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## Perceived Marginalization, Educational Contexts, and (Non) Religious Educational Experience

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### Abstract

Prior research has suggested the possibility of marginalization of religious students on college campuses and the marginalization of nonreligious individuals in society more generally. In this article, the authors examine perceived marginalization of religious and nonreligious college students on and off a college campus in the southeastern United States. The authors find that there is not a significant difference in perceived experiences of marginalization on the college campus, and nonreligious students report significantly more perceived experiences of marginalization off the campus. The forms of marginalization on and off campus are generally that of *microaggressions*, such as insults, jokes, and exclusion. The authors conclude by discussing some of the implications of their findings for colleges and universities.

An emerging line of research reveals prejudice and discrimination directed at the nonreligious in contemporary American society (Cragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer, & Nielsen, 2012; Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, 2006; Hammer, Cragun, & Hwang, 2013). Implications from these studies include that nonreligious people often face prejudice and harassment in similar forms and degrees to those of other minority groups (Hammer, Cragun, Hwang, & Smith, 2012) while experiencing institutional discrimination within occupational and legal domains

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(Wallace, Wright, & Hyde, 2014). Although recent years have seen a rise in research looking at the perceived campus climate for nonreligious individuals (Rockenbach, Mayhew, & Bowman, 2015) and a growing body of research examining the factors that contribute to greater acceptance of religious and spiritual diversity on college and university campuses (Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin, Crandall, & Selznick, 2015), there is very little research exploring experiences of marginalization of nonreligious people in educational settings. The limited research on the marginalization of nonreligious people in educational settings raises questions about whether nonreligious people experience marginalization within educational contexts and what forms such marginalization could take.

Alongside questions of nonreligious marginalization, some research suggests certain religious people—especially those within minority and/or fundamentalist religions—may experience some forms of marginalization in varied contexts (Edgell et al., 2006; Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin et al., 2015). In some cases, such research suggests that colleges and universities may expose religious adherents to such marginalization (Hyers & Hyers, 2008). However, case studies find active religious groups on some campuses (Wilkins, 2008), and powerful conservative movements with pro-religious leanings active on even elite college campuses (Binder & Wood, 2014). These mixed findings, of course, raise questions about the nature of marginalization religious students may also experience within educational contexts.

Additionally, this article responds to calls for additional research on the experiences of nonreligious students on college and university campuses. Rockenbach, Mayhew, and Bowman (2015), in their exploration of the perceived campus climate for atheists, concluded that, “Future research aimed at disentangling nonreligious perspectives, experiences, and narratives would not only be instructive for higher education scholars and practitioners but would also disrupt assumptions that nonreligious identities are homogenous” (Rockenbach, Mayhew, & Bowman, 2015, p. 185). Prior research has also specifically called for more qualitative research detailing the experiences of nonreligious and minority college students: “Many of these questions call for qualitative approaches to complement and enrich the findings of a growing body of quantitative research” (Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin et al., 2015, p. 53). Our study addresses both of these calls for additional research.

We examine experiences of perceived marginalization through quantitative and qualitative responses from nonreligious and religious students at a southeastern university. Specifically, we explore the ways they experience marginalization as well as the ways such experience varies on and off campus. In so doing, our analyses reveal some ways (non)religious status or identification may influence educational experience. In conclusion, we suggest some ways attention to nonreligious and religious experiences in varied educational contexts may advance existing studies of college and university educational experiences.

## **Religious and Nonreligious Educational Experience**

Although American educational systems have a long history of religious sponsorship, content, and effects, sociological analyses of such systems rarely focus on the experiences of religious or nonreligious students (however, see Park & Bowman, 2014; Rockenbach et al., 2014). Rather, such scholarship typically focuses on comparisons between religious and nonreligious schools and school systems (Hallinan & Kubitschek, 2012), conflicts between religious beliefs and scientific teachings (Scheitle, 2011), or the ways nonreligious or religious educational contexts influence the formation of different types of schools (Renzulli, 2005). While these lines of inquiry suggest religion or the lack thereof may play a role in educational experience, we know far less about how such dynamics play out in concrete educational contexts.

