

## Do Atheism and Feminism Go Hand-in-Hand?: A Qualitative Investigation of Atheist Men's Perspectives about Gender Equality

Rebecca D. Stinson<sup>1</sup>  
*The University of Iowa*

Kathleen M. Goodman  
*Miami University*

Charles Bermingham  
*The University of Iowa*

Saba R. Ali  
*The University of Iowa*

*ABSTRACT: Drawing upon semi-structured interviews with 10 self-identified atheist men in the American Midwest, this qualitative study explored their perspectives regarding atheism, gender, and feminism. The data was analyzed using consensual qualitative research methodology (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). Results indicated these men had a proclivity for freethought—a commitment to questioning things and prioritizing reason over all else. They believed gender differences were primarily due to cultural and social influence in society. Gender inequality was highlighted as a problem within the U.S. and throughout the world, however this belief did not necessarily lead to being feminist-identified. There appeared to be a pathway linking their intellectual orientation, atheism, and belief in gender equality.*

KEYWORDS: ATHEISTS, MEN, GENDER EQUITY, FEMINISM

---

1 Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Rebecca D. Stinson, The University of Iowa, Department of Psychological and Quantitative Foundations, 361 Lindquist Center North, Iowa City, IA 52242, email: [rebecca-stinson@uiowa.edu](mailto:rebecca-stinson@uiowa.edu).

## Introduction

Atheists are individuals who do not believe in a god<sup>2</sup> or gods. It is difficult to calculate the number of atheists in the United States because of the various terms atheists use to identify themselves (e.g., humanist, skeptic, non-believer; see [Zuckerman, 2009](#)), and because atheists may hesitate to self-identify as atheists due to the negative consequences associated with the label ([Arcaro, 2010](#)). However, estimates range from 5%-12% of the population ([Zuckerman, 2009](#)).

Many atheists come from religious backgrounds and eventually settle upon non-belief ([Fitzgerald, 2003](#); [Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006](#); [Smith, 2011](#)). A commitment to rational and critical thought motivates them to study multiple traditions, question religious teachings, and talk to others about faith from an analytic perspective ([Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997](#); [Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006](#); [Smith, 2011](#)). This process leads them to reject supernatural phenomenon ([Arcaro, 2010](#)), conclude there is no evidence to support the existence of god, and assert that many religious tenets are nonsensical ([Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997](#); [Fitzgerald, 2003](#); [Smith, 2011](#)). Other atheists reject religion based upon moral grounds, condemning irrationality, intolerance, and violence, which they believe is perpetuated by religion ([Fitzgerald, 2003](#); [Smith, 2011](#)). Additionally, atheists tend to be less nationalistic, less prejudiced, less racist, less authoritarian, less ethnocentric, and less dogmatic than religious individuals ([Beit-Hallahmi, 2007](#); [Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006](#); [Zuckerman, 2009](#)).

Demographically, the majority of atheists in the United States are young, male, and identify as white ([Beit-Hallahmi, 2007](#); [Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006](#); [Zuckerman, 2007](#)). They tend to be law-abiding, tolerant of others, compassionate, and well-educated ([Beit-Hallahmi, 2007](#); [Zuckerman, 2009](#)). Individually, they are inclined to support gender equality and women's rights ([Zuckerman, 2007](#)), and nations with high percentages of atheism show greater concern for gender equality than highly religious nations ([Beit-Hallahmi, 2007](#); [Zuckerman, 2007](#)). Feminism is one of several social issues important to many atheists ([Beit-Hallahmi, 2007](#); [Zuckerman, 2009](#)).

Many feminists believe that religions consider womanhood “less than” manhood and encourage women to be submissive ([McElroy, 2005](#)). Thus, it has been posited that women fare better in the atheist community because of the greater belief in gender equality ([Kirkley, 2000](#)). Yet historical analysis ([Kirkley, 2000](#)) and present-day news ([McCreight, 2011](#)) suggest the dichotomous belief that religion is “bad” for women and atheism is “good” for women is an oversimplification of complex ideas that must be explored in greater depth.

Several female scholars have attempted to examine the tension between religion and feminism. For example, Christine Overall ([2007](#)) explored potential counterarguments to the belief that religion is harmful to women. However, in her final analysis Overall concluded that several moral and philosophical reasons support the position that feminists should be atheists because there were no justifiable arguments to the contrary. Wendy McElroy ([2005](#)) provided a possible counterargument to Overall's ([2007](#)) claims. McElroy contended there is no inherent tension between feminism and religion. She provided as an example the U.S. feminist movement that sprang from the abolitionist movement of the 1830s – a movement that was dominated with Quaker women. These women, who argued for both the end of slavery and the rights of women, were driven by religious conviction.

Historian Evelyn Kirkley's ([2000](#)<sup>2000</sup>) study of atheists in the postbellum<sup>3</sup> U.S. adds to the

---

2 Because this paper is written about atheists, and atheists do not consider “god” a proper noun, we do not capitalize the term god.

3 The term “postbellum U.S.” refers to the time period following the Civil War.

evidence suggesting that the relationship between atheism and feminism is complex and varied. The majority of historical documents she analyzed were written by men and represent what atheist men of that time period thought about gender. When undertaking her investigation, she suspected she would find that the Freethought<sup>4</sup> movement supported women's independence and equality because Freethinkers were predominantly male, white, and middle class, and thus had the power to establish new gender norms based on rationalism. However, Kirkley notes that Freethinkers also had a stake in preserving the status quo, which afforded them privilege based on their gender, race, and class. The competing commitments between the inclination to make change on one hand and wanting society to remain static because it provided social and economic power on the other hand prevented a uniform attitude toward gender equality from developing among atheist men. Thus, while atheist men professed a commitment to gender equality, they did very little to actualize it.

More recent news describing an incident at a 2011 atheist conference also suggests there may be a disconnect between atheist men's verbal support of gender equality and their actual behavior. Rebecca Watson, after giving a speech about atheism, was approached in a hotel elevator by a male atheist who invited her to his room. Watson (2011a) spoke about this incident in a video posted on her blog, making light of it but also suggesting "Hey guys, don't do that" because it is "creepy." Watson's blog entry led to an extensive "internet war" (McCreight, 2011; Watson, 2011b) within the online atheist community. Some thought the incident was not troublesome and blown out of proportion by Watson, while others thought it demonstrated sexism (Winston, 2011). The conflicting perspectives about whether atheism is "good" for women suggest thoughts about gender equality within the atheist community are varied and complex. Despite the general support for gender equality from the atheist community, not all atheists or feminists agree about the relationship between atheism and feminism.

