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*St. Catherine University*

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The Impact of Social and Family Support on the Psychological Well-being  
of Atheists

By

Justin R. Potter, B.A.

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work  
University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
In Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at the University of St. Thomas/St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social work research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

**Abstract**

Extensive research has been done on various religious groups, but few studies have looked at the experiences of atheists. This study investigated how perceived support from friends and family impacts atheists on facets of psychological wellbeing. Five atheist organizations were contacted, and asked to forward the survey onto their list servers. Five hundred eighty-three self-identified atheists participated in this study. Participants were given the Ryff Psychological Wellbeing scales and were asked questions related to how much support participants received from friends and family regarding their non-beliefs. Results indicate that atheists who received more support from friends and family score statistically significantly higher on positive relations with others, autonomy, purpose in life and self-acceptance. These results suggest how friends and family members treat individuals who identify as atheist can impact their long-term development and wellbeing. Additionally, this study offers some suggestions that atheist organizations can implement to provide outreach to their members.

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## Introduction

The construct of atheism is fairly well established within the field of philosophy; however, the concept of atheism is still in its nascency in the academic world. Atheism is slowly gaining recognition as a group with gravitas in the United States. Unfortunately, the general public perceives and understands atheism differently, based on conflicting representations. For example, media portrayals of atheists are complex and idiosyncratic. There are individuals who champion science and intellectualism such as Neil DeGrasse Tyson and Bill Nye. Comedian Bill Maher, whose comedy routinely focuses on what he perceives to be the foolishness of religious people or organizations, receives ample visibility, on mainstream television. Richard Dawkins, an atheist pontificator, harshly criticizes all practices of religion and advocates for the end of all religion. Consequently, the general public may have widely divergent views and perceptions of atheists and the roles atheism plays in our culture. The impetus for this paper springs from working with individuals who have divested themselves from their religious identity and seek an identity, and community, that receives and accepts their non-religious orientation.

The consequences of being a non-believer in the United States often yields negative consequences within one's family and social life (Edgell, Gerteis & Hartmann, 2006; Galen & Kloet, 2011). Gervais (2013) determined that being an atheist might even hurt one's chances of being elected to political office. Currently, there are six states that contain language in their state constitution prohibiting atheists from holding political office (Gervais, 2013).

The purpose of this research is, first, to expand the literature on the role social support plays on the psychological wellbeing of individuals who identify themselves as

being either an atheist or agnostic in the United States. The second goal of this research is to propose a theoretical framework that could be utilized as a model for future studies.

Lastly, this research will examine how often atheists feel the need to hide or conceal their beliefs.

### **Literature Review**

Recent polls reflect a decline in the role that religion plays in the lives of Americans. Reoccurring Gallup (n.d.) polls found 12% of Americans “do not believe in God or a universal spirit,” while only 2% of Americans hold “no opinion on god.” These statistics are in contrast to 1994 polls, indicating 3% of respondents “do not believe in God or a universal spirit.” Moreover, it is argued that the importance of religion in the lives of individuals in America is waning as well. In 2013, 56% of the respondents said religion was “very important” to their lives, while 22% of the respondents said religion was “fairly important,” and 22% expressed that religion was “not very important” to their lives. Again, these polls are a marked contrast from the 1993 data, when respondents rated the importance of religion in their lives quite differently. In 1993, 59% of the respondents stated religion was “very important,” while 29% indicated religion was “fairly important” and the remaining 12% of those polled, felt religion was “not important” in their lives.

One of the larger challenges in studying the topic of atheism is that there is little to no consensus, which operationally defines atheists, agnostics or non-believers, both within academia and the general population. The term “atheism” conceivably refers to a wide spectrum of people who do not believe in a higher power. This spectrum ranges from adamant belief that there is no god/higher power to uncertainty that there might be a

god/higher power, and finally, to indifference. For the purpose of this study, “non-believer” will be used primarily to reference the atheism spectrum. Furthermore, “non-believer” will operationally be defined as any individual who does not believe in, or is skeptical of, any supernatural or religious higher power. Moreover, any individual who self-identifies him or herself as an atheist, agnostic, secular humanist, bright or a free-thinker will be included in the study as well.

The empirical literature dedicated to studying the topic of non-belief is few. Brewster, Robinson, Sandil, Eposito & Geiger (2014) performed a content analysis of 100 articles published between 2001-2012, across multiple disciplines, including psychology, sociology and religious studies. The results found 58% of the articles reviewed were not empirical; they lacked breadth, particularly in terms of topics covered. Namely, the topics discussed compared religious or spiritual belief systems, as well as atheism and a discussion of bias against atheism (Brewster, et al., 2014). Brewster et al. (2014) noted only a few studies focused on psychological elements of mental health, such as well-being, distress, or isolation. The last two years showed an increase in the literature on the topics of non-belief. This may be due to the emergence of the discussion of spirituality and its relationship to physical and mental health; it may also reflect an increase in visibility and discussions by more vocal atheists.

### **Identity**

The term “identity” engenders a variety of meanings within the life of the social sciences and the general public. For purposes of this study, the use of the term “identity” is defined as: “a self, composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies” (Stryker & Burke,

2000, p. 284). An individual's self-identity is fluid and one's self-identification may alter in response to interaction with others. Inevitably, one's self-defined identities will conflict. Ultimately, such conflict leads the various self-identities to coalesce and organize into a "salience hierarchy;" in other words, an individual chooses which identity to use (Stryker & Burker, 2000, p. 286). Identity salience is defined as "the probability that an identity will be invoked across a variety of situations, or alternatively across persons in a given situation" (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 286).

When it comes to interpersonal relationships, individuals typically live and interact within small, similarly focused networks of people (Stryker & Burke, 2000). On the whole, individuals desire to maintain, and remain in, these networks. This sense of belonging to a network produces "commitment." Commitment is defined as: "The degree to which persons' relationships to others in their networks depend on possessing a particular identity and role" (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 286). Commitment is measured by an individual's desire to maintain a relationship, which in turn influences how important one's identity is, as reflected in exhibited behaviors and roles (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Stryker and Serpe (1982) suggested the salience of a religious identity ultimately predicts the amount of time spent participating in religious activities as well as an individual's commitment to maintaining that religious identity. From this finding, it is reasonable to infer that an individual who realizes he or she may identify as an atheist, might feel forced to withdraw from religious activities, leading to the loss of significant relationships with those individuals. Burke (1991) reported that when an individual falls within the minority, and receives feedback from others that conflicts with his or her

identity, the individual suffers from an identity interruption. Such an interruption in identity causes an individual to experience stress. The typical response in this scenario is to change the behavior to match the salient identity. However, individuals who feel they cannot match their salient identity with appropriate behaviors may feel further stressed. This situation is one in which many non-believers are unwillingly placed on a regular basis. A non-believer may be told to attend church with his or her family. A non-believer must then choose an identity that maintains a relationship with his or her family. The non-believer may capitulate, attend church without complaint, or if intent to honor his or her own belief system, risks upsetting the family balance by his or her choice.

### **Types of Atheists**

In an effort to create a typology for atheists, Silver (2013) did extensive interviews with atheists to see if there were characteristics or traits among those who identified as atheists. Silver (2013) determined there were six types of atheists or agnostics. The six types are: The Intellectual Atheist/Agnostic (IAA), the Activist Atheist/Agnostic, (AAA), Seeker Agnostics (SA), Anti-theists, Non-theists and Ritual Atheists/Agnostics (RAA) (Silver, 2013).

**Intellectual Atheist/Agnostic.** IAAs consistently seek to further improve their knowledge, typically through education (Silver, 2013). IAAs seek healthy-spirited debates and discussions in an effort to deepen their understanding of religion. IAAs will engage in these discussions in both electronic forums and actual physical meetings. These individuals are typically well read in ontological findings, both in the affirmative and negative of his or her personal position. In addition to being well-informed in theology,

these individuals are typically also well-versed on issues in socio-political, philosophy, culture and science.

**Activist Atheist/Agnostic.** AAAs are typically vocal and proactive on issues related to atheists or agnostics (Silver, 2013). They are not only articulate and vocal about issues concerning the separation of church and state, they tend to be actively involved in promoting current issues and topics, such as human rights, feminism, gay rights, environment, animal rights and politics. Their involvement in these issues range from education of friends or family to joining marches for a specific cause or legal action.

**Seeker Agnostic.** SAs tend to explore and understand their beliefs as well as the beliefs of others (Silver, 2013). These individuals acknowledge the complexities and limitations of human knowledge and philosophy. Most SAs will admit to uncertainty, and freely acknowledge they do not possess 100% certainty on the existence of a god. SAs do not hold a firm position on their beliefs, but rather it waxes and wanes as they journey towards personal and philosophical truth. Many SAs tend to rely heavily on science, but they also accept there are limitations to its application. They rely upon personal experiences and philosophy to fill in the gaps in their knowledge base. Unlike the other types of atheists, SAs accept and embrace uncertainty with open arms. Some SAs suffer from being labeled. They are often viewed as being “too much of a believer” by their fellow atheists, or conversely, they are labeled as having “too little belief” by those with faith. This often results in exclusion from social affiliations, opportunities and events that strengthen connections with friends and family.

