A THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT
OF IDENTITY THEORY: THE EMERGENCE
OF CONTEXT SPECIFIC SALIENCE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Research on self and identity has a long history within sociology. William James (1890), referencing the self, suggested that each individual has as many selves as there are others to perceive them. Each interaction partner creates a separate “self” within the individual. George Herbert Mead (1934) understood this process through role-taking. Individuals take on the role of the other in interaction in order to examine the self as an object of itself. The process of role-taking allows for individuals to develop shared meaning and creates roles for each individual within a specific interaction. Structural symbolic interactionism (Stryker 1980), developed based on Mead’s (1934) work, argues that individuals can internalize these roles (particularly, the meanings and expectations associated with them) and refers to these internalizations as role-identities. Additionally, structural symbolic interactionism, and particularly identity theory, offers explanations of how these identities are organized within an individual’s self.

The main concept that identity theory posits as the organizing structure of the self is the identity salience hierarchy (Stryker 1968). The salience of any given identity is defined as the likelihood that the identity will be enacted across situations (Stryker 1968). Each identity an individual claims has a specific level of salience, and when examined as a whole, these identities fall into a hierarchy with those most likely to be enacted located at the top. A second organizing structure has also been discussed within identity theory, the identity prominence hierarchy (McCall and Simmons 1966). Prominence represents the location of an identity within an
individual’s self-concept, and is often defined as the importance of an identity to the individual (Stets and Serpe 2013). While salience has been the main focus of much work in identity theory (Stryker 1968; Stryker and Serpe 1982; Stryker and Serpe 1983; Serpe 1987; Serpe and Stryker 1987), more recent research has begun to examine both prominence and salience, as well as the relationship between these two concepts (Nuttbrock and Freudinger 1991; Stryker and Serpe 1994; Brenner 2011; 2012; Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker 2014). Theoretically, it is expected that the prominence of an identity is predictive of its salience (Nuttbrock and Freudinger 1991; Brenner 2011; 2012). This causal ordering, however, has only been empirically supported within one dataset specific to the scientist identity (Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker 2014). The current research project seeks to examine the relationship between prominence and salience for those individuals claiming the counter-normative identity of non-religious.

Counter-normative identities, or those that are negatively evaluated in society, have had virtually no exploration within identity theory (Stets and Serpe 2013; Long 2016). These types of identities, however, present potential problems for some of the relationships proposed in the theory. In particular, given that the stigma management technique of passing has been of interest since Goffman (1963) originally proposed it, these negatively evaluated identities may likely be low in salience in order to avoid negative evaluation in interaction. The current literature suggests that prominence and salience are positively related (Nuttbrock and Freudinger 1991; Brenner 2011; 2012; Brenner et al. 2014). Thus, according to this hypothesis, counter-normative identities, that are low in salience, should also be low in prominence. These types of identities, particularly when an individual voluntarily claims them, however, may be highly defining to an individual’s self-concept and, thus, high in prominence. They are simply low in salience because of the perceived need to avoid the negative reaction of others in interaction.
This dissertation seeks to examine the nature of salience within the religious identity and specifically the counter-normative identity of the non-religious. This identity was chosen because of the strong negative evaluation associated with it in American society (i.e. Edgell, Gerteis and Hartmann 2006), and previous research regarding the stigma management techniques employed by this group (i.e. Smith 2013; Long, Yarrison, and Rowland 2015). Thus, this dissertation seeks to examine the salience of the non-religious identity in three ways. First, the direct relationship between prominence and salience will be examined for both religious and non-religious individuals. Given the negative evaluation of the non-religious, it is expected that the relationship between prominence and salience will be weaker for the non-religious. Individuals who claim a negatively evaluated identity may avoid enacting that identity in interaction with others, regardless of the level of prominence of the identity within their self-concept.

Second, the impact that proximate social structure, or the structure within which an individual enacts their identity, has on the relationship between prominence and salience for the religious and non-religious will be explored. It is expected that the more an individual’s proximate social structure includes individuals similar to them in terms of religion and non-religion, the stronger the relationship will be between prominence and salience. Finding oneself in a situation with others who share a negatively evaluated identity will influence how often individuals are willing to enact that identity.

Third, given the discreditable, or hidden (Goffman 1963), nature of religious beliefs, the likelihood that an individual will behave consistent with their identity when interacting with either a religious or non-religious individual will be explored. This will be examined using a new measure of identity salience that seeks to incorporate the context of the interaction into the measurement of identity salience. In the past, salience has been measured as a general
component of the make-up of an individual’s self-concept (Stryker 1968; Stryker and Serpe 1982; Stryker and Serpe 1983; Serpe 1987; Serpe and Stryker 1987). The situations we find ourselves in during everyday interaction, however, contain specific contextual information that may influence which identities an individual is willing or perceives as able to enact (McCall and Simmons 1966).

Chapter two of this dissertation continues with a review of the literature surrounding the organization of self, with a particular focus on prominence and salience. This is followed by a discussion of non-religion as a counter-normative identity and the potential impact that holding a negatively evaluated identity may have on the relationship between prominence and salience. Chapter two concludes with specific hypotheses to be examined. Chapter three discusses the data and methods including the specific measures employed in the analyses. The hypotheses are examined using data from a nationally representative, probability-based web panel of U.S. adults and groups structural equation modelling (SEM). In Chapter four, the results of these analyses are presented. Finally, Chapter five includes a discussion of these results as well as an exploration of the impact of this study on research in self and identity and avenues for future research.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Organization of Self

Early work regarding the self recognized that individuals have multiple selves based on their interactions with others. James (1890: 291) proclaimed that an individual’s self is “the sum total of all that [they] can call [theirs].” He argued that the self is comprised of multiple components: the material self, the social self, the bodily self, and the spiritual self. James was the first to suggest that the self is hierarchically organized, with the spiritual at the top, the bodily at the bottom, and the various material and social somewhere in the middle. The tradition of examining the self continued with Cooley (1964 [1902]), who argued for the conception of the “looking-glass self.” This conception suggests that an individual’s self is influenced by a process of imagining how others will perceive them, how these perceptions will be judged by others, and how those judgments will impact the individual. For Cooley, this reflexive process is at the heart of the creation and maintenance of the self.

This conceptualization was refined by George Herbert Mead (1934), who, like Cooley, recognized that the self is influenced through taking the role of the other, or “role-taking.” Mead extended this from specific interactions with “others” to the “generalized other,” which includes the shared meanings and expectations of society at large. The inclusion of the generalized other extends the process of role-taking beyond specific others and shows how general societal norms can impact the self. In addition, Mead (1934), borrowing the concepts from James (1890), argued
that there are two major components to the self: the “I” and “Me.” The “I”, on the one hand, represents the component of self that is active, creative, and impulsive. The “Me,” on the other hand, represents the component of the self which is aware of the actions the individual has taken and can evaluate them with reference to the self. This interplay between the “I” and “Me” allows for the self to be taken as an object to itself. While this conception is an attempt to explain the organization of the self, it offers little apart from splitting the self into two components. The major contributions of Mead to the organization of the self are the incorporation of an individual’s ability to take the self as an object and the incorporation of societal norms and expectations through role-taking of the generalized other.

Mead’s ideas represent the major underpinnings of the symbolic interactionist tradition (Serpe and Stryker 2011; McCall 2013; Stets and Serpe 2013;). The term symbolic interactionism (henceforth “SI”) was coined by Herbert Blumer. While Blumer is important to an understanding of SI, his traditional version does not focus on the organization of the self. This is because Blumer (1969) argues that all interaction is emergent. In other words, the process of interaction is a constant creation of meaning and definition. Individuals, according to Blumer, do not enter interactions influenced by forces outside of that specific interaction. Thus, the only organization of self that exists for Blumer (1969) is that which develops in one specific interaction, and does not carry over to other interactions. This conception is problematic from the perspective of attempting to understand how the self is organized, and eliminates the ability to make predictions about patterned social action. Based on his beliefs about interaction, Blumer was stalwartly against the use of “traditional” social science approaches and suggested that specific theory and predictions had no place in social psychology (McCall 2013).
In staunch opposition to the approach of Blumer, Manford Kuhn adopted the method of “conventional science” (McCall 2013). Unlike Blumer, Kuhn (1964) argued that social structure does exist beyond specific interactions, and that this structure has the potential to constrain interactions. In addition to his inclusion of structure, Kuhn continued the discussion of the self as object put forth by Mead (1934). For Kuhn, the self represents a plan of action, and is the most important object in an interaction. The understanding of an individual’s self provides the best possible prediction of subsequent behavior (Kuhn and McPartland 1954). The self, then, is “organized and directed” by an “individual’s attitudes toward himself” and the measurement of the self represents a major addition to social psychological research (Kuhn and McPartland 1954:68; emphasis in original).

To this end, Kuhn and his students developed what has become a relatively well-known measure of the self: the Twenty Statements Test (Kuhn and McPartland 1954). This test comprised of simply asking respondents to write down twenty statements that come to mind in response to the question “Who am I?” The respondents were then given a sheet with twenty numbered blanks and told to answer “fairly fast, for time is limited” (Kuhn and McPartland 1954: 69). Responses dichotomized into what were termed consensual and subconsensual references (Kuhn and McPartland 1954). In general, using contemporary terminology, respondents’ first answers were most likely to be specific roles (i.e. student, husband/wife, Protestant) and they exhausted all of these references before moving to the subconsensual (i.e. happy, too heavy, interesting, etc.) (Kuhn and McPartland 1954). In general, Kuhn argued, the fact that individuals’ responses consistently follow this pattern gives credence to the idea that the self is, indeed, organized in a specific way. In fact, in a footnote, Kuhn and McPartland (1954:72) argue that the order of responses likely represents the “salience of self-attitudes,” and
that knowing an individual’s specific ordering of their roles provides much more by way of understanding their attitudes than simply knowing that they hold those roles.

“It seems reasonable to assume that a very salient attitude…has more importance for the person expressing it than does an attitude which [they express] only after a good deal of prodding or questioning” (Kuhn and McPartland 1954:72).

While Kuhn and McPartland (1954) imply a specific organization of the self, it is not explicitly examined in their work. Kuhn’s findings from the Twenty Statements Test, however, laid the groundwork for specific examinations of the organization of the self and challenged the conception of the self as emergent proposed by Blumer.

Kuhn’s work represents the precursor to what has become Structural Symbolic Interactionism (Stryker 1980). This “flavor” (McCall 2013:16) of symbolic interactionism, championed by Burke (1991), McCall (McCall and Simmons 1966), and Stryker (1980), follows the general principle that self and interaction impact society, while, at the same time, society or social structure impacts individuals’ selves and interactions. This implies that individuals’ experiences are not random, but socially patterned; these patterns, then, imply that individuals will be more likely to interact with certain kinds of people; and, thus, will be more likely to develop certain types of “selves” (McCall and Simmons 1966).

Two main theoretical approaches to the organization of the self develop out of the structural symbolic interactionist framework: the prominence and salience hierarchy of McCall, and the salience hierarchy of Stryker. Both are similar in that, based on the work of Kuhn, they propose a hierarchical approach to the organization of the self. In addition, while the approaches differ for reasons explicated below, they are considered to be two components within Identity Theory (Stets and Serpe 2013). Consistent with previous work, identity theory recognizes that
individuals maintain multiple selves (Stets and Serpe 2013). These selves are referred to as identities and can have one of three bases: role-identities, which are based on specific roles within society that have shared expectations and meanings; group-identities, which are based on group affiliation and the shared meanings and expectations associated with that group; and person identities, which are sets of meanings that define an individual (Burke and Stets 2009).

