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Life Narratives of Self-Confessed Atheists: Exploring the Psychological Process
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**LIFE NARRATIVES OF SELF-CONFESSED ATHEISTS: EXPLORING
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESS**

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of
College of Graduate Studies and Teacher Education Research
Philippine Normal University
Taft Avenue, Manila

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Bachelor of Science - Master of Arts
in Psychology and Guidance Counseling

ALEXIS JOHN N. RAMIRO
April 2019

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ABSTRACT

Name: Alexis John N. Ramiro
Title of Study: Life Narratives of Self-Confessed Atheists: Exploring the Psychological Process

Key Concepts: atheism, identity, young adults, guidance and counseling

Degree: Bachelor of Science - Master of Arts in Psychology and Guidance Counseling

Specialization: Pyschology and Counseling

Adviser: Dr. Teresita Rungduin

Non-belief especially atheism is quickly becoming popular among the young adults of this generation. This study aimed to explore the underlying psychological process on how an individual adopts an atheist identity through their narratives. It also determined the struggles encountered by atheists though the use of Pargament's model of understanding the psychological Distress of non-believers. Findings showed that there are five stages which an individual undergo in the process of adopting an atheist identity. These are: Identity Crisis, Doubt Reinforcement, Identity Formation, Dealing with Emotions, and Social Adjustment. It was also found out in the study that factors such as sexual orientation, and rebellion affect an individual's decision to abandon his/her religion. It aims to understand the point of view on non-believers in the context multiculturalism. Today and future counselors may use this study as a framework for understanding the psychological aspect being a non-believer. This may have a huge impact on the call to eradicate stigmas and biases in the counseling profession to address the issue diversity and the rising secularism in the country.

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CHAPTER I

The Problem and Literature Review

Background of the Study

In the study of religion – particularly the psychology of religion, atheists have been given very limited attention while believers and converts stood at the center of interest (Streib & Klein, 2013). Due to the increasing number of people with these kinds of beliefs, atheism has been becoming a recent and emerging research focus within the psychology of religion literature (Silver, 2013). According to statistics, there is a continuous growth in number of people worldwide who have been considering themselves as religiously unaffiliated or those who do not believe in religion and in God per se. Since the percentage has steadily risen since 2008, guidance counselors might expect more and more clients who have post-conventional beliefs (Bellin, 2014). This will certainly affect Guidance and Counseling in the near future. Statistics on religious unaffiliation has increased from 15% to 20% in just a span of 5 years in the United States alone according to the Pew Forum report, *Nones on the Rise* (2012). Among these unaffiliated people, more than 13 million describe themselves as atheists or agnostics, and over 33 million are religiously unaffiliated (Lugo, et.al. 2012). According to the data provided by the Global Religious Futures (2016), there is only about 1% of atheists and agnostics in the Philippines. In the March 2017 Social Weather Survey, 15% of 1200 respondents said that religion was “not important at all”. There has also been a decline in church attendance from 66% in 1991 to 40% in 2017 especially among Catholics. This empirical data shows that there is an ongoing religious decline in the country as the

number of religiously unaffiliated people has been steadily rising. Zuckerman (2007) argued that there are about 500 to 750 million non-believers around the world. As the population grows exponentially, we can expect a faster increase in the number of these people who are religiously unaffiliated, agnostics, or atheists.

One of the most common prejudices among non-believers is that they automatically have no values or no morality (Zuckerman, 2009). Not only normal people hold negative stereotypes about these people but also professionals in the academe. Even a psychologist like Justin Barrett who described atheism in his book *“Why Would Anyone Believe in God”* as “unnatural” or “oddity”, and Rodney Stark, a sociologist who publicly stated the unbelievers “are prickly..they’re just angry”. These accusations are just simply untrue as findings in several studies show that atheists or secular people maintain strong beliefs, values, and opinions. Sherkat & Darren (2008), found out that higher education is positively related with atheism, agnosticism, and secularity. According to Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006) atheists, next to agnostics have the lowest scores on dogmatism, zealotry, and religious prejudice, and they are more accepting of other minority groups especially the homosexuals and the bisexuals as they also experiences prejudices from religious individuals. It is also evident that atheists and secular people are more likely to be seen in rich industrialized nations than in poorer or less developed ones (Zuckerman, 2009). These misconceptions have been the reasons why further study in understanding post-conventional faith is warranted (Brelín, 2014).

Because of the consistent increase of people who are self-identified atheists, agnostics, non-believers, or apostates over the past decades, the Guidance and Counseling

profession is very much affected. For example, there is a recent trending Facebook post submitted as an entry in the page, “The Diliman Files” about a teenager who is experiencing symptoms of depression and undergoing counseling. According to the client, the conversation was going on smoothly until they got to the issue of religion. The client said that she is not practicing religion because she believes more in spirituality. That is when the counselor tried to refute her belief, and the client, according to her own words said that the counselor exclaimed that “spirituality cannot be divorced from religion, that religion is necessary, that religion is the way God shows goodness, that people may be imperfect but they’re God’s work, and even quoted some things from the bible”. Even though the client felt insulted, she said that she just let it pass because she didn’t want to waste the 60-minute session worth 2500 pesos for a religious debate. But as the counseling went on, the counselor didn’t stop mentioning about Jesus and the bible. The counselor told her that the next time she experiences symptoms of depression, the client should say the mantra and “call on the power of Jesus to shun the bad spirits away” and claimed that the things the client has been feeling were just “bad spirits”. According to the client, “I was already crying at that time because of so much frustration. I walked to that session hoping to feel better, and here I was, about to walk out feeling so much worse”, “I didn’t go on a debate with her because I didn’t want to, because I went there for a psychological assessment and consultation, not for a debate about personal beliefs”, “I was expecting that room to be a safe space, one where I could express myself without fear of being judged. Instead, I was lectured because of my beliefs. Instead of focusing on my mental health, the focus shifted to my beliefs. Instead of helping me overcome my challenges, she preached to me and made me feel so much worse”. This is

very saddening because the counselor only made the situation even worse for the client by disrespecting and imposing his/her own religious beliefs which is a taboo in the profession. This only shows that today's counselors have little or no knowledge about post-conventional beliefs.

The researcher's experience as a counseling student, those non-beliefs mentioned has not been included in the discussion of religion in multiculturalism and diversity. That is why, these post-conventional beliefs should be given emphasis in teaching guidance and counseling to equip counselors in the 21st century the skills and knowledge on how to deal with these types of clients to avoid incidents like this. This is because, "Counselors must accept the fact that, for clients who lack belief in a higher power, believe there is no God, or have limited or no spirituality, their experience is also real, valid, and significant for them, regardless of the counselors' personal belief and value systems", and that clients also have been expecting that the counselors would respect instead of challenge their beliefs (D'Andrea & Sprenger, 2007).

Acceptance of people regardless of their religious beliefs has been one of the values emphasized when teaching multiculturalism and diversity but those with no religious beliefs were not included. This might be a problem since the population of people with no religious beliefs has been increasing consistently. Becker (2011), has been arguing that Atheism is much more misunderstood and understudied and that it deserves be a multicultural sub-category of the religious and spiritual dimensions in psychology and psychotherapy. This is necessary in order to equip future counselors with skills and prepare them for the evolving landscape of religion and spirituality as evidenced by the

empirical data and statistics, counselors will encounter more and more clients who do not fit in the conventional beliefs in the near future (Walz & Bleuer, 2009).

Because of this growing interest in post-conventional beliefs instead of organized religion, it is now an issue in the Guidance and Counseling profession whether to include post-conventional beliefs such as atheism as a multicultural sub-category of the diversity issues. Post-conventional beliefs constitute just another culture - a culture of believing in science, philosophy, and reason. This is the reason why it should also be included when teaching about diversity and multiculturalism and psychology in order for us to open our minds to new beliefs and ideas, to avoid biases and discriminations, and to liberate our minds from crippling religious dogmas.

It is apparent that non-belief is quickly becoming an issue of diversity within the fields of psychology and counseling as a profession (D'Andrea & Sprenger, 2007). Still, research on irreligion and atheism remains limited among social science scholarship, psychology, and within counseling psychology, specifically (Brewster et al., 2014). Since this is a least researched topic, there have not been much studies made regarding this area especially in a country where faith and religion are so much of a virtue.

This research study attempts to explore the underlying psychological process of apostasy or how an individual renounces his/her religious identity, by looking into the life narratives of individuals who are self-confessed atheists. This study also attempts to identify the factors that lead people to abandon their religion and explore the process of adopting an atheist identity. With this in mind, the researcher aims to dig deeper and understand the subjective world of self-confessed atheists, and to validate their

experiences. This could serve as guidelines for counselors in dealing with these types of clients.

This study is important because in a country like the Philippines where faith is a core value, even counselors who are expected to accept their clients unconditionally regardless of their beliefs or culture, still hold biases and prejudices against people with post-conventional beliefs especially atheism. Those negative perceptions greatly affect the outcome of the counseling process, which should uphold multiculturalism and diversity in counseling. Counselors should always consider the diversity of the clients. Even if the counselor is a hardcore Christian and his/her counselee has different beliefs due to a different culture, the counselor should respect that and should not impose his/her own religious beliefs. The problem is that atheism, and other kinds of non-belief are still not given attention, neither are they mentioned when teaching about multiculturalism and diversity. That is why most of today's counselors lack the knowledge and the ability to handle these types of clients. This is also the reason why previous studies suggest that these non-beliefs should be given its rightful place as a multicultural sub-category in the diversity issues in psychology, psychotherapy, and other religious domains. It was also found out in previous studies that the number of people with these kinds of beliefs has been steadily rising and that counselors should expect more and more of these clients in the future. This study aimed to address the issue of the growing interest in post-conventional beliefs especially atheism. This also aims to shed light regarding this area or topic, to eliminate biases and negative perceptions, and to prepare counselors for the unprecedented rise of clients with these kinds of beliefs.

Literature Review

This chapter includes all the literatures that have been used in the study including the past researches that is related and can be used to understand the psychological process of adopting an atheist identity.

Atheist Belief

Atheism is simply just a lack of belief in god(s) or a belief in the non-existence of god(s) and a complete rejection of any existing religions. In addition to that, atheists are people who does not believe in a God/s and/or those who thought that the idea of God(s) and religion is absurd and incongruous (Baggini, 2003). The atheist's reality focuses on the natural rather than the supernatural world. They believe that the physical materials in the natural world have all the beauty, emotions, and moral values that make life meaningful (Baggini, 2003). They are philosophical realists who don't believe in higher meaning or that everything happens for a reason because they believe that things happen as a consequence of one's actions or sometimes it is just pure coincidence or luck. Meanwhile, an agnostic is someone who is unsure or undecided about the existence of God, or who believes that the existence of a God are beyond the capabilities of human knowledge and comprehension (Eller, 2005).

Atheists exist in every country around the world. Zuckerman (2009) in his study, "Atheism: Contemporary Rates and Patterns", developed two categories of atheism, the "coercive atheism" and "organic atheism". Coercive atheism happens in a state wherein non-belief was enforced by a dictator or the government such as in North Korea,

Vietnam, and other states in the Soviet Union. Organic atheism happens in a normal state wherein there is a religious freedom, and beliefs are not forced by the government. Countries like Sweden and Netherlands have a high population of organic atheists, but they are considered as the wealthiest, healthiest, best educated, and freest societies on Earth (Zuckerman, 2007).

The Philippines has only 1% of atheist population, and it is considered as an “organic atheism” in nature and it can be explained by taking into consideration the historical, cultural, economic and sociological factors (Zuckerman, 2007). The Philippines was colonized by Spain who brought Catholicism/Christianism for three centuries. Jose Rizal who is the country’s national hero was among the first ever who questioned the church and religion. In this predominantly Catholic/Christian country, atheism and other post-conventional beliefs are bizarre or not very acceptable to the society. Any attempt at secularization is sure to be bombarded with ad hominem, Bible quotes and conservative moral codes (De Leon 2012). The Philippine Atheists and Agnostics Society or popularly known as PATAS, a non-stock, non-profit organization approved by the Security and Exchange commission, aims to provide a venue where people can express their views and opinions about the different issues in the Philippines and also to introduce the concept of atheism and agnosticism using free discourse, philosophical, and scientific thinking. The group was founded by Marissa Torres last February 27, 2011, it has several chapters here and abroad. It has two different subgroups: The Youth Atheists and Agnostics Society which accepts members from 20-

30 years old and the Bahaghari Atheists and Agnostics Society which is dedicated in supporting the LGBT rights (Magante, 2016).

In a democratic country like the Philippines, there is no government coercion in religious beliefs but people feel that it is necessary to say that they believe in a God because it is socially desirable. Being an atheist in the Philippines is a social stigma and quite not popular and desirable because of the dominant religious population in the area. Moreover, Filipinos have an unfavorable opinion about atheists which stemmed from the misconceptions brought by culture and media. Because of these, Filipino atheists experience discrimination in the society. For example, most government offices requires to write a religion in the governmental forms which resulted to atheists having difficulties in getting a job because companies favor those employees who are religious because of the stigma and because the reason that they equate religion as the basis for values. To address those problems, PATAS organization holds conferences, humanitarian projects and social media exposures to change the conception of stigmatized atheism to a more formalized, humane Filipino concept of atheism (Magante, 2016).

Since there is a growing number of atheists in the Philippines especially in the youth, problems also arose in the guidance and counseling profession due to lack of knowledge regarding with these belief. This study looked at the process of how does one adopts an atheist identity in a psychological perspective through in-depth analysis of their narratives. In a qualitative research study, life narratives is a means by which the researcher systematically gather, and analyze people's stories as told by them (Etherington, 2004). These stories are reconstructions of a person's experiences, the way

he/she remembered and told them at a particular point of their lives. These stories uncover subjective meanings from the way they are being told.

As people grow older, they are continuously accumulating experiences and interactions with other people and their surroundings which make up their life stories. These life stories are psychosocial constructs coauthored by the individual himself with which his life is rooted and given meaning (McAdams, 2001). These are the individual's recollections of the past, life scripts, or their significant memories. In a life narrative, the narrator is the person who plays an active role in the story. These narratives provide a window in the process of constructing one's identity (Elliot, 2005). These individuals are constantly trying to build and rebuild the persons they used to be, currently becoming, and the person they wish to become through the construction and investigation of narratives (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative research is quickly becoming popular and is often used in the field of education, mainly because teachers, like every other people, are storytellers who socially and individually have stories to tell (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Thus, narrative research is the study of how individuals experience the world, and these stories are collected by narrative researchers then writes narrative experiences (Gudmundsdottir, 2001). These life narratives of an individual is detrimental to understanding their identity.

The term identity refers to an individual's goals, values, beliefs, and the roles they play in a society (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011). "Who am I? What am I doing with my life? What does this all mean?". These are questions of identity that we are constantly experiencing at different points of our lives especially during the early adult

years (Whitbourne, Sneed, & Sayer, 2009). This is due to the fact that entering adulthood is the stage where people face issues concerning identity, and focus on their self-development. During this stage, individuals are now able to ask questions and find meanings and answers because their formal operational thought, abstract and logical thinking are fully developed.

