usualness" of the person or group bestowing the label. That is to say, it is a relationship between stereotypes and attributes (Goffman, 1963). Ultimately, two types of social identities exist: Virtual social and actual social. In the first, there are assumptions (characterizations) made about a stigmatized person regarding how they should exist according to acceptable norms. In the latter, there are the attributes that can be proven to belong to an individual (Goffman, 1963); one is presumed, whereas the other is real. Now that the concept of social identities has been defined, it is time discuss the labeling process and its inherent consequences.

From a Modified Labeling perspective (Link et. al., 1989) we find a few, clearly defined steps in the labeling process. It starts with society deeming a certain activity, physical or characteristic trait as being flawed and abnormal. The next step involves the labeling of an individual or group as being deviant; these societal beliefs become apparent to the individual (internalization). Once the label has been internalized by an individual, the stigmatized person then reacts in one of three ways: secrecy, withdrawal, and/or education (more on this later). The third step involves the negative consequences of being labeled or the perceived potential for being discriminated, which include lowered self-esteem, a decrease in earning potential, and shame (Link et al., 1989). These are possible outcomes that can create a snowball effect; one societal issue creates yet another (Link et al., 1989). Link's (1989) study focused primarily on those with mental disorders, but the theory can apply to any stigmatized individual or group (Camp, Finlay & Lyons, 2002; Westbrook, Bauman & Shinnar, 1992). Once an Atheist is labeled as godless (i.e., void of morals), for example, they may internalize their deviancy and respond by hiding their true self (secrecy), thereby resulting in negative consequences such as a sense of shame or guilt for being different, which can end with an increased potential to develop further social and/or psychological risk factors.

Within the parameters of Goffman's (1963) theory are three variations of stigma. First, there are bodily stigmas; physical deformities such as paralysis or a clubfoot fall under this category. Second, character blemishes that run the gambit from weak willed to domineering to dishonesty and mental disorder(s). Third, tribal stigmas such as race, nationality and religion are transmitted from one generation to the next and affect all

members of a family or society. Issues regarding Atheists' and their beliefs can be categorized as either character blemishes and/or tribal stigma for a few reasons. First, Atheism can be viewed as a character blemish since Atheists openly reject normative religiousness. Second, since the basis of religious belief and non-belief is typically passed down from generation to generation (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006), Atheism can be considered as tribal stigma (Goffman, 1963). Since we now have a working idea of the type(s) of stigma Atheists can be categorized under, the focus can now shift to methods for stigma management.

Consider those living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa (not as a direct comparison to Atheists, but as an example of the resulting stigma they endure from being labeled deviant). In the work of Gilbert and Walker (2010), we find that South Africans living with HIV/AIDS suffer a high level of stigmatization based on their illness: societal and self blame for having the disease; rejection by family, friends and society once they have disclosed their illness; the development of physical manifestations of their illness that tell the world they are to be kept at a distance (Gilbert & Walker, 2010). As a result, infected persons may experience physical manifestations, mental and emotional distress, and an impact on sexual or interpersonal relationships (Gilbert & Walker, 2010). A life of secrecy, it would seem, was (is) the ideal method for protecting oneself from being labeled and stigmatized. This perhaps describes Atheists who hide their non-religiousness from friends and family members for fear of being labeled and stigmatized. While being an Atheist and struggling openly with HIV/AIDS are not necessarily

substantively similar experiences, they do illustrate similarities in how stigmas are constructed and how those affected manage stigma (Finlay, Dinos & Lyons, 2001).

There are several methods for managing stigma that need to be addressed. “Passing” (or secrecy), “withdrawing” and “preventive telling” are three categories of strategies that deviants may utilize as a means of dealing with applied stigmas (Goffman, 1963; Lee & Craft, 2002, Link et al., 1989). To begin with, stigmatized individuals may conceal their non-normative identity by passing as a member of a socially accepted group (Link et al., 1989). In this instance, an Atheist may pose as an Agnostic believing that this route may create fewer social problems or stigmas. Next, preventive telling offers labeled persons the chance to educate others on their deviant behavior in an effort to limit or cease disapproval, based on the possibility that their behavior may be discovered at any time; the labeled individual manages the unveiling of their identity (Lee & Craft, 2002, Link et al., 1989). For example, an Atheist may highlight the good deeds of non-religious persons to family members prior to “coming out.” Lastly, withdrawal pertains to a stigmatized individual that avoids all contact with those who have labeled them, and instead opts for contact with those who share a similar form of deviance (Goffman, 1963; Lee & Craft, 2002, Link et al., 1989). The act of joining an Atheist/Humanist social club is one such example of withdrawal from normative/hegemonic society; it is here that the non-religious individuals can feel at ease among their own brethren without fear of further stigmatization. Let us now further explore group membership as a coping mechanism for non-religious persons.

Erving Goffman (1963) permits us an abbreviated definition of stigmatized behavior. “Social deviants,” as he claims, consist of individuals that converge to form a sub-community (Goffman, 1963). While the theory is limited on explaining deviance as applied to Atheism, it does offer a starting point for exploring other theories. Leary, Tambor, Terdal and Downs (1995) developed the Sociometer Theory on the importance of group inclusion. To summarize, people who are included in groups experience an increased level of self-esteem; quite the opposite for those excluded from groups who encounter increased depression and uncertainty (Leary et al., 1995). An extension of this theory is the Uncertainty-Identity Theory which postulates that humans have an intrinsic need to reduce feelings of uncertainty regarding their identity and character as motivating factors behind group membership (Hogg, Hohman & Rivera, 2008). Hogg et al. (2008) further claim that it is detrimental for individuals to join groups as a means of creating and defining a social identity while at the same time gaining support for one’s actions and/or behaviors. Furthermore, groups serve as a means of conducting Stigma Management Rehearsals wherein incidents of stigmatization are discussed in small groups and responsive strategies are considered (O’Brien, 2011).

Atheists, for instance, may join Atheist/Humanist clubs in part for the purposes of reducing social stigma(s), and increasing self-esteem while establishing a positive identity among fellow stigmatized individuals. Further actions may include the development of ad campaigns on the positive aspects of Atheism as a response to being stigmatized by religious groups. While the work of Goffman, Leary, Hogg and others provides us a lens through which we can view the development of stigma and group

membership, it is not so specific that it can explain the reason(s) why Atheists become Atheists.

More recent theories suggest that individuals become Atheists for numerous reasons and they develop a variety of ways with which to handle their stigmatized identity. Hunsberger and Altemeyer's (2006) study found that a majority of Atheists (73% on average) make a slow transition from a religious upbringing to that of a non-theistic lifestyle. Atheists seldom have a "life changing" moment wherein an epiphany is reached and changes in their daily life are quickly made in order to meet their new lifestyle choice (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006). On the contrary, Atheists made this transformation through a series of self-realizations wherein "truths" were discovered that lead them down an Atheistic path. The Bible, it would seem, was not believable and it was organized religion that transformed them into non-theist converts (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006).

Fitzgerald (2003) offers a possible explanation as to how Atheists develop their non-normative identities and how they manage their stigmatized, non-religious identity. She explains that Atheists must take on a non-normative identity in order to cope with issues related to being a nonconformist. This is an important step in understanding human development vis-à-vis social learning theory, and can be useful in creating methods for managing stigma(s).

Fitzgerald (2003, pp. 7-9) conducted interviews with 36 participants who self-identified as Atheist;¹² she found that Atheists tend to be more "open" about their non-

¹² Demographic information was not presented in this study.

belief, tend to live in large cities. Conversely, those who lived in small towns or communities tended to be more “closeted” (Fitzgerald, 2003). In terms of Atheistic onset, those who were raised in a strict, religious household (approximately 42%) became theistically doubtful later in life (usually during adolescence) and did not self-identify as Atheist until young adulthood or adulthood (Fitzgerald, 2003). Participants that were raised in a low to moderately religious household, showed a much earlier Atheistic onset (usually in childhood), were more open about their non-theistic beliefs, and began self-identifying as Atheist during adolescence. These findings, however, do not explain the actual transformation from religious belief to that of disbelief.

Fitzgerald (2003, pp. 10-12) described the progression from religious to non-religious in terms of three phases. In Phase 1, participants began to have doubts about religion and the belief in a higher power. It is during this phase that individuals either asked others questions, or dealt with an inner struggle that involved reading and self-reflection. It should also be noted that at this point people started discarding their own denomination (mostly Christianity). Phase 2 involves the questioning of all types of religion, organized or otherwise. As a result, religion is discarded entirely, yet there may be some who continue to believe in a deity. In the third and final phase, people begin to doubt the existence of god which leads them to discard theism altogether. It is at this point that an individual has made the transformation from theist to Atheist (or non-religious). All 36 participants went through a similar progression, with some taking longer than others to become an Atheist. Fitzgerald (2003) claims that this process is the result of both social environmental factors (wherein family and church are dominant

factors), and individual intellectual and cognitive factors (wherein people have a yearning for the truth and embrace things such as science and critical thinking).