Stryker, in his original formulation of identity theory, argues that identities are organized into a salience hierarchy (Stryker 1968). In this case, salience refers to the likelihood of each identity being enacted across situations (Stryker 1968). Thus, an identity that is high in the salience hierarchy is more likely to be enacted than one that is low. In Stryker’s model, salience is predicted by levels of commitment (i.e. Serpe and Stryker 1987). Commitment to a specific identity can be in one of two forms: interactional commitment and affective commitment. Interactional commitment represents the number of social ties an individual has because they claim a specific identity as well as the number of interactions they have with these ties, and affective commitment represents the intensity of these relations (Stryker 1968). Theoretically, interactional commitment captures the social structural constraints influencing which identities an individual is able to claim. It is through this process that the salience hierarchy is formed; impacted by placement in the social structure, interaction with others, and some level of human agency (Stryker 1968). It is the salience hierarchy that organizes the self, and allows for specific predictions about behavior. Stryker (1968, 1980) asks the question: What makes one father go golfing with his friends on Saturday and another play with his children? The response provided by this approach is that whichever identity is higher in the salience hierarchy, friend or father, is more likely to be enacted on any given Saturday.
Developed at approximately the same time, McCall and Simmons (1966) present a similar conception of the organization of self. McCall and Simmons (1966) discuss a salience hierarchy as well, but with a slightly different definition. In addition to the salience hierarchy, however, McCall and Simmons (1966) present a prominence hierarchy. In this conception, referred to as the interactional perspective within identity theory (Stets and Serpe 2013), salience is more situationally specific. As implied by the name, the interactional perspective relies more heavily on perspectives on interaction, particularly the definition of the situation (Goffman 1959). The salience hierarchy in this perspective represents the ordering of identities within a specific definition of the situation. As individuals enter interaction, they negotiate the definition of the situation, and once established, the individual will understand the interaction as calling upon certain identities more than others (McCall and Simmons 1966). The order that these identities are perceived to be appropriate and useful for a given interaction represents the salience hierarchy. The salience of any given identity, unlike for Stryker, is not set and stable; it varies based on the interactions an individual finds themselves in.

The more stable organization of self from the interactional perspective is represented by the prominence hierarchy. In the simplest terms, the prominence hierarchy represents the “ideal self” (McCall and Simmons 1966). In other words, the prominence of a given identity is based on the desires and values of the individual. It represents the hierarchy of identities based on how an individual wishes to be perceived by others (Stets and Serpe 2013).

The prominent theoretical approaches to the organization of self within identity theory, salience (in Stryker’s terms) and prominence (in McCall’s) represent the focus of the remainder of this review. First, the concept of prominence is examined in depth. As a relatively new
addition to the structural identity model, prominence has had limited empirical investigation in the literature.

Identity Centrality/Prominence

While the concept of identity prominence (McCall and Simmons 1966) has existed since identity theory’s conception (Stryker 1968), the focus of research in identity theory has been on the structural and perceptual control research programs (Stets and Serpe 2013). There are numerous studies examining how salience predicts individual behavior, and what other concepts impact the salience of specific identities (Stryker 1968; Stryker and Serpe 1982; Stryker and Serpe 1983; Serpe 1987; Serpe and Stryker 1987; Serpe 1991). Despite this fact, recent work has begun to incorporate prominence as a component of the identity theory model (Nuttbrock and Freudinger 1991; Stryker and Serpe 1994; Brenner 2011; 2012; Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker 2014).

Prominence has a history within social psychological research more broadly, appearing throughout the literature under different names. Some researchers have referred to “psychological centrality” or simply “centrality” (Rosenberg 1979; Stryker and Serpe 1994), and others have simply termed it “importance” (Ervin and Stryker 2001). As with many concepts in social psychological research, each of these references has slightly different meanings, but the current usage of prominence by identity theory scholars is an attempt to incorporate all components (Brenner et al. 2014). Thus, the prominence of a given identity represents the subjective importance it holds for an individual, the value or worth given to that identity, and the location of the identity within an individual’s self-concept (Stryker and Serpe 1994; Burke and Stets 2009; Stets and Serpe 2013; Brenner et al. 2014).
In most empirical work, prominence has been incorporated into the identity model at the same level of salience; both prominence and salience are predictive of specific behavior. The more important and valued an identity is, the more an individual will behave consistently with that identity. Also, prominence is predicted by affective and interactional commitment (Stryker and Serpe 1994). Lastly, while prominence and salience are similar concepts, they are theoretically distinct from one another; prominence requires some level of conscious awareness of one’s self-concept, while salience represents only their behavior with respect to enacting an identity (Stryker and Serpe 1994; Brenner et al. 2014).

The Relationship between Prominence and Salience

The main theoretical difference between prominence and salience is with respect to the conscious awareness of each concept to the individual. Salience, defined as the likelihood of enacting an identity across a number of situations, does not imply that an individual must be aware of the ordering of identities. Prominence, on the other hand, defined as the importance and value given to a specific identity, implies that individuals must be conscious of the identity and process how important it is to them (Stryker and Serpe 1994; Brenner et al. 2014). As both prominence and salience represent theoretical methods for the organization of self, there has been some discussion of their roles within an identity theory model. Stryker and Serpe (1994) attempt to address the issue of which concept is more appropriate for predicting behavior. The findings led the authors to argue that both prominence and salience are of value, and that both should be included in subsequent research (Stryker and Serpe 1994). Other work has suggested that prominence and salience should be related to one another, and specifically that prominence likely is a predictor of salience (Nuttbrock and Freudinger 1991; Brenner 2011; 2012). The main argument here is that if an identity is not prominent to an individual (as in not highly valued and
unimportant), it is also unlikely to be called upon in interaction, and thus, be low in salience. Recently, using a longitudinal dataset, Brenner et al. (2014) tested the hypothesized direct effect of prominence on salience. Results support this hypothesis and show that prominence is a predictor of salience over time. These findings move the placement of prominence in an identity model to preceding salience.

The Problem

One of the major limitations of current work in identity theory is the focus on normative, positively evaluated identities (Stets and Serpe 2013). Given the emphasis on the salience of identities, this is potentially problematic. The positive valence associated with these normative identities makes them acceptable, and often even expected, in interactions with others. Not all identities, however, follow the norms and expectations of society, and those that do not are often stigmatized. The understanding that some stigmatizing identities are discredited, or immediately noticeable (such as physical handicaps), while others are discreditable, or identities that must be revealed (Goffman 1963), is of import here. It is these discreditable identities which present a potential problem for the identity model as it exists. It is entirely possible that an individual may hold a discreditable identity, and avoid bringing it up in interaction based on the negative evaluation they expect to receive from others (Long, Yarrison, Rowland 2015). Thus, by definition, that identity will be low in the salience hierarchy for that individual. That does not necessitate, however, that the identity also be low in prominence. Individuals who claim negatively evaluated identities within major components of everyday life (i.e. non-religion or childfree), often have made an explicit decision to avoid the normative identity expected of them, and likely experience this choice as highly defining to their self (Scott 2009, Blackstone and Stewart 2012, Smith 2013).
In addition to not investigating negatively evaluated identities, identity theory as it currently exists contains three major area of focus: the structural, the perceptual control, and the interactional research programs. While these three combined represent identity theory as a whole, little research has been conducted that integrates these areas (Stets and Serpe 2013). This represents a second gap in the identity theory literature that including counter-normative identities can help to fill. In particular, this project seeks to begin to integrate components of the structural research program of Stryker and colleagues (Stryker 1980) and the interactional research program of McCall and Simmons (1966) to better understand how identities function in interaction.

**Counter-Normative Identities**

For this study, “Counter-Normative identities” refer simply to positions individuals may claim that differ from or oppose the shared meanings of holding a normative identity (Long 2016). Whether or not they are, in fact, stigmatized is an important question, but not one that will be addressed here. What is important to note is that any negatively evaluated, or counter-normative, identity can be stigmatized for some individuals, but not for others. The literature regarding negatively evaluated identities has focused on deviance and stigma and relied heavily on the work of Goffman (1963).

Goffman (1963) distinguishes two types of potentially stigmatizing information: discredited and discreditable. The former refers to information that cannot be hidden, and is obvious to others, while the latter refers to information that must be revealed in order to be known. From the perspective of identity theory, individuals can hold obvious (discredited, like race) and hidden (discreditable, like non-religion) counter-normative identities. In addition to this distinction, Goffman (1963) argues that individuals with discreditable identities can use the
stigma management technique of “passing” as “normal” to avoid revealing their stigmatizing information. While a number of other stigma management techniques exist – such as techniques of neutralization (Sykes and Matza 1957) or deviance avowal (Turner 1972) – the current study focuses on passing. Given that some identities can be discreditable, individuals who claim counter-normative identities that can be hidden in this way have the opportunity to “pass” in interactions with others to avoid negative evaluation. Indeed, research on negatively evaluated identities has found that this management technique is employed by gays and lesbians (i.e. Cain 1991; Kanuha 1999; Chrobot-Mason, Button, and DiClementi 2001; DeJordy 2008), individuals with HIV (i.e. Siegel, Lune, and Meyer 1998), topless dancers (Thompson and Harred 1992), transsexuals (Kando 2005), the voluntarily childless (Park 2002), and the non-religious (Long, et al. 2015).

This management technique directly translates to concepts within identity theory. If an individual is “passing” as normal, they are avoiding the activation and use of their counter-normative identity. In other words, the identity is not highly salient. This presents a problem for the identity process as it currently exists for normative identities. While the individual may pass in interactions, this does not imply that the identity is not prominent to them; simply that they are doing what they can to avoid negative feedback. Thus, it is possible for individuals who claim counter-normative identities, and “pass” in interaction to have low salience, but high prominence. This suggests that the positive relationship between prominence and salience in the identity model (Brenner 2011; 2012; Brenner et al. 2014) may be diminished for individuals who claim counter-normative identities. Indeed, Brenner et al. (2014) acknowledge that particular identities may show a non-significant relationship between these concepts.
Another possibility, as Goffman (1963) noted, is that these individuals may lead a “double life” in terms of their counter-normative identity. Goffman argues that the discreditable nature of certain stigmatizing information allows individuals choice in who they will reveal this information to and who they will not. One good example of this is the examination of the “coming out” process among gays, lesbians, and bisexuals (i.e. Coleman 1982). Individuals with a discreditable identity hold some level of control over when, where, and with whom, they will reveal that identity. Thus, it is possible, and perhaps even likely, that individuals with counter-normative identities will reveal them to some interaction partners, but not others. Importantly, the perceived traits of these interaction partners may play a key role in the decision of whether to “come out” with a counter-normative identity.

McCall and Simmons’ (1966) conception of salience is of interest here. From this perspective, salience represents the organization of identities within specific interactions, based on the perceived definition of the situation. This implies that individuals must create a definition based on the others they are interacting with, as well as the situation within which they find themselves. For counter-normative identities to be high in this situationally based salience, then, individuals must perceive the situation to be appropriate, and welcoming, to their counter-normativity.

