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Labeling of religious non-believers: The effect of the "atheist" title on moral judgments about non-theists

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University of Northern Iowa

LABELING OF RELIGIOUS NON-BELIEVERS:

THE EFFECT OF THE "ATHEIST" TITLE ON MORAL JUDGMENTS

ABOUT NON-THEISTS

An Abstract of a Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Prior research indicates that how concepts are described impacts our beliefs about the subject itself. For example, when the term "welfare" (instead of "help for the poor") is used to ask people whether assistance should be increased in times of economic hardship, support is lower (Smith, 1987). My research question centers on whether or not this effect would carry over to the area of religion and the use of the terms "atheist" or "those with no religious beliefs." Participants in the current studies were presented with a vignette about a student who was labeled as an atheist, as having no religious beliefs, or with no religious information provided (control) who committed an ethical transgression (cheating on an exam). Participants completed dependent measures assessing morality of the target, seriousness of the transgression, recommended punishment, and responsibility. Additionally, participants' religiosity (Huber & Huber, 2012) and Cognitive Need for Closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) were analyzed as potential moderators. When the target was labeled as an atheist, participants across the three studies recommended that the target be punished more severely and viewed the transgression as more serious than when the target was described as having no religious beliefs. Neither Need for Closure nor religiosity moderated these effects.

Keywords: labeling effect, religious prejudice, atheism, need for closure, religiosity

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This Study by: Brock Rozich

Entitled: Labeling of Religious Non-Believers: The Effect of the "Atheist" Title on Moral Judgments about Non-Theists

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

<u>Prejudice toward Atheists</u>

In contemporary American culture, many groups face stereotyping and prejudice. Latino individuals may be automatically categorized as illegal immigrants, particularly if they are first generation. A woman in the business world may be seen as less competent and more emotional than her male counterpart. A Black male driving an expensive sports car may be unfairly targeted by police for a traffic stop. Although these prejudices are certainly prevalent in our society, this type of stereotyping is also recognized as being problematic. When it comes to religious outgroups, however, there seem to be justifications for ostracizing non-Christian individuals in the United States. For example, it can be seen as acceptable to wiretap an Islamic mosque with no just cause, because the rationale can be provided that we are protecting American's freedom from Islamic terrorists. Others may be discriminated against based on religious attire, such as wearing hijabs or yarmulkes in public. One of the most easily targeted religious outgroups in present-day society, however, is one whose members may not desire to fall under a religious category at all- the American atheist.

In a recent Gallup poll (McCarthy, 2015), participants were asked how likely they were to vote for a Presidential candidate given the candidate's group classification: atheist, gay/lesbian, Muslim, Black, female, Hispanic, Jewish, Mormon, and Catholic. Catholics, Blacks, Hispanics, Jews, and females all received a support rate in excess of 90% based on their respective group identity being the only information available.

Mormons received an 81% support rate. Gays and lesbians were significantly lower than the support ratings for other outgroups, measuring a 74% response for a hypothetical candidate. At the bottom of the support ladder were Muslims at 60%, and atheists at 58%. Anxiety over the September 11th, 2001 attacks certainly may have influenced the lack of support for Muslims; however, Muslims were not included in this poll until 2012 (this was the first time the poll had taken place following the 2001 attacks). Atheists, however, have been included since 1958. While other ethnic and religious minority groups have seen support increase over the years, atheists have consistently placed at or near the bottom of the poll for support, even below other groups some would consider as disadvantaged today. Consider the following levels of support for atheists (who were consistently the least supported group) and the *second lowest* group in terms of support for Presidency over the course of several decades as measured by Gallup polls: in 1958, atheists, 18%, Blacks, 38%; in 1978, atheists, 40%, females, 76%; in 1999, atheists, 48% Jewish, 92% (Jones, 2012). While support for other discriminated outgroups has increased substantially in the past half-century, atheists remain on the outside looking in, with barely half of Americans willing to support a candidate who identifies as atheist.

Similarly, in a study conducted by Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann (2006), researchers analyzed United States citizens' attitudes toward both religious and ethnic outgroups. The research focused on two main factors: (1) the religious and ethnic outgroups that were viewed as non-representative of what America should be, and (2) the outgroups that the participants would approve marrying into their family. Atheists fared poorly in both of these categories with nearly 40% of respondents indicating that atheists

did not share their view of America, and nearly 50% of respondents stating that they would not want an atheist marrying into their family. These responses were significantly higher than outgroups who have historically faced discrimination, including Muslims (26% respondents indicated Muslims did not share their view of America and 36% indicated they would not want a Muslim marrying into their family) and Blacks (5% of respondents indicated Blacks did not share their view of America and 27% indicated they would not want a Black individual marrying into their family). These findings, along with the Gallup poll (Jones, 2012) , indicate that atheists are one of the most negatively viewed outgroups in the United States today.

Given the overall consensus that being openly prejudiced in the United States is socially undesirable (Sritharan & Gawronski, 2010), why do individuals turn a blind eye when the group being discriminated against is atheist? Why is it seemingly socially acceptable to discriminate against someone whose religion is "none" while, at the same time, it is socially unacceptable to discriminate against an individual who is either Jewish, Muslim, Christian, or any other religion? To answer these questions, I will examine the influence of labeling on people's judgments of religious non-believers' morality during a hypothetical moral transgression. Specifically, I will examine how the labeling of a non-believer as explicitly "atheist" compares to a more passive label of "having no religious beliefs" on these judgments. Additionally, concepts such as religiosity and need for closure will be analyzed as potential moderators.

Atheism in the United States Today

The rise of secularist groups fighting for the separation of church and state (Kuru, 2007), online message boards surrounding the topic of religious non-belief, and books on atheism topping the best-sellers lists of major newspapers (Henig, 2007) have resulted in atheists becoming increasingly engrained in contemporary culture. Although it may seem counter-intuitive to lump religious "nones" into a communal group, it would be difficult to argue that atheists are not seen as a collective outgroup in today's society, particularly among religious majorities.

In recent years, atheist and agnostic populations in the United States have increased substantially, with atheism becoming the fastest growing "religious group" in the country (Pew Research Center, 2012; 2015). While the numbers of reported non-believers have certainly increased in recent years, it is possible that this increase is not necessarily due to an increase in the actual number of atheists, but rather due to the recent increase of individuals who are no longer afraid to "come out" as atheist. In research conducted by Gervais (2011), a higher prevalence of atheism in nations such as Sweden and Denmark led to an overall increase in their acceptance in the eyes of the general population compared to countries with lower rates of reported atheism, such as the United States and, to a lesser extent, Canada. While outspoken proponents of atheism have emerged in the past quarter century, including prominent scientists such as Richard Dawkins, Steven Hawking, and Christopher Hitchens, atheists are still regarded as an outgroup in the United States. Additionally, these challengers of religion have brought atheism to the forefront of national discussion due, in part, to their outspoken nature. This

shift in identity from a hidden outgroup to public opponents of religion has led to calls from some to increase secularism in the United States, such as by appealing to remove nativity scenes from outside town halls, omitting the phrase "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance, and banning the Ten Commandments from being displayed outside of courthouses (Dawkins, 2006). These calls for change, particularly in areas where religion is deeply embedded in the regional culture, have put religious individuals on the defensive. However, even prior to these calls for a separation of church and state by atheist contemporaries, there had been an extreme lack of trust towards atheistic individuals in general (Jones, 2012; Benson, Merolla, & Geer, 2011). Although the presence of atheism is certainly evident in contemporary culture within the United States, there is no definitive answer as to why atheists are a marginalized outgroup. One must consider a variety of potential factors that lead people to have overall negative attitudes towards atheists.

Prejudice against Atheists

General Prejudice. Although atheists are among one of the largest religious "groups" in the world, research relating to prejudice against them is relatively new when compared to the research that is focused on other stigmatized groups (Edgell et al., 2006; Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, 2011). Atheists in the United States may face prejudice due to their non-majority status or being viewed as a value-violating outgroup (Gervais, 2011). Although research on atheist prejudice is sparse, there are many similarities between how prejudice and stereotyping affect atheists in comparison with other outgroups.

The simple act of categorizing individuals into groups can lead to increases in prejudice. The use of the minimal-groups paradigm (Turner, 1978) demonstrates that separating individuals into competing groups based on manufactured differences (whether a presented color is blue or green, how many dots are in a grid, etc.) will lead the individual to favor members of his or her respective ingroup over members of the outgroup. These findings indicate that simply categorizing into separate groups can lead to prejudice, as opposed to value differences or direct threat.

Individuals are also susceptible to having their opinions of outgroup members altered simply by the attitudes and behaviors of those around them. Participants who interacted with a confederate who either condoned racist views or condemned anti-racist views aligned their own views with the attitude that the confederate expressed to them (i.e., they had fewer anti-racist views when the confederate condoned racism and more anti-racist views when the confederate condemned racism (Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, & Vaughn, 1994). These results suggest that social influence plays a large part in the way that attitudes are formed and maintained.

Individuals who belong to outgroups are victimized by prejudice more frequently if their respective outgroup is seen as one that violates social norms. In research by Crandall, Eshleman, and O'Brien (2002), researchers analyzed the perceptions of appropriate times to act in a prejudiced manner against a variety of outgroups. Separate samples of participants rated the acceptability of discriminating against a set of 105 target groups (e.g., atheists, convicts) while they themselves were in a group with other participants (with no more than 20 individuals per group). A different sample of

participants rated those target groups individually using a feeling thermometer. The two measures correlated strongly ($r = .96$), indicating that personal attitudes are heavily aligned with group social norms. Similarly, in a second study, support of discrimination against a member of a target group was predicted by the level to which participants viewed prejudice against the same target groups as acceptable (for instance, a participant who was accepting of prejudice towards Jews would also be accepting of discrimination against Jews). Discrimination in interpersonal settings (such as a dating relationship) was accepted more frequently than in professional settings (such as renting a house to a member of the target group or hiring a member of the target group for a job). It was viewed as acceptable to discriminate against and to have prejudice towards value-violating outgroups such as racists and drug dealers. However, this was not viewed as true for Blacks and the physically disabled. Although atheists were not one of the 105 target groups in the Crandall et al. (2002) study, their status as a value-violating outgroup (Gervais, 2011; Shariff, Norenzayan, & Henrich, 2010), which was measured in this study (e.g. convicts, drug dealers, racists) would likely yield similar results in acceptability of prejudice and discrimination against them.

How a person behaves based on their personal beliefs is heavily influenced by the perceptions of others' beliefs. Individuals tend to not express explicit prejudice towards outgroups for fear of violating social norms unless it is socially acceptable to do so, as it is for a criminal, members of hate groups, etc. (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). However, these suppressed prejudices do tend to be expressed when an individual is presented with a reason to express these prejudices, such as encountering an individual from an outgroup

who acts in a manner that is consistent with stereotypes about that outgroup (e.g., a Muslim individual being involved in a terrorist organization). Many stereotypes exist regarding atheists, including the perception that they are immoral, anti-religion, and dishonest (Ehrlich & Van Tubergen, 1971). If an individual encounters atheists who are overly aggressive in the expression of their attitudes towards religion (e.g., Richard Dawkins), that individual is more likely to activate the negative attitudes towards the atheist outgroup that they had previously suppressed, according to Crandall and Eshleman's Justification-Suppression Model (2003).

Although it is generally not socially acceptable to discriminate against certain outgroups (e.g., Blacks, the disabled), social norms regarding negative attitudes toward other outgroups are more ambiguous (e.g., ex-convicts). Zitek and Hebl (2007) found that when the social acceptability of discriminating against an outgroup was ambiguous, willingness to discriminate against that outgroup was higher. Additionally, when it was unclear if discrimination towards a particular outgroup was socially acceptable, participants were more likely to allow their short-term and long-term attitudes of such outgroups be influenced by others. Although atheists are one of the most negatively viewed outgroups in the United States (Gervais et al., 2011), the negative social repercussions for being openly prejudiced towards them are not the same as that for traditionally stigmatized outgroups, such as Blacks or Jews. Based on these studies, one can understand how anti-atheist sentiment is so prevalent within the United States, whereas this widespread prejudice does not exist in more secular nations where atheist prevalence is much higher (Gervais et al., 2011).