The stigma involved with an Atheistic conversion was implied, but not discussed in detail. For some individuals, the process was painful and embarrassing; some participants described being made fun of by peers for questioning god. For others, they felt that by questioning religion they would be cast into hell, thus fear and guilt kept them in line. Still others had fears of disappointing or upsetting family members, implying that the mere questioning of the existence of god would “rock the boat” (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 9). To that extent, this study seeks to fill this apparent void by investigating how stigma plays a role in the lives of the non-religious.

Fitzgerald’s (2003) research does lend a great deal of knowledge towards the study of Atheists and the transformation into a non-believer, and yet it does not fully explain how Atheists may internalize and react to deviant labels. In other words, while we know that Atheists may feel guilty or fear reprisal for questioning their religious upbringing, we still do not know how they react to stigmas and negative labels (i.e., joining Atheist/Humanist groups, remaining closeted about their non-religious beliefs, etc.) beyond an emotional level.

Method

Data Collection

In order to fully understand the effects of labeling and stigma on this particular group of non-religious individuals, it becomes necessary to explore their narratives and

experiences within the confines of the United States. Due to the nature of the research questions, a qualitative method of study was chosen over a purely quantitative method for a few reasons. First, qualitative data via open-ended semi-structured interviews taps into a participant's wealth of opinions and knowledge on a given topic. Semi-structured interviews are defined as "questions that the interviewer can ask in different ways for different participants" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 195). This type of interview allows for richer data to be obtained and creates the possibility to explore other avenues related to the research question(s) (Silverman, 2006). Second, open-ended semi-structured interviews offer a way for participants to voice their opinions in an intimate, conversational forum where they feel their thoughts/ideas matter so as to elicit a wealth of information that may have previously been out of reach (Silverman, 2006).

A snowball sampling method, wherein a participant recommends a friend, family member or colleague who in turn recommends others to participate (Browne, 2005), was chosen for several reasons.¹³ Snowball sampling provides an excellent way to gather information on a population that may otherwise not be recognized as legitimate within a given society (Browne, 2005). This is an important factor when dealing with non-religious persons or groups. The advantages of this method are the ability to include persons who may not have been known by the researcher and to tap into resources or social structures that may be otherwise difficult to reach (Heckathorn, 1997). Atheists, it should be noted, can be very elusive in revealing their non-theistic beliefs for fear of retribution or judgment (Kamguian, 2005).

¹³ This method creates a sample wherein participation and data from the third and fourth waves approximates a random sample.

The observance and application of participants' confidentiality were handled in the following manner. The permission of interview subjects to be recorded, with assurance of confidentiality and notice of their legal rights was confirmed via a consent form and verbal recorded consent.¹⁴ Pseudonyms were used for participants as a means of protecting their identity. Self-identified non-religious participants were then asked questions about their experiences with religion throughout their lifetime, as well as questions about their perception of religion, deviance, and power roles.¹⁵

Lastly, all digital audio recordings and transcribed interviews were stored on a secure, password protected hard drive located in the principal researcher's residence. Following transcription, recorded interviews were erased/destroyed. Signed consent forms were kept until completion (publication) of research, then shredded as per the research proposal approved by the IRB. Only the principal researcher had access to the aforementioned documents and files.

Research Focus

Table 1 shows a brief review of definitions for the terms employed in this study. Again, this study focused on Atheists since they tend to be vilified with greater frequency within American culture than Agnostics or non-religious persons.

¹⁴ See Appendix B for a copy of the Consent Form.

¹⁵ See Appendix C for the entire interview guide.

Table 1
Definition of Terms

Term	Definition
Atheist	Non-belief in a higher power and/of the concept of organized religion.
Agnostic	Belief that a higher power is unknown and most likely unknowable. Emphasis on knowledge.
Secularist	Belief in a separation of church and state. Can be from either religious or non-religious background.
Non-theist/ Non-religious “other”	Non-belief in a deity or organized religion, yet do not self-identify as Atheist or Agnostic.
Stigma	Byproduct of perceived deviance. Self-image is diminished.
Labeling	The process wherein social groups create rules whose violation results in deviance.
Deviance	Behavior that violates an established social norm.

Note: "Stigma" is based on Erving Goffman's (1963) definition; "Deviance" and "Labeling" are based on Howard Becker's (1964) definitions. All other definitions are based on aforementioned criteria.

Data Analysis

Both demographic and qualitative data were collected and analyzed for the purposes of this study. Demographic data consisted of: Age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, nationality, religious upbringing, number of children, non-religious claim, citizenship status, current job, current income, and highest level of education completed. The last three demographic categories were used to measure socioeconomic status (SES).

Demographic data were used to give a snapshot of my sample, and to make sure there were no new or significant trends across race, gender, SES, and so forth.¹⁶

Two sampling methods were used for this study. Participants were gathered using the aforementioned snowball sampling method in addition to convenience sampling; heads of Atheist/Humanist groups were contacted and asked to recommend other members for interviewing. Approximately two-thirds of the participants were gathered through the snowball sampling method.

First, all recorded interviews were transcribed from digital audio recordings. Next, ten interviews were reviewed and common themes that emerged from participants' responses were assigned a color for easier reference. In a subsequent review of all transcriptions I color coded responses to questions that were associated to specific themes.

Sample

Qualitative data for this study were collected from semi-structured open-ended interviews with self-identified Atheists, Agnostics and any other not-yet-defined non-religious persons, aged 18 years and older and primarily within the San Francisco Bay Area. A call for participation was issued through the Internet (email, bulletin boards, chat rooms, etc.), posted on bulletin boards throughout a local state university and via word-of-mouth or recommendations from interview participants.¹⁷ Several San Francisco Bay Area Atheist/Agnostic/Humanist groups were also contacted via email and asked to

¹⁶ Please see Appendix D for demographic information.

¹⁷ See Appendix A for a copy of the Call for Participation.

participate in the study. Interviews were administered in English at a safe and mutually agreed upon location in the San Francisco Bay Area, lasting between 20 minutes to one hour. Two of these interviews were collected in the Seattle area of Washington State, but both participants were born and/or raised within the San Francisco Bay Area. The use of this sample provides insight and a clearer understanding of the occurrence of deviance and stigma among a non-religious population within the U.S. While the San Francisco Bay Area is an excellent source of data, results may not be generalized to the entire United States.

The final sample consisted of 30 participants; 16 males and 14 females with an age range of 20 to 80 years (average age = 46.2 years). The sample was primarily Caucasian (86.7%), American born (76.7%) and college educated (93.3%), with an even split between being married or single. Seventy percent of the sample self-identified as Atheist, 16.7% as Agnostic and 13.3% as non-religious. With regards to religious upbringing, 20 participants came from a Christian/Protestant background, 3 were raised in the Jewish faith, 1 was Hindu and the remaining 6 had no religious upbringing whatsoever.¹⁸

Nineteen participants had a bachelor's degree or higher, with the remainder having a high school diploma, some college or an associate's degree. Career ranged from unemployed to stay-at-home parent to college student and university professor. Approximately one-third of respondents worked in a science/technical field. This is no real surprise considering the San Francisco Bay Area is home to the Silicon Valley and

¹⁸ See Appendix D for complete demographic results.

several national laboratories. As a side note, 67% were involved with some sort of non-religious group and the majority (87%) was actively involved with their community (i.e., community service projects, PTA, neighborhood watch, etc.).

Demographically, these findings are similar to a recent study on the development of Atheist identity (Smith, 2011), yet it is not generalizable to the entire U.S.

Atheist/Agnostic/non-religious population. Again, the point of this study is to explore the ways in which non-religious persons perceive the world around them, with no emphasis being placed on representativeness to the entire non-religious population.

Research Findings

My findings are divided into several themes that emerged from my analyses. The opening section on Becoming Godless provides a general background of the path towards rejecting religious dogma; it is an affirmation of findings previously discussed in the theoretical framework. The next section, presents the reactionary habits of non-religious persons, wherein incidents of passing (blending in among religious/"normative" persons), withdrawal (avoidance of contact with those who have labeled them) and preventive telling (informing/educating people about Atheism before their identity is discovered/revealed) (Lee & Craft, 2002) emerge from participant narratives. The third section reveals participants' perceptions of religious dominance and power within the United States. In the fourth section, the perceptions and experience of participants in regards to discrimination is explored. Finally, stigma as a result of social and

interpersonal interactions (discrimination) among non-religious persons within the S.F. Bay Area is discussed.