According to Schwartz (2001), personal identity refers to one's values and beliefs; and is often studied in the context of political preference, occupational choice, moral standards, and religious or spiritual identity. These identities take the form of a life story, complete with setting, scenes, characters, and plot (McAdams, 1996).

Individuals assume a certain role and adopt an identity that they will play for the rest of their lives. Participants in this study abandoned their previously held beliefs and adopted an atheist identity. They threw away their religious identity through deconversion or apostasy. The word apostasy came from the Greek word *apostasia* that originated from *aphistemi*, in which *apo* literally means "away from" and *histemi* which means "stand" (Helps Ministries, 1987). Woods (2009), defined apostasy as an act of departing from a previously embraced truth, or a change in standing that denotes walking away (Adam, 2009). According to Zuckerman (2011), apostasy is a part of maturation and individuation process, where individuation entails a rebellion or rejection against their parents' religious identities. Abandoning one's religion is of course a form of apostasy because it denotes a change in standing or walking away from a previously held truth but "deconversion" is more preferred because "apostasy" has negative connotations (Streib, Hood, Keller, Csoff, & Silver, 2009). Streib et al. (2009, p. 17), defined deconversion as

“re-writing one’s religious identity, revising one’s system of beliefs and world views, and re-structuring one’s way of thinking, moral judgment, and dealing with authority”.

Wright, Giovanelli, and Dolan (2007) gave three explanations for deconversion: 1) a battle between faith and reason, 2) the doctrine of hell and the ubiquitous existence of human suffering, and 3) interactions with other Christians. They have identified these three reasons for deconversion by analyzing 50 narratives of former Christians with ages from 20 to 50, who were educated, and came from middle to upper class as of society. To explain the first reason, battle between faith and reason, individuals find it hard to reconcile their religious beliefs with what they learned from history, science, education, and common-sense. They describe the bible as unbelievable, inaccurate, and at times offensive. Another reason is the doctrine of hell and the ubiquitous existence of human suffering. For them, the concept of a God who is all good and loving is inconsistent or contradicts the idea that God punishes people eternally. Lastly, interactions with Christians also plays in the commitment of apostasy. The apostates think that hypocrisy in the behavior of Christians and their unwillingness to engage in meaningful dialogue is of the reasons for their deconversion. The same criticism is also applied to church leaders and clergy, and pastors who seem to accumulate wealth in the name of God. These apostates are those who become non-believers such as atheists and agnostics. There can be many factors that may have affected an individual’s apostasy. Examples of these are:

Developmental Aspects

The developmental aspects of young adults also cause people to abandon their religion because the adolescents experiences significant changes in their way of thinking.

This gradual process that spans from adolescence to young adulthood changes their ability to think about themselves, and the others around them (Teipel, 2018). They develop greater ability to consider different points of view that allow them to understand and respect the diversity of people with concern and greater empathy. It is also the time when they get to explore their own identity and recognize their uniqueness and separation from parents. Teipel (2018), argued that this is also the time that young adults develop a more complex understanding of moral behavior and justice. Young adults begin to think and question their beliefs in childhood and restructure these beliefs into a personal ideology.

Erikson's psychosocial stages tell us that adolescents from 12 to 18 years old experience the stage of *Identity vs. Role Confusion*. During this stage, adolescents search for a sense of self and personal identity through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs, principles, and goals. This is a major stage where the child learns the roles he will undertake as an adult and it is during this stage that adolescents will re-examine their identity and try to find out who they are. "The adolescent mind, is essentially a mind on moratorium, a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood, and between the morality learned by the child, and the ethics developed by the adult" (Erikson, 1963). This connection between the morality learned by the child and the ethics developed by the adult explains why young adults establish their new sense of identity with a different views on beliefs and perspectives because they went through the stage of identity vs. role confusion during adolescence.

In his stages of moral development, Kohlberg (Fischer, Yan, & Stewart, 2003) tells us that the highest level of morality is the post-conventional stage in which people live by their own ethical principles that include liberty and justice, and not the morals that they were just taught to, or because they are scared of punishment, they just try to fit in to the society. People in this stage believe that those laws and beliefs that do not promote general welfare should be changed to meet the greatest good of all the people. People also choose their own principles that focus on equality, dignity, and respect. They also live by the principles of evidence and rationality, knowledge, and justifications for conclusions because moral evaluation and judgment are one of the intellectual challenges that young adults face in this world where there are multiple and conflicting standards of morality (Fischer, Yan, & Stewart, 2003). This is because morality is subjective. Different places, with different cultures have their own agreed upon morality which is just as valid as the morality of other people in other places.

Globalization

Globalization is a process of interaction and integration among people, companies, and governments of different nations aided by information technology (Levin Institute, 2017). It enables free flow of goods, market, people, ideas, beliefs, and culture thus resulting to the process of the world becoming as one. This process has effects on the environment, culture, political systems, and on human well being and on societies around the world.

Spirituality, religion and globalization affect one another together with environmental forces such as politics, technology, and economics, determined the

cultural milieu in which we live (Kale, 2004). Globalization served as a catalyst in the process of exchanging and understanding various and diverse cultures around the world. With the smooth flow ideas and interaction, western liberal ideas spread throughout the world. People especially the millennial generation who are more exposed to internet and technology became the primary consumers of this product that globalization offers. This greatly affected as to how millennial generation identify themselves as compared to the previous generations. Globalization enabled integration of one culture to another and that is why young adults are considered “global citizens” because they are the most culturally and ethnically diverse as compared to older generations.

Globalization paved the way to a multicultural society. Multiculturalism as defined by Rosado (1997), is a system of beliefs and practices that recognizes diversity in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their differences, and encourages continued contribution within the organization or society. It's simply about having diverse culture, beliefs, tradition, race, and ethnicity.

Multiculturalism also emboldens and permits contribution of various groups in a diverse society. It promotes peace, respect, understanding, and harmony across people of all races and cultures. According to Launikari & Puukari (2005), Multiculturalism in counseling refers to supporting and helping activities where the counselor and counselee/s are of different race, ethnicity, culture, etc. Counselors must accept clients with unconditional positive regard no matter what race or culture the client has without biases. In integrating multiculturalism in counseling, it is expected of the counselors to respect every client's diversity in all aspects.

Even before we were born, cultural patterns have already been established and have been passed on from generation to generation. We inherited these cultural patterns from our parents, teachers, and authorities that guided our ideas, influenced our decisions, and helped us take control of our lives (Pedersen, 2002). As we grew up, we then began to realize that our culture which we believed as “true” or “the best” was just one of the many cultural patterns that exist in this world. We came to understand that our culture only depends on the cultural pattern that has been passed down from the place where we were brought up. As we become aware of other different cultures – pressured by the radical social changes in the society, we began to see the flaws of our traditional conservative values that lead us to think of replacing our worn-out habits and lifestyles with new alternatives.

Pedersen (2002), argued that multiculturalism is a “fourth force” in psychology. The term “fourth force” means that multiculturalism is of great importance throughout the field of psychology because it serves as a medium for understanding the culture of the therapists and their clients. Understanding these multicultural perspectives leads to a more accurate, empathic, and successful counseling process. In this world today, these transmission and integration of one culture to another have become faster because the world keeps getting smaller due to media and technology.

Understanding multiculturalism is important in field of Psychology. Every culture, and every belief should be recognized and should be treated just as equal with the others. In the Philippines, the atheist culture is still young and can be considered as minority because the country is religiously dominant. Because of these, there is a

widespread discrimination towards these people by the society. That is why this study looked at the experiences and struggles by the people who adopted an atheist identity in a very religious country.

Synthesis

There is not much studies regarding atheism since this is a new and emerging trend and due to its controversiality. This study focuses on identifying the reasons why people chose to abandon their faith or religion and to explore the underlying psychological process involving in the adoption of the atheist identity, through the analysis of the life stories of self-confessed atheists.

Decline in religiosity and rise of secularism is rampant among western countries. In the Philippines, there is a slow but steady rise in number of people who are turning away from their religion and resorting to post-conventional beliefs such as atheism. One of the characteristics of the young adults in this generation is that they are curious and they want to explore new things. It is in their generation when the sudden bloom in the advancement of media and technology happened. Due to this, globalization became has become a necessity/trend. There has been a free flow of knowledge and ideas aided by the media and the internet. Western liberal ideas have been incorporated with the traditional conservative ones. Due to gadgets and technology which the young adults are so much exposed to, the flow of ideas and information has been with ease. With the help of the internet and Google, knowledge has become readily accessible. Young adults have become open to new cultures, ideas, and traditions. Multiculturalism helped them realized that there are so many other cultures and beliefs other than their own. They began to realize that beliefs such as religious faith only depends on the culture they happened to be

born into. This new age of information and science taught the new generation to experiment, explore, discover, and reason. This is why traditional conservative beliefs have been steadily being forgotten out in the past decades.

Developmental aspects of adolescents also constitute a reason why adolescents abandon their religion when they become young adults. As children grow up, they also develop their cognitive thinking skills, reasoning, and rationality. Adolescence is also the age when they are receiving education and becomes open to new knowledge and perspectives, thus, they gradually begin to question previously held beliefs and principles. Adolescents also go through the stage of identity vs. role confusion where they try to establish their own personal sense of identity by recognizing their individuality different from what their parents expect them to be. They begin to reconstruct previously held beliefs and develop their own sense of moral evaluation and judgment as part of their new personal identity. With these stages young adults are going through, at the age of 21 they became self-sufficient and independent from their parents and, they are able to establish new identity.

Growing up also means having different kinds of experiences which eventually shape the person the way they are today. Adolescents, having explored new things, met different people, experienced different cultures, and mature cognitively, fueled by rampant globalization and technology, they begin to view the world differently. They begin to doubt and question their previously held beliefs that are inconsistent with their new found knowledge based on reason and rationality. All these contribute to apostasy or turning away from previously held beliefs and adopting an atheist identity.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by the Pargament's model for understanding the psychological distress of nonbelievers. According to this model, nonbelievers may experience 3 types of struggles which are: interpersonal, intrapsychic, and divine struggles.

Pargament's (2005) dynamic model for understanding the psychological struggles of nonbelievers was developed from his earlier model of understanding the psychological struggles of religious believers. Pargament's model divided spiritual struggles into three categories: intrapsychic struggles of doubt, interpersonal struggles of cooperation, and divine struggles of understanding God. According to Pargament (2005, p. 13), these three categories of struggles can be described as follows:

1. Interpersonal Struggles: Nonbelievers must learn to live, work, and cooperate with others in a society where people maintain religious belief systems. This has been a struggle for nonbelievers because of negative perceptions and the stigma associated with them.
2. Intrapsychic struggles: If believers doubt the existence of God or the authenticity of religious teachings, nonbelievers may also doubt and rethink their decision to live without religion or they struggle to find their moral compass. Also, studies showing that nonbelievers have difficulty in forgiving God, and difficulty in adjusting to a nonbelief worldview support the hypothesis that nonbelievers have these intrapsychic struggles.

3. Divine struggles: Although most nonbelievers have abandoned their beliefs about God, some still struggle to find meaning in their lives, to question their existence, and to find the courage to face aging and death.

In this study, Pargament's model for understanding the psychological distress on non-believers were used as a basis to determine the struggles encountered by Filipino atheists during their venture to atheism. The interview questionnaire used in this study was patterned to each of Pargament's assumptions that atheists' experiences struggles such as Interpersonal, Intrapsychic, and Divine. Through this model, the researcher was able to determine the struggles experienced by Filipino atheists, what phase of their atheism they experienced such struggles, and how those struggles affected them in their journey to atheism.

Statement of the Purpose

As the number of people with post-conventional beliefs especially atheism rapidly increases around the world, there is an emerging challenge for counselors in the 21st century on how to properly deal with these types of clients.

Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Explore the narratives of self-confessed atheists and determine the problems they encountered in terms of their:
 - 1.1 Interpersonal Struggles
 - 1.2 Intrapsychic Struggles
 - 1.3 Divine Struggles
2. Describe the psychological process of adopting an atheist identity

3. Identify the possible reasons why self-confessed atheists chose to abandon their faith/religion

Limitations of the study

This section explains the boundaries of the study and provides a brief overview of the methodology. This also includes description of the setting, participants and the analysis that would be applied to the data gathered in the study.

This research focused on determining the reasons why self-confessed atheist chose to abandon their religion and the struggles they experienced. It also attempted to explore the psychological process involved in adopting the atheist identity. Participants of the research came from cities around the metro, like Taguig, Quezon City, and Pasay. Those who agreed to participate were subjected to an interview about their experiences or reasons why they chose to detach themselves from their former religion and resorted to atheism. Responses would be analyzed by coding the themes or meaning units and eventually deriving the process on how one adopts atheist identity through their life stories.

This study utilized only 10 self-confessed atheist participants which are comprised of mostly males and one female. All of the participants are aged 25 and above and came from Metro Manila only.

Definition of Terms

This section includes the definitions of the important words used in this study. In order to fully understand the concepts, words are defined conceptually or based from the definitions of authors, and operationally or how the concept is used in the present study.

Atheist - The word “atheist” is comes from the Greek word “atheos” which literally means “without god(s)”. Atheists are people who do not believe in God and/or who find the idea of God and religions as absurd or incoherent (Baggini 2003). In this study atheists are people who do not in God(s) and prefer to believe in science than in any organized religion. They are existentialistic in nature who believe in their own free will, and in consequences of their own action. They believe that they have the sole responsibility in creating meaning in their own life.

Apostasy - Apostasy is defined as the extent to which faith is permanently abandoned by a former believer (Hood et. al., 2009). It is used to describe as the process of throwing away or renouncing previously embraced truth in search for a new one. In this study, apostasy is used to describe the phenomenon of abandoning one’s religious beliefs among Filipinos who are self-identified atheists.

Identity - The term identity refers to people’s goals, values, beliefs, and roles played in the society (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011). In this study, identity is used to describe the context of a person’s religious affiliation.

Psychological Process – The term psychological process refers to a person's sensation, perception, learning, attention, and memory – and how they contribute to the mind and human behavior (Froelich, 2018). In this study, psychological process is used to describe the process of becoming, with consideration of an individual's intellectual and psychological state.

CHAPTER II

Methods

This chapter includes discussions of the research design, research setting, population and sampling method, research instrument, data gathering procedures, and ethical considerations that the researcher used in order to come up with results.

Qualitative Design and Methodology

The researcher used the narrative design and focused on the life stories of people who are self-confessed atheists in order to identify the reasons why they abandoned their religion and explored the psychological process of adopting an atheist identity. This qualitative research method systematically gathers, analyzes, and presents people's stories as told by them in order to subsume the essence or the subjective meanings of their stories.

Research Site

The data collected from this research primarily came from cities around Metro Manila like Pasay, Taguig, and Quezon City, which was an ideal setting for the researcher and the participants due to the following reasons: First, Metro Manila is center of business and industrialization. It also promotes diversity because this is where people from various places go to. The limited time given for the study also makes the area a suitable place to conduct the study. There are also many establishments that are located in Metro Manila with employees whose ages are within the desired range.