<u>Distrust of Atheists</u> Although factors such as anonymity, distrust, and outgroup threat account for at least some atheistic prejudice, the level of animosity exhibited towards atheists, even while they would not be considered explicitly threatening, suggests that there are other factors that lead to an increase in distrust and other negative attitudes towards atheists. Gervais et al. (2011) found that even individuals who scored low on a scale measuring religiosity rated atheists as significantly less trustworthy compared to the general population. These findings seem counterintuitive; individuals who themselves have little or no religious centrality in their lives still perceived atheists more negatively than members of other outgroups. These findings suggest that there may be additional factors that influence negative attitudes towards atheists.

One of the reasons that atheists tend to be viewed negatively is the perception that they are untrustworthy. Gervais et al. (2011) explored the underlying causes of prejudice against atheists by comparing them to other outgroups that typically face stereotyping and prejudice, including homosexual males, religious minorities, feminists, and criminals. Particularly, they focused on determining the role of distrust and disgust in prejudice towards outgroups and predicted that high disgust would be associated with homosexual males, whereas high distrust would be associated with atheists. Participants responded to a general attitude scale, a disgust scale, and a distrust scale regarding three groups: atheists, gay men, and the general population. The results supported the hypothesis that distrust was central to prejudice against atheists, whereas disgust was central to prejudice against homosexuals. Responses were less favorable for atheists and homosexual men than for the general population in the general attitudes measure.

In a second study, they compared atheists to people of other religions (Christianity and Islam), as well as rapists (as a distrusted outgroup), and measured the number of conjunction errors in each case based on a description of an individual across the four conditions. Conjunction errors occur when observers categorize an individual into both specific and broader categories when provided with limited information. Consider the following: a man in a car hits a vehicle in a parking lot and leaves a blank note instead of his insurance information. Later, he takes money out of a wallet that he finds on the street. When asked if the man was likely to be a teacher, or a teacher *as well as* a member of another group (in this case, an atheist, rapist, Muslim, or Christian), a conjunction error is committed when the participant states that the perpetrator is likely to belong to their stated group as well as another group based on the limited information available. Conjunction errors determine when participants are more likely to associate a particular behavior with a certain group. For instance, a charitable act may be more likely to be associated with Christianity, whereas an act of theft may be more likely to be associated with a criminal. It is by measuring how frequently participants associate socially negative behavior with certain groups (committing a conjunction error) that we can use this method as a measure of prejudice. Conjunction errors were committed significantly more frequently when participants had the opportunity to label the perpetrator as being an atheist (Gervais, 2011). These results indicate that immoral behavior, particularly dishonest behavior, is associated with atheists at a significantly higher rate than with Muslims, Christians, or even rapists.

Gervais and colleagues (2011) also sought to examine the effect that being an atheist would have when being considered for a job. High trust required positions (e.g., daycare worker) and low trust required positions (e.g., food server) were compared to focus on the concept of distrust as a main reason behind prejudice towards atheists. The results indicated a slight preference for atheists to be hired as food servers. More importantly, atheists were significantly less likely to be selected for the high trust required position of daycare worker. These findings support the notion that distrust is central to anti-atheist prejudice. When individuals are tasked with analyzing the suitability of an atheist candidate for a high trust required role, they are more likely to pass over that candidate based on the atheist label. In low trust required positions, however, this bias does not occur.

Individuals who identify as religious tend to view non-religious individuals as less trustworthy. Tan and Vogel (2008) found that during dyadic interactions, trust and cooperation ratings of an individual's partner were higher when the partner identified themselves as religious as opposed to non-religious, with individuals who were religious rating religious partners as more trustworthy and cooperative than non-religious partners. By applying the findings of Gervais et al. (2011), one can conceptualize how distrust among religious ingroups towards an atheist outgroup could prohibit cooperation and therefore increase the likelihood of prejudicial attitudes towards atheists. What the findings from both of these studies do not address, however, is why people do not trust atheists in the first place.

One possible explanation for atheist distrust is anonymity. Fear of unknown threats can be just as intimidating as known explicit threats (Furedi, 2007; Riezler, 1944). Although members of religious groups can often be easily identified (i.e., they gather for religious services, wear religious symbols on their person, adorn themselves with yarmulkes and hijabs), atheists can be hidden in plain sight. There are no widespread symbols or clothing used to associate an individual with atheism. They typically do not meet in large groups with any degree of regularity, and there are no identifying markers to separate them from the rest of society, which makes them extremely concealable as a religious outgroup. Though anonymity likely plays a role in distrust of atheists, another potential reason for distrust is a negative association with the word "atheist" itself.

<u>The Labeling Effect on Prejudice against Atheists</u>

Perceptions of outgroup traits, either positive or negative, affect how a person perceives individual members of that outgroup. Also of importance, however, is the label with which one associates another individual and the effect that that label has on how that individual is judged. Suppose an office worker is introduced to a new co-worker by his or her boss. If the new employee is introduced as a "new employee," it is likely that the original office worker sees the new employee as a relatively equal peer. If he or she is introduced as a "summer intern," however, perhaps the office worker perceives him or her as less competent and more of a burden. This difference of attitude toward the individual based on the label used to describe him or her is known as the labeling effect (Darley & Gross, 1983).

Labels play an important role in how individuals perceive others in the world around them. Darley and Gross (1983) examined the processes that occur when the label assigned to an individual influences the judgment of that person's perceived characteristics. When a video observation of the child's performance was the sole piece of information provided, the child was rated relatively consistently as being apt for his or her age group. When additional information was presented stating that the child was either of high or low socioeconomic status, however, the high SES child was rated as being advanced for his or her age and the low SES child was rated as being underdeveloped for his or her age, even though the actual performance was the same across conditions.

Concepts often can evoke varied reactions by the general public based solely on their label. Research conducted by Smith (1987) viewed how individuals rated controversial concepts when presented with just the label as opposed to when individuals were presented with a description of the concept itself. For example, the term "welfare" was presented to participants, as was "government assistance for those in need." "Government assistance to those in need" was consistently rated as being more acceptable and was more likely to be supported compared to the specific label of "welfare." These findings indicate that individuals are more prone to negatively associate concepts that have negative schemas (welfare being associated with lazy individuals or those who are out to manipulate the system to their advantage), even though they may support the underlying concept (helping those in need).

In terms of self-identification, when researching attitudes towards feminism, Williams and Wittig (1997) found that although a majority of women in the United States supported feminist ideals and the need for a strong feminist movement, only slightly more than half of those individuals who supported feminist ideals identified themselves as a "feminist." These women were willing to show support for the feminist movement while simultaneously distancing themselves from the "feminist" label, which often carries a negative stigma in society (Buschman & Lenart, 1996).

Using these findings that demonstrate the differences between attitudes towards a concept and attitudes towards a label, we can potentially apply them to the labeling of religious outgroups. That is, it is possible that the word "atheist" itself leads to negative attitudes towards this group rather than the concept of atheism itself? Given the common portrayal of atheists as a group that is consistently threatening to the moral values of others, the word "atheist" itself is likely to have a negative schema attached to it so that individuals view it negatively in spite of the underlying meaning, much like welfare is viewed in a more negative manner than government assistance for those in need.

<div align="center">Religiosity as a Moderator for Atheistic Prejudice</div>

Religion plays a central role in the lives of many people. How a person identifies with their religion plays a part in how they view the world and interact with others. Although many aspects of religion bring out positive behavior in individuals such as altruism, a stronger moral compass, or a general desire to help others, some research has shown that religiosity is correlated with prejudicial behavior as well (Allport & Ross, 1967; Johnson, Rowatt, & LaBouff, 2012; Rowatt, Carpenter, & Haggard, 2013; Rowatt,

LaBouff, Johnson, Froese, & Tsang, 2009). While some types of religious orientations, notably quest religiosity, are associated with positive attitudes towards outgroups (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Shen, Yelderman, Haggard & Rowatt, 2013), other types of religiosity, such as extrinsic orientation, are associated with negative attitudes towards members of outgroups.

Literal interpretations of religious teachings can affect how people carry out their religious beliefs. Researchers (Shen et al., 2013) explored the foundations of prejudice against both racial and value-violating outgroups in relation to religiosity. In regard to religiosity, however, the researchers critiqued prior studies as having defined the term "religiosity" too broadly. To remedy this, researchers defined religiosity as a composite of several additional measures, such as the inclusion or exclusion of belief in God as transcendent, a literal belief versus symbolic interpretation of religion, and a self-report of religiosity.

In the first study, researchers focused on the flexibility of religious belief using the literal/symbolic interpretation measure. To measure prejudice, a proximity scale was used with lower scores being associated with higher levels of tolerance towards members of both racial and value-violating outgroups and higher scores indicating less comfort being close to the outgroups of interest (gay men, atheists, Arabs, and African-Americans). Additionally, in a subsequent study, the inclusion of transcendence in one's religious beliefs led to more prejudice against value-violating outgroups. In addition to having a positive correlation with proximity scores (indicating discomfort) for both gay men and atheists from the value-violating outgroup, transcendence also correlated with

proximity scores for Arab individuals from the racial outgroup category, in which researchers attributed to the possibility of participants misinterpreting the term "Arab" as "Muslim."

Shen et al. (2013) also hypothesized that the literal/and transcendence measures would mediate the relationship between the reported religiosity scale and the prejudice scores for both sets of outgroups (value-violating and racial). The religiosity scale was comprised of self-reports of attending religious services, reading of holy books, prayer/meditation, and a self-report of religiosity. Inclusion of transcendence in religious beliefs mediated the effects of general religiosity on prejudice towards value-violating outgroups (including atheists) and the literal religious interpretation mediated the effect of religiosity on atheists, Arabs, and African-Americans.

Given that atheists can be categorized under both the broad spectrum of a value-violating outgroup (in which the concept of transcendence mediated the relationship between religiosity and prejudice for value-violating outgroups) and specifically as atheists (in which literal religious interpretation mediated the relationship between religiosity and prejudice towards atheists), it was important in the current study to use a scale that measured both transcendence and literal religious interpretation. The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (Huber & Huber, 2012) measures both of these concepts as part of religiosity as a broad construct, as opposed to using several separate measures.

Need for Closure as a Moderator for Atheistic Prejudice

Just as many individuals view religiosity as an important factor in their everyday lives, order is also a central part of our existence (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994; Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & De Grada, 2006). Without order and structure, societies would descend into lawlessness and would be unable to function. Although lack of order is not always as severe as total anarchy, there is still a desire for structure and closure. Simple events, such as an individual not being punished for a transgression, can lead to a disruption in the sense of order. One of the many beliefs relating to a higher power is that a religious overseer helps maintain order in the world. Perceiving atheists as having no concept of divine punishment (acting as a moral compass when no secular figure is present) could elicit negative attitudes among people who have a high sense of need for closure and are themselves religious individuals.

Need for Closure is a concept that builds on the idea that individual differences are present in the need for someone to have any answer given to them to explain the unknown (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Individuals who are high in need for closure face discomfort when something is left unexplained or unanswered, whereas individuals who are low in the measure do not face this dilemma. In their study, Webster and Kruglanski (1994) compared different groups of students who would likely exhibit the polar extremes on these traits: students who majored in an art field (low need for closure) and students who majored in a financial related field (high need for closure). The respective groups scored on their respective extremes of the scale, confirming the ability for the Need for Closure scale to differentiate an individual's likelihood of belonging to a

particular group. The Need for Closure scale is also a predictor of religious

fundamentalism (Brandt & Reyna, 2010).

Relating to religious individuals who are high in need for closure, the concept of

an individual potentially getting away with a crime without the fear of divine punishment

may lead to an increase in attribution of punishment towards the transgressor by religious

individuals. The idea of atheists not believing in a higher power is a potential reason why

they are so distrusted among the general public. If this is indeed true, then a moral

oversight of atheists should lead to a decrease in distrust towards them. Gervais and

Norenzayan (2012) examined the general levels of prejudice and distrust towards atheists

and outgroups when presented with reminders of secular authority (police officers,

judges, etc.) over the course of three experiments. They hypothesized that when

presented with these reminders, individuals would be less distrusting of atheists because

the secular authority would serve as a reminder of resistance to immoral behavior. Their

hypothesis was supported, such that when individuals observed visual reminders of

secular authority (e.g., a video of a judge or police monitoring the streets), there was less

distrust towards the atheist outgroup, but not outgroups in general. Given that previous

research shows that distrust is a central tenant of prejudice against atheists as opposed to

disgust (Gervais, 2011), prejudice towards atheists should decrease when there is less

reason to distrust atheists, and should increase when there is more reason to distrust them.

In the first study, researchers manipulated prejudice target (atheists vs. general

outgroup prejudice) and presentation of video (reminder of secular authority vs. control).