**Anti-Theist.** Anti-theists are wholly opposed to the idea of religion (Silver, 2013). These atheists may self-identify as “new atheists” or be known to others as

“militant atheists.” Many anti-theists view religion as an outdated concept and view any individual who has religious beliefs as unenlightened and ignorant. Anti-theists will forcefully attempt to educate those who hold religious beliefs and typically in a hostile manner.

**Non-theist.** Non-theists are individuals who hold no interest or opinion on religion (Silver, 2013). Other terms that might best describe their views are “apathetic” or “indifferent” (Silver, 2013, p. 119). These individuals typically do not have any agenda for, or against, religion. A non-theist does not bother with religion and, in short, they simply do not believe.

**Ritual Atheist.** RAAs tend to hold no belief in a higher power or they view it as unlikely (Silver, 2013). RAAs are open and honest about their beliefs and may educate themselves on other religions or beliefs held by others. The quintessential difference between RAAs and the others types of atheists/agnostics is that they acknowledge religious traditions may hold some value. They may view religious teachings as a guide on how to live life or a means to find transcendence. For example, these individuals might be involved in holiday traditions, yoga or meditation (Silver, 2013). These individuals may be wrongly labeled as spiritual but not religious; however, these individuals will then correct others and explain their position of non-belief.

### **Discrimination/Bias**

Unlike race, an individual’s religious beliefs are not something immediately discernable from a quick glance. Even an individual’s actions do not solely determine his or her belief system. However, once an individual does voice his or her non-belief, bias from others begins to manifest itself. Even if not immediate, negative bias may declare

itself in the life of the non-believer, particularly if the non-believing individual comes from a more religious family. Galen (2009) found non-believing individuals, who come from religious backgrounds, had more strained or stigmatized relationships with family members when compared to individuals who did not come from a religious background.

Americans often use an individual's faith as a measure of morality and character. This perception might explain why atheists are the least trusted group in America (Edgell et al., 2006). Edgell et al. (2006) found Americans believe atheists are least likely to hold the same vision for American society, as the general public does. Additionally, 47.6% of parents stated they would disprove of their child marrying an atheist—edging out the next closest disapproved religious group or ethnicity—Muslims—by 14% (Edgell et al., 2006). Atheists continue to be viewed in a negative light by most Americans; this perception has remained stable over the years, as recent polls conclude (Pew Foundation, 2014). A more recent study asked participants to rate their views of other religious groups on a scale of 0 (negative as possible) and 100 (positive as possible). The study found atheists held an average score of 41. Again, this is a one-point distinction from the even lesser trusted ethnic group of Muslims (Pew Foundation, 2014).

Politically, Americans are overwhelmingly against the notion of an atheist holding public office (Gervais, 2013). According to a 2007 Gallup poll, atheists were the only group unable to acquire a majority vote in an election. The same Gallup (2007) poll found only 45% of respondents surveyed would be willing to vote for an atheist candidate (as cited in Gervais, 2013). Comparatively, of those who were polled, 55% said they would vote for an openly gay politician. This poll is further supported in a study conducted by Franks & Scherr (2013). The authors determined that, as a group,

Christians were significantly less likely to vote for an atheist candidate when compared to a white, heterosexual, Christian candidate, or a black, heterosexual, Christian candidate. Christians were also less likely to vote for an atheist candidate when compared to a gay, white, Christian candidate, although this difference was not statistically significant (Franks & Scherr, 2013). Franks & Scherr (2013) suggested, notwithstanding a lack of statistical significance, there is still a moderate impact of negative perception when maintaining an atheistic identity, which may result in a candidate losing, rather than winning, an election. Furthermore, Christians considered an atheist candidate the least trustworthy of all candidates. This study suggests that if voters maintain a Christian majority status, it would be extremely difficult to have an atheist elected into office.

Smith (2013) suggested the distrust for atheists might be related to the perception that morality is deeply intertwined with religion. As such, the general population's belief systems and perceptions regarding a non-believer's rejection of god may preclude them from trusting a non-believer to hold office. It is conceivable the general population maintains idiosyncratic beliefs about non-believers. Perhaps the general public does not believe an atheist possesses a moral compass to guide one's decisions or inform one's choices to do "the right thing." The public may fear atheists, perceived lack of moral foundation as empowering the atheist to not "serve" what is in the public interest. A negative perception of atheists or non-believers, by the public, further fuels feelings of mistrust and being misunderstood between, and among, the general population and atheists or non-believers.

Another reason for public distrust may be due to statements and behaviors of militant atheists like Richard Dawkins, who openly and aggressively decries religious

practices. Such ardent expositions from militant atheists often disrupts the status quo and causes “push back” from those who comprise the majority. The general public may perceive vocal atheists, such as Dawkins, as a representative of the views of all atheists. A similar comparison is how violent Islamic extremists shape the general public’s perception of Muslims.

### **Atheist Framework/Model**

Currently, literature is unavailable on research for identity conflict for atheists. Alternatively, models developed for the LGBT population may be applied to non-believers for identity conflict. Both groups are minorities, hold identities that challenge mainstream cultural and religious beliefs, are often misperceived as lacking morals, and their identities are not immediately discernable through appearances. The rationale for not utilizing an accepted faith-based model for research on identity conflicts is due to the fact that when one changes his or her faith to another faith or religious denomination, a belief in a Higher Power is still maintained. Although changing from one religion or theistic belief system to another might engender ill will within the confines of an individual’s religious background identity, it is conceivable that maintaining a theistic core or maintaining faith in a god, is more acceptable and a better alternative than rejecting a belief in a god, altogether. Members of a theistic community may not approve of an individual switching from Christianity to Judaism, for example, but it may be far preferable to one proclaiming no theistic belief whatsoever.

**Conflict between gender identity and faith.** Levy & Reves (2011) summarize five options Christian LGBT have at their disposal, when they realize there is a conflict between their religious beliefs and sexual identity. A Christian LGBT may choose to 1)

reject their sexual identity; 2) reject their faith; 3) synthesize their identities; 4) compartmentalize, or 5) choose to live with the conflict. For atheists, their options are merely to reject their new beliefs of atheism, reject their old beliefs of Christianity, compartmentalize their emotions or continue to live with the conflict. Levy & Reves (2011) proposed a five stage process (seen in Figure 1) that LGBT consider when trying to resolve their sexual identity with their religious one.

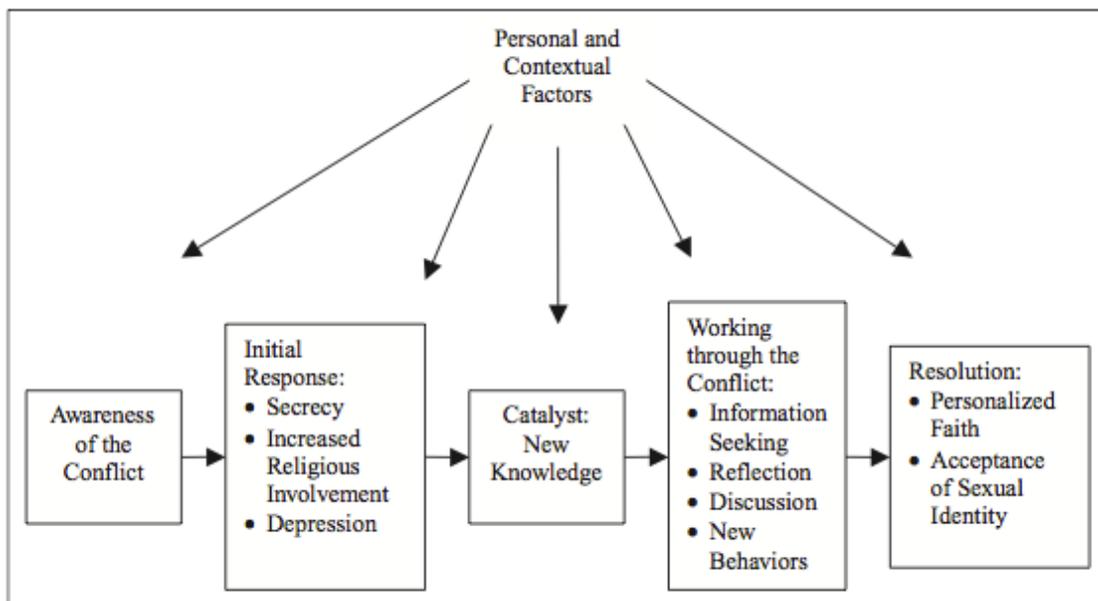


Figure 1: Model of internal conflict resolution for LGBT (Levy & Reves, 2011).