Recent analyses concerning the experience of religion and conservatism on college campuses, however, provide a useful foundation for understanding religion and nonreligion within and between

educational settings. In her analysis of a college Christian subculture, for example, Wilkins (2008) found that students often received ample campus resources for developing and signifying religious selves, organizations, and community efforts, though other research illustrates that more could be done on this front (Rockenbach et al., 2014; Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin et al. 2015). Likewise, Binder and Wood's (2014) extensive comparison of east and west coast college campuses revealed many ways religion becomes integrated into conservative political and educational movements on campus. In fact, their analysis suggested college campuses sometimes operate as training grounds for the next generation of religious and conservative activists.

On the other hand, researchers have suggested college campuses may be less than welcoming for religious students and ideas. Hyers and Hyers (2008), for example, studied self-reports of marginalization by religious college students, and found that such students often experienced hostility on college campuses. Similarly, Hodge (2007) found that self-identified Evangelical Christian social work students reported more negative experiences and perceived greater marginalization on campus than other students. These studies suggest that some religious students feel marginalized on college campuses.

Recent research offers a framework for understanding why such marginalization may take place. Building on the work of Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1999), Rockenbach, Mayhew, and Bowman (2015) detail a framework that suggests four key elements are important in understanding how religiosity and spirituality are manifested on college and university campuses: (a) the historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion at a college or university (i.e., some groups may have received preferential treatment), (b) the structural worldview diversity that exists at the college or university (i.e., how diverse is the college or university in terms of worldviews), (c) the psychological climate (i.e., whether there is a perception that diverse worldviews are accepted or not), and (d) the behavioral climate (i.e., what formal and informal interactions take place between individuals with varied worldviews). This framework would suggest that, in instances where individuals are experiencing marginalization as a result of their (non) religious or (non)spiritual worldview, which is a manifestation of a hostile behavioral climate, that the likely reason why such marginalization may occur is related to the other three factors that contribute to the environment of the university—historical legacies of inclusion/exclusion, limited structural worldview diversity, or a less than accepting psychological climate. Our focus in this article is on the behavioral climate. Specifically, we have two research questions in this article that are related to the behavioral climate component of this framework. First, how pervasive is experienced marginalization on college and university campuses, and is it more pervasive on college or university campuses than it is outside of the campus environment? Second, does perceived marginalization vary by the religious affiliation of students? The above framework and other literature offer some suggestions as to what we might find.

There are limited studies of nonreligious educational experience to date. Cragun and associates (2012), for example, found that nonreligious respondents experienced marginalization in educational settings in their wider analyses of nonreligious people's experiences within contemporary American institutions. However, their findings offer no information about the processes at the heart of these perceptions, or about the forms of marginalization themselves. Interviewing college students about the nonreligious, however, Harper (2007) found that respondents generally interpreted nonreligion in negative and derogatory terms. Rockenbach, Mayhew, and Bowman (2015) found that atheists were more likely to report a hostile campus climate for atheists than were Christians, but they did not report any actual experiences of marginalization in their study. Prior research, then, suggests marginalization of nonreligious students might be common in educational settings, but there is no clear indication of how common it is or what forms the perceived marginalization takes.

This lack of information is not surprising in a contemporary American social landscape, wherein nonreligion may be seen by many Americans as the ultimate form of deviance and a status that precludes one from truly “being” American (Edgell et al., 2006). Whether we look to states (seven at present) that have laws barring nonbelievers from holding office or polls showing half the population would not vote for a qualified nonreligious candidate (Jones, 2012), contemporary American citizenship is predicated upon and organized in relation to the assumption of religiosity (see also Barton, 2012; Sumerau, 2014). While scholars have only recently begun to examine the marginalization of nonreligion in America, early studies reveal systematic patterns of harassment, prejudice, and discrimination in interpersonal and institutional structures throughout the nation (Edgell et al., 2006; Hammer et al., 2012; Wallace et al., 2014). Although none of these studies focuses specifically on educational contexts, it would not be surprising to find similar patterns in such settings (Cragun et al., 2012).