In studies two and three, they measured prejudice towards specific outgroups (atheists

and gay males). Distrust and disgust toward the target were measured as dependent variables in addition to an overall prejudice scale.

When participants were presented with reminders of secular authority (e.g., police officers, a judge), they were less distrustful towards the atheist outgroup, but not towards the gay outgroup, than in the control condition. When individuals are reminded of secular authority, they exhibited less prejudice towards a target who is a member of a distrust-oriented outgroup, such as an atheist. The reminder of secular authority did not, however, lead to a decrease in prejudice towards a disgust-oriented outgroup, such as a homosexual man, which indicated that secular authority does not lead to a general decrease in prejudice, but leads to a specific decrease in distrust in trust-violating outgroups, as distrust is less salient when a moral authority is present.

It is hypothesized that without a reminder of secular authority, atheists will be perceived as more capable of acting immorally due to a lack of perceived oversight. Individuals who are high in need for closure are therefore predicted to be more punitive towards atheists than those in the control condition, based on a belief of a lack of a moral compass among atheists (Gervais & Norenzayan, 2012).

<div align="center">Present Study</div>

Design

There is little research that examines the relationship between religious label and attributions of morality, responsibility, punishment, or seriousness of transgressions for religious non-believers. Therefore, I designed three studies to address the relationships between these variables: a pilot study, Study 1, and Study 2. The pilot study was designed

to determine if there were significant differences between judgments of moral transgression based on religious label, as well as to assess the validity of response items and potential moderators. Study 1 was designed to address shortcomings present in the pilot study and to collect data from a community sample. Study 2 was identical in nature to Study 1 and was intended to recruit from a strictly religious sample.

According to previous research on labeling (Smith, 1987; Williams & Wittig, 1997), the negative stigma associated with the word "atheist" could potentially play a role in the negative judgments of non-believers. Specifically, I was interested in separating the labels of non-believers into two categories- those explicitly labeled "atheists" and a more passive label of "those with no religious beliefs." It was hypothesized that there would be significant differences between the two labels during judgments of a moral transgression, with atheists being viewed as less moral and subject to more harsh attributions overall compared to religious non-believers. The pilot study was designed to measure the effects of religious label and spontaneity (pre-meditated immoral behavior versus spontaneous immoral behavior) on these attributions. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine if there was a significant difference between how atheists, people labeled as having no religious beliefs, or people in a control condition with no religious beliefs listed were rated while behaving immorally. Studies 1 and 2 focused solely on the effect of religious label as well as potential moderators of attributions during moral transgressions and qualitative measures towards religious groups. Study 1 consisted of a community sample collected via Amazon's Mechanical Turk software, and Study 2 consisted of college-aged

religious participants recruited from introductory psychology classes at a public

Midwestern university.

<u>Hypotheses</u>

H1: Participants in the "atheist" condition will be more punitive in the

punishment and morality attribution responses than participants in the "no religious

beliefs" or "control" conditions (all studies).

H2: Religiosity will moderate the relationship between religious label and

attribution of punishment and morality. Specifically, those high in religiosity will be

more punitive towards the individuals labeled as "atheist" than those low in religiosity

(Study 1 & Study 2).

H3: Need for Closure will moderate the relationship between religious label and

attribution of punishment and morality for those participants who identify as religious.

Specifically, religious individuals who are high in need for closure will be more punitive

towards the individuals labeled as "atheist" than those low in religiosity (Study 1 & Study

2).

CHAPTER 2

PILOT STUDY

Participants

A community sample of 129 individuals 18 years of age or over participated in

the study (majority European-American (80.3%), female (60.7%) and Christian (41.8%);

32.8% of the sample identified as non-religious- see Table 1 for complete demographics).

Procedure

Participants were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk software, an online

recruiting tool that serves as an intermediary between researchers and participants.

Participants select a study based on a brief description (see Appendix C for a description

of this study) and factors such as reimbursement rate (in this case, $0.25 US dollars) and

average completion time (in this case, approximately 15-20 minutes), and are

subsequently linked to a third-party website containing the survey (in this case,

Qualtrics). Participants are then presented with an electronically displayed informed

consent form (see Appendix A) immediately after accepting the study from Amazon's

Mechanical Turk software.

Participants first completed the Need for Closure scale (Appendix F; Webster &

Kruglanski, 1994), before being presented with the vignette of a student who was caught

cheating on an exam by his professor. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six

conditions that manipulated independent variables including the religious label of the

student who cheated on the exam (atheist; no religious beliefs; control), as well as

premeditation of the moral transgression (spontaneous; premeditated). Following this,

participants were asked to respond to a series of items rating the morality, responsibility, likelihood of guilt, and suggested punishment, if any, for the perpetrator (Appendix E). After they completed this task, the participants completed the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (Appendix G; Huber & Huber, 2012), as well as a brief demographics measure (Appendix H).

Following completion of these items, participants provided their Amazon Mechanical Turk worker identification numbers and were provided with an email of the principal investigator, debriefed (Appendix B), and notified that the study had been completed.

<div style="text-align:center">Measures and Materials</div>

Need for Closure Scale

Webster and Kruglanski's (1994) Need for Cognitive Closure scale (see Appendix F) is a 47-item scale that uses a 6-point Likert scale ranging from *'strongly disagree'* to *'strongly agree'* to measure an individual's need to have *any* answer provided to them during times of uncertainty (e.g., "I feel uncomfortable when I don't understand the reason why an event occurred in my life"). The Need for Cognitive Closure scale also measures the following subscales: order, predictability, decisiveness, closed-mindedness, and ambiguity, which could be potentially related to the measures used in the study. Additionally, a 'lie score' composite is made up of several items (e.g., "I have never been late for an appointment in my life") to determine if participants are responding accurately, with individuals scoring higher than the permitted lie score being excluded

from data analysis. Cronbach's alpha for the composite Need for Closure scale is relatively high (α=.92), and was moderately high in the current study (α=.78).

Centrality of Religiosity Scale

Huber and Huber's (2012) Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS-15) (see Appendix G) is a 15-item scale. The scale measures a general construct of religiosity, as well as five subscales including public practice, private practice, religious experience, ideology, and intellectual dimensions. In three studies conducted by Huber and Huber (2012), the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS-15) had a very strong internal consistency, ranging from α=.92 to α=.96. A sample question from the scale would be "How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine wants to communicate or to reveal something to you?," which would fall under the religious experience subscale. The scale uses a 5-point Likert scale scoring system, ranging from "*not at all*" to "*very much so*" on levels of importance/belief (to what extent do you believe in an afterlife—e.g. immortality of the soul, resurrection of the dead or reincarnation?), and '*never*' to '*very often*' on measures of frequency (how often do you pray during the week?). Within the pilot study, the Centrality of Religiosity scale demonstrated an internal consistency coefficient of .82 for the religiosity of participants.

Vignette

A vignette was presented to participants detailing an academic transgression where a student cheated in either a pre-meditated or spontaneous manner (see Appendix I). The student was described as having never been in trouble academically at college

before, and was identified as politically neutral and either as an atheist, someone with no

religious beliefs, no religious description was provided (control scenario). Participants

were then asked to use a seven-point Likert scale to rate the student's morality, the

seriousness of transgression, his control of situation, the understandability of his actions,

and how harshly he should be punished. Additionally, participants were asked to

correctly identify the religion, reason for punishment, and political orientation of the

accused student, as well as provide the student's name. If participants failed to correctly

identify more than 50% of these items, they were excluded from data analysis (though

similar phonetic names such as "Matthew" instead of "Michael" were accepted as

correct).

<div align="center">Results</div>

Significant differences based on religious label, spontaneity of the transgression,

and interactions between the two were found on several measures throughout the study.

Three-by-two between-subject ANOVAs using Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests were

conducted with religious label (atheist, no religious beliefs, or control) and spontaneity of

the moral transgression (spontaneously looking at a neighbor's paper during an exam as

well as premeditatedly constructing a "cheat sheet" with exam information) as the

between subjects variables, with ratings of the student's morality, the seriousness of

transgression, the student's control of situation, the understandability of the student's

actions, and how harshly the student should be punished as the dependent variables.

Seven participants were removed from data analysis due to either failure to answer

greater than 50% of the manipulation checks correctly, or by having a composite score greater than the permissible "lie score" on the scales administered.

There was a significant effect of religious label on participants' ratings of the target's control over the situation, (F (2,116) = 6.72, p=.002, η^2= .11), with atheists (M=6.66, SD=0.63) rated as being in significantly more control of the situation than both individuals with no religious beliefs (M=5.90, SD=1.07) and individuals in the control condition (M=5.62, SD=1.74). Additionally, a significant main effect of religious label on the understandability of the target's actions was found (F (2,116) = 4.53, p=.03, η^2= .08), with the atheist condition (M=3.90, SD=1.07) being rated lower than both the control (M=4.90, SD=1.67) and no beliefs (M=4.69, SD=1.29) conditions. No significant differences were found for the student's morality, the seriousness of the transgression, or how harshly the student should be punished.

Additionally, main effects for spontaneity of the transgression were present for several of the response items. For seriousness of offense, (F (1,118) = 7.33, p=.008, η^2= .06), individuals who planned to cheat ahead of time (M=4.86, SD=1.24) were rated as having committed a more serious offense than those who acted spontaneously (M=4.48, SD=1.48). Also, participants' responses to the understandability of the actions of the target, (F (1,118) = 4.32, p=.040, η^2= .04), indicated that planning to commit the act was seen as less understandable (M=2.95, SD=1.80) than those who acted spontaneously during the exam (M=3.60, SD=1.78). Lastly, a main effect was present for the morality of the target, (F (1,116) = 5.71, p=.041, η^2= .04), with those who acted in a premeditated manner (M=3.21, SD=1.15) being viewed as less moral than those who acted

spontaneously (*M*=3.66, *SD*=1.24). Significant differences did not emerge for control of the situation or severity of punishment.

Interactions between the spontaneity of the transgression and the religious label were present in several response items. For the participants' perceived seriousness of the transgression, F (2,118) = 3.02, *p*=.044, η^2= .05, atheists who acted in a premeditated manner (*M*=5.74, *SD*=1.24) were rated as having committed a more serious offense than individuals in the spontaneous control condition (*M*=4.50, *SD*=1.61). For the level of recommended punishment, F (2,118) = 3.59, *p*=.031, η^2= .06, atheists who planned ahead of time to cheat (*M*=4.90, *SD*=0.88) as well as atheists who spontaneously decided to cheat (*M*=5.05, *SD*=1.19) received harsher attributions than individuals who acted spontaneously and were in the control condition (*M*=3.85, *SD*=1.69). When asked if the target's actions during the transgression were understandable, (F (2,118) = 3.11, *p*=.048, η^2= .05), participants empathized less with atheists who planned to cheat ahead of time (*M*=2.53, *SD*=1.54), viewing their actions as less understandable than individuals with no religious beliefs who acted premeditatedly (*M*=3.70, *SD*=1.92) as well individuals in the control condition who acted spontaneously (*M*=4.30, *SD*=1.66). Additionally, atheists in the spontaneous condition (*M*=3.00, *SD*=1.75) were viewed less empathetically than students in the spontaneous control condition (*M*=4.30, *SD*=1.66). For ratings of the target's moral values, F (2,118) = 4.93, *p*=.009, η^2= .08, atheists in the premeditated condition (*M*=3.11, *SD*=1.29) were viewed as significantly less moral than students in the spontaneous control condition (*M*=4.20, *SD*=1.40), with the students in the premeditated control condition (*M*=2.85, *SD*=1.23) also being viewed as less moral than those in the

spontaneous control condition (M=4.20, SD=1.40). Moderators were not analyzed in the pilot study due low n, an issue that was addressed in Study 1 and Study 2.

<u>Discussion</u>

Overall, labeling did have a significant effect on judgments about the perpetrator on several of the measures. In support of the hypothesis, atheists were rated more harshly than both those with no religious beliefs and the control. Additionally, significant interactions were found between religious label and spontaneity of the transgression, as well as main effects for spontaneity of the transgression.