More recently, the structural research program within identity theory has begun to examine more contextual components of identity enactment. To do this, social structure is broken down into three levels (Stryker, Serpe, and Hunt 2005; Serpe and Stryker 2011; Merolla, Serpe, Stryker, and Schultz 2012). Large social structures include large-scale constructs often used for boundary formation, such as race, class, and gender. Location in large-scale social structure can facilitate or constrain a person’s access to interactional opportunities where the
shared meanings are internalized. Thus, differences in shared meanings may be attributable to structural constraints. The second level of social structure is intermediate, referring to localized networks of people. These networks, such as communities and schools, bring substantial groups of people together and act as a more specified boundary for interaction with others and refine the shared meanings associated with the individual’s identity. The third level, proximate social structure, represents the context within which individuals enact identities. These are the closest structures to the individual, such as families or social clubs (Stryker, Serpe, and Hunt 2005; Serpe and Stryker 2011; Merolla, Serpe, Stryker, and Schultz 2012). Empirical research has shown that participating in a homogenous proximate social structure is positively related to increases in the commitment, prominence, salience, and behavior associated with a given identity (Merolla, Serpe, Stryker, and Schultz 2012). Proximate social structure relates directly to the notion of a “double life” that individuals claiming counter-normative identities may experience. Within a specific proximate social structure where others share ones identity, an individual may feel comfortable sharing their counter-normative identity, while in a context in which others do not share ones identity they may simply choose to pass. This links directly to McCall and Simmons (1966) conception of situationally specific salience; in interactions with one proximate social structure an individual’s counter-normative identity may be relatively high in salience, while in another it may be low. In addition, specific interactions within those proximate social structures may call upon a different salience hierarchy. Thus, depending on who an individual is interacting with, they may be more likely to enact a specific identity. A specific example may help to clarify this discussion. To this end, a brief discussion of non-religion as a counter-normative identity is presented, followed by an exploration of how this identity may play out as described above.
An Example: The Non-Religious in America

The United States is a historically religious nation (Putnam and Campbell 2011). In fact, even including those who say atheist, agnostic, secular, humanist, none, no religion, and non-religious, only around 15-20 percent of the population in the U.S. is non-religious (Kosmin and Keyser 2009). As religious is the expected state of individuals within the U.S., the non-religious often experience strong negative evaluations of their non-religious affiliation. Non-religious individuals, for example, represent the group that U.S. adults deem as least likely to share their vision of America, least likely to receive their vote in an election, and most upsetting if their son or daughter brought home as a partner (Edgell, et al. 2006). Apart from simple negative evaluation, other work finds non-religious individuals report discrimination based on their lack of belief (Hunsberger and Altemeyer 2006; Harper 2007; Cragun, Kosmin, Keyser, Hammer, and Nielson 2012). These negative evaluations and experiences regarding non-religion serve as evidence of the counter-normative nature of this identity.

Non-religion also represents an identity that fits neatly into the dilemma laid out above. As “religious” is the normative, expected identity (Putnam and Campbell 2011), individuals who claim non-religious identities may find it exceptionally easy to “pass” as normal in American society. Religious affiliation is not deemed as an acceptable discussion for small-talk, and assuming that others are religious represents the default in interaction. Thus, individuals who do not claim this identity simply can avoid the discussion and they will likely “pass” as religious. Indeed, interviews with the non-religious reveal that many suggest they simply do not tell others; but they are not purposefully hiding, it simply never comes up (Long, et al. 2015). Having the identity “never come up” is by definition representative of low salience for that identity. Non-
religious individuals rarely, if ever, define a situation to be appropriate for revealing their non-religious identity.

Given the ease with which non-religious individuals can pass as religious, they have a substantial amount of choice in who they reveal their counter-normative identity to. While little research exists, findings indicate that individuals do, as Goffman (1963) suggested, lead double-lives with respect to their non-religiousness. For example, while the non-religious attempt to enter interactions with other non-religious individuals (Smith 2013), they are also very explicit about the avoidance of revealing their non-religion to specific others (often family members) (Long et al. 2015). From the perspective of identity theory, these individuals are attempting to create proximate social structures within which their non-religious identity is accepted and usable, while, at the same time, interacting within other proximate social structures where they feel inclined to hide their non-religiousness.

The Measurement of Salience

Identity salience, defined as the likelihood of enacting an identity across situations, has been the main organizing concept of the structural research program of identity theory from its inception (Stryker 1968). For the most part, the measurement of this theoretical construct has remained stable over that time period as well. Only two variants of the measure have been employed in research on identity theory (Burke and Stets 2009). In the first test of the theory, Stryker and Serpe (1982) measure salience by asking respondents to rank their religious identity in relation to being a parent, worker, spouse, or something else. Respondents are asked to think about meeting people for the first time and asked to rank which of the four components they would tell others about first. Next, they are asked what they would tell others about second, third, etc, until all four components have been ranked. This item is followed with one that asked
respondents to think about a weekend when they could choose what they were going to do. Similar to the first item, they are then asked to choose the activity that they would select first from a list of four. Each of the activities is connected to one of the four identities, go to a religious service, go on an outing with their children, catch up on work, spend time with their husband or wife, or none of these (Stryker and Serpe 1982). The strength of this measure is the direct comparison of one identity to another. Of course this is limited to the identities that are asked about. In addition, the second item is really about role-choice behavior, which, according to the theory, is predicted by the salience hierarchy.

This measurement approach evolved into the measure that has been used across a majority of identity theory research incorporating salience. The new measure asks respondents to think about meeting a number of different “others” for the first time and asks how likely they would be to tell that person about a particular identity. For example, “Think about meeting a friend of a friend for the first time, how likely is it that you would tell them about your religion?” Respondents can then rank the likelihood that they would tell this person on a Likert type scale. With very slight variations, this measurement strategy has been the main approach for salience research in identity theory across different studies (Nuttbrock and Freudiger 1991; Stryker and Serpe 1994; Stets and Biga 2003; Stets, Carter, Harrod, Cerven, and Abrutyn 2008; Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker 2014; Yarrison 2016). The main idea behind this measurement approach is to explore the likelihood that an individual will enact a given identity when meeting a number of people for the first time. The more likely an individual is to enact a given identity across the different others, then, represents the strength of the salience associated with that particular identity. This measure does lose the direct comparison to other identities that was employed in the original measure, but the measure can be employed a number of times for the same
individual with different identities in order to gain an understanding of the actual ordering of those identities within a salience hierarchy.

This measurement, while the dominant approach in much research exploring identity salience, is explicitly designed for the measurement of salience from the approach of the structural research program within identity theory. It is designed to measure salience as an overarching concept and does not include any particular information about the interaction the person finds themselves within apart from who they are interacting with. One of the goals of this dissertation is to explore the influence of context on the identity process. This is done in two ways; the first is to include measures of proximate social structure to obtain an overall sense of the context an individual finds themselves in on average with respect to their religious identity. While incorporating proximate social structure is the first step to examining context in identity theory, its inclusion does not eliminate the problem that when asking about the salience of an identity, the respondent is given no context about the interaction or their interaction partner. This is particularly problematic from the perspective of counter-normative identities. As discussed above with respect to non-religion, individuals may feel the need to conceal their identity for fear of negative evaluation of others.

The interactional approach of identity provides a starting point for exploring the use of identities in context. As described above, non-religious individuals often seek out other non-religious individuals to interact with; most likely in order to create a “safe” proximate social structure or interaction context to enact their non-religiousness within. With this understanding in mind, a new variant of the salience measure is employed here to explore how individuals may enact identities differentially within specific contexts. With respect to the particular identity of religion and non-religion, previous research has shown that individuals are particular about who
they will reveal their non-religious identity to (Long et al. 2015). Unfortunately, not all aspects of the specific context can be accounted for in a survey format, but we can begin to explore how context influences individuals and their identities. In particular, because of the discreditable nature of non-religion, and the expectation of being religious, this study will begin to explore context by giving one more piece of information about who an individual is interacting with. In this case, the one additional piece of information is knowing the “others” religious beliefs.

Hypotheses

This dissertation seeks to empirically examine these theoretically driven explanations of the relationship between prominence and salience for discreditable counter-normative identities with a particular focus on the non-religious. The overall dissertation focuses on three major goals. First, the dissertation seeks to explore differences in the relationship between prominence and salience for religious and non-religious individuals. Second, the role of proximate social structure in the relationship between prominence and salience will be explored in detail. Lastly, overarching these two more specific goals will be an exploration of context with respect to the salience of identities. In general, this exploration will begin to overlap the structural and interactional research programs within identity theory by exploring the impact of situationally specific information on the salience of an individual’s identity. In particular, this dissertation will explore the likelihood of an individual to reveal their religious beliefs to someone who shares their beliefs as well as someone who does not share their beliefs.

In terms of these three goals specifically, it is expected that the positive relationship that previous research has found for normative identities may not hold among those who claim negatively evaluated, counter-normative identities. In other words, the prominence of a given identity may not predict the salience. This is based on the fact that individuals who claim
discreditable counter-normative identities have the ability to pass as normal in the given identity, and may purposefully avoid using the identity to avoid negative evaluation. Given the discussion above, it is expected that:

*Hypothesis 1: The relationship between identity prominence and salience will be weaker for the non-religious than the religious.*

The strong support for the impact of prominence (McCall and Simmons 1966; Stryker and Serpe 1994; Brenner et al. 2014), and the need to verify identities (Burke and Stets 2009), however, lend credence to the double-life metaphor when discussing the salience of counter-normative identities. The second hypothesis, which receives support from literature in identity theory, would suggest that individuals who claim counter-normative identities will selectively reveal this identity, and, therefore, find opportunities within specific interactions for the identity to be salient. For example, someone who is non-religious may be willing to enact this identity when around their close friends, but may not around their parents or grandparents. It is possible, then, that the prominence of a counter-normative identity may be predictive of salience in specific interactions or proximate social structures, while not in others. Thus:

*Hypothesis 2: The relationship between prominence and salience for counter-normative individuals will be moderated by the extent to which an individual finds themselves embedded within a proximate social structure that shares their non-religiousness.*

The third goal of this dissertation is to begin an exploration of the impact that specific context has on individuals’ identities. This will be done by asking respondents to imagine meeting a friend of a close friend who either shares, or does not share, their own religious beliefs and evaluating their likelihood of revealing their own identity along with continuing to socialize with this individual. The salience hierarchy proposed by McCall and Simmons (1966) requires
one step beyond exploring an individual’s proximate social structure. Even within an individual’s group of friends, it is possible that a particular subset may be more accepting of the individual’s counter-normative identity. Regardless of the general make-up of any particular proximate social structure, this conception argues that specific interactions will call upon a different structure of identities. Thus, the dissertation expands the traditional measure of salience that has been employed by the structural research program within identity theory. In order to examine the measure, all models will be run once with the traditional measure and again with the proposed context specific measures. On the one hand, it is important to establish how results using this new measure compare to those obtained with the traditional measure. In particular, it is expected that the relationship between prominence and salience should be similar when using the traditional measurement structure, and when religious individuals are instructed to think about interacting with an individual who shares their beliefs. On the other hand, however, these measures are designed to tap the interactional component of identity salience and may show how different interactions can impact the likelihood of enacting a specific identity. It is expected that, generally, this contextual measure of identity salience will follow a similar pattern as the traditional measure. In particular, however, it is expected that the prominence of an individual’s identity will more strongly predict contextual salience when thinking about interacting with someone who shares their religious beliefs than when thinking about interacting with someone who does not share their beliefs:

*Hypothesis 3: The relationship between identity prominence and contextual salience will be stronger when respondents are thinking about interacting with someone who shares their beliefs.*
CHAPTER III
METHODS

Data

In order to explore the above issues regarding prominence, salience, and proximate social structure for counter-normative identities, data from a large, national probability-based web survey will be employed. While the current study focuses on the religious identity set, the overall data collection included parents and childless individuals, along with married and single individuals. Overall, the sample included 3,045 respondents. Given the minority nature of the identities under examination, quotas were used to ensure that enough of each potential combination of identities can be examined. The current study will focus on the religious and non-religious, and includes a sample of 1,500 respondents in both the religious and non-religious categories.