There are, however, reasons to assume that these larger structural patterns might not be present in educational contexts. In relation to college campuses specifically, some research has shown that students often become more socially tolerant or accepting of varied viewpoints as part of their educational careers (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996). However, such studies find that changes are due primarily to university efforts (rather than individual student development) and that such changes are not uniform across college campuses since universities may equally facilitate intolerance and existing structural inequalities (Binder & Wood, 2014; Rockenbach et al., 2014). Stated simply, educational contexts—including but not limited to college campuses—may mirror or diverge from wider patterns within a given society in regard to religion and nonreligion precisely because there are intentional efforts on some campuses to address the key aspects outlined in the framework described above. The degree to which college and university campuses create accepting, pluralistic environments is highly dependent upon the efforts of the faculty and staff at those universities to foster pluralistic attitudes (Rockenbach et al., 2014; Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin et al. 2015).

In the interest of gaining a better understanding of perceived marginalization of both nonreligious and religious students, we examined responses from nonreligious and religious students concerning perceived marginalization on and off a southeastern college campus. We include qualitative responses in order to better illustrate the nature of these perceived instances of marginalization. Building on the insights from aforementioned studies, we propose two hypotheses. First, given the emphasis placed on tolerance and diversity in higher education and efforts to create religiously and spiritually pluralistic environments, we hypothesize that *there will be lower levels of perceived marginalization reported by both religious and nonreligious students on campus than off campus* [H1]. However, given prior research suggesting discrimination against religious students (Hyers & Hyers, 2008) and perceptions of favoritism toward atheists by Christians on college campuses (Rockenbach, Mayhew, & Bowman, 2015), we further hypothesize that: *religious students will report more perceived marginalization on campus than nonreligious students, and that nonreligious students will report more perceived marginalization off campus than religious students* [H2].

## Data and Methods

Data for this study derive from a 2009 survey of students at a southeastern, non-sectarian private university. The goal of the initial survey was to determine the effects of a new chapel and faith center not specific to any religion on the religious and spiritual perceptions of the student body (see Cragun, Henry, Mann, & Russell Krebs, 2014, for results of such analyses). The total number of full- and part-time students at the university was about 5,500 at the time of data collection. Given regional variations in religiosity in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2015), the context where the data were collected is worth noting. The southeastern United States is generally more religious than most of the rest of the United States (Karnes, McIntosh, Morris, & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2007;

Stump, 1984). However, the university in question is located in a large city in one of the 30 least religious metropolitan areas in the United States (Piacenza & Jones, 2015), which likely suggests that other, more religious areas of the United States may have higher rates of perceived marginalization experienced by nonreligious students.

With IRB approval, an alphabetical list of students was obtained and students were numbered 1–4 on the list in a repeating fashion. Those assigned a “1” were invited to participate first, and so on. E-mail invitations were sent to students followed by a reminder about a week later. The target sample size was 400 respondents, and respondents who completed the survey were entered into a drawing for a gift card to facilitate participation. The survey was conducted online. Approximately 75% of students were e-mailed (3,357) over a month-and-a-half period in the spring of 2009. A total of 474 students completed the survey, but one of these was missing too much data so the final sample contains 473 respondents. The response rate was 14.5%.

Descriptive statistics for the respondents are provided in Table 1. These statistics closely match those provided by the university. About 70% of the student body identifies as female, and the four grades are almost equally represented. Most of the students are from the United States, and almost one third are from the state where the university is located. The social class and political identifications are reasonable reflections of other private universities. Only 6% of the population is Black, 9% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and another 9% are “other.” The rest of the population identifies as White (74.6%).