One of the main limitations of the pilot study was the presence of floor and ceiling effects for several of the items. Specifically, items measuring morality and control of the situation exhibited significant ceiling and floor effects, with over 85% of participants having ratings within a 3-point extreme on either end of a 7-point Likert scale (1, 2, or 3 for morality and 5, 6, or 7 for control of the situation). These questions were changed for subsequent studies from "How would you rate the target's morals?" to "How reflective of the target's morals overall were his actions in the event described?," and from "How much control do you feel the target had in the situation described?" to "How much do you think the target's actions were due to external factors (pressure to succeed, a bad score on another exam) rather than internal factors (not caring that he was doing something immoral)?" Additionally, the subsequent studies focused solely on religious label as the independent variable. While removing a potential confound in premeditation, this also aided in addressing the issue of low power by increasing the number of available participants per cell for religious label.

CHAPTER 3

STUDY 1

Method

Participants

A community sample of 167 individuals 18 years of age or over participated in
this study (majority European-American (75.8%), male (52.6%) and Christian (52.6%);
33.8% of the sample identified as non-religious - see Table 2 for complete
demographics). Participants were awarded $0.45 US dollars in Amazon credit for their
participation in the study.

Procedure

As in the pilot study, participants selected the study and were linked to a third-
party website containing the survey (in this case, Qualtrics). Participants were then
directed to an electronically displayed informed consent form (Appendix A) immediately
after accepting the study from Amazon's Mechanical Turk software.

Participants first completed the Need for Closure scale (Appendix F; Webster &
Kruglanski, 1994), before being presented with the vignette of a student who was caught
cheating on an exam by his professor. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of
three conditions that manipulated the religious label of the student (atheist; no religious
beliefs; control).

Following this, participants were asked to complete a series of questions asking
them to rate the morality, responsibility, likelihood of guilt, and suggested punishment, if
any, for the perpetrator, as well as other related measures describing the individual in the

vignette. After they completed this task, the participants completed the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (Appendix G; Huber & Huber, 2012), as well as a brief demographics measure.

After these measures, participants were asked to respond to two qualitative questions (Appendix K) measuring attitudes towards the target in the vignette. Participants were required to enter at least 25 characters in order to complete the questions.

Following completion of these items, participants were asked to provide their Amazon Mechanical Turk worker identification numbers, and were provided with an email of the principal investigator, debriefed, and notified that the study had been completed.

Measures and Materials

Centrality of Religiosity Scale This is the same measure that was administered in the pilot study (Huber & Huber, 2012). Within this sample, the Centrality of Religiosity scale demonstrated a very high internal consistency coefficient of .97 for the religiosity of participants.

Need for Closure Scale This is the same measure that was administered in the pilot study (Webster & Kurglanski, 1994). Within this sample, the Need for Closure scale demonstrated an overall internal consistency of .86.

Vignette A vignette was presented to participants detailing an academic transgression where a student cheated on an exam (see Appendix J). This vignette was identical to that of the pilot study with the exception that spontaneity of the transgression was not manipulated. In all conditions, the target's actions were spontaneous. Participants were then asked to rate the student in terms of morality, seriousness of transgression, control of situation, the understandability of the student's actions, and how harshly the student should be punished.

Qualitative Response Two qualitative measures were presented to participants asking them how they felt about the individual's actions during the transgression as well as how they felt about the individual's religious group as a whole (atheists; people with no religious beliefs; Christians). A Christian measure was used in lieu of a control so participants were still writing about a religious group in the United States. These responses were rated by two independent coders on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "very negative" (They're wolves in sheep clothing. They're the reason my kids have "winter" break because they can't mind their own business.) to "very positive" (Atheists have every right as anyone else to believe as they wish). These responses were coded by two raters with an interrater reliability of $r=.87$, and an average of the two values was used for analysis.

<u>Results</u>

<u>Hypothesis 1: Religious Label on Judgments During Moral Transgressions</u>

Six one-way (atheist; no religious beliefs; control) between-groups analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted using Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests to examine the effects of religious label on judgments about non-theists during an ethical transgression. These analyses were conducted for how reflective the target's actions were of his overall moral values, how understandable the target's actions were, perceived seriousness of the transgression, severity of punishment for the target, how much the target's actions were due to internal versus external factors, and how severe the target thought his actions were (See Tables 5-10). Thirteen participants were removed from data analysis due to either failure to complete greater than 50% of the manipulation checks, or by having a composite score greater than the permissible 'lie score' on the scales administered.

There were no significant main effects for the target's morality (p=.15; Table 6), nor for the perceived seriousness of the transgression (p=.19; Table 5).

Two of the main effects directly supported Hypothesis 1. When asked to determine how understandable the target's actions were in the situation described, a measure designed to gauge empathy, a main effect (F (2,151) = 3.50, p = .03, η^2 =.09) showed that participants were less likely to see cheating as being understandable when the target was described as an atheist (M=3.84, SD=2.03) than when he was labeled as having no religious beliefs (M=4.93, SD=2.12), or when the target's religious beliefs were not mentioned (control) (M=4.67, SD=1.88) (see Table 8). This finding indicates that participants were less likely to "put themselves in the shoes" of the target when he

was described as atheist as compared to being described as having no religious beliefs or not having any religious information presented to them. Furthermore, a significant main effect was found for how serious the target perceived his actions to be during the situation described (F (2,151) = 3.95, p = .02, η^2 =.08). When the target was described as being atheist (M=4.38, SD=1.88), participants viewed the target as seeing the transgression as less serious than when he was labeled as having no religious beliefs (M=4.98, SD=1.41) or when the target's religious beliefs were not mentioned (control) (M=5.24, SD=1.37) (see Table 10).

For severity of punishment, a main effect of religious label was present (F (2,151) = 4.88, p = .01, η^2 =.08), with the no religious beliefs label (M=4.61, SD=1.47) being punished significantly less than both the atheist (M=5.25, SD=1.47) and control (M=5.29, SD=1.19) conditions (see Table 7). Additionally, there was a significant difference for the measure of whether the target's actions were due to external factors (such as pressure to succeed in the course) or internal factors (not caring if it was right or wrong) (F (2,151) = 2.71, p = .05, η^2 =.04) (see Table 9). When the target was labeled an atheist (M=4.72, SD=1.54), participants were more likely to associate the target's transgression with internal factors (demonstrated by higher scores on a 7-point Likert scale) than the control condition (M=4.04, SD=1.74), but not when the target was labeled as having no religious beliefs (M=4.24, SD=1.76).

Hypotheses 2 and 3: Need for Closure and Centrality of Religiosity as Moderators

   It was hypothesized that both Need for Closure and religiosity would moderate

the relationship between religious label and judgments of a moral transgressor, such that

those high in Need for Closure and religiosity would be more punitive when the

transgressor was labeled as an atheist. Moderated regression analyses were conducted for

Need for Closure and religiosity, as well as an interaction of the two variables, to

examine effects on participant responses. Response scores were first standardized, then

interaction variables were created with the religious label of the participant in order to

examine main effects, two-way and three-way interactions. For the first model, Need for

Closure, religiosity, and religious labels were analyzed for main effects. Next, for model

2, Need for Closure and religious label as well as religiosity and religious label were

analyzed for two-way interactions. Lastly, religious label, religiosity, and Need for

Closure were analyzed for three-way interactions. A two-way interaction was found

between Need for Closure and judgments of those in the non-belief condition (β=1.99,

t=2.04, p=.05) on how understandable the target's actions were during the moral

transgression (see Table 11). This finding indicated that when individuals were high in

Need for Closure, they were more punitive towards individuals labeled as having no

religious beliefs. Given the lack of significant findings in regard to moderators in the

study, however, it is likely that this finding is a result of a type I error.

Qualitative Findings

Participants were asked to complete a brief qualitative response to the target following a more detailed religious description, which was identical in nature to that of Study 1 (see Appendix K). The interrater reliability was a respectable $r = .87$. No significant results were found between atheists label ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.21$), those with no religious beliefs ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.97$), and Christians ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.45$) ($p=.56$) on attitudes towards the respective religious groups when using a one-way between-groups Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for differences based on religious label.

Exploratory Analyses

Exploratory analyses were carried out to identify possible relationships between judgment measures and participant demographics, including education level, race, income, political orientation, and religion (Table 3). None of these measures showed significant results.

CHAPTER 4

STUDY 2

Study 2 was conducted to recruit a more homogeneous religious sample in comparison to Amazon's Mechanical Turk workers, who tend to be more non-religious than what is representative of the population as a whole (Rozich & MacLin, 2014). It was anticipated that by focusing on a group that is more likely to harbor anti-atheist prejudice (religious individuals), the effect of religious label on moral and punitive judgments would be more pronounced. Besides recruiting religious participants, Studies 1 and 2 are identical in nature.

Method

Participants

Ninety-six college students 18 years of age or older who identified as Christian, Jewish, or Muslim participated in this study (see Table 3 for demographics). Participants selected a study to participate in based on a brief description of the study and completion time, and were subsequently linked to a third-party website containing the survey (in this case, Qualtrics). Participants were recruited from introductory psychology courses and were awarded .5 research participation credits.

Procedure

Individuals from the university sample were recruited via the University of Northern Iowa's SONA System, an online recruiting tool that serves as an intermediary between researchers and college students. Participants had to identify as either Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or Buddhist on a pre-screening survey to be eligible for the study. Once

participants selected the study and clicked on the link to take it, they were directed to an

electronically displayed informed consent form (Appendix A). Once they accepted the

terms of the consent form, they began the study, which was identical to that of Sample 1.

Measures and Materials

Centrality of Religiosity Scale Within the university sample, the Centrality of

Religiosity scale demonstrated an internal consistency coefficient of .94 for the religiosity

of participants.

Need for Closure Scale Within the university sample, the Need for Closure scale

demonstrated an overall internal consistency of .86.

Results

Hypothesis 1: Religious Label on Judgments During Moral Transgressions

Consistent with the first study, it was hypothesized that the negative stigma

associated with the word "atheist" plays a role in the judgments people make about non-

believers. Six one-way (atheist, no religious beliefs, control) between-groups analyses of

variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to examine the effects of religious label on

judgments about non-theists during an ethical transgression. These analyses were

conducted for perceived seriousness of the transgression, severity of punishment for the

target, how understandable the target's actions were, how much the target's actions were

due to internal versus external factors, how severe the target thought his actions were, and

how reflective of the target's overall moral values were his actions (see Tables 5-10).

One participant was removed from data analysis due to failure to complete greater than

50% of the manipulation checks (measuring recall of the target's name, religious

identification, political identification, and why he was being reviewed by the discipline board).

There were no significant main effects for any of the measures when all eligible participants were included in the data analysis. Though categorically non-religious individuals were filtered out during the prescreening process, I did not require a specific level of identification with one's religion for entry into the study (participants could identify as "Christian," but also report that they did not feel any sort of connection with their identified religion).

Thus, I reran the analyses using only those individuals who identified at least "somewhat" with their listed religion during analyses of variance (excluding those who stated they did not identify with any religion or did not identify at all with their stated religion). When the new analysis was conducted, there was a significant main effect for how reflective of the target's moral values his actions were during the scenario described (F (2,66) = 3.50, p = .05, η^2 =.06) (See Table 6). When the target was labeled as an atheist (M=4.30, SD=1.38), participants rated the moral transgression as significantly more reflective of the target's moral values than the control group (M=3.14, SD=1.32), but not significantly more reflective than if the target was labeled as having no religious beliefs (M=3.80, SD=1.50). Although this finding does not directly support hypothesis 1, it does replicate past research that shows that atheists are viewed more negatively than people in control conditions (Gervais, 2011).

Hypotheses 2 and 3: Need for Closure and Centrality of Religiosity as Moderators

Based on research by Gervais and Norenzayan (2012) that atheists may be distrusted because of a lack of a moral overseer, it was hypothesized that individuals who were religious and high in Need for Closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) would be more punitive towards atheists based on the need for punishment for moral transgressions. Additionally, high levels of religiosity (Huber & Huber, 2012) were hypothesized to moderate negative attributions towards atheists, with higher religiosity scores leading to more punitive scores.

Just as in Study 1, moderated regression analyses were conducted for Need for Closure and religiosity, as well as an interaction of the two variables, to examine effects on participant responses. Response scores were first standardized, then interaction variables were created with the religious label of the participant in order to examine main effects, two-way and three-way interactions. There were no significant results for any of the dependent variables. Viewed alongside the sole significant result from Study 1, it is likely that Need for Closure and religiosity do not serve a moderating influence on judgments about non-theists' moral transgressions.

Qualitative Findings

Similar to Study 1, there were no significant differences found between the participants rating atheists ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.34$), those with no religious beliefs ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.51$), and Christians ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.94$) ($p=.75$) when using a one-way between-groups Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for differences based on religious label.