The sample was provided by Survey Sampling International (SSI). Using their “Dynamix” sampling platform, SSI initially contacts potential respondents via random digit dialing as well as cell-phone techniques. This initial contact is designed to recruit potential respondents into SSI panels, and to collect some basic demographic information. If respondents agree to participate in surveys, SSI adds them to their potential sampling frame. Surveys are then sent out to random samples within this frame when they become available. Respondents receive an email with a link to a survey when they have been selected to participate. This strategy provides samples that are representative equivalents to traditional random digit dialing.

Measurement

Control Variables

All items as they will appear on the survey are shown in Appendix A. Given that individuals who are non-religious are predominately white, middle class, younger, males (Kosmin and Keyser 2009); these factors will be controlled for in all analyses. Race is measured with two items, the first asking respondents whether they are Latino or Hispanic, and the second asking them which race they consider themselves to be. In all analyses, race will be dummy coded into four variables, Black, Latino, White, and Other. Education is measured with one item asking respondents to select the choice that best describes their education. Choices range from 1 – Less than high school to 5 – Graduate or professional degree. Income is measured with one item asking respondents to select the income category that best describes their annual household income. Choices range from 1 – Less than $14,999 to 12 – Above $300,000. Age is measured with one item asking respondents to type their age in years. Lastly, gender is measured with one item asking respondents to select which choice best describes their current gender identification. In all analyses, gender will be employed as a dummy code with Female coded as 1 and Male as 0.

Identity Variables

Prominence

Identity prominence is measured with four items adapted from Brenner et al. (2014). This measure includes four items with a five-point Likert agreement scale. The measure is designed to examine respondents’ conception of self, sense of centrality for the identity being measured, and
the subjective value placed on the identity. Higher scores on this scale represent higher levels of prominence for the relevant identity. All of the items are specific to the identity that each respondent chooses at the beginning of the survey. The items include:

- Being [Insert religious / non-religious] is an important part of my self-image.
- Being [Insert religious / non-religious] is an important reflection of who I am
- I have come to think of myself as [Insert religious / non-religious].
- I have a strong sense of belonging to the community of [Insert religious individuals / non-religious individuals]

**Salience**

The traditional identity salience measure is consistent with previous literature (Serpe 1987; Serpe and Stryker 1987; Stryker and Serpe 1982, 1994; Brenner et al. 2014; Yarrison 2016) and will be adapted to the specific identities under examination. The four-item scale asks respondents how likely it would be that they tell someone about their specific identity upon meeting them for the first time. All four items are worded almost identically apart from the “other” the respondent is instructed to think about meeting. The four “others” include: person of the same sex, friend of a family member, friend of a close friend, and stranger. Each item has a 4-point scale ranging from “1 – Almost certainly would not” to “4 – Almost certainly would,” higher scores represent higher levels of identity salience.

**Proximate Social Structure**

Proximate social structure is conceptualized in two ways. First, as the degree of homogeneity the respondent experiences in everyday life with respect to their specific identity. Homogeneity is measured with a scale of four items asking the respondent how many of the people they interact with hold the same identity (religious or non-religious) as them. This scale includes the following items:
“How many of your close friends (people that you know and can count on if you need them) are [insert religious / non-religious]?”

“How many of your friends (people you know and do things with) are [insert religious / non-religious]?”

“How many of the people that you grew up with do you think are [insert religious / non-religious]?”

“How many of the people in your neighborhood do you think are [insert religious / non-religious]?”

Each item has the following response options: Almost none, Less than half, About half, More than half, or Almost all. These are coded in such a way that a higher score indicates a more similar proximate social structure.

The second conceptualization of proximate social structure employs what previous research has termed interactional commitment. This is measured with a scale of three items. The first item asks respondents “How often do you do things with people who are [insert religious / non-religious]?” with the following response categories: Never, Seldom, Once a month, Less than once a week, Once a week, Several times a week, and Daily. The second item in this scale asks respondents “In an average week, how many hours do you spend doing things with people who are [insert religious / non-religious]?” The third item used in this scale asks “Of the money you do not need for rent, food, clothing and other essentials how much do you spend on things you do with people who are [insert religious / non-religious]? Things like, going to the movies and gifts?” The possible answer choices for this item include “Almost none,” “Less than half,” “About half,” “More than half,” and “Almost all.” Because these three items do not share the same measurement structure, responses are standardized to represent the same scale across all three items. In its original formulation, interactional commitment was designed to incorporate a measure of structure into the identity model (Stryker 1980). These measures, however, represent
a step closer to the individual in terms of their experiences within their proximate social structure. It may matter little if an individual is surrounded by people who do not share their identity if they do not interact with those individuals. They may have an even closer network of individuals that do share their identity. Interactional commitment captures the extent to which an individual interacts with similar others and will be employed in this study as a component of proximate social structure.

*Contextual Salience*

The third goal of this dissertation is to begin to incorporate the evaluation of context when examining identities, with a particular focus on salience. Given the discreditable nature of, and previous research on, the non-religious identity (Long et al. 2015), it is important to understand when non-religious individuals actually enact their identity. In order to begin this exploration, a series of questions are included here to measure the likelihood that an individual will reveal their identity when interacting with someone who shares their identity, as well as when interacting with someone who does not share their identity. In addition to the likelihood of revealing their identity, the measures also gauge how likely an individual is to continue to interact with someone who shares their religious beliefs and someone who does not. These two components are measured by asking respondents to think about meeting a friend of a close friend for the first time at a social gathering and then asking the following four items:

- During the conversation, they tell you they are [religious / non-religious]. How likely is it that you would share with them that you are [show non-religious/ religious]?  

- During the conversation, they tell you they are [religious / non-religious]. How likely is it that you ask them more about being [show religious / non-religious]?  

- During the conversation, they tell you they are [religious / non-religious]. How likely is it that you would buy them a drink?
During the conversation, they tell you they are [religious / non-religious]. How likely is it that you would invite them to get together in the future?

The four items are asked twice. In the first series, the respondent finds out that this individual is religious, and in the second series that they are non-religious. The rest of the questions remain the same in both series of questions. This allows for the questions to be asked regarding interacting with someone who shares the respondents beliefs, and again about interacting with someone who does not share their beliefs. All items include a 1 to 7 scale with 1 = Almost certainly would not and 7 = Almost certainly would. Higher scores represent a higher perceived likelihood of revealing one’s identity and willingness to continue interaction with this partner.

Analysis

In order to examine the specific hypothesized relationships including the newly developed contextual measures of salience, the measure must first be explored. Because this measure is new, an empirical exploration of the measure using factor analysis will be conducted. The complex nature of this measure and the sample employed require multiple factor analyses to be completed. In particular, two factor analyses will be conducted within both those who are religious and those who are non-religious. Within the two identities, a factor analysis will be conducted for interacting with people who share respondents’ religious identity and those who do not share respondents’ religious identity. Once the measure has been explored alone, it can be incorporated into larger models to test the specific hypotheses proposed in chapter two.

In order to examine the first hypothesis, that the relationship between prominence and salience will be weaker among non-religious individuals, a full information, maximum likelihood (FIML) groups structural equation model will be estimated. The model using the
traditional measure of salience is shown in Figure 1. Included in this analysis will be the major control variables discussed above, along with a direct relationship between prominence and salience. The model will be estimated as a groups model, which allows for the simultaneous estimation of the proposed relationship for both religious and non-religious individuals. In order to test whether differences exist between these groups, constraints will be employed. First, a model with the direct effect not constrained to be equal across the two groups will be estimated. A second model, with the direct effect constrained across the religious and non-religious will then be estimated. Estimating both models allows for an examination of the change in chi-square to be analyzed. If the change in chi-square is significant, then the effect is significantly different between the two groups. This strategy is useful for examining differences across groups in fairly simple models (Preacher 2006).

A similar procedure will be employed to explore the new contextual salience measures. Given the nature of the measures, however, two separate models must be estimated. The first, shown in Figure 2, will explore the contextual salience items when an individual is thinking about interacting with someone who is like them in terms of religious beliefs. The second, shown in Figure 3, will examine the contextual salience items when the respondent is thinking about interacting with an individual who does not share their religious beliefs. Both of these models will be estimated using the same groups procedure described above to test for differences between the religious and non-religious.
Figure 1: Original Measure

Figure 2: Contextual Salience Like Me
The second hypothesis predicts a moderation of the relationship between prominence and salience based on an individual’s proximate social structure. Similar to the analysis for the first hypothesis, each model will be estimated for the traditional measure of salience as well as the contextual measures of salience. In addition, two measures of proximate social structure, the contextual and interactional, are employed here. Thus, each measure of proximate social structure will be tested as a moderator for each of the measures of salience as shown in Figures 4-12.

The moderation will be tested using the steps outlined by Little, Bovaird, and Widaman (2006). Estimating moderation using structural equation modelling has one substantial advantage over more traditional OLS regression procedures; the ability to model measurement error. With this particular sample design, it also has the added benefit of being able to simultaneously estimate the moderation in a groups model, allowing for comparisons between religious and non-religious individuals. Little et. al’s (2006) procedure involves the following steps. First, all
possible product terms for each item involved in the latent structure of the main independent variable and the moderator must be created. In this project, the main independent variable is prominence and the moderator is proximate social structure. Thus, each item that is included in the measure of prominence must be multiplied by each item used to measure proximate social structure. Second, each of these product variables is regressed on the original items in the latent constructs (i.e. all items included in prominence and all items included in proximate social structure) and the residuals are saved. These residuals, then, are used as the indicators of the latent construct that represents the moderation, as shown in the Figures. In the models proposed here, this means that the interaction construct will have 16 indicators (four prominence items X four proximate social structure items) when contextual proximate social structure is used (shown in Figures 4, 5, and 6) and 12 (four prominence items X three proximate social structure items) indicators when interactional proximate social structure is used (Shown in Figures 7, 8, and 9). These indicators must all be allowed to correlate with one another because of their strong relationship via the process by which they are created (Little et. al 2006). In addition to examining the two measures of proximate social structure separately, the measures will be examined simultaneously. Figures 10 through 12 show the models that incorporate both contextual and interactional proximate social structure as simultaneous moderators of the relationship between prominence and the three different measures of salience. In particular, in this example, each moderation model with both measures of proximate social structure will have two moderation latent constructs with indicators that were created using the above approach.
Figure 4: Context Proximate Social Structure Moderation
Figure 5: Like Me Context Salience with Context Proximate Social Structure Moderation
Figure 6: Not Like Me Context Salience with Context Proximate Social Structure Moderation
Figure 7: Interactional Proximate Social StructureModeration
Figure 8: Like Me Context Salience with Interactional Proximate Social Structure Moderation
Figure 9: Not Like Me Context Salience with Interactional Proximate Social Structure Moderation
Figure 10: Both Proximate Social Structure Measures Moderation
Figure 11: Like Me Context Salience with both Proximate Social Structure Moderation
Figure 12: Not Like Me Context Salience with both Proximate Social Structure Moderation
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview

The descriptive statistics for all the variables in the models both for religious and non-religious respondents can be seen in Table 1. Table 2 shows the bivariate correlations between all variables employed in these analyses for religious individuals. Table 3 shows the bivariate correlations for the non-religious individuals included in the sample. Looking at Table 1, we can see that the religious and non-religious samples are similar in terms of demographics. The religious group is slightly more racially diverse with 14% of respondents being Black and 12% of respondents being Latino. With rounding, there is no difference between the two groups levels of education, both reporting on average between some college and a college degree. In addition, the average age of both groups is very similar, with both groups falling between 40 and 42. The gender breakdown is also very close between the religious and non-religious groups with around 60% of the sample being female. The only slight difference in terms of demographics is for income, with non-religious individuals reporting slightly lower average income.