From this framework, a model for atheists or non-believers may be derived. Initially, atheists/non-believers may realize their religious beliefs conflict with other parts of their identity. Upon recognizing their conflicting beliefs, non-believers' initial response may be to become more secretive about their new beliefs, become depressed or invest themselves more deeply into their religious tradition. Eventually, non-believers' may acquire knowledge that challenges their old religious identity with their new religious identity. The atheist or non-believer may discover new ideas or find

substantiation for their non-theistic beliefs through rigorous scrutiny of previous held religious beliefs, or newly acquired knowledge from exposure to other non-believers literature. Additional negative influences from militant religious groups, such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, extreme Christian fundamentalists, or even from the rise of religion in politics, may influence their newly formed non-theistic identity (Smith, 2013).

Once a catalyst to their traditional religious beliefs appears, a non-believer will work his or her way through it by seeking more information, reflecting upon current beliefs, identifying the conflict with the old belief systems, and engaging in discussion with others. This catalyst may also result in changing the individual's behavior, which could include the exploration of new religions or ceasing involvement with current religious practices. The act of seeking additional information matches what was proposed by Silver (2013), when he described intellectual atheist/agnostics. Ultimately, a resolution is made between the old religious beliefs and the non-beliefs. This is where identity salience emerges and the identity will be resolved if the identity standards are congruent with one another (Burke, 1991).

**Discrimination among LGBT.** Little is known about how widespread and prevalent discrimination is against atheists. It is for this reason, which documented discrimination towards LGBT can serve as a parallel model for future research to be based on. Research confirms the LGBT community experiences problems with bullying, discrimination and homelessness (Haas et al., 2011; Mays & Cochran, 2001; Ray, 2006). Ray (2006) found 42% of homosexuals or bisexuals attributed the discrimination they routinely experienced as explicitly due to their sexual orientation. Pew Research (2013) found 43% of the LGBT sampled had been victims of slurs or jokes regarding their

identity, although it had not happen in the past year. Another 16% of the LGBT surveyed stated such bullying occurred within the last year.

Collectively, Pew Research (2013) found 39% of their sample was rejected by a family member due to their sexual orientation, but only 6% stated that their rejection occurred within the last year. Furthermore, 30% had been threatened as a result of their sexual identity, but, again, only 4% stated the rejection occurred within the last year. Additional research found 23% of the LGBT population reported they received poor service in a place of business, and 5% stated it occurred within the last year. Lastly, 21% of the LGBT surveyed stated they were treated unfairly by their employer; only 5% stated such unfair treatment occurred in the last year.

Ray (2006) estimated that anywhere between 20-40% of homeless youth identify themselves as LGBT. With an estimated 3-5% of the United States' population identifying as LGBT, it suggests LGBT are disproportionately overrepresented within the homeless youth population. It is conceivable that non-believers face a similar problem with homelessness due to distrustful views of them and non-believing youth are consequently cast out from their families.

### **Support**

As noted, there are a number of health benefits from having strong convictions or beliefs, irrespective of the religiosity of beliefs (Galen & Kloet, 2011). Galen & Kloet (2011) found individuals who have strong beliefs that god exists, or does not exist, will have a significantly higher life satisfaction when compared to those who are less certain. It appears that conviction of belief or disbelief is more beneficial than uncertainty. Additionally, those with stronger convictions or beliefs scored higher on levels for

emotional stability, when compared to those with weaker beliefs or uncertainty (Galen & Kloet, 2011).

Aside from the social support garnered from the faith community, when one espouses a strong faith, one's friends and family are often an additional significant source of support. Social networks are frequently formed among individuals who share similar backgrounds and views; this concept is known as homophily (Ueno, Wright, Gayman & McCabe, 2012). As individuals develop their social networks, they restructure and reform their social networks to include others who have similar belief systems. For non-believers this often becomes an arduous task. Since non-believers are a small community, and it is not possible to readily identify those who do or do not believe without disclosing their own non-belief, identification of those with similar non-theistic beliefs becomes difficult. This process parallels what LGBT people experience, when their identities are forming, while being shaped by both stigmatization and their social networks. Gottschalk (2007) found that LGBT people who lived in rural regions felt much more isolated than those in urban areas due to the lack of social networks and resources available to them. While the parallels between LGBT people and non-believers does not provide a perfect comparison, particularly since the data was gathered in 1994, several years before the Internet began its ascent into everyday use, it does suggest problems of isolation may arise when an individual views his or herself as a part of a stigmatized minority.

There are several hypotheses investigated by this study: Non-believers, not supported by their family when they initially started identifying as a non-believer, will have lower scores on positive relationships with others. Non-believers, not supported by their friends when they initially started identifying as a non-believer, will have lower

scores on positive relationships with others. Non-believers, not presently supported by their family with respect to their non-beliefs, will have lower scores on positive relationships with others. Non-believers, not presently supported by their friends in regards to their non-beliefs, will have lower scores on positive relationships with others. Individuals who come from more religious families will have lower scores on the positive relations with others scale than those who came from less religious families. Support from family members in the past will remain stable and will not change, when compared to present support. This research will evaluate whether the discrimination that LGBT people experience similar to what non-believers experience.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study utilizes two theories to interpret and frame the questions and discuss the results. The first will be system theory because the major hypotheses in this study hinge on whether atheists feel isolated from others due to their beliefs going against the norms that have been established by American culture. The second framework that will be utilized is minority stress theory. Much like the LGBT population, non-believers are stigmatized and viewed with negative biases (Edgell et al., 2006). Individuals who constantly feel they are in stressful situations may experience negative mental health and physical health. System theory and minority stress theory are useful to interpret these and other results (Meyer, 2003).

### **Systems Theory**

Systems theory will be utilized to examine the results of this research. Systems theory is an ideal way of investigating the data because it serves as a means to analyze how the environmental factors influence the individual. Systems theory is derived from a

biological theoretical perspective, which was applied to social and family systems (Brown & Christensen, 1998). The underlying principle is that an individual is surrounded by many different systems, which are made up of individuals, groups or units. The actions of the systems surrounding the individual influence their decisions and, in turn, the decisions of the individual influence the systems around them (Brown & Christensen, 1998). Four main concepts from systems theory will be utilized: wholeness, feedback, homeostasis, and equifinality.

The concept of wholeness suggests a system is comprised of its parts and it is impossible to fully understand the individual without examining the parts that make up that individual (Brown & Christensen, 1998). Feedback is how individuals who make up the system interact with and communicate with one another and results in change within either the individual or the system (Brown & Christensen, 1998). Homeostasis is the system's attempt to remain stable despite the changes that are occurring (Brown & Christensen, 1998). The concept of equifinality is that there are many different ways to resolve a conflict and what is important is the end result (Brown & Christensen, 1998).

The following assumptions of systems theory, as identified by (Green, n.d.): A system is comprised of interrelated individuals who act as a unit. The limits of the system can be seen as arbitrarily drawn or established by its members. These limits give the system an identity and allow it, as well as others, to distinguish one system from other systems. All the systems are part of larger systems. Any changes made within one system will cause changes in response to the initial change. Furthermore, any of these changes result in the system attempt to correct the change to remain in homeostasis.

### **Minority Stress Theory**

Meyer (2003) proposed minority stress theory as a way to understand the negative physical and mental health consequences of identifying as LGBT. This is far from a new theory; it has been proposed by numerous sociologists in the past to explain the negative health effects of being a member of a minority group. The theory suggests the experience a socially oppressed individual endures negatively impacts their physical health. Their experience of prejudice, expectation that they will be rejected, being forced to hide their identity and other coping behaviors lead to the individual suffering (Meyer, 2003). Due to the negative perception of non-believers in America, this theory provides a useful lens to understand or explain any differences found in the psychological wellbeing of non-believers. According to Meyer (2003) minority stress theory is:

- (A) unique—that is, minority stress is additive to general stressors that are experienced by all people, and therefore, stigmatized people are required an adaptation effort above that required of similar others who are not stigmatized;
- (b) chronic—that is, minority stress is related to relatively stable underlying social and cultural structures; and (c) socially based—that is, it stems from social processes, institutions, and structures beyond the individual rather than individual events or conditions that characterize general stressors or biological, genetic, or other nonsocial characteristics of the person or the group (p. 4).

Minority stress theory has not yet been applied to the non-believing population, but it has been applied to the LGBT population.

There are several types of stressors minorities face; distal and proximal stressors (Meyer, 2003). Distal stressors are stressors that do not depend on an individual's perception of the event, but relies on how others view that individual. In other words, an

individual may not consider him or herself as a non-believer, but may be subject to prejudice from others if they are viewed as a non-believer (Diamond, 2000). Proximal stressors are internalized stressors as a result of being minority status (Meyer, 2003). Some examples of this are “vigilance in interactions with others, hiding of identity for fear of harm, or internalized stigma” (Meyer, 2003, p. 5). It is these stressors that non-believers face that may impact on facets of their autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

## **Methods**

### **Procedure**

A snowball sampling methodology was utilized to recruit participants. This sample was gathered through the use of list servers held by atheists/agnostic/similar non-belief organizations. Five organizations in total were solicited. Three organizations replied they were willing to facilitate the initial emails. Permission to use their list servers was accomplished in two ways. The first means was modeled on methods used by Smith (2013) and Silver (2013), to physically network among these organizations. This researcher met with the organizational leaders to obtain consent for use of their list servers. An email (Appendix B) was sent to the leaders to forward onto their list servers, as performed by Garneau (2012).