Part of Rockenbach, Mayhew, and Bowman’s (2015) framework includes measuring the structural worldview diversity, or how diverse the campus climate is in terms of worldviews (Item b in their framework). To capture this structural worldview diversity, we asked participants, “What is your religion, if any?” The student body was composed of 31.7% Catholic, 4.4% Jewish, 30.4% nonreligious, 25.4% Protestant identified students, and 5.3% other religions (e.g., Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, etc.). Nonreligious students in the sample were those who chose “None” when asked, “What is your religion, if any?” If they chose one of the other options (excluding “Don’t Know”), they were categorized as religious. Collectively, the religious students made up 66.8% ( $n = 316$ ) of the sample; the nonreligious students were 30.4% ( $n = 144$ ) of the sample; students who did not report any religious affiliation (i.e., “missing”) were 2.8% ( $n = 13$ ) of the sample and were not included in either the “religious” or “nonreligious” columns in Table 1 but are included in the Total Sample column.

The majority of the survey questions measured the effect of the chapel on students, but the results reported in this article are from several questions designed to measure students’ experiences with nonreligious/religious marginalization on and off campus. As suggested by Rockenbach, Mayhew, and Bowman (2015), we sought to capture the behavioral environment the students experienced as part of the overall focus on the chapel (item “d” from their framework). In so doing, we collected responses to questions about the ways religious and nonreligious students made sense of and experienced their current collegiate environment and the behaviors of others within it.

The primary questions exploring religious/nonreligious marginalization were “Have you ever experienced discrimination at the university because of your (lack of a) religious affiliation” and “Have you ever experienced discrimination anywhere else (outside of the campus) because of your (lack of a) religious affiliation?” Respondents could choose “Yes,” “No,” or “Don’t Know.” If the respondents answered yes, they were asked a follow up question, “If so, please describe what happened during the worst experience.” Respondents were then presented a large text box to describe the incident. Finally, each group (nonreligious and religious) were asked, “Now thinking about all aspects of your life (both on and off campus), how often have you experienced discrimination?” Response options included most days, about once a week, 2–3 times a month, about once a month, every few months, one or two times a year, or less than once a year.

We used Chi-Square, independent sample means tests, and single sample proportions tests to examine and present the quantitative data from our survey. In terms of qualitative data analysis and presentation, we utilized

Table 1

**Characteristics of Sample Divided by Religious Identification**

	Total sample	Religious	Nonreligious	Sig. diff.
<i>n</i> *	473	316	144	
Demographic characteristics				
% married	3.7	3.5	4.2	n.s.
% single, not dating	51.5	50.3	54.2	
% dating exclusively	30.6	32.6	26.4	
% cohabiting	10.2	9.2	12.5	
% freshmen	22.6	24.9	17.7	n.s.
% sophomores	24.2	23.9	24.8	
% juniors	29.8	29.2	31.2	
% seniors	23.3	21.9	26.2	
% White	74.6	70.5	83.7	$p < 0.05$
% male	29.5	26.2	38.8	$p < 0.05$
% homosexual	4.2	4.5	3.5	n.s.
% bisexual	3.3	2.3	5.6	
% middle class	71.7	69.8	75.7	n.s.
% Democrat	33.8	31.3	38.5	$p < 0.05$
% Republican	22.7	28.2	12.3	
% from U.S.	88.0	85.4	93.7	$p < 0.05$
% live on campus	65.7	67.5	61.7	n.s.
Average age	21.3	21.3	21.4	n.s.
Average GPA	3.3	3.3	3.3	n.s.
Religious characteristics				
% never attend	24.2	7.8	59.4	$p < 0.001$
% regularly attend (> 1/month)	27.1	38.9	13.9	
% believe in afterlife	63.6	78.4	31.3	$p < 0.001$
% believe Bible is literal	7.7	11.3	0.0	$p < 0.001$
% atheist	8.4	2.9	20.6	$p < 0.001$
% theist	54.2	58.8	39.4	
How religious, 1–10; average	4.1	5.3	1.7	$p < 0.001$
How spiritual, 1–10; average	5.8	6.4	4.4	$p < 0.001$
Discrimination				
% experienced on campus	7.3	8.2	5.8	n.s.
% experienced off campus	19.7	14.3	32.6	$p < .001$

\* 13 respondents reported their religion as “don’t know” or chose not to respond to this question.

^ For nominal and ordinal variables, Chi-Square was used. For interval and ratio variables, independent samples t-tests were used. For the discrimination question, single sample proportions tests were used.