<u>Exploratory Analyses</u>

Exploratory analyses were carried out to identify possible relationships between judgment measures and participant demographics, including education level, race, income, political orientation, and religion (Table 3). None of these measures showed significant results.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

<u>Summary</u>

The main purpose of the study was to explore how the novel idea of how the labels "atheist" vs. "no religious beliefs" affect people's judgments about the perpetrator of a hypothetical moral transgression, as well as to replicate previous findings that atheists are viewed more negatively than the general population. Partially supporting hypothesis 1, several measures across both the pilot study and Study 1 exhibited significant differences between the "no beliefs" condition and the "atheist" condition. Furthermore, previous research was partially replicated on several measures where individuals rated atheists more negatively than the control target, which mirrors findings where atheists were perceived more negatively than the general population (Gervais et al., 2011; Goodman & Mueller, 2009).

Although there were not significant differences across multiple measures in Study 2, this could potentially be explained by previous research showing that higher frequency of atheistic individuals in one's environment leads to a decrease in hostility and negative attitudes towards atheists (Gervais, 2011), with universities typically having higher populations of atheistic individuals than the general population (Goodman & Mueller, 2009). Similarly, Allport's (1954) research on intergroup attitudes indicates that an increase in intergroup contact leads to an increase in positive attitudes towards one's outgroup. Additionally, research by Crandall et al. (2002) has shown that self-

identification with being a college student increases the need to suppress prejudicial attitudes. Although the effect of suppressing attitudes decreased over time spent in college, given that the majority of our participants in the sample were first year college students, it is plausible that this identification played a suppressing role in negative attitudes towards atheists. Another possible explanation is that individuals in the college sample did not want to be overly punitive towards an individual who is in a situation similar to one that they could potentially encounter during their academic careers (being accused of academic misconduct).

This study also explored the moderating effects of Need for Closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) and Centrality of Religiosity (Huber & Huber, 2012). Both of these moderators failed to predict any significant effect on judgments about non-theists, nor were there interactions between the two (with the exception of one interaction of Need for Closure and religiosity on judgments of individuals with no religious beliefs). Future research should utilize measures such as quest religiosity or religious fundamentalism, as these measures demonstrate a more unfaltering belief that one's religion is the only correct religion, which might lead to better predictors of negative attitudes towards religious outgroups given previous findings (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Shen et al., 2013).

Furthermore, this study aimed to determine if individuals' qualitative attitudes towards non-theists would be influenced by religious label. Surprisingly, the vast majority of responses were positive, although occasional negative comments occurred in both directions (religious individuals responding with negative comments about non-

theists, as well as non-theists responding with negative comments about the Christian control group).

Although specific hypotheses were not formed for any demographic information, exploratory analyses were conducted in both Study 1 and Study 2 for potential relationships between judgments based on religious label and race, political orientation, education level, and income. None of these factors exhibited a significant relationship.

This study also focused solely on a negative situation--an individual committing a moral transgression. Though hypothesis 1 was partially supported, it is important to not overgeneralize the findings of this study to all types of interactions with religious non-believers until further research is conducted analyzing the effect of labels using a more neutral or positive prime, such as using a job hiring scenario (Gervais & Norenzayan, 2011) with the same manipulation of religious label used in the present study. In a study conducted by Swan and Heesacker (2012), researchers analyzed the effect of religious label on judgments in an online dating site. Contrary to the findings of the current study, significant differences were not found between individuals who were described as having no religious beliefs and atheists. Though it is possible that religious label does not make a difference in this scenario, it is also possible that individuals are more likely to seek out a similar ingroup member in a dating scenario. That is, it does not matter if the dating partner is labeled as an 'atheist' or 'having no religious beliefs,' what matters to the individual is that the hypothetical dating partner does not share a common belief which may be held central to them. It is also, possible, however, that context interacts with labels in regard to how Americans view non-theists. Future research could

potentially clarify whether individuals identified with the "atheist" label are only viewed negatively when they act immorally, serving as a confirmation bias for those who feel atheists lack a moral compass, by evaluating this research question across a variety of situations, such as a job hiring scenario or moral judgments during an altruistic act.

<p align="center">Strengths</p>

This study represents continuing research into the areas surrounding prejudice against atheists in the United States, but also puts forth novel findings relating to the effect of labeling on religious non-believers in this country. One of the most important findings of this study was not necessarily that atheists were judged more harshly than the target described as having no religious beliefs or the target in the control condition, but that when the target was described as having no religious beliefs, there *was not* a significant difference between those responses and the control. These findings indicate that though atheists are judged more harshly, those who are described as having no religious beliefs are not, indicating that the label, not the concept, is at least partially responsible for negative sentiment towards religious non-believers. Although previous research has found that atheists were viewed more negatively than Christians (Gervais et al., 2011), these studies did not analyze attitudes towards individuals with no religious beliefs.

Furthermore, the results of the pilot study being replicated using the community sample lowers the probability of the findings being a result of a type I error. Although Study 2 failed to replicate these findings, the community sample collected via mTurk, which did replicate the results of the pilot study, provides a more diverse demographic

than a rural, Midwestern university. It is therefore plausible to state that a community sample taken from around the country would be more reflective of the prejudice that atheists face today than a large university, where individuals tend to be more open to alternative ideas and lifestyles (Goodman & Mueller, 2009).

Additionally, this study contributes to the field of psychology by replicating previous research (Gervais, 2011) that demonstrates that atheists are judged more harshly than control targets. Although the findings for these specific measures did not directly support hypothesis 1 that the no beliefs label would be significantly different than the atheist label across all measures, it does help to provide evidence that atheists are a stigmatized outgroup in the United States today.

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

One limitation of this study is that the community sample drew from a high population of religious non-believers (33.8% non-religious). Although significant results still emerged, a sample from a heavily religious, community sample might provide an interesting comparison to these results. Because religious individuals are more likely to hold negative attitudes towards non-theists (Gervais, 2011), it is possible that the results are not as strong as they would be with a high proportion of religious individuals.

I also failed to find significant results in Study 2. In addition to the factors listed earlier (prevalence of atheists in colleges/universities and hesitation to punish a cheater), the low sample size when corrected for religious identification is a factor that could be corrected for future research.

Future Research

Although this study provided novel findings regarding religious prejudice against atheists, research regarding this topic and labeling of religious non-theists in general is still sparse in comparison to research involving prejudice towards other religious outgroups. In an effort to generalize the findings of this study, future research should examine various contexts in which religious non-theists are judged, as opposed to focusing on judgments that occur only within the realm of moral transgressions.

Future research utilizing a more neutral prime, such as a job applicant or a similar non-moral transgression vignette would be beneficial to clarify the findings of the present study. If findings of a similar study demonstrated that there were no significant differences between the labels "having no religious beliefs" and "atheist," then it may be the case that deviant behavior more so than a preconceived attitude towards 'atheists' leads to negative attitudes towards the group.

Concluding Remarks

This study supports the hypothesis that at least some of the prejudice exhibited toward non-believers is a result of the negative connotation associated with the atheist label. Though the implications of these prejudices may not be as dire as those faced by some outgroups, they still have serious consequences. Individuals who are atheist may continue to be more likely to live in concealment given the negative social judgments that arise from an individual being identified with the atheist label. Although this study indicates that self-identifying as "not having any religious beliefs" may be advantageous in situations where one identifies their religion, an endorsement should not be made to

change one's self-identification to appease the sweeping generalizations of others in order to 'conceal' one's own identity as a non-believer.

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Table 1.
Demographics characteristics of participants (Pilot Study).

N = 122	*Percentage of Sample*	*M*
Variable		
Age		36.42 (8.30)
European American	80.3	
African American	7.4	
Hispanic American	4.0	
Other	8.3	
Male	39.3	
Female	60.7	
Religion- Christian	41.8	
Religion- Jewish	3.3	
Religion- Muslim	4.0	
Religion- Non-Religious	32.8	
Religion- Other	12.1	

Note. Standard deviation is presented in parentheses.

Table 2.
Demographics characteristics of participants (Study 1).

N = 154	*Percentage of Sample*	*M*
Variable		
Age		43.34 (13.41)
Ethnicity - European American	75.8	
Ethnicity - African American	8.5	
Ethnicity - Hispanic American	3.3	
Ethnicity - Asian American	11.1	
Ethnicity- Other	1.3	
Sex – Male	52.6	
Sex – Female	47.4	
Religion-Christian	52.6	
Religion- Jewish	1.9	
Religion- Muslim	1.9	
Religion- Non-Religious	33.8	
Religion- Other	9.7	
Political Orientation- Liberal	46.7	
Political Orientation- Moderate	29.9	
Political Orientation- Conservative	23.3	
Education- Less than High School	1.3	
Educaton- High School/GRE	5.9	
Education- Some College	28.8	
Education- 2-year Degree	7.2	
Education- 4-year Degree	42.5	
Graduate Degree	14.4	

Note. Standard deviation is presented in parentheses.

Table 3.
Demographics characteristics of participants (Study 2).

N = 96	*Percentage of Sample*	*M*
Variable		
Age		25.34 (5.02)
Ethnicity - European American	88.5	
Ethnicity - African American	5.2	
Ethnicity - Hispanic American	4.2	
Ethnicity - Asian American	2.1	
Ethnicity- Other	0.0	
Sex – Male	37.5	
Sex – Female	62.5	
Religion-Christian	96.9	
Religion- Jewish	0.0	
Religion- Muslim	0.0	
Religion- Non-Religious	0.0	
Religion- Other	3.1	
Political Orientation- Liberal	20.8	
Political Orientation- Moderate	57.3	
Political Orientation- Conservative	21.9	
Education- First Year	82.3	
Education- Sophomore	11.5	
Education- Junior	5.2	
Education- Senior	1.0	
Education- Other	0.0	

Note. Standard deviation is presented in parentheses.

Table 4.
Descriptive Statistics of Studies 1 and 2

Items (Study 1)	Atheist Condition		'No Beliefs' Condition		Control Condition	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1	5.25[b]	1.47	4.61[a]	1.47	5.29[b]	1.19
2	4.87	1.98	4.61	2.15	4.63	1.29
3	3.84[a]	2.03	4.93[b]	2.12	4.67[b]	1.88
4	5.08	1.65	5.14	1.94	4.74	1.51
5	4.38[a]	1.88	4.98[b]	1.41	5.24[b]	1.37
6	4.72[a]	1.54	4.04[b]	1.74	4.24[b]	1.76

Subscripts denote significant differences between groups at p < .05.

Items (Study 2)	Atheist Condition		'No Beliefs' Condition		Control Condition	
Item	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1	5.38	1.39	4.98	1.46	5.53	1.02
2	4.30[a]	1.38	3.80[a]	1.50	3.14[b]	1.32
3	3.93	1.40	4.08	2.03	3.88	1.43
4	5.38	1.39	4.78	1.46	5.33	1.02
5	4.91	2.01	4.86	1.69	5.21	1.89
6	4.56	1.44	4.36	1.78	4.56	1.54

Subscripts denote significant differences between groups

1=Severity of punishment, 2=Reflective of target's moral values, 3=Understandability of Target's actions, 4=Severity of transgression, 5= Target's perception of severity, 6= Actions due to internal/external factors (higher numbers indicating internal)

Table 5.