For organizations located further away, the methods used by Garneau (2012) were implemented. An internet search was completed using phrases like, “atheist organization,” “agnostic organization,” and “secular organizations.” Each search was followed by a state/major city in the Midwest in order to limit the number of results. An email request (Appendix C) to utilize the organization’s list server was sent to the leaders

of these organizations or to individuals who this researcher did not personally meet. The email explained who the researcher was, the nature of the project, the goals of the research and why use of the list server was desired. If the leaders consented to use of their list server, a second email (Appendix B) meant for the potential participants was sent the leader, to be forwarded on to their list server. An additional snowball sampling method was used as well. All participants were asked to forward the email they received to anyone they knew who met the same criteria of being of a similar non-belief status.

All of the results were obtained through Qualtrics, an online survey platform. The data was collected over a 21-day period; the survey was closed on the 21<sup>st</sup> day at midnight.

### **Sample**

The size of this sample was 583, with 319 (54.7%) men and 237 (42.2%) women and 6 (1%) transgender. The average age of the group was 40.47 years old (SD = 15.104), with a range of 69. The sample was primarily Caucasian, with 90.3% of the sample identifying as such. The most common way the participants described their religious/spiritual views was as atheist (68.6%); the second most common self-description was secular-humanist (12.2%). The average length of time for identifying as an atheist was 20.25 years, with a standard deviation of 15.41 years. The average score for certainty of whether a god or higher power did not exist was 91.24, and had a standard deviation of 20.

### **Protection of Subjects**

Confidentiality for this study was maintained by having no direct contact with the participants. All participants were contacted through emails sent by their respective list

server owner. Furthermore, no personal identifying information was collected on the web survey. In order to obtain consent from the participants, the first question from the survey was the informed consent (Appendix D). All participants were required to give consent to participate in the survey and state that they were over 18 years of age. If consent was not obtained, the survey would redirect them to a new page and thank them for their time.

### **Survey**

The full survey consisted of 106 items and was comprised of three sections. The first section of the survey was designed to collect information regarding the participants' religious beliefs, perception of support, and perception of treatment due to their beliefs. The second section collected data regarding demographical information. Some questions regarding discrimination were based on questions developed by Garneau (2012). The third section of the survey was comprised of the 54 item Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-being (Ryff PWB). A complete version of the survey used can be seen in Appendix E.

### **Measures**

This survey used a mixture of 5-item Likert and 6-item Likert questions (used for the Ryff PWB), as well as other ordinal and nominal level questions. The Likert scale questions were used to determine the level of support subjects reported they received in the past and present, how well informed others were of their beliefs, to what extent others shared their beliefs, and how comfortable they were discussing their beliefs with others.

The past support questions measured the degree of support the participant reported they received from various individuals and groups. The past support questions

were operationalized as follows: “How much support were you given when you first started identifying as a non-believer from the following?” The individual questions were operationalized as: “Family”, “Friends,” “Non-believing community/organization.” Present support measured the level of support received from various entities. The questions were operationalized as: “How much support do you receive now in regards to your non-beliefs from the following?” The individual questions were broken down as “Family,” “Friends,” “Non-believing Community/Organization.” The scale response options were: “None at all,” “Very little,” “Somewhat,” “Quite a bit,” and “A great deal.” These factors were recoded into three categories, “Low,” “Medium,” and “High” for statistical analysis. Responses of “None at all,” and “Very little,” were recoded into a “Low” option. “Somewhat” was recoded into a “Medium” category. “Quite a bit,” and “A great deal” were recoded into a “high” category.

The religiosity scale was used on a 5-item Likert scale. This scale asked one question operationalized as: “How religious was your family during your upbringing?” The response options were: “Not at all religious,” “Very little religious,” “Somewhat religious,” “Quite a bit religious,” and “A great deal religious.” This question was recoded into three categories, “Low,” “Medium,” and “High” for statistical analysis. Responses of “Not at all religious,” and “Very little religious,” were recoded into a “Low” option. “Somewhat religious” was recoded into a “Medium” category. “Quite a bit religious,” and “A great deal religious” were recoded into a “high” category.

**Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being.** The Ryff PWB was developed by Ryff (1989) as a way to ground psychological well-being theory into a questionnaire. The PWB measures autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive

relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Appendix A describes the traits of those who scored high and low in those facets of psychological wellbeing. The original, full-length questionnaire included 14 questions pertaining to each subset scale. A medium length, 54 question version of scale was used instead of the full length questionnaire. This decision was made in an effort to prevent participant dropout as a result of the survey being too long.

The Ryff PWB was developed by operationally defining each dimension of overall psychological wellbeing, which was later turned into a scale (Ryff, 1989). Ryff (1989) wrote 80 questions per dimension, with 40 questions being related to either high or low levels of that dimension. Ryff (1989) eliminated any questions that were redundant, vague, no longer fit with the operational definitions or unable to elicit varied response. The result was a questionnaire with 32 questions per dimension, which was given to a sample of 321 people. From this sample, item-to-scale correlations were run in, order to simplify the questionnaire; creating a 20-item per facet version. This was then used as the basis for developing the 84 and 54 item versions of the Ryff PWB.

**Support.** The past support measures the level of support, as perceived by the participant, when initially identifying as a non-believer. The present support scale measured the support the participant felt at the time, while taking the survey. The support consisted of two to three questions, contingent on whether or not the respondent answered a previous question regarding belonging to a non-believing community/organization. The question for past support was operationalized as: “How much support were you given when you started identifying as a non-believer from the following?” The options listed were: “Family,” “Friends,” “Non-believing

community/organization.” The participant was then asked to answer, on a 5 point Likert scale: “None at all” (1), to “Somewhat” (3) to “A Great deal” (5). A high score would indicate how supported one felt with respect to one’s non-beliefs by friends and family.

### **Results**

The results indicated 78.2% of the participants hid their beliefs from others, with 29.5% stating they frequently hide their beliefs from others and 48.7% stating they occasionally hide their beliefs from others. Only 5.5% of the participants reported being frequently discriminated against, while 33% stated they were occasionally discriminated against. These results suggest that discrimination is something non-believers do experience and may be related to why so many individuals report hiding their beliefs.

Overt hostile actions made towards non-believers did not yield clearly defined results. Thirty-seven percent of the participants believed they are treated unfairly occasionally due to their beliefs. It was found that 2.7% received frequent verbal threats and 22.9% of the respondents experienced occasional verbal threats they attributed to their non-belief status. Similarly, 3.4% reported frequently experiencing emotional harm; 32.1% experiencing verbal harm occasionally. It was rare for participants to experience physical harm from threats. Only 2.3% of the respondents claimed to have been occasionally harmed physical. The manner atheists were treated rarely resulted in feelings that they should take their own life, only 0.9% of the sample stating that they have thought about suicide due to their own non-beliefs.

From this sample, 8.9% of the participants reported they experienced frequent conflicts with their immediate family regarding their non-beliefs; 41.9% of respondents indicated they have occasional conflicts with their immediate family due to their non-

beliefs. These numbers are similar to conflict rates with their extended family; 11% reported frequent conflict and 39.1% reported occasional conflicts. Frequent conflict amongst friends was reported by 2.3% of the sample and 50.1% reported occasional conflict with their friends due to their non-beliefs. These results support the idea that conflict is not uncommon in both relationships with friends and family. The sample reported only 3.8% (20) have been threatened with being removed from their home due to their non-beliefs, but only 1.1% (6) of the sample reported actually being removed from the home. A follow up question was asked to those who had been removed from the home, but of the 6 who were given the question, 4 skipped it. The two reported lengths of time were 1 day and “forever.”

Four one-way ANOVAs were run using the “positive relations with others scale.” The grouping variable for each ANOVA was the recoded value of past friend support, past family support, current friend support or current family support. These support groups were recoded into low, medium and high groups.

Table 1.1 and 1.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing positive relations with others to past family support, split into low, medium and high groups. There were significant levels of difference between the three groupings for past family support  $F(2, 476) = 8.86, p > .001$ . Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD indicated the mean score for the low condition ( $M = 39.47, SD = 8.77$ ) was significantly lower than the medium condition ( $M = 41.77, SD = 8.50652$ ) and the high condition ( $M = 45.29, SD = 7.77$ ). A significant difference was found between the medium condition and high condition as well. Altogether, this test suggests that past family support does impact positive relations with others at all three levels. These tests support the hypothesis that

individuals who received more support from their family in the past would score higher on positive relations with others scale.

Table 1.1

Descriptives for Positive Relations with Others and Past Family Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	136	39.47 <sup>a b</sup>	8.77	.75	37.98	40.96	17.00	54.00
Medium Support	294	41.77 <sup>b</sup>	8.51	.50	40.80	42.75	18.00	54.00
High Support	49	45.29	7.77	1.11	43.05	47.52	22.00	54.00
Total	479	41.48	8.65	.40	40.70	42.25	17.00	54.00

Note. <sup>a</sup>Statistically different from Medium Support. <sup>b</sup>Statistically different from High Support.