Becoming Godless

The road from god fearing to godless can be slow and tricky. As mentioned before, Altemeyer and Hunsberger (2006) found that approximately 73% of those they studied experienced a slow transition from religious to non-religious. The percentage of participants of this study mirrored the aforementioned findings; roughly 73% expressed a similar transition. The remainder of the sample was either brought up in an Agnostic/Atheist household (14%) or had a single, life-changing event that pushed them towards Atheism (13%).

With regards to Bridget Fitzgerald's (2003) aforementioned research on Atheistic onset, several commonalities surfaced during analysis. First, the majority of the participants in this study admitted that they were "open" in regards to their non-religious beliefs (i.e., do not hide their beliefs if asked about them); a parallel to Fitzgerald's (2003) findings of "open" Atheists living in large cities. As a reminder, the San Francisco Bay Area is a metropolitan area with some of the largest cities on the West Coast, predominantly known for liberal political views.

Another comparison to the Fitzgerald study pertains to the age of Atheist/Agnostic onset. While I did not ask specific questions regarding the age of when interviewees first became non-religious, general time frames were evident. For example, those raised in a strict religious household did not embrace Atheism/Agnosticism until

they were out of their familial home as young adults or adults. Ray did not begin to self-identify as an Atheist until well into adulthood, after having a very negative experience in seminary school. He elaborates:

That's kind of when I walked away from a religious life. I think it probably took about five or six years of grappling with that and kind of trying to de-program all of this indoctrination that I had up to that point in my life, before I really felt safe to say I'm Atheist...and I know it.

Those who were raised in a religiously lenient home tended to discover Atheism/Agnosticism at a much earlier time in their life; around the time of late middle school or early high school. Carl, a retired professor, relates his experience; "Back in the 60s when I was still in high school...I didn't really see myself as an Atheist at that point, but I was interested enough to at least do some preliminary reading in that area." The overarching result is a correlation between the level of at-home religiosity and the age at when self-identifying as Atheist begins; the stricter the home, the longer it takes for self-identifying to take place.

Stigma Management: Passing, Withdrawal and Preventive Telling

Passing, it seems, was a common theme among practically all participants in this study. Almost every individual shared some brief experience or story about appearing as someone other than who they truly are in order to protect themselves from reactions to their non-religious identity. For some Atheists, it was a matter of hiding their beliefs from their friends and/or family. Bob, a 61 year old retired software developer, hid his

Atheism from his parents for “quite some time,” while Sunny stated “my parents don’t even know that I’m agnostic. I just don’t talk about it.”¹⁹

The workplace is a problematic setting for Atheists. Many report going to great lengths to keep their non-religious beliefs hidden there. “I feel like I have to keep that [religious discussions] to a minimum,” Sheila mentions, “I wouldn’t want to bring it up in say a faculty meeting.” Family is also commonly mentioned. Some participants continued to pass as a believer in order to appease family members. As Lola, a young woman from the Midwest, explained, “I definitely hid it [Atheism] all through high school from my parents because I thought that my parents wouldn’t trust me anymore or there would be consequences.” These types of responses were found primarily among Atheists. Agnostics, with the exception of Sunny, did not feel like they had to hide their beliefs.

The Agnostic identity deserves special consideration. Not only did Agnostics apparently feel more secure about revealing their identity—reporting little passing—the agnostic identity appears to be a refuge for Atheists too. One form of passing employed by some Atheist participants to protect themselves from judgment was to self-identify as Agnostic instead of Atheist. As Susan, a female college student who self-identifies as Agnostic, put it, “I think people just judge you--make that snap judgment. I think Agnostic is the softer word to use and not use Atheist.” Sarah expressed similar sentiments with regards to identifying herself to others as non-religious:

I do feel like I don’t want to be judged in that way, but I also feel like I don’t want people to feel uncomfortable for me to be around them. [It’s] because I know that

¹⁹ All names used are fictitious.

religious people tend to think of people who don't believe in god as not moral and not ethical.

Ray, a self-identified Atheist, conveyed his preferred method of identifying himself to others: "You know, occasionally people ask me what my religion is or where I go to church or whatever. When they do, I'll politely tell them that I'm a secular humanist, so I don't go to a church."

While my data suggest that some Atheists self-identify as Agnostic in order to protect and manage their identity, this cannot be applied to all Atheists since it is not known to what extent this occurs. However, this finding has implications for the ways we understand the Atheist experience and for how we define categories of belief in relation to lived experience. Another implication is for Labeling Theory. The finding highlights the role that alternative identities play in the process of passing (and potentially withdrawal). It seems that a "compromise" identity, less stigmatized, acts as a refuge; it allows the public to know that the actor is different, but not extreme, and it allows the actor to avoid denying their belief system—confirming the identity—while enjoying the benefits of passing. Future research projects that explore Atheist/Agnostic identity (as well as others), would greatly benefit from exploring this type of question: Do non-religious persons (or other stigmatized people) self-identify using labels that are approximations of their identity but that are viewed as less deviant by others?

In some (rare) instances, participants claimed to be forthright with their Atheism if asked point blank. As Drake, a 48 year old writer and artist states, "If anyone ever asks, I tell them like it is. If it comes up, I'm not going to hide it." Still others were even more adamant about sharing their Atheistic beliefs. Aaron, an 80 year old retired federal

employee, immediately pointed out the “Atheist” button prominently displayed on his chest when I asked him if he ever hides his beliefs. “I wear this everywhere. Everybody knows that I’m an Atheist. So, for you to ask if I hide my Atheism, there’s no way.” People like Drake and Aaron were clear exceptions in the interview sample, as we would expect from research on Atheists and Agnostics in the U.S. Both have managed to turn the negative portion of their identity into a positive aspect as a form of preventive telling. This type of reaction was also found among a small amount of sexual assault victims in Australia who managed to transform their shame into a source of pride (Thorpe, Solomon & Dimopoulos, 2004). Even though the number of self-reported Atheists in America has grown in recent years, there are still a vast majority that do not openly accept and wear this label.

The overall implications are that Atheists, in particular, feel the need to hide their true identity from the rest of society, especially from family. This also appears to be on par with Fitzgerald’s (2003) conclusion that Atheists internalize the shame associated with a deviant label, resulting in the development of a secretive identity. For the non-believer there is much more at stake than broadly social repercussions; such as the fear of being judged and rejected by family. Passing, in short, becomes a management strategy for dealing with and decreasing their deviant identity (Lee & Craft, 2002; O’Brien, 2012).

In cases where Atheists/Agnostics relayed stories of rejection by family and friends, they used another stigma management technique: withdrawal, the avoidance of contact with those who create and apply labels in favor of contact with those who share a similar form of deviance (Goffman, 1963; Lee & Craft, 2002, Link et al., 1989). One

such management strategy is to join social clubs or societies of like-minded people, as noted in Uncertainty-Identity Theory (Hogg et al., 2008). Approximately two-thirds of the participants in this study belonged to some sort of Atheist/Humanist/Secularist organization. Some of these individuals stated their membership in various secular/Atheist organizations, but no one gave any insight as to why they joined except as a means of being social. Bob and Carl are both members of (or at least associated with) no fewer than three Atheist/Humanist organizations. Beyond membership in non-religious groups, many participants also shared their involvement in political and social justice movements.

Some participants, mostly Agnostics, also claimed participation at their local Unitarian Universalist church. To be clear, participants do not attend as a means of having organized religion in their lives, but merely as a means of being social and having a sense of community. As 62 year old Alexander put it, "I thought, here's a church I can fit into and it gives me a sense of community, not so much as a 'religion.'" In all instances where membership in a social group was brought up, participants also conveyed a sense of pride in their societal role; findings that are on par with Hogg et al.'s (2008) research on why people join groups.

One would think that Atheists' attempts to avoid or minimize contact with religious persons would be part of the withdrawal process. This, however, did not seem to be the case. All of the interviewees in this study reported maintaining regular contact with religious individuals. This contact was described in various forms. When it comes to friends, the majority of participants explained that they surround themselves with

likeminded, non-religious folks.²⁰ Five participants described work relationships where talk about religion is avoided, yet a mutual respect for one another is recognized. As Albert, a 44 year old Atheist put it, “I try not to wear it [Atheism] on my sleeve. I wouldn’t want my co-workers to wear their religion on their sleeve so I don’t wear it on mine.” For other participants, it is important to maintain familial relationships regardless of the differences in theological opinion. Tanya shared an experience with her mother:

She [her mother] calls me in the room, in front of the T.V. and says ‘quick, you need to sit down for the blessing.’ And I said, ‘no, I don’t.’ And she said, ‘why not?’ I said, ‘because you have to believe in it in order for it to work. So, you go be blessed and I’ll go back to the kitchen.’ She was a little miffed but she didn’t hold it against me.