Selection Criteria and Participants

This study used the purposive sampling method in gathering the desired participants. The researcher came up with characteristics that the participants should have in order to achieve his objective and fully understand the process of adopting an atheist identity. Participants should be former believers and are now self-identified atheist with at least 25 years of age and should be residents of any city in Metro Manila. The researcher posted an announcement to several Atheist groups on Facebook, along with the details of the study and the qualifications needed to become a participant. A self-confessed or self-proclaimed atheist who met the criteria and wished to participate in the study be immediately scheduled for a face-to-face interview with the researcher. The study needed 10 self-identified atheist with both male and female participants to ensure proper representation of both sexes. The snowball sampling technique was also used to hasten the gathering of data.

The Participants

After explaining the nature of the study, the 10 self-confessed atheist participants who agreed to participate in the study were made to answer a demographics file before conducting the interview.

Table 1. *shows the demographics of the 10 self-confessed atheist participants*

Code	Sex	Age	Civil Status	Job	Years being an atheist
MS	M	36	Married	Singer/Composer	7
AM	M	41	Single	Program Officer (NGO)	5

ER	M	51	Married	Businessman	20+
PG	M	47	Married	Lawyer/Professor	20+
GP	M	46	Married	Heavy Machinery (Dealer)	8
XL	M	50	Married	Engineer	9
FF	M	35	Married	Restaurant Manager	3
MA	M	29	Single	Financial Advisor	10+
JV	F	33	Married	Processor	17
ML	M	25	Single	BPO agent	7

Research Instrument

In order to gather the information needed, the researcher used self-constructed interview questions and a consent form. He also gathered the demographic profile of the respondents. Since this is a qualitative study, questionnaires were not necessary and the researcher merely focused on one on one interviews with the participant.

The informed consent form contains the agreement between the researcher and the participants of the study. The purpose of the study, assurance of confidentiality, and other details that a participant should know before proceeding to the interview proper were explained in the form. The demographic information of the participants was also gathered. This includes their age, sex and religious upbringing.

The six interview questions are structured and they focus on the meaning of having a post-conventional belief (e.g. *“In your own understanding, what does it mean to be an atheist?”*), factors that caused the action (e.g. *“What are the significant experiences you encountered that made you decide to become an atheist?”*), experiences having the

belief (e.g. *“What are the struggles you encountered from becoming an atheist?”*). The questions were checked and validated by professionals to ensure that they are valid and free from any other form of biases.

Data Gathering Procedure

The first phase was the identification of participants. The researcher used different channels to search for participants: first, through the referral of friends; second, by posting an announcement along with the characteristics of the needed participants on social networking sites. Once a participant was found, the date of interview was set based on his/her convenient time. The second phase would be the data collection. During the meet-up, the researcher first explained the nature of the study along with the informed consent form given to the participant. Then, the interview between the researcher and the participant took place for about an hour. The third and the last phase was be coding and analyzing. Responses of the participants will be coded based on the emerging themes. Then, these themes were analyzed to identify the reasons why they abandoned religion and adopted an atheist identity.

Methods of Validation

The themes were coded by the researcher through line by line analysis of the participant's data. Those themes were then presented along with the encoded interviews of the respondents and the chapters 1 and 2 of the study to three experts who all have a PhDs in Psychology. The themes were checked, corrected, and validated by the experts to ensure that the themes presented in the study would really capture the essence of that participants' narratives.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, the researcher saw to it that the proper ethical guidelines in research were observed. Since this is a qualitative research study, data were collected through face-to-face interviews only and did not require biological materials from the participants. The study's participants did not include the vulnerable population because they will be consisted of adults with ages of at least 25 years old. This study also did not include sensitive topics like sexual violence, abuse, drugs, etc. that may cause potential harm to participants. It was also ensured that conflict of interest in the study is avoided as the participants in the study were randomly chosen atheists from atheist Facebook groups who willingly volunteered to be part of the study. They were not friends or relatives of the researcher.

Respect. Before conducting the study, the researcher saw to it that the proper informed consent form was given to the respondents before the interview. Details of the study were explained thoroughly for the respondents to understand the nature of the study so that they could just back-out when they feel doubtful whether to continue participating in the study or the felt uncomfortable during the course of the interview. The entire conversation was also audio recorded if the participant agreed to it and the researcher also ensured that all the information given by the respondent remains confidential and the researcher would be using codes and aliases instead of using the real names of the participants. Safety of all the data gathered was ensured as they would be stored in a password-protected personal laptop. There would be no deception involved since it was not necessary. The researcher explained, upon the request of the participants that the

study is just about their experiences, struggles, and their reasons why they chose to become Atheists, and that won't affect the outcome of the study. That is why deception on the true nature of the study was no longer needed. There was no need of debriefing the participants either after the interview.

Beneficence. Nonbelievers, especially the atheists, have always been criticized and misunderstood because of their seemingly not “normal” or deviant worldview especially in a country like the Philippines where faith and belief in God are values that Filipinos uphold the most. As a future psychologist and guidance counselor, the researcher – given the idea through this study, aims to reach out and understand the point of view of these marginalized group in order for him to cater to the needs of all types of clients with regards to their diversity. Thus, this study would be beneficial to both atheists and to the guidance counselors as it seeks to promote understanding and respect for all people with diverse beliefs. Findings of the study will be shared via email to the administrators of atheist Facebook groups where the participants were gathered. They will be issued upon their request.

Justice. The researcher ensured that the selection of participants in this study was free from bias with regard to sex, class, and ethnicity. Participants were selected according to the specific criteria set by the researcher and it was also ensured that there would be both male and female participants in the study to have a proper representation of both sexes. Instruments used in the study were checked and validated by professionals to ensure their validity and reliability so as to properly analyze the respondents' answers to the interview questions.

CHAPTER III

Findings and Discussion

This chapter includes the discussion of the findings of the research study obtained through the thematic analysis of the participants' narratives. These findings will answer these three following statements: 1) determine the problems encountered by the self-confessed atheists terms of their interpersonal, intrasychic, and divine struggles; 2) describe the psychological process of adopting an atheist identity; 3) identify other possible reasons why self-confessed atheists chose to abandon their faith/religion.

Statement of Purpose no. 1: Explore the narratives of self-confessed atheists and determine the problems they encountered in terms of their interpersonal, intrapsychic, and divine struggles.

Participant no. 1

MS is a former Catholic and is very active in church. He was a choir member, he used to attend youth encounters, recollections, and he once dreamed to become a priest. Upon finishing his studies, he wasn't able to board a ship as a seafarer because he refused to give the bribe money as much of as one-hundred thousand pesos. For him, his was wrong. He said that he was an honest person, he studied hard, and he was a scholar so he deserved it but his other classmates whom according to him were "gamblers", "drunkards", "addicts" got the job because they bribed money which for him is undeserving and unfair. He said that God knows how he worked hard, how he wanted, and how he prayed for that job but it was all worthless in the end. According to him, that

was a triggering factor and it was his first step in his path towards atheism. After that, he became a volunteer for an NGO for almost 15 years, where he had been to many places in the Philippines for environmental and political reasons, helping the indigenous peoples and the poorest of the poor. Over those years that he had been helping, he realized that nothing ever changed. He asked himself why is it that these people are so poor? Filipinos are very religious and these people kept on praying and praying almost everyday waiting for a little miracle to happen but nothing came. The people love God so much but God doesn't love us back in return and God doesn't really care at all because nothing has ever changed. For MS, prayers don't work and God doesn't hear us or he doesn't exist. In reality, we are accountable of our own actions. Whatever happens to us is the outcome of our actions and decisions in life. Some are just coincidences and some just get very lucky. For him, that's the reality of life. So what he did was to let go of his faith and he stood up on his own feet. Right now, he is a singer-songwriter who has won numerous awards locally. He is a proud father and he keeps himself busy by doing shows for a cause. For his recent project, he pledged to build a mini library, along with his wife in the elementary school in the province where he came from.

Table 2. shows the narratives of 1 of the 10 atheist participants

Participant	Pre-Atheism	Becoming an Atheist	Being an Atheist
MS	<i>"I was a very religious person back then....I used to attend youth encounters...recollections...and I even once dreamt to become a priest"</i> Epiphanies	Interpersonal Struggles <i>"I found it hard at first to deal with these religious people. I was always engaging in debates back then. And I think that's the process every atheist</i>	<i>"Being an atheist made me a stronger person. I am now responsible for my own actions and decisions in life"</i>

“ I worked as a volunteer in NGO’s for 15 years, helping the poor and the indigenous peoples. It was then when I had these questions in mind, “Why do these people are so poor? They always pray every day....they have a huge faith in God, and they love God so much but nothings ever changed. It’s as if there is no one hearing and answering their prayers”

has to go through”
Intrapsychic Struggles

“I think I felt depressed back then. It’s like your life has no direction and I don’t know where to go... I was confused what’s real and what’s not. Imagine, you have been brainwashed and fool ever since as a kid. And now, you have no one to lean on...you have to go back on yourself....and you have to be 3x stronger”

*“I’m happier as an atheist because I can freely express myself”
“How I wish that I have already realized way back then that there is no God... It is really good to be an atheist”*

Divine Struggles

N/A

No struggle

“Life has no intrinsic meaning...there is no purpose. It is us gives meaning to our own lives”

*“No *laughs...life is short so as long as you’re young, do all the things that you wanted to do. You’ll only be afraid of death if you did not lived your life”*

Participant no. 2

AM is a former Christian who worked as a part of the communications team of the Victory Church. He was also part of the worship team of the church and sometimes wrote scripts for the pastor. According to him, he used to be a diehard Christian and he took theology seriously. The only problem he had was his sexuality because in their church, being a member of the LGBT community is unacceptable. According to him, Victory church believes that “you can pray the gay away” and that being gay means “you are possessed by an evil spirit” and it’s something that can be exorcised of. Because he was very serious about his faith, he tried to go to his pastor many times for counseling and “exorcism”. He was penalized for his actions by relieving him temporarily of his duties. In the year 2012, he was offered to work for the Tacloban City government by Mayor Romualdez because he was impressed by his work when the mayor visited Victory but he declined because he didn’t want to leave the church. In 2014, he left Victory church and finally accepted the offer because he was getting tired and started to lose interest in his job in Victory. He wanted to help because that was also the time when the Yolanda incident happened. At that time, he had the chance to read books during his free time. He came across the works of atheists like Dr. Bart Ehrman who used to be an evangelical Christian and a New Testament scholar, Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, and Frank Schaeffer. According to him, Schaeffer used to be a member of the American Bible Belt and his works exposed the greed and corruption inside the evangelical community. That was the reason why he slowly lost interest in faith and

religion and decided to become an atheist. In his first few months of being an atheist, he kept on posting atheist ideas and criticizing religious beliefs in his Facebook feed, and this prompted debate with his Christian friends. That is one thing he is regretting now because he said that he could have just transitioned peacefully but he just couldn't handle his anger any longer at that time because he felt that he just gave and wasted eight years and the prime of his life to a cause, which in his own words are "toxic doctrines and toxic teachings". Right now, he is happy and contented with his life being a scriptwriter, and works in an NGO that helps people with HIV, and he also does theatre.

Table 3. shows the narratives of 1 of the 10 atheist participants

Participant	Pre-Atheism	Becoming an Atheist	Being an Atheist
AM	<i>"Have you heard about the Victory Christian Fellowship? I was in Victory for 14-15 years and was part of the communications team. I was also a video supervisor, choir member, and I sometimes writes scripts for the pastors. I was a young Earth creationist back then..I used to believe in the rapture...second coming of Christ...uhmmm..Im pretty die hard...really really die hard"</i> Epiphanies <i>"I told you I'm gay and this question has been in my head "could we ever have been wrong about anything?". If I am the way I am, I like men *laughs, how could that ever be</i>	Interpersonal Struggles <i>"I was deeply offended by an action by some pastor when he told me "Bro, whoever wronged you, just forgive him already" and the assumption is that my faith was too weak to have withstood such test... you know that? Or I supposedly prayed for something that I've been praying for so long it's because Im 41 yrs old and I'm still single and now sulking with the Lord because I still don't have a wife...like that... it's always there was a something... there was a test that I was not able to survive like</i>	<i>" I think a lot more critically now. Before, whatever the pastor says, I take it with even questioning. The difference is I'm more realistic than idealistic now"</i> <i>"Im happier now because Im more comfortable in embracing reality unlike before which I used to get upset with things"</i> <i>"I think the most important thing is</i>

changed? Because the Christian promise was that, you can pray the gay away. It's something that can be exorcised something that can be prayed away in Jesus' name"

"Somewhere in the writings of apostle Paul, he exhorted that believers should be able to defend their faith. What I did is, instead of reading the works of Christian apologists, I tried to read the works of the proponents of other worldviews and their objections because I need to have knowledge on both sides to be able to better defend my faith. What I realized is that, these Christian apologists does have nothing to offer against the rational and logical inquiry of these proponents of other worldviews"

because my faith was not strong enough so they tell me that "Bro I'm still praying for you". That too is an insult!"

Intrapsychic Struggles

*"At first I had doubts because I was afraid of the doctrine of hell. But then, through further readings... I realized that it was also bullsh*t so I was able to overcome it"*

Divine Struggles

N/A

No struggle

"Well there is this entire course of human history that I did not exist. And there will be vast expanse of time in the future that where I will not exist. That is why I am comfortable with the idea that here will come a time that I won't be existing"

"But you know, we live in such a time when people are trying to vanquish death. There might be a way to save the brain, or reverse the aging process. That gives me some hope but it won't probably happen in my lifetime"

I now believe in taking responsibility of my own actions and decisions. So I am more proactive about considering my environment and assessing instead asking the Lord and looking for signs"

"I was also able to freely express myself now. I do theatre... and I work in the HIV helping the LGBT people"

Participant no. 3

ER is baptized as Catholic and has converted into a Christian with the influence of his wife's uncle. He used to be part of the youth congregation of their church. Eventually, he rose from the ranks and because of that, he was given a chance to study in a bible college and become a pastor. He went on to study and became a scholar. There was a time in the bible school when they were tasked to go to a hospital and interview sick people and pray for them. When he went back to the hospital after praying, most of the patients he prayed for died. That's when he asked himself why did he even need to pray for them when they can pray for themselves. Would prayer be more effective if there are many people praying for you because God won't hear your prayer or invalidate because you're the only one praying? And if there is a God's plan, what is the use of praying? To change God's mind? Those questions kept bugging him. In the bible college, they were also tasked to preach and conduct bible study in the homes of the members of their church around Metro Manila, but the problem was the allowance he was getting was just enough for his travel expenses. He couldn't even support his kids, let alone buy proper food for himself. He got tired of this and slowly he lost interest to pursue his studies and left the church to look for a job. He also began to read books about atheism, especially the work of Dan Barker which is "Losing faith in faith". Reading and reading those kinds of book made him realize and see the flaws of religion, and this eventually led him to finally become an atheist. Right now, he is already 51 years old and he is active in Facebook atheist groups advocating atheism.