### **Purpose of the Current Study**

This study builds on and contributes to philosophical, feminist, historical, and contemporary social science understandings of the relationship between feminism and atheism. Overall (2007) posited that feminists should be atheists because religion perpetuates gender inequity, but she did not address how atheists conceptualize feminism. McElroy's (2005) stance suggested feminism may not conflict with religion, but this stance similarly does little to further our understanding of what atheists think about feminism. Kirkley (2000) provided evidence that atheist men in the postbellum U.S. did little to promote substantive change regarding gender equality; however, it represents a period of time nearly 150 years ago. Contemporary sociology has characterized atheist beliefs as committed to gender equality (Beit-Hallahmi, 2007; Zuckerman, 2009), yet recent controversies suggest that atheists have displayed an array of beliefs and actions that could be considered sexist (McCreight, 2011; Watson, 2011a, 2011b). Given these seemingly contradictory representations concerning atheists and gender equality, the purpose of this study was to examine how a group of atheist men living in a small Midwestern city in the United States conceptualize gender and feminism. Accordingly, 10 atheist men openly discussed their personal backgrounds, atheist worldviews, beliefs about men and women, and feminist attitudes.

### **Method**

This research was conducted using the consensual qualitative research (CQR) method developed and

---

4 Freethinkers were atheists committed to reason, science, and progress, dedicated to rationalism and eschewing Christianity

propagated by Hill and colleagues ([Hill et al., 2005](#); [Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997](#)). CQR allows for co-construction of “truth” with participants and researchers and values the diversity of perspectives and meaning-making that exist among participants. Therefore it is constructivist in nature. However, CQR emphasizes objectivity, remaining close to the data without making leaps of interpretation, and generalizability, thereby reflecting post positivist philosophies as well.

### **Interviewers and Auditor**

CQR relies on teams of researchers working closely together to seek consensus regarding findings ([Hill et al., 2005](#); [Hill et al., 1997](#)). Teams of researchers with a variety of backgrounds and perspectives are common in CQR because “variety of viewpoints and experiences among the team members may help unravel the complexities and ambiguities of the data” ([Hill et al., 2005](#), p. 197). For the current study, the primary research team consisted of one male and two female researchers at various stages in two different doctoral programs. An external auditor not directly affiliated with the study was used during various phases of the project. All of the primary research team members and the auditor were trained in CQR methods.

In accordance with CQR ([Hill et al., 1997](#)), the primary research team members began the project by discussing their own cultural backgrounds, perceptions of religious and non-religious persons, how feminism may be perceived or endorsed by atheist-identified or religiously-identified men, and their own attitudes toward and experiences with feminism. All of the researchers identified as White. One of the researchers identified with life-long Catholicism, one with atheism although raised Catholic, and one with life-long agnosticism. Two research team members self-identified as strong feminists, while one member had little exposure to feminism and feminist ideas. All three members shared the perception that atheist men are likely to be concerned about gender equality. They believed that religious men often expect women to conform to prescribed gender roles and that atheist men would be unlikely to do so.

### **Participants and Locale**

Ten adult Caucasian men who self-identified as atheist participated in this study. This is an appropriate sample size for CQR because it allows each participant’s voice to come through in the analysis ([Hill et al., 1997](#)). The sample size is also related to the homogeneity of the group; the goal of CQR is to find a homogeneous population that is knowledgeable about the topic being studied (in this case, the perspectives of atheist men regarding gender equality and feminism). Because our sample was homogeneous, we could rely on a smaller sample size ([Hill et al., 1997](#)).

All participants resided in or around a small Midwestern city in the United States. The state has a national reputation for its level of education (third-highest graduation rate in the country). Historically, the state was an early adopter of civil rights and woman’s rights, and recently legalized same-sex marriage. Politically, it is considered a swing state, although in recent years it has leaned slightly toward democratic candidates in elections. Approximately 13% of the residents of the state claim no religion ([Kosmin, Mayer, & Keysar, 2001](#)).

The small city from which the sample comes is home to a research-intensive public university that enrolls approximately 20,000 undergraduate students and 10,000 graduate/professional students. The university has a national reputation as a party school with an extensive social scene. Football and tailgating are popular among students, alumni, and the community. However, the university also provides opportunities for political, artistic, and professional involvement through the 100+ student

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample (N=10).

Variable	N
Age	
18-21	1
22-25	2
26-30	3
31-40	3
61+	1
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	5
Homosexual/gay	1
Education	
Some College	2
2-year Associates Degree	1
4-year College Degree	3
Master's Degree	2
Doctoral Degree	1
Professional Degree	1
Marital Status	
Single, never married	4
In a relationship	1
Married	4
Divorced	1
From a Religious Background	
Practicing Catholic	4
Non-practicing Catholic	1
Protestant	2
Other	1
From a Nonreligious Background	1
Number of Children	
Zero	7
One	1
Two	2

Note: Numbers within some categories do not add to 10 because some participants chose not to share complete demographic information

organizations it hosts.

Of the 10 research participants, five were current university students, two were staff at the university, one was a K-12 teacher, one was an attorney, and one performed manual labor in the community. All of the participants had at least some college education, and 70% had a four-year degree or higher. They ranged in age from 18-61. Sixty percent fell between the ages of 26 and 40. All but one participant came from a religious background. One participant identified as homosexual/gay, 5 identified as heterosexual, and 4 did not provide information about their sexual orientation. Demographic data for the participants is presented in Table 1.

## Procedure

### recruiting participants.

Participants were recruited primarily through poster advertisements in university buildings as well as public places such as local coffee shops. Recruitment posters disclosed that the study was examining religious affiliation and beliefs about gender. We also employed snowball sampling, asking participants to recommend other atheist men who might want to participate in the study. Participants were not compensated for their participation.

### interview protocol.

A hallmark of CQR is to create 8-10 questions for use in a semi-structured interview in order to collect consistent information across participants (Hill et al., 2005). The research team revised the interview protocol several times to create a total of seven questions that they agreed upon (see Table 2). The research team members also developed prompts for each question that the interviewer could use to clarify participant responses or gather more information. After receiving approval from the university's institutional review board, but before

beginning data collection, two pilot interviews were completed in order to receive feedback regarding the questions and question order. The pilot interviewees were personal contacts of people on the research team who fit inclusion criteria. The male research team member who was assigned to conduct the interviews for the study also conducted the pilot interviews. Based upon the pilot interviewees'

feedback, the research team reworded several questions for the sake of clarification and changed the order of the questions.