More differences become apparent when exploring the identity specific variables. In general, the non-religious respondents score lower on the identity specific concepts explored here. Specifically, on average, non-religious respondents score more than half a point lower on prominence, or the importance of the identity to them. Non-religious individuals also score more than a sixth of a point lower on the contextual proximate social structure. This implies that the non-religious individuals are less likely to find themselves surrounded with other non-religious
individuals. No difference can be explored via these descriptive statistics for interactional proximate social structure because of the need to standardize the scores for each question. When exploring salience, however, we can see that non-religious individuals score a seventh of a point lower on traditional salience, a full point lower on the new like me contextual salience measure, and more than a point lower on the new not like me contextual salience measure.

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<th>Mean / Proportion Religious</th>
<th>Non-Religious</th>
<th>Std Dev Religious</th>
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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics by Religious and Non-Religious
### Table 2: Bivariate Correlations for Religious Individuals

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Other Race</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Prominence</th>
<th>Context Proximate</th>
<th>International Proximate</th>
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<th>Like Me Salience</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>0.3185*</td>
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<td>0.3425*</td>
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<td>-0.0514</td>
<td>-0.0082</td>
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<td>0.1642*</td>
<td>0.2741*</td>
<td>0.5631*</td>
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</table>

*Significant at the p<0.05

### Table 3: Bivariate Correlations for Non-religious Individuals

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<th>Black</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Other Race</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Prominence</th>
<th>Context Proximate</th>
<th>International Proximate</th>
<th>Salience</th>
<th>Like Me Salience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>-0.0871*</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>-0.0630*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<td>0.1128*</td>
<td>0.3824*</td>
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<td>1.000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>-0.043</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>-0.1744*</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prominence</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.0581*</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.0558*</td>
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<td>-0.0644*</td>
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<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
<td>0.0737*</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.0965*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Proximate</td>
<td>-0.0764*</td>
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<td>0.0845*</td>
<td>0.0862*</td>
<td>-0.1663*</td>
<td>0.1505*</td>
<td>0.0956*</td>
<td>0.1136*</td>
<td>0.4209*</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-0.0831*</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>-0.0875*</td>
<td>0.3254*</td>
<td>0.0917*</td>
<td>0.1069*</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like Me Salience</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>-0.052</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td>-0.0823*</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>-0.0969*</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
<td>0.2515*</td>
<td>0.1011*</td>
<td>0.0744*</td>
<td>0.3699*</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Like Me Salience</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.0956*</td>
<td>-0.030</td>
<td>-0.1483*</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>-0.0706*</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
<td>0.0753*</td>
<td>0.0881*</td>
<td>0.1080*</td>
<td>0.3549*</td>
<td>0.4950*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at the p<0.05
Factor Analysis

Because the contextual salience measures were developed specifically for this project, and have not had previous research, first these scales must be explored to establish these measures. Table 4 shows the factor loadings for the like me and not like me contextual measures of salience for both religious and non-religious individuals. This exploratory factor analysis, overall, shows that both the contextual measures seem to load well as latent constructs. The lowest factor loading for any item is 0.419 for the first like me salience item for non-religious individuals. The only other item that shows a slightly weak loading is the second not like me salience measure for religious individuals with a loading of 0.448. All other items have factor loadings of at least 0.500 suggesting strong loadings for both religious and non-religious individuals. These results support the use of these new contextual measures as latent constructs in further analyses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Like Me Salience Factor Loading</th>
<th>Not Like Me Salience Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During the conversation, they tell you they are [show non-religious/religious]. How likely is it that you would share with them that you are [show also non-religious/religious]?</td>
<td>0.681 0.419</td>
<td>0.504 0.501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the conversation, they tell you they are [show non-religious/religious]. How likely is it that you ask them more about being [show non-religious/religious]?</td>
<td>0.655 0.561</td>
<td>0.448 0.538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the conversation, they tell you they are [show non-religious/religious]. How likely is it that you would buy them coffee or a drink at this social event?</td>
<td>0.815 0.838</td>
<td>0.846 0.889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the conversation, they tell you they are [show non-religious/religious]. How likely is it that you would invite them to get together in the future?</td>
<td>0.908 0.887</td>
<td>0.836 0.939</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 states that the relationship between identity prominence and salience will be weaker for those who are non-religious than those who are religious. As described above, this is examined with three separate measures of salience in three separate SEM models. The results from these three models are shown in Table 5 through Table 10. Each set of tables (i.e. Table 5 and Table 6) shows the same model estimated first without constraints and second with a constraint on the relationship between prominence and salience to make the effect equal between the religious and non-religious. This method allows for the comparison of the chi-square values from both models to evaluate whether there is a significant difference in the effect of prominence on salience. As can be seen in Table 5 and 6, when the traditional measure of salience is included, the chi-square difference between the constrained and unconstrained model is 45.09, which is much larger than the necessary difference of 3.84. This means that the unconstrained model is a better fit to the data, and that there is a significant difference in the effect of prominence on salience between the religious and non-religious. In this first model, the effect of prominence on salience for the religious individuals (β=.615) is stronger than for the non-religious individuals (β=.304), supporting hypothesis 1.
### Table 5: Model 1a - Prominence on Traditional Salience No Constraint

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prominence</th>
<th>Traditional Salience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relig</td>
<td>Non-Relig</td>
</tr>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>.073</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
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<td>-.004*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-.014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prominence</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model Fit: $\chi^2 = 941.52$, p-value = .000, CFI = 0.947, RMSEA = 0.069, SRMR = 0.063

Religious n = 1248
Non-religious n = 1272
The second and third models show a similar, but weaker pattern for both the like me and the not like me measures of salience. Recall that these measures are designed to gauge how likely an individual is to say they would reveal their identity when interacting with someone who they know either shares (“like me”) or does not share (“not like me”) their religious or non-religious identity. The results from the second model, examining the “like me” measure of salience, are shown in Table 7 and 8. Comparing the chi-square from the two models, we can see that the model with the constraint, shown in Table 8, has significantly worse fit to the data ($\Delta \chi^2 = 10.12$) which shows that there are significant differences in the effect of prominence on like me salience between religious and non-religious individuals. This difference shows that the
The effect of prominence on like me salience is stronger for those who are religious ($\beta = .341$) than those who are non-religious ($\beta = .205$). The third model, shown in Table 9 and 10, incorporates the not like me measure of salience. The results are similar, the model with the constraint shows significantly worse fit ($\Delta \chi^2 = 5.12$) than the unconstrained model. This again shows that there is a significant difference in the effect of prominence on not like me salience between religious and non-religious individuals. For the not like me measure employed in this model there is a significant positive effect from prominence for those who are religious ($\beta = .148$), but the effect is non-significant for those who are non-religious.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: Model 2a - Prominence on Like Me Salience No Constraint</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prominence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model Fit: $\chi^2 = 1451.15$, p-value = .000, CFI = 0.846, RMSEA = 0.090, SRMR = 0.084

Religious n = 1115
Non-religious n = 1255
Table 8: Model 2b - Prominence on Like Me Salience With Constraint

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prominence</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
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<td>Non-Relig</td>
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<td>.018</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.151</td>
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<td>-.004*</td>
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<td>-.163**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prominence</td>
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<td>-</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Model Fit: $\chi^2 = 1461.27$, p-value = .000, CFI = 0.845, RMSEA = 0.090, SRMR = 0.086
Religious n = 1115
Non-religious n = 1255
Table 9: Model 3a - Prominence on Not Like Me Salience No Constraint

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Prominence</th>
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<th>Not Like Me Salience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Non-Relig</td>
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</table>

Model Fit: $\chi^2 = 1019.84$, p-value = .000, CFI = 0.888, RMSEA = 0.075, SRMR = 0.069
Religious n = 1053
Non-religious n = 1287
Overall, these results support the first hypothesis. There appears to be a difference in how prominence influences salience between the religious and non-religious individuals. In particular, the effect is significantly stronger for those who are religious than those who are non-religious.

This finding persists across the three different measures of salience (traditional, like me, and not like me). The verification of these results across these three measures validates the usage of these two measures of contextual salience. If these results did not hold across the three measures of salience, the contextual and traditional measures of salience would have been measuring separate concepts, but the similarity in the results provides some evidence that these measures are similar.
These consistent findings also solidify the need to examine possible explanations for the difference between religious and non-religious individuals.

**Hypothesis 2**

The second hypothesis begins to explore one potential reason for these differences; proximate social structure. In particular, it is expected that the amount that a non-religious individual finds themselves embedded within a proximate social structure that shares their religious values, will moderate the relationship between prominence and salience. As described in Chapter 3, this hypothesis will be tested using the structural equation method for analyzing moderation as described by Little et. al (2006). Given the limited examination of proximate social structure in previous research, two different measures are employed here.

First, in Tables 11, 12, and 13, the results for the contextual measure of proximate social structure are shown as a moderator for the relationship between prominence and traditional salience (Model 4), like me salience (Model 5), and not like me salience (Model 6). In model 4, we can see that the pattern found when only prominence and traditional salience were in the model persists. The effect from prominence to salience is significant and positive for both religious and non-religious individuals, but the effect is slightly lower for those who are non-religious. The contextual proximate social structure measure shows a similar pattern, with a strong, significant, positive effect on traditional salience for both the religious ($\beta=.178$), and a still significant and positive, but slightly weaker effect for those who are non-religious ($\beta=.064$).