Table 4. shows the narratives of 1 of the 10 atheist participants

Participant	Pre-Atheism	Becoming an Atheist	Being an Atheist
ER	<i>"I was brought up as a Catholic. That time, I don't really give that much thought to religion because I was skeptic as a kid. Honestly, I would go to the church for the girls"</i> <i>"When I first came to Saudi Arabia, that started my path to Atheism"</i> Epiphanies <i>"When I was in Saudi Arabia, my wife has an uncle who is a Born-again Christian and he used to invite me every weekend to attend the services. Then came the speaking in tongues... everyone was babbling and I was like "What the f*ck is happening?" Being the only one who was not doing it, they circled around me...and laid their hands on me trying to cast out the demon. It was when I asked myself, Is it really me? Or are they just fooling themselves?"</i> <i>"Upon returning to the Philippines from Saudi</i>	Interpersonal Struggles <i>"Of course my colleagues would call me a backslider"</i> Intrapsychic Struggles N/A No struggle <i>"Nothing! That I can be sure of. It's just like, one day I believe, the next day...I don't! That's just it!"</i> Divine Struggles N/A No struggles <i>"I have long accepted the reality that people die, even when I was still a believer. It's part of living, there is nothing we can do. You can prolong life, but you can't avoid death. So if you ask me if I</i>	<i>" I don't really see much of a difference when I was a believer compared to now that I am an atheist. Except, I learned to control myself and became more responsible now that I am an atheist"</i> <i>"Life is better now. I can provide the needs of my family, and I don't have to do those bullsh*ts anymore"</i>

Arabia, I was invited my Christian friends to attend the services in Cathedral of Praise. It was then that I was given a chance to study in their Bible college and become a pastor. In the bible college, we have this subject where we have to go to the hospital and interview sick people and pray for them. Then get back after few months and ask for the result. What happened was, majority of the people whom I prayed died. It was when I realized that you don't even need someone to pray for you, just pray for yourself! Because if God really wanted you to heal, he would do it! Right?

*fear death, no I don't!
What I fear for those people I'm leaving behind. Death is to be prepared for while enjoying life"*

"Meaning of my existence? Nothing! I was born in this world by accident. I never chose to be born"

"During my last year in the Bible college, I started to handle cells. I need to do bible studies around the Metro. The problem is, I got financial problems! Why? Because I don't have a job! I was only relying on my scholarship allowance. How could I provide the needs of my family? God will provide? He doesn't! I've been in this way for years now since entering the Bible college and nothing's ever changed but I kept on going because I still have a little faith. It was one time and I was really hungry and all I have is just enough is for

*transportation so I can
roam around and do bible
studies. It was when I tried
to re-evaluate my life. I
gradually lost interest...I
started to skip classes...I
started to skip the meetings
and I started to work”*

Participant no. 4

PG is a Lawyer and a Statistics professor at a certain university. He was raised as a Catholic and converted to a Christian. He enrolled in a Christian school for his secondary education. He was a natural born skeptic. He kept on asking their priest so many questions because he was a former altar boy. As he grew older, he asked more questions about faith, the Bible, God, and he was dissatisfied with the answers he got because they kept on telling him that “it is just the way it is”, “you should not ask so many questions”, and “just have faith”. According to him, exposure to media, TV, documentaries, and Science made him an Atheist. He said that he would rather believe in Science because Science can answer things that religion cannot, and he also prefers reason and logic instead of just having faith. He has a wife who’s an OB Gynecologist and is a deeply devout Catholic. According to him, he and his wife always pray every night before going to sleep and he has to play along because he doesn’t intend to tell her that he’s an atheist. If that happens, he would need to explain why he is an atheist and he knows that his wife wouldn’t be able to handle it. He said that people like his wife who are deeply devout believers can’t handle those kinds of perspectives in life and that some people couldn’t live without their God neither can handle the idea that they have been wrong all their lives. That is why he doesn’t want to shaken her beliefs. He just want to

leave thing as they are because it is for the better. After all, he doesn't mind praying at all because he loves his wife and he does it to please her. According to him, he doesn't really have a hard time with it at all, that's why he doesn't feel the need to disclose his identity because it will only make things worse. The only struggle he encountered was when he had to disclose his beliefs during their mini reunion with high school friends because they kept on talking about their faith and religions since they were all Christians. All of a sudden, everyone threw questions at him regarding his beliefs. Some even insisted on meeting him after that party trying to win him back to Christianity, and some kept on messaging him on Facebook. He just kept on retaliating until they stopped on hitting him. Right now, he is an aspiring politician that's why he insisted on maintaining strict confidentiality regarding his identity.

Table 5. shows the narratives of 1 of the 10 atheist participants

Participant	Pre-Atheism	Becoming an Atheist	Being an Atheist
PG	<i>"I was born and raised as a Catholic. I was an altar boy back then but I have never had that much faith. I have so many questions I kept on asking on our priest and he always just ends up with "just have faith ". During high school, our family became Born-again Christians and I enrolled into a Christian school"</i> Epiphanies <i>"There's no significant event that really happened. Let me put it this way...I had these questions as a kid...then eventually I</i>	Interpersonal Struggles <i>"Well, there were feelings of discomfort. During one of our high school reunions..they kept on talking about faith and God because they were all Christians of course. When they asked me, I disclosed that I'm already an atheist. So it was a long night of debates and discussion. I also didn't liked that way they look at me. Even after that, they kept on</i>	<i>"I'm happier now! Because I'm free. I'm more free to move"</i> <i>" And also, I'm glad that rising above the norms gave me a sense of fulfilment"</i>

*entered highschool...then
college... knowledge grew
and faith faded”*

*calling me, texting, and
messaging me on
Facebook”*

*“Well, I’m an aspiring
politician. That’s why I
ask you to keep my
identity with strict
confidentiality.
Because, this could be
used against me. You
know how the society
works”*

Intrapsychic Struggles
N/A

No struggle

*“Nothing really. It’s
because I never really
had it with me. I never
really had faith to
begin with”*

Divine Struggles
N/A

No struggle

*“I’m fascinated okay?
I’m fascinated in a way
it’s an experience
everybody has to go
through. So why
fear?Death is just
there, there’s nothing
to be afraid of”*

*“Where do I get the
purpose? There’s not
much it okay? There’s
not much to it really.
We just live the way we*

have to live”

Participant no. 5

GP was a Born-again Christian for almost 30 years. According to him, he started to think of becoming an atheist is when someone challenged him to search in the internet for information about the flaws of religion, and atheism. From then on, he kept on researching, watching videos, and reading books regarding atheism which made his interest in religion to slowly dissolve. For him, the arguments for atheism is more logical and reasonable and that religion only relies on faith but has no solid evidence that’s why he deconverted and became an atheist. When he tried to open-up to his family, they were shocked because they were all religious and he received cold shoulders from them and their relatives. Eventually, after explaining a couple of times, things went back to normal. As matter of fact, he was even able to convince his father, who is now 70 yrs old to join him on his beliefs. According to him, his two sons are slowly deconverting also. Right now, he is a member of a Humanist alliance group where they do charities and advocates compassion and humanity.

Table 6. shows the narratives of 1 of the 10 atheist participants

Participant	Pre-Atheism	Becoming an Atheist	Being an Atheist
GP	<i>“I’m was Born-again Christian for more than 30 years. I can say I was fundamental and a hardcore believer during my teenage years then eventually became a moderate believer when I had started my own</i>	<i>Interpersonal Struggles</i> <i>“Well of course, I got cold shoulders especially from my siblings because they were all Christians”</i>	<i>“Before I always relied on my faith. Now, I’m more logical and reasonable on my actions and</i>

family. It's because I had my own family at an early age so my focus...my priorities shifted on work and being a parent"

Epiphanies

"Well actually there is someone who challenged me to search the internet about flaws of religion and religious beliefs, and atheism. That is when I realized that faith is irrational...I learned the powers of church and religion..its flaws...and I also realized that there is really no rational evidence that a God does exist"

"My wife also found it hard to believe and accept me since she is a devout catholic"

Intrapsychic Struggles

"There's a little at first I think because I have been a believer all my life. But apart from that, I'm a very reasonable person so it only took a little time for my faith to dissolve through intelligence and reasoning"

Divine Struggles

N/A

No struggle

"I almost died many times. Being an atheist, I'm aware that death is actually a part of life. So by accepting that, you're placing a lot more importance in your life and on the lives of the people you love"

"My existence is just a product of society... a part of human kind. Also I'm a product of my own experiences which is why I am now a Humanist which I think is my own meaning in life "

decisions"

" Quality of life? It's s thousand time better than being theist because I free now. I'm in control"

"My Atheism had led me to Humanism. It made me a lot more compassionate, emphatic, and a lot more happier"

Participant no. 6

XL is a former Catholic and an altar boy. He was a skeptic ever since he was just a kid and he always kept on asking questions everytime they had a bible study in which he was always prohibited from asking those questions because it is “blasphemy”. He was deeply discouraged because of this. When he worked as an engineer at Mercedes Benz in Malaysia, he had the time to watch atheist documentaries on YouTube by prominent atheists like Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Christopher Hitchens. According to him, the easy access and readily available information on the internet is what made him an atheist. It was very easy for him to deconvert because he never really had that much faith to begin with because he was a skeptic. He has been an atheist for 9 years now and the only struggle he had for being an atheist is that his family can’t seem to understand his beliefs. He is getting cold shoulders from his wife and his children. He is sometimes getting involved in debates and discussions with his friends during drinking sessions. Now, he is a member of a Humanist group and they have what they call an organizational empowerment of the people called “I STEP” which aims to help the youth, the elderly, and the farmers.

Table 7. shows the narratives of 1 of the 10 atheist participants

Participant	Pre-Atheism	Becoming an Atheist	Being an Atheist
XL	<i>“Well I was a Catholic and an altar boy back then. I was already skeptic as a child so I have these so many questions I was refrained from asking during our weekly bible studies. Because of these, I slowly lost my interest in religion as years went by,</i>	<i>Interpersonal Struggles</i> <i>“There is one time that I had quarrel with my friend during a drinking session because of a religious debate”</i>	<i>“I have a better quality time now because I cherish every moment. Theist’s believe in life after death , that’s why they do not focus on the</i>

<i>and as I grew older ”</i>	<i>“I also felt that my wife and my kids became very distant to me because I am an atheist. Until now, I feel there is still a discrimination in our home because of my beliefs”</i>	<i>present. But there is no afterlife, so they are wasting their only life here on Earth ”</i>
Epiphanies		
<i>“That time when I worked as an engineer in Mercedez Benz in Malaysia, that was when I had the time to watch YouTube documentaries. I watched videos of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. It was when I found the answers to my questions”</i>	Intrapsychic Struggles N/A	<i>“ Atheists are happier than theist’s because unlike them, we don’t believe in hell”</i>
	No struggle <i>“Not really. It was easy for me to become an atheist when I was presented with reason and logic”</i>	<i>“Being an Atheist led to my advocacy in Humanism. Aside from that, we have a movement called I-STEP which aims to help the youth, the elderly, and the farmers”</i>
	Divine Struggles <i>“The only struggle is find more evidence. To find more data...more studies..on how do we get here...how life begun”</i>	

Participant no. 7

FF was born and raised as Catholic and grew up from a very religious family. As a kid, he enjoyed going to church every Sunday not for the mass but because they always went straight to their grandparent’s house to have breakfast. For him, that was his fondest childhood memory because he enjoyed their family bonding. According to him, there is really not much that happened to him that made him decide to be an atheist because his deconversion was a gradual process. What started his path to atheism was when he was growing up and met new people, he realized that they have different religious beliefs.

There are so many religions in the world with different Gods, and different perspectives. Also, he believes that the Bible is flawed and gruesome especially the Old Testament where God supposedly allowed murders to happen. He believes that the Bible was just written by ancient people to try explain the world around them and to gain power and control. He couldn't fathom how come such a loving God would commit and allow murder of his children. Also, the lack of physical evidences supporting the claim of religion is also one of the factors that made him walk away from it. Watching atheist documentaries and channels in YouTube was one huge factor that made him decide to be one of them. Now, he has been a closeted atheist for 3 years.

Table 8. shows the narratives of 1 of the 10 atheist participants

Participant	Pre-Atheism	Becoming an Atheist	Being an Atheist
FF	<i>"I was born raised as Catholic and my family were so religious. But, actually I really enjoyed going to church every Sunday as a kid because it's our family bonding. After the mass, we would go to my grandparent's house to have breakfast. It was really wonderful "</i>	Interpersonal Struggles <i>"Sometimes I get confrontational in some theists that looks at us and treats us so badly. Other than that, there's nothing really"</i>	<i>"Actually there's not much of a difference with me when I was a believer as compared to now. Except that, I'm much more happier now because I choose to value and cherish every moment...I spend a lot more time with my kids and my parents because I know that life is short and this is the only one I have"</i>
	Epiphanies <i>"When I was a young kid, I really thought that there is only one God that we that believe in and I thought Catholicism is the only religion. It was when I learned that there are Muslims, Hindus, Jews....there is Allah and etc... I was shocked! But I'm</i>	Intrapsychic Struggles <i>"Well there are times that I couldn't help myself and I pray. But I don't believe it's working, I don't believe in prayers. I just do it out of habit"</i>	
		Divine Struggles	
			<i>"Other than</i>

somehow fascinated by it ”

*“Well at first, yes!
There is. Because if
you look at it, it is
really hard to grasp
that everything came
from nothing....that’s
why I was a Deist at
first ”*

*Atheism, I’m also
rooting for
Secular-Humanist
group if there is
one here in the
Philippines”*

*“The doctrine of hell
also scared me back
then. Because if I am
wrong, I would burn in
eternity. Now I know
that it is just a load of
non-sense”*

Participant no. 8

MA is a former Christian and a member of ADD (Ang Dating Daan) church. According to him, he was a diehard believer and an aggressive theist before. He would usually engage in debates about his faith and his beliefs. Because of that, he started to have his own realizations, “logical realizations”, as he would say it. He began to see the flaws of his religion and started to find a new one. While and searching, he couldn’t seem to find what he was searching for. He always felt like there is something missing. Until he came across the works of prominent atheists like Hitchens, and Dawkins which made a huge impact on him. According to him, what really convinced him to become an atheist was the Epicurean paradox. He said that if you observe the world, it is very chaotic. As he stated, “Epicurus said the evil exists in this world. Does God know that evil exist in this world? If not, then he is not an all-knowing God. Is he able to stop evil? If not, then he is not all powerful. Is God willing to stop evil? If not, then he is not all-good. But still,

evil exist so God is neither all-knowing, all-good, nor all-powerful. Then why call him God?”. For him, Epicurus’ philosophy really made sense and with that in mind, he chose to abandon his religion and his belief in God for which he received backlash from friends and former church members. He claimed that letting go of his faith is very easy because he is a very logical and reasonable person. Right now, he was a member and a financial advisor of HAPI (Humanist Alliance of the Philippines), a non-profit organization that advocates humanism and charity.