Table 1.2

ANOVA for Positive Relations with Others and Past Family Support

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1283.91	2	641.95	8.86	.000
Within Groups	34477.61	476	72.43		
Total	35761.52	478			

Table 2.1 and 2.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing positive relations with others to past friend support, split into low, medium and high groups.

There was significance found between the three groups for past friend support  $F(2, 478) = 8.30, p > .001$ . Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD found a significant

difference between the low friend support group ( $M = 38.46, SD = 8.55$ ) and the medium friend support group ( $M = 41.40, SD = 8.62$ ), as well as the high friend support group ( $M$

= 44.76, SD = 8.04). A significant difference was found between the medium support group and the high support group as well. The results support the hypothesis that individuals who received more support from their friends in the past would score higher on positive relations with others scale.

Table 2.1

Descriptives for Positive Relations with Others and Past Friend Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	63	38.46 <sup>a b</sup>	8.55	1.08	36.31	40.61	21.00	54.00
Medium Support	359	41.40 <sup>b</sup>	8.62	.45	40.51	42.30	17.00	54.00
High Support	59	44.76	8.04	1.05	42.67	46.86	22.00	54.00
Total	481	41.43	8.67	.40	40.65	42.21	17.00	54.00

Note. <sup>a</sup>Statistically different from Medium Support. <sup>b</sup>Statistically different from High Support.

Table 2.2

ANOVA for Positive Relations with Others and Past Friend Support

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1211.15	2	605.58	8.30	.000
Within Groups	34884.76	478	72.98		
Total	36095.92	480			

Table 3.1 and 3.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing positive relations with others to current support from family, split into low, medium and high categories. There was significance found between the three groups for current family support  $F(2,479) = 13.37, p > .001$ . Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD found a

significant difference between the low (M = 38.21, SD = 9.36) and medium (M = 41.56, SD = 8.41) and high (M = 45.14, SD = 7.42) groups. Significance was found between the medium and high grouping as well. This test supports the hypothesis that the individuals who presently receive more support from their family will score higher on positive relations with others scale.

Table 3.1

ANOVA Descriptives for Positive Relations with Others and Current Family Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	91	38.21 <sup>a,b</sup>	9.36	.98	36.26	40.16	17.00	54.00
Medium Support	321	41.56 <sup>b</sup>	8.41	.47	40.64	42.48	18.00	54.00
High Support	70	45.14	7.42	.89	43.37	46.91	22.00	54.00
Total	482	41.45	8.68	.40	40.67	42.22	17.00	54.00

Note. <sup>a</sup>Statistically different from Medium Support. <sup>b</sup>Statistically different from High Support.

Table 3.2

ANOVA for Positive Relations with Others and Current Family Support

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1914.53	2	957.27	13.37	.000
Within Groups	34292.67	479	71.59		
Total	36207.20	481			

Table 4.1 and 4.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing positive relations with others to current support from friends split into low, medium and high categories. There was significance found between the three groups for the current friend

support  $F(2,478) = 10.21, p > .001$ . Significance was found between low ( $M = 37.4, SD = 7.35$ ) and high ( $M = 44.27, SD = 7.84$ ) categories. Significance was found between medium ( $M = 40.84, SD = 8.81$ ) and high categories. A significant difference was not found between low and medium categories ( $p = .094$ ). These results support the hypothesis that individuals who presently receive more support from their friends would score higher on positive relations with others scale.

Table 4.1

ANOVA Descriptives for Positive Relations with Others and Current Friend Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	29	37.41 <sup>b</sup>	7.35	1.37	34.62	40.21	25.00	51.00
Medium Support	341	40.84 <sup>b</sup>	8.81	.48	39.91	41.78	17.00	54.00
High Support	111	44.27	7.84	.74	42.80	45.75	22.00	54.00
Total	481	41.43	8.67	.40	40.65	42.21	17.00	54.00

Note. <sup>a</sup>Statistically different from Medium Support. <sup>b</sup>Statistically different from High Support.

Table 4.2

ANOVA for Positive Relations with Others and Current Friend Support

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1480.09	2	740.04	10.21	.000
Within Groups	34635.70	478	72.46		
Total	36115.78	480			

Table 5.1 and 5.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing positive relations with others to how religious the individual’s family was during their upbringing

split into low, medium and high categories. Significance was found between the three groups  $F(2,481) = 5.18, p = .006$ . Significance was only found between the low ( $M = 43.11, SD = 8.57$ ) and high ( $M = 40.07, SD = 8.70$ ) religious family. This suggests that individual who came from highly religious families score lower on positive relations with others than those who did not come from a religious family.

Table 5.1

ANOVA Descriptives for Positive Relations with Others and Religiousness of Family

Religious Upbringing

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Religiosity	152	43.11 <sup>b</sup>	8.57	.70	41.73	44.48	19.00	54.00
Medium Religiosity	148	41.29	8.59	.71	39.89	42.69	19.00	54.00
High Religiosity	184	40.07	8.70	.64	38.80	41.33	17.00	54.00
Total	484	41.39	8.70	.40	40.62	42.17	17.00	54.00

Note. <sup>a</sup>Statistically different from Medium Religiosity. <sup>b</sup>Statistically different from High Religiosity.

Table 5.2

ANOVA for Positive Relations with Others and Religiousness of Family Religious

Upbringing

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	771.59	2	385.79	5.18	.006
Within Groups	35794.04	481	74.42		
Total	36565.63	483			

Table 6.1 and 6.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing self-acceptance to current support from family, split into low, medium and high support

categories. There was significance found between the three groups for current family support  $F(2,478) = 4.00, p = .019$ . Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD found a significant difference between the low ( $M = 40.38, SD = 9.40$ ) and high ( $M = 44.26, SD = 9.11$ ) groups. This test supports the hypothesis that the individuals who presently receive more support from their family will score higher on self-acceptance.

Table 6.1

ANOVA Descriptives for Self-Acceptance and Current Family Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	90	40.38 <sup>b</sup>	9.40	.99	38.41	42.35	14.00	54.00
Medium Support	321	41.57	8.45	.47	40.64	42.50	15.00	54.00
High Support	68	44.26	9.11	1.10	42.06	46.47	12.00	54.00
Total	479	41.73	8.79	.40	40.94	42.51	12.00	54.00

Note. <sup>a</sup>Statistically different from Medium Support. <sup>b</sup>Statistically different from High Support.

Table 6.2

ANOVA for Self-Acceptance and Current Family Support

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	609.972	2	304.99	4.00	.019
Within Groups	36285.201	476	76.23		
Total	36895.173	478			

Table 7.1 and 7.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing autonomy to current support from family, split into low, medium and high support categories.

There was significance found between the three groups for current family support  $F(2,478) = 4.00, p = .019$ . Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD found a significant difference between the low ( $M = 40.08, SD = 5.36$ ) and high ( $M = 41.99, SD = 4.57$ ) groups. Significance was also found between the medium ( $M = 40.33, SD = 4.86$ ) and high groups. This test supports the hypothesis that the individuals who presently receive more support from their family will score higher on autonomy.

Table 7.1

ANOVA Descriptives for Autonomy and Current Family Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	91	40.08 <sup>b</sup>	5.36	.56	38.96	41.19	25.00	48.00
Medium Support	323	40.33 <sup>b</sup>	4.86	.27	39.80	40.86	27.00	48.00
High Support	68	41.99	4.57	.55	40.88	43.09	32.00	48.00
Total	482	40.51	4.95	.23	40.07	40.96	25.00	48.00

Note. <sup>a</sup>Statistically different from Medium Support. <sup>b</sup>Statistically different from High Support.

Table 7.2

ANOVA for Autonomy and Current Family Support

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	175.74	2	87.87	3.63	.027

Within Groups	11586.66	479	24.19
Total	11762.40	481	

Table 8.1 and 8.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing environmental mastery to current support from family, split into low, medium and high support categories. There was significance found between the three groups,  $F(2,481) = 7.30, p = .001$ . Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD found a significant difference between the low ( $M = 38.64, SD = 8.78$ ) and high ( $M = 43.48, SD = 7.86$ ) groups. Significance was also found between the medium ( $M = 40.30, SD = 7.83$ ) and high groups. This test supports the hypothesis that the individuals who presently receive more support from their family will score higher on environmental mastery.

Table 8.1

ANOVA Descriptives for Environmental Mastery and Current Family Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	91	38.64 <sup>b</sup>	8.78	.92	36.81	40.47	17.00	53.00
Medium Support	322	40.30 <sup>b</sup>	7.83	.44	39.44	41.15	18.00	54.00
High Support	69	43.48	7.86	.95	41.59	45.37	14.00	54.00
Total	482	40.44	8.12	.37	39.71	41.16	14.00	54.00

Note. <sup>a</sup>Statistically different from Medium Support. <sup>b</sup>Statistically different from High Support.