### **interviewing.**

All interviews were conducted in a private meeting room on campus and lasted 45 minutes, on average. Before beginning the interview, participants were given information about the study and asked to provide their informed consent to participate. After providing oral consent, participants were asked to fill out a demographic information sheet. We asked each participant to take part in one semi-structured interview. The male researcher conducted the interviews in an attempt to increase participants' comfort level and rapport, especially when discussing gender and feminism. Using the same interviewer for all participants also added consistency across interviews. All participants in this study responded to each of the protocol questions. Each interview was audio-recorded. One of the female research team members transcribed each interview verbatim for data analysis. Pseudonyms were assigned to ensure anonymity.

*Table 2: Interview protocol*

---

Question 1: Do you have a religion and how does it play a role in your life? What does your religion mean for you?
Question 2: Do you believe men and women are more similar or different? In what ways and why?
Question 3: In your opinion how should women and men behave?
Question 4: What is your cultural heritage and do you believe it has impacted your beliefs/views on men and women in society? If yes, how?
Question 5: What do you believe are the most pressing issues for men and women today?
Question 6: What does feminism mean to you?
Question 7: What do you think influences people to be feminists?

---

### **Data Analysis**

We analyzed the interview data using CQR methods ([Hill et al., 1997](#); [Hill et al., 2005](#)), which are rigorous and systematic means for analyzing participant responses and making meaning of participant perspectives. The key feature of CQR is that analysis does not move forward until the research team reaches consensus at each step. CQR data analysis is a multi-step process of coding and analyzing participant narratives. Research team members break the interview data into broad domains and then look for core ideas within those domains. Each core idea is summarized briefly, staying close to the participants' words. Then the researchers do a cross-analysis, looking for themes (called categories).

### **domain coding.**

During the first step of CQR analysis, all three research team members independently read each participant transcript and generated a list of broad but descriptive domains based upon the research questions and themes that emerged from participant narratives. The researchers then convened, shared their personal lists of domain ideas, and discussed until consensus was reached regarding domain labels. Data was organized within three domains: atheist worldview, gender, and feminism (see Table 3).

**core ideas.**

The purpose of core ideas is to succinctly capture the essence of participant narratives in a few words or a short phrase (Hill et al., 1997). It requires individual research team members to read each transcript and pull out information, or core ideas, that can then be classified within each domain. The research team spent several weeks analyzing one transcript at a time and discussing the data to arrive at a consensus concerning the core ideas. Core ideas are summaries of sentences the participants said. For example, “I don’t think religion or culture should impose any behavioral differences on men and women” and “There is more difference within than between the sexes” were two core ideas. The data were sent to our auditor who read the transcripts to see whether our suggested core ideas captured participant narratives and were appropriately classified within the domains. The research team revisited each core idea and classification that the auditor questioned and came to a final consensus.

**cross analysis.**

The process of cross analysis involves looking at the core ideas within each domain across participants to determine categories into which the data can be classified (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). The three researchers independently analyzed the data in each domain and suggested category names that appropriately classified the data. Then they met weekly to review their individual analyses and come to consensus regarding the final categories. This required discussing the data at length to ensure that all three researchers reached consensus regarding interpretation.

Cross analysis provides the researchers with information regarding frequency of a specific response type and highlights similarities and differences between participants. Per Hill et al.’s (1997; 2005) recommendation, we counted the number of participants whose core ideas were represented within each category. Categories were considered general if nine to 10 participants were represented, typical if five to eight participants were represented, and variant if two to four participants were represented (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). If a category contained information from only one participant, it was not deemed illustrative of the sample and was subsequently dropped from the analysis (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). The categories are listed in Table 3 and described in detail in the results section below.

## Results

We conducted our data analysis within three broad domains addressing participants’ (1) atheist worldview, (2) thoughts about gender, and (3) perspectives of feminism. Please see Table 3 for a succinct breakdown of domains and categories identified over the course of analysis.

**Domain 1: Atheist Worldview**

During our interviews, the participants shared personal definitions of their atheist worldview and discussed how their atheist worldview affects their lives. Participants shared similar themes, noting (1) a denial of the supernatural, (2) an allegiance to freethinking, (3) societal prejudice against atheists, (4) commitment to core values encompassing humanistic ideals and personal responsibility, and (5) a rejection of gender roles prescribed by organized religions.

*Table 3. Domains and Categories.*

<b>Domains</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Atheist Worldview	Denial of the supernatural	typical
	Guided by freethinking	general
	Prejudice against atheists	variant
	Core values	typical
	Humanistic ideals	variant
	Sense of personal responsibility	typical
	Reject religions' prescriptive gender roles	typical
Gender	Ideal behavior	typical
	Reject gendered expectations	typical
	Guiding principles	typical
	Sexes more similar than different	typical
	Basis for gender differences	general
	Cultural constructions	general
	Biology	typical
	Gender inequality a problem	general
Feminism	Definition of feminism	general
	Female empowerment	typical
	Recognizing nuance	variant
	Stereotypes of feminism prevail	typical
	Factors influencing becoming feminist	general
	Inequality	typical
	Exposure to feminist ideas	variant
	Connection with feminism	general
	Engaged with feminism	typical
	Not engaged with feminism	variant

Note: general = 9-10 participants represented, typical = 5-8 participants represented, variant = 2-4 participants represented.

### **denial of the supernatural.**

A majority of participants explained that a rejection of the supernatural was central to their worldview and the way they approach the world. Eight out of 10 participants explicitly stated their atheist identity was a direct consequence of rejecting belief in a supernatural being. Harold shared, "I just don't believe in anything supernatural. I think everything we see on the planet has a natural explanation that can be sought through science and philosophy." This rejection of the supernatural is closely tied to their tendency to question and critically analyze ideas.

### **guided by freethinking.**

While no participants used the word "Freethinker," they clearly exemplified freethought, a rejection of "authority and dogma particularly in religious thinking, in favor of rational inquiry" (Edwards, 2006, p. 44). All but one participant referred to the importance of forming opinions based on reason independent from authority either in the initial development of their atheist worldview as children/adolescents or in the ways they approached the world as adults. For many participants a

religious upbringing was common, but they questioned their religious backgrounds because what they were being taught did not seem rational. Bacchus commented,

*I basically looked at what I'd been taught about the Bible, saying that man must be the head of the household. And looked in the part of the Bible that gays are an abomination, as are shellfish and clothing of mixed weave, and these other teachings. And I said 'Well, you don't follow this other stuff, so why are we taking this bit of Romans and running with that?' And so I just kind of said 'You know what. Screw it. This doesn't make sense.'*

Gage, an active member of a Methodist congregation growing up, said,

*There were no rabble-rousers in the community, per se. However when I started to lose my faith in high school, I started questioning everything. Like 'Well, if this isn't true, what else have they been telling me that isn't true?' And I think that was important as far as me taking a critical look at the things, at my assumptions about everything.*

For our participants, questioning the world around them and thinking critically is a tool they use quite regularly in their everyday lives. Gerome shared,