Table 9. shows the narratives of 1 of the 10 atheist participants

Participant	Pre-Atheism	Becoming an Atheist	Being an Atheist
MA	<i>“I was a former Christian and A member of ADD (Ang Dating Daan) church. I was once a diehard believer and an aggressive theist. I would also engage in constant debates back then ”</i> Epiphanies <i>“After engaging in so many debates....I don’t know... I just saw the flaws of my religion so I backslidden and started to find a new one ”</i> <i>“What really struck me is the Epicurean paradox. It really made sense to ”</i>	Interpersonal Struggles <i>“ Well, some of my former church mates would say mean things about me. While some still try to win me back to Christianity”</i> Intrapsychic Struggles N/A No struggle <i>“Not really. I think I’m a logical and reasonable person so letting go of my faith was easy”</i> <i>“It’s really easy to undergo apostasy especially if you don’t have the fire burning anymore”</i> Divine Struggles N/A	<i>“I enjoy my life now because I’m living for today, unlike the theists. Also there are many things a theist cannot do because there were bounded by restrictions”</i> <i>“I also advocate Humanism. It is like Atheism in action”</i>

No Struggle

“No. Not really. After all, everyone’s going to die. But me, I’m living the moment. I have to live now...not in the future...not in the past”

“Nahh...the meaning of existence...it’s only you who can give it. For me, it is always the pursuit of happiness”

Participant no. 9

JV is a former Catholic and had a very religious family. According to her, her path to atheism started as a rebellious act at first. Because her family was so religious, they were obliged to go to church every Sunday, attend every church event, and confess her sins constantly. She grew tired of these that’s why he started to backslide from religion during her senior year in high school and she kept on reading books to justify her rebellious acts. During her freshman year in college, she encountered some Philosophy and Theology subjects. She began to read more and more and she reached a logical realization she had is she learned that there are so many religions in this world. She even studied them and came into conclusion that religion doesn’t really matter and one can live without following any of those religions that exist, and that one can be good without God. She also learned about different schools of thoughts like Existentialism which deeply influenced her. She said that it was at this time when she learned so many things

that she never learned from church nor from her parents. That was also the first time she encountered the word “atheist” which she said describes her belief. From then on, she identified herself as one. She has been an atheist for almost 17 years now and she influenced her other siblings to become atheists also. When she had her first child, there was this struggle because her family wanted the child to be baptized in the Roman Catholic tradition especially since her family was very religious but she didn’t agree. Fortunately, she was able to convince her parents to wait for her daughter to reach legal age and let her decide for herself whether she wants to be baptized or not. Now, she is the founder of an atheist Facebook group that aims to provide a safe haven for atheists who feel estranged or don’t have anyone to talk to.

Table 10. shows the narratives of 1 of the 10 atheist participants

Participant	Pre-Atheism	Becoming an Atheist	Being an Atheist
JV	<i>“So I was born and raised as a Catholic and my family were so religious, especially my father’s side .We were required to go church every Sundays.....do confessions... bible studies...rosaries..and other stuffs. Eventually, I grew tired of it. So I rebelled and drifted away from religion ”</i> Epiphanies <i>“I was in first year college when I first encountered Philosophy and Theology subjects. It was when I first learned about the other schools of thought. I also read and studied every major religion. It was then</i>	Interpersonal Struggles <i>“There was one time when I was asked by my boss to lead the prayer at work to which I politely refused but I got discriminated because of it”</i> <i>“When I had my baby, my parents wanted her to be baptized to which I refused. Fortunately, we were able to convince them to wait for my daughter to be of legal age and let her decide if she wanted to to be baptized”</i>	<i>“I am more expressive and more responsible with myself now. That’s why Im happier”</i> <i>“Actually, me and my boyfriend are in an open relationship. We’re polygamous couples. And there’s nothing wrong that, we are not bounded by Christian laws. It is my body and I am responsible for it”</i>

<i>that I realized that there's too many discrepancies between them. I also realized that there's too many religions in this world and it doesn't matter. Once can live without religion, one can be good without having the fear of God"</i>	Intrapsychic Struggles N/A No struggle <i>"For me it's easy to let go of faith because of its inconsistencies. When I learned that there is an alternative, It became very easy for me"</i> Divine Struggles N/A No Struggle <i>"Well it is you who makes your life meaningful. Right now, my meaning is my daughter"</i>	<i>"I also do outreach programs sometimes because it makes me feel good. Right now, me and my boyfriend pledged to build a mini library to a small school in province where my boyfriend used to study"</i> <i>"I also created Atheist Facebook groups for atheists to have someone to talk to...their safehaven"</i>
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Participant no. 10

ML came from a very religious family. They were born-again Christians and his grandfather was a pastor of their church. He, too, was also a young pastor back then. He sometimes facilitated masses, preached at different places, and attended many worship services and conferences. His curiosity started when he met his professor in the subject "History of the Bible" who was according to him – an atheist. He was astounded by the fact that his theology professor, teaching history of the bible, was an atheist because it seemed quite ironic. From then on, he started to question his beliefs, started to read and do research, started to see the wrongdoings and hypocrisy of his so-called "holy" church mates, and started to take one step away from his religion. He struggled a lot during that time because he lost all his motivation to preach and to attend worship services but he

had no choice but to continue what he was doing because he was afraid that he might tarnish his family's reputation. When he turned 18, he finally had to courage to speak up to his family and tell them how he feels because he couldn't deal with it any longer. Unfortunately, he was disowned by his family for disclosing that he has become an atheist. From then on, he had to live all by himself and worked as a call center agent in order to support his everyday necessities and his studies. He also had a hard time finding new friends after that because no one seemed to understand nor accept his belief. Right now, he is contented with his life having few close theist friends and friends within the atheist community. His only wish now is for his family to fully accept him for who he is because even if he's alright with them now and he constantly visits them, they are still trying to push him back to religion.

Table 11. shows the narratives of 1 of the 10 atheist participants

Participants	Pre-Atheism	Becoming an Atheist	Being an Atheist
ML	"I was raised in a very religious family. We were Born-again Christians and my grandfather was the pastor of our community church. I was a diehard believer back then and I do preach. I also used to attend different youth congregations. That is how active I was before " Epiphanies "What happened is I met this professor during my days in the Bible school. He was our professor for history of the bible and he was an Atheist! Can you	Interpersonal Struggles "I wanted to stop attending services...I wanted to stop preaching...but I can't. I still have to live with my families expectations of me" "When I started to voice out when I was 18, they disowned me. I left my family and worked my ass off to feed myself" Intrapsychic Struggles N/A	"Of course I'm much more happier now because I'm free! I'm living my life to the fullest!" "Now, I'm not forced to do thing the I don't like. And I can do things that I wanted to do"

*believe it? Bible school?
Atheist? That was when I
also started my path
atheism”*

No struggle
*“Nope. The moment I
realized the truth, I
couldn’t help myself
but go for it”*

Divine Struggles

N/A

No Struggles
*“Of course not. Death
is a reality of life.
Being an atheist allows
me to live to the
fullest”*

*“The meaning of my
existence is to enjoy
my life as much as I
can. That’s it”*

According to Pargament’s (2005) model of understanding the psychological struggles of non-believers, non-believers may experience any of these spiritual struggles: interpersonal, intrapsychic, and divine struggles. While only a few admitted that they experienced intrapsychic and divine struggles for only a short period of time and was able to easily overcome it. As shown in the tables above, non-believers mainly experienced interpersonal struggles. They found it hard to fit in the society to which they belong. Some struggled to express themselves, to their friends, and to their family because of the stigma associated with being a non-believer. According to the participants, they were called “evil” and were told to go to hell. De Leon (2012) said that any attempt at

secularization here in the Philippines would surely be bombarded with ad hominem, Bible quotes, and conservative moral codes.

Of the 10 atheists who participated in the study, most of them said that they did not experienced intrapsychic or divine struggles contrary to what Pargament said. None of them doubted or had a second thought about living life without religion once they became atheists. None of them also struggled to find meaning in their lives nor feared aging and death. According to the participants:

“I don’t believe that there is. As I told you, as a kid, I believed that there’s a meaning to my existence. But when I started to read....and when you think of it carefully, there is no intrinsic meaning that is given to us by someone. But, it is we who decide on what should be the meaning of our lives....as for me...the meaning of my life for now is my family..that’s it. “ (FF,M,35)

*“I don’t think there’s a meaning to it. How about those children who were killed? Is that the meaning of their existence? It doesn’t mean anything! So for me, my life is...I have long accepted the fact that I am an insignificant piece of sh*t who happens to be in this world by accident.” (ER,M,51)*

They believed that life has no intrinsic meaning that has been given by some higher power. Instead, they believe that they came into this world accidentally. They could and could not have existed. What’s important for them is how to make their meaningless life meaningful. For them, it’s up to the individual to create meaning in his

own life through the things they do and they have done. Others believe that the meaning of their lives is spelled out through their offspring. As for aging and death:

“It’s because it’s already given. Im not afraid to die, Im not afraid to grow old.... because again, this is life. Death is inevitable, your numbers will go up..will rise .. you can’t pause it. Accept the fact! If you’ll die, you’ll die. If you’ll live, you’ll live. As simple as that, right?” (PG,M,47)

“I have long accepted the reality that people die. Even when I was still a believer. It’s part of living, there nothing we can do. You can prolong life, but you can’t avoid death. Rico Puno just died yesterday....he’s a friend of my dad actually. And I met him in person....they used to hang out together back then. Being an atheist, I can still derive some lessons from the bible because they are still applicable. Dust thou art, and dust thou shall return.... You’re just a speck of dust in an infinite universe. You’re just dust... here today, gone tomorrow. That’s....do I fear death? No I don’t! What I fear is for those people I’m leaving behind. That’s why I’m working hard. Death is to be prepared for, while enjoying life” (ER,M,51)

All of the participants answered that they are not afraid of death because for them, it is inevitable and they have long accepted the fact that everyone will die someday. For them, what they are afraid of is not dying but they are afraid that they are not making the most of their lives while they are still alive. That is why for them, one should not waste time because every minute is precious. They don’t believe that there is an afterlife and they believe that they only have one shot at life, that’s why a person should make the

most out of it. The existentialist view present in the responses of the interviewed atheists show a negation of the afterlife but an acceptance and cessation of life. The respondents were not afraid to die and accepted of the inevitability of their own deaths. The non-belief of a religion transcends to the questioning ideas of what to expect after death, and with the acceptance of their deaths, they highlighted the meaning of being alive.

Statement of Purpose no. 2: Describe the psychological process of adopting an atheist identity.

Through analyzing the narratives of the ten participants, the researcher have come up on the psychological process on how do these individuals adopted an atheist identity.

Table 12. *shows the psychological stages in an individual's path to Atheism*

Stage themes	Person	Description	Sample Responses
1. Identity Crisis	XL	This is the stage where the individuals are confused with their values, ideals, and personal beliefs	<i>"It's simple, religion says that the Bible is the word of God...absolute truth....eternal. Then according to the Bible....Jesus said "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to my father except through me" and that "If you deny me front of everyone, Ill deny you in front of my father...or something like that" Even in the revelations, it is stated that those "sheep" were the only ones who will be saved from the rapture. The</i>

			message is very clear, only those who believe and accept Jesus Christ as their savior are the only ones who will be saved. So how about the Buddhists? Muslims? Hindus? And everyone that isn't Christian. It would be unfair if they'll go to hell no matter how good a person they have been just because they belong to a different religion. That's stupid! Religion is Stupid!"
	ER		"If you're saying that God is in control and God has a plan, then why would you pray? What are you trying to do? You wanna change his mind?"
2. Doubt Reinforcement	GP	Individuals look for other resources such as media, books, and internet in order look for answers to their questions regarding their doubts on their identity	"Oh yeah! Uhmm...at first I was planting seeds of doubt on them....eventually I found videos and reading materials which reinforced my non-belief. Then eventually it solidified into atheism, and into advocacy for

			<i>atheism”</i>
	AM		<i>“Then I told myself “Instead of reading the works of Christian apologists, why not read the proponents of the objections, the other worldviews”. I have to read myself what the proponents of those worldviews have to say about their worldviews, am I right?”</i>
3. Identity Formation	JV	This is where individuals come to a realization and finally decide to adopt their new identity without God and religion	<i>“There are so many discrepancies regarding the beliefs of every religion.....there are so many religion in the world...and it came to the point that I studied them one by one. I have read about Buddhism, Islam, Protestants, Born- Again Christians, and different branches of Catholicism. It was then I realized that it’s possible to live without these religions...that you can be a good person without having fear of God”</i>
	ER		<i>“I think it was when I was 25 years old.</i>

			<i>But I was not a fully pledged atheist at that time. Then years went by. ...still reading, then I came across the works of Hitchens, Dan Barker...which is Losing Faith in Faith. It was written by a pastor....Dan Barker was a former Pastor. He had the same experiences as I have so I really can relate”</i>
	AM		<i>“For most people, observing from the outside....my deconversion was gradual. As for me, it was just a few months. It’s because I had these questions in my head at first, then I began reading.... the first catalyst was reading the works of Robb Bell, who was also an evangelical pastor”</i>
4. Dealing with emotions	AM	Upon adopting a new identity, atheists may have negative emotions about former religions and the people around them	<i>“I gave 8 years and the prime of my life for these cause.. . propagating these messages, these toxic doctrines, and toxic teachings.”</i>

5. Social Adjustment	AM		<i>"I could have transitioned more peacefully. But again, because of my hatred.....and sometimes I got provoked on social media"</i>
	MS		<i>"Ahh you want to debate with everyone *laughs. That's the process every atheist has to experience but they will calm down eventually. Their hatred stems from the fact that they think they were fooled....and this is their channel to release their anger"</i>
	GP	Individuals who adopted a new identity have finally found a way to adjust to the society they belong to	<i>"Less than a year. I met HAPI, a Humanist group... last summer. What happened is that, I just accidentally found them on Facebook then I eventually got acquainted with them. The advocacy of Humanism is more on...uhhmmm...it takes apart religion...of what it means to become really human. Through Humanism, you can do the same things....you can still share and help others...but without</i>

Identity Crisis

Schwartz (2001) stated that personal identity refers to one's values and beliefs, including one's religious beliefs. Questions of identity include “Who am I? What am I doing with my life? What does this all mean?”. These are questions of identity that we are constantly experiencing at different points of our lives especially during the early adult years (Whitbourne, Sneed, & Sayer, 2009). All of the participants were once believers, some were hardcore and others were just moderate ones. But what caused them to question their beliefs? According to Teipel (2018), the gradual process that spans from adolescence to young adulthood changes their ability to think about themselves, and the others around them. It is also the time that young adults develop a more complex understanding of moral behavior and justice. Young adults begin to think and question their beliefs in childhood and restructure these beliefs into a personal ideology (Teipel, 2018). According to one of the participants:

“It's simple, religion says that the Bible is the word of God...absolute truth....eternal. Then according to the Bible....Jesus said “I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to my father except through me” and that “If you deny me in front of everyone, I'll deny you in front of my father...or something like that”. Even in the revelations, it is stated that the “sheep” were the only ones who will be saved from the rapture. The message is very clear, only those who believe and accept Jesus Christ as their savior are the only ones who will be saved. So how about the Buddhists? Muslims? Hindus? And everyone that isn't Christian. It

would be unfair if they'll go to hell no matter how good a person they have been just because they have different religions. That's stupid! Religion is stupid!"
(XL,M,46)

Ironically, this shows that reading the Bible itself may turn one into an atheist which coincides with Hunsberger and Altemeyer's (2006) findings which showed that former Christians who became atheists first doubted about God and religion because they were reading the Bible. As young adults develop a more critical and rational thinking, they begin to question themselves: Are the teachings of religion really just and morally upright? Do other people - no matter how good they are, deserve to go to hell because they have religious beliefs when other than the religion or the culture an individual just happened to be brought up in? That is when multiculturalism is put into action. According to Pedersen (2002), cultural patterns have already been established and have been passed on from generation to generation. We inherited these cultural patterns from our parents, teachers, and authorities who guide our ideas, influence our decisions, and help us take control of our lives. While growing up, we then began to realize that our culture whom we believed as "true" or "the best" was just one of the many cultural patterns that exist in this world. We came to understand that our culture only depends on the cultural patterns that have been passed down in the place where we happened to be brought upon. As we become aware of other cultures, we begin to see the flaws of our traditional conservative values. This leads us to replace our worn-out habits and lifestyle with new alternatives. This is when individuals realize that truth is merely subjective, that different people, and different places in the world have their own "truth". One cannot justify that their version of "truth" is a "greater truth" than other people's "truth", which

could be their religious beliefs. Because of these flaws of religious beliefs, especially the doctrine of hell which some people think of as unfair, and irrational, they chose to backslide from religion. Fischer, Yan, & Stewart (2003), argued that people also choose their own principles that focus on equality, dignity, and respect. People also believe in the use of evidence and rationality, knowledge, and justifications for conclusions because moral evaluation and judgment are one some intellectual challenges that young adults face in this world where there are multiple and conflicting standards of morality. Because these young adults think that these religious teachings are not rational and do not promote equality and respect. They refuted them and chose to become atheist.