Table 8.2

ANOVA for Environmental Mastery and Current Family Support

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	939.41	2	469.72	7.30	.001
Within Groups	30811.22	479	64.32		
Total	31750.63	481			

Table 9.1 and 9.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing personal growth to current support from family, split into low, medium and high support categories. There was no significance found between the three groups,  $F(2,476) = .95$ ,  $p = .385$ . This test does not support the hypothesis that the individuals who presently receive more support from their family will score higher on growth.

Table 9.1

ANOVA Descriptives for Personal Growth and Current Family Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	89	46.74	5.61	.59	45.56	47.92	31.00	54.00
Medium Support	319	46.52	5.31	.30	45.94	47.11	26.00	54.00
High Support	69	47.51	5.43	.65	46.20	48.81	31.00	54.00
Total	477	46.70	5.38	.25	46.22	47.19	26.00	54.00

Table 9.2

ANOVA for Personal Growth and Current Family Support

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	55.40	2	27.70	.95	.385
Within Groups	13745.92	474	29.00		

Total	13801.32	476
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Table 10.1 and 10.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing purpose in life to current support from family, split into low, medium and high support categories. There was significance found between the three groups,  $F(2,482) = 3.75$ ,  $p = .024$ . Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD found a significant difference between the low ( $M = 41.46$ ,  $SD = 8.37$ ) and high ( $M = 44.76$ ,  $SD = 6.92$ ) groups. This test supports the hypothesis that the individuals who presently receive more support from their family will score higher on purpose in life.

Table 10.1

ANOVA Descriptives for Purpose in Life and Current Family Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	92	41.46 <sup>b</sup>	8.37	.87	39.72	43.19	18.00	54.00
Medium Support	323	42.62	7.52	.42	41.80	43.44	14.00	54.00
High Support	68	44.76	6.92	.84	43.09	46.44	24.00	54.00
Total	483	42.70	7.65	.35	42.02	43.38	14.00	54.00

Note. <sup>a</sup>Statistically different from Medium Support. <sup>b</sup>Statistically different from High Support.

Table 10.2

ANOVA for Purpose in Life and Current Family Support

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	434.25	2	217.12	3.75	.024

Within Groups	27789.22	480	57.89
Total	28223.47	482	

Table 11.1 and 11.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing autonomy to current support from friends, split into low, medium and high support categories. There was significance found,  $F(2,480) = 6.08, p = .002$ . Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD found a significant difference between the low ( $M = 39.30, SD = 6.26$ ) and high ( $M = 41.90, SD = 4.23$ ) groups. Significance was found between medium ( $M = 40.19, SD = 4.96$ ) and high groups. This test supports the hypothesis that the individuals who presently receive more support from their friends will score higher on autonomy.

Table 11.1

ANOVA Descriptives for Autonomy and Current Friend Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	30	39.30 <sup>b</sup>	6.26	1.14	36.96	41.64	25.00	48.00
Medium Support	341	40.19 <sup>b</sup>	4.96	.27	39.66	40.72	27.00	48.00
High Support	110	41.90	4.23	.40	41.10	42.70	28.00	48.00
Total	481	40.53	4.94	.23	40.08	40.97	25.00	48.00

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>Statistically different from Medium Support. <sup>b</sup>Statistically different from High Support.

Table 11.2

ANOVA for Autonomy and Current Friend Support

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	291.12	2	145.56	6.08	.002
Within Groups	11440.81	478	23.94		
Total	11731.93	480			

Table 12.1 and 12.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing environmental mastery to current support from friends, split into low, medium and high support categories. There was significance found,  $F(2,480) = 3.56$ ,  $p = .029$ . Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD found a significant difference between the low ( $M = 37.27$ ,  $SD = 9.78$ ) and high ( $M = 41.66$ ,  $SD = 7.44$ ) groups. This test supports the hypothesis that the individuals who presently receive more support from their friends will score higher on environmental mastery.

Table 12.1

ANOVA Descriptives for Environmental Mastery and Current Friend Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	30	37.27 <sup>b</sup>	9.78	1.79	33.61	40.92	17.00	52.00
Medium Support	343	40.36	8.11	.44	39.50	41.22	14.00	54.00
High Support	108	41.66	7.44	.72	40.24	43.08	20.00	53.00
Total	481	40.46	8.12	.37	39.73	41.19	14.00	54.00

Note. <sup>a</sup>Statistically different from Medium Support. <sup>b</sup>Statistically different from High Support.

Table 12.2

ANOVA for Environmental Mastery and Current Friend Support

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	464.29	2	232.15	3.56	.029
Within Groups	31197.08	478	65.27		
Total	31661.38	480			

Table 13.1 and 13.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing personal growth to current support from friends, split into low, medium and high support categories. There was significance found,  $F(2,475) = 5.87, p = .003$ . Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD found a significant difference between the low ( $M = 45.07, SD = 5.52$ ) and high ( $M = 48.11, SD = 4.375$ ) groups. Significance was also found between medium ( $M = 46.36, SD = 5.49$ ) and high groups. This test supports the hypothesis that the individuals who presently receive more support from their friends will score higher on environmental mastery.

Table 13.1

ANOVA Descriptives for Personal Growth and Current Friend Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	28	45.07 <sup>b</sup>	5.52	1.04	42.93	47.21	34.00	54.00
Medium Support	337	46.36 <sup>b</sup>	5.49	.30	45.77	46.95	26.00	54.00
High Support	111	48.11	4.75	.45	47.21	49.00	35.00	54.00
Total	476	46.69	5.38	.25	46.21	47.18	26.00	54.00

Note. <sup>a</sup>Statistically different from Medium Support. <sup>b</sup>Statistically different from High Support.

Table 13.2

ANOVA for Personal Growth and Current Friend Support

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	333.49	2	166.74	5.87	.003
Within Groups	13428.11	473	28.39		
Total	13761.60	475			

Table 14.1 and 14.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing purpose in life to current support from friends, split into low, medium and high support categories. There was significance found,  $F(2,481) = 5.40$ ,  $p = .005$ . Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD found a significant difference between the low ( $M = 39.57$ ,  $SD = 9.77$ ) and high ( $M = 44.38$ ,  $SD = 7.04$ ) groups. This test supports the hypothesis that the individuals who presently receive more support from their friends will score higher on purpose in life.

Table 14.1

ANOVA Descriptives for Purpose in Life and Current Friend Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	30	39.57 <sup>b</sup>	9.77	1.78	35.92	43.21	18.00	54.00
Medium Support	343	42.45	7.54	.41	41.65	43.26	14.00	54.00
High Support	109	44.38	7.04	.67	43.04	45.71	23.00	53.00
Total	482	42.71	7.66	.35	42.02	43.39	14.00	54.00

Note. <sup>a</sup>Statistically different from Medium Support. <sup>b</sup>Statistically different from High Support.

Table 14.2

ANOVA for Purpose in Life and Current Friend Support

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	621.34	2	310.67	5.40	.005
Within Groups	27579.99	479	57.58		
Total	28201.33	481			

Table 15.1 and 15.2 show the results for the one-way ANOVA comparing purpose in life to current support from friends, split into low, medium and high support categories. There was significance found,  $F(2,477) = 5.21$ ,  $p = .006$ . Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD found a significant difference between the low ( $M = 37.55$ ,  $SD = 9.94$ ) and high ( $M = 43.32$ ,  $SD = 8.78$ ) groups. Significance was also found between the low and medium ( $M = 41.59$ ,  $SD = 8.58$ ) groups. This test supports the hypothesis that the individuals who presently receive more support from their friends will score higher on self-acceptance.

Table 15.1

ANOVA Descriptives for Self-Acceptance and Current Friend Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low Support	29	37.55	9.94	1.85	33.77	41.33	22.00	54.00
Medium Support	339	41.59	8.58	.47	40.67	42.50	12.00	54.00
High Support	110	43.32	8.78	.84	41.66	44.98	14.00	54.00
Total	478	41.74	8.79	.402	40.95	42.53	12.00	54.00

Table 15.2

## ANOVA for Self-Acceptance and Current Friend Support

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	790.61	2	395.31	5.21	.006
Within Groups	36059.22	475	75.91		
Total	36849.83	477			

### Discussion

The results suggest the experiences of non-believers are similar to experiences of some LGBT individuals; both groups experience discrimination on some level. While there are significant amounts of non-believers who do face discrimination, emotional harm and deception of beliefs, the frequency is lower than what other studies have found (Ray, 2006, Pew Research, 2013). Non-believers and LGBT individuals both have similar rates of being threatened by others. The rates of suicide between the two groups are not remotely comparable, with a dearth of non-believing respondents indicating that they thought about taking their own life. Non-believers overwhelmingly do not consider taking their lives. This may suggest that the atmosphere created by bullying or lack of support is not comparable between these two groups. However, this atmosphere can be attributed to some of the changes in the psychological wellbeing, such as lower positive relationships with others, seen in atheists.

Overall, these results are still comparable. This suggests that non-believers are experiencing similar levels of discrimination that LGBT experience. Because of the important similarities, some outreach efforts or strategies made by LGBT organizations may have some success when addressing the needs and concerns of non-believers.