It should be noted that three distinct reactions occurred within familial relationships. 1) A participant’s lack of religious faith is accepted (in full or partially). Charlie Brown shared his thoughts, “I do share Atheism with a member of my family. And so from that, it’s kind of nice to know that the other person feels like I do.” 2) It is recognized and rejected (family denies or ceases communication). Carl recounted a negative familial interaction in regards to last rights being given to his uncle:

I said, ‘I don’t mean to be rude, but my wife and I, we’re going to leave when the minister comes because we don’t want to participate in that.’ And several of the people in my family haven’t talked to me since. I mean, they don’t answer my emails, they don’t answer my phone calls.”

3) It is recognized, but ignored (the topic of religion is never brought up). Jake related how this occurred between him and his father; “I said...I don’t believe in any god. It

²⁰ This is not to imply that Atheists/Agnostics do not maintain friendships with religious individuals. In fact, many participants admitted to being friends with religious persons, yet there is an agreed upon religious understanding between both parties.

doesn't apply to me and my lifestyle.' And he didn't talk to me for about a good year after that."

The fact that participants resorted to withdrawing in the first place may speak to the role of stigma in their social experiences. They reported in some cases relying heavily upon relationships with other non-religious persons or other "deviants" as a means of replacing lost or diminished relationships in years past. As Matt put it, "[the] Majority of my friends tend to be immigrants or outsiders or people who don't fit in anyway." Within Jake's social network, "seventy-five percent of my [his] friends are Atheist." Participants, as we know of other populations labeled as deviant, seemed to actively seek social acceptance wherever they could (Hogg et al., 2008). Perhaps the one method for managing stigma, as related to me by numerous participants, involves the "coming out" of all Atheists. As Carl put it, "I think that we need...we Atheists, need to come out and state our position and say what we believe in." This statement implies that Atheists on both a micro (individual) and macro (group) level would benefit greatly from being more open about their Atheistic beliefs in that it functions as means of gaining broader acceptance.

Experience with (Regional) Discrimination

As mentioned previously Atheists can, and have, experienced various forms of interpersonal and institutional discrimination in a society dominated by religious ideologies and discourse. Whether it is discrimination on a global scale (persecution of Atheists in various countries) or on a regional level (previous banning of Atheists from

holding state political offices), Atheists still face challenges with gaining worldwide acceptance.

Regional evidence of the fear of reprisal is provided by Jake's recounting of religious bias in the workplace. While working for a company owned and operated by Jehovah's Witnesses, his employers discovered his Atheistic beliefs; from that point on he started to receive different treatment. He elaborates:

I was refused...little things. I asked for my birthday off; they did not give it to me because they don't celebrate birthdays. So I had to work on my birthday; not a huge deal, but I did notice other people there were getting raises when it took almost two years for me to get my first raise. As a manager, I still didn't get a raise after two years. Not many people would talk to me there.

More subtle (subversive) versions of discrimination were experienced by Aaron through the silencing of political voice; "I've been writing letters to the editor of the [local] newspaper here in Fremont for over 20 years. Many times the editor has deleted sentences that I have written referring to the atrocities of religion." Carl shared a story involving his close friends who were denied membership in a gated living community because of their Atheism. "In one gated community where I have some friends who acknowledge they were Atheists. They were denied membership in that community and there didn't seem to be any other reason. They certainly had the money."

In some of the more extreme examples of discrimination as conveyed by a participant, Eric (a German immigrant) had the misfortune of being verbally harassed:

I responded to some letter to an editor to a local newspaper and...then I suddenly got telephone calls from people; they figured out by my name on the...the

telephone number... and gave me calls, and my garage was egged. That's why you see that camera on the garage.²¹

While issues such as having lines deleted from a letter to an editor or not being allowed to live in a gated community may not seem like a big deal, they can be described as subtle forms of interpersonal (censorship) and institutional (denial of housing) discrimination—particularly if patterns arise from future studies. Most of the people I interviewed did not experience such overt instances of discrimination as that of Jake or Eric. Still, these examples tell us something about how Atheists and Agnostics experience being labeled as deviant for their beliefs. One can only wonder what others might experience in other, more heavily religious regions of the country such as the Midwest or Deep South.

Fear of Reprisal. On a micro level (as noted by Fitzgerald, 2003), this fear of reprisal is what keeps Atheists/Agnostics from openly expressing their lack of religious beliefs to friends, family and coworkers. Reprisal could mean the loss of a job, or strained/destroyed relationships with friends, family, and community members. These are all factors that came up numerous times in almost every interview. During an interview with Sheila, a self-identified Atheist, she expressed her fear of reprisal:

I deliberately haven't self identified as Atheist until very recently because of fear of reprisal. Recently I was in a social group with some people that I didn't know very well and I commented on Atheism, and one of the people there who I had really come to like made some comment about non-believers. Some comment like 'I didn't know you were a non-believer' and I thought, you could have used

²¹ When I arrived at Eric's house to conduct the interview, the first thing I noticed was a security camera mounted above the garage door. Something that I thought was at first strange, but which made sense once he told me about being harassed.

any other word than non-believer and now I suddenly feel like I'm on the out. I suddenly feel like I can't be in your inner circle of friends.

In Sheila's case, the fear of reprisal is not merely a concern over losing her job; it is the concern of being socially rejected and alienated. Sheila's story is indicative of experiences shared by other participants in this study.

This implies that Atheists and other non-religious persons have a definite fear of religious dominance within the U.S. While it may not be the type of fear or concern that disenfranchised minority groups may face, it is relevant nonetheless. There was no solid evidence of the perception of a macro level fear of reprisal; the fear was based on an individualized level. However, participants did express a concern over a (growing) religious dominance within the context of politics and power dynamics.

Perception of Religious Dominance and Power

As described before, within contemporary U.S. politics, there is a religious influence that affects Americans on many levels. Laws attempting to ban abortions (Guttmacher Institute, 2011; Maddow, 2011; USA Today, 2011) and gay marriage (McCraw, 2008; Mormons for Prop 8, 2009) are a common occurrence in addition to social influence through clubs such as Boy Scouts of America (Downey, 2004). When individuals such as Pastor Mike who are part of much larger, religious institutions make comments regarding the creation of a database of known Atheists (Stahl, 2010), for example, the health of secular democracy, and the rights for non-believers to participate in this democracy might be called into question. As previously discussed, subversive groups are making self-admitted attempts at controlling politicians and political discourse

in an effort to turn the United States into (functionally) a Christian nation (Sharlet, 2008; 2010). As part of the interviewing process, several questions were asked pertaining to the interviewee's perception of religious dominance within American culture and politics. This was done not simply to explore their thoughts on the issue, but to see, as Howard Becker did in *Outsiders* (1964), how those constructed as deviant viewed the dominant society around them.

All participants (with the exception of one) in this study pointed to the dominance of Judeo-Christian influence within politics and the American way of life. Concerns ranging from the lack of Atheists in seats of political power, to issues of religious dominance and influence, and a lack of true secularism on a national level were conveyed during interviews. Sheila conveyed her concern regarding religious dominance during the 2010 elections, "I think they [religious groups] do hold power and it scares me a lot. I am really concerned about the election next year. I think the veiled, or unveiled religion in the Tea Party and other groups that I thought were splinter groups, is disturbing." When asked if he felt that religious individuals or groups hold much political power in the U.S., Michael adamantly responded, "Oh sure! Absolutely! First of all, you can't get elected, pretty much. There are one or two²² notable exceptions, but you can't really get elected to Congress if you're not religious. Well, you have to say you're religious." The perception here is that one cannot or should not attempt a career in politics because it would most likely not pan out. Where the moral entrepreneurs who construct dominant religious discourse do so from seats (or behind seats) of power, they can frame political

²² As mentioned before, Congressman Pete Stark (D-CA) is the only known openly Atheist politician as of this writing. He represents in the 13th District of California, located in the San Francisco Bay Area.

discourse, determining what is permissible and what it not. Atheists may not experience deviant labels through widespread employment discrimination, but they certainly do not have access to positions of power while openly expressing their beliefs.

This dominance manifests itself in various ways. In Midwestern states, creationism is taught as a parallel scientific theory to evolution to kids in kindergarten through to their senior year of high school, or the refusal to teach sexual education to children. As Aaron noted, “for instance the schools. You take Texas for instance; their religious people are telling the kids what to believe and what to read. They’re even controlling the publishers, telling them what to put in (McKinley, 2010).” Still other Atheists see direct attacks against federal provisions such as the First Amendment. As Michael put it:

There’s no question that there’s a movement to really try to undo the First Amendment, I mean the ‘church and state’ part. And it’s also true that much of what happens both quietly and publicly in the political world is driven by people’s religious convictions.