Doubt Reinforcement

Deconversion doesn't just happen in an instant. It is a gradual process of thinking, questioning, and researching to reinforce their doubts on their identity. All of the participants answered that it was through research, videos, youtube documentaries, and reading the works of prominent atheists like Dawkins, Hitchens, and Carl Sagan which solidified their beliefs in atheism. According to one of the participants:

“And reading the works of prominent atheists like Carl Sagan... Carl Sagan is an astrophysicist...he writes so beautifully and ahh... he's a scientist who writes about Science very poetically. To me, his works made me cry more than the Bible ever...it's really beautifully written. He's not an evolutionary biologist, I actually have yet to read the works of Richard Dawkins...he's an evolutionary biologist and we know he's an atheist..primarily he is a scientist, he is an evolutionary biologist. Of course I have read the works of Christopher Hitchens

and nahhh...desperately for a few months I was... I was looking for Christian rebuttals about the ideas of these people but I.. .you know in that search I realized ...there's nothing...they have...they have next to nothing...to even compete with rational inquiry what Science has to offer. That's primarily, the examination of other worldviews in comparison with the Christian worldview" (AM,M,41)

Due to the emergence of the internet and technology, information can now be easily accessed and readily available. This smooth flow of knowledge and ideas around the world greatly affects the perceptions and worldviews of young adults of this generation. According to Kale (2004), Globalization serves as a catalyst in the process of exchanging and understanding various and diverse cultures around the world. With the smooth flow ideas and interaction, western liberal ideas spread throughout the world. People, especially the young adults who are more exposed to the internet and technology became the primary consumers of this product that globalization offers. This greatly affects the way the millennial generation identify themselves which is much different from the previous generations.

Identity Formation

Erikson's psychosocial stages tell us that adolescents experience the stage of *Identity vs. Role Confusion*. According to Erikson (1963), the connection between the morality learned by the child and the ethics developed by the adult explains why young adults establish their new sense of identity with different views or beliefs and

perspectives because they go through the stage of identity vs. role confusion during adolescence. One of the respondents said:

“There are too many discrepancies regarding the beliefs of every religion.....there’s too many religions in the world...and it came to the point that I studied them one by one. I have read about Buddhism, Islam, Protestants, Born-Again Christians, and different branches of Catholicism. It was then that I realized that it’s possible to live without these religions...that you can be a good person without having fear of God” (JV,F,33)

As a child, our primary source of knowledge about morality was our religion. But as an adult, upon learning that there are so many religions in the world, our views on morality changed. Being exposed to different kinds of worldviews and philosophies, individuals come to realize that it is not necessary to follow one religion as one cannot ascertain which is the right religion because of the several religions that exist. Hence, it is only logical to conclude that one’s religion doesn’t really matter as it is just pure coincidence. As what the participant said, he realized that one can live without any religion to follow. Thus, one can be good without God and so he chose to deconvert and become an atheist. As what the researcher has mentioned before, deconversion does not happen in an instant. It is a gradual process of logical and rational thinking, questioning and finding evidences of religious beliefs and thorough researching and examination of religious beliefs and worldviews before one decides to let go of his faith and deconvert.

Dealing with emotions

After adopting a new identity, atheists may struggle on how to deal with the negative feelings from the members of their former religion and other people who have perceptions and prejudices against them. They may struggle to fit in a society where people maintain strong religious beliefs and who judge them by their lack of belief in a higher being. As what one of the participants said:

I was deeply offended by an action of a pastor when he told me “Bro, whoever wronged you, just forgive him already” and the assumption is that my faith was too weak to have withstood such test... you know that? Or I supposedly prayed for something that I’ve been praying for so long it’s because Im 41 yrs old and I’m still single and now sulking and blaming the Lord because I still don’t have a wife...like that... it’s always that there was a something... there was a test that I was not able to survive like because my faith was not strong enough so they tell me that “Bro I’m still praying for you”. That too is an insult! (AM,M,41)

Incidents like this cause atheists to retaliate by engaging in debates with theists, or posting on social media, while some just choose to shrug them off to avoid further commotions. Upon embracing atheism, an atheist may also experience being withdrawn from their families and in worst cases, disowned.

“Unfortunately, I was the only one. I say unfortunately my family is very uhmmm.. traditional at some points, they were not open minded. I was... let me share this... when I started to voice out when I was 18, I was disowned... I was disowned by my own family. So I had to work my ass of, I have to feed my own self, I had to really work” (ML,M,25)

Also, atheists may try to find a way where they can express their emotions and negative feelings towards religion and other people. According to one of the participants:

*“Ahh you want to debate with everyone *laughs”. That’s the process every atheist has to experience but they will have to calm down eventually. Their hatred because they think they were fooled....and this is our channel to release our anger” (MS,M,35)*

Just like what the participant said, an atheist may come to a stage where he is full of hatred because he feels that he has been fooled by religion for a long time. Also, believer attitudes and negative perceptions towards atheists may add fuel to the fire that’s why atheists find way to channel their hatred by provoking theists or engaging in debates with them constantly.

Social adjustment

After confronting themselves and dealing with their negative feelings towards religion or the people around them, atheists may have finally found a way to settle their grudges and be able of peacefully blend in the society to which they belong to. This is the stage when atheists have already calmed down after releasing their emotions or when they realized that, to keep on arguing with theists whether there is a God or there is no God is a futile act because it would be a never-ending scenario. Because in the end, people would always believe what they want to believe. Knowing this, atheists may try to view the situation on lighter note or try to view it on a different perspective. Like what the participants answered when asked how they perceive people who believe in God, they answered:

“During my transition phase, i was like “they’re a bunch of idiots”, “oh, how dumb is he”, “so stupid, he didn’t even tried to be a skeptic” but now, I can separate these comments from my life. Now, I understand that they were just indoctrinated ...that’s what they were taught ever since they were still children... they were never told not to question stuffs like that...so I understood, I can now see the humanity in every person I meet. So what happens is, when I meet someone who is so religious, I just have to be very careful about what I say. I try to be the bigger person” (JV,F,33)

When the dust finally settles, atheists learn how to manage their emotions and refrain from doing inappropriate actions. At this point, an atheist tries to be the bigger person and be more empathic when dealing with theists so as to avoid unnecessary disputes. Also, most of the participants said that their atheism led them to attempt a new perspective in life that they are promoting which is Humanism. According to them:

“Yes I do advocate Humanism. What’s good about humanism is that it takes away religion. You can still be good without God. You do good not because you have fear in God or you are expecting a reward in the afterlife but because you know that is the right thing to do. That’s what it means to be human”
(GP,M,46)

With this new perspective in life, atheists finally learn how to peacefully blend in a religious society which is the best thing to do since they are a minority. In order to this, they have to find an alternative, a common middle-ground between atheists and theists, and that is being humanist.

Statement of the Purpose no. 3: Explore other possible reasons why self-confessed atheists chose to abandon their faith/religion

Aside from those mentioned, there are also themes that emerged in the study. These are themes that are unique in the cases of some participants regarding on why they chose to abandon their faith/religion.

Table 13. The themes that emerged in the study which contributed to the individuals apostasy

Emerging Themes	Person	Description	Sample Responses
1. Sexual Orientation	AM	One's sexual orientation emerged as a factor for individuals to abandon religion and turn into atheism	<i>"Wow! Number 1, I'm gay! Okay? I've been in the closet since I was a teenager"</i> <i>"I told you I'm gay and this question has been in my head "could we ever have been wrong about anything". If I am the way I am, I like men *laughs, how could that ever be changed? And the Christian promise is that, you can pray the gay away. It's something that can be exorcised, something that can be prayed away in Jesus' name *laughs"</i>
2. Rebellion	JV	Too much religiosity imposed by the parents to their children may cause them to	<i>"It's like in our family, we have to go to church every Sunday...every first Friday of the</i>

retaliate

month...we have to do confessions...all those kinds of stuffs because my father's side of the family were so religious. So I think it was just a rebellious act at first that I started to drift away from religion. Until later on, I started to read books....about the bible...about philosophy and all...to justify my rebellious acts"

Sexual Orientation

One of the themes that emerged as one of the factors that lead to atheism is sexuality. According to one of the participants, the main reason he deconverted is because he is gay. In his former church, he said that the pastor would often preach against homosexuality and he had undergone several counselling and "exorcism" in order to cast away whatever demon or impurities was inside his body but nothing ever changed. This coincides with numerous studies which show that there is a persistent heterosexist policies and attitudes within religious groups including the Catholic Church, Mormons, fundamentalist Christian, Jewish, and Islamic Sects (Bullivant & Ruse, 2013) That is why the participant asked himself if it is wrong for him to be the way he is, if it is really bad to be a gay because the Christian scripture says so. That is when he started to lose interest in religion and started to expose himself to other worldviews and chose to become an atheist. This is exactly what Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006) showed in their study that

atheists, next to agnostics have the lowest scores on dogmatism, zealotry, and religious prejudice, and they are more accepting to other minority groups especially the homosexuals and bisexuals as they both experiences prejudices from religious individuals. Because of this, many LGBTQ persons around the world, have shifted away from conservative religious beliefs into atheism (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006).

Rebellion

One of the participants in the study answered that her path to atheism first started as an act of rebellion against her parents because of their strict imposition of their religious beliefs and practices to their children. According to her, she began to hate going to church every Sunday and to confess her sins to the priest so she started to drift away from religion during her senior year in high school. She then began to read books about atheism to justify her rebellious acts and she became a fully-blown atheist in her freshman year in college. This is conclusive to what Middleton and Putney (1961), said that children's rebellion against their parents' religious beliefs will lead to apostasy. The reason is that although most children will just conform and follow what their parents tell them because they are perceived as authorities, some children are natural-born skeptics who would always question and doubt everything if it seems illogical for them. Because of this, children may start to rebel from their parents religious beliefs which will later on lead them to embrace atheism

Implications of the Study

As previously mentioned in the study, the increase in numbers of people with post-conventional beliefs such as atheism has been consistent in the past years and will continue to do so in the next decades. Most of these non-believers belong to the younger generation because they are more exposed to internet, media, and technology. They are also more diverse, and more accepting to change as compared to the older generation. With this, there are already cases when counselors mishandled clients with these kinds of beliefs due to misinformation, stigma, and personal biases. This is happening because non-belief is not treated and is not taught as a multicultural sub-variable on the context of diversity in the domains of Psychology. Since this is also one of the least researched topic areas, the researcher conducted this study in order to shed light in this topic so as to serve as basis in understanding these types of people.

Counseling profession should strive and innovate to cater the changing needs of clients with regards to the diversity of population. Since researches on these kinds of topic is very limited especially in this country where there is a religious dominance, there are already cases in this context that are existing in the counseling profession. With respect to the statistics and previous studies about the consistent growth of population of non-believers worldwide – in addition to misinformation about this topic, further conflicts will arise in the future especially in this country where secularism is taboo and blasphemous. That is why non-believers are stigmatized and have always been a subject of prejudice and discrimination. With this study, the researcher aimed to uncover the underlying psychological process on how and why do these people choose to abandon

their faith/religion. It aims to deeper understand their perspectives in an attempt to eliminate various misconceptions regarding non-believers especially in a very religious country. This study might help the future and today's counselors in understanding the deeper reasons and meaning behind atheists and other kinds of non-believers. The findings of this study can be used as basis for future counselors for them to understand that people with these kinds of beliefs were some lost or misguided sheeps or people who choose to worship Satan. Instead, they are people who have valid experiences, and there is an underlying psychological process on how and why they adopted a new identity. Counselor training programs and seminars can be created with the findings of this study as a reference in order to help future counselors to have the knowledge and understand these peoples' culture and respect their diversity and eradicate biases and stigmas. This is necessary to achieve a more efficient and effective counseling process because it has always been the duty of the counseling profession to cater the psychological needs of all kinds of client regardless of who they are and what they believe.

CHAPTER IV

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

The study is all about exploring the psychological stages of how an individual adopts an atheist identity. It also identified the reasons why self-confessed atheists chose to abandon their religion and determined the problems they encountered in terms of their interpersonal, intrapsychic, and divine struggles. This study was done by interviewing atheists who are 25 years old and above and is a resident of Metro Manila. In this study, the narrative design was used in order to have an in-depth look at the life stories of individuals who are self-confessed atheists.

The findings of the study revealed that former believers who are now atheists have undergone five stages: Identity Crisis, Doubt Reinforcement, Identity Formation, Dealing with emotions, and Social Adjustment. Identity Crisis is the stage where they are confused about their personal beliefs, values, and ideals. This is the stage where these individuals are full of doubt and skepticism about their religious beliefs. Looking for answers to their questions, they now enter into the second stage which is Doubt Reinforcement. This is the stage where these individuals look for online resources, YouTube videos, documentaries, and books which are either scientific, philosophical, or atheistic. The next phase is Identity formation. This happens when these individuals think that they already found the answers to their questions through research. After giving a lot of thought to it, they finally make up their mind and conclude that it is irrational and illogical for them to believe in God and religion, so they now decide to adopt an atheist identity. In their first few months of deconversion, new blooded atheists may struggle to

deal with negative emotions towards their former religion or the people around them and even people on social media and they usually challenge people for debates. Upon resolving their negative emotions, atheists can now adjust to the society. This is when they finally settle their grudges and find a way to fit in the society to which they belong with less struggles and less complications.

In the study, it is interesting to note that sexuality emerged as one of the factors that lead to deconversion into atheism. This maybe because of the strong stance of fundamentalist churches against the LGBT community. It is also important to note that the internet was pointed out by all of the participants as one of the main reasons for their deconversion because it is in the internet where they found all the available resources that they need like books, videos and documents regarding atheism.