Looking to the specific moderation effect, however, we see support for the second hypothesis. For those who are religious, there is no moderation of contextual proximate social structure on the relationship between prominence and traditional salience. For those who are
non-religious, however, contextual proximate social structure does have a significant moderation
effect on the relationship between prominence and traditional salience. In particular, the
moderation has a significant positive effect on the relationship between prominence and
traditional salience ($\beta=.153$). This positive effect can be interpreted such that, for non-religious
individuals, the more prominent their non-religious identity is to them, and the more likely they
are to find themselves within a proximate social structure that shares their identity, the more
likely they are to reveal their identity across situations. More specifically, the positive effect that
we see from prominence to salience is dependent upon the level of similarity that an individual
perceives within their contextual proximate social structure. In other words, the more similar an
individual perceives their proximate social structure to be, the more the prominence of their non-
religious identity influences the salience of it. In this model, with the traditional salience and the
contextual measure of proximate social structure, this is not the case for those who claim a
religious identity – contextual proximate social structure does not influence the relationship
between prominence and traditional salience.
These results are very similar when we move to the new “like me” measure of contextual salience in Table 12. The effect from prominence to like me salience remains after including the contextual measure of proximate social structure as well as the moderation term in the model. Additionally, the contextual measure of proximate social structure has significant effects on like me salience for both religious and non-religious individuals. As with the traditional measure of salience, the moderation effect, when examining the like me contextual salience measure, supports the second hypothesis. The moderation construct has no significant impact on like me salience for those who are religious, but is significantly related for those who are non-religious ($\beta = .156$). Again, this shows that the relationship between prominence and like me salience is
influenced by the contextual measure of proximate social structure for those who are non-religious. The more a non-religious individual finds themselves in a proximate social structure that shares their religious beliefs, the more the prominence of that identity will influence like me salience. More specifically, if a non-religious individual finds themselves in a contextual proximate social structure that shares their non-religiousness, the more prominent their identity is, the more likely they will be to enact their non-religious identity.

The results change slightly when examining the “not like me” contextual salience measure. Table 13 shows the results of the model when the contextual proximate social structure
measure is used for the moderation and the not like me contextual salience measure is used as the outcome. Using this measure as the outcome, we can see that contextual proximate social structure does not have a significant influence on the not like me salience measure for either the religious or non-religious individual. This is not particularly surprising given that contextual proximate social structure is meant to measure how similar the individuals surroundings are in terms of sharing their identity, and the not like me salience measures how likely they are to reveal their identity to someone who they know does not share it. There is no reason for proximate social structure to influence how likely someone is to reveal their identity to someone who does not share it. Interestingly, however, while proximate social structure does not have a direct influence on not like me salience, it does still moderate the relationship between prominence and not like me salience. The same effect as in the previous two models appears for those who are non-religious ($\beta= .223$). The amount that they perceive being in a proximate social structure that shares their identity influences how prominence impacts not like me salience. In particular, for those who are non-religious, the more they find themselves in a proximate social structure that shares their identity, the stronger the relationship between prominence and not like me salience. In this case, however, contextual proximate social structure also acts as a significant moderator of the relationship between prominence and not like me salience for those who are religious. For the religious, however, the effect is negative ($\beta = -.129$). This can be understood as the more a religious individual finds themselves in a religious proximate social structure, the weaker the relationship between prominence and not like me contextual salience. In other words, the more similar a religious individual’s proximate social structure, the less influence prominence of the religious identity has on their likelihood to reveal it to someone who they know does not share their religious status.
The next set of models, shown in Tables 14, 15, and 16, examine the same three outcomes (traditional salience, like me contextual salience, and not like me contextual salience) but include the interactional measure of proximate social structure. In Model 7, the same pattern described above holds for the effect from prominence to traditional salience with the interactional measure of proximate social structure and the moderation construct in the model. Prominence is a significant predictor of traditional salience for both the religious (β=.463) and the non-religious (β=.291). In addition, we can see that the interactional measure of proximate social structure has a similar effect on traditional salience as the contextual measure did in the previous models; a significant positive effect for both religious (β=.293) and non-religious

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prominence</th>
<th>Proximate Social Structure</th>
<th>Moderation</th>
<th>Not Like Me Salience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relig</td>
<td>Non-Relig</td>
<td>Relig</td>
<td>Non-Relig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>.188*</td>
<td>-.281*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.202</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
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<td>.115</td>
<td>-.076</td>
<td>.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.040*</td>
<td>-.019</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>-.043</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.004**</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.007*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.039*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.020</td>
<td>-.157*</td>
<td>-.059</td>
<td>-.015</td>
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<td>Prominence</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proximate Social Structure (PSS)</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prom by PSS</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model Fit: $\chi^2 = 3834.96$, p-value = .000, CFI = 0.929, RMSEA = 0.052, SRMR = 0.070
Religious n = 1232
Non-religious n = 877
(β=.149) individuals. When we examine the moderation in model 7, however, the similarity to previous models ends. With the interactional measure of proximate social structure, we see no significant effect of the moderation construct for the non-religious. More specifically, while interactional proximate social structure has a direct effect on traditional salience, it does not moderate the relationship between prominence and salience. For the religious, on the other hand, there is a significant negative effect of the moderation (β=-.204). Similar to model 6, this means that the more interaction religious individuals have with others who are religious, the weaker the relationship between prominence and traditional salience.

Table 14: Model 7 - Prominence and Interactional Proximate Moderation with Traditional Salience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prominence</th>
<th>Proximate Social Structure</th>
<th>Moderation</th>
<th>Traditional Salience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Non-Relig</td>
<td>Relig</td>
<td>Non-Relig</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>.030</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.005**</td>
<td>-.004*</td>
<td>-.007***</td>
<td>-.012***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<td>-.021</td>
<td>.035**</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>-.135*</td>
<td>-.211***</td>
<td>.122*</td>
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<td>Prominence</td>
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<td>Proximate Social Structure (PSS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prom by PSS Moderation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model Fit: χ² = 3383.18, p-value = .000, CFI = 0.920, RMSEA = 0.058, SRMR = 0.054
Religious n = 1221
Non-religious n = 1026
Model 8 uses the same interactional measure of proximate social structure, but employs the like me contextual measure of salience as the outcome. Both prominence and the interactional measure of proximate social structure have significant positive relationships with the like me measure of salience for both religious (prominence: $\beta=.277$, interactional proximate social structure: $\beta=.173$) and non-religious (prominence: $\beta=.211$, interactional proximate social structure: $\beta=.119$) individuals. The moderation construct in this model, however, has no significant relationship with like me salience for either the religious or non-religious. In this case, the interactional measure of proximate social structure does not significantly impact the relationship between prominence and the like me contextual measure of salience. Model 9 shows the same pattern for this moderation. The interactional measure of proximate social structure does not influence the relationship between prominence and not like me salience for either the religious or non-religious.
Table 15: Model 8 - Prominence and Interactional Proximate Moderation with Like Me Salience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prominence</th>
<th>Proximate Social Structure</th>
<th>Moderation</th>
<th>Like Me Salience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relig</td>
<td>Non-Relig</td>
<td>Relig</td>
<td>Non-Relig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
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<td>-.278**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
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<td>-.096</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>-.007**</td>
<td>-.011***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<td>-.020</td>
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<td>.039**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Prominence</td>
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<td>Prom by PSS Moderation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Model Fit: $\chi^2 = 3869.40$, p-value = .000, CFI = 0.878, RMSEA = 0.064, SRMR = 0.072

Religious n = 1207
Non-religious n= 950
The results from models 10, 11, and 12 can be found in Tables 17, 18, and 19. These final three models are estimated to examine whether the effects of the moderations of the two proximate social structure measures change with both in the model simultaneously across the three measures of salience. The findings described above from models 4 through 9 are consistent across these models, which provides additional support for the stability of these results. Model 10 examines both measures of proximate social structure as moderators of the relationship between prominence and traditional salience. Consistent with model 4, the moderation construct for the contextual measure of proximate social structure shows a significant effect for those who are non-religious ($\beta=.172$), but not those who are religious. In addition, consistent with model 7.
the moderation construct from the interactional measure of proximate social structure shows no relationship for those who are non-religious, but a negative significant relationship for those who are religious ($\beta=-.231$). The only effect that changes in model 10 from the results of the models that were run independently is the relationship between the contextual measure of proximate social structure and traditional salience for the non-religious. In model 4 this relationship was significant ($\beta=.064$), but now with both measures of proximate social structure and both moderation constructs included, the effect is no longer significant. This is not a substantial change given that the effect in model 4 was only significant at the $p<0.05$ level. Overall, this model shows that the moderation of the relationship between prominence and traditional salience for both the contextual and interactional measures of proximate social structure found in previous models are stable even with both measures of proximate social structure included. In particular, for those who are non-religious, the more they find themselves surrounded by others who share their identity (contextual proximate social structure) the stronger the relationship between prominence and traditional salience, but the amount of interaction they have with individuals who share their identity (interactional identity) does not influence the relationship between prominence and traditional salience. For those who are religious, the contextual measure of proximate social structure has no moderation effect, but the interactional measure has a significant negative effect on the relationship between prominence and traditional salience.
Model 11 takes the same approach by including both measures of proximate social structure, but as moderators of the relationship between prominence and the like me contextual salience measure. The results from model 11 also mirror those found when each measure of proximate social structure was employed in the model alone (models 5 and 8). For the contextual measure of proximate social structure, we see that the moderation construct has a significant effect for those who are non-religious (β=.143), but not those who are religious. As in model 5, the more a non-religious individual perceives that the proximate social structure surrounding them shares their non-religious status, the stronger the relationship between prominence and the contextual measure of like me salience. As in model 8, the interactional measure of proximate social structure does not act as a moderator for the relationship between prominence and like me salience for either religious or non-religious individuals. Across all the effects only the direct...
effect from interactional proximate social structure on like me salience shows a notable change. In model 8, this direct effect was significant for both religious ($\beta = .173$) and non-religious ($\beta = .119$) individuals, but in model 11, interactional proximate social structure has no significant direct effect on like me salience for the non-religious. Other than this small change, the overall pattern of effects found in models 5 and 8, when the two measures of proximate social structure were included individually as moderators, remain stable when both are included in model 11.

Model 12 examines these two proximate social structure measures as moderators of the relationship between prominence and the not like me contextual measure of salience. Again, the results from this model, with both measures of proximate social structure included simultaneously, are similar to the results found in models 6 and 9, when each proximate social
structure measure was included individually. As in the previous models, prominence shows a positive significant relationship with the not like me salience measure for those who are religious ($\beta=.089$), but not for those who are non-religious. Also consistent are the direct effects from the two measures of proximate social structure on the not like me measure of salience. The contextual measure of proximate social structure shows no significant relationship with not like me salience for either religious or non-religious individuals, and the interactional measure of proximate social structure shows a significant positive relationship for both religious ($\beta=.129$) and non-religious ($\beta=.222$) individuals. Similar to model 9, the interactional measure of proximate social structure does not act as a significant moderator of the relationship between prominence and not like me salience for either the religious or non-religious. The only substantial difference found in model 12 is for the moderation of the contextual measure of proximate social structure. As in model 6, this measure acts as a significant moderator for those who are religious, albeit with a negative effect ($\beta=-.143$). For those who are non-religious, however, with the addition of the interactional measure of proximate social structure, the contextual measure is no longer a significant moderator of the relationship between prominence and not like me salience.
Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis three predicts that when exploring the two new contextual salience measures, prominence will have a stronger influence on the likelihood that an individual will interact with someone who they know shares their religious beliefs (i.e. like me salience). These new contextual measures are included in a number of models which provides a number of chances to examine this hypothesis. First, in its simplest form, models 2a and 3a examine the effect from prominence to these two contextual measures with only the control variables included in the model. In model 2a, prominence has a significant positive effect on the like me contextual salience for both religious (β=.341) and non-religious (β=.205) individuals. While the effect across these two groups were shown to be significantly different using the constraint and chi square values, both effects are still significant when the constraint is not included. In model 3a,
on the other hand, the effect from prominence to not like me salience is only significant for those who are religious ($\beta=.148$). For the religious individuals, then, the absolute effect of prominence is larger for the like me contextual measure of salience than the not like me contextual measure of salience. For the non-religious, the difference is more explicit; the effect of prominence on like me salience is significant, while prominence has no significant effect on not like me salience. This pattern remains stable across all the models analyzed here. Each time that prominence predicts the like me contextual salience measure (models 5, 8, and 11), the effect is significant for both religious and non-religious individuals. In addition, the effect from prominence to the not like me contextual salience measure is significant for those who are religious, and not for those who are non-religious. These findings show support for hypothesis 3, especially for those who are non-religious. For the non-religious, prominence is a significant predictor of the like me contextual salience measure, but does not predict the not like me contextual salience measure. In addition, for those who are religious, the absolute effect from prominence is larger when predicting the like me contextual salience measure than when predicting the not like me contextual salience measure. Thus, it seems the effect of prominence is stronger for the like me contextual measure than the not like me measure. In other words, prominence is a stronger predictor of an individual being willing to share their religious beliefs when they know they are interacting with individuals who they know share their religious beliefs.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The organization of the self has been of interest to social psychological researchers for decades; beginning with the work of James (1890), Cooley (1964 [1902]) and Mead (1934). Out of this initial work, symbolic interactionism was developed, and the work of Kuhn (1964) furthered this development to what is known as structural symbolic interactionism. In general, structural symbolic interactionists argue that the self is made up of the roles an individual claims as part of their self-concept, but that social structure has an important influence on individuals’ self-concepts. More specifically, two main approaches to the organization of the self developed out of this conception; both based in the overall approach of Identity Theory (Stets and Serpe 2013).