*When I was younger, growing up Christian, that was enough to get through. Do what the parents said and stuff. But now I've just become used to being a little more critical of not only those beliefs, but things in general. ...Since I've become more atheist in my worldview I've oddly enough realized it's a lot easier to say 'I don't know,' which really surprised me.*

Parker demonstrated a potential link between freethinking and beliefs about gender roles,

*I was raised as a Catholic and come from sort of the stereotypical white, western, middle class American experience. That plays a large role in the way that I understand gender roles. But at the same time I'm consciously trying to be aware of that underpinning and see what I feel the gender roles are or should be. I try to move toward what they should be like as opposed to what my background says they should be.*

### **prejudice against atheists.**

Two participants expressed frustration about the prejudice they perceive against atheism and atheists, both at a personal and societal level. One, Ladd, said,

*My friend, who's über-religious, just came out of the closet a while ago. He's going through his own identity stuff too. And I remember he told me explicitly I have no morals [because I'm atheist] or whatever. And that's offensive to me because I do follow a kind of ethical code.*

The other, Bacchus, spoke at length about prejudice and the atheist civil rights movement, sharing,

*I think it's in North Carolina where an open atheist won a city council seat and his opponent on the city council who lost is now suing him because under the state law, in the state constitution, atheists or people who do not recognize that there is a god are not allowed to hold public office.*

For these participants, prejudice against atheists is especially frustrating because it is incorrectly founded on a belief that atheists have no morals. On the contrary, many of our participants talked about the relationship between being atheist and developing their values.

### **core values.**

Half of the participants indicated their atheist worldview was intimately tied to a belief in humanism and a sense of obligation to act ethically, do good, and help humanity. Bacchus stated,

*I am an atheist, which means I don't believe in any sort of supernatural deity. So that's what I don't believe in. I do believe I'm a secular humanist, which means that I value things like democracy...freedom of speech, equality, basically using human resources to solve human problems. ...I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility to do good when good needs to be done. And so I use that to inform my decision making on a daily basis.*

Other participants shared a similar sense of responsibility. Jordan stated,

*As an atheist... I don't think there's going to be any part of me around after I die. And that means I got just this amount of time to live a life that I can be, I hope, not too ashamed of or perhaps somewhat proud of. And that makes it all the more critical to me that I make the morally right choices and don't rely on the thought that sometime shortly before I die I can repent all the bad stuff and still get a free pass.*

Simon echoed others, sharing,

*I'm an atheist. And what that worldview means for me most directly is that I have an obligation upon myself to be ethical and to try to make proper choices to help out humanity as a whole. It has to instead originate within me and not from a divine agent.*

For many of the participants, these core values carried over into how they thought about gender roles as well. They believed that religion prescribes gender roles that do not align with their own personal values.

### **rejection of religions' prescriptive gender roles.**

Over half of our participants rejected what they perceived to be prescriptive gender roles imposed by organized religion. For example, Dargan stated,

*I think if one is religious in a certain way it's easy to believe that there's some sort of set role that is supposed to be adhered to. ... I was raised Catholic and I think that Catholics tend to hold a certain essentialism about gender roles. So insofar as I rejected that, it was*

*just a push to step back and rethink [gender roles].*

Similarly, Gage shared,

*I don't believe there's any god who has said 'Well these are your lots. Men, you have this lot and women, you have this lot.' So the preconceived 'This is just the way men and women are. That's the way it should be,' I dismiss out of hand.*

Harold simply stated "I'd say that there's a tendency in Christianity and Islam to kind of put women in a more subordinate position. And I don't think that's right."

## **Domain 2: Gender**

The atheist men in our study rejected gendered expectations as well as religion, which they viewed as a perpetuator of traditional gender roles. On the topic of gender, participants spoke of (1) their beliefs about how men and women should behave in the world, (2) similarities and differences between women and men as well as why those differences occur, and (3) their perception that gender inequality continues to be a central concern of our day.

### **ideal behavior.**

No participants indicated a belief that men and women should adhere to specific gender norms or behaviors. In fact, over half explicitly rejected gendered expectations of behavior. For example, Gage shared,

*I think each person kind of has an inclination to behave a certain way. So, for example, for a man a lot of people think that I'm somewhat effeminate. Um, and you know, whatever. That's the way I make my decisions. And it works for me. So could I be more "manly"? Absolutely. But would it be natural for me? Absolutely not. Conversely, there are women who are kind of "mannish." So again I think if we were to accept this kind of anecdotal societal acceptance of 'men are supposed to act this way and women are supposed to act that way,' we're going to be pushing people into generals that maybe don't fit their natural tendencies.*

At the same time, some participants recognized that individuals may be satisfied behaving within norms for their gender. Thus, gender norm-congruent behavior was not seen as necessarily detrimental if chosen freely. Ladd shared,

*I know there are some people who want to think outside the box and some people are happy with gender roles. I've encountered people who say that "Oh people are happy in their gender roles." So, it's confusing for me, but I don't think people should be coerced into behaving in a certain way.*

When discussing their current personal views about how men and women should behave, participants generally indicated a belief that all people, regardless of gender, should behave congruent with humanistic principles and in ways that make the individual happy without impeding on others. In

other words, they suggested living by principles that transcend gender. Parker offered, “The golden rule was always a good one. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Likewise, Dargan said, “Basically whatever people want to do insofar as it doesn’t interfere with what other people want to do. ... I don’t think that people should behave in ways that restrict how other people are able to do things.” Simon shared “Ethically, I don’t have any prescribed actions that men and women ‘should behave in such and such a way.’ ... Whichever way the action is going to generate the most happiness, that’s the way to act for both genders.”

### **sexes more similar than different.**

Participants typically endorsed the belief that men and women are more similar than different, although participants generally acknowledged that both a biological basis and cultural constructions of gender lead to observed differences between the sexes (see next category description for details). Participants consistently expressed the belief that similarities outweigh differences between men and women. Gage commented,

*I think that for the most part men and women are very similar in a lot of ways because, for all intents and purposes, we’re the same organism. Now I think that it’s inarguable that different sets of hormones pulse through our body and cause us to prioritize things differently and cause us to make decisions in a different way. Not necessarily inferior or superior just—I kind of view it as an evolutionary byproduct.*

Similarly, Harold offered, “I would say the differences that [men and women] have are really exaggerations of things that aren’t very big. So I’d actually probably say they’re more similar than anything. You’d have to pick things apart to find huge differences.”