One of the most surprising discoveries was 78.2% of the participants indicated they hide their beliefs from others. Although the question in the survey was not posed to

answer why non-believers are likely to hide their beliefs, there is room for speculation. As Edgell et al. (2006) reported, atheists are viewed negatively; it could be this negative perception caused some atheists to hide their beliefs. It may be inferred that it is the treatment from friends or family that influenced an individual's decision to disclose their non-beliefs to others. Furthermore, as suggested by Stryker & Burke (2000), individuals may choose to hide their religious identity, as they may feel it is more important for them to avoid conflict by not disclosing their beliefs.

Another finding is that 37% of respondents reported they are treated unfairly; 38.4% believed they are discriminated against due to their non-beliefs. Furthermore, 35.5% indicated they experienced emotional harm. For non-believers, the discrimination may have created the belief that they must hide their beliefs to avoid confrontation. But even confrontation is not avoidable, as 52.4% indicated they still experienced at least occasional conflicts with their friends due to their non-beliefs. Even within their own families, respondents reported occasionally experiencing similar amounts of conflict. Internalizing negative feelings toward others, and refusing to change their personal belief system, often resulted in non-believers negative perception of their relationships with others. These negative internalizations may result in atheists having less positive and rewarding relationships with others. Collectively, the results support findings that identifying as an atheist may negatively impact family and social relationships (Edgell et al., 2006).

These results did not support the concept of homophily as suggested by Ueno et al. (2012). Non-believers are not seeking newer networks that match their belief system. It would be expected that according to homophily, non-believers would seek more friends

that share their beliefs. This is not the case as indicated by the results, which shows they still have conflicts with their friends due to their non-beliefs at a similar amount to the experience with their family. If homophily was true for non-believers this number would have been lower, as non-believers can readily change their friends, but removing oneself from one's family is considerably more difficult.

The lack of disclosure may cause individuals to become more stressed (Burke, 1991). The stress experienced in this type of situation offers an explanation as to why individuals, who have more support in regards to their non-beliefs from friends and family, scored higher on positive relations with others. Minority stress theory offers another possible explanation for the differences in the scores. Non-believers are a minority in the United States and feel they must hide their beliefs. Non-believers might generalize that all individuals view them negatively, based on their interactions with friends and family members. This generalization, that everyone views them negatively, might impact how they view their relationships with others. For example, non-believers may have fewer relationships that are warm and positive. They may become more frustrated in their current relationships with others. Such experiences could potentially make them less willing to compromise, which is an important element in maintaining relationships. Not being willing to make compromises may serve as a rationale for continued conflicts with their friends and family.

Lack of family and friend support might serve as a possible explanation for the differences seen in self-acceptance. Those who score low on self-acceptance are described as "Feels dissatisfied with self; is disappointed with what has occurred with past life; is troubled about certain personal qualities; wishes to be different than what he

or she is,” whereas the high scorers are described as “Possesses a positive attitude toward the self; acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities; feels positive about past life” (Ryff, 1989). The lack of social support could lead to atheists possibly feeling resentful that their parents, friends and/or society are less accepting of them, therefore they are less willing to accept others. As a result, atheists may have fewer positive relationships, which would serve as an explanation as to why some atheists have a low positive relationship scores.

Brown & Christensen (1998) suggest that feedback from the system is how change is made. Self-acceptance, autonomy, and positive relations with others all can be stifled if the individual lacks some form of positive feedback within their system. The lack of positive feedback could stem from their support network (friends and family) not accepting the atheists’ beliefs, which can lead to lower overall psychological wellbeing. Atheist organizations can use this knowledge to reach out to atheists by providing atheists a sense of community, belonging and support. By serving as a platform for atheists put in some form of positive feedback loop within the system, atheists could improve their overall psychological wellbeing. Outreach efforts could be modeled on outreach efforts that LGBT groups have done.

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations from the support scale. Support for individuals may be provided in number of ways, such as emotional (showing compassion and empathy), informational (offering practical information), and instrumental (giving practical assistance with daily living) (Tanis, 2007). The scale used in this survey is one-dimensional and does not take these additional factors into account. For example, the

individual may have received tangible support, but lacked emotional support. This could have caused a difference in the scores. Future studies could incorporate a support scale that measures different types of support. Furthermore, there is no real differentiation between past support and present support.

There was a lack of information and/or follow up on respondents' removal from the home. It could be concluded that removal from the home does occur amongst atheists. Additionally, the recruiting for this sample was done using organizations located in the Midwest. The rate of being removed from one's home due to non-belief may be different in another region of the United States, where religious identity is considered to be more important. Future researchers may want to include a larger national sample or examine states where religion plays a more important role in people's lives, to determine if homelessness is an actual problem among non-believing youth.

The results from the conflict questions do not reveal the extent or content of the conflicts. These conflicts could range from mild disagreements about not having faith to lengthy diatribes. Furthermore, it cannot be determined whether or not these disputes impact non-believers perception of support from friends and family. A qualitative study could investigate the nature these conflicts. Additionally, a qualitative study could determine the extent to which such conflicts impact an individual's relationship with family and friends. This study has only scratched the surface of investigation of the non-believers identification and discriminatory experiences. Further studies will be useful in more clearly identifying the population, consequent problems and perceptions within the general population.

Another way this study could be improved in the future is to have a control group of religious individuals to compare the average scores of the PWB scale to atheists. Presently this study is only generalizable to atheists and this study is unable to make any generalizations to society as a whole. In that regard, a study that compares religious individuals who do not have their family's support, such as an individual who changes from one belief system to another, could be compared to atheists.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice**

This research highlights how non-believers have been subjected to discrimination and how it has negatively impacted them. Social work should use this research to help identify the need to advocate for policy and society change that will lessen the extent to which non-believers are discriminated against. Furthermore, social workers will need to change how they view non-belief and atheism as a whole. As of right now, social work tends to view atheists as being completely removed from spirituality and therefore remove all baggage that accompanies it. What social workers need to start doing is acknowledging that non-belief has its own cultural morays that need to be identified and incorporated into social work practice.

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## Appendix A

### Ryff Psychological Well-being Facet Definitions

#### Self-Acceptance:

A high scorer possesses a positive attitude toward the self; acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities; feels positive about past life (Ryff, 1989). A low scorer feels dissatisfied with self; is disappointed with what has occurred with past life; is troubled about certain personal qualities; wishes to be different than what he or she is.

#### Positive relations with others:

A high scorer has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others; is concerned about the welfare of others; capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy; understands give and take of human relationships. A low scorer has few close, trusting relationships with others; finds it difficult to be warm, open, and concerned about others; is isolated and frustrated in interpersonal relationships; not willing to make compromises to sustain important ties with others.

#### Autonomy:

A high scorer is self-determining and independent; able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways; regulates behavior from within; evaluates self by personal standards. A low scorer is concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others; relies on judgments of others to make important decisions; conforms to social pressures to think and act in certain ways.

#### Environmental mastery:

A high scorer has a sense of mastery and competence in managing the environment; controls complex array of external activities; makes effective use of surrounding opportunities; able to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values. A low scorer has difficulty managing everyday affairs; feels unable to change or improve surrounding context; is unaware of surrounding opportunities; lacks sense of control over external world.

Purpose in life:

A high scorer has goals in life and a sense of directedness; feels there is meaning to present and past life; holds beliefs that give life purpose; has aims and objectives for living. A low scorer Lacks a sense of meaning in life; has few goals or aims, lacks sense of direction; does not see purpose of past life; has no outlook or beliefs that give life meaning.

Personal growth:

A high scorer has a feeling of continued development; sees self as growing and expanding; is open to new experiences; has sense of realizing his or her potential; sees improvement in self and behavior over time; is changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness. A low scorer has a sense of personal stagnation; lacks sense of improvement or expansion over time; feels bored and uninterested with life; feels unable to develop new attitudes or behaviors.

**Appendix B**

## Request to Take Survey

Thank you for taking the time to read this e-mail. I am a graduate student at the University St. Thomas. I am investigating the relationships of atheists/agnostics/non-believers have with their friends, family and community for my master's thesis. I am inviting you to help contribute to my thesis by taking this online web-survey. This survey should only take between 25 and 35 minutes to complete. I want to assure anyone who takes this survey that I do not have any means to connect your personal information to your IP address, or to your responses, which means that your participation in this survey will be anonymous. I would also like to request that you forward this e-mail to anyone else, who you personally know, that identifies as atheist/agnostic/non-believer. This is known as snowball sampling. I am utilizing this way to get the biggest sample size I can, as this population can be somewhat difficult to find.

Here is the link to the survey:

[http://stthomassocialwork.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_bP1uXs1Eef4Mr1X](http://stthomassocialwork.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bP1uXs1Eef4Mr1X). Please complete it only once.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at pott4495@stthomas.edu.

Thank you for your time.