Matt had a similar response, “The social connections that people derive from their religious connections, especially when you get into the upper echelons of economic and social/political, are highly influenced by one’s religious connections.”

As documented here and above, there are genuine concerns over the control of U.S. politics by religious persons on either side of the aisle. Perceived solution(s) to this quandary are simple, but complex. Interviewees were asked if they saw a potential solution to the secular aspects of American politics. While a majority of the sample found secularism in the U.S. to be practically nonexistent, the solutions were all very similar: 1) Create more secular laws. 2) Balance the power dynamic by electing more

secular/non-religious politicians. As Sarah, a mother of two explained in regards to secular laws:

I feel like one possible solution is to separate religious belief from morality and ethics. I think a lot of religious people believe that the way you become moral and ethical is by believing in god and being religious. To me they are totally different.

One participant felt that organized religion, as we know it today, is waning. As Steven sees it: “I think that...a general trend in society towards secularism or towards a reduction in...‘noisy religions.’ I think part of the noise is the death rattle. It is changing and changing fast.”

Discussion

As stated earlier, I hypothesized that Atheists, Agnostics, and other non-religious persons within the San Francisco Bay Area would face social sanctions for openly expressing their religious position to include the perception of being politically silenced or socially excluded. However, since the San Francisco Bay Area is politically liberal (Bay Area Center for Voting Research, 2012), one might have expected my research to have yielded little evidence of anti-Atheist activity. To the contrary, evidence was found that supported my hypothesis.

While this study was not designed to replicate either Fitzgerald’s (2003) study on the development of Atheists or Hunsberger and Altemeyer’s (2006) research on Atheist groups, I collected evidence that confirms some of their findings. With regards to Hunsberger and Altemeyer’s (2006) work, the majority of Atheists in my sample made a slow transition from believer to non-believer by way of searching for answers to doubts

they had towards organized religion. In Fitzgerald's (2003) study, participants who grew up in strict religious households made a slower progression towards Atheism and that they did not start doubting the existence of God until late high school/early college. Conversely, non-believers raised in households where less emphasis was placed on religion had a much quicker progression towards being godless, claiming to be Atheists by the time they were in high school or their first year of college. It should be noted that doubting the existence of God is not the same as rejecting it; rejection is indicative of finalizing the progression towards Atheism/Agnosticism.

Discrimination of an overt nature was found but only in a few cases that involved physical harassment and maltreatment in the workplace. Of even greater concern among a few participants was a fear of reprisal.²³ This fear usually manifested itself in the forms of shame and secrecy. While this fear of reprisal was not an overarching theme, the fact that it was expressed by interviewees does raise questions pertaining to this topic and the extent to which it might be found in other regions of the U.S. When non-religious persons have to resort to stigma management strategies such as secrecy or passing themselves off as someone else (even if that means labeling themselves as Agnostic instead of Atheist), it raises mental health concerns.²⁴ A further exploration into the fear of reprisal is recommended for future research projects.

Atheists, Agnostics, and non-religious persons in this sample expressed various methods for managing stigma. Two-thirds of participants claimed to have membership in

²³ Fear of reprisal (or repercussion) was found in Fitzgerald's (2003) research.

²⁴ Some participants self-identified as "non-religious." It is possible that by not identifying as Atheist or Agnostic, non-religious people self-prescribe a less-deviant label as a means of managing stigma.

at least one Atheist/Humanist/Secular club or group, a key factor in maintaining their overall mental health where members do not feel the need to hide their true identity. A portion of the participants also described their efforts to minimize contact with religious persons, a form of withdrawal. Group membership has the added benefit of allowing Atheists and Agnostics to create a positive identity from a negative one, a form of preventive telling. For many, political and social activism is a means of stigma management; it gives them a sense of self-acceptance for whom they are regardless of what others may think.

Perhaps the greatest concern expressed by participants was the perceived threat of political control by monotheistic (Judeo-Christian) moral entrepreneurs in positions of power. For the Atheists/Agnostics in this sample, there was a very real and very dangerous threat to their way of life. Concerns over the Religious Right commandeering American politics appeared to be a very plausible assumption. Subversive groups such as the Fellowship and more overt politicians such as George Bush, Jr., have made it apparent they want the U.S. to be a Christian nation. With the help of religious institutions such as the Catholic and Mormon Church, this plausible scenario seems to be turning into reality.

Limitations and Future Research

As with all studies, there are numerous limitations that need to be addressed. To begin, it should be noted this is exploratory research designed to investigate non-religious identity as it applies to deviance and stigma. Research on this particular topic is

practically nonexistent (Smith, 2011). Future research that builds upon the theoretical concepts and findings discussed herein will expand the limited body of knowledge on deviance, stigma, and lived experiences of Atheists, Agnostics, and other non-religious persons.

An initial group of participants was identified through personal/professional contacts who in turn referred others to participate; this is known as “snowball” sampling. As mentioned previously, this method creates a sample wherein participation and data from the third and fourth waves approximate a random sample (Browne, 2005). A drawback to this type of sampling method is that it can produce varying and inaccurate results (Heckathorn, 1997). Furthermore, snowball sampling makes it difficult to know whether or not the sample accurately reflects the experiences of others in the target group under study (Heckathorn, 1997). Future studies in the area of Atheism, deviance, and stigma should utilize a mixed methodological approach to include statistical (survey) data as a means of answering research questions.

While the interviews gathered a wide range of beliefs and feelings attached with being labeled a deviant and/or Atheist, they were conducted only in English. By conducting interviews strictly in English, the potential to interview godless individuals across a wide range of languages became limited. Future studies, especially within the confines of the United States, should be conducted in various languages reflecting the dominant cultures in any given region. For example, within the Southwest and Southeast, interviews should also be conducted in Spanish; in the San Francisco Bay Area, they should include other languages such as Mandarin or Vietnamese since there are large

populations who speak them (among many other cultures). Additionally, the San Francisco Bay Area is a sociopolitical “bubble” (in the sense that it is more politically liberal than most other regions). Expanding research to include other (more conservative) regions in the U.S. would support the data presented here as well as lend a great deal of legitimacy to Atheist/non-theist issues in America

While many of the participants divulged information on their progression towards a non-religious lifestyle, there were still no definite answers regarding the psychological reasoning behind their decision. For those who become Atheist, is it merely a matter of rejecting theism as a reaction to a strict religious upbringing; are they Atheist because their parents disapprove of it, or do they truly believe there is no god? Furthermore, do those who choose Atheism accept the rejection of God (or any god) as part of the label or have they developed this understanding as part of their journey? These are all important areas of exploration, especially when dealing with the mental health issues of stigmatized individuals.

While Atheists in particular may not be considered by main stream society as an oppressed minority, their experience is similar in many respects to other disenfranchised groups. It is important to understand these experiences and the ways in which labeling and stigma can and do affect individual and group identity to the extent of impacting mental health and social mobility. By failing to recognize how a particular group of people are mistreated or disenfranchised is to ignore the much larger problem of hegemonic dominance and unbalanced power relations, a problem that directly affects the functioning of a secular democratic society.

References

- Adair, B. (2004). Abortion debate vaults to federal stage. *St. Petersburg Times Online*. Retrieved from http://sheridan_conlaw.typepad.com/sheridan_conlaw/antiabortion_strategy/
- American Christian Lobbyists Association (2009). Pending bills & resolutions before the 111th U.S. Congress. American Christian Lobbyists Association. Retrieved from http://www.americancla.org/pending_bills_congress.html
- Associated Press. (2007, March 19). Fans applaud politician for revealing Atheist beliefs. *Napa Valley Register*, Retrieved from <http://www.napavalleyregister.com/articles/2007/03/19/news/national/doc45fe8660bcdb9407470445.txt>
- Associated Press. (2011, January 24). Air force academy's superintendent under fire for choosing evangelical Christian speaker. *Denver Post*, Retrieved from http://www.denverpost.com/commented/ci_17178700?source=commented-#ixzz1C0NXxGvI
- Baigent, M. (2009). *Racing toward armageddon: The three great religions and the plot to end the world*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Bakunin, M. (1916). *God and the state*. Bombay, India; Modern Publishers Indore.
- Banks, A. M. (2011). Army faces queries on 'spiritual fitness' test. *Christian Century*, 128(3), 17.
- Bay Area Center for Voting Research. (2011). *The most conservative and liberal cities in the United States*. Retrieved from <http://alt.coxnewsweb.com/statesman/metro/081205libs.pdf>
- Becker, H. S. (1964). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance*. New York, NY: The Free Press of Glencoe.
- Bernstein, E. & Jakobsen, J. R. (2010, August 25). Sex, secularism and religious influence in U.S. politics. [web log comment]. Retrieved from <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/elizabeth-bernstein-janet-r-jakobsen/sex-secularism-and-religious-influence-in-us-politics>
- Best, J. (Ed.). (1995). *Images of issues: Typifying contemporary social problems* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Gruyter.
- Bloesch, E., Forbes, G. B., & Adams-Curtis, L. E. (2004). A brief, reliable measure of negative attitudes towards Atheists. *Psychological Reports*, 95, 1161-1162.