Also, contrary to what Pargament (2005) said that atheists may have Intrapersonal and Divine Struggles, the results of this study showed otherwise. None of the participants answered that they struggled to find meaning and their moral compass in life, nor they struggled to find the courage to face aging and death. None of them did really rethink their decision to live without God or religion. Those who said that they experience intrapsychic and divine revealed that they only experienced it for a short period of time and was easily able to overcome it. What they experienced are the Interpersonal struggles in which they felt discriminated because of the stigma associated with being an atheist and they had a hard time to adjust in a society where people maintain strong religious beliefs. Moreover, all of them mentioned that their life now as atheist is much better than they a believer. Some mentioned that being an atheist gave them sense of freedom and responsibility, while some stated that it gave them some kind of self-fulfilment.

The findings of this study may have a huge impact on the multicultural counseling in the 21st century. This is only one of the few study made in this area of topic that advocates the inclusion of non-belief as a multicultural sub-variable which will make multicultural counseling to be more efficient and effective. It aims to address the needs and to ease the conflict of the rising secularism in a highly religious society.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, the researcher can conclude that adopting an atheist identity does not happen overnight. As from what we can infer from the participants' narratives, their adoption of an atheist identity is a product of their experiences and the knowledge they have learned through a span of time. It is a long process in which they underwent five psychological stages such as Identity Crisis, Doubt Reinforcement, Identity Formation, Dealing with Emotions, and Social Adjustment. It can also be concluded that most people have a little or no knowledge about non-belief which resulted to misinformation and discrimination. This is evident from the fact that the self-confessed atheist participants in the study reported that they mainly experienced interpersonal struggles. This only shows why there is a need to do these kinds of studies in order to help ease stigma and misinformation between people and even in the counseling profession.

Recommendations

For future researchers, the researcher highly suggests that they increase the number of participants as this study only included ten. In order to achieve this, future researchers should try to do a mixed-method type of research so as to get the

demographics of atheists in the Philippines for the quantitative part. Future researchers could also try to explore the parenting styles of atheist parents, or maybe do a case study on those kids who were raised as atheists. Also, since all of the participants in this study were ex-Christians, it is also interesting to explore the perspectives of ex-Muslim atheists to know whether there are differences. A research on the perceptions of Filipinos on atheism and atheists would also be feasible.

The non-inclusion of non-belief in as a diversity issue in the topic of multiculturalism in psychology and guidance counseling is the reason why today's counselors have a little or no knowledge about this topic. This resulted to instances where counselors mishandled clients with these kinds of beliefs. In order to prevent further conflicts in the future, the researcher suggests there should be seminars and training workshops for guidance counselors and counseling students about multicultural counseling in which non-belief is included and emphasized as an additional multicultural sub-variable. Through this, counselors would be informed and educated on what non-belief is all about which in turn will erase their biases from their personal beliefs and would end stigma about non-believers. This will help prevent problems caused by the consistent rise of the population of non-believers especially among the youth. This is necessary to uphold the values and competencies of a counselor in which they should have unconditional positive regard and they should cater the needs of different types of clients.

Epilogue

Atheism in the Philippines has been growing steadily over the past decade, especially among the younger generation. There are several atheist groups and communities that exist now. In spite of this, there is still a widespread discrimination due to the stigma of being an atheist, misinformation, and lack of awareness. One may easily assume that they are “immoral”, “Satanists”, “anti-Christ”, or “hateful” because that is the stigma associated to those people who do not believe in God especially in a country where faith is regarded highly, like in the Philippines. They are even sometimes dubbed as people who are living meaningless life. But once you talk to them, once you hear their stories, you might have a change of heart. You will realize that they are just ordinary people like everyone else. They are someone’s father, mother, husband, wife, child, or friend. They have ordinary jobs living an ordinary life. They are nothing special, they are just like everyone of us. Except that, they chose to look at the world differently. They chose to deviate from the norm and look at things with a different perspective.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Informed Consent Form

The researcher requests your consent to participate in the study entitled “Life Narratives of Self-Confessed Atheists: Exploring the Psychological Process”. This consent form asks you to allow the researcher to record and conduct interviews and to use your answers and insights to enhance understanding of the topic.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, there will not be any negative consequences. Please be aware that if you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time whenever you feel uncomfortable.

The researcher will maintain the confidentiality of the research records or data which will be stored in a password-protected personal laptop. Also, all data will be destroyed three (3) years after the completion of the research

By submitting this form, you are indicating that you have read the description of the study, are over the age of 18, and that you agree to the terms as described.

If you have any questions, or would like a copy of this consent letter, please contact me via e-mail at ramiro.ajn@pnu.edu.ph or via text at 09173343562.

Thank you in advance for your participation!

Alexis John Ramiro
Researcher

INFORMED CONSENT

Instruction: The following questions are concerned with the extent to which you allow the researchers to use your personal information and anything you disclose during the course of the research as data. The questions with asterisk (*) require an answer. Kindly put a check (✓) on the space provided before your chosen response.

****1. I agree to participate in the research study. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without any penalty or consequences.***

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

****2. I grant permission for the data generated from this interview to be used in the researcher's publications on this topic.***

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I grant permission under the following conditions:

****3. I grant permission for the interview session to be recorded and saved for purposes of review by the researcher.***

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

****4. Indicate your permission for audio or video clips or stills from the interview session to be used in presentations or documentation of this study. Select your preferences below:***

- ☐ I agree to allow audio and visual clips including images, videos or stills, to be used in reports or presentations about this study.
- ☐ I agree to allow audio clips only in reports or presentations about this study.
- ☐ I do not permit the researcher to use images or audio from the interview.

****5. With your identity remaining anonymous, choose one of the following options:***

- ☐ I grant permission for the researcher to use direct, attributed quotations from my interview.
 - ☐ I grant permission for the researcher to use my responses in aggregate or anonymous statements, but I prefer to maintain confidentiality and request that any comments are presented without attribution to me.
-

INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____, have been informed about the purpose of the research study on the *Life Narratives of Self-Confessed Atheists*. I understand that I have the right to withdraw my participation at any point in time and that any information or data about me will remain confidential. I also have read and understood the terms by which I want to disclose my identity and I have chosen the most appropriate for me.

I give my informed consent to participate in this research.

Name

Date

INFORMED CONSENT COPY FOR PARTICIPANT

I, _____, have been informed about the purpose of the research study on the *Life Narratives of Self-Confessed Atheists*. I understand that I have the right to withdraw my participation at any point in time and that any information or data about me will remain confidential. I also have read and understood the terms by which I want to disclose my identity and I have chosen the most appropriate for me.

I give my informed consent to participate in this research.

Name

Date

Appendix B
Letter for Expert Validation

October __, 2018

Dear _____,

I, Alexis John Ramiro, a psychology student from Philippine Normal University would like to request you, being aware of your expertise to validate my research instrument for my thesis entitled “Life Narratives of Self-Confessed Atheists: Exploring the Psychological Process”. The objectives of the study are as follows: to understand the reasons why they chose to be atheists, to determine the struggles they encountered by becoming atheists, and the overall psychological process involved in adopting an atheist identity.

Attached is the research instrument that will be validated. Please evaluate the said instrument based on clarity and comprehensiveness in relation to the overall content of the study.

You, with your expertise and knowledge, are highly recommended and I really appreciate your time and effort in providing feedback about the instrument being validated.

Thank you and God bless.

Respectfully yours,

Alexis John Ramiro
Researcher

Noted by

Dr. Teresita Rungduin
Thesis Adviser

Directions: Please evaluate if each question as to whether it is to be accepted, rejected, or it needs revision. If an item needs revision, kindly indicate some suggestions for improvement.

Statement of the Purpose	Instrument Questions	Accepted	Rejected	Needs Revision	Suggestion for the Item
1. Identify the reasons why self-confessed atheists chose to abandon their faith/religion	1. What does it mean to become an atheist? 1.1 What is your religious upbringing? 1.2. Are there other atheists in your family? 1.3. Describe your level of religiousness prior to being an atheist 1.4. For how long have you been an atheist? 2. What are the significant experiences you have encountered that made you decide to be an atheist? 2.1. What has driven you to become an atheist?				
2. Describe the experiences encountered by people who are self-confessed atheists	3. What are the struggles you encountered when you become an atheist? 3.1. During the transition period 3.2. First few				

	months of being an atheist 3.3. At present 4. How do you cope with those struggles?				
3.Determine the problems encountered by self-confessed atheists in terms of their: 3.1. Interpersonal Struggles 3.2. Intrapsychic Struggles 3.3. Divine Struggles	5. In what ways has becoming an atheist changed your personality as compared to your personality when you were still a believer? 5.1 What do you think of those people who believe in God/s? 5.2. How do you deal with people who believe in God/s? 6. Without God or religion to rely on, where do you get your: 6.1 Moral Compass 6.2 Courage to face aging and death 6.3 Meaning of your existence				

Appendix C

Interview Guide

1. In your own understanding, what does it mean to become an atheist?

- 1.1 What is your religious upbringing?
- 1.2. Are there other atheists in your family?
- 1.3. Describe your level of religiousness prior to being an atheist
- 1.4. How long have you been an atheist?

2. What are the significant experiences you have encountered that made you decide to be an atheist?

- 2.1. What made you decide to finally abandon your faith or religion?

3. What are the significant experiences or challenges you have encountered when you become an atheist?

- 3.1. During the transition period
- 3.2. First few months of being an atheist
- 3.3. At present

4. How do you cope with those challenges?

5. In what ways has becoming an atheist changed your personality as compared to your personality when you were still a believer?

- 5.1 How do you perceive those people who believe in God/s?
- 5.2. How do you deal with people who believe in God/s?

6. Without God or religion to rely on, where do you get your:

- 6.1 Moral Compass?
- 6.2 Courage to face aging and death?
- 6.3 Meaning of your existence?

Appendix D Validated Questions

Statement of the Purpose	Instrument Questions	
1. Identify the reasons why self-confessed atheists decided to abandon their faith/religion	1. What does it mean to become an atheist? 1.1 What is your religious upbringing? 1.2. Are there other atheists in your family? 1.3. Describe your level of religiousness prior to being an atheist 1.4. For how long have you been an atheist? 2. What are the significant experiences you encountered that made you decide to be an atheist? 2.1. What has driven you to become an atheist?	Comment [DL1]: In your own understanding, what does it mean to become an atheist? Comment [DL2]: You may directly ask the question: How long have you been an atheist? Comment [DL3]: What made you decide to finally abandon your faith or religion?
2. Describe the experiences encountered by people who are self-confessed atheist	3. What are the struggles you encountered from becoming an atheist? 3.1. During the transition 3.2. First few months of being an atheist 3.3. Present day 4. How do you cope with those struggles?	Comment [DL4]: The word "struggle" is too limiting. You may change the question to: What are the significant experiences or challenges you encountered from becoming an atheist? Comment [DL5]: How do you cope with those challenges?
3. Determine the problems encountered by self-confessed atheists in terms of their:	5. In what ways does becoming an atheist change your personality as compared when you were still a believer?	
3.1. Interpersonal Struggles	5.1 What do you think of those people who believe in God/s?	Comment [DL6]: How do you perceive those people who believe in God/s?



Survey Validation Rubric for Expert Panel – VREP
Adapted from Marilyn K. Simon with input from Jacquelyn White

Directions: Please evaluate the interview questions about the life narratives of self-confessed atheists. Kindly check the appropriate column using the scale/score below.

Criteria	Operational Definitions	Score 1 = Not Acceptable (major modifications needed) 2 = Below Expectations (some modifications needed) 3 = Meets Expectations (no modifications needed but could be improved with minor changes) 4 = Exceeds Expectations (no modification	Statements NOT meeting standard (List page and statement number) and need to be revised. <i>Please use the comments and suggestions section to recommend revisions.</i>
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		s needed)			
		1	2	3	4
Clarity and Content	1. The questions/statements are direct and specific.		/		
	2. Only one question/statement is asked at a time.		/		
	3. The participants can understand what is being asked.		/		
	4. Statements demand specific answers for the study.		/		
Wordiness and Language	1. The statements are straight to the point.		/		
	2. The language used is free from jargons and terms used are understandable by the target		/		

	population. 3. The language used is appropriate for the field of study. 4. The language used can be easily explained.		/		
Balance and Appropriateness	1. The questions/statements are unbiased. 2... The statements are appropriate for the study. 3. The statements are balanced.		/		
Appearance	1. Statements have readable font style and size. 2. Statements are free from grammatical and spelling errors. 3. Statements are well presented		/		

	as a whole. 4. Statement of instruction is present and clear.		/		
Relationship to Problem	1. The statements are sufficient to resolve the problem in the study. 2. The statements are sufficient to answer the research questions. 3. The statements are sufficient to obtain the purpose of the study. 4. Statements are reflective of the data needed by the study.		/		

Comments and Suggestions

Please see attached document with comments.

(SGD.) LORIE M. MORONA, Ph.D.

Evaluator
Signature over printed name

Appendix E

Transcribed interview sample

R: So ayun po, I just want to make it clear na your participation here is voluntary, hindi po kayo pinilit, and I can assure na yung confidentiality po ng data, yung name niyo is safe.. and ahmm you can back-out whenever you feel uncomfortable during the course of the interview

I: Sure! No problem!

R: So can we start po?

I: Go!

R: So first of all, in your own understanding, ano po ba ang ibig sabihin ng pagiging isang atheist?

I: Being atheist is being open..socially accepted..out of the norm kumbaga...unorthodox as I usually say to my friends. I wanted to break yung thinking ng mga tao na pag atheist ka wala kang kwenta, na you're unprofessional... I wanted to break that stigma, so everytime...someone would ask me "Why are you an atheist?", my answer always is why not diba? If you're the kind of person who has a big knowledge or uhhh.... big respect for the humanity or sa folks mo or what not..colleagues mo... you would understand kasi I'm not...I'm not trying to instill or to tell you na atis ako, respetuhin mo ako, No! What I'm trying to say is I'm an atheist and I'm also a person, you give me what is due to me, I'll give you what is due to you.

R: So ano po yung religious upbringing ninyo?

I: To be honest, I was baptized as a born-again Christian and my grandfather is a pastor. I was a young pastor before, I took up theology when I was in college...Pharmacy tsaka Theology. So I stayed with the church for 16 years inside the church.

R: So sabi niyo nga po na young pastor kayo so nag-oorganize talaga kayo ng –

I: Yes! I do masses, Ive been preaching before, I do Sunday school classes..those stuff

R: So meron pa po bang ibang atheist sa inyong pamilya?

I: Unfortunately, ako lang. I say unfortunately kasi since yung family ko is very uhmmm.. traditional at some point, hindi sila open eh. I was...eto mashare ko lang.. when I started to voice out when I was 18, tinakwil ako, itinakwil ako ng pamilya ko. So I have to work my ass of, I have to feed my own self, I have to really work. I was studying, still studying so I really have to cut everything, alam mo yun? Pero it's self-fulfilment kasi kung di man.. kung di ginawa sa akin yun, I won't have the courage to say that I survived

R: So before po noong believer pa kayo, paano niyo po madedescribe yung level of religiousness ninyo?

I: Die hard! Die hard kasi pag may mga... let's say worship, or mga conference, Don Moen before... I usually go to different places to preach. Talagang die hard fan dati. Im not saying na... yun nga pinagsisihan ko yun okay? It's not 'cause it's part of my life, it's just that sana ano.. sana I've opened... I'm open of these things sana before pa.

R: So ano naman po yung mga reasons niyo kung bakit kayo naging atheist?