Justin Potter  
Graduate Student  
Social Work Department  
University of St. Thomas  
pott4495@stthomas.edu

**Appendix C**

## Request for Permission to Use List Server

To [Name of web coordinator],

Hello my name is Justin Potter and I am a graduate student at the University of St. Thomas and currently working on my master's thesis. I am investigating the relationships of atheists/agnostics/non-believers have with their friends, family and community for my master's thesis. I was wondering if you would be willing to forward a email to your members that contains a link to my survey. All responses to this web-survey would be anonymous.

Please respond if you would be willing to send the email to your group and I will respond back with the link to the survey. If you have any questions or concerns you wish to address before forwarding the survey, I would be happy to answer them. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Justin Potter  
Graduate Student  
Social Work Department  
University of St. Thomas  
Pott4495@stthomas.edu

**Appendix D****CONSENT FORM****UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS****Relationships to Friends and Family When Identifying as Atheist or  
Agnostic****UST IRB Number:** 649294-1

I am conducting a study about how relationships and connections to other people are impacted when an individual identifies as an atheist, agnostic, free-thinker, secular humanists, brights or similar non-belief system. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a part of an organization that is comprised of mostly atheists, agnostics, free-thinkers, secular humanists, brights or other similar non-belief system or you were forwarded this study because someone you know believes that you identify as atheist, agnostic, non-believer or similar belief system. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Justin Potter, who is overseen by Karen Carlson, Ph.D. from the School of Social Work at the University of St. Thomas.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to see how individuals are impacted in relationships with friends and family when they identify as atheist, agnostic or non-believer and whether or not these relationships and how these relationships impact an individual. This study will make use of a quantitative approach, and ask questions related to how an individual felt others treated them as an identified atheist, agnostic or other form of non-belief. The data will be collected using Qualtrics, an online survey collection platform.

Current research is mostly focused on how discrimination and biases exist within society. Presently there is no empirical research that looks at how relationships are by their non-belief status. The benefits of participating in this research will be that it will expand on the literature into the realm of relationships with others and psychological well-being. If this research shows that a need exists to help individuals, organizations might become more willing to allocate resources for those facing these issues and interventions can be implemented.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: Please set aside approximately 30-45 minutes to complete this questionnaire, please answer every question as honestly as possible. If there is a question you do not wish you answer, you may skip it. If you personally know of anyone else who identifies as atheist, agnostic, non-believer, or other group that falls into this category, please forward them a link to this survey.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

There are no known risks to participating in this study. Additionally, there are no direct tangible benefits from participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. Additionally, once the questionnaire has been completed, I will be unable to identify you and your information, which means should you decide that you no longer wish your data to be included in the study, I am unable to remove it once it has been submitted. I am able to remove incomplete surveys from the dataset. The data from your survey will be kept on a computer that is password protected by a 10 alphanumeric password to access of which, only I have access. This data gathered from this

project may be used by used by me for future research projects. The data will be destroyed after seven years, if no further research is planned.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with any of the organizations you are involved with or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until you complete the questionnaire. Some of the questions in this study are of a personal nature. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer, for whatever reason. I am unable to remove data from the questionnaire once completed due to no identifiers being attached to your survey upon completion.

**Contacts and Questions**

You may ask e-mail me any questions or concerns you have before you take the survey. If you have questions later, you may contact me at [pott4495@stthomas.edu](mailto:pott4495@stthomas.edu). If you wish to contact my research advisors, Karen Carlson, Ph.D., she may be contacted at [carl1307@stthomas.edu](mailto:carl1307@stthomas.edu)

(651) 962-5867. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By checking this box, I consent to participate in the study and I am at least 18 years of age.

**Appendix E**

Survey

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender

Age \_\_\_\_\_

What ethnicity do you identify as most?

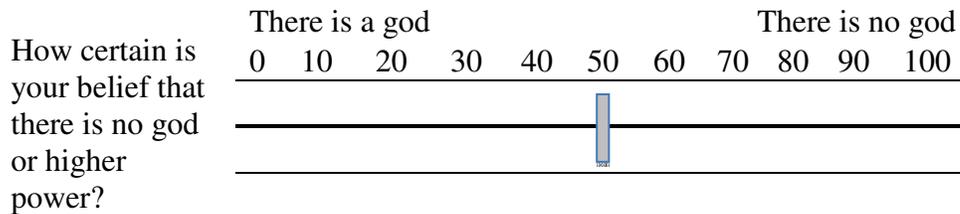
- African-American/African
- American Indian/Native American
- Asian-American/Asian
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Caucasian
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

What is your political philosophy?

- Liberal
- Moderate
- Conservative

Which of the following best describes your religious/spiritual views?

- Religious
- Spiritual but not religious
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Apathetic
- Bright
- Free-thinker
- Secular-Humanist
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Don't know/no Answer



How long have you had identified as an atheist/agnostic/non-believer? Please answer in years. \_\_\_\_\_

Did you have a "coming out" experience where you disclosed your non-belief status to others?

- Yes
- No

Was that "coming out" a difficult or stressful experience?\*

- Yes
- No
- Cannot recall/Don't Know

\* Note this question was only displayed if the participant answered "Yes" that they had a coming out experience.

How long has it been since you first "came out" to other in regards to your non-belief of a higher power? Please answer in years.\* \_\_\_\_\_

\*Note this question was only displayed if the participant answered that they had a coming out experience.

Have you ever considered taking your own life due to your non-beliefs?

- Yes
- No

Were you a part of a non-believing community/organization when you first started identifying as a non-believer?

- Yes
- No

Are you a part of a non-believing community/organization now?

- Yes
- No

Which of the following best describes your perspective on the number of people that share your beliefs?

	Very few share my beliefs	Few share my beliefs	Equal amounts share and don't share my beliefs	Most share my beliefs	Almost all share my beliefs
How many people in your community share your beliefs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How many people in your place of employment share your beliefs?

How many of your friends share your beliefs?

How many members of your family share your beliefs?

Which of the following best describes others' knowledge of your beliefs?

	Very few know my beliefs	Few know my beliefs	Equal amounts know and don't know my beliefs	Most know my beliefs	Almost all know my beliefs
How many of your coworkers know of your beliefs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How many of your friends know of your beliefs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How many of your family members know your beliefs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How comfortable are you in discussing your beliefs with the following?

	Very uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable	Neutral	Somewhat comfortable	Very Comfortable
Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Family	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Neighbors	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Stranger	<input type="checkbox"/>				

How much support were you given when you started identifying as a non-believer your from the following?

	None at all	Very Little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A great deal
Family	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Non-believing Community/Organization	<input type="checkbox"/>				

How much support do you receive now in regards to your non-beliefs from the following?

	None at all	Very Little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A great deal
Family	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Non-believing Community/Organization	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Have your non-beliefs ever caused conflict with your friends?

- Yes, often
- Yes, occasionally
- No

Have your non-beliefs ever caused conflict with your immediate family?

- Yes, often
- Yes, occasionally
- No

Have your non-beliefs ever caused conflict with your extended family?

- Yes, often
- Yes, occasionally
- No

Have your non-beliefs ever caused conflict with your coworkers/place of employment?

- Yes, often
- Yes, occasionally
- No

To the best of your knowledge, have you ever been treated unfairly due to your non-beliefs?

- Yes, often
- Yes, occasionally
- No

Have you ever experienced verbal threats due to your non-beliefs?

- Yes, often

Yes, occasionally  
No

Have you ever experienced physical harm due to your non-beliefs?

Yes, often  
Yes, occasionally  
No

Have you ever experienced emotional harm due to your non-beliefs?

Yes, often  
Yes, occasionally  
No

Have you ever experienced discrimination due to your non-beliefs?

Yes, often  
Yes, occasionally  
No

Have you ever hid your beliefs from others in order to prevent negative judgment or consequences?

Yes, often  
Yes, occasionally  
No

Have you ever been threatened that you would be kicked out of or removed from your home/place of residence because of your non-beliefs?

Yes  
No

How long were you removed from your home? Please answer in days.\* \_\_\_\_\_

\*Note. This question was only displayed if the participant answered "Yes" to having been removed from their home.

Which of the following best describes your religious/spiritual upbringing?

Buddhist  
Christian  
Jewish  
Muslim  
Hindu  
No religion (Atheist/Agnostic/Non-belief)  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

How religious was your family during your upbringing?

Not at all religious



<p>It's difficult for me to voice my own opinions on controversial matters.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<p>I often change my mind about decisions if my friends or family disagree.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree
<p>I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<p>In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<p>The demands of everyday life often get me down.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<p>I do not fit very well with the people and the community around me.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<p>I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<p>I often feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<p>I generally do a good job of taking care of my personal finances and affairs.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<p>I am good at juggling my time so that I can fit everything in that needs to get done.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree

I have difficulty arranging my life in a way that is satisfying to me.

I have been able to build a home and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my liking.

I am not interested in activities that will expand my horizons.

I don't want to try new ways of doing things--my life is fine the way it is.

I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.

When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years.

I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time.

I do not enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree Somewhat   Disagree Slightly   Agree Slightly   Agree Somewhat   Strongly Agree

For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.

I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.