- Boy Scouts of America. (2005). Clarifying unit tax-exempt status. *Western Los Angeles County Council Boy Scouts of America*. Retrieved from <http://bsa-la.org/miscellaneous/tax-exempt-status.html>
- Boy Scouts of America. (2011). *Presidents of the United States and the boy scouts of America*. Retrieved from <http://www.scouting.org/About/FactSheets/presidents.aspx>
- Brady, J. (2005, January 17). Colorado Springs a Mecca for evangelical Christians. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4287106>
- Brody, E. (2011). *What is ignostic Judaism?: Thoughts of a secular, humanistic, cultural, "ignostic" Jew regarding science, religion and faith*. Bloomington, IN; Author House.
- Browne, K. (2005). Snowball sampling: Using social networks to research non-heterosexual women. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8(1), 47-60.
- Butt, R. (2009, March 17). Pope claims condoms could make African AIDS crisis worse. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/17/pope-africa-condoms-aids>
- Camp, D. L., Finlay, W. M. L. & Lyons, E. (2002). Is low self-esteem an inevitable consequence of stigma? An example of women with chronic mental health problems. *Social Science & Medicine*, 55(5), 823-834.
- Carl, M. (2012, September 17). Persecution of Christians on rise in U.S. *World Net Daily*. Retrieved from www.wnd.com/2012/09/persecution-of-christians-on-rise-in-u-s/
- Cimino, R. & Smith, C. (2007). Secular humanism and atheism beyond progressive secularism. *Sociology of Religion*, 68(4), 407-424.
- Cline, A. (2006, March 30). *Atheists discriminated against in child custody cases*. Retrieved from <http://atheism.about.com/b/2006/03/30/atheists-discriminated-against-in-child-custody-cases.htm>
- Cline, A. (2011). *Atheism vs. Agnosticism: What's the difference? Are they alternatives to each other?*. Retrieved from <http://atheism.about.com/od/aboutagnosticism/a/atheism.htm>
- Collier, K. (2012, June 15). Indonesian man imprisoned for atheist facebook comments. *The Daily Dot*. Retrieved from <http://mashable.com/2012/06/15/imprisoned-atheist-facebook/>

- Collins, M. (2009, July 10). Wamp, housemates hurt by link to scandals. *Knoxville News Sentinel*. Retrieved from <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2009/jul/10/c-street-group-hurt-by-links-to-scandals/>
- Crouse, E. R. (2002). Popular cold warriors: Conservative protestants, communism, and culture in early cold war America. *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 2(1).
- Dawkins, R. (2006). *The god delusion*. New York, NY; Bantam Press.
- Domhoff, G. W. (2005). Social cohesion & the bohemian grove: The power elite at summer camp. *Who rules America?* Retrieved from http://sociology.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/power/bohemian_grove.html
- Downey, M. (2004). Discrimination against Atheist: The facts. *Council for Secular Humanism*. Retrieved from http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/downey_24_4.htm
- Eddington, M. (2000, April 26). What happens if scouts must admit gays? *Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from <http://www.mormonstoday.com/000430/N1GayScouts02.shtml>
- Edgell, P., Gerteis, J., & Hartmann, D. (2006). Atheists as "other": Moral boundaries and cultural membership in American society. *American Sociological Review*, 71(2), 211-234
- Egelko, B. (2010, March 11). Appeals court says 'under god' not a prayer. *San Francisco Chronicle*. p. C1.
- Evans, R. J. (2003). *The coming of the third Reich*. New York, NY: The Penguin Press.
- Feagin, J. R. & Feagin, C. B. (1978). *Discrimination American style: Institutional racism and sexism*. New York, NY: Prentice-Hall.
- Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme and the Ligue de Défense des Droits de l'Homme en Iran. (2003, August). *Discrimination against religious minorities in Iran*. Retrieved from <http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/ir0108a.pdf>
- Fiala, A. (2008). Militant atheism, pragmatism, and the god-shaped hole. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 65(3), 139-151.
- Finlay, W. M. L., Dinos, S. & Lyons, E. (2001). Stigma and multiple social comparisons in people with schizophrenia. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 31(5), 579-592.
- Fitzgerald, B. (2003). Atheist career paths: The construction of a nonnormative identity. *Conference Papers -- American Sociological Association*, 1-15. doi:asa_proceeding_9245.PDF

- France, D., Ordonez, F., Kovach, G. C. & Bireda, S. (2001, August 6). Scouts divided. *Newsweek*, 138(6), 44-52.
- Galen, L. W. (2009). Profiles of the godless: Results from a survey of the non-religious. *Free Inquiry*, 29, 41-45.
- Gervais, W.M. (2011). Finding the faithless: Perceived atheist prevalence reduces anti-atheist prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(4), 543-556. doi: 10.1177/0146167211399583
- Gettleman, J. (2010, January 4). Americans' role seen in Uganda anti-gay push. *The New York Times*, pp. A1.
- Gilbert, L. & Walker, L. (2010). 'My biggest fear was the people would reject me once they knew my status...': Stigma as experienced by patients in an HIV/AIDS clinic in Johannesburg, South Africa. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 18(2), 139-146.
- Godman, P. (2004). *Hitler and the Vatican: Inside the secret archives that reveal the new story of the Nazis and the church*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Goodhart, M. (2009). *Human rights: Practice and politics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Goodstein, L. (2005, May 12). Air Force chaplain tells of academy proselytizing. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/12/education/12academy.html>
- Guttmacher Institute. (2011, July 13). States enact record number of anti-abortion restrictions I first half of 2011. *Guttmacher Institute Media Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.guttmacher.org/media/inthenews/2011/07/13/index.html>
- Hallowell, B. (2011, August 18). Is the tea party a spiritual movement? Retrieved from <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/is-the-tea-party-a-spiritual-movement/>
- Hamburger, T. & Gold, M. (2011, September 10). Evangelical pastors heed a political calling for 2012. *The Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/sep/10/nation/la-na-adv-christian-right-20110911>
- Harris, S. (2004). *The end of faith: Religion, terror and the future of reason*. New York, NY; W.W. Norton and Company Limited.
- Hasson, K. J. (2008). The myth: Is the religious liberty in America? *American spectator*, 41(1), 36-45.

- Hastings, S. E. & O'Neil, T. A. (2009) Predicting workplace deviance using broad versus narrow personality variables. *Personality & Individual Differences*, 47, 289–293.
- Hatcher, A. (2008). Adding god: Religious and secular press framing in response to the insertion of “under god” in the Pledge of Allegiance. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 7, 170-189.
- Heckathorn, D. (1997). Respondent driven sampling: A new approach to the study of hidden populations. *Social Problems*, 44(2), 174-199.
- Henry, M. (2012). *Matthew Henry's commentary, Versus 1-3*. Retrieved from <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalms+14%3A1&version=NIV>
- Hersh, S. (2011, January 21). Military branch being run by ‘crusaders’. *The Huffington Post*, Retrieved http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/21/seymour-hersh-military-crusaders_n_812363.html
- Hitchens, C. (2007). *God is not great: How religion poisons everything*. New York, NY: Hachette Book Group.
- Hogg, M. A., Hohman, Z. P., & Rivera, J. E. (2008). Why do people join groups? Three motivational accounts from social psychology. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(3), 1269-1280.
- Holyoake, G.J. (1896). *The Origin and Nature of Secularism*. London: Watts and Co.
- Hunsberger, B. E. & Altemeyer, B. (2006). *Atheists: A groundbreaking study of America's nonbelievers*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Jacoby, S. (2004). *Freethinkers: A history of American secularism*. New York, NY: Metropolitan.
- Jayne, E. (2000). A Brief history of secularism. *Freethought bibliography-Major secular texts*. Retrieved from <http://www.edwardjayne.com/secular/biblio.html>
- Kamguian, A. (2005, June 15). The Fate of Infidels and Apostates under Islam. Retrieved from <http://www.iheu.org/node/1540>
- Kesavan, M. (2003). India's embattled secularism. *Wilson Quarterly*, 27(1), 61.
- Leary, M. R., Tambor, E. S., Terdal, S. K., & Downs, D. L. (1995). Self-esteem as an interpersonal monitor: The sociometer hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68, 518–530.
- Lee, J. D. & Craft, E. A. (2002). Protecting one's self from a stigmatized disease...once one has it. *Deviant Behavior*, 23(3), 267-299.