I: Hindi naman ako nag start na atheist agad eh, I started as agnostic.. the reason why..pinakaunang reason ko before was sa loob ng church, I've seen a lot of members, mga "brethrens" quote and unquote na Sundays, oo holy kayo...they're holy, fine.. paglabas ng simbahan, Mondays to Saturdays, sila pa yung mga manginginom alam mo

yun? So maraming... nadismaya ako ng very very light dati. Until nag-progress ako sa dasal ako ng dasal, kanino nga ba ako nagdadasal? Yun nga yung sinasabi nilang holy trinity diba nga tatlo. Sabi ko “bakit ganto na may tatay, may anak, may ispirito santo tapos hindi naman daw nya nanay si ganto” alam mo yung... my mind starts to wonder and then yun nga, noong nag theology na ako... my prof ng history of the bible is an atheist.. oo atheist siya..ang question nya was “Sino sa mga Gods ang dinadasalan niyo? Si Shiva ba? Si Buddha ba? Si Allah ba? Si Yahweh ba?” so parang... oo nga no... why would you pray for..why would you pray to someone na di ka nga certain eh.. kung sino diba? Lagi ko nga sinasabi sa sarili ko, kung magdadasal ko let’s say kay Allah, eh paano kung ang totoong God pala eh let’s say si Buddha? Magseselos siya, alam mo yun? Kaya andami kong why’s eh..... bakit? Until hindi na ako masagot ng lolo ko. Sinasabi na just have faith, sabi ko “faith won’t take you anywhere” kung talagang may panginoon, kung talagang nandiyan siya sabi ko sa lolo ko... magpakita siya, as simple as that. Hindi ako yung tao na...hindi ako yung atheist na nanggaling sa sama ng loob and then tinalikuran, personal curiosity lang talaga and then nag progress,

R: So ano po, hindi ho ba kayo nahirapan na i- let go yung faith ninyo?

I: Hindi, to be honest. Kasi when I was 18, backslider na ako nun diba? Ahmm madali lang i-let go sa akin kasi number 1 wala akong support groups eh.. walang support group... yung mga hawak ko dati, kilala ko naman sila sa loob ng simbahan, paglabas di na ako kilala. So wala talagang... wala talagang ganun na attachment sa mga tao. Siguro kung may humila sa akin pataas ulit, bumalik siguro ako.

R: So ayun nga po, sabi niyo nga po agnostic kayo noon, ano po yung turning point para maging atheist talaga kayo?

I: Actually marami, pero yung number 1 nalang is... saan ba ang langit? Do we create heaven itself or do we let other people create heaven for you? Yun lang sa akin.

R: Ano naman po yung other reasons?

I: Ahmm.. other reasons ko was... kung may... kung may plano ang panginoon sa atin, so yung mga maysakit, ano plano niya sa mga yan? Yung mga people who were trying to.. may mga misfortune sa kanila, may palno daw siya...ano? kumbaga enlighten me why? Why do you have to give them these kind of sh*t’s? Sabi nga diba sa bible na “Come to me all you weary, who are weak, and I’ll give you rest”, eh ikaw naman ang nagbibigay sa kanila ng paghihirap? So sa akin, nakaka-bullsh*t lang na papahirapan mo kami pero gusto mo bumalik kami sayo. Ano to? Pinaglalaruan mo ba kami? Freewill? Gagawin ko yung gusto ko...masama pala, alam mo yun? Napaka contradicting eh. Ang contradicting lang nung sinasabi sa bible .

R: Can you give example sir ng mga sinasabi ninyo na contradicting?

I: Ahmmm.. sabi diba.. sabi ng lolo ko dati “mahal kita, pero bumalik ka sa kanya”.. parang.. yun unconditional love daw pero gusto mo akong ...gusto mong gawin ko yung gusto mo . Unconditional ba yun?. Hindi! It’s conditional. Don’t give me terms and conditions na ikaw lang yung mag bebenefit. Ive been inside the church for quite some time , lahat ng gagawin mo sa loob ng simbahan,... you have to be careful, you have to be nice.....

R:So ano naman po, during the transition from a believer to an agnostic, are there any struggles or nahirapan po ba kayo?

I: May mga struggles, I have to admit..kasi hindi naman ako... hindi naman ako agad agad umalis ng bahay eh... yung tipong ayaw mo nang magturo, ayaw mo nang mag-preach but you have to.. you have to contain yourself. Pag gusto mong kuwestiyunin or gusto mong mag-raise ng question sa loob ng simbahan during prayer meetings and all, you can't do it kasi number 1, image pa rin ng pamilya ko yung pino-protect ko... I can't do that. Yun lang yung nahirapan ako, nahirapan ako na umattend ng services, hindi naman dahil kailangan kaso moral support nalang sa lolo ko dati. Alam mo yun? Image.. its more of the image..

R: So noong first few months po kayo naging atheist, ano naman po yung mga challenges?

I: Friends.. ang hirap ko makakuha ng... makahanap ng mga tropa na kaya kong intindihin. Aminin natin, people would judge you..number 1, with your status in life. Number 2, with your money...number 3 is with your race...and number 4 is with your religion. People would always judge on those aspect. In my case, binitawan ko yung relihiyon...ang sabi sa akin "demonyo ka", "punta ka sa impyerno", wow saan ba yun? See you there, kung meron man see you there. I'll reserve a spot for you. At saka ang hirap na mag open-up kasi nga may stigma dito sa Pilipinas na pag atis ka, ang sama sama mo, satanista ka... wala akong makausap, yun ang struggle ko talaga.

R: Sa present day po? Mayroon ba?

I: Ngayon, ang struggle ko na lang ngayon is kung paano ako maaccept ulit ng family ko, yun lang. They were ok, we're ok now. Pero yung to the point na every Sunday na pag umuwi akong Baguio, I really have to go to the church, walang issue sa akin yun eh..... pero yung pagpasok mo ng simbahan sasabihin sayo ng lolo mo "oh bumalik ka na ha? Namimiss ka na ng simbahan. Namimiss ka na ni lord". Yun nalang, yun nalang talaga yung struggle ko.

R: So ayun nga po, how do you cope with those struggles po?

I: Gusto mo ban g seryosong sagot diyan? Alak! Alak and travel. I travel a lot, I drink alak really bad. Pero kung gusto mo ng medyo demure, food *laughs

R: So ano naman po, paano po nabago ang personality ninyo as compared noong believer pa po kayo at ngayong atheist na kayo?

I: Hindi na ako naging people pleaser. Kasi pag theist ka, di ba you have to present yourself..dapat wholesome ka.. kung meron kang..we're adults, kung may libog ka sa katawan mo, hindi mo pwedeng ipakita yun ng harap-harapan. Aminin natin, ngayon I can be as blunt as I can, pero of course may limitations pa rin. Pero yung prangka ko dati, mas prangka na ako ngayon ... kasi again, I don't have to please everyone. If you don't like me, I don't give a damn. Basta respetuhin mo ako, rerespetuhin kita.

R: So ano naman po, generally how do you perceive those people who believe in God/s?

I: Sa akin wala namang issue eh... I don't have an issue about it, just don't shove it on my face. Just don't let me feel na you're trying to convert me. Pero that's not a big issue, if that's how they want it... kung doon sila masaya.

R: So how do you deal with them po?

I: As a normal person. There's nothing to be special about it, I don't treat theists as special... bakit sino ka ba? May paniniwala ka, may faith ka, may belief ka lang, yun lang.

R: As an atheist naman po, saan nanggagaling ang inyong moral compass?

I: The people around me... the environment, big factor sa akin yun. Kasi..again, what you'll give me, Ill reciprocate it. Ganun lang, ganun lang ako. Kung bastos ka, bastusan tayo. Pero in general, yung moral ko talaga is all.... its a collective eh..collective siya ng mga tao na nakasalubong ko. Kung sa tingin ko ito okay sa akin to, okay yung ganitong attitude... pero if it's not working, okay.. yun lang.

R: Ahh ano naman po, where do you find your courage to face aging and death?

I: Its given na kasi eh, its given. Im not afraid to die, Im not afraid to age myself.. kasi again, this is life. Death is inevitable, your numbers will go up..will rise .. you can't pause it. Accept the fact! If you'll die, you'll die. If you'll live, you'll live. As simple as that di ba?

R: How about the meaning of your existence?

I: The meaning of my existence? To spread awesomeness, charot! Hindi... the meaning of my existence... siguro to influence people... influence in a way that, this is me.. this is my life story... my life is an open book. Its up to you if you want to read it, to understand it... its up to you, yun lang.

R: So paano niyo naman po madedescribe yung inyong quality of life as of now as compared sa dati noong believer pa kayo?

I:Less complications, less drama. Kasi aminin natin, we got tons of dramas in life , pero at least ngayon, kung may drama man ako sa buhay ko "mommy inom tayo" or "brad inom tayo". I don't have to dwell on it! Kasi ayoko yung.. ayoko yung laging sinasabi ng mga tropa kong pastor na "In God's perfect time", "In God's will" pero at the end of the day, yung ginagawa mo paulit-ulit lang". Sige given the fact na will ni God, pero you have to act it. Don't depend your life on him.

R: So balikan ko lang po, sabi niyo po may atheist kayong professor, sa tingin niyo po ba maaring nakaimpluwensya siya sa pagiging atheist ninyo?

I: I would say eye-opener.. kasi noong nalaman ko na atheist siya, "ano trip ba to? Theology school? History of the Bible? Propesor ko atis?", Doon ako na-challenge dati. Kung kaya niyang tayuan yung paniniwala niya, at the same time magturo, why can't I?

R: So mayroon po ba kayong mga advocacies?

I: Right now, the reason why I have my hair long because meron akong batang gustong tulungan... may cancer kasi siya, unfortunately namatay. So di ko alam kung itutuloy ko pa ba to but right now as much as kung anong kaya kong tulong na maibigay.

R: So that concludes our interview po. Do you have any questions po ba?

I: No. Wala naman...

R: Okay! Thank you po sir!

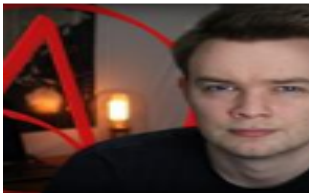


February 16 at 11:11 PM ·

Sometimes, well-meaning Christian friends would tell me something like, "I'm still praying for you". While I appreciate those kind words and trust that they are coming from a place of genuine love and concern, I also know, having been a Christian myself, that they come from an assumption that people who leave religion are apostates, "backsliders" undergoing a moral breakdown, being "handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit would be saved on the day of the Lord".

It's very hard to explain that I left my former faith because in a personal quest to become a better defender of it, as the Apostle Paul admonishes all Christians to be, I instead came to the conclusion that Evangelicalism and other fundamentalist sects are "built on sinking sand", to borrow from the idioms of those subcultures.

While I do not have the academic credentials of the guy in this video, I went through a very similar process of transitioning that spanned a few years.



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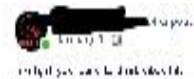
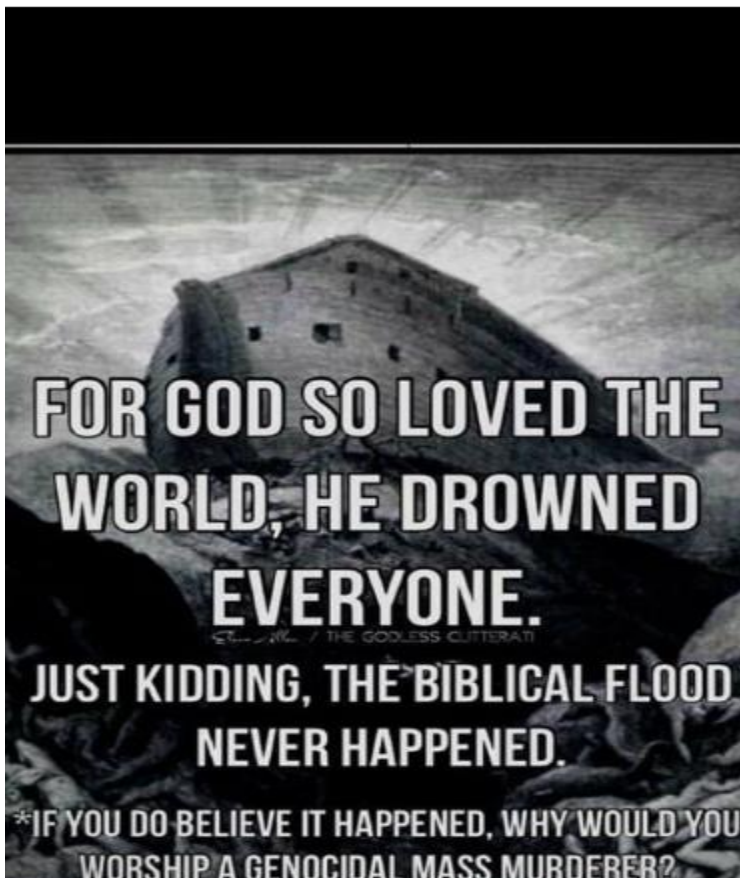
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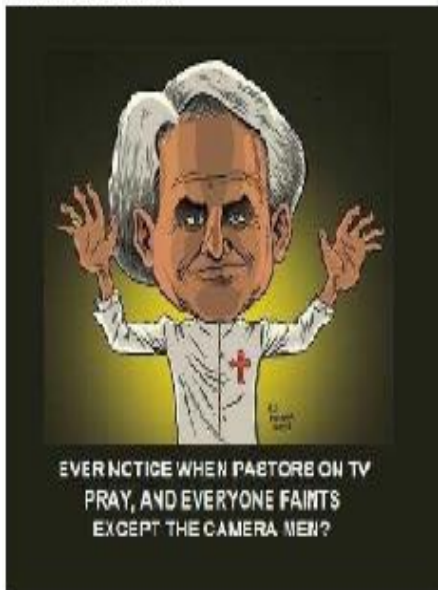


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Educational Attainment:

- **Tertiary Education**
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(2014- Present)
- **Secondary Education**
Caidiocan National High School
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- **Primary Education**
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Professional Training

(SMEC) 3rd International Research Congress Knowledge 2018
De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde School of Design and Arts Campus
Malate, Manila
February 23, 2018

**42nd YMCA National Congress of College Students and 22nd YMCA National
Campus Club Advisers Seminar Workshop**
Senior Mess, Teachers Camp Baguio City
November 30 - December 4, 2017

30th Annual Psychological Association of the Philippine Junior Affiliates Convention
SMX Convention Center, Mall of Asia, Pasay City
January 20-21 2017

Professional Affiliations:

PNU- College Y Club

Philippine Normal University
Member; VP foer
2017-Present

Philippine Normal University-

Psychological and Couseling Society

Philippine Normal University
2015-present

PNU Advocare

Member
(2016-2017)

**Young Men's Christian Association of
Manila (YMCA-Manila)**

Member
2017-2018

Skills:

- | | | |
|---|-----|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge in writing psychological reports• Good Interpersonal Skills• Goal | Ori | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fast Learner• Hardworking• Ability to multitask and work under pressure |
|---|-----|---|

I hereby certify that the above is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

ALEXIS JOHN NOTARTE RAMIRO