### **basis for gender differences.**

Many participants questioned whether gender differences are more biologically or culturally based. For example, when asked about similarities and differences, Jordan shared,

*I suppose one ought to distinguish between differences that are mainly the result of acculturation within a certain culture and differences that might have some sort of genuine biological basis. And I’m sure there are experts in psychology that have thought about that and probably tried to sort those things out in one way or another. I haven’t thought about it that much and just don’t know.*

Bacchus echoed that sentiment, stating,

*Right now I’ve noticed there are some very strong social differences between men and women. But I don’t know how much of that is inherent or how much of that is culturally ingrained. Women are trained from an early age... High heels. Classic example. Women are told they wear these shoes—that are totally uncomfortable and hurt your feet—because they make your calves look nice. You don’t see that same advice being given to men a lot. So, I think that there’s cultural messages that are passed to women at an early age that makes it really hard to say for sure...how different [men and women] really are.*

When discussing similarities and differences between men and women, many participants mentioned their belief that neither sex is innately better. Harold succinctly stated, “I don’t think that any one sex or gender is more or less capable than the other when it comes down to it.” Likewise, Bacchus shared, “If I remember right there have been some studies that have found psychological differences between men and women. But I don’t think that means that either sex is inherently better than the other.” He goes on to state that science can be a tool to support the idea that men and women are equally capable, saying “...using the scientific method we can see ‘Hey, women are capable of a lot of the same things as men. Why should we treat them differently?’”

### **gender inequality is a problem.**

Because they reject gender expectations and construct values based on humanist principles, it is not surprising that almost every participant noted that gender inequality in multiple spheres continues to be a significant problem within the United States and worldwide. Domestically, participants highlighted disparities between men and women related to income, political representation, control over health care, and sexual assault victimization. Harold stated,

*I think abortion is a big issue, because people want to make health care decisions for other people. I think it’s different for men because men don’t even have those parts (laughs). Getting pregnant and giving birth is a heavy burden and each person should make that decision individually.*

Gage extended this sentiment, noting more insidious differential treatment for women,

*I think that there are pervasive, systemic ways that as a culture we treat women as being second-class citizens. I’ve got a little bit of a bee in my bonnet right now because I’m reading The Macho Paradox by Jonathan [sic] Katz. ...As I’ve been reading this book I’ve been realizing...just the language that we use, and the commercialism has been particularly dangerous from the position of women in our society because we kind of create this ‘You’re never pretty enough. You, as you are, will never suffice. You’ll always have to do more’ [message]. And that message is not sent to men. And whether women are conscious of it or not I think a lot of times that that kind of wears down on their ability to maximize their potential.*

Two participants referenced their wives when discussing concerns about how women’s experiences can drastically differ from those of men. When discussing the gender inequity he perceives in society, Gerome made the off-hand comment, “There are tons of stuff (sic) that my wife probably puts up with that I don’t even know about. So it would be interesting just to live the life in her shoes and see what she goes through.” Bacchus gave a specific example of the ways in which women may be undermined in small ways,

*My wife and I have talked it over—and she’s actually more adamant about this than I am—that we just don’t want children. We don’t think we’d be good parents. She’s terrified of the childbirth process. And quite frankly...it costs too much in time and energy and money. We just don’t think it’s worth it. When I mention this to people they go ‘Oh, she’ll change her*

*mind.' And it frustrates me. It's, like, how patronizing? Just because my wife has a uterus they automatically know her better than I do and I've been living with her for five years. It doesn't make any sense to me. There's just assumptions. Just because she's female she'll automatically want kids. And I just don't get it.*

Some participants, while recognizing inequality in the U.S., were emphatic that women in other countries around the world suffer much more. Jordan shared,

*Gender issues become very, very real in a lot of societies where the disparity in power between men and women is in fact much larger than it is here. I'm not meaning to belittle or minimize the issues that arise here now, for us, but I don't think they rise to the level of the problems we have in some cultures. ...It just does seem to me that certain things— like female circumcision—are wrong. I mean they're very seriously wrong and that overrides any concerns I might have for the integrity of those cultures. They are cultures that I think need to find a way to change their beliefs enough to stop doing that stuff.*

Parker also shared the belief that women in developing nations suffer much greater inequality than American women, saying,

*Worldwide there are horrible, horrible crimes that are continually being carried out against women that we see so often...in, like, Sub-Saharan Africa where rape is used as a tool of social control and is a tool of warfare. Um. Also, there are a host of political issues. I'm currently working on a paper on the most recent elections in Iran and how women were denied any chance to have a female candidate running at all. That's kind of always been the case. I think that the political role of women is one that they need to press for and that people in general need to press for to ensure equal representation.*

Bacchus reported that, from his perspective, most people do not recognize that gender inequality is a problem,

*There have been studies finding that when the average education level of the female segment of the population goes up, crime goes down, birth rate goes down, I mean a lot of the societal indicators for stability and happiness increase. And so when I look at areas like Pakistan and Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, and places that are having a lot of problems, I'm thinking well, a lot of this is probably because they expect 51% of the population to stay in the Stone Age. This doesn't work. It's like saying "Okay we're going to halve our brain pool here, and see if we can come up with better ideas." It doesn't work. Even in this country, we've got the massive difference between the pay scale for women and the pay scale for men. I've seen some feminists claim we live in a rape culture, and looking at their examples it's hard to disagree with them. I mean, if you do a lot of online gaming and someone gets sniped, it's like 'Dude! He totally raped you.' Well no. It's kind of trivializing a rather big problem. And so I think a lot of it is consciousness raising. I think one of the biggest issues is just pointing it out.*

### Domain 3: Feminism

We asked participants to discuss their personal definitions of and relationship with feminism. While their thoughts about gender were expressed almost unanimously, there was less consensus about feminism. Many were able to articulate that feminism is about female empowerment, but they also defaulted to stereotypes of feminism, often leading the conversation with references to “bra-burning.” However, at least half of the respondents cited their belief that feminism is complex and nuanced, demonstrating that their understanding goes beyond the stereotypes. They believed that individuals become feminists because inequality exists. Further, they acknowledged that exposure to feminist ideas also influenced people to become feminists. Seven participants stated that they were feminist, while three did not. Therefore, the categories within this domain reflect participants’ (1) definitions of feminism, (2) acknowledgement of stereotypes about feminism/feminists, (3) opinions about what influences individuals to become feminist, and (4) their personal connection with feminism.

#### definitions of feminism.

Typically, participants defined feminism as a movement focused on achieving gender equality. Harold stated, “I guess [it’s] just kind of an ideology that is trying to balance out the discrepancy between the sexes.” Bacchus echoed this sentiment, saying, “To me feminism is the strange and shocking notion that we should treat women like people. I guess to me feminism comes down to treating men and women as equals and the same if at all possible.” A couple of participants, like Dargan, extended the definition beyond gender to include other underrepresented groups, stating, “I think that historically feminism has been narrowly focused on White middle class women and maybe the most pressing thing about feminism now is expanding beyond that base.”