Between-subjects ANOVA of perceived seriousness of transgression (Study 1 & Study 2)

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of squares	Mean Square	Df	F	p	η^2
Religious label	Perceived Seriousness (S1)	5.00	2.50	2	1.95	.19	.03
Error	Perceived Seriousness (S1)	185.03	1.29	144			
Total	Perceived Seriousness (S1)	5163.00		147			
Religious label	Perceived Seriousness (S2)	0.28	0.14	2	0.15	.87	.01
Error	Perceived Seriousness (S2)	60.77	0.95	64			
Total	Perceived Seriousness (S2)	2378.00		67			

Table 6.
Between-subjects ANOVA of target's morality (Study 1 & Study 2)

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of squares	Mean Square	Df	F	p	η^2
Religious label	Target's Morality (S1)	9.43	4.72	2	1.93	.15	.03
Error	Target's Morality (S1)	351.28	2.44	144			
Total	Target's Morality (S1)	3360.00		147			
Religious label	Target's Morality (S2)	13.83	6.92	2	3.50	.05	.06
Error	Target's Morality (S2)	124.86	3.14	64			
Total	Target's Morality (S2)	1079.00		67			

Table 7.
Between-subjects ANOVA of severity of punishment (Study 1 & Study 2)

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of squares	Mean Square	Df	F	p	η^2
Religious label	Severity of Punishment (S1)	16.86	8.43	2	4.88	.01	.08
Error	Severity of Punishment (S1)	269.40	1.87	144			
Total	Severity of Punishment (S1)	4123.00		147			
Religious label	Severity of Punishment (S2)	1.04	0.52	2	0.45	.64	.01
Error	Severity of Punishment (S2)	74.00	1.16	64			
Total	Severity of Punishment (S2)	1831.00		67			

Table 8.
Between-subjects ANOVA of understandability of target's actions (Study 1 & Study 2)

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of squares	Mean Square	Df	F	p	η^2
Religious label	Understand ability of target's actions (S1)	19.51	9.76	2	3.50	.03	.09
Error	Understand ability of target's actions (S1)	401.89	2.79	144			
Total	Understand ability of target's actions (S1)	2570.00		147			
Religious label	Understand ability of target's actions (S2)	1.86	0.93	2	0.42	.66	.01
Error	Understand ability of target's actions (S2)	142.08	2.22	64			
Total	Understand ability of target's actions (S2)	2580.00		67			

Table 9.
Between-subjects ANOVA of influence of internal vs. external factors (Study 1 & Study 2)

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of squares	Mean Square	df	F	p	η^2
Religious label	Internal vs. External (S1)	15.23	7.62	2	2.71	.05	.04
Error	Internal vs. External (S1)	404.93	2.81	144			
Total	Internal vs. External (S1)	3224.00		147			
Religious label	Internal vs. External (S2)	5.57	2.79	2	0.93	.40	.03
Error	Internal vs. External (S2)	192.85	3.01	64			
Total	Internal vs. External (S2)	1109.00		67			

Table 10.
Between-subjects ANOVA of target perceiving his actions as serious (Study 1 & Study 2)

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of squares	Mean Square	df	F	p	η^2
Religious label	Target's Perception of Seriousness (S1)	19.95	9.97	2	3.95	.02	.08
Error	Target's Perception of Seriousness (S1)	363.85	2.53	144			
Total	Target's Perception of Seriousness (S1)	3881.00		147			
Religious label	Target's Perception of Seriousness (S2)	0.17	0.08	2	0.03	.97	.00
Error	Target's Perception of Seriousness (S2)	201.24	3.14	64			
Total	Target's Perception of Seriousness (S2)	1474.00		67			

Table 11.
Moderators on understandability of target's actions (Study 1)

Variable	Standardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	Sig.	ΔR^2
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Need for Closure (NFC)	.02	.02	.21	.19	
Religiosity (R)	.00	.02	.01	.95	
Atheist	-.31	.12	1.83	.07	
No Beliefs	.17	.06	.93	.07	
Model One					.11
R*Atheist	-.10	.14	-1.10	.45	
NFC*Atheist	-.03	.04	-1.36	.44	
R* No Beliefs	-.50	.17	-1.16	.41	
NFC*No Beliefs	.20	.10	1.99	.05*	
Model Two					.07
R*NFC*No Beliefs	.00	.00	.86	.07	
R*NFC*Atheist	.00	.00	-1.79	.56	
Model Three					.03

Dependent Variable: Understandability of target's actions
* $p <0.05$, two-tailed test, R^2 significant at Model Two.

Table 12.

Moderators on perceived seriousness of offense (Study 1)

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.	ΔR^2
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Need for Closure (NFC)	.00	.01	.11	.52	
Religiosity (R)	-.01	.01	-.15	.33	
Atheists	.04	.03	.41	.17	
No Beliefs	.09	.11	.81	.23	
Model One					.04
R*Atheist	.02	.08	.38	.80	
NFC*Atheist	.00	.02	-.16	.93	
R* No Beliefs	.02	.09	.84	.82	
NFC*No Beliefs	.00	.06	.04	.97	
Model Two					.00
R*NFC*No Beliefs	.00	.00	-.19	.85	
R*NFC*Atheist	.00	.00	-.29	.85	
Model Three					.00

Dependent Variable: Perceived seriousness of offense

Table 13.

Moderators on recommended level of punishment (Study 1)

Variable	Standardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	Sig.	ΔR^2
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Need for Closure (NFC)	.01	.01	.19	.23	
Religiosity (R)	-.02	.01	-.19	.21	
Atheist	.07	.05	.32	.17	
No Beliefs	-.09	.04	-1.32	.09	
Model One					.11
R*Atheist	.02	.09	.09	.86	
NFC*Atheist	.01	.03	.39	.82	
R* No Beliefs	.01	.08	.22	.85	
NFC*No Beliefs	.01	.07	.11	.92	
Model Two					.02
R*NFC*No Beliefs	.00	.00	-.23	.81	
R*NFC*Atheist	.00	.00	-.09	.95	
Model Three					.00

Dependent Variable: Recommended level of punishment

Table 14.
Moderators on perceived effect of internal vs external factors (Study 1)

Variable	Standardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	Sig.	$\varDelta R^2$
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Need for Closure (NFC)	-.01	.01	-1.01	.31	
Religiosity (R)	-.03	.01	-1.77	.08	
Atheist	.10	.04	1.99	.06	
No Beliefs	.07	.09	.74	.14	
Model One					.13
R*Atheist	.05	.11	.41	.68	
NFC*Atheist	.03	.03	.88	.38	
R* No Beliefs	.02	.05	.91	.21	
NFC*No Beliefs	-.08	.09	-.93	.36	
Model Two					.04
R*NFC*No Beliefs	.00	.00	-.34	.24	
R*NFC*Atheist	.00	.00	1.13	.82	
Model Three					.02

 Dependent Variable: Perceived seriousness of offense

Table 15.
Moderators on target's perception of severity of actions (Study 1)

Variable	Standardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	Sig.	ΔR^2
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Need for Closure (NFC)	-.01	.01	-.95	.35	
Religiosity (R)	.02	.01	1.78	.09	
Atheist	-.04	.02	1.41	.07	
No Beliefs	.10	.05	.87	.14	
Model One					.09
R*Atheist	.03	.11	.26	.79	
NFC*Atheist	.02	.03	.88	.48	
R* No Beliefs	.03	.05	.19	.43	
NFC*No Beliefs	-.10	.08	-1.30	.21	
Model Two					.04
R*NFC*No Beliefs	.00	.00	-.65	.33	
R*NFC*Atheist	.00	.00	.95	.67	
Model Three					.03

 Dependent Variable: Target's perception of severity of actions

Table 16.
Moderators on perception of target's moral values (Study 1)

Variable	Standardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	Sig.	ΔR^2
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Need for Closure (NFC)	.00	.01	.45	.78	
Religiosity (R)	.00	.01	-.06	.70	
Atheist	.02	.01	.27	.58	
No Beliefs	-.01	.03	.36	.41	
Model One					.03
R*Atheist	.00	.11	-.08	.96	
NFC*Atheist	.01	.03	.38	.83	
R* No Beliefs	.01	.05	.44	.82	
NFC*No Beliefs	-.03	.08	-.35	.74	
Model Two					.00
R*NFC*No Beliefs	.00	.00	.36	.72	
R*NFC*Atheist	.00	.00	.06	.97	
Model Three					.00

 Dependent Variable: Perceptions of target's moral values

Table 17.
Moderators on understandability of target's actions (Study 2)

Variable	Standardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	Sig.	ΔR^2
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Need for Closure (NFC)	-.03	.01	-1.07	.43	
Religiosity (R)	.02	.03	1.45	.18	
Atheist	.05	.07	1.03	.29	
No Belief	.03	.02	.89	.24	
Model One					.06
R*Atheist	.03	.14	.48	.62	
NFC*Atheist	.03	.05	.81	.85	
R* No Beliefs	.02	.09	.89	.32	
NFC*No Beliefs	-.08	.11	-1.04	.54	
Model Two					.02
R*NFC*No Beliefs	.00	.00	-.29	.21	
R*NFC*Atheist	.00	.00	.84	.49	
Model Three					.02

 Dependent Variable: Understandability of target's actions

Table 18.
Moderators on perceived seriousness of offense (Study 2)

Variable	Standardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	Sig.	ΔR^2
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Need for Closure (NFC)	-.03	.03	-.78	.25	
Religiosity (R)	.05	.01	.29	.41	
Atheist	-.04	.09	-.39	.38	
No Beliefs	.07	.02	.26	.52	
Model One					.07
R*Atheist	.04	.07	-.03	.91	
NFC*Atheist	.09	.11	.27	.61	
R* No Beliefs	.02	.08	.11	.44	
NFC*No Beliefs	.08	.07	.85	.54	
Model Two					.01
R*NFC*No Beliefs	.01	.00	-.25	.85	
R*NFC*Atheist	.00	.00	.08	.74	
Model Three					.00

 Dependent Variable: Perceived seriousness of offense

Table 19.

Moderators on recommended level of punishment (Study 2)

Variable	Standardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	Sig.	ΔR^2
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Need for Closure (NFC)	.03	.01	1.41	.21	
Religiosity (R)	.01	.01	.98	.19	
Atheist	.03	.02	.77	.24	
No Belief	-.01	.03	-.31	.71	
Model One					.08
R*Atheist	.05	.15	.41	.38	
NFC*Atheist	.03	.05	.81	.24	
R* No Beliefs	.05	.04	.86	.13	
NFC*No Beliefs	-.06	.08	-.97	.37	
Model Two					.03
R*NFC*No Beliefs	.00	.00	-.24	.39	
R*NFC*Atheist	.00	.01	1.09	.47	
Model Three					.01

Dependent Variable: Recommended level of punishment

Table 20.

Moderators on perceived effect of internal vs external factors (Study 2)

Variable	Standardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	Sig.	ΔR^2
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Need for Closure (NFC)	-.01	.01	-.34	.24	
Religiosity (R)	.02	.01	.78	.28	
Atheist	.04	.11	1.01	.14	
No Beliefs	.09	.04	1.21	.19	
Model One					.06
R*Atheist	.03	.13	.41	.66	
NFC*Atheist	.04	.03	1.18	.50	
R* No Beliefs	.03	.05	.19	.68	
NFC*No Beliefs	.10	.08	.87	.36	
Model Two					.02
R*NFC*No Beliefs	.01	.00	.24	.43	
R*NFC*Atheist	.00	.00	1.01	.37	
Model Three					.02

Dependent Variable: Perceived effect of internal vs. external factors

Table 21.

Moderators on target's perception of severity of actions (Study 2)

Variable	Standardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	Sig.	ΔR^2
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Need for Closure (NFC)	.05	.03	1.37	.24	
Religiosity (R)	.03	.09	.23	.14	
Atheist	.05	.06	.64	.21	
No Beliefs	-.03	.05	-.71	.37	
Model One					.13
R*Atheist	.03	.11	.29	.21	
NFC*Atheist	.04	.03	.43	.61	
R* No Beliefs	.01	.08	.19	.37	
NFC*No Beliefs	-.01	.01	-.67	.24	
Model Two					.04
R*NFC*No Beliefs	.00	.00	.44	.47	
R*NFC*Atheist	.00	.00	.09	.55	
Model Three					.01

 Dependent Variable: Target's perception of severity of actions

Table 22.

Moderators on perception of target's moral values (Study 2)

Variable	Standardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	Sig.	ΔR^2
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Need for Closure (NFC)	.04	.09	.95	.59	
Religiosity (R)	-.03	.04	-1.18	.19	
Atheist	.05	.07	1.13	.14	
No Beliefs	.07	.03	.66	.21	
Model One					.03
R*Atheist	-.05	.11	-.26	.14	
NFC*Atheist	.02	.04	.48	.45	
R* No Beliefs	.04	.08	.81	.57	
NFC*No Beliefs	-.03	.09	-1.03	.21	
Model Two					.01
R*NFC*No Beliefs	.00	.00	.19	.37	
R*NFC*Atheist	.00	.00	-.14	.69	
Model Three					.00

Dependent Variable: Perception of target's moral values

Table 23.

Hypotheses and results.