- Lewis, J. (1946). *The ten commandments: An investigation into the origin and meaning of the Decalogue and an analysis of its ethical and moral value as a code of conduct in modern society*. New York, NY: FreeThought Press Association.
- Library of Congress. (1998, June). Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists. *Library of Congress Information Bulletin*, 57(6). Retrieved (2011, June 16) from <http://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html>
- Lindlof, T.R. & Taylor, B.C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
- Link, B. G., Cullen, F. T., Struening, E., ShROUT, P. E. & Dohrenwend, B. P. (1989). A modified labeling theory approach to mental disorders: An empirical assessment. *American Sociological Review*, 54, 400-423.
- Lu, A., & Chancey, L. (2008). I don't believe in god: Differentiating religious "nones" in American society. *Conference Papers -- American Sociological Association*, 1-8.
- Maddow, R. (January 5th, 2010). The Rachel Maddow Show. New York, NY: MSNBC.
- Maddow, R. (July 13th, 2011). The Rachel Maddow Show. New York, NY: MSNBC.
- Marshall Jr., T. C. (July 22nd, 2011). Obama commends military for handling of law's repeal. *U.S. Department of Defense*. Retrieved from <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=64781>
- Martinez, M. & Vercammen, P. (2012, October 18). Attorneys release confidential Boy Scouts files on alleged child sex abusers. *CNN Justice*. Retrieved from www.cnn.com/2012/10/18/justice/boys-scouts-sex-abuse-report/index.html
- McCraw, J. (2008). Know your enemy-The endorsers of proposition 8. *Government and Elections*. Retrieved from <http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2008/11/04/18548821.php>
- McKinley Jr., J. C. (2010, March 12). Texas conservatives win curriculum change. *The New York Times*, p. A10.
- Meacham, J. (2009, April 3). The end of Christian America. Retrieved from: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2009/04/03/the-end-of-christian-america.html>
- Milbank, D. (2001, December 24). Religious right finds its center in oval office. *The Washington Post*, p. A2.
- Mills, C.W. (1956). *The power elite*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Miovic, M. (2004). An introduction to spiritual psychology: Overview of the literature, east and west. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 12(2), 105-115.
doi:10.1080/10673220490447209
- Mohsenpour, B. (1988). Philosophy of education in post revolutionary Iran. *Comparative Education Review*, 32(1), 76-86.
- Mormons for Prop 8. (2009). Mormons for proposition 8 donors. *Mormons for Prop 8*. Retrieved (2009, December 14) from <http://mormonsfor8.com/>
- Muehlhauser, L. (2010, February 3). 17 kinds of atheism. *Common Sense Atheism*. Retrieved from <http://commonsenseatheism.com/?p=6487>
- Murphy, J. P. M. (1999). Hitler was not an atheist. *Free Inquiry*, 19(2), 9-10.
- Newton, F. (2008, July 28). Belief in god far lower in western U.S. *Gallup Poll*. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/109108/belief-god-far-lower-western-us.aspx>
- O'Brien, J. (2011). Spoiled group identities and backstage work: A theory of stigma management rehearsals. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 74(3), 291-309.
- O'Hair, M. (2009). Atheists neither citizens nor patriots. *Positive Atheism*. Retrieved from <http://www.positiveatheism.org/writ/ghwbush.htm>
- Pasandaran, C. (2012, January 19). 'God does not exist' comment ends badly for Indonesia man. Retrieved from <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/news/god-does-not-exist-comment-ends-badly-for-indonesia-man/492370>
- Phillips, M. (2009, February 5). This is my hope. This is my prayer. Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog_post/this_is_my_prayer/.
- Press Association. (2012, April 4). Christians are being persecuted and vilified claims former archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey. Retrieved from www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/04/14/christians-are-being-persecuted-and-vilified-claims-former-archbishop-of-canterbury-lord-carey_n_1425327.html
- Preston, A. (2010, January). The politics of realism and religion: Christian responses to Bush's new world order. *Diplomatic History*, 34(1).
- Robinson, B. A. (2008). *Ontario consultants on religious tolerance: Apathism: Does god exist? I don't know & I don't really care*. Retrieved from <http://www.religioustolerance.org/apatheism.htm>

- Sessions, D. (2011, August 18). Tea party: Is it the Christian right in disguise? Retrieved from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/08/18/tea-party-is-it-the-christian-right-in-disguise.html>
- Sharlet, J. (2008). *The family: The secret fundamentalism at the heart of American power*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
- Sharlet, J. (2010). *C street: The fundamentalist threat to American democracy*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.
- Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting qualitative data*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Smith, G. H. (1979). *Atheism: The case against god*. Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books.
- Smith, J. M. (2011). Becoming an atheist in America: Constructing identity and meaning from the rejection of theism. *Sociology of Religion*, 72(2), 215-237.
- Spiegel, D. (1998). Inside the Vatican files. *World Press Review*, 45(11), 42-43.
- Srikrishnan, M., Pliner, J., Schlesinger, J., Goldstein, J. & Khan, H. (2010, November 3). *Which tea party candidates won?* Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/2010_Elections/vote-2010-elections-tea-party-winners-losers/story?id=12023076
- Stahl, M. (2010, September 30). *Putting atheists on a "national registry"- What say you?* Retrieved from <http://pastorstahl.blogspot.com/2010/09/putting-atheists-on-national-registry.html>
- Starobin, P. (2009). The godless rise as a political force. *National Journal*.
- Stenger, V. J. (2009). *The new atheism: Taking a stand for science and reason*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Taibbi, M. (2010, September 28). The truth about the tea party. *Rolling Stone Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/matt-taibbi-on-the-tea-party-20100928>
- Tapp, R. B. (2008). The universal declaration of human rights: Still ahead of it time? *The Humanist*, 68(6). 7-9.
- Thorpe, L., Solomon, R. & Dimopoulos, M. (2004). *From shame to pride: Access to sexual assault services for indigenous people*. Fairfield, Australia: Elizabeth Hoffman House.

- Thrower, J. (2000). *Western atheism: A short history*. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books.
- Timbol, E. (2012, August 16). American Christians cannot claim persecution. Retrieved from www.huffingtonpost.com/emily-timbol/american-christians-cannot-claim-persecution_b_1772863.html
- Torcaso v. Watkins, 367 U.S. 488 (1961).
- USA Today. (2011, July 23). States enact record wave of anti-abortion laws. *USA Today online*. Retrieved from http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2011-07-23-anti-abortion-laws_n.htm
- Volokh, E. (2007, February 6). Parent-child speech and child custody speech restrictions. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eugene-volokh/parentchild-speech-and-ch_b_40550.html
- Wald, K. D. & Calhoun-Brown, A. (2007). Religion and politics in the United States (5th Ed.). Lanham, MD; Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Watts, F.N. (2009). History of Modern Atheism. *Investigating atheism-University of Cambridge*. Retrieved from <http://www.investigatingatheism.info/history.html>
- Weber, M. (1998). *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publications.
- Westbrook, L. E., Bauman, L. J. & Shinnar, S. (1992). Applying stigma theory to epilepsy: A test of a conceptual model. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 17(5), 633-649.
- White, J. (2005, June 23). Intolerance found at Air Force Academy. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/22/AR2005062200598.html>
- Wright, W. (2002). *Harvard's secret court: The savage 1920 purge of campus homosexuals*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Yurica, K. (2004). The despoiling of America: How George W. Bush became the head of the new American Dominionist church/state. Retrieved from http://www.yuricareport.com/Dominionism/TheDespoilingOfAmerica.htm#_edn1

APPENDIX A

Call for Participants

Research on labeling as it applies to Atheists and Agnostics

ATTN: All Atheists, Agnostics and non-religious persons

Are you an Atheist, Agnostic, or other non-religious person? I am searching for participants in a graduate level study aimed at investigating how Atheists and non-religious persons view the world around them. If you are interested in participating, please read the proceeding information and contact me at the email address listed below. Thank you.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to investigate how self-identified Atheists, Agnostics and non-religious persons think about and experience their beliefs.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

- Investigate the Atheist/agnostic experience in the United States.
- Contribute to the broader understanding of the connections between religion, moral entrepreneurship, and relations of power.
- Contribute to the larger body of work suggesting that Atheists and Agnostics represent important perspectives in modern democracies.

INTERVIEW CRITERIA

This study will consist of a semi-structured interview lasting approx. 30-60 minutes in length, and conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area. Participation is open to adults age 18 years or older regardless of race, gender, social status, sexual orientation, etc. and who self-identify as Atheist, agnostic, or non-religious. Participants' identities will remain anonymous and there is no compensation available for those who choose to participate.