One participant, Tyson, suggested that feminism has shifted over time from an active movement to an academic field, stating,

*I think feminism is just the call for the examination of the systems we have. And are they really equal for all parties? Whatever your gender or whatever group you happen to belong to. ... I’m not an expert in this, but it seems like maybe it morphed a little bit into more of an academic field of study. How do you systematically study these gender differences and those sorts of things?*

While providing their perspective on what feminism is, half of our participants recognized the nuance and breadth of feminism. For example, Gage commented,

*As for how to define feminism? I don’t think I can, because I think it’s got so many different facets and [gender inequality] is such a complex problem that I don’t think that we can come up with a pithy descriptor that’s going to be sufficiently nuanced to address all of the problems. ... If we’re going to solve the problem, it’s gonna take a lot of work. It’s gonna take a lot of brain power. And I think a lot of people are intimidated by how philosophically deep you have to get to really understand women’s issues.*

Similarly, Ladd shared,

*Initially, when I was younger, I viewed feminism as just zealous young women who feel*

*really out of place with society. And as I grew older... as you read more about it obviously you get more familiar with it and you kind of relate to what some of the tenets are. And it's not one single movement either. It's highly subdivided.*

### **stereotypes of feminism prevail.**

Over half of the participants mentioned stereotypes of feminism stemming from the politically active 1960s. When asked to reflect on feminism, Gage quipped, "Stereotypical or not? (laughs) You imagine all that burning bras and stuff..." Likewise, Bacchus commented, "There's this strange strong-man stereotype that 'feminist' automatically means bra-burning dyke or whatever."

Often, these stereotypes were the first thing participants shared when asked to talk about feminism, emphasizing that even 50 years after the second wave of the feminist movement, negative connotations still accompany the idea of feminism. One participant, Gage, made the connection between the stereotypes of feminism, the accompanying backlash against the feminist community, and the continuation of gender inequality, noting,

*Well I think there are some kinds of cultural biases against feminism on its face. Kind of a denial of [gender inequality] in the first place. And even if they're willing to acknowledge the problem, there's a strong tide toward denying a solution put forth by the feminist community as being a reasonable solution. Um, so I think that at its face there's immediate resistance to [feminism].*

### **factors influencing becoming feminist.**

Participants uniformly stated that exposure to gender inequality or marginalization leads people to become feminist. Simon stated that an individual would acquire a feminist orientation due to, "perceived or real oppression or just preferential treatment toward men. A systematic preferential treatment toward men. And neglect of issues they would categorize as women's issues." Parker explained further, "What makes people feminist is the cultural history, the private history. I think that being personally subject to some of the anti-feminist practices or rhetoric even would make someone more likely to become feminist." Jordan agreed, stating, "When people are not just marginalized, but become aware of how marginalized they are, they start thinking about the fact they ought to do something about it."

Beyond a personal awareness of oppression or inequality, half of our participants also indicated that a person may begin to identify with feminism after being exposed to feminist ideas and viewpoints either through social connections or academia. Bacchus shared that an individual does not have to be personally affected by gender inequity to internalize feminist values, stating, "I think a lot of it is just actually talking with women and listening to them... I think the thing that influences people to be feminist is a willingness to listen to women and treat them as equals." Likewise, Gage stated,

*I've got a lot of friends who work very actively for the feminist cause and they've all educated me on what some of the problems are. So I think I've gotten unique opportunities to understand the problems a little more in depth than maybe a lot of other people do just because I get to engage these people that are very important to me in conversation on a*

*nearly daily basis about these problems.*

### **connection with feminism.**

Participants expressed a variety of personal connections to feminism. Identification with feminism ranged from no identification or interest to resolute feminist identification. More than half of our participants categorized themselves as feminist or pro-feminist and shared that feminism had personal significance in their own lives. One participant, Ladd, made a specific distinction between a feminist and pro-feminist identity, stating:

*I consider myself pro-feminist. I'm pro-equality. ... I can be pro[feminist] all I want, but it's a world that I will always be cut off from I feel like. I feel like I can relate to some of the tenets of what it's shooting for and what it's marching for. But I feel like I'm always cut off from it because of my upper middle class White background. In spirit I support it, but realistically I'll always be cut off from it to a certain degree.*

Bacchus expressed how feminism has meaning for his own life, sharing,

*I try to be aware of [exclusivity] in my language. I try to be aware of it in my thinking. And granted, as a White heterosexual male I can only do so much to be aware of these issues. But if somebody happens to mention that I mention something kind of sexist, I stop and think about it and ask them questions and try to figure out 'Okay. Is this actually sexist or not? How so?' Rather than just dismissing them out of hand.*

Often feminist-identified participants referenced the connection between their humanistic values and feminism when discussing their personal role in addressing oppression and promoting feminist causes. For example, Gage stated,

*I'm an atheist. I'm a humanist. I'm a feminist. Kind of a stacking of Russian dolls. ... [Jackson Katz] has the idea that violence against women is really men's problem. We should be doing something about it. It affects women most directly and most overtly, but affects society as a whole—which really resonates with me as a humanist.*

Bacchus said, “As I understand the concept, secular humanism is entirely in line with and would encourage feminism just because of the base of equality.” He commented further,

*I've been told 'Well, you're male, you're automatically part of the oppression whether you know it or not.' And it's like 'Okay fine. What do I do about this?' It's kind of frustrating to be told you're defective without being given a way to fix that. Or 'Okay, so you're saying I'm part of the problem. How can I be part of the solution?'*

Despite expressing feminist viewpoints in other parts of their interviews, a few participants rejected any personal connection with feminism. Harold stated,

*I'm not really feminist. Feminism to me always tended to be more like empowerment—kind of almost a takeover, a domineering type of role. I don't know. When you hear the word 'feminist' you kind of think of a bra-burning, protesting type of situation. ... I don't really consider it that much. I just try to treat everyone the same.*

Dargan shared the belief that feminism has meaning, but denied that it plays any role in his life, sharing “I'm not a part of any central target group that feminism would be trying to empower.” One participant, Gerome, had not even considered he could be feminist-identified, stating “Are there male feminists also? ...I never considered that actually.”

## Discussion

Our qualitative study of 10 atheist men living in a small Midwestern city in the United States attempted to add to the sociological understanding of those who do not believe in a god. By asking these atheist men to discuss their perspectives of gender and religion we hoped to build on the philosophical, feminist, historical, and contemporary social science understandings of the relationship between gender equity and atheism.