	Hypothesis	Supported
H1	Participants in the 'atheist' condition will be more punitive in the punishment and morality responses than participants in the 'no religious beliefs' or control condition.	Supported
H2	Religiosity will moderate the relationship between religious label and attribution of punishment and morality. Specifically, those high in religiosity will be more punitive towards the 'atheist' label than the 'no religious beliefs' label and the control condition.	Not supported
H3	Need for Closure will moderate the relationship between religious label and attribution of punishment and morality for those participants who identify as religious. Specifically, religious individuals who are high in need for closure will be more punitive towards the 'atheist' label than the 'no religious beliefs' label and the control condition.	Not supported

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT (PILOT, STUDY 1, STUDY 2)

Title of Research Study: Responsibility Attribution of Academic Dishonesty

Investigator's Name: Brock Rozich

This consent form asks you to take part in a research study about personality and responsibility attribution. First, we will ask you to complete questionnaires about your personality. You will then be instructed to read a description of a case of academic dishonesty and respond to questions attributing responsibility to the parties in the event. The entire experiment is expected to last thirty minutes or less.

You must be at least 18 years of age or older to take part in this study. You will receive compensation for your participation in this study through Amazon's Mechanical Turk program. You will receive credit within one week of completing the study. In order to confer credit, we will ask you to report your worker identification number at the beginning of the study. Once data collection has completed, we will delete these numbers, as well as IP addresses which are collected, from our data set. Please remember that you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Your participation is voluntary; you can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason and without penalty or loss of benefits which you would otherwise be entitled. Should you withdraw from the study, you will still receive the Amazon credit.

How anonymity will be maintained: If you choose to participate, your responses in this research will be collected along with your IP address and Amazon Mechanical Turk worker identification number. Following the completion of the study, the IP address and Amazon worker ID will be deleted from the dataset . Your responses will be stored securely in the investigator's office. Your name is not collected on any of the experimental materials and there is no way to connect it to your responses. . Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

Benefits and risks: There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. We anticipate no risks or discomforts. We hope that you will be able to learn about psychological research methods by participating. Please feel free to ask the experimenter questions you might have about the methods used in this study. We hope that with this research we are better able to understand what factors contribute to the attribution of responsibility.

Now, or at any time, you may ask questions about this research. To do so, please contact the principal investigator, Brock Rozich, by E-mail at rozichb@uni.edu

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Human Participants Review Committee, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, University of Northern Iowa, 213 East Bartlett, Cedar Falls, IA 50613 Phone: (319) 273-3217 E-Mail: rsp@uni.ed

APPENDIX B

DEBRIEFING FORM (PILOT, STUDY 1, STUDY 2)

Thank you for participating in our study. Now that the study is over, we would like to tell you a little bit about it. We are interested in whether the wording used to describe non-religious individuals (non-religious or atheists) has an effect on judgment of the individual's attributes on factors such as guilt, morality and other personality factors. We hope to use this data to better understand prejudice towards religious outgroups.
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the faculty supervising the research at carolyn.hildebrandt@uni.edu

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT STATEMENTS

SONA Systems (Study 1):

Title: Responsibility Attributions of Academic Dishonesty
Credits: .5 Credits
Duration: 30 Minutes
Description: Answer several questionnaires relating to personality and assess attributes to an individual described in a brief paragraph.

Amazon mTurk (Study 2):

Title: Responsibility Attributions of Academic Dishonesty
Reward per Assignment: $.45
Average Time per Assignment: 14 minutes, 16 seconds
Description: Answer several questionnaires relating to personality and assess personality traits to an individual described in a brief paragraph.

Amazon mTurk (Pilot Study):

Title: Responsibility Attributions of Academic Dishonesty
Reward per Assignment: $.45
Average Time per Assignment: 14 minutes, 16 seconds
Description: Answer several questionnaires relating to personality and assess personality traits to an individual described in a brief paragraph.
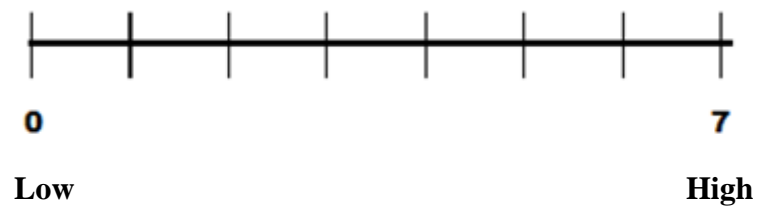
APPENDIX D

RESPONSIBILITY QUESTIONNAIRE (PILOT)

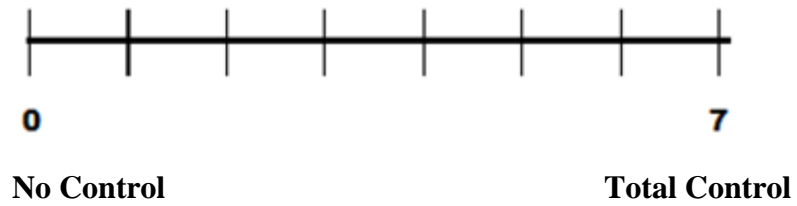Select a number on the scale when asked to make a judgment.

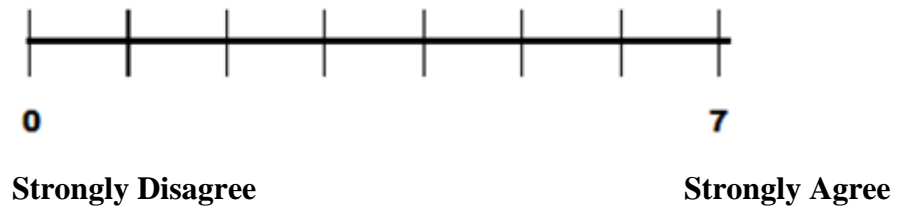1) How serious of an offense was cheating on the exam?

0   **7**

Not at all serious   **Very serious**
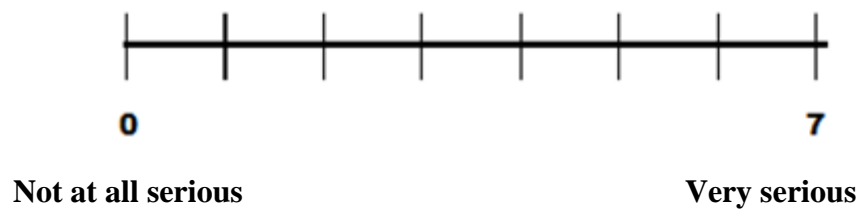
2) What level of punishment would you recommend for Michael?

0   **7**

Low   **High**

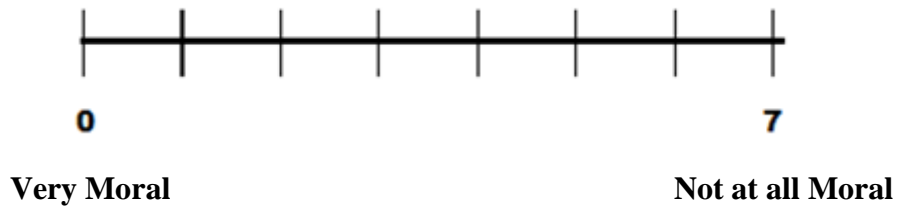3) How much control do you feel that Michael had over the situation described?

```
|----+----+----+----+----+----+----|
0                                   7
```

No Control   **Total Control**

4) How Michael acted during the exam is understandable.

```
|----+----+----+----+----+----+----|
0                                   7
```

Strongly Disagree   **Strongly Agree**

5) Did Michael see his actions as a serious offense?

```
|----+----+----+----+----+----+----|
0                                   7
```

Not Serious   **Very Serious**
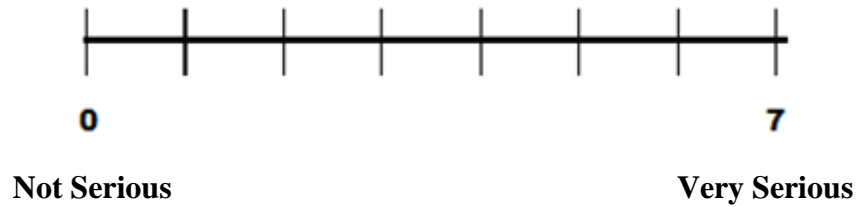
6) How would you judge Michael's morals?

```
 |———+———|———|———|———|———|———|
 0                               7
```

Very Moral   **Not at all Moral**

7) How responsible do you think that Michael is for his actions?

```
 |———+———|———|———|———|———|———|
 0                               7
```

Not at all Responsible   **Very Responsible**
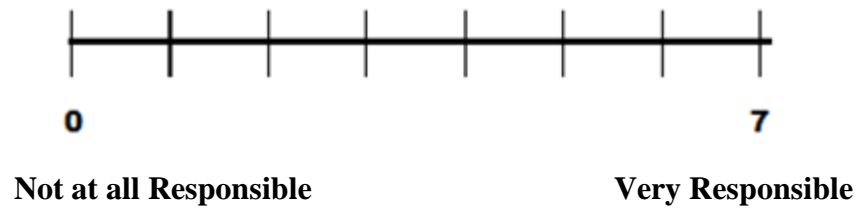
8) Given that it was Michael's first offense, what would you recommend for his punishment?
a) Receive a failing grade on the exam
b) Receive a failing grade for both the exam and the course
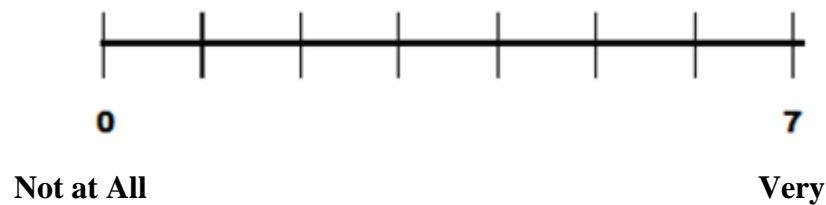c) He should not be punished

APPENDIX E

RESPONSIBILITY QUESTIONNAIRE (STUDY 1 & STUDY 2)

Select a number on the scale when asked to make a judgment.

1) How serious of an offense was cheating on the exam?

0   **7**

Not at all serious   **Very serious**
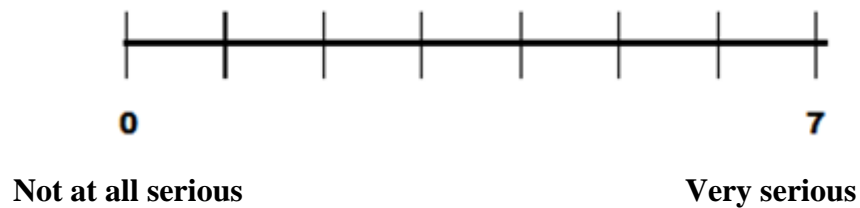
2) How severely should Michael be punished?

0   **7**

Not at All   **Very**
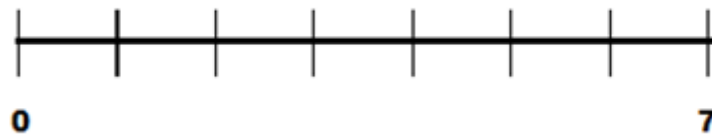
3) How much do you think Michael's actions were due to external factors (pressure to succeed, a bad score on another exam) rather than internal factors (not caring that he was doing something immoral)?
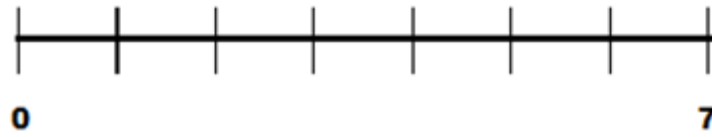
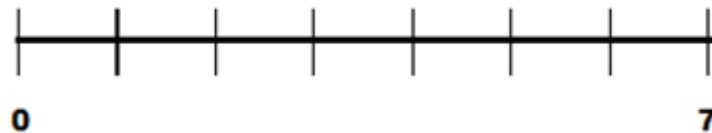**Totally Due to Internal Factors**   **Totally Due to External Factors**

0   7

4) How Michael acted during the exam is understandable.

0   7

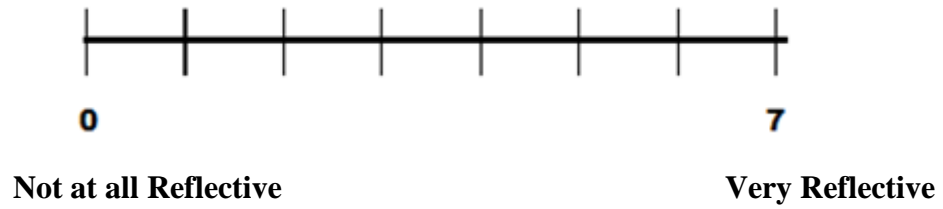**Strongly Disagree**   **Strongly Agree**

5) Did Michael see his actions as a serious offense?