If you would like to participate, please contact:

Damian Bramlett (Researcher; M.S. Grad Student, San José State University)

damianbramlett@yahoo.com

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

A study by a student of the San José State University (SJSU) Justice Studies Department

Agreement to Participate in Research (Interviews and Focus Groups)

Responsible Investigator(s): Damian Bramlett, Grad Student, SJSU

Title of Protocol: *Godless Americans: Non-religious Persons in a Religious Society*

1. You are being asked to participate in a research study investigating how Atheists, Agnostics and secularists view the labels applied to them by religious persons. This study is not being conducted by a religious person or anyone affiliated with a religious group, church, etc. Currently, non-religious persons are viewed as not to be trusted in American society. The goal of this interview is to investigate how Atheists/Agnostics/secularists view themselves in society. The hope is that this study may help in changing the perspective of non-religious persons among religious individuals and/or groups.
2. You will be asked to participate in an (approximately) one-hour interview or focus group with the principle researcher in a public (safe) place of your choosing. I will also have some standard locations for you to choose from if necessary. You will be asked to discuss a series of questions regarding your experiences and perceptions as an Atheist, Agnostic, and/or non-religious person. Interviews and focus groups will be recorded with a digital recorder, and saved to a computer file.
3. Though I do not foresee any serious risk to your participation, there is some chance that questions or focus group conversations might make you feel uncomfortable. *You do not have to answer any questions or participate in any conversations that make you uncomfortable in any way.* If at any time you feel uncomfortable with a question or conversation, let me know, and I will move on to the next question.
4. Though I do not foresee any direct benefit for your participation in this interview or focus group, you will be making an indirect contribution to your community. Your participation is a great help in these efforts, and is appreciated.

Participant's initials _____

5. Although the results of this study may be published, information that could identify you WILL NOT be included. You will have the opportunity to choose a pseudonym (fake name) that I will use in transcribing the interview or focus group discussion. Each interview and focus group will be recorded as a digital audio file, and kept on the primary researchers' private hard drive pending transcription. At the point of transcription, your name will be replaced with the pseudonym of your choice, and the original recording will be permanently erased. All records, presentations, or publications from this research WILL NOT include your name or personal information. The information you provide, including your identity, WILL NOT be shared with any person or group. *All interviews will be kept absolutely and completely anonymous—your identity and your feedback will be kept absolutely safe and secret indefinitely.*
6. There is no compensation for your participation in this study, though your time and energy are greatly appreciated.
7. Questions about this research may be addressed to:

Damian Bramlett

P.O. Box 2642

Dublin, CA 94568

Complaints about the research may be presented to:

Dr. William Armaline

SJSU, Justice Studies Dept.

One Washington Square, MH 508

San José, CA 95192-0050

Questions about research subjects' rights or research-related injury may be presented to:

Pamela Stacks, Ph.D.

Associate Vice President

Graduate Studies and Research

(408) 924-2427

8. No service of any kind, to which you are otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose not to participate in this study. Your consent is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or in any part of the study. You have the right not to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative effect on any relations you may have with San José State University.

9. At the time that you sign this consent form, you will receive a copy of it for your records, signed and dated by the investigator.

The signature of a subject on this document indicates agreement to participate in the study.

The signature of a researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the above named subject in the research and attestation that the subject has been fully informed of his or her rights.

_____	_____
Participant's Signature	Date

_____	_____
Investigator's Signature	Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Godless Americans: How Non-Religious Persons are Labeled as Deviant in a Religious Society

Brief Project Description

“This project is designed to investigate how Atheists and non-religious persons view the world around them. This study is not affiliated with any religious institution, and findings WILL NOT be shared with any religious organization. My hope is these findings might help non-religious and religious persons to devise and develop ways in which to coexist peacefully.”

“I will take several steps to protect your identity, and to make sure this interview remains anonymous. Though I have to record the interview, all interviews will be transcribed (copied in writing). When I transfer the interviews from recording to writing, I will replace your name with a fake one and destroy the original recording. That way, there is nothing connecting you or your identity to the information you share with me.”

“As you can see (**provide consent form**) I have given you a form that outlines and protects your rights to anonymity and your rights to inquire further about my project and project findings. Signing the form protects me, in that I have explained all of these things to you, and protects you, in that you can hold me accountable for violating the trust we have so far established. One copy is for me, and one copy is for you to keep. Once the forms are signed we can begin the recorded interview. Thank you again! Do you have any questions [address them]? OK, let’s begin.”

HAVE PARTICIPANT SIGN CONSENT FORM

BEGIN RECORDING INTERVIEW HERE

(Make sure to do a quick sound check first!)

Recorded Consent

“[Interviewee’s FIRST name*], you have read and signed a consent form stating you understand the purpose of the interview, your rights as an interviewee, and the purposes of this project, is that correct? You have agreed to be recorded for this interview, and have been informed of your right to remain anonymous, is that correct? You have the right to refuse to answer any question at any time. You also have the right to end the interview at any time, for any reason. I would like to thank you again for helping me in my research.”

***Do NOT ask for, or purposely record the last names of interview participants.**

Establish Pseudonym

“To protect your identity, I will replace your name with a fake name of your choice when I transcribe (copy the interview in writing) the interviews. Do you have a name you would like me to use? If not, I can choose one for you.”

Substantive Interview Questions (Interview Guide)

Introductory Questions

1. What do you do for a living (Work, school, unemployed, entrepreneur, etc.)?
2. Are you involved with your community? Do you participate in community organizations or activities? (Schools, churches, clubs, etc.)
3. Do you identify as an Atheist, Agnostic, or non-religious individual?
 - a. What does being a non-religious person mean to you?

Religious Experience/Perception

4. What religion, if any, were you raised in? Was it a strict or lenient religious upbringing?
5. Have you ever attended other churches, synagogues or mosques? How would you compare it to the religion/church you were raised in?
6. Please tell me whether you consider yourself spiritual or not and how does this play a role in your daily life?
7. Was there a point or event in your life when you decided to be Atheist, Agnostic or non-religious?
8. What is your general view of organized religion and do you think it serves a purpose in American society/culture?
 - a. What is your general view of religious persons?
 - b. Do you think organized religion helps or hinders U.S. citizens?
9. When you think of the United States do you see it as a secular place? Why or why not?
 - a. What about California?
10. Do you feel that religious persons/groups hold much power (political, social, etc.) within the U.S.? Do you think this power has a strong (negative/positive) influence on our society?
 - a. If negative, what do you think is a possible solution to this disparity?

Perception of Deviance

11. Have you ever felt discriminated against because you self identify as an Atheist or Agnostic individual? Describe a specific event that you can remember?
12. Do you believe that you are an “outsider” because of your lack of religious faith? How does this label make you feel?
13. Do you feel you have to hide your Atheist/Agnostic beliefs from others? If yes, why?
14. Have you ever been accepted/rejected within your family or community because of your Atheist/Agnostic beliefs?
 - a. How does it make you feel?
15. Do you feel that you have not been able to achieve career, financial, or interpersonal success because of your Atheist/Agnostic/non-religious beliefs?

Demographics

16. What is your age?
17. What is your gender [**don't ask if obvious**]?
18. How do you identify ethnically?
19. What is your marital status (single, married, divorced, widowed)?
20. Do you have any children?
21. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
22. What is your current annual income?
23. What country were you born in?
24. Do you have any questions or comments for me?

APPENDIX D

Demographic Data

Sample Demographics		<i>n</i> = 30
Age	18-20	1
	21-30	7
	31-40	6
	41-50	4
	51-60	3
	61-70	7
	71+	2
Gender	Female	14
	Male	16
Ethnicity	White (non-Hispanic)	26
	Asian	2
	Black	1
	Other/Mixed	1
Marital status	Single	14
	Married	13
	Common law	1
	Divorced	2
	Widowed	0
Number of children	with	12
	without	18
Highest level of education	High school	2
	Some college	8
	Associate's	1
	Bachelor's	6
	Master's	5
	Doctorate	8
Nationality	American	23
	Australian	1
	Austrian	1
	British	1
	Chilean	1
	Czech	1
	German	1
	Indian	1
Citizenship	Yes	28
	No	2
Income	below \$20,000	8
	\$20,000-39,999	3
	\$40,000-59,999	7
	\$60,000-79,999	5

	\$80,000-99,999	4
	\$100,000-119,999	0
	\$120,000-139,999	1
	above \$140,000	2
Career field	Retired	6
	Student	6
	Teacher/Professor	3
	Unemployed	3
	Science	2
	Other	2
	Parent	2
	Military	1
	Arts/Humanities	1
	Medical	1
	Legal	1
	Business	1
	Technical	1
Non-religious claim	Atheist	21
	Agnostic	5
	Non-religious	4
Religious upbringing	Christian/Protestant	20
	Judaism	3
	Hinduism	1
	Other/Non-religious	6