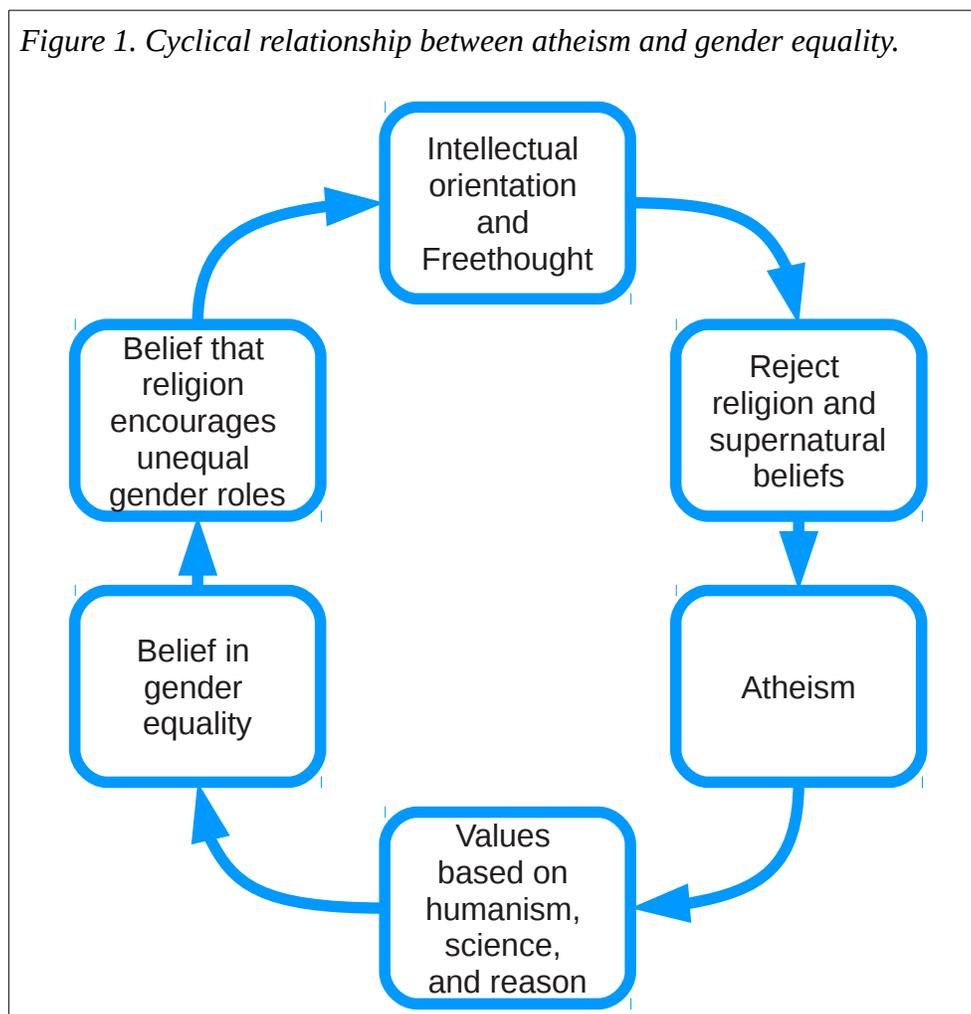
Several beliefs were universally endorsed among our participants. First, they all demonstrated a proclivity for freethought—a commitment to questioning things and prioritizing reason over all else. Second, they agreed men and women are more similar than different and attributed gender differences primarily to cultural and social influences. Third, they identified gender inequality as a problem within the U.S. and throughout the world. These beliefs support prior research findings, which suggest that atheists have an intellectual orientation ([Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997](#); [Fitzgerald, 2003](#); [Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006](#); [Smith, 2011](#)) and support gender equality ([Beit-Hallahmi, 2007](#); [Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006](#); [Zuckerman 2007, 2009](#)). Several other themes were endorsed by the majority of the participants. They denied belief in anything supernatural as well as expressed a commitment to personal responsibility to do good—two ideas that are also supported in the literature ([Arcaro, 2010](#); [Beit-Hallahmi, 2007](#); [Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006](#); [Zuckerman, 2009](#)).

Another important outcome of our study is further rejection of the myth that atheists lack a moral core. Our participants described their values, based on humanism, science, or reason, multiple times. While Americans typically believe that religion is a necessary foundation for morality ([Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, 2006](#)), our participants suggest otherwise. Two participants in particular discussed how hurtful it is to encounter prejudice against atheists in our society and to be thought of as immoral; from their perspective the principles that guide their behavior (e.g., kindness, respect, equality) are more effective and beneficial for society than those promoted by religion.

Unique to this study is documentation of atheist men's views on feminism. Although only seven of the participants self-identified as feminist, all participants typically expressed viewpoints commensurate with feminism. In addition to believing gender inequality is a significant problem in the world, participants rejected expectations of gender-normative behavior; instead they expressed belief that men and women should behave however they want as long as they do not impede upon or hurt others. Their definitions of feminism typically referenced a commitment to female empowerment, but several also acknowledged the breadth, depth, and complexity of the field. What was surprising to hear, but perhaps should not have been given strong cultural backlash against the feminist movement, was the immediate association among our participants between feminism and feminist stereotypes—even for those who identified as feminist! Although many eventually moved beyond the stereotypes and

explored their beliefs about feminism, it is hard to deny that such stereotypes continue to influence people. In fact, at least one individual explicitly stated he does not identify with feminism because of the internalization of stereotypic beliefs about the feminist movement. Finally, our participants expressed belief that internalizing a feminist identity is most likely to occur from being subject or witness to gender inequality. However, it was also noted that being exposed to feminist ideas through readings, peers, or school could lead to a feminist orientation.

While prior research has demonstrated a relationship between atheism and a belief in gender equality, we believe this study has laid new ground in explaining why that relationship exists. The fact that atheists are guided by freethinking leads to deconstructing hegemonic beliefs, thus rejecting religion and establishing an atheist worldview. Their atheist worldview leads to the construction of personal values and principles to live by, which are often based upon humanistic principles, science, and reason. Given these values, atheists conclude that gender inequality is unacceptable, which in turn leads them to reflect upon the role of organized religions in perpetuating gender roles. This critical thinking brings them back to a commitment to freethought. This cyclical relationship is depicted in Figure 1.



Finally, it should be noted that while these atheist men appeared to universally champion gender equality and respect for women as equals, this did not automatically lead to being pro-feminist or feminist-identified. Despite all endorsing favorable attitudes toward gender equality, three participants stated explicitly that they are not feminists. The disconnect between favoring gender equality yet not identifying as feminist may explain why situations like the elevator incident described by McCreight (2011) can happen within the atheist community. Like their antebellum predecessors (see [Kirkley, 2000](#)), our participants all favored gender equality but demonstrated varying levels of understanding and commitment to it. Although beyond the scope of this paper, this issue raises questions regarding what “counts” as pro-feminist discourse and whether one must demonstrate committed action toward eliminating inequity in order to be considered truly pro-feminist.