Note: The percentages for the nominal and ordinal variables do not always add up to 100%. Some categories were left out of the table to save space.

elements of “constant comparative” methods (Berg & Lune, 2011) to explore thematic similarities and differences in our participants’ descriptions of experienced marginalization. Specifically, we collected the total responses wherein participants described their experiences and then compared and contrasted these experiences for thematic patterns in the overall collection of observations. In so doing, we sorted the observed experiences into categories to capture shared aspects of experience encountered by our respondents as well as variations between respondents with different religious identifications (Berg & Lune, 2011). In the analysis below, we organized these responses in terms of both thematic quality and varied (non)religious experience and background.

In so doing, our analysis speaks to Rockenbach, Mayhew, and Morin, et al.’s (2015) framework by outlining the ways students experienced the environment and behavioral climate of their university in relation to religious and nonreligious selfhood. As suggested by other scholars (see Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin et al., 2015), our analysis adds qualitative experience to quantitative measurements of perceived marginalization. Specifically, we outlined a set of *microaggressions* or interpersonal experiences of marginalization students faced within this specific climate. Our analysis may provide foundational qualitative observations of the experience of marginalization that may be explored in other cases, contexts, and educational settings.

## Results

Before focusing on nonreligious and religious experiences of marginalization on and off campus, there are some significant differences between these two populations worth noting (see Table 1). On most of the demographic variables, there are not significant differences between the religious and nonreligious, but nonreligious respondents were more likely to be male, White, and politically identified as Democrats, as other samples of nonreligious people have found (Kosmin, Keysar, Cragun, & Navarro-Rivera, 2009; Pew Forum on Religion, 2012). Further, religious respondents were more literal in their views of the Bible, more likely to believe in an afterlife or personal deity, more likely to attend religious services, and more likely, on average, to highly rate their spirituality. Since our goal was to outline varied experiences of the campus behavioral climate, such variation in social background allowed us to see how differently situated students experience the same environmental setting.

At the bottom of Table 1, the results from the marginalization questions are presented. To better visualize these results, Figure 1 contrasts the percentages reporting marginalization by religiosity and location. Overall, 7.3% of the respondents reported marginalization due to religion/nonreligion on campus, and 19.7% reported it off campus. However, the overall numbers mask key differences between religious and nonreligious respondents. On campus, 2.4% more religious students reported experiencing marginalization in comparison to nonreligious respondents. This difference, however, was not significant using a single sample proportions test ( $t = 1.05, p > 0.05$ ), indicating the difference observed was due to sampling error and not an actual difference in the population. Off campus, 18.3% more nonreligious students reported experiencing marginalization in comparison to religious respondents. This difference, in contrast to the previous one, is both large and statistically significant ( $t = 6.27, p < 0.001$ ).

Regarding frequency of marginalization, the majority of both groups reported never having experienced discrimination or prejudice due to their (non)religiosity (67.3% of the religious and 61.2% of the nonreligious). Among the religious, 24.1% reported discrimination occurring one or two times a year or less; a comparable number of the nonreligious expressed the same, 22.5%. Among the religious, only 8.6% reported experiencing marginalization every few months or more (1 person reported most days), whereas 7.5% of the nonreligious reported the same (again, 1 person reported most days).



Figure 1. Percent Experiencing Discrimination by Religiosity and Location.