0   7

Not Serious   **Very Serious**

6) How reflective of Michael's overall moral values were his actions in the event described?

0   **7**

Not at all Reflective   **Very Reflective**

APPENDIX F

NEED FOR CLOSURE SCALE

INSTRUCTIONS: Read each of the following statements and decide how much you agree with each according to your beliefs and experiences. Please respond according to the following scale.

1.........strongly disagree
2....moderately disagree
3...........slightly disagree
4................slightly agree
5.........moderately agree
6..............strongly agree

1.I think that having clear rules and order at work is essential for success.
2.Even after I've made up my mind about something, I am always eager to consider a different opinion.
3.I don't like situations that are uncertain.
4.I dislike questions which could be answered in many different ways.
5.I like to have friends who are unpredictable.
6.I find that a well ordered life with regular hours suits my temperament.
7.I enjoy the uncertainty of going into a new situation without knowing what might happen.
8.When dining out, I like to go to places where I have been before so that I know what to expect.
9.I feel uncomfortable when I don't understand the reason why an event occurred in my life.
10. I feel irritated when one person disagrees with what everyone else in a group believes.
11.I hate to change my plans at the last minute.
12.I would describe myself as indecisive.
13.When I go shopping, I have difficulty deciding exactly what it is I want.
14.When faced with a problem I usually see the one best solution very quickly
15.When I am confused about an important issue, I feel very upset.
16.I tend to put off making important decisions until the last possible moment.
17.I usually make important decisions quickly and confidently.
18.I have never been late for an appointment or work.
19.I think it is fun to change my plans at the last moment.
20.My personal space is usually messy and disorganized.
21.In most social conflicts, I can easily see which side is right and which is wrong.
22.I have never known someone I did not like.
23.I tend to struggle with most decisions.

24.I believe orderliness and organization are among the most important characteristics of a good student.

25.When considering most conflict situations, I can usually see how both sides could be right.

26.I don't like to be with people who are capable of unexpected actions.

27.I prefer to socialize with familiar friends because I know what to expect from them.

28.I think that I would learn best in a class that lacks clearly stated objectives and requirements.

29.When thinking about a problem, I consider as many different opinions on the issue as possible.

30.I don't like to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it.

31.I like to know what people are thinking all the time.

32.I dislike it when a person's statement could mean many different things.

33.It's annoying to listen to someone who cannot seem to make up his or her mind.

34.I find that establishing a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more.

35.I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life.

36.I prefer interacting with people whose opinions are very different from my own.

37.I like to have a plan for everything and a place for everything.

38.I feel uncomfortable when someone's meaning or intention is unclear to me.

39.I believe that one should never engage in leisure activities.

40.When trying to solve a problem I often see so many possible options that it's confusing.

41.I always see many possible solutions to problems I face.

42.I'd rather know bad news than stay in a state of uncertainty.

43.I feel that there is no such thing as an honest mistake.

44.I do not usually consult many different options before forming my own view.

45.I dislike unpredictable situations.

46.I have never hurt another person's feelings.

47.I dislike the routine aspects of my work (studies).

APPENDIX G

CENTRALITY OF RELIGIOSITY SCALE

01: How often do you think about religious issues?
02: To what extent do you believe that God or something divine exists?
03: How often do you take part in religious services?
04: How often do you pray?
06: How interested are you in learning more about religious topics?
08: How important is to take part in religious services?
09: How important is personal prayer for you?
11: How often do you keep yourself informed about religious questions through radio, television, internet, newspapers, or books?
12: In your opinion, how probable is it that a higher power really exists
13: How important is it for you to be connected to a religious community?

05: How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine intervenes in your life?
14: How often do you pray spontaneously when inspired by daily situations?
15: How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine is present?
07: To what extend do you believe in an afterlife—e.g. immortality of the soul, resurrection of the dead or reincarnation?
10: How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine wants to communicate or to reveal something to you?
16. How strongly do you associate with your identified religion?

APPENDIX H

MANIPULATION CHECK/DEMOGRAPHICS

Manipulation Check
What was the student's name in the scenario described? [Text Entry]
What was his political affiliation, if any? (write 'none' if none) [Text Entry]
What was his religion, if any? (write 'none' if none) [Text Entry]
Why was the student facing discipline? [Text Entry]
What did you think the study was about? [Text Entry]

Demographics
1. What is your sex? [Drop-down Menu]
2. What is your race/ethnicity? [Drop-down Menu]
3. In what year were you born? [Text Entry]
4. What is your religion? [Drop-down Menu]
5. What is your political affiliation? [Drop-down Menu]
6. Have you ever been accused of academic misconduct? [Drop-down Menu]
7. Highest level of completed education?
8. Annual household income?

APPENDIX I

ETHICAL TRANSGRESSION VIGNETTE (PILOT)

General Scenario Text:

The following is an account from an academic misconduct investigation. Please read over the scenario carefully. Following this, you will be asked to answer several questions about the material presented to you.

Spontaneous/ No Beliefs

Michael is a sophomore student at a university in the Midwest United States. He generally receives good grades, has never been in trouble with the law, and has never faced academic punishment of any kind during his time studying at the university.

Michael describes himself as an ambitious student. He identifies himself as politically neutral. On a self-report questionnaire about religion, Michael describes himself as (not having any religious beliefs). He was brought up in a middle-class family in a medium sized town in the Midwest.

During a midterm examination, Michael was caught violating the university's academic honesty policy. (During an exam, Michael was observed struggling with a particular question. After several minutes of looking at his paper, he was seen looking over briefly at an individual next to him who typically earns top grades in the course. Michael then proceeded to quickly write down an answer on his exam. Both Michael and the other student recorded the same incorrect answer).

Spontaneous/ Atheist

Michael is a sophomore student at a university in the Midwest United States. He generally receives good grades, has never been in trouble with the law, and has never faced academic punishment of any kind during his time studying at the university.

Michael describes himself as an ambitious student. He identifies himself as politically neutral. On a self-report questionnaire about religion, Michael describes himself as (an atheist). He was brought up in a middle-class family in a medium sized town in the Midwest.

During a midterm examination, Michael was caught violating the university's academic honesty policy. (During an exam, Michael was observed struggling with a particular question. After several minutes of looking at his paper, he was seen looking over briefly at an individual next to him who typically earns top grades in the course. Michael then proceeded to quickly write down an answer on his exam. Both Michael and the other student recorded the same incorrect answer).

Pre-meditated/ No Beliefs

Michael is a sophomore student at a university in the Midwest United States. He generally receives good grades, has never been in trouble with the law, and has never faced academic punishment of any kind during his time studying at the university.

Michael describes himself as an ambitious student. He identifies himself as politically neutral. On a self-report questionnaire about religion, Michael describes himself as (not having any religious beliefs). He was brought up in a middle-class family in a medium sized town in the Midwest.

During a midterm examination, Michael was caught violating the university's academic honesty policy. (Prior to an exam, Michael had written a 'cheat sheet' with relevant information on the exam onto a piece of paper. He had placed the sheet of paper on the inside of his sleeved shirt to avoid detection by the professor. Halfway through the exam, Michael accidently dropped the sheet of paper, which was confiscated by the professor).

Pre-meditated/ Atheist

Michael is a sophomore student at a university in the Midwest United States. He generally receives good grades, has never been in trouble with the law, and has never faced academic punishment of any kind during his time studying at the university.

Michael describes himself as an ambitious student. He identifies himself as politically neutral. On a self-report questionnaire about religion, Michael describes himself as (an atheist). He was brought up in a middle-class family in a medium sized town in the Midwest.

During a midterm examination, Michael was caught violating the university's academic honesty policy. (Prior to an exam, Michael had written a 'cheat sheet' with relevant information on the exam onto a piece of paper. He had placed the sheet of paper on the inside of his sleeved shirt to avoid detection by the professor. Halfway through the exam, Michael accidently dropped the sheet of paper, which was confiscated by the professor).

Spontaneous/ Control

Michael is a sophomore student at a university in the Midwest United States. He generally receives good grades, has never been in trouble with the law, and has never faced academic punishment of any kind during his time studying at the university.

Michael describes himself as an ambitious student. He identifies himself as politically neutral. He was brought up in a middle-class family in a medium sized town in the Midwest.

During a midterm examination, Michael was caught violating the university's academic honesty policy. (During an exam, Michael was observed struggling with a particular question. After several minutes of looking at his paper, he was seen looking over briefly at an individual next to him who typically earns top grades in the course. Michael then proceeded to quickly write down an answer on his exam. Both Michael and the other student recorded the same incorrect answer).

Pre-meditated/ Control

Michael is a sophomore student at a university in the Midwest United States. He generally receives good grades, has never been in trouble with the law, and has never faced academic punishment of any kind during his time studying at the university.

Michael describes himself as an ambitious student. He identifies himself as politically neutral. He was brought up in a middle-class family in a medium sized town in the Midwest.

During a midterm examination, Michael was caught violating the university's academic honesty policy. (Prior to an exam, Michael had written a 'cheat sheet' with relevant information on the exam onto a piece of paper. He had placed the sheet of paper on the inside of his sleeved shirt to avoid detection by the professor. Halfway through the exam, Michael accidently dropped the sheet of paper, which was confiscated by the professor).

APPENDIX J

ETHICAL TRANSGRESSION VIGNETTE

General Scenario Text:

The following is an account from an academic misconduct investigation. Please read over the scenario carefully. Following this, you will be asked to answer several questions about the material presented to you.

No Beliefs

Michael is a sophomore student at a university in the Midwest United States. He generally receives good grades, has never been in trouble with the law, and has never faced academic punishment of any kind during his time studying at the university.

Michael describes himself as an ambitious student. He identifies himself as politically neutral. On a self-report questionnaire about religion, Michael describes himself as (not having any religious beliefs). He was brought up in a middle-class family in a medium sized town in the Midwest.

During a midterm examination, Michael was caught violating the university's academic honesty policy. (During an exam, Michael was observed struggling with a particular question. After several minutes of looking at his paper, he was seen looking over briefly at an individual next to him who typically earns top grades in the course. Michael then proceeded to quickly write down an answer on his exam. Both Michael and the other student recorded the same incorrect answer).

Atheist

Michael is a sophomore student at a university in the Midwest United States. He generally receives good grades, has never been in trouble with the law, and has never faced academic punishment of any kind during his time studying at the university.

Michael describes himself as an ambitious student. He identifies himself as politically neutral. On a self-report questionnaire about religion, Michael describes himself as (an atheist). He was brought up in a middle-class family in a medium sized town in the Midwest.

During a midterm examination, Michael was caught violating the university's academic honesty policy. (During an exam, Michael was observed struggling with a particular question. After several minutes of looking at his paper, he was seen looking over briefly at an individual next to him who typically earns top grades in the course. Michael then proceeded to quickly write down an answer on his exam. Both Michael and the other student recorded the same incorrect answer).

Control

Michael is a sophomore student at a university in the Midwest United States. He generally receives good grades, has never been in trouble with the law, and has never faced academic punishment of any kind during his time studying at the university.

Michael describes himself as an ambitious student. He identifies himself as politically neutral. He was brought up in a middle-class family in a medium sized town in the Midwest.

During a midterm examination, Michael was caught violating the university's academic honesty policy. (During an exam, Michael was observed struggling with a particular question. After several minutes of looking at his paper, he was seen looking over briefly at an individual next to him who typically earns top grades in the course. Michael then proceeded to quickly write down an answer on his exam. Both Michael and the other student recorded the same incorrect answer).

APPENDIX K

QUALITATIVE RESPONSES

Atheist Condition: Michael stated that "I have always been an atheist. The idea that someone could believe that there's some all-powerful being that controls the universe seems incredibly silly to me. Just because I'm an atheist doesn't mean I'm not a good person overall."

Non-Belief Condition: Michael stated in regards to his religion "I really tried growing up to follow religion. I tried to believe it, but it just didn't make sense to me personally. I still try hard to be a good person, even though like everyone, I make mistakes. I think my biggest disappointment is that I feel I let down my parents, who are both rather religious."

Control Condition: Michael stated in regards to his religion "I have always been a religious person. I try to live my life based on the morals of my religious teachings. While I make mistakes from time to time, I still feel that I am a good person."

Please write a few sentences about a) how the average American would feel about Michael's response to the religious query and b) how the average American feels about (atheists/people who have no religious beliefs/ religious individuals) who commit immoral acts.