### Limitations and Future Research

While our results shed light on the otherwise understudied area of atheist men’s perspectives of gender equality and feminism, this investigation is not without limitations. First, all of our participants racially identified as white, and thus their thoughts and attitudes are not necessarily representative of men from other racial backgrounds. Second, they all lived in the same area of the American Midwest. The cultural background of their geographic location may differ greatly from other parts of the country, and thus may influence their perspectives in ways that may not appear for men from other parts of the country. Third, our sample was relatively young. It would be interesting to see how atheist men from various generations perceive gender equality given the different waves of feminism and feminist action over the past century. Fourth, while the research team sought to draw a sample from a variety of sources around the city, snowball sampling occurred due to referrals by initial participants. Because some of these participants interacted with one another socially, it is possible that their belief systems were in agreement with one another based upon research showing people tend to socialize with others who have similar worldviews ([Newcomb, 1956](#); [Byrne, 1961](#)). Thus, future researchers should seek a more diversified sample in regard to race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, geographic background, and socioeconomic status if this exploratory investigation were to be replicated. Finally, we approached data collection with a semi-structured interview. While such an approach leaves room for participants to offer unsolicited narratives, it guides their responses. It would be important for future studies to approach interviews from an unstructured standpoint, thus allowing participants to generate comments and thoughts related to gender and feminism of their own accord. Likewise, additional methods such as participant observation could add to the understanding of atheist men’s perspectives about gender and feminism.

When considering future directions for this line of research, several intriguing possibilities remain. First, several participants noted a belief that organized religion (particularly Christianity and Islam) perpetuates gender discrimination and anti-feminist values. Qualitative investigations such as the current one, only with samples of religious men, could greatly enhance our understanding of the individual perspectives religious men hold regarding gender equality, gender roles, and feminism. Second, we think that a study of atheist women, addressing their experiences with or perceptions of the presence of sexism within the atheist community would highlight the apparent disparity between attitudes and actions. Finally, future studies should explore in greater depth how atheist men who identify with feminist values and endorse gender equality actually go about acting upon or putting into practice those beliefs in their daily life.

In sum, regardless of the current limitations and future possibilities, this study is significant

because it contributes to the general knowledge base of atheism. It expands on the existing quantitative research that demonstrates a link between atheism and belief in gender equality by uncovering the pathway between intellectual orientation, atheism, and belief in gender equality. It also highlights, however, that a belief in gender equality does not necessarily coincide with a pro-feminist orientation. This may explain the contradiction experienced by women within the atheist community who are told it is a “better” community for women than organized religion (for example, see [Overall, 2007](#)), but also may be subject to seemingly un-feminist attitudes and interactions.

## References

- Altemeyer, B., & Hunsberger, B. (1997). *Amazing conversions: Why some turn to faith & others abandon religion*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Arcaro, T. (2010). The stigma of being an atheist. *Skeptic*, 15, 50-55.
- Bainbridge, W. S. (2005). Atheism. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, 1, 1-24.
- Beit-Hallahmi, B. (2007). Atheists: A psychological profile. In M. Martin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (pp. 300-317). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Byrne, D. (1961). Interpersonal attraction and attitude similarity. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 62, 713-715.
- Edgell, P., Gerteis, J., & Hartmann, D. (2006). Atheist as "other": Moral boundaries and cultural membership in American Society. *American Sociological Review*, 71(2), 211-234.
- Edwards, F. (2006). What is a Freethinker and why does it matter? *The Humanist*, 66, 44-45.
- Fitzgerald, B. (2003, August). *Atheist career paths: The construction of a nonnormative identity*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta, GA.
- Galen, L. W. (2009). Profiles of the godless: Results from a survey of the nonreligious. *Free Inquiry*, 29, 41-45.
- Hill, C. E., Knox, S., Thompson, B. J., Williams, E. N., Hess, S. A., & Ladany, N. (2005). Consensual qualitative research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, 196-205.
- Hill, C. E., Thompson, B. J., & Williams, E. N. (1997). A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 25, 517-572.
- Hunsberger, B. E., & Altemeyer, B. (2006). *Atheists: A groundbreaking study of America's Nonbelievers*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Jenks, R. J. (1986). Perceptions of two deviant and two nondeviant groups. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 126, 783-790.
- Kirkley, E. A. (2000). *Rational mothers and infidel gentlemen: Gender and American atheism, 1865-1915*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Kosmin, B. A., Mayer, E., & Keysar, A. (2001). American religious identification survey. The Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Retrieved from [http://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY\\_GC/media/CUNY-Graduate-Center/PDF/ARIS/ARIS-PDF-version.pdf](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/CUNY-Graduate-Center/PDF/ARIS/ARIS-PDF-version.pdf)
- McCreight, J. (2011). Richard Dawkins, your privilege is showing. *BlagHag* (blog), Retrieved July 2, 2012 from <http://www.blaghag.com/2011/07/richard-dawkins-your-privilege-is.html>
- McElroy, W. (2005). Religion and American feminism. *Society*, 42, 28-31.
- Newcomb, T. M. (1956). The prediction of interpersonal attraction. *Psychological Review*, 60, 393-404.
- Overall, C. (2007). Feminism and atheism. In M. Martin (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to atheism* (pp. 233-249). New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Pasquale, F. L. (2007). Empirical study and neglect of unbelief and irreligion. In T. Flynn (ed.), *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief* (pp. 760-766). Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Smith, J. M. (2011). Becoming an atheist in America: Constructing identity and meaning from the rejection of theism. *Sociology of Religion*, 72, 215-237.
- Watson, R. (2011a). About mythbusters, robot eyes, feminism, and jokes. *Skepchick* (blog), Retrieved June 20, 2012 from <http://skepchick.org/2011/06/about-mythbusters-robot-eyes-feminism-and-jokes/>
- Watson, R. (2011b). The privilege delusion. *Skepchick* (blog). Retrieved July 5, 2012 from <http://skepchick.org/2011/07/the-privilege-delusion/>
- Winston, K. (2011, Sept. 15). Atheists address sexism issues. *USA Today*. Retrieved June 20, 2012 from <http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/story/2011-09-15/atheist-sexism-women/50416454/1>
- Zuckerman, P. (2007). Atheism: Contemporary numbers and patterns. In M. Martin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (pp. 47-65). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Zuckerman, P. (2009). Atheism, secularity, and well-being: How the findings of social science counter negative stereotypes and assumptions. *Sociology Compass*, 3, 949-971.