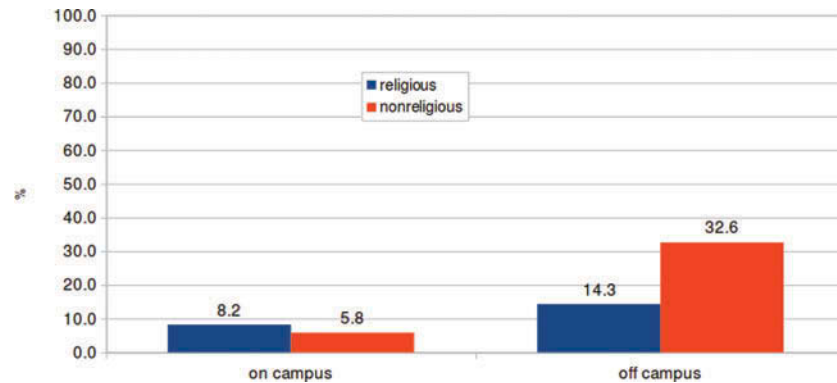


Table 2

**Microaggressions by Type, by Student Religiosity, and by Location**

Type of discrimination	Religious students		Nonreligious students	
	On campus	Off campus	On campus	Off campus
Exclusion	0	1	2	2
Insults, remarks, yelling	11	10	8	17
Jokes or laughing	5	3	0	2
Physical abuse	0	3	0	3
Total	16	17	10	24

What about the forms of marginalization experienced by nonreligious and religious college students? Echoing Rockenbach, Mayhew, and Bowman (2015), we sought to ascertain if the forms varied in different populations and contexts. We only asked those students who reported experiencing marginalization about the most extreme incident they experienced. Even so, examining these examples illustrates types of marginalization—primarily in the form of *microaggressions* (see Hardie & Tyson, 2013), or minor insults, ridicule and/or harassment predicated upon insider/outsider status—respondents faced. We identified 67 examples of such incidents of marginalization, which are categorized by type, location, and student religiosity in Table 2.

To make sense of these types, we transferred the responses to qualitative data analysis software, read through them several times, and sorted them into categories. In so doing, we sought to map the marginalization experiences of these students qualitatively in order to outline the ways behavioral norms in this campus climate result in varied experiences for people of different religious and nonreligious identifications (see also Rockenbach, Mayhew, and Bowman, 2015; Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin et al., 2015). What follows are examples of each distinct form of marginalization experienced in our data set organized by category, religiosity,

and location. In each case, we describe the category itself and provide an illustrative example of such marginalization reported by our respondents.

The first category concerned microaggressions directed at nonreligious people off campus. Similar to other studies revealing microaggressions targeted at communities marginalized throughout mainstream society (see McCabe, 2009), the most common form involved insulting nonreligious people for their lack of religion:

I just get the usual accusations of being amoral and threats of damnation and hellfire.

Alongside insults, nonreligious people also experienced physical abuse off campus:

A girl in my high school threw a Bible at the back of my head during class time.

Nonreligious respondents also reported being excluded from groups and events as a result of their lack of religiosity:

I have friends whose parents did not want them hanging out with me because I'm not religious.

Finally, nonreligious respondents described situations where they became the source of jokes and ridicule:

One time this guy in my class wrote something on my arm with marker and then asked me if it burned. I said no and then when I looked down it was a cross.

In all such cases, nonreligious people faced off campus consequences for not adhering to American proscriptions of assumed religiosity (Edgell et al., 2006). In such cases, others reminded them of their difference and devaluation through micro-interactional activities (see also McCabe, 2009).

The second primary category involved marginalization religious people faced off campus. Similar to nonreligious responses, the core of these experiences involved microaggressions that, while sometimes vague, positioned religiosity as a negative option in social life:

Many people judge my view and understanding of God.

Teased at work place and by peers.

We also noted patterns between different types of religion. In fact, the bulk of the religious respondents who experienced marginalization were not Protestants or Catholics—the religions granted the most privileged positions in American society (see, e.g., Barton, 2012; Edgell et al., 2006; Sumerau, 2014):

I was pushed, verbally assaulted [sic], and spit on during 9/11. (Muslim student) Some parents wouldn't allow their children to associate with me or my brother. (Jehovah's Witness student)

In such cases, some religious people experienced similar patterns of microaggression beyond the confines of campus.

The third category of responses involved the few examples of marginalization experienced by nonreligious respondents on campus. In such cases our respondents reported ridicule:

I had to listen to people scream and shout that I am stupid and wrong because of the fact that I do not believe in anything.

Such ridicule was typically coupled with experiences of exclusion:

I have been ostracized in front of a group of students during a class, picked out as the "heathenistic" one who would burn eternally.

Although less often, nonreligious people could anticipate similar marginalization tactics both on and off campus. Whether such efforts came from fellow students or other members of campus communities, they reveal marginalization such students may need to find ways to navigate in the course of their educational efforts.

Our final category captured experiences of marginalization by religious students on campus. In such cases respondents reported microaggressions (typically involving ridicule and insulting jokes) directed at them for being religious:

A friend of mine went off for two hours on how stupid religion is.

Similar to religious experiences off campus, however, many of these responses revealed bias against non-Christian religious people:

Laughed at and mocked for being Jewish.

Similar to their nonreligious counterparts, religious respondents may need to develop strategies for navigating marginalization in relation to the pursuit of educational goals.

As Rockenbach, Mayhew, and Bowman (2015) suggested, the context of interactions matters when we seek to understand the marginalization of religious or nonreligious people on and off college campuses. Whereas university settings may reveal variations in treatment tied to the behavioral expectations of the environments, students will also have to manage the behavioral climate outside the campus itself. In so doing, our results suggest both religious and nonreligious students may need to develop strategies for managing various types of marginalization throughout their social and educational college experiences as they navigate varied contexts of activity on and off campus.

## Discussion

Utilizing responses from college students at a non-sectarian private university in the southeastern United States, we explored perceptions of marginalization among religious and nonreligious students. Our focus was on the behavioral climate on college and university campuses. Our first hypothesis found support wherein there were fewer reported incidences of marginalization on campus than off for both religious and nonreligious students. Based on the framework outlined by Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin et al. (2015), this lower level of marginalization would seem to suggest that the three other dimensions that contribute to a pluralistic environment on college campuses—historical legacy of inclusion/exclusion, structural worldview diversity, and psychological climate—are all likely more pluralistic in their orientation on the college campus than is the case outside the university. In other words, while there may have been a historical legacy of exclusion at this university (there was never a formal one, but likely there was an informal one), recent efforts by the faculty and staff seem to be reducing the effects of that legacy to allow for greater acceptance of minority worldviews than is the case outside the university. Likewise, the lower levels of perceived marginalization on the campus would seem to suggest that there is greater structural worldview diversity on the campus than off, though to what extent that structural worldview diversity translates into productive contact is unclear in this study (Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin et al., 2015). Finally, the lower levels of perceived marginalization also seem to suggest that the psychological climate is more pluralistic on this college campus than it is outside the campus. While it is premature to suggest that our results can be generalized to other college campuses, our findings do suggest that intentional efforts at fostering worldview diversity on college campuses, which are underway at this university (see Krebs, 2015), may facilitate greater tolerance for both religion and nonreligion. However, our results could be deeply tied to the

religious or lack of religious sponsorship and influence on a given campus (see, e.g., Binder & Wood, 2014; McNamara Barry, Nelson, Davarya, & Urry, 2010; Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin et al., 2015). While a non-sectarian college may facilitate tolerance, some sectarian schools have been shown to accomplish the opposite (McNamara Barry et al., 2010). This finding suggests more attention should be directed at the context of college students' experiences on varied campuses (see also Binder & Wood, 2014), which has been suggested by other scholars as well (see Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin et al., 2015).

Our second hypothesis found partial support. There was not a statistically significant difference in perceived marginalization on campus, but a much larger (and statistically significant) number of nonreligious people experienced more marginalization off campus. This finding suggests that intentional efforts like those outlined by Rockenbach, Mayhew, and Bowman (2015; Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin et al., 2015) may result in making college campuses mostly safe for religious students (see also Binder & Wood, 2014), and important sanctuaries for the nonreligious (Cragun et al., 2012). These findings also suggest caution in extrapolating previous findings in specific contexts to larger populations. When it comes to (non)religion on campus, the importance of context—as noted in studies of conservatism on campus (Binder & Wood, 2014)—will likely make sweeping generalizations impractical.

In some ways, our findings serve as a commendation for educators and administrators at colleges and universities because they indicate that, at least in this specific case, the university campus is a safer place for both religious and nonreligious individuals than is the surrounding environment. Even so, both religious (particularly minority religions) and nonreligious individuals reported some perceived marginalization on the campus, which suggests more work can be done to address these issues.

There are several ways we can see these findings translating into recommendations for faculty, administrators, and policy makers. For instance, our finding that students are more likely to experience marginalization due to their religious/nonreligious worldview off campus could serve as the basis for specific events or programs in which students are invited to discuss their perceived marginalization and the microaggressions they have experienced in a safe and supportive environment on campus. Such a forum could take place in the context of an interfaith dialog or retreat or could even be turned into an educational video that could be shared on the campus television network or at an event. Not only could this help those who experienced these marginalizations and microaggressions work through these experiences in a safe environment, but using the marginalization experiences of students off campus to educate and inform students on campus would likely help create a safer psychological climate and foster more pluralistic and accepting attitudes among students on campus. This approach would utilize failures in one aspect of Rockenbach et al.'s framework—the behavioral climate—even if they occurred off the campus, to inform other aspects of the framework, potentially leading to improvements in the overall campus environment. Highlighting and discussing such microaggressions, whether they occur on or off campus, could lead to greater awareness of structural worldview diversity and a safer, more affirming psychological climate.

While our analyses extend earlier studies examining psychological climates for atheists (Rockenbach, Mayhew, & Bowman, 2015) and other groups (Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin, et al., 2015), there are important limitations to consider when planning further research in this area. First, we did not collect the (non)religious affiliation of faculty and staff, and thus we are unable to pinpoint what (if any) role such factors may play in nonreligious and religious college experiences. Although scholars have repeatedly demonstrated that studies should focus on the experience of marginalization instead of being distracted by individual dynamics like who does what to whom (McCabe, 2009), it might be useful to find ways to incorporate faculty, staff, and student experiences of marginalization on and off college campuses.

A second limitation for consideration in future analyses concerns the types of marginalization reported by our respondents. Since most of their reports echo patterns of interactional microaggressions noted within and beyond educational settings (see Hardie & Tyson, 2013), fully excavating the operation of these practices, their meanings in specific situations, and the effects they have on religious and nonreligious students may require more in-depth qualitative data concerning religious and nonreligious educational experience. As has been shown in relation to racial, classed, gendered, and sexual microaggression studies, the methods of and reasons for such actions are often nuanced and situated in relation to institutional and interactional hierarchies (McCabe, 2009). It may be useful for future studies to gather—either in isolation from or in collaboration with quantitative efforts—more in-depth information about these experiences in concrete settings and situations over the course of time.

Finally, like many early analyses into newly emerging fields of study, our analysis relies on a specific set of contextual, institutional, and identification factors that limit generalizability in analytic or substantive terms. As a result, our findings reveal both marginalization in terms of religious and nonreligious educational experience and variation in such experiences between populations and contexts. While these findings suggest avenues for systematic study of nonreligious and religious educational experience, capitalizing on these suggestions will require marshalling larger data sets and/or a collection of cases over time to systematically explore nonreligious and religious variations in a wide variety of educational contexts, structural settings, and organizational forms. Having demonstrated the existence of such variation, we seek to facilitate this potential avenue for future studies of educational experience and contexts.

## Conclusion

In this article, we provide a comparative analysis of nonreligious and religious educational experiences related to marginalization. We focused on perceived marginalization among these populations on and off campus. We found higher percentages of marginalization off campus reported by both groups, though especially for the nonreligious. On campus, however, there was not a significant difference between the frequency of marginalization between the two groups. Further, we explored the type of marginalization reported by nonreligious and religious people, which included various types of microaggressions previously noted in relation to other hierarchical relations embedded within contemporary American society.

Our findings support the emerging recognition of prejudice and discrimination directed at and faced by nonreligious people in American society. Further, our findings reveal similarities and nuances in the educational experiences of religious and nonreligious students. Finally, our findings reveal that colleges may provide a refuge from both religious and nonreligious marginalization in some cases. The combination of these findings suggests systematic examinations of variation in religious and nonreligious educational experiences may provide a fruitful avenue for future educational research and theorizing.

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