First, the approach of Stryker (1968), argues that an individuals’ self-concept is organized by the likelihood that they will enact specific identities across situations. In this salience hierarchy, as it is termed, each identity an individual claims has a specific placement based on how likely it is to be enacted. The salience of a given identity is predicted by its prominence, or how important an identity is to how the individual sees themselves (Brenner et al. 2014). For the most part, this structural approach to identities argues that an individual’s overall salience hierarchy is relatively stable across situations. The second conception, referred to as the interactional approach within identity theory (Stets and Serpe 2013), takes a more fluid approach to the organization of the self. Originally formulated by McCall and Simmons (1966), the
interactional approach argues that the salience of a role or an identity is fluid based on the situation an individual finds themselves in. The more stable conception of self from this perspective is that of prominence, which is argued to exist in a hierarchy based on how an individual ideally would want to be perceived by others.

In general, research in identity theory has focused heavily on the structural approach and the stable conception of salience predicted by the prominence of an identity for a specific individual. This dissertation argues that this approach works well for the most part, as much empirical research has shown, but that counter-normative identities an individual may claim present a problem. In particular, it is argued here that the interactional approach to identities provides an excellent theoretical orientation for those identities that deviate away from normative expectations. The interactional approach argues that the context within which an individual finds themselves has differential influences on the enactment of identities. This dissertation begins to explore this possibility by developing a new contextual measure of salience that inserts one additional piece of information for respondents than the traditional measure. In addition, this research incorporates the influence of proximate social structure from two different measurement approaches.

Using these measures and 12 structural equation models, this dissertation explored three specific hypotheses about how counter-normative identities, prominence, salience, and proximate social structure interact. Each hypothesis was tested using different measures of salience and proximate social structure where applicable. First, the relationship between prominence and salience that has been established for normative identities was examined for the counter-normative identity of non-religious. In particular, it was hypothesized that the relationship
between these two concepts would be weaker for those who claim the counter-normative identity of non-religious than those who are religious.

The results support this hypothesis for the traditional measure of salience, as well as both new contextual salience measures. The direct effect from prominence to salience is weaker for those individuals who claim the counter-normative identity of non-religious than those who claim the normative religious identity. The effect is also weaker regardless of whether the non-religious individual is thinking about interacting with a random, unknown other, someone who they know shares their non-religiousness, or someone who they know is religious. In fact, the influence of prominence on interacting with someone who does not share their beliefs is non-significant for the non-religious. This means that when a non-religious individual is interacting with someone who they know is religious, the prominence of their non-religiousness has no influence on how likely they are to reveal their status. These results support the prediction that counter-normative identities will not follow the theoretical framework of the structural research program in identity theory. Additionally, the inclusion of one more level of context into the measurement of salience changes the effect of prominence. As would be expected, prominence does have an influence on the likelihood of revealing a non-religious status to someone who shares that status, but does not influence how likely an individual is to reveal that identity to someone who does not share it. In general, these findings provide support for the inclusion of context and a more fluid examination of salience within interaction, especially when considering counter-normative identities. This lays the groundwork for the incorporation of proximate social structure when thinking about counter-normative identities.

The second hypothesis predicts that proximate social structure will act as a moderator of the relationship between prominence and salience for those who are non-religious. Essentially,
the more an individual finds themselves in a proximate social structure that is similar to them (i.e. contains others who are non-religious), the more prominence will act as a predictor of how likely the individual is to reveal their non-religious status. This hypothesis is tested in eight models with slight variations. First, two different measures of proximate social structure are employed; the contextual and interactional measures. The contextual measure is designed to evaluate how much an individual perceives that close others (like family and friends) share their religious beliefs. The interactional measure is designed to evaluate how much time and commitment an individual devotes to interacting with people who share their religious identity. These two measures are similar then, in that they both measure the amount that an individual’s proximate social structure is made up of people who share their religious beliefs. The contextual measure is simply focused on the amount of others in an individual’s proximate social structure that share their identity, while the interactional measure is focused on how much of the interactions an individual has are with others who share their beliefs. These two measures are tested as moderators of the relationship between prominence and salience, with all three measures of salience being evaluated. First, these two measures are estimated separately for each of the three measures of salience and then, to evaluate the stability of these effects, these measures are included simultaneously as moderators of the relationship between prominence and the three measures of salience.

Across the nine models that examine these moderations, a clear pattern emerges for the contextual measure of proximate social structure. The contextual proximate social structure acts as a moderator for the relationship between prominence and salience for those individuals who are non-religious five of the six times it is included. The stability of this finding across different measures of salience, and while the interactional measure of proximate social structure is
included in the model, lends confidence to the power of the contextual measure of proximate social structure. In the simplest terms, the more an individual perceives that people they are surrounded by share their religious beliefs, the more that the prominence of their non-religious status influences how likely they are to reveal it. This is especially true when salience is measured in general (the traditional measure) and when the respondent knows that they are interacting with someone else who shares their religious beliefs.

The interactional measure of proximate social structure does not have as clear a pattern. This measure does not act as a moderator for the relationship between prominence and salience any time except when traditional salience is used and the respondent is religious. This measure does not act as a moderator at all for the non-religious. These findings suggest that the amount of time and commitment an individual allocates to interactions with people who share their religious beliefs does not influence the relationship between prominence and salience.

Overall, the results explored here with respect to the second hypothesis provide an excellent exploration of how context can be incorporated to the traditional identity theory model. With respect to the non-religious, proximate social structure plays an important role in the relationship between prominence and salience. In particular, these findings suggest that how many individuals that share their non-religious status an individual finds themselves surrounded by plays a more important role than how much of their interactions are with people who share their non-religious status. This is not unexpected given the measurement strategy employed for salience.

The traditional measure of salience is designed with a “one size fits all” approach. Specifically, the traditional theoretical conception of salience is a stable one, and Stryker (1968)
developed this measure to examine multiple identities across a multitude of interactions. The measure employed that can incorporate all of this, then, must be very general. The traditional measure asks respondents to think about how likely they are to tell someone who they just met, in an ambiguous social situation, about a specific identity. For the non-religious then, there is around an 85% chance that this specific other they are perceiving is religious (Pew 2015). Given the ambiguity of the social interaction they are imagining, it is no surprise that the contextual measure is more important that the interactional one. The contextual measure is designed to capture how many others that an individual interacts with regularly share their non-religious status, while the interactional measure evaluates how much time and commitment they give to interacting with non-religious people. The issue here is that the time and commitment they give to interacting with people who share their beliefs may be with only one or a few people. These few individuals do not provide much support in the scenario of interacting with a new and unknown individual. If they often find themselves surrounded by others who share their non-religious status, however, they can eliminate at least some ambiguity of the social situation that the salience measure forces on them, because there are more likely to be individuals who share their beliefs in the interaction based on their contextual proximate social structure.

This is also the case for the contextual measures of salience. These measures give the respondent one additional piece of context, but they must fill in the rest of the social interactional context in their head. Again, if they perceive that they are usually surrounded by others who share their identity (i.e. a large number of individuals who they interact with share their beliefs), these individuals are more likely to be incorporated into the hypothetical social interaction, which provides additional context for them to evaluate the likelihood that they would reveal their identity. These findings are consistent with the theoretical approach to salience that is
incorporated into the interactional approach of identity theory. In this conception, salience is less stable and more dependent on how individuals see, and define, specific interactions and interaction partners.

The third hypothesis explores this contextual component further by specifically examining how providing the additional context of knowing whether an interaction partners does or does not share respondents religious beliefs influences the relationship between prominence and salience. Based on the interactional approach, it was hypothesized that the relationship between prominence and salience is stronger when an individual knows they are interacting with someone who shares their beliefs. This prediction was supported for both religious and non-religious individuals. Interestingly, while prominence was a weaker predictor of revealing their religious status to someone who does not share it, the effect was still significant for religious individuals. For the non-religious, however, prominence was only a significant predictor of revealing their identity to someone who they knew shared their non-religious status.

For religious individuals, the more prominent their identity is to them, the more likely they are to share this with someone they just met, even when they know that this individual is non-religious. This is likely due to the shared meanings and expectations associated with the religious identity. Most major religions, particularly the Christian-based religions that dominate American society, expect their follows to act as messengers to others. Not all religious individuals follow this expectation, but it does make sense that those who find being religious to be highly prominent and important to their sense of self would be more likely to heed the call to educate others. Knowing that an interaction partner is non-religious presents a perfect opportunity for this.
In general, then, these results demonstrate that the non-religious pay more attention to the context they find themselves in, and are more likely to have that context influence their likelihood to reveal their non-religious status. Religious individuals find themselves in a society that evaluates them positively and expects them to reveal and discuss their religious status. Non-religious individuals in America, however, exist in a religious society that maintains strong negative evaluations of their non-religious status. Because of this, as these results show, they must pay more attention to the context that they find themselves in. They have much more at stake when it comes to revealing their religious status. The non-religious identity is one that is discreditable in nature (Goffman 1963); it is not immediately visible to others and must be revealed to be known. Thus, not only might they face negative evaluation from the interaction partner they reveal it to, they also may risk exposure beyond that individual and, in turn, may face negative evaluation from multiple others. Thus, having more information about the context in which they find themselves plays an important role in their perception of how likely they are to reveal it. In this case, if they know they are interacting with someone who shares their non-religious status and if their proximate social structure is made up of a large number of people who share that identity, then how important being non-religious is to them has a strong influence on how likely they are to reveal it.

Overall, this dissertation makes three important contributions to research in identity theory. First, while the structural research program has been one of the main focuses of research in identity theory for the past few decades (Stets and Serpe 2013), it has not been applied to identities that are not the normative expectation within society. This dissertation examines how the specific predictions of the structural research program fit with individuals who claim the counter-normative identity of non-religious. The main prediction examined here is the
relationship between prominence and salience. The general prediction of the structural approach holds for non-religious individuals, but it is a significantly weaker effect when compared to the religious. These findings suggest that the relationship between prominence and salience predicted by the structural research program performs differently for normative and counter-normative identities. This draws attention to the need to incorporate counter-normative identities more heavily into identity theory research. They present an excellent opportunity for development of identity theory’s understanding of the self and the relationship between self and society.

Second, given the fact that discreditable, counter-normative identities seem to present a challenge for the structural research program, this dissertation seeks to integrate some aspects of the interactional approach to identity theory (McCall and Simmons 1966). This approach considers the salience of identities to be more fluid and dependent upon components of the situation an individual finds themselves in. For the structural research program, theoretically, the salience hierarchy is fairly stable, and thus, the measurement of this concept has remained stable across the years. This dissertation introduces measures of contextual salience that include additional information about the interaction partner the respondent is considering revealing their identity to. With the non-religious, we see that these contextual measures make a difference in how likely they are to reveal their counter-normative identity. When they know that an individual shares their identity, then the predicted effect from prominence to salience remains. When they know that the individual does not share their identity, however, the predicted effect is no longer significant. For the religious individuals, however, the predicted relationship remains regardless of whether their interaction partner does or does not share their religious beliefs.
These results suggest that the interactional approach to salience fits well for counter-normative identities.

Third, this dissertation seeks to take advantage of opportunities where the structural and interactional approaches overlap. In particular, when thinking about social structure, the structural program discusses three different levels – large, intermediate, and proximate social structures (Stryker et al. 2005, Merolla et al. 2012). While all three are important to the identity process, proximate social structure intersects heavily with the interactional approach and provides an excellent potential solution for the dilemma of counter-normative identities. Proximate social structure is designed to represent the specific interaction context that an individual enacts identities within. If an individual who claims a counter-normative identity finds themselves in a proximate social structure that is more likely to share their non-normative identity, they may be more able to enact that identity. These results support this idea, particularly when thinking about proximate social structure as defined by the number of others an individual interacts with that share their identity. This fits well with the predictions of the interactional approach, which argues that the salience hierarchy, or the identities an individual is likely to enact, is dependent upon how they define the situation they find themselves in. In this example, non-religious individuals seem to be more likely to reveal their counter-normative status when they are more likely to be surrounded by multiple people who are also non-religious. These findings provide excellent support for the need to focus on context and specific interactional components when examining counter-normative identities.

While this dissertation makes these contributions, a few shortcomings and opportunities for future work must be addressed. First, and foremost, the overall goal was to begin to explore counter-normative identities from the perspective of identity theory. In this research, however,
only one identity set was examined – the religious and non-religious. This identity set was chosen for a number of reasons, including the fact that it is an overarching component of American society and that everyone falls into one or the other category, but it is still only one example of a counter-normative identity. It is an empirical question as to whether the pattern of results found here is representative of counter-normative identities more generally. These findings represent an excellent starting point to examining counter-normative identities, but cannot be generalized beyond the religious and non-religious at this point. Future research should explore these findings in other counter-normative identities. In addition, the non-religious identity represents a discreditable one. Future research should also explore how prominence, salience, and proximate social structure interact for individuals who hold a discredited (or immediately visible) counter-normative identity.

Second, in addition to only one identity, this dissertation focused heavily on one specific prediction of the structural research program; that prominence predicts salience. The structural research program, in general, has been employed very limitedly with respect to counter-normative identities, so there are a number of places where this can be further explored. In particular, while commitment and proximate social structure were included in these models in some ways, they were not employed as a predictor of prominence as would be hypothesized by the structural research program (Stryker 1980). In addition, perhaps salience is not the most relevant outcome of interest for individuals who claim counter-normative identities. Given that these individuals hold a negatively evaluated identity, it may be important to evaluate how these identity components (like prominence, proximate social structure, and salience) influence individuals’ self-worth, efficacy, and authenticity. Given that these individuals may feel the need to hide their identity; this could negatively impact their experience of being true to their self,
which may negatively impact authenticity and self-esteem in general. Future research should explore these concepts with respect to how normative and counter-normative identities differ.

Third, while this dissertation is designed to show the importance of the interactional program when exploring counter-normative identities, it only represents the first step in the integration of the structural and interactional research programs. Only small additions of context into the traditional structural approach were made here, and a number of other opportunities for the insertion of context exist. While the traditional measure of salience was pushed toward a more contextual measure in this example, only one additional piece of information was added to the previously general measure. This new contextual measure does not incorporate any number of other contextual factors that may influence the individual’s likelihood to reveal a counter-normative identity. In addition, this measure is employed via an online survey and asks respondents to think about meeting a new interaction partner for the first time. These findings suggest that knowing additional information about an interaction partner matters to these individuals who claim a counter-normative identity, but future research could easily test this in a more controlled environment and manipulate the amount of information a respondent has about their new interaction partner. In addition, future research should consider examining how individuals with counter-normative identities enact them in their daily lives via interviews and participant observation. It is one thing to think about revealing your identity on a survey, which has no consequences and is, therefore, influenced by an individual’s ideal perception of their self-concept, but this may not carry over to actual interactions with others.

This dissertation presents an excellent opportunity for theoretical development of identity theory. Where the structural and interactional research programs have mainly been separate entities in the past, counter-normative identities provide a chance for these two approaches to
overlap and become a more complete explanation of individuals’ experience with their identities. The structural research program laid the groundwork for the research presented here, but counter-normative identities illuminate some room for improvement in this approach. The interactional research program can easily be incorporated to fill those gaps and to provide a full understanding of the relationship between self, structure, and interaction.
CHAPTER VI

REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Demographics

Which of the following best describes your religious affiliation or preference?

1. Protestant
2. Christian
3. Catholic
4. Buddhist
5. Hindu
6. Muslim
7. Jewish
8. Mormon
9. Agnostic
10. Atheist
11. No religion
12. Other (Please specify)

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response

Do you consider yourself to be religious or non-religious?

1. Non-religious
2. Religious

Please select the following that best describes your current gender identification.

1. Man
2. Woman
3. Non-Binary (e.g. genderqueer, agender)

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response
Are you Latino or Hispanic?
0. No
1. Yes

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response

What race do you consider yourself to be?
1. White
2. Black/African American
3. American Indian or Alaska Native
4. Asian Indian
5. Chinese
6. Filipino
7. Japanese
8. Korean
9. Vietnamese
10. Other Asian (Please Specify) ____________________________

11. Pacific Islander (Native Hawaiian, Guamanian, Chamorro, Samoan)
12. Other [Please Specify] _____________

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response

What is your age?
_____ Age in Years

Which of the following best describes your education?
1. Less than high school
2. High school graduate
3. Some college or technical school
4. College graduate
5. Graduate or professional degree

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response
Below are some income categories. Please choose the category that best describes the total annual income of the household. Please include your personal income, as well as the income of others living in the household.

1. Less than $14,999
2. Between $15,000 and $24,999
3. Between $25,000 and $34,999
4. Between $35,000 and $44,999
5. Between $45,000 and $59,999
6. Between $60,000 and $74,999
7. Between $75,000 and $99,999
8. Between $100,000 and $149,999
9. Between $150,000 and $199,999
10. Between $200,000 and $249,999
11. Between $250,000 and $299,999
12. Above $300,000

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response

**Prominence**

Being [Show religious / non-religious] is an important part of my self-image.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree or Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

98. Don’t Know
99. No Answer

Being [Show religious / non-religious] is an important reflection of who I am.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree or Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

98. Don’t Know
99. No Answer
I have come to think of myself as a “[Show religious / non-religious individual].”
1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree or Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

98. Don’t Know
99. No Answer

I have a strong sense of belonging to the community of [Show religious / non-religious individuals].
1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree or Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

98. Don’t Know
99. No Answer

Salience

Think about meeting a person of the same sex as you for the first time. How certain is it that you would tell this person that you [show are religious / non-religious]?

1. Almost certainly would not
2. Probably would not
3. Neither agree or disagree
3. Probably would
4. Almost certainly would

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response

Think about meeting a friend of a close friend for the first time. How certain is it that you would tell this person that you [show are religious / non-religious]?

1. Almost certainly would not
2. Probably would not
3. Neither agree or disagree
3. Probably would
4. Almost certainly would

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response
Think about meeting a friend of a family member for the first time. How certain is it that you would tell this person that you [show are religious / non-religious]?

1. Almost certainly would not
2. Probably would not
3. Neither agree or disagree
4. Probably would
5. Almost certainly would

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response

Think about meeting a stranger for the first time. How certain is it that you would tell this person that you [show are religious / non-religious]?

1. Almost certainly would not
2. Probably would not
3. Neither agree or disagree
4. Probably would
5. Almost certainly would

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response

Proximate Social Structure – Homogeneity

How many of your close friends (people that you know and can count on if you need them) are also [show religious / non-religious]?

1. Almost none
2. Less than half
3. About half
4. More than half
5. Almost all

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response
How many of your friends (people you know and do things with) are also [show religious / non-religious]? 

1. Almost none 
2. Less than half 
3. About half 
4. More than half 
5. Almost all 

98. Don’t Know 
99. No Response 

How many of your family members (spouse/partner, parents, grandparents, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, etc.) are also [show religious / non-religious]? 

1. Almost none 
2. Less than half 
3. About half 
4. More than half 
5. Almost all 

98. Don’t Know 
99. No Response 

How many of the people you interact with on a daily basis do you think are also [show religious / non-religious]? 

1. Almost none 
2. Less than half 
3. About half 
4. More than half 
5. Almost all 

98. Don’t Know 
99. No Response
Proximate Social Structure – Commitment

How often do you do things with people who are also [show religious / non-religious]?

1. Never
2. Seldom
3. Once a month
4. Less than once a week
5. Once a week
6. Several times a week
7. Daily
98. Don’t Know
99. No Response

In an average week, how many hours do you spend doing things with people who are also [show religious / non-religious]?

_____ Number of Hours Per Week
98. Don’t Know
99. No Response

Of the money you do not need for rent, food, clothing and other essentials how much do you spend on things you do with people who are also [show religious / non-religious]?
Things like, going to the movies and gifts?

1. Almost none
2. Less than half
3. About half
4. More than half
5. Almost all
98. Don’t Know
99. No Response
Contextual Salience

For the next few questions, please think about meeting a friend of a close friend for the first time at a social gathering...

During the conversation, they ask you about your religion. How likely is it that you will tell them about being [show religious / non-religious]?

1. Almost certainly would not
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. Almost certainly would

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response

During the conversation, they tell you they are [religious / non-religious]. How likely is it that you would share with them that you are [show non-religious / religious]?

1. Almost certainly would not
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. Almost certainly would

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response

During the conversation, they tell you they are [religious / non-religious]. How likely is it that you ask them more about being non-religious?

1. Almost certainly would not
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. Almost certainly would

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response
During the conversation, they tell you they are [religious / non-religious]. How likely is it that you would buy them coffee or a drink at this social event?

1. Almost certainly would not
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. Almost certainly would

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response

During the conversation, they tell you they are [religious / non-religious]. How likely is it that you would invite them to get together in the future?

1. Almost certainly would not
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. Almost certainly would

98. Don’t Know
